

## Hybrid Buildings

Steven Holl

*What pressures specific to the 20th century does the combination of program impose on architectural form? Concentration of many social activities within an architectural form distend and warp a pure building type. Certain previously neglected forms of associations have been wrenched together in the modern city so as to generate buildings which might stand as an anti-typology, if examined under current theoretical preoccupations. Building functions are mixed, disparate uses combined; structures collected here are "Hybrid Buildings:" with respect to use. Although there are examples of combined function buildings throughout history (the house over the shop is prevalent in many ages and cultures), Hybrid Buildings developed most rapidly in the 20th century. The modern city has acted as fertilizer for the growth of architectures from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous in regard to use. Urban densities and evolving building techniques have affected the mixing of functions, piling one atop another, defying critics who contend that a building should "look like what it is."*

—Steven Holl and  
Joseph Fenton,  
*Hybrid Buildings*,  
Pamphlet Architecture 11

In the 21st century, what is the potential of Hybrid Buildings? Certainly the hyper-urbanization of cities in China, such as Shenzhen, Beijing and Chengdu, can act as catalyst incubators for new and experimen-

tal architectural types. These urban circumstances provoke unorthodox combinations and particular ideas related to specific places.

In the first decades of the 21st century, China is experiencing the most radical migration from rural to urban sites in human history: three hundred million in the process of moving into urban places. Rapidly constructed developments in Asia have reached nerve shattering proportions whose banalization yields a brutal urban compression. This condition urgently calls for unprecedented architectural and urban prototypes with social combinations of new public space models, green inventions, programmatic juxtaposition, new sectional levels, and spatial energy to redirect rapid urbanization. We are in a moment of new possibilities, of combining the most technologically advanced systems, green urbanism strategies, and layered cultural programming into a new hybrid—dynamic and porous. The question then is: where do you start?

We have now completed three large-scale urban projects in China, which embrace cultural connections and modern technologies to look to the next urban topologies. China at present is undeniably globally connected, supported by a global commerce. The cultural part of the new Chinese city should not be a kitschy recreation of tradition but a place of new symbols

In the apartments of our Linked Hybrid complex in Beijing, we followed

feng-shui principles of domestic space by using an exoskeleton to create large areas of flat slabs that eliminate all overhead beams in people's homes. One of the sustainable aspects of the project is that all apartments connect to the gray water basin that creates the central space within the

complex. Located within this central space are cultural facilities like the cinema. Upper level bridges also connect the buildings with functions such as cafés. The project brings together green building techniques and cultural spaces—a 21st century identity warmly embraced by today's China.

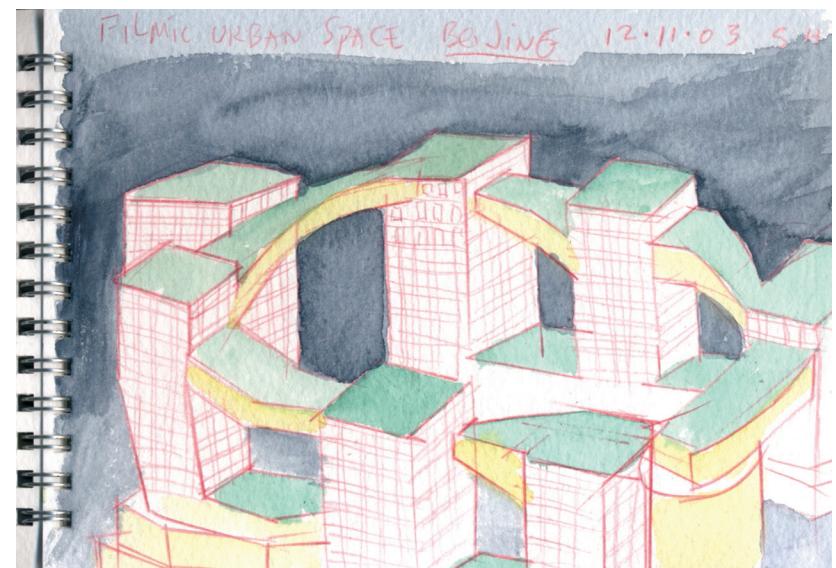


Figure 1. Concept Sketch, Linked Hybrid, Beijing.



Figure 2. Linked Hybrid, Beijing.



Figure 3. Linked Hybrid, Beijing.

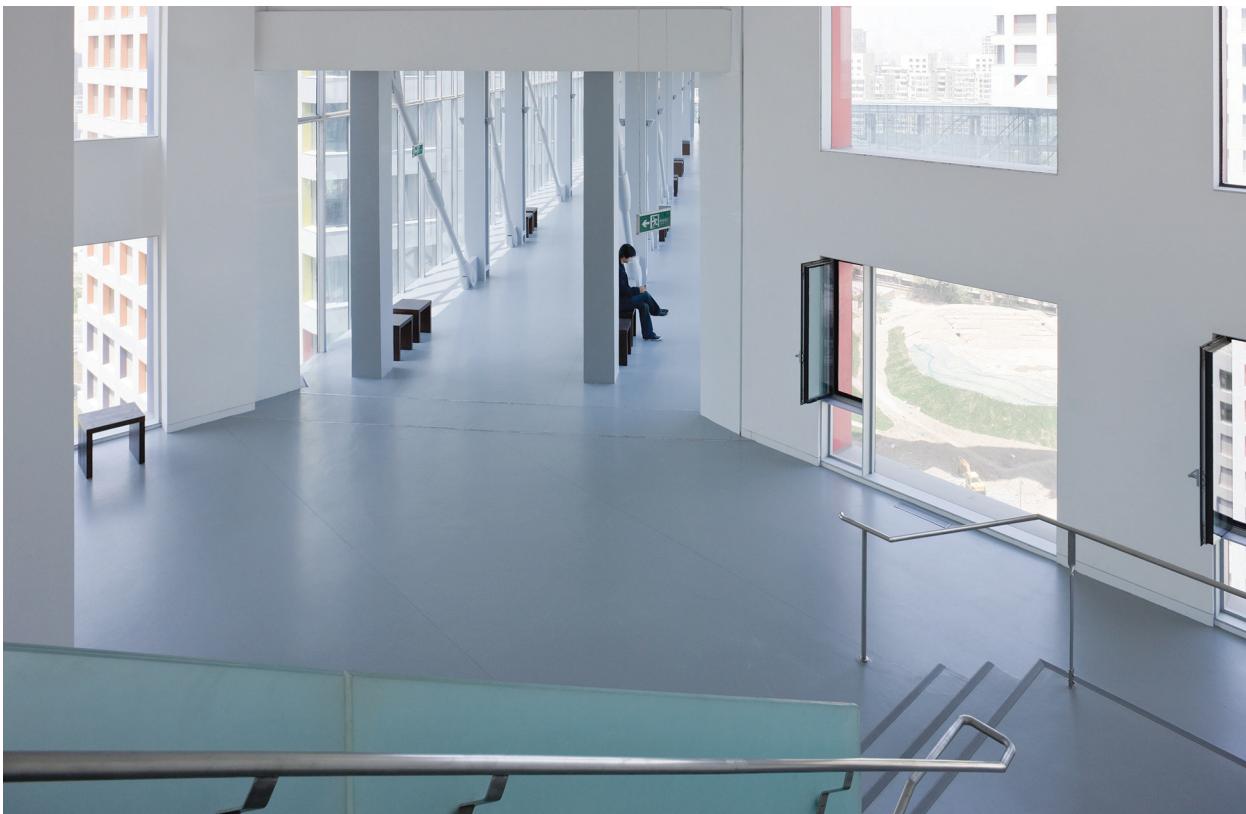


Figure 4. Linked Hybrid, Beijing.

We have also worked in Shenzhen—a sprawling metropolis that has literally been built in the past 34 years and is an economic engine.

How do you find the general tenor of its built environment? In 1980 it was a fishing village of 8,000; the city is now over 10 million—one of the fastest growing in urban history. Reforming communist party leader Deng Xiaoping's special development zone here accelerated economics and capitalization of China's economy leading to the present new Chinese epoch. The average age of the population in Shenzhen, around 26 years old, is almost equal to the age of the city itself. Shenzhen is a drastically different place and time, carrying residual memory of thousands of years of culture but only as a kind of amnesia without physical evidence. The ugliness of Post Modern-styled, hastily constructed, high rise apartment towers is the only physical evidence, and yet the city is full of life and programmatic energy.

Our Vanke Center presents a maximized tropical landscape; an alternative vision for this specific site. Raising the structure to the height limit of 35 meters affords views to the sea horizon while simultaneously creating a maximum of landscape and public space. With many programs—among which a hotel, condominium residences, and offices—it is a floating horizontal skyscraper as long as the Empire State building is tall.

Urban porosity is a key intention for large hybrid buildings with the aim of pedestrian oriented places. Public spaces formed by hybrid buildings contain living, working, recreation and cultural facilities. These new pedestrian sectors lessen the need for automobile transfer across the city. They become localized “social condensers” for new communities.

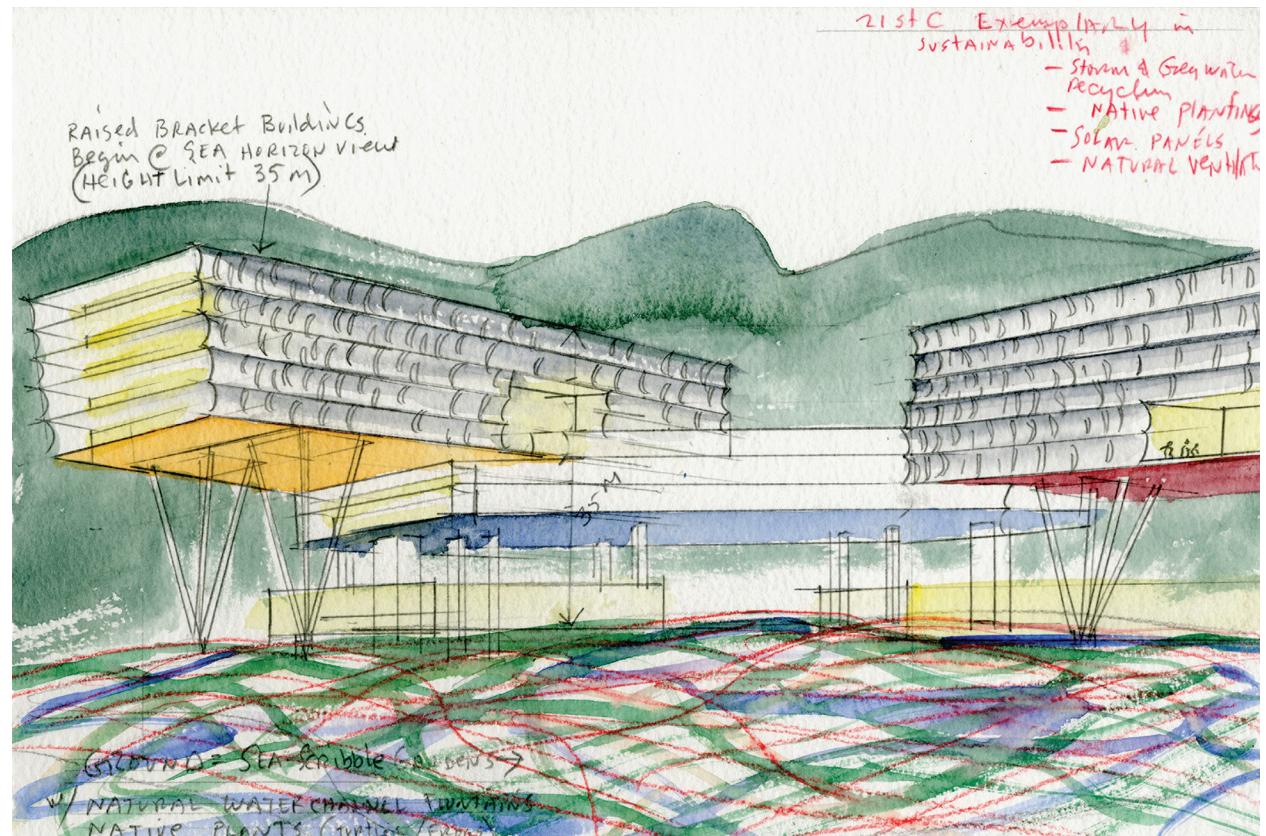


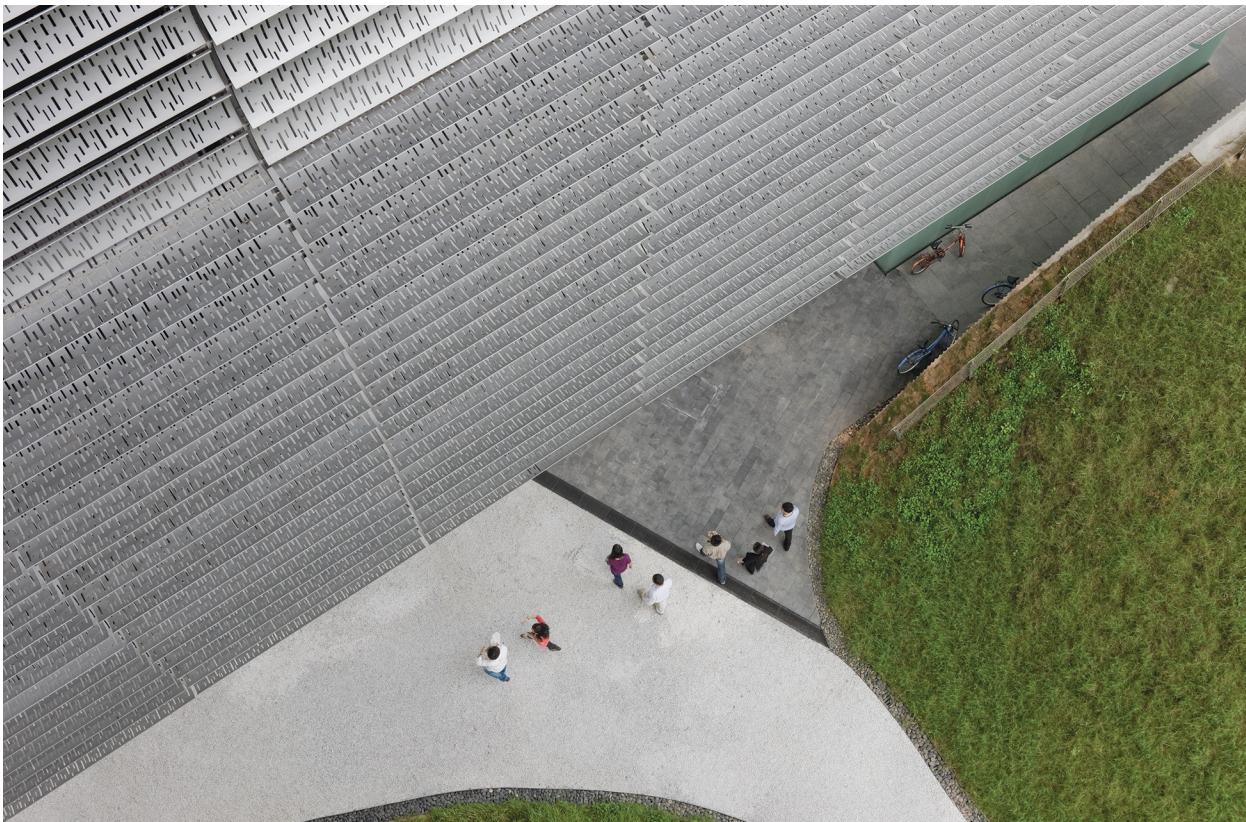
Figure 5. Vanke Center, Shenzhen.



Figure 6. Vanke Center, Shenzhen.



*Figure 7. Vanke Center, Shenzhen.*



*Figure 8. Vanke Center, Shenzhen.*

Working on the Sliced Porosity Block in Chengdu, we found that some of the most exciting urban architecture—the one that creates vibrant communities—resides at the mid-scale. Urban examples of change can lead others to hopes and expectations of their own. The solidity of the open architecture of the Sliced Porosity Block can adopt to change and flow. It is an architecture of duration rather than throw-away space. Master plans, endlessly debated and politically positioned,

move too slowly to be effective. In a large, rapidly developing city as Chengdu, a critical fragment as the Sliced Porosity Block with inspired experiential properties can be realized to stir up developments. The momentum a project like this generates can drive the master plan or a change of dynamic for future urban developments. Larger urban projects of multiple buildings provide architecture with a renewed transforming potential. Architecture today may not only affect the way we will

live—it can inspire and shape new feelings and meanings.

As urbanists and architects of metropolitan densities we must think first of building sections for the qualities of sunlight and the dynamics of diagonal sectional movement. Sections of hybrid buildings take precedent over the planimetric. The old conditions of linear perspective (from planimetric projections) disappear behind us as modern urban life presents multiple horizons and

vanishing points. The further affirmation of the diagonal and the vertical in new spatial experience is the challenge of new metropolitan density.

Ultimately, freedom of invention is the particular potential of hybrid buildings. Unprecedented ideas may drive the design of new building types. In certain ways, these new buildings might illuminate the unique character of the site and city they arise in.



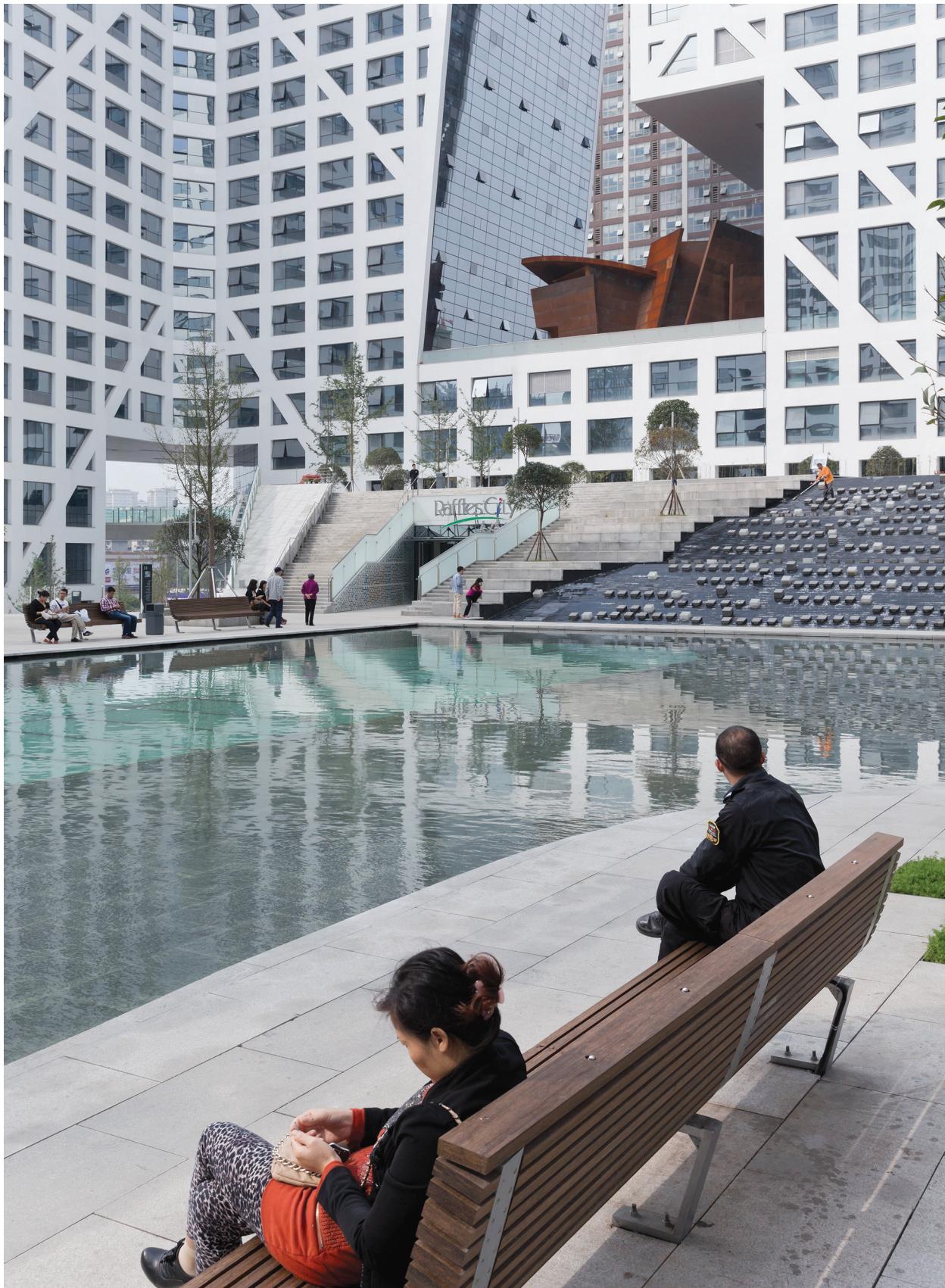
Figure 9. Sliced Porosity Block, Chengdu.



Figure 10. Sliced Porosity Block, Chengdu.



76 Figure 11. Sliced Porosity Block, Chengdu.



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Figure 12. Sliced Porosity Block, Chengdu.