

Unbinding Architectural Imagination: Wang Shu's Textual Bricolage in Theoretical Writing and Design

Xin Jin^{a*} and Jonathan Hale^b

^aLecturer, Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Chongqing University, Chongqing, PRC

^bProfessor of Architectural Theory, Faculty of Engineering, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

*Corresponding Author

Telephone: 0086 186 8079 5565

Email: xin_jin@cqu.edu.cn

Dr Xin Jin is an architect and faculty member in the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Chongqing University, PRC. Dr Jonathan Hale is Professor of Architectural Theory in the Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham, UK.

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Architectural writing norms have been a subject of constant debate in past decades. Architectural poststructuralists conceptualise writing as virtual construction with words. Recent scholarship relating to innovative architectural writing questions the power relations that entrench in the canonical forms of academic architectural writing. This article examines Chinese architect Wang Shu's 2000 PhD thesis, 'Fictionalising Cities', and other derived essays and focuses on their experimental forms, the critical intentions behind them, and the multiple resonances between Wang's written and built works. First, this article foregrounds the intentions behind Wang's experimental writing approach, namely his rejection of the dualistic opposition between writing and building and instrumentalism in architectural representation. Through close reading of 'Fictionalising Cities', this article explicates the central roles of Roland Barthes's notion of text and Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricolage in shaping Wang's writing approaches and design thinking. By comparing Wang's written and built works, specifically the Ningbo History Museum (2003–2008) and the Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art, Phase II (2003–2007), the article examines Wang's continuous critical sensitivities towards the power relations and temporality that prestructure modes of architectural creation. By highlighting Wang's case, this article explores how the critical concerns that drive innovative architectural writing can be expanded into creative design practice.

That I assert my thesis writing is more like a design is because for me, writing and designing are similar notions. [...] My exploration of writing is closer to the way Roland Barthes conceptualises it. For example, I pay much attention to writing genre than just what is written about. [...] my writing is self-referential.¹

Chinese architect Wang Shu in a 2012 interview

There are no more critics, only writers.²

Roland Barthes

The Ethical-Political Agenda of Innovative Architectural Writing

The norms of architectural writing have provoked constant debate in recent times. During the 1980s and 1990s, in Western architecture, architectural poststructuralists and deconstructionists aspired to reconceptualise architectural writing in light of studies on language and signs. Within this discourse, architectural writing was no longer considered a transparent tool that merely records thoughts but virtual construction with words.³ In recent years, studies on the innovative mode of architectural writing have explored the possibilities of intertwining traditionally incompatible genres – literary and technical and scientific writing – in new modes of qualitative architectural investigations.⁴ The endeavours of innovative architectural writing evidence strong concerns about the ethical-political issues that are involved in representation and attempt to question and displace the power relations that entrench in the canonical forms of undertaking and writing architectural research while tacitly regulating our way of knowing.⁵

This article examines Chinese architect and theorist Wang Shu's PhD thesis, 'Fictionalising Cities', and other derived essays and focuses on the experimental forms of these texts, their critical concerns in relation to the politics of representation, and the dynamic resonances between Wang's written and built works.⁶ 'Fictionalising Cities' is widely considered a key to understanding Wang's design thoughts and approaches.⁷ In his thesis and

later interviews, Wang repeatedly claimed that one essential element of his theoretical writing is the intention to experiment with the language of representing the city. Only recently have the experimental forms of Wang's texts started to receive analytical attention. By thoroughly comparing excerpts from Chapter 3 of 'Fictionalising Cities' with other authors' writings, Gaojin Xinleng, Jonathan Hale, and Wang Qi noted that Wang's thesis employs a particular writing technique that involves systematically reusing and collaging textual fragments from other authors' writings while forgoing the conventions of modern academic referencing.⁸ Additionally, Gaojin and his colleagues identified several distinctive features of Wang's written works when compared with the norms of the canonical academic thesis.

'Fictionalising Cities' is an open text in the sense that in his writing, Wang does not play an omniscient God but initiates dialogues between heterogeneous voices and invites readers to participate in the adventure of making meanings. Moreover, 'Fictionalising Cities' is a novelistic thesis, which parodies the generic norms of the academic essay and mixes them with seemingly incompatible dialogic forms that are often found in polyphonic novels.⁹

Building upon Gaojin and his colleagues' valuable efforts, this article further explores Wang's written and built works and addresses several points. First, the article foregrounds the intention behind Wang's writing experiment in 'Fictionalising Cities' and other derived essays, which was to demolish the distinction between theory and design and reject reductive instrumentalism in architectural representation.¹⁰ Second, the article explicates how two specific intellectual sources – Roland Barthes's notion of text and Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricolage – have shaped both Wang's writing method and his design thoughts. By expanding the intertextual logic of meaning and the make-do logic of bricolage into the activities of rational reflection, Wang challenges the traditional mode of representing and theorising architecture and the city. Third, by comparing aspects of Wang's written and built works, specifically the Ningbo History Museum (2003–2008) and the Xiangshan Campus of the

China Academy of Art, Phase II, Hangzhou (2003–2007), this article foregrounds the resonances between the respective works; both Wang’s writings and buildings can be understood as imperatives of textual bricolage that display continuous sensitivities towards the power relations and temporal order that prestructure architectural imaginations. In so doing, this article examines a previously underexplored aspect of Wang’s work, namely his criticism of the norms of architectural representation. Moreover, the article articulates how critical intentions behind innovative architectural writing can be expanded into creative design practice.

Wang Shu on Architectural Writing: Phenomenology and Semiotics

For Wang, architectural writing is not an ancillary tool for packing and communicating architectural meaning. His rejection of the instrumentalism of architectural writing and, more broadly speaking, representation has been influenced by two intellectual traditions: phenomenology and semiotics. In the ‘Preface’ of ‘Fictionalising Cities’, Wang expresses his admiration for Italian novelist Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. According to Wang, Calvino’s novel demonstrates an effective way of writing about the city, which ‘would not reduce the existential whole of the urban world’.¹¹ Paralleling Wang’s appreciation for Calvino’s literary language is the doubt that he cast upon analytical language and, more generally speaking, the epistemological assumptions that are embedded in the standardised form of the academic essay, which he deems ‘the enemy of the lived experience of the city’ and thus ‘not the appropriate way of speaking about the city’.¹² Wang’s distrust of analytical language is rooted in his apprehension about the Martin Heideggerian notion of lifeworld, the existential qualities of which could never be fully grasped through rational analysis and technical modes of representations that are characterised by typical procedures of objectification, disengagement, generalisation, abstracting, and intellectual reduction. For Wang, the

existential being of the city is an enigma, and it is the institutionally schematised language that we uncritically use and violently impose upon the living urban experience that demythologises the mysterious being of the city-in-itself.¹³ Thus, Wang's theoretical project, 'Fictionalising Cities', is first and foremost an experiment on the form of written language through which the city comes to be comprehended.¹⁴

In addition to his dismissal of reductive instrumentalism in architectural representation, Wang's reception of linguistic semiotics is another source of his criticism of orthodox theoretical writing. Similarly to his Western counterparts of the 1980s and 1990s who regarded writing as virtual construction, Wang holds that 'if designing is "doing", theorising is "doing" as well'.¹⁵ A goal of 'Fictionalising Cities', as Wang claims, is 'demolishing the distinction between theory and design, concept and object. From now on, theorising is a kind of creative activity'.¹⁶ Wang's aspirations to go beyond reductive representation and forge dynamic resonances between architectural writing and design persist in his career. In his 2012 interview with architectural critics Li Xiangning and Zhang Xiaochun, Wang reconfirmed that architectural writing is a way to make the architectural world 'emerging' rather than a tool for 'interpreting' it as a pre-given reality. In architecture, as well as in writing, what fascinates Wang is the 'emerging of existence'.¹⁷ Moreover, in this interview, Wang insisted that the writing form of 'Fictionalising Cities' is a designed work in its own right:

For me, there is no such difference between 'writing a thesis' and 'designing [a project]'. That ['Fictionalising Cities'] is not at all a normative theoretical writing but an architectural design with words and texts. [...] 10 years after its completion, I have realised the thesis once again in architecture [...].¹⁸

Given Wang's testimony, ignoring his experiment with architectural writing would lead to a misunderstanding of his 'Fictionalising Cities' and even a failure to recognise the entire

critical dimension that has persisted in his work for years: the criticism of architectural representation.

Writing, Power, and Time

The following analysis offers a reading of the text of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ and explores the critical intentions that the text bears. By adopting Gaojin and his colleagues’ comparative analytical approach, excerpts from ‘Fictionalising Cities’ (nonitalicised) and other texts (italicised) are juxtaposed for comparison in selected reading samples.¹⁹ The analysis is based on the assumption that the text of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ is a patchwork that weaves together heterogeneous texts or fragments of the already said. The hybrid textual pattern is mapped out and displayed in the final part of this section.

Text: Criticism of Power

Sample 1 demonstrates how by reusing a passage from structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind*, ‘Fictionalising Cities’ describes the daily life of a Chinese vernacular village, which appears in the thesis as part of case studies on regional urban tradition.

Sample 1

Excerpt from ‘Fictionalising Cities’:

Often a farmer is also a carpenter, an amateur architect, and construction labourer, who can identify the kind of tree from which a tiny wood fragment has come and, furthermore, make an accurate judgement by observing the appearance of its wood and bark, its smell, its hardness, and similar characteristics.²⁰

Excerpt from *The Savage Mind*:

Of a backward people of the Tyukyu archipelago, we read: ‘Even a child can frequently identify the kind of tree from which a tiny wood fragment has come and, furthermore, the sex of that tree, as defined by Kabiran notions of plant sex, by observing the appearance of its wood and bark, its smell, its hardness, and similar characteristics. [...]’²¹

In Sample 1, the grey-coloured words from ‘Fictionalising Cities’ and the underlined italics from *The Savage Mind* are strikingly similar. Given that Wang has not explained such textual similarities in ‘Fictionalising Cities’ or elsewhere, these resemblances may raise concerns about academic ethics. In all fields of scientific research, properly attributing sources is promoted as a universally legitimate practice. This legitimacy is, of course, understandable for pragmatic reasons, but it also implements subject–object dualism in the sense that academic referencing constructs the judging authority of the author over ‘the other’ within the research text. By introducing, evaluating, commenting, and reflecting upon quoted material, the author monopolises the power to mean and the right to represent others. Therefore, academic referencing is not value free but a device that prestructures the epistemological activities of the scientific mode of knowing.

Wang’s way of uttering through rather than on behalf of other authors differs from the routine of academic referencing. First, Wang’s indirect utterance forges lively intertextual dialogues between the already said and the current writing. In Sample 1, Lévi-Strauss’s voice that is embedded in his original writing and the refreshed significances stemming from Wang’s appropriation of the original writing do not converge but resonate. Subsequently, the reader who experiences this intertextual form is given the freedom to actively interpret why the description of the life details of ‘a backward people of the Tyukyu archipelago’ can be used to provide an account of daily life in a traditional Chinese village, which is geographically and culturally distant from the former. Wang’s uttering through other texts suspends the author–other hierarchy that is practised in academic referencing. The absence of semantic authority shatters Wang’s text into heterogeneous fragments, multiplies the text’s meanings, and prevents ‘Fictionalising Cities’ from being consumed as a plot summary of Wang the theorist’s reflections.

The intertextual form of 'Fictionalising Cities' also multiples Wang the individual's identities in his text. Although Wang constantly uses the first-person pronoun 'I' in his thesis, the subjectivity of the 'I' is effectively deconstructed by the fact that his text is actually a text that has been constructed using multiple discourses from many others. Thus, 'Fictionalising Cities' ceases to be an architectural treatise in the traditional sense, one which articulates sets of discipline-specific knowledge and claims professional authority, but reclaims the status of writing, an art of meaning making. In addition, Wang's professional identity – architectural theorist – is dissolved, and in his text, he is reborn as a writer who, in turn, is responsible for the forces that dissolve subjectivity (i.e., intertextual composition and the associated uncertainty of the meaning of 'Fictionalising Cities'). As Wang the individual writes to diversify his identities, the 'I' denoting Wang the theorist becomes closer to a fictional figure created by Wang the writer.

Wang's writing form in 'Fictionalising Cities' is a result of multiple intellectual influences, one of which is the French literary critic and essayist Roland Barthes's notion of text, which is construed as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.²² Drawing upon Jacques Derrida's *Écriture* and Julia Kristeva's development of Mikhail Bakhtinian dialogism, Barthes's text theory surpasses the confinement of traditional interpretations of meaning. Meaning is neither innate in signs nor created by an Author-God but arises from intertextual relations between a text and other texts.²³ It follows that meaning is not something that can be contained, possessed, and privatised but the resonances between the already said and can be said. Fundamentally, the intertextual logic in Barthes's text theory, which articulates the plurality of meaning, constitutes a criticism of homogeneity and authority, whether institutional power, authorship, or *doxa* in language. Modelling on Barthes's theory, Wang draws an analogy between the city and text, as expressed in his terminology 'texture city', which, according to him, is 'a paradoxical whole comprising

heterogeneous and trivial elements'.²⁴ In addition to his appeal to the aesthetics of fragmentary textual forms, Wang also receives a call for radical democracy that is implicated in the intertextual nature of meaning. Wang asserts that 'speaking of the texture [city] is really to talk about the city as a concert of nonpower constructions'.²⁵ When Wang expands the intertextual logic of meaning into the activities of reflecting the city and architecture, he also necessarily rejects the idea that theorising means claiming authority over the *Other*, regardless of whether it be the city (the thesis's subject matter) or preexisting discourses (those of other writers).²⁶

Sample 2

Excerpt from 'Fictionalising Cities':

We usually think of eroticism and empathy [with others] as immediate affective experiences; however, for me, they are major theoretical categories with a role in any theory of urban reading and designing.²⁷

Excerpt from *Barthes*:

We usually think of boredom as an immediate affective experience, but it is a major theoretical category with a role in any theory of reading.²⁸

Wang's empathy with the *Other* and his dissolving of his fixed self-identity in writing are two sides of the same coin. Wang's purposeful avoidance of power compels him to reject 'any theory and conception of design which are systematic in nature' and 'contend self-consciously' with the 'subjectivity of architect', the 'language through which we analyse and know', and the 'norms of urban design'.²⁹ Similarly to what Barthes did in his later works, such as *A Lover's Discourse* and *Roland Barthes*, where a traditional boundary between criticism, theory, and fictional writing no longer exists, in 'Fictionalising Cities', Wang attempts to invent a way of theorising while leaving behind the orthodoxies of the traditional conception of the thesis (a unitary and authoritative meaning). It is in the specific context of Wang's thesis, which aims to deconstruct power unconsciously or wilfully actualised in

research and writing methods, that the controversies over academic ethics likely to arise from ‘Fictionalising Cities’ can be taken as part of its provocative efforts.

Bricolage: Criticism of Progress

As demonstrated in the above samples, another characteristic of the writing form of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ is that the text embodies a nonlinear temporal order whereby the already said becomes an indispensable constituent of the current intellectual reflection. Differently, in standard academic referencing, the current writing represents the intellectual past. The former is privileged as a perspectival point through which the intellectual past is exhibited, assessed, and received. In referencing, the intellectual past is recapitulated and objectified as a subject matter for the undergoing reflection. The historical context no longer operates as the very precondition whereby such reflection emerges. More precisely, academic referencing embodies a linear temporal order, which is assumed in scientific modes of rational thinking. In and through this questionable temporal order, the present is elevated to an ontological status that is situated completely outside history, which has presumably come to an end. The radical discontinuity between ‘the now’ and ‘the then’ and their irreversible order, which underpin scientific rational thinking, are arguably coherent with the modernist notion of progress where ‘the now’ is often expected to be an escape from tradition or even a total replacing or eradicating of the past.

Alternatively, ‘Fictionalising Cities’ constitutes an example of writing with the past, which interrupts a simple past–present evolution. This approach of writing with the past parallels the strategies of architectural typology design articulated in Chapter 2 of ‘Fictionalising Cities’, which is entitled ‘Possibilities of the Urban Text for the Suppression of Time’. Wang’s typology design approach is modelled on the Lévi-Straussian notion of bricolage, a metaphorical term that characterises mythical thought and, more generally, artistic modes of

creation.³⁰ According to Lévi-Strauss, myth is a narrative form in which ‘mythemes’ or elements of old stories are recycled and reassembled for the telling of new ones. Wang incorporates this recycling ecology of the narrative form of myth, or the make-do logic, into his typology design theory. According to Wang, an architectural type is a fragmentary form detached from the existing fabric of a city, and the task of urban design is similar to the work of a bricoleur and involves the agential rearrangement of recycled forms into new constructions.³¹

Sample 3

Excerpt from ‘Fictionalising Cities’:

[...] the characteristic feature of typology design, as of ‘bricolage’, is that it builds up structured sets, not directly with other structural sets but by fitting together events, or rather debris of events.³²

Excerpt from *The Savage Mind*:

*Now, the characteristic feature of mythical thought, as of ‘bricolage’ on the practical plane, is that it builds up structured sets, not directly with other structural sets but [...] by fitting together events, or rather the remains of events [...].*³³

Wang argues that traditional Chinese cities, such as Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Beijing, have been constructed in a similar way to the bricolage of myth.³⁴ Following Lévi-Strauss’s opposing between bricoleur and engineer, Wang contrasts the premodern Chinese craftsman or artisan with the Western conception of the architect or creator because the former works with concrete artefacts and makes do with the already formed, while the latter begins with concepts and imposes preconceived order on the city. By metaphorically linking architectural typology design and bricolage, Wang criticises the modernist narrative of architectural progress, which, since the late 1990s, has been a dominant ideology in mainland China’s urban renovation movement.

Sample 4

Excerpt from ‘Fictionalising Cities’:

The history of the city is reconstituted each time the past of the city is retold or recollected. [...] By having the past become part of the present, the theory of texture-city discounts traditional theories of progress or evolution.³⁵

Excerpt from *The Age of Structuralism*:

*For him [Lévi-Strauss], history is reconstituted each time a myth is retold or the past is recollected. [...] By having the past become part of the present, Lévi-Strauss’ theory discounts traditional theories of progress or evolution.*³⁶

Beneath Wang’s criticism of ‘traditional theories of progress’ is Lévi-Strauss’s conception of a circular temporal order, which is based on the model of mythopoetic thought in which the ‘before’ and ‘after’ events mutually depend upon each other and time is perceived as reversible.³⁷ Like Wang’s treatment of the notion of text, the make-do logic and associated circular temporal order model are internalised in Wang’s approach of writing with the past in ‘Fictionalising Cities’.

Embodiment: An Image of the City

The abovementioned writing approach, which is characterised by fragmentary composition and bricolage, is systematic in Wang’s ‘Fictionalising Cities’ and other derived essays. To fully demonstrate Wang’s writing approach, this article employs the same method of textual comparison to map the full text of Chapter 2 of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ – ‘Possibilities of the Urban Text for the Suppression of Time’ – which was published in the Chinese architectural journal *The Architect* and reprinted in *The Beginning of Design*, a collection recording Wang’s major written and built works with critics’ commentaries.³⁸

Table 1 outlines the 147 textual fragments found in Chapter 2 of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ in the order of their appearance in the examined text. Each entry in Table 1 follows a specific format: the heading number (in bold), the English title of the original text, the page number(s)

of the original Chinese texts and the page number(s) of the original English texts. If there is no corresponding English edition of the Chinese text, the digit(s) following the English title refer(s) to the page number(s) in the Chinese source. When a text appears for the first time in Table 1, it is indexed with a letter (from '[A]' to '[K]'), which further classifies the textual fragments into 11 different bibliographic categories.

(Insert Table 1 here)

Each entry in Table 1 indicates an intertextual dialogue between preexisting text and Wang's appropriation of it, as those identified in the above reading samples. One's reading experience of Chapter 2 of 'Fictionalising Cities' constantly jumps from one scene of dialogue or one intertextual situation to another and oscillates between past and present discursive events. Moreover, Table 1 indicates that the Barthesian notion of text and the Lévi-Straussian notion of bricolage have twofold significances in 'Fictionalising Cities'. The notions provide analogical models in Wang's theory, whether the city as text or the city as myth, while operating as the very methods for writing about and researching the city. 'Fictionalising Cities' weaves together a 'tissue of quotations' to formulate an intertextual form where meanings proliferate. Meanwhile, the thesis is a work of bricolage that combines previously unrelated topics, texts, and ideas to construct ad hoc instruments of analysis. The configuration of 'Fictionalising Cities' evokes an image that presents the concept of 'texture city' with sensory concreteness. It is in this sense that the text of 'Fictionalising Cities' is self-referential; the text simultaneously articulates Wang's design thinking and performs it. Going beyond instrumental modes of representation, 'Fictionalising Cities' is charged with symbolic force. After all, what 'Fictionalising Cities' aims to achieve is less a rigorous rational account of the city as a given reality but more a form of writing that does not demythologise its subject matter. This avoidance of demythologising and even the will to remythologise involve a radical expansion of cultural logics – intertextuality and bricolage –

into the activities of theoretical reflection to displace two factors that prestructure rational contemplation: singularity of meaning and linear temporality. For Wang, theorising becomes an anthropological activity of meaning making. Again, the intention behind the analysis presented above is not to deny the necessity of academic referencing as an accepted rule in the academic sphere but to situate and construe the experimental form of Wang's writings within his specific theoretical contexts, in which theorising without claim to power is a key factor.

Writing–Building Resonances

Comparative studies of the Amateur Architectural Studio's (cofounded by Wang and Lu Wenyu) built projects and Wang's written essays may shed new light on how the intertextual and make-do logics of cultural creations, which are central in 'Fictionalising Cities', continue to play a role in Wang's design practices. One such study might compare Wang's approach of writing with the past in 'Fictionalising Cities' and a vernacular tiling technique that he has adopted in several major public projects, which is known as *wapan*. The *wapan* technique allows Wang and his team to literally build with the past, as it involves reusing construction waste that has been recycled from collapsed urban fabrics to construct a new tectonic whole. For example, the Ningbo History Museum's acclaimed masonry facade was constructed using bricks, tiles, and other irregular broken pieces that varied in size, colour, shape, texture, and manufacturing period, which were salvaged from approximately 30 villages that previously occupied the museum's site (Figure 1). Much like Wang's textual version of installation art, the museum facade's texture is 'a visual manifestation of fragmentation' that draws attention to the 'enigmatic juxtaposition' of repurposed readymades.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the museum's architectural bricolage effectively forges intensive 'intertextual' vibrancies between itself and the city in the sense that the experience of the new building is

simultaneously that of the city's erased past. It is not simply that the new museum represents the demolished urban past and associated historical memories but that the demolished urban past and associated historical memories constitute the very raw materials to represent poetically in the form of architecture. The immense critical force of Wang's text theory informed design strategies lies in the strategies' abilities to dissolve and transform the political and institutional powers that are responsible for destroying the daily life into novel architectonic 'language' to rebuild life world. In Wang's architectural bricolage, the past-present interdependence is pushed to a new level. The museum's facade reembodies time as a sensory experience and recovers the natural link of time, events, matters, and human perception. In so doing, it prevents time from being abstracted into nothing more than a mathematical concept, an autonomous and homogeneous continuum that heads towards the future in equal pace. Through the reregistration of time with sensory supports, Wang's criticism of the modernist notion of progress, which is embraced in the Chinese Communist Party's state-sanctioned urban renovation movement, is brought to the fore. This criticism refers back to Lévi-Strauss's articulation of mythopoetic thought in which 'all traces of events are part of a single synchronous totality' of the present.⁵¹

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Text theory and intertextuality play significant conceptual roles in Wang's Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art, Phase II, where the architect seeks to recover mutual dialogues between architecture, local culture, and natural landscape. The CAA Campus complex consists of three building types: hill, water, and courtyard type houses, which are geometric abstractions of distinctive forms that Wang extracted from various cultural and historical sources (Figure 2).⁵² Each type is repeated several times on the campus site while varying to fit particular topographical and compositional conditions. For example, defined by

their twisting and undulating volumes, Buildings 11 and 18 are variations of the hill type house and are modelled on the Buddhist grotto of Lingyin Temple outside Hangzhou.

Buildings 14 and 19 are water type houses whose curvilinear roofs metaphorically refer to the ripples of water depicted in traditional Chinese landscape paintings. Buildings 12, 13, 15, 16, and 17 belong to the courtyard type, which used to be the most common form of vernacular urban house in the region (Figure 3). Like Wang's bricolage of derivative texts in 'Fictionalising Cities', the design of the CAA campus combines transformed historical typological forms from local religious, urban, and landscape traditions to house new programmes to sustain cultural continuity.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

(Insert Figure 3 here)

However, the CAA Campus is not an enclosed typological system embracing nothing more than cultural and historical nostalgia. Conversely, Wang self-consciously opens up the campus complex by applying several parallel formal rules simultaneously. As shown in Figure 3, the spatial organisations of Buildings 18 (hill type house) and 14 (water type house) involve a similar layering pattern. The buildings comprise three strips: the external passageways, the middle mixed-use utility spaces, and the internal corridors. Building 18's middle utility space extends horizontally in an even grid made from reinforced concrete. However, 11 inserted voids, which are actually full-height spaces that run from the ground to the building's top floor and link the three layers physically or visually (Figure 4), break the continuity of the horizontal extension.

(Insert Figure 4 and Figure 5 here)

The contrast between the horizontal continuity and the interrupting voids becomes more apparent when Building 18's middle spatial volume is displayed in a linear form (Figure 5). A similar layering scheme and contrast between continuous horizontal spaces and

interrupting voids are also found in Building 14. Applying the same approach in the analysis of Building 18, the middle spatial volume of Building 14 is unfolded to highlight the tension between the building's horizontal extension and breaching voids (Figure 6).

(Insert Figure 6 here)

The building typology and layering scheme are contradictory in the sense that the former separates buildings into morphologically disparate entities, while the latter contaminates such fixed taxonomy by inserting similitudes into them. Wang asserts that a 'texture city' is 'a city of inconsistent classification rules'.⁵³ The architectural family resemblances destabilise the conceptual boundary between individual buildings and open up the campus complex's formal system. Accompanying Wang's effort to deconstruct from within are his attempts to sustain reciprocal dialogues between the buildings and their urban and landscape surroundings. In the CAA Campus, the intertextual logic works as active expressions of mutuality and interdependences between architecture and landscape, part and whole, here and there, which are often construed as dualistically opposing categories in modernist architectural discourses.

(Insert Figure 7 here)

For example, Wang intentionally deploys identical or similar architectural scenes in different site locations, whether gardens, roof terraces, small pavilions, or other forms of spatial fragments (e.g., the voids displayed above; Figure 7). Wang's configurations have multiple effects on one's perception of the relation between the campus buildings and its circumstances. First, to navigate through the recurring scenes in motion, one must constantly reference the changing surroundings. In such a type of experience, the architectural scenes' distinctive qualities are no longer defined by their own formal properties but the surrounding elements that to be found physically outside them. Therefore, Wang's configurations invalidate the commonsensical border between architectural texts and their immediate contexts, as the external surroundings 'over there' are 'internalised' in the architectural

scenes in one's perception. Moreover, Wang's positioning of familiar scenes in the distance blurs the absolute distinction between the near and the far, which is grounded on the modern conception of mathematically coordinated space. The scenery resemblances bring physically remote locations adjacent in one's short-term memory while they meander on the campus. Additionally, in Wang's configurations, the natural landscape, campus buildings, and manmade urbanscape become exchangeable equivalences, as in turn, they appear as the background in one's experience of the 'immediate here' (Figure 7). In this type of parallax, the campus complex constantly transforms into landscape and its own circumstances and therefore is in becoming its 'other' in traditional conception. With the CAA Campus, Wang skilfully suspends the totality of architectural form and furthermore dissolves its assumed ontological autonomy for the sake of joining buildings again in the flux of appearances of lifeworld.

Conclusion

For Wang, architectural writing is not transparent but thick textual construction, nor is the academic essay a neutral form; it is rather a value-laden genre of representation.

'Fictionalising Cities' is constructed as an intertextual form where meanings are evoked in situated dialogical events in which fragmentary discourses and readers participate.

'Fictionalising Cities' is also a form of bricolage whereby the intellectual past is retold for the sake of articulating novel design ideas. More than simply a document recording Wang's design thinking, 'Fictionalising Cities' evokes a figurative image of the concept 'texture city'.

The notions of text and bricolage provide analogical models and explanatory vocabularies for Wang's design thinking. The two notions also operate as cultural logics that underline Wang's methods for writing about and researching the city. The expansion of the intertextual and make-do logics into activities of architectural theoretical writing presents multiple challenges to the norms of academic reflection. In particular, 'Fictionalising Cities' interrupts

subject–object dualism, the associated power relations, and the linear temporality, which are tacitly embedded in the standardised form of academic referencing. Wang’s critical points identified in ‘Fictionalising Cities’ continue to shape his built projects, which have taken place within the context of unprecedented urbanisation movement in contemporary China. Retelling historical discourses in Wang’s thesis has become his recycling uses of urban detritus in the Ningbo History Museum where the damaged lifeworld has returned to project an alternative urban future to that in the narrative of modernist progress. On the CAA Campus, intertextuality is expressed by dissolving the autonomous formal system of architecture, which allows the distinctive types of buildings, the campus complex, and their landscape and urban surroundings to blend together. The resonances between Wang’s written and built works provide a valuable case that suggests how the sensitivities of innovative architectural writing can transition into activities of creative design. Such transition affects both the way in which we theorise and, more essentially, the way in which we construct, imagine, and live in the built world when facing the crises of everyday life.

Table

Table 1. The 147 textual fragments found in Chapter 2 of ‘Fictionalising Cities’

(‘Possibilities of the Urban Text for the Suppression of Time’)

1. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> [A], ³⁹ 136/133	37. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 56-57/62	92. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 16/11
2. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 98/99	38. <i>Empire of Signs</i> , 54/34-35	93. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 16/11
3. ‘Chinese Geomancy and Urban Image’ [B], ⁴⁰ 301-303	39. <i>Structuralism</i> , 22/10	94. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 16/11
4. <i>Structuralism: Moscow-Prague-Paris</i> [C] ⁴¹ (henceforth <i>Structuralism</i>), 123/95	40. <i>The Age</i> , 207/205	95. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 16/11
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6. ‘Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes’ [D], ⁴² 193/xix	42. <i>Structuralism</i> , 107-108/82	97. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 17/12
7. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 58/63	43. <i>Structuralism</i> , 109/83	98. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 18/13
8. ‘Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes’, 194/xx	44. <i>Structuralism</i> , 108/82	99. <i>Structuralism</i> , 137/107
9. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 16/25	45. <i>The Age</i> , 144/145	100. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 16-17/12
10. <i>The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault</i> [E] ⁴³ (henceforth <i>The Age</i>), 6/16	46. <i>The Age</i> , 144/145	101. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 22/16
11. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 16/25	47. ‘The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West’ [H] ⁴⁶ (henceforth ‘The myth’), 147/108-109	102. <i>The Age</i> , 6/17
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13. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 16/25	49. <i>The Art of the Novel</i> [I], ⁴⁷ 93/94	104. <i>Structuralism</i> , 114/87
14. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 14/23	50. ‘The Myth’, 148/109	105. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 15-16/11
15. <i>The Savage Mind</i> [F], ⁴⁴ 297-298/259-260	51. ‘The Myth’, 148/109	106. ‘In Praise of Amateur: On Roland Barthes and La chambre Claire’ [K], ⁴⁹ 163
16. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 15/24	52. ‘The Myth’, 148/109	107. <i>Structuralism</i> , 94/71
17. <i>The Age</i> , 3/14-15	53. ‘The Myth’, 148/109	108. <i>The Age</i> , 5/16
18. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 14/23	54. ‘The Myth’, 149/110	109. <i>The Age</i> , 5/16
19. <i>The Age</i> , 4/15	55. <i>Structuralism</i> , 105/88	110. <i>The Age</i> , 4/15
20. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 14/23	56. ‘The Myth’, 149/110	111. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 22/16
21. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 41/49	57. ‘The Myth’, 149/110	112. <i>The Age</i> , 6/17
22. <i>Structuralism</i> , 112/86	58. <i>Structuralism</i> , 4 note 2	113. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 23/17-18
23. <i>Structuralism</i> , 115/88	59. <i>Structuralism</i> , 123/95	114. <i>The Age</i> , 6/17
24. <i>The Age</i> , 214/211	60. <i>Structuralism</i> , 4 note 2	115. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 16-17/25-26
25. <i>Structuralism</i> , 114/87	61. <i>Structuralism</i> , 124/95-96	116. <i>The Age</i> , 3-4/15
26. <i>The Age</i> , 3/14	62. <i>Structuralism</i> , 116/88	117. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 24/18
27. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 138/137	63. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 58/63	118. <i>The Age</i> , 14/23
28. <i>Structuralism</i> , 22/10	64. <i>Structuralism</i> , 12/2	119. <i>The Age</i> , 6-7/17
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30. <i>Empire of Signs</i> , 52/34	66. <i>Structuralism</i> , 124/95	121. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 43/35
31. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> , 36-37/44-45	67. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 3/1	122. <i>The Age</i> , 7/17
32. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i> ,	68. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 4/1	123. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 43/35
	69. <i>Barthes: A Very Short Introduction</i> [J] ⁴⁸ (Henceforth <i>Barthes</i>), 88/89-90	124. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 25/19
	70. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 4/2	125. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 28/21
	71. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 4-5/2	126. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 26/20
	72. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 5/2	127. <i>The Age</i> , 7/17
	73. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 5/2-3	128. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 28/21-22
	74. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 6/3	129. <i>The Age</i> , 7/17-18
	75. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 6/3	130. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 44/36
	76. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 7/4	131. <i>The Age</i> , 7/17-18
	77. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 8/5	132. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 26/19
	78. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 9/5	133. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 26-27/20
	79. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 11/7	134. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 27/21
	80. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 12/8	135. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 28-29/22
	81. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 13/9	136. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 28/21
	82. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 48/39	137. <i>The Age</i> , 7/18
	83. <i>The Savage Mind</i> , 14/9-10	138. <i>The Age</i> , 8/18
		139. <i>The Age</i> , 3/14-15
		140. <i>The Age</i> , 8/18

<p>37/45</p> <p>33. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i>, 62/67</p> <p>34. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i>, 101/101</p> <p>35. <i>Claude Lévi-Strauss</i>, 56-57/61-62</p> <p>36. <i>Structuralism</i>, 116-117/89</p>	<p>84. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 13-14/9</p> <p>85. <i>The Age</i>, 15/24</p> <p>86. <i>Structuralism</i>, 132/103</p> <p>87. <i>Structuralism</i>, 132/103</p> <p>88. <i>Structuralism</i>, 133-134/104</p> <p>89. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 14-15/10</p> <p>90. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 15/10</p> <p>91. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 15/10-11</p>	<p>141. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 44/36</p> <p>142. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 44/36</p> <p>143. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 26-27/20</p> <p>144. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 24/18</p> <p>145. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 27/20</p> <p>146. <i>The Savage Mind</i>, 27/21</p> <p>147. <i>The Age</i>, 15/24</p>
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Figures

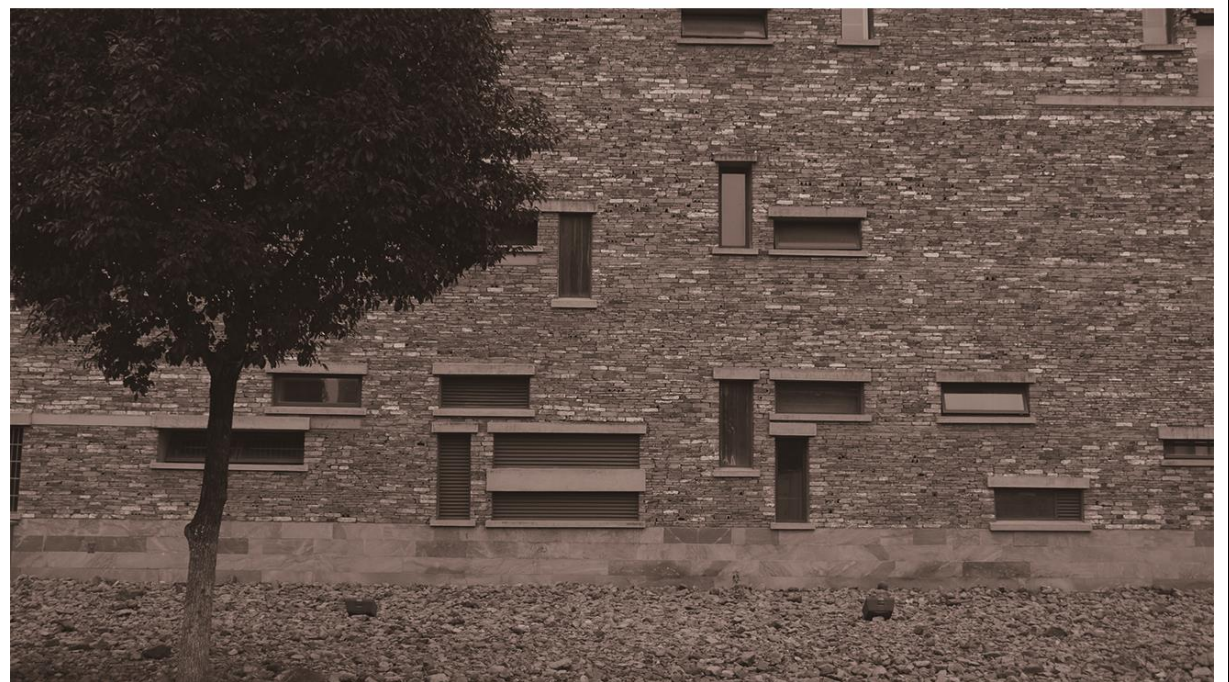


Figure 1. The Ningbo History Museum's masonry facade, Ningbo, 2003–2008

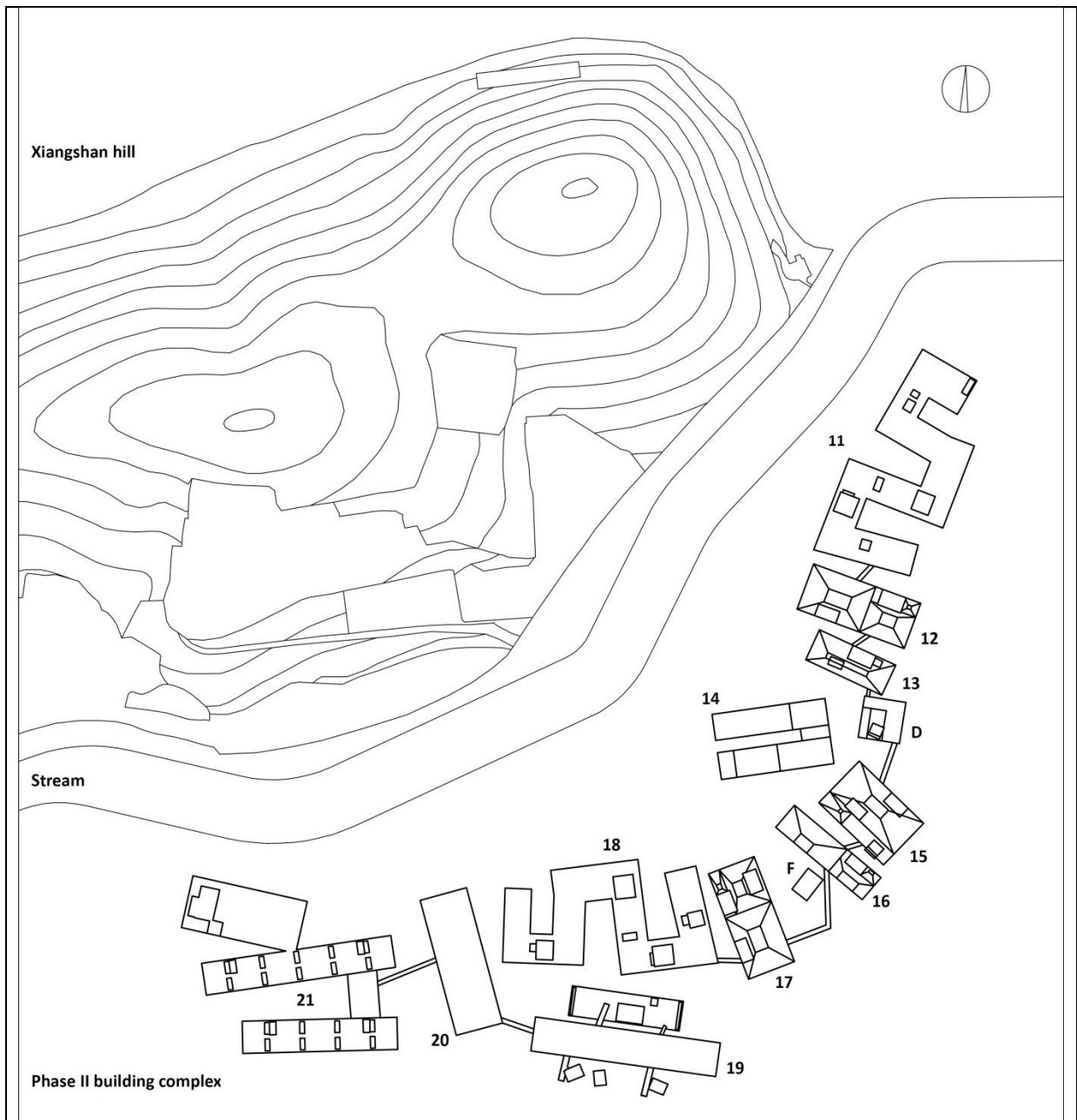
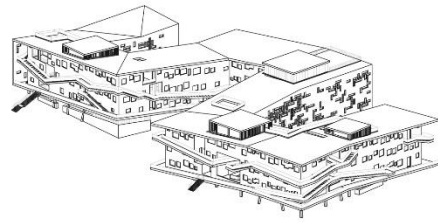
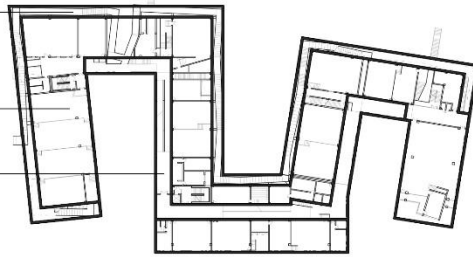


Figure 2. The overall plan of the CAA Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007

external passageway

utility space

internal corridor

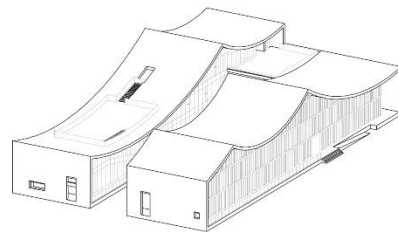
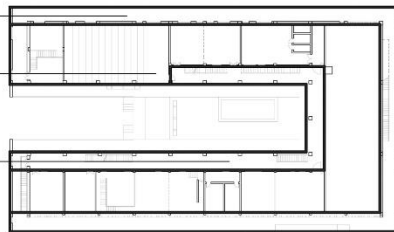


Building 18 - hill type house

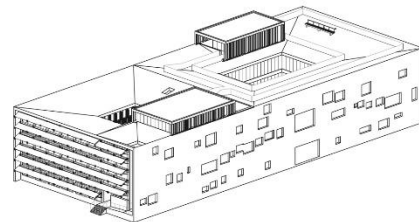
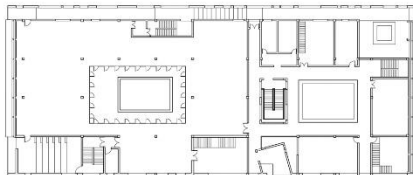
external passageway

utility space

internal corridor



Building 14 - water type house



Building 12- courtyard type house

Figure 3. Buildings 18 (the 'hill type house' [top]), 14 (the 'water type house' [middle]), and 12 (the 'courtyard type house' [bottom]) of the CAA Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007



Figure 4. Several voids interrupting the horizontal extension of Building 18's space

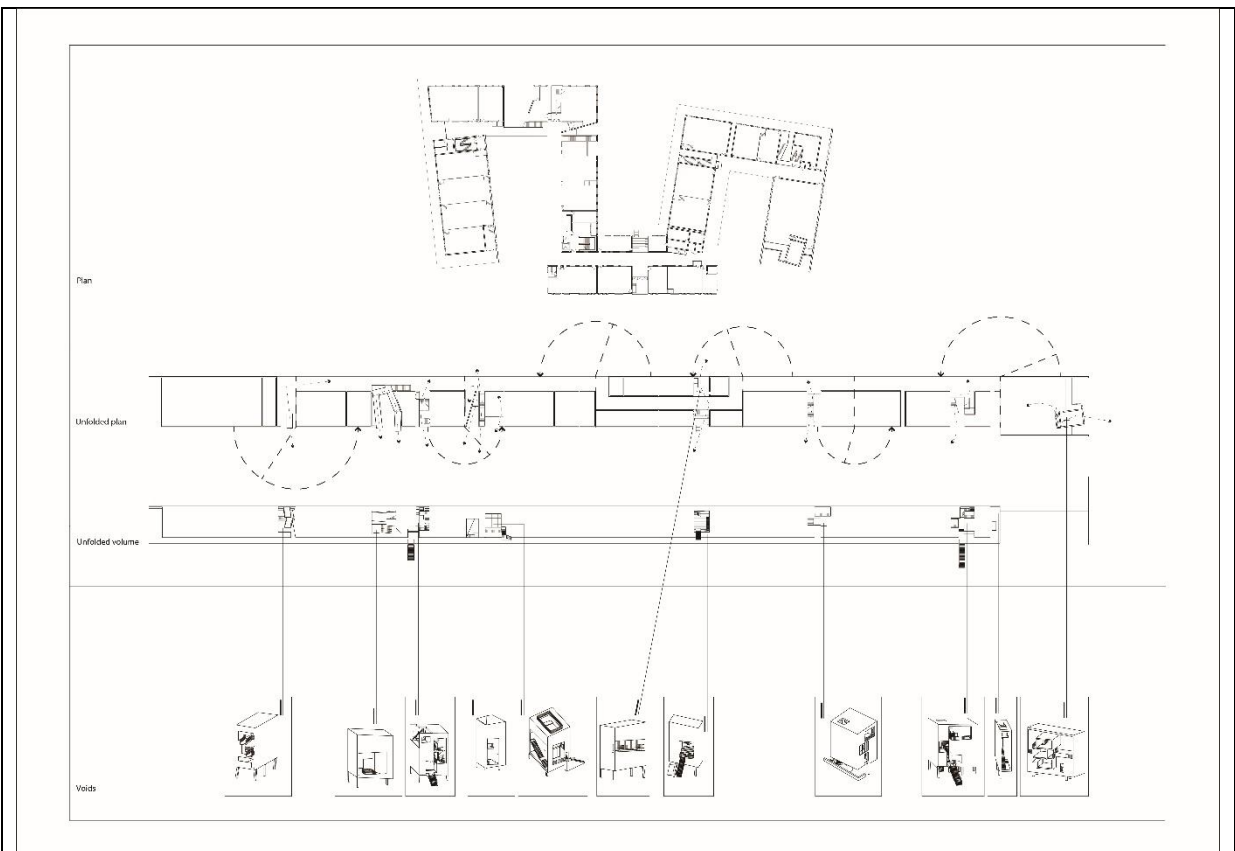


Figure 5. The horizontally extending space and 11 voids in Building 18. From top to bottom: The original plan of the middle volume, the unfolded plan and volume, and the 11 voids

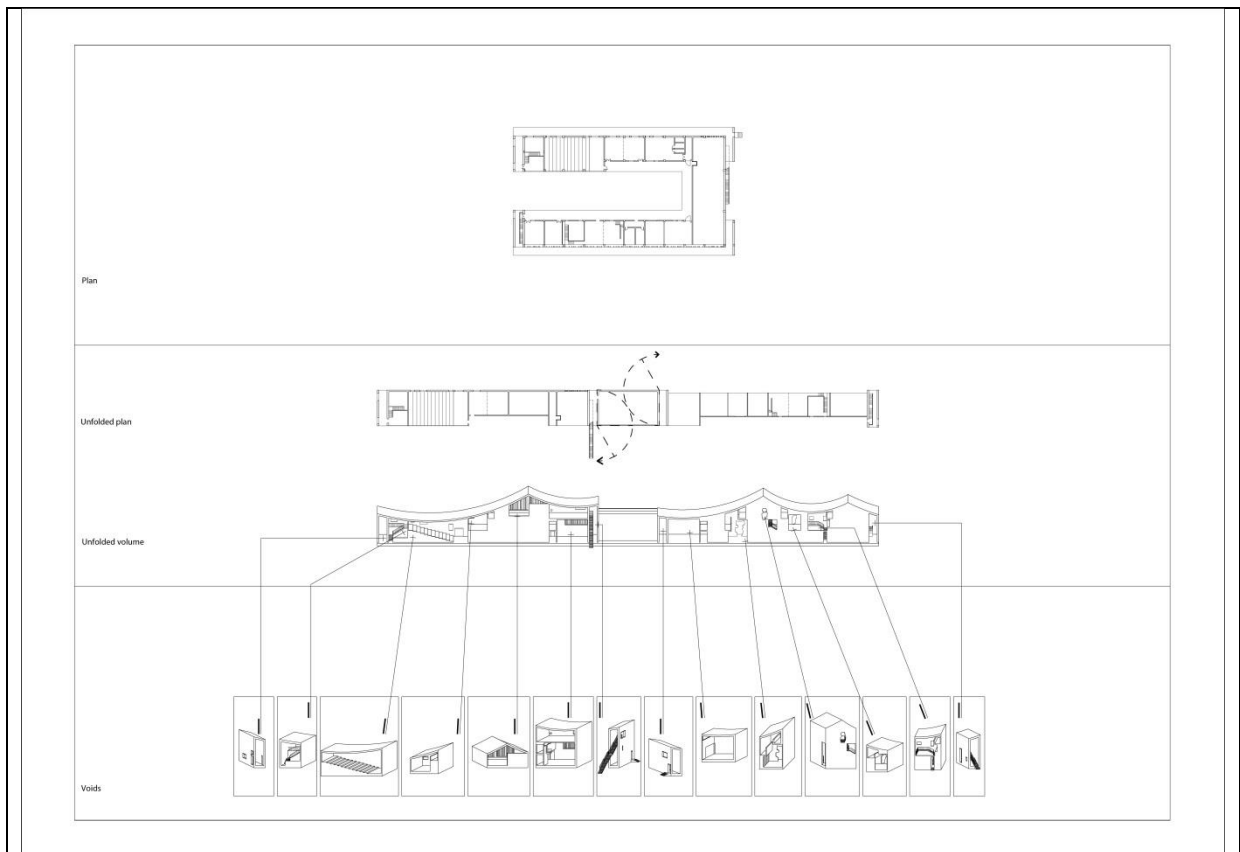


Figure 6. The horizontally extending space and 14 voids in Building 14. From top to bottom: The original plan of the middle volume, the unfolded plan and volume, and the 14 voids



Figure 7. Similar architectural scenes deployed on the CAA Campus Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007

Figure captions

Figure 1. The Ningbo History Museum's masonry facade, Ningbo, 2003–2008

Figure 2. The overall plan of the China Academy of Art Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007

Figure 3. Buildings 18 (the 'hill type house' [top]), 14 (the 'water type house' [middle]), and 12 (the 'courtyard type house' [bottom]) of the CAA Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007

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Figure 5. The horizontally extending space and 11 voids in Building 18. From top to bottom: The original plan of the middle volume, the unfolded plan and volume, and the 11 voids

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Figure 7. Similar architectural scenes deployed on the CAA Campus Campus, Phase II, Hangzhou, 2003–2007

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- ⁵ See Hélène Frichot and Naomi Stead, 'Waking Ideas from Their Sleep: An Introduction to Ficto-critical Writing in and of Architecture', in *Writing Architecture: Ficto-Critical Approaches*, ed. by Hélène Frichot and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 11-24.
- ⁶ Wang Shu, 'Xugou Chengshi' ['Fictionalising Cities'] (doctoral thesis, Tongji University, 2000). In this article, all English translations of Wang's writings are ours.
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- ⁸ See Gaojin Xinleng, Jonathan Hale, and Qi Wang, 'Novelistic Essay: on the Form of Wang Shu's PhD Thesis, "Fictionalising Cities"', *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 23 (2019), 157-66.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ The presented study mainly focuses on the parts of 'Fictionalising Cities' that have been published in the form of journal articles and book chapters. See Wang Shu, 'Xugou Chengshi' ['Fictionalising Cities'] (doctoral thesis, Tongji Univ., 2000; abstract in *Xin Jianzhu [New Architecture]*, 3 (2002), 80). For Chapter 2 of 'Fictionalising Cities',

which was published as a journal article, see Wang Shu, ‘Shijian Tingzhi de Chengshi’ [‘The City for the Suppression of Time’], *Jianzhushi [The Architect]*, 96 (2000), 39-60. The journal article was republished two years later, see Wang Shu, ‘Shijian Tingzhi de Chengshi’ [‘The City for the Suppression of Time’], in *Sheji de Kaishi [The Beginning of Design]*, ed. by Wang Mingxian and Du Jian (Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2002), pp. 130-70. For a section of Chapter 3 of ‘Fictionalising Cities’, which was published as a book chapter, see Wang Shu, ‘Xiaomoxing’ [‘Small-scaled Models’], in *Yichu de Chengshi [Brimming City]*, ed. by Jiang Yuanlun and Shi Jian (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004), pp. 119-21..

¹¹ ‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], Preface section, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, Preface section, p. 1.

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¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Abstract section, para 6 of 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Preface section, p. 5.

¹⁷ ‘Wang Shu Fangtan’ [‘An Interview with Wang Shu’], pp. 94-95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*. Wang confirmed his intention to experiment with writing in other interviews. See Shi Jian and Feng Keru, ‘Wang Shu Fangtan——Huifu Xiangxiang de Zhongguo Jianzhu Jiaoyu Chuantong’ [‘Interview with Wang Shu: Renew the Imagined Tradition of Chinese Architecture Education’], *Shijie Jianzhu [World Architecture]*, 5 (2012), 24-29 (p. 25).

¹⁹ ‘Fictionalising Cities’ was originally written in Chinese. The textual comparisons in the presented samples were first made between the thesis’s original writing and the other literature in Chinese. This article’s authors’ English translations of ‘Fictionalising Cities’ have referenced both the Chinese and English versions of other writers’ literature.

²⁰ The original Chinese text: 一个农夫常常也是一个木匠，是业余的建筑师与建筑工人，能够认出哪块小木头是属于哪一种树上的，而且通过观察木头和树皮的外表、气味、硬度和其它属性来做精细确定。‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], p. 116.

²¹ The original Chinese text: 关于琉球群岛的一个落后种族，我们读到：“甚至一个孩子也能常常认出哪块小木头是属于哪一种树上的，而且通过观察木头和树皮的外

- 表、气味、硬度和其它特征来确定那种的性别 [……]” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Yexing de Siwei* [*The Savage Mind*], trans. by Li Youzhen (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1987), p. 8; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 5.
- ²² Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (Illinois: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 146.
- ²³ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 3rd edn (Routledge: London and New York, 2022), pp. 69-86.
- ²⁴ ‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], p. 140
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- ²⁷ The original Chinese text: 通常，我们把爱欲和慈悲想作一种直接的情绪体验，但我以为，它们是重要的理论范畴，在任何城市阅读与设计理论中均起作用。‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], pp. 138-39.
- ²⁸ The original Chinese text: 通常，我们把厌烦想做一种直接的情绪经验，但它也是一个重要的理论范畴，在任何阅读理论中均起作用。 Jonathan Culler, *Luo Lan·Ba Te* [*Roland Barthes*], trans. by Fang Jian (Taipei: Lauréat Publications, 1992), p. 81; Jonathan Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2002), p. 84.
- ²⁹ ‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], pp. 129-30.
- ³⁰ *The Savage Mind*, 1966, pp. 1-33.
- ³¹ ‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], pp. 122-28.
- ³² The original Chinese text: 做为修补术的类型学，其特征是：建立起有结构的组合，并不是直接通过其它有结构的组合，而是通过事件，或者更准确的说，把事件的碎屑拚合在一起来建立诸结构。‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], p. 125.
- ³³ The original Chinese text: 现在，作为实际平面上的修补术的神话思想，其特征是，它建立起有结构的组合，并不是直接通过其它有结构的组合，而是[……]通过把事件，或更准确地说，把事件的碎屑拚合在一起来建立诸结构[……]。 *Yexing de Siwei* [*The Savage Mind*], 1987, pp. 21-22; *The Savage Mind*, 1966, p. 28.
- ³⁴ ‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], pp. 122-28.
- ³⁵ The original Chinese text: 也就是把过去的城市讲述一次，或者把过去的事情每回忆一次，城市的历史就被从新构造一次。[……]由过去变成了现在的一部分，关于

织体城市的理论就是对关于城市的历史进步与历史发展的传统理论的拒绝。

‘Xugou Chengshi’ [‘Fictionalising Cities’], p. 123-24.

- ³⁶ The original Chinese text: 按照他的看法，一个神话每重新讲述一次，或者过去的事情每回忆一次，历史就被重新构造了一次。[……]由于过去变成了现在的一部分，莱维-斯特劳斯的理论不赞成关于历史进步或历史发展的传统理论。 Edith Kurzweil, *Jiegou Zhuyi Shidai: Cong Lei Wei-Si Te Lao Si dao Fu Ke* [The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault], trans. by Yin Dayi (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1988), p. 14; Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 23.
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- ³⁸ See above at n. 10.
- ³⁹ Edmund Leach, *Lie Wei Si Te Lao Si* [Lévi-Strauss], trans. by Wang Qingren (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1988); Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 4th edn (London: Fontana Press, 1996).
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- ⁴¹ Jan M. Broekman, *Jiegou Zhuyi: Mosike-Bulage-Bali* [Structuralism: Moscow-Prague-Paris], trans. by Li Youzheng (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1980); Jan M. Broekman, *Structuralism: Moscow-Prague-Paris*, trans. by Jan F. Beekman and Brunhilde Helm (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974).
- ⁴² Susan Sontag, ‘Xiezu Benshen: Lun Luo Lan Ba Te’ [‘Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes’], in *Fuhaoxue Yuanli: Jiegou Zhuyi Wenxue Lilun Wenxuan* [Elements of Semiology: Selected Essays of Structuralism Literary Theory], trans. and ed. by Li Youzheng (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1988), pp. 182-207; Susan Sontag, ‘Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes’, in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. by Susan Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), pp. vii-xxxvi.
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