

# Editorial

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## ASSIMILATION

The absorption and integration of people, ideas, or culture into a wider society or culture.

The process of becoming similar to something.

The process of taking in and fully understanding information or ideas.

*According to the Oxford Dictionary*

Since its foundation in 1865 by British banker Thomas Sutherland, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has changed its headquarters four times. Curiously, all four headquarters were built in the same plot at Victoria Bay in Hong Kong; each version was demolished and replaced with a new building and new branding strategy to reflect Hong Kong's shifting identity from colonial economy to a significant participant in the global free market.

The first version, a neoclassical building in the fashion of its European contemporaries, opened the road to a full assimilation of western architecture in the area, becoming one of the main examples of the neoclassical style in the Far East. Twenty years later, the building was de-

molished and replaced by a larger project in the Victorian style, following the trend of colonial architecture in the British Empire. This headquarters would last until 1934, when Hong Kong became an important player in the proto-globalized economy, consequently requiring a larger and more modern building. More than ten stories high, the new Art Deco headquarters stylistically mirrored its North American counterparts. Finally, rushing to be assimilated by growing global capitalism during the 1970's, Hong Kong developed into a major international financial centre. Once again, the building proved insufficient, and in 1978, was torn down and replaced with their current headquarters by Foster+Partners in 1986. The project became one of the most explicit examples of a developing region's eagerness to be assimilated into an external idea of a global market, adopting the skyscraper as a symbol of the emerging economy in Asia.

The HSBC headquarters enacts two conditions of assimilation in architecture: as the physical presence of a foreign reigning power—in the case of the first neoclassical and Victorian versions—or as a voluntary desire to be perceived as part of a global identity, culminating in the current techno-corporate tower by Foster+Partners.

Assimilation is a double-edged process, actively used by both the ones who wish to assimilate and by those who wish to be assimilated.

In this short issue, a heterogeneous group has shared their views on assimilation, using different media and distinct approaches to address the duality of this process. David Bergé tackles the role of infrastructure in the making of a contemporary idea of a society's identity by conjuring a notorious Roman road curator, Asli Çiçek takes us into her personal miniature's world and explores how this representation technique has been used by a myriad of different cultures, Louis De Belle shares his enticing captures on vernacular assimilation, Dennis Lagermann dissects a pivotal moment in the making of European identity, and Nile Greenberg raises the possibility of a charged ubiquity in Mies' Patio House.

Although Assimilation, like the remaining Building Identity processes of Appropriation, Rejection, and Conciliation, has been a constant throughout history, its specific duplicity highlights its relevance in the current moment, as the number of forces, of wills, which influence our perspectives and decision-making seem to be at an all-time high. With this issue, we share with you a number of suggestions of how Assimilation relates to architecture, and we open the doors onto new perceptions of our Identities.