

HYBRID RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE CENTRAL CITY. CHAP. IV. MUMBAI

SPRING 2014

Instructor: Juan Herreros; TA's: Diana Cristóbal y María Esnaola.

In our 2014-spring semester studio we will work on three decisive issues around the present moment:

TYPOLOGICAL CORRECTION: Following the same line of thinking than in the previous studios in Madrid, Barcelona, New York and Milan, we would like to add Mumbai to the list of cities which centers have lost their ideal conditions for living but offer at the same time a physical fabric full of architectural interest in bad state and infra-utilized or significantly vacant asking for a second chance to find again a pertinent role in the urban scene. The analysis and description of the starting conditions and the understanding between the architecture and the social, economic and political coordinates will be fundamental as a starting point. Likewise, the relationship between the scale and the physical construction of the architecture with the city will be object of study, as well as the capacity of the architecture to house programs that already exist with others to come.

CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION: In order to analyze, describe, test and communicate our work -and in definitive, to "project it" into the future- architects use different forms of representation. The election, implementation, and even invention of those different systems of representation would be a permanent object of study during the semester. It is not only about re-present but about using consciously the different formats as real instruments of investigation, causing the discovery of the unknown instead of simply registering or fixing what is known. From the analysis of the existing conditions and its social, economic and politic coordinates, to the decisions of organization, scale, urban implications and construction, everything would be a reflection around the production processes of the project.

GLOBAL PRACTICE: In our time, everyone is involved in one way or another in a global practice. As a result of exchanges but also as mechanisms of dominance, Mumbai, as well as Cuzco, New Orleans, Tel-Aviv or Brasilia are cities that show a strong character that has been constructed by architects and stylistic trends that were alien to their ancient history and that however today hold a "borrowed" personality as the most idiosyncratic of its character. Hence, it is important to establish some guidelines in order to develop a critical sense when acting in certain contexts where mimesis neither imposition are an

alternative. No fascinations by the local “problematic” conditions but trying to understand what is the reality of the starting point as a rich substrate to value and to potentially develop, the global practice of architecture allows for the foreign gaze to discover new equations and re-set the context with a different lexicon. A new understanding that allows even the local to build new affections for what they have while re-contextualizes their immediate environment into the global culture.

We will work in Mumbai, in the neuralgic crowded center right in front of the Central Station, an area conformed by part of the Fort district and the Ballard State. Eminently, an artificial place; half built on a soil generated by sea filler between the islands that constituted the ancient Bombay; occupied by imported architectures that evidence the past financial splendor of the first City of Mumbai grown around the Cotton business and maritime traffic; a neighborhood built by the British in a mixture of neo-Gothic, Renaissance, Deco and other stylistic revivals that constitutes a historical episode of the global practice (StudioX headquarters, located in the work area, is a good example. In fact, it is not by chance that they are hosted in this precise spot). This place is today a deserted languishing business center with a significant number of buildings in disrepair (collapses of buildings is an everyday episode). However, the diversity of functions, religions, social groups, forms of commerce... creates an incredible urban vitality. This is a great place for contemporary architecture to replace the center of gravity of Mumbai, a kind of ideal laboratory to write the fourth chapter of our research, "Residential Infrastructure for the Revitalization of the Central city". The studio will work with medium-scale architectural organizations taking the built city as support –existing buildings, open space and infrastructures- to manipulate, enlarge, re-configure hosting mainly residential opportunities, completed with urban-collective services implicating the forthcoming transport infrastructures (the site will be crossed by a subway line and Express Highway in the near future with a layout still under discussion) and especially the need for a public space. Issues such as re-programming, re-presenting, re-densifying, re-forming, re-living, etc. In short, we aim to recycle small fragments of the city by converting them into pieces of sufficient scale to alter the system of centers of gravity of Mumbai. Stepping away from megastructural fantasies, we will try to find the appropriate scale for a contemporary global practice. One that interests all the strata that conform the city, but can also be considered realizable for the architectural project together with all necessary disciplines, in a reasonable time.

Our trip will obviously be to India and we will plan a journey that will discover the “imported architecture”, from the Mumbai to Chandigarh.