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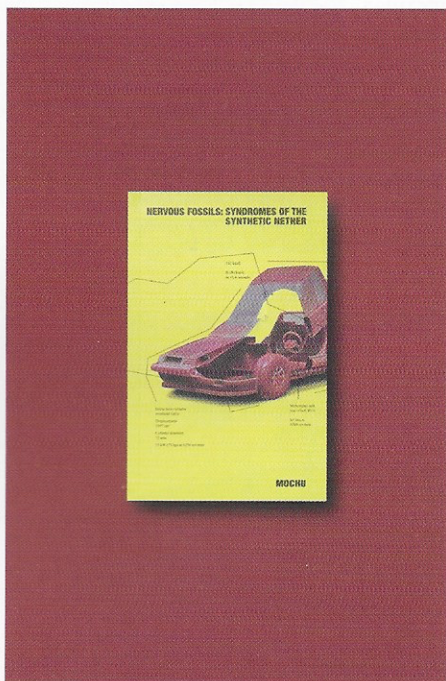




## VOYAGES THROUGH TIME

## NERVOUS FOSSILS: SYNDROMES OF THE SYNTHETIC NETHER

Text by Mochu, images by Adityan Melekalam and Mochu; 3D modeling by Anmol Singh Jaswal  
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Building on fact and theory, Mochu's work of speculative fiction *Nervous Fossils: Syndromes of the Synthetic Nether* explores the possibility of an eternal consciousness—thought unbound by materiality or the existence of human beings. It's a space-time-bending ride that unfolds across 88 pages of text and illustrations, and a rewarding one at that.

The book opens with an essayistic discussion of Stendhal Syndrome, a psychosomatic condition with symptoms including fainting and disorientation, induced by an aesthetic experience. From there, Mochu plunges readers into the waters of the East African archipelagic country of Comoros and an anecdote about a diver surrounded by lampreys with skin of such pure black "it felt like a concept." One imagines that immersion in this darkness and "absolute sensorial vacuum" might be akin to momentarily being in a dimension beyond and independent of

human perception. When the lampreys dispersed and light pierced through, the shock was enough to kill the diver—perhaps the syndrome's first fatal case.

The text then zips to a fictive anthropologist's account of a Comoros facility that investigated military and space-technology applications for the lamprey's black skin, with shady investments from Dubai. This leads to the imaginary Disconnection Conference, where a team of designers draw inspiration for the utopic Dubai Freeport, which they envision would be coated in a pigment developed from the lamprey research—a black hue where "all dimensions collapsed." Shaped like the dramatically slanted and compressed skull in Hans Holbein the Younger's 1533 painting *The Ambassadors*, the building's form is a reminder of a human's physical limits, which is what the Freeport aims to bypass—the designers "held the view that the human body is a tax that is being paid systematically to credit the account of death. A truly tax free zone should ideally keep out any involvement with such an unsustainable organic debt."

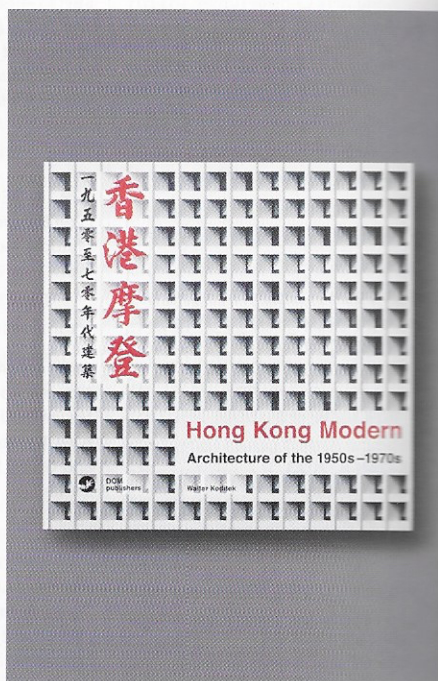
There is an element of body horror in this quest for eternal consciousness that is humorously encapsulated in two illustrations of a portable tanning lamp, with a satirical disclaimer that warns improper use "could cause a radical disconnection from human sensory apparatus, which in turn would void any known warranty." The Freeport's distorted-skull shape also points to an impossible perspective, one outside the order of human time and space.

To be clear, we are talking about the concept of an eternal life here, though not necessarily eternal human life. Where this could quickly veer into woo-woo mysticism, the book thankfully doesn't take itself too seriously. My favorite image in the book is the four-page rendering of the Škoda Super Sport "Ferat Vampire RSR." The caption explains the vehicle's name is a nod to its appearance in the Czechoslovakian film *Upir z Feratu* (1982) as a sports car that ran on human blood. From the undead to the metaphysics and possibilities of consciousness, *Nervous Fossils* stretches readers' imaginations, and though we don't transcend the confines of consciousness itself, we are perhaps more ready for it.

CHLOE CHU

## HONG KONG MODERN: ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1950S-1970S

Edited by Walter Koditek  
With contributions by Cecilia L. Chu, Eunice Song, Ying Zhou, and Charles Lai  
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Every day during my walk in To Kwa Wan, an old neighborhood that embodies a mix of chaos and affability in Hong Kong, one building often catches my attention. Located at No. 111-127D Ma Tau Wai Road, the eight-story building is painted in vibrant taro, sky-blue, rose, green, and orange colors, with its staircases gleanable through the vertical apertures on its exterior. This is only one of the architectural heritages left by Macanese architect Antonio Hermenegildo Basto, who helped with the development of many civilian buildings, especially *tong lau* (Chinese tenement houses), in Hong Kong throughout the 20th century. None of these structures were known to me until I opened the hefty, encyclopedic book *Hong Kong Modern: Architecture of the 1950s-1970s* (2022).

Compiled by German photographer Walter Koditek and a group of scholars, researchers, and architects, the 448-page book records more than 300 postwar