EPIC FAIL:
SPECULATION AND THE CATHERSIS OF CITIES

The design studio’s process of speculating on a better world through conceiving ideal models and through conjuring some kind of Utopia seems certain for failure, but it does seem to be innate and it might, like religion and property speculation be inextinguishable. Is the search for the ideal in the studio ultimately a futile and dangerous one that necessitates a suspension of reason and realism or is the speculation / fail / speculation / fail cycle of the design studio intrinsically part of what we do both at RMIT and in practice? Is it even possible to conceive of a design process at all without the ideal, without utopia or without a paradise?

These symptoms are acutely present in the design and conception of cities. From Babel to Masdar via the Radiant City, the Garden City and New Babylon, our canonic models are epic fails – dead on the drawing board. That they endure and have currency in the way we talk about the making the world suggests one of two conditions. Either that failure is cathartic and there is restorative power in speculation or that we’re addicted to the escapism of the ideal – profession junkies looking for our next hit of failure. Discuss.