Cities of Repetition

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Housing is one of the most fundamental elements of urban growth and Hong Kong has for decades hosted some of the most intense living environments on the planet. The city's urbanization has without a doubt produced unparalleled living conditions in terms of scale and density. As a socio-political microcosm, Hong Kong has been dealing with the impacts of hyper-dense urban environments since the mid-twentieth century. Due to lack of space, topological constraints, historical and political conditions, and the struggle with population density, the city has become an incubator for the development of mass housing models for high density living. Today, the common approach to housing developments is based on repetitive, reductive and profit driven concepts. Much of the city has been built with endless repetitive canons utilizing formulaic layouts and building designs. For better or worse, rapidly growing cities around the world, especially in China, have followed Hong Kong's model.

Throughout the 20th Century, in Hong Kong and around the world, the prefabrication of standardized architectural elements enabled builders, governments and developers to increase the scale and pace of construction. This increase in construction efficiency was especially useful in times of need for social housing. During the influx of new residents to Hong Kong in waves throughout the mid-20th Century, new high-rise housing types were invented and built all over Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories. New social housing needed to be built rapidly to safely accommodate thousands of new residents. The housing produced was tall, dense and standardized to house as many residents as possible as quickly as possible. Over the course of the following decades in Hong Kong, the strategy of mass standardization has shifted from social necessity to the pursuit of profit by private developers.

While the history and architecture of public housing has been well researched and documented, relatively little has been done to trace the evolution of Hong Kong's private housing estates. It is quite remarkable that in most places in the world, when housing is left to the private sector, the results are diverse. When mass housing is left to the private sector in Hong Kong the resultant architecture has proven to be highly formulaic.

Cities of Repetition provides a comprehensive graphic documentation and analysis of the ten largest Hong Kong housing estates built by private developers from the late 1960's through the 2000s. The original drawings and diagrams in this exhibition illustrate the ultra-dense, mass produced, highly repetitive built environments in which hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents live. Drawings, photographs and models not only display the immense scale of the housing estates within the city, but present the hundreds of similarly planned housing blocks and their subtle differences. A detailed graphical analysis compares statistical information to show how the planning of these massive estates has evolved over the past decades to efficiently conform to building regulations and produce huge profits. The project reveals the spatial realities of living in some of the most densely populated, urban environments ever built.

CITIES
OF REPETITION
Hong Kong's Private Housing Estates

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