

# ARCHITECTURE AS AN ACTION

JINFENG CHEN

2022-2023

DIPLOMA PROGRAM  
BERGEN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## *Alienation*---WHAT

*"My own feelings of rootlessness as an Israeli-born South African living in England evoked a strong response as I witnessed the vast scale of change under way in China. **The west, and often the worst of it, is mirrored in China's development and in that I saw a reflection of all mankind. The mistakes we have all made are being repeated.**China is a nation that appears to be severing its roots by destroying its past. Demolition and construction were everywhere on such a scale that **I was unsure if what I was seeing was being built or destroyed, destroyed or built**"—Nadav Kander*

### Background

China's rapid modernization and urbanization process began with the reform and opening-up policy in 1978. Since then, the number and size of Chinese cities have expanded rapidly. "98 Housing Reform" is an urban housing system reform implemented in 1998, and the direction of reform is marketization, monetization and commercialization of urban housing.China's urbanization thus began to be driven by both capital and power. After 40 years of rapid growth, China's urbanization rate reached 60% in 2019. At the same time, the estate bubble began to burst and the China's natural population growth rate has been declining and recorded negative population growth for the first time in 2022. China's society has reached a new crossroad.

### Land Finance - *Urbanization driven by capital and power*

Land finance refers to the sales of land for urban development, accounting for a major source of income for local governments. After "98 Housing Reform" , local governments got the right to examine and approve the use of land, as a result of which Chinese local government has become the biggest supplier of land through its monopoly of power. To make it easier for the government to manage, sell and develop land more efficiently, giant real estate companies ,as a representative of capital, began to appear. Drven by power and capital, the process of urbanization has profoundly changed the urban space in Chinese.

### Spacial Alienation - *Place and Non-Place*

Urban space that is developed under the dramatic social acceleration and the logic of capital and power, must has been alienated ,which means that the space beening producted no longer serves people.if "*Place*" can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space on the contrary will be a "*Non-Place*". The non-place is the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it cannot contain any history, culture or even time, nor can it create anything, whether singular identity or relationships: only loneliness and similarity. In the past 40 years, we produced a lot of "Non-Place " rather than "Place", which is the reality we have to face in the following future.

### Collapse of Identity and Individual Autonomy

Social acceleration under the logic of capital is no longer possible to achieve individual autonomy, and is no longer a force of liberation, but a pressure to enslave people. Similarly, the space produced based on the logic of capital and power no longer serves people, but in turn erodes the individual autonomy, identity of the users. Architecture is no longer an active act of people to build their own living environment, but a passive acceptance. The critical task of urbanization in China in the following future is not only to reconstruct physical public urban space, but also to reconstruct the identity and individual autonomy of people.

## *Xian-Cheng- 县城* ---WHERE

### Xian-Cheng

Xian-Cheng, the smallest type of city in China, is located at the intersection of urban and rural areas, as a special concept of administrative division. As the main carrier of China's urbanization, more than 300 million people live in more than 1000 different Xian-Cheng in China. Xian-Cheng is not only the smallest city, but also the center of rural areas, which means that Xian-Cheng is responsible for both urban and rural development. We can say that the development of Xian-Cheng is the section of Chinese urbanization process.

### Lianjiang

I was born in Lianjiang, a typical Xian-Cheng in southern China. In the past its urban space has been rapidly capitalized. Parks, green spaces and other public spaces originally belonging to all citizens have been completely eroded by capital and power in a very short decade. The huge complex of private residential and commercial centers with closed form and bad quality built by big real estate companies stands at almost every important urban public node in the city. These new "public spaces" serve capital, not peopl. My project focus on these "non-spaces"and try to transform them into "places".

## *Decay and Social Inequality*---WHY

### Declining Population

Due to the rapid social acceleration, people are under increasing living pressure. China's young people are no longer willing to have children. In 2022, there was negative population growth for the first time, which means that China will be in a state of negative population growth for a long time in the future. At the same time, the level of economic development in China varies greatly among regions. Big cities such as continue to absorb a large number of migrants with their huge resource advantages, while small cities have become the main areas for population outflow. Therefore, the population of small cities will decline further in the future, which is already inevitable.

### Inevitable Decay - *Unnecessary high-density and bad quality*

The emergence of these high-density complexes, mainly private housing and commercial centers, is not the needs of people's life, but the needs of capital and power to plunder wealth during the period of rapid economic growth. These huge structures that are built in a very short time are often of extremely poor quality. It is clear that such high-density, concentrated housing is not suitable for Xian-Cheng. Therefore, in the coming decades, these low-quality complexes, which occupy the main public space, will inevitably decay due to the increasing maintenance costs and the constant loss of population.

### Infrastructure - Social inequality

On the one hand, the excessive expansion leads to the shortage of infrastructure; On the other hand, the real estate monopolizes public resources such as education, hospital and transportation, resulting in the centralization and stratification of infrastructure, which intensifies social inequality. Under the pressure of a declining population, Chinese government has realized that the logic of urbanization based on capital and power has come to an end. They will focus on investing in infrastructure and reducing social inequality in the future.

## *Architecture as An Action*---HOW

### Opportunity and Potential

The precipitous decline in population and the bursting of the real estate bubble spell the end of China's 40 years of rapid economic growth based on capital and power. China's urbanization will shift from the previous focus on increment to focus on inventory, and Chinese government will also work to improve infrastructure and reduce social inequality. The collapse of the old order indicates the opportunity for the establishment of a new one, which is social reality in the following future. Instead of simply tearing them down, the huge real estate buildings which occupy important urban node have great potentials for being parts of new infratructure systems in the future. My project focus on how to transform them based on human being and environment, not only based on capital and power and based on degrowth and reuse, not only based on proliferation and expansion.

### Mesoscale

In the past two decades, these huge real estate complexes have been collaged like unknown flying stones on the original urban fabric, occupying every important urban node in Lianjiang. The closed form and large volume cut off the original urban context, natural landscape, community, public space and street system. This crude invasion directly kills the vitality of urban space. Therefore, my project will focus on the mesoscale with these complexes as the core, involving the surrounding natural landscape, street system, public space and community. I believe that mesoscale is the way to suture wounds.

### Remove,Reshape,Reassemble

In my project, I propose the transformation of these huge buildings into an open, unfinished, self-growing structure,directly connected to the new infrastructure system. People reoccupy it, transforming it to be no longer a single architectural entity, but becomes part of the new urban topography, streets and communities. There are three critical approaches to this propose: **Remove - Removal is to open.** These huge buildings with the sole purpose of profit have extremely closed form, high density and poor quality. I retained the load-bearing core and removed part of the top volume to conform to the natural environment(sunlight,wind,view,etc). The removed bottom volume opens directly to the existing street, community and typography.

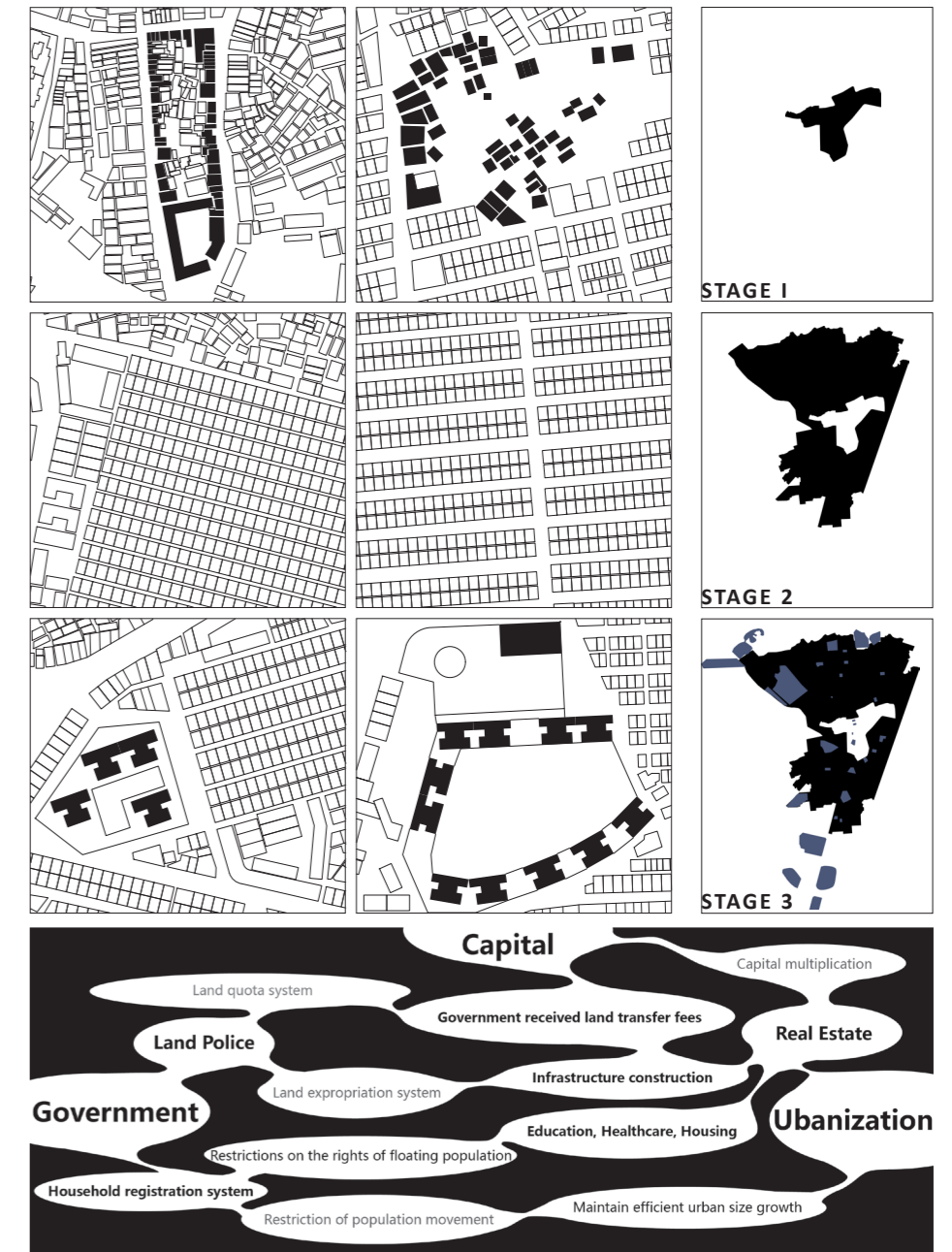
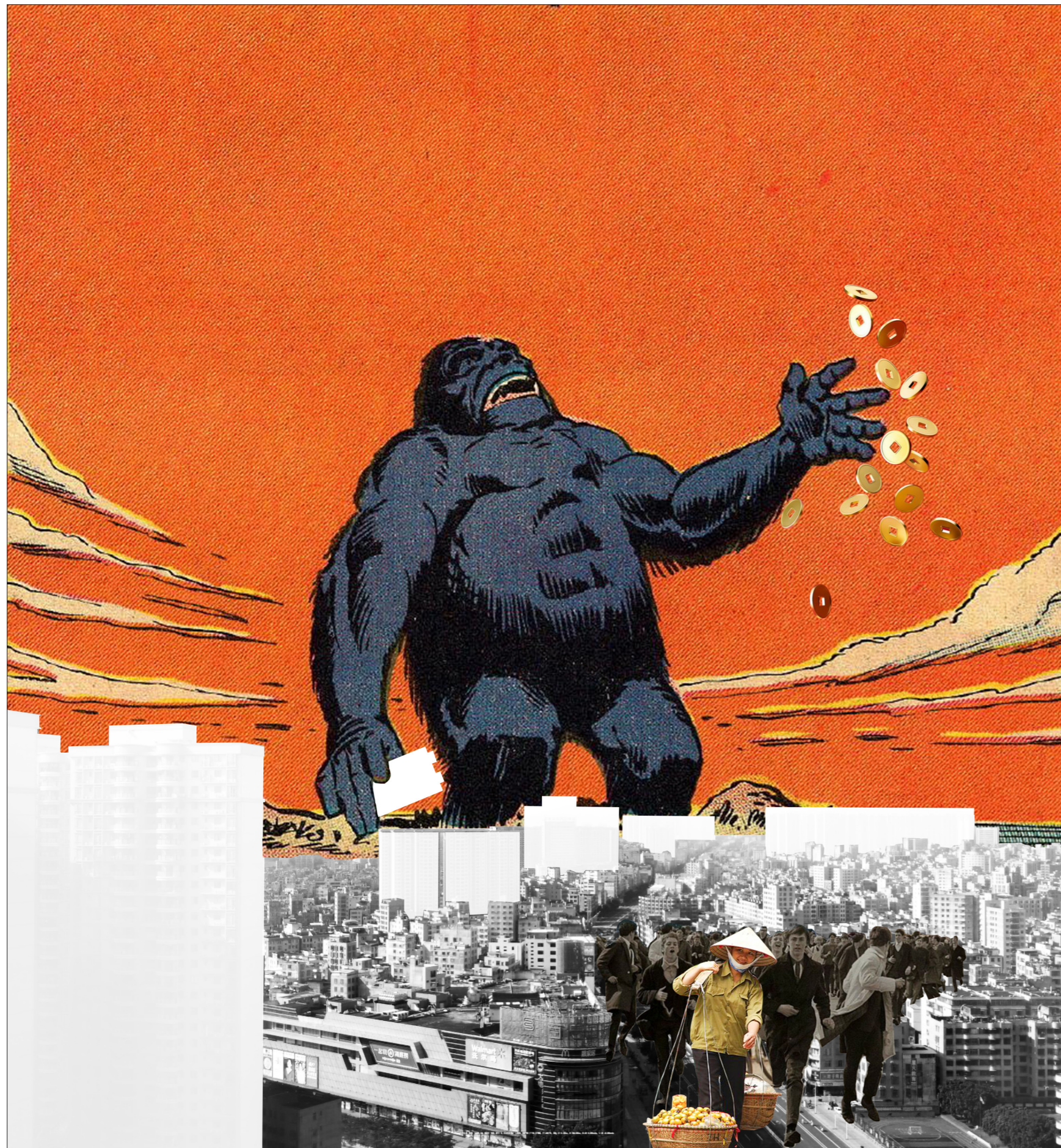
**Reshape - Reshaping means reconnecting.** These huge buildings cut off the original urban context, natural landscape, community, public space and street system.I used the waste materials obtained from the removal of the volume to reshape the topography and reconnect it with other elements of the site.

**Reassemble - Reassembly creates new relationships and narratives** After removal and reshaping, I insert some open structures with no fixed function. There are roofs, open platforms, staircases, new load bearing structures,open gardens and so on. These new elements work together with the old structure as an open invitation and background, helping the people to reoccupy the space, which also encourage people create new relationship and narratives.

### Architecture as an Action

Spaces based on the capital and power enrode the autonomy and identity of people.On the contrary, space based on the human being should help people to build their own autonomy and identity, which means that architecture is the concious awareness of action for building our own living enviromrnt. In this sense, the architect's autonomy is embodied in the initiative to create the background and conditions for people to realize their own autonomy.





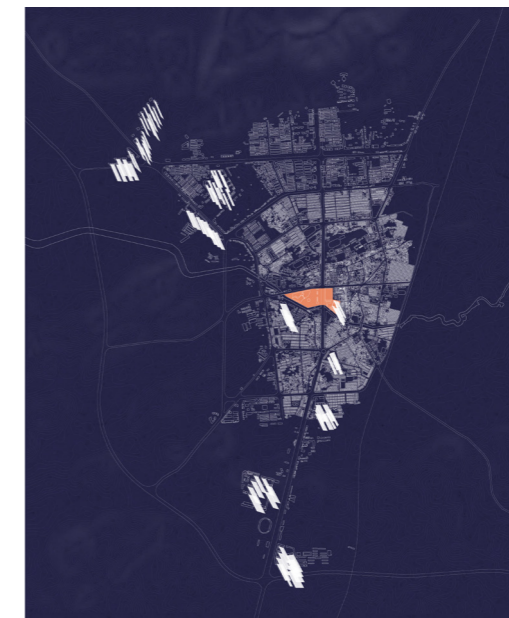
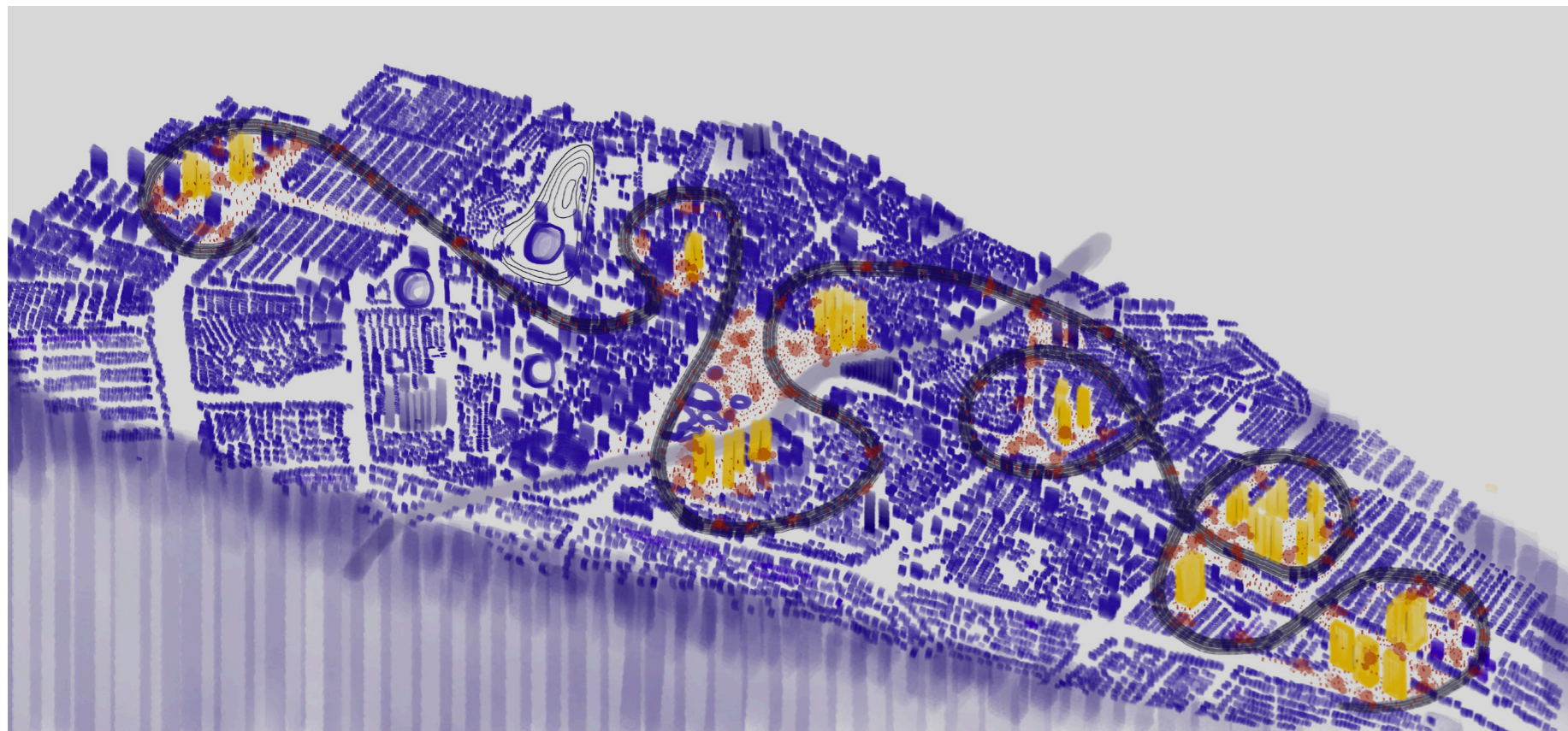
The collage on the left is a metaphor for urbanization process of Lianjiang city. The powerful orangutan symbolizes the power and capital behind the urbanization process, which easily and carelessly changes the existing urban fabric. And the evicted crowd hints at the spatial inequality created in this process.

The diagrams on the right shows the different urban textures formed in three different stages of Lianjiang City's urbanization process and the expanding spatial areas. we can see that the real estate complexes in the third stage is collaged on the original urban texture in a very simple and rude way. The relationship diagram of Capital-Power-Urbanization below shows how capital and power kidnap public resources in the process of urbanization. These collages and diagrams explain the context of my project, which is the reality in most Chinese cities.





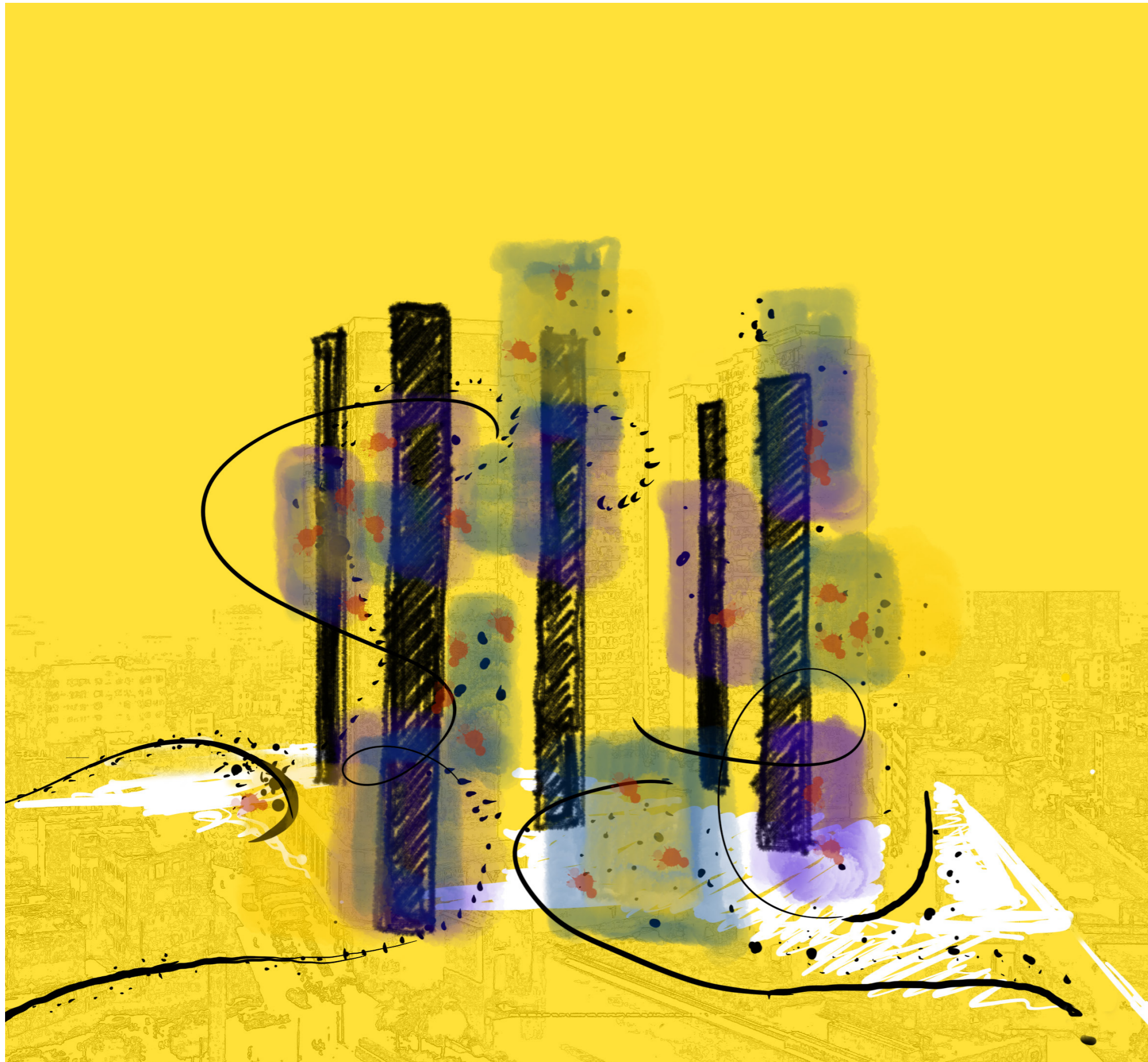
Along the River During the Qingming Festival (Qingming Shanghe Tu) is a handscroll painting by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan. It captures the daily life of people and the festive spirit and worldly commotion at the Qingming Festival, rather than the holiday's ceremonial aspects, such as tomb sweeping and prayers. Read right to left, as a viewer unrolled it, successive scenes reveal the lifestyle of all levels of the society from rich to poor as well as economic activities in rural areas and the city, and offer glimpses of period clothing and architecture. The painting is considered to be the most renowned work among all Chinese paintings, and it has been called "China's Mona Lisa." For me, what is most interesting about this painting is what "city" meant in ancient China. From this painting, we can see that the center of ancient Chinese cities was a huge open market surrounded by mountains and water. "Cities" are set up for people to gather, trade and communicate, and almost all spaces are open and temporary. Everything can be changed, replaced and reset, and people is the active participant and constructor in this space, as a result of which, all the spaces in the cities center are open and inclusive.



*My project is mainly conducted on the mesoscale. I chose the real estate complex located in the most central part of the city as my site. This is the earliest real estate complex in the city, surrounded by the most complex urban fabric and urban context.*

Compared with ancient Chinese cities, the development of cities based on the logic of capital and power is closed and exclusive. On the left it is my proposal on the macroscale for a future in which these huge closed buildings can be opened up and reoccupied by the people. These spaces work together to become a new infrastructure system that serves the people and active the city.



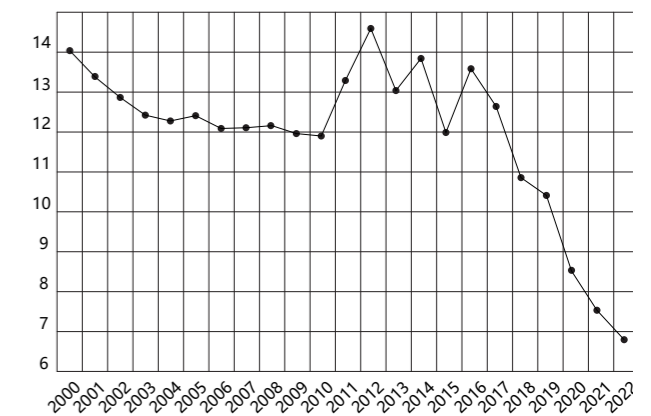


On the one hand, the emergence of these high-density complexes, mainly private housing and commercial centers, is not the needs of people's actual life, but the needs of capital and power to plunder wealth during the period of rapid economic growth. These cookie-cutter, huge structures that are built in a very short time are often of extremely poor construction quality.

On the other hand, with the decrease of population growth rate year by year, China will become a country with negative population growth in 2023. What's worse, a large number of young people from Xian-Cheng will flow to big cities every year for a better quality of life. The Decay is inevitable.

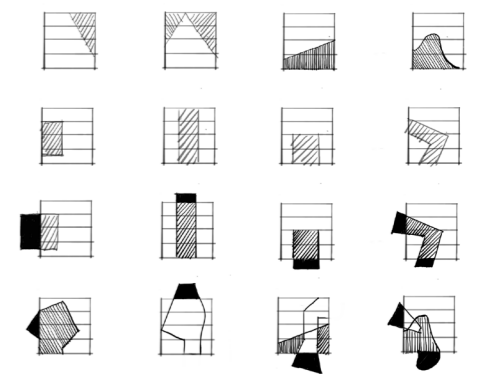
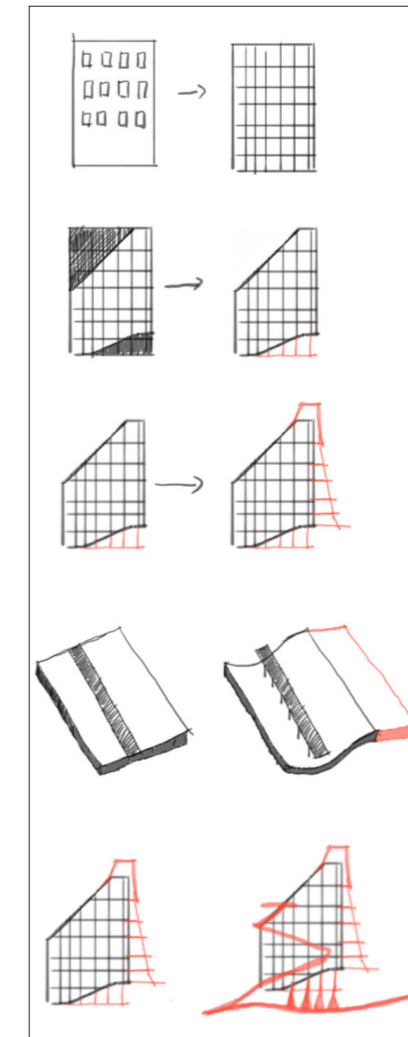


Population Grow Rate in the past 20 years



The painting on the left shows the main concept of my project. Instead of dismantling it, I try to reintegrate it by removing, reshaping, reassembling, which will take this closed system back into the city as part of a new infrastructure which is open and inclusive.



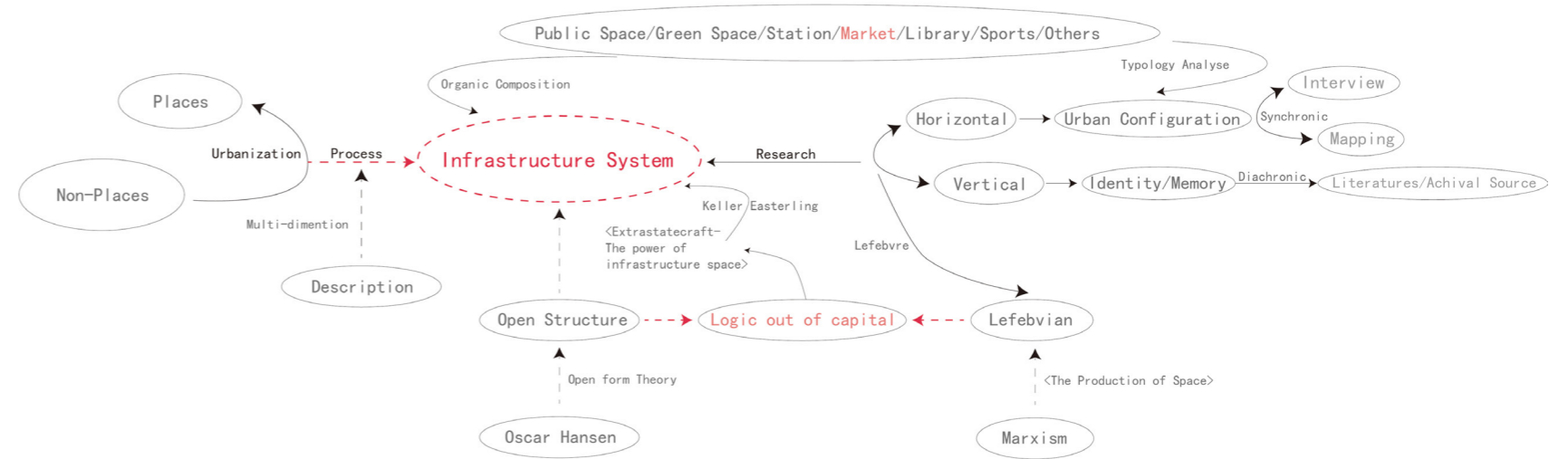


These diagrams show part of my thinkings of how to deal with the existing building with the methods "Remove-Reshape -Reassembling". Diagram is an important approach in my project.

Models are another important tool to move my project forward. The material of the model is critical because it's not just a design project. It's not about adding something, it's about subtracting it. Finally, I chose to print mold with a 3D printer, and then made working models with plaster casting. With this method, I can mass-produce solid models that are easy to cut and shape, and I can see how much waste I got from the removing.



# REFERENCE AND TIMELINE



	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
Social Science Essay	X					
Reference Reading	X	X	X	X	X	
Research	X	X	X	X	X	
Interview		X				
Site Analysis		X	X	X		
Physical Site Model/Digital 3D Model		X	X	X		
Concept		X	X	X		
First Design Phase			X	X		
Second Design Phase			X	X	X	
Detailed Design				X	X	X
Physical Design Model				X	X	X
Drawing				X	X	X
Exhibition						X



# CV

---



## Jinfeng Chen

Email: 451658510@qq.com  
Tel: (+86)15521047836 / (+47)92503880  
Address: No. 53 Nancheng District, Lianjiang City,  
Guangdong Province, China

---

## EDUCATION

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 09.2014-06.2019 | Guangdong University of Technology, Guangdong, China<br>Bachelor of Architecture<br>GPA: 3.43/5, Class Ranking 6/40, Grade Ranking: 13/90 |
| 06.2019-06.2020 | Bergen School of Architecture, Bergen, Norway<br>Master of Architecture (one year of course completed, one year left)                     |
| Exchange        | Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden (08,2022-01.2023)   |
- 

## WORK EXPERIENCE

- |                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 05.2017-09.2017 | Credohus Architecture Studio |
| 06.2019-10.2020 | FEI Architecture Studio      |
| 10.2020-02.2022 | Teamer Architecture Studio   |
- 

## WORKSHOPS/EXHIBITIONS/ACTIVITIES

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 2014-2015 | Li Yuan Primary School Architecture Education Volunteers   |
| 08.2016   | "Taste of Cherry" Mapping Workshop   |
| 2018-2019 | Study on the Relation between Family Life and Spatial Form of Traditional Dwellings in Western Guangdong |
| 04.2019   | "Reading the Great Number" Exhibition  |
| 09.2019   | "Enough: The Architecture of Degrowth" Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019, Oslo, Norway                    |
| 01.2020   | "To Be a BOOK" Exhibition, Bergen, Norway  |
- 

## SKILLS

Sketch up | Auto CAD | Adobe Photoshop | Archicad | Rhinoceros |  
Adobe Illustrator | Adobe Indesign | V-ray for Sketch Up

---

## LANGUAGES

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| English  | Speak fluently and read/write with high proficiency |
| Mandarin | Native language                                     |
| Japanese | Basic knowledge                                     |
- 

# MASTER STUDIO

## Semester 1

Sauna House

*Enough : The Architecture of Degrowth  
(Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019)*

## Semester 2

Local Perspective

*Moving Through Studio*

## Semester 3

Green House

*A Healthcare Center Renovation in  
Vedstena, Sweden*