

HYBRID RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE CENTRAL CITY. CHAP. V.: THE PROJECTS

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

TYPOLOGICAL CORRECTION: Following the same line of thinking than in previous studios, we select the New York social housing developments (popularly known as Projects) as urban typologies that have lost their ideal conditions for living but offer at the same time a physical fabric full of architectural interest. In the previous studios in Madrid, Barcelona, China Town-NYC and Mumbai, we selected case studies in bad condition, infra-utilized or significantly vacant. In this occasion, we'll focus in a typology with a strong urban presence but that has remained untouched for decades. Today the Projects perform as a collection of anachronistic urban islands that block the continuity of the city and contain a number of stigmas that make them be not widely accepted by the neighbors. However, like in our previous experiments, the Projects appear to us full of potential, asking for a second chance to find again a pertinent role in the urban scene. To this aim, their relation with the ground, their programs, their internal organization, etc. should be reformulated. We will look both for the benefits of living there but also for the positive consequences in the urban renewal of their environments. In other words, the series of "Typological Corrections" that will be developed by the studio will not only transform the physical reality of those urban areas, but will produce significant urban, social, economic and cultural changes in the neighborhoods where they are located.

CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION: The analysis of the physical conditions and the current relations between the architecture and the urban, social, economic and cultural issues will be fundamental as a starting point. Talking about architecture means to open the discussion about scale, density, programs and physical construction. The current relationship between these and other urban parameters is what we want to analyze, describe, test and communicate to "project" into the future. The research around existing conditions will have a natural continuity in the design phase thanks to the deliberate choice of representation systems. The election, implementation, and even invention of those

different systems of representation would be a permanent object of study. It is not only about representation as a registration of facts, but about representation as a discovery. The students will consciously use the different formats as real instruments of investigation, looking for 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 studio.

REAL STATE AND GENTRIFICATION: The transformation of industrial, decadent and segregated neighborhoods into the new areas where the city expands its real estate business has been a constant in the recent history of New York. Developers take these areas that can be reached at low prices to create new markets for new neighbors. Beyond the idea of renovation and expansion of the central city, there are also some negative effects such as the sterilization of the historical fabric, the social segregation and the loss of identity in favor of a relentless gentrification. As architects, it is important to establish some guidelines in order to develop a critical sense when acting in certain contexts where the splendor of progress includes hidden defects. There will be no fascinations by the “problematic” current conditions; instead the studio aims to potentially discover new equations and re-set the context with a different lexicon. A new understanding that allows both the new and the old residents to build new affections for what they have, while their immediate environment is re-contextualized into the city.

We will work in Harlem, apparently the next goal for real estate developers in NYC. After the historical districts in Brooklyn, Harlem offers an incredible high quality and solid architectural fabric with a significant collection of buildings that evidence its past splendor and that coexist with other large pieces (such as big supermarkets, universities, hospitals, churches...) and with the Projects. However, the diversity of functions, religions, social groups, forms of commerce... creates an incredible urban vitality that today is being the substratum of a strong transformation and an incredible real state price rise. Harlem is a great place for contemporary architecture, a kind of ideal laboratory to write the fifth chapter of our research, "Residential Infrastructure for the Revitalization of the Central city". The studio will work with the Projects –both with the buildings and the space in between- as support to manipulate and host new residential opportunities and other public and private programs and open spaces. Issues such as re-programming, re-densifying, re-configuring, re-forming, re-living, etc. will be the tools to recycle these city fragments and convert them into pieces of sufficient scale to alter the system of centers of gravity of New York.