

HYBRID RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURES IN MANHATTAN: ARTIFICIAL NATURES IN HUDSON HEIGHTS

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In the Spring 2015 semester studio we will work on four decisive issues around the present moment:

TYOLOGICAL CORRECTION: In previous studios we have selected a series of case studies located in central urban areas that are in bad condition, infra-utilized or significantly vacant, and have offered them a second opportunity based on the quality of its original architecture, not always easy to appreciate. Following the same line of thinking, we have chosen the complex of housing developments and infrastructural facilities on, along and under the trans-Manhattan expressway —Interstate 95— in Hudson Heights. It is hybrid obsolete big scale urban piece with a rich history in terms of typological experiments that needs to be re-described in architectural terms. After having considered China Town-NYC and Harlem-NYC as previous case studies in Manhattan, this area (between 178th and 179th streets from Hudson to East Rivers) has a diversity of grain and connectivity ideal to work as a laboratory for the study of the development of the city. The George Washington Bridge Bus Station designed by Pier Luigi Nervi and the Washington Bridge Apartments design by Brown and Guenther on top of the highway, provide an opportunity to explore urban transformations related to the social, economic and cultural shifts of the city, particularly as they have manifested in the Northern tip of Manhattan in the last century. Today, the typologies over the trans-Manhattan expressway perform as anachronistic urban islands charged with a number of stigmas that motivate their rejection both by neighbors and city wide inhabitants. However, this area appears to us full of potential, which we want this studio to explore by reformulating the relation of its different constitutive pieces among them and with the ground, their programs and internal organization, etc. We will look both for the benefits of occupying these structures but also for the positive consequences in the urban renewal of their environments. In other words, the “Typological Correction” that will be developed by every project of the studio will not only transform the physical reality of the existing buildings, but will seek to produce significant urban, social, economic and cultural changes in the neighborhood where they are located.

ARTIFICIAL NATURES: We will work on architecture’s capacity to create artificial natures, in response to the contemporary emphasis on the “naturalization” of the city. The typological correction will be our tool to work within the artificial metabolism of the city. We will study the principles of Japanese metabolism as a precedent, and will travel to Japan to consider its architectural manifestations and the context to which they responded. Rather than searching for the literal application of their projects in today’s dense cities, we are pursuing a way of thinking in architecture that re-considers its own discipline enriched with references from different contexts and fields. Japanese metabolists tried to offer a particular response to the contemporaneous concerns about the growth and change of the city in a new technological context which expanded and diverged from the European work of the modern movement and the CIAM-Team X. Grounded on a biological life-force metaphor to design the future city, the project of the metabolists was in fact a celebration of the artificial nature of the urban condition. To put it bluntly, they never planted a single tree. Recent reappraisals of the metabolist

project will constitute part of the course bibliography. However, we will avoid any nostalgic approach to this movement and its manifestos, with the aim to discover new equations and re-set our context with a different lexicon.

REAL ESTATE AND GENTRIFICATION: The transformation of decadent and segregated big pieces of architectural heritage into new spots for the expansion of the city's real estate business has been a constant in the recent history of New York. Developers take these areas that can be acquired at low prices, and transform them to create new markets for new neighbors. Beyond the idea of renovation and expansion of the city, there are also some negative effects to these processes, such as the sterilization of the historical fabric, the social segregation and the loss of identity in favor of gentrification. As architects, interested in particular conditions of density, programmatic hybridization and new ways of living—all juxtaposed under a huge range of speeds—it is necessary to establish design guidelines seeking to develop a response towards solutions in which the splendor of progress hides existing challenges. There will be no fascinations by the “problematic” current conditions; instead the studio aims to change the equation of development and gentrification with a different lexicon and sophisticated responses. After the historical districts in Brooklyn, and with process of gentrification already underway in Harlem, the Northern tip of Manhattan is soon to fall under the radar for real estate developers in NYC, if it has not already. The redesign of the George Washington Bridge Bus Station currently under development (GWBBS Redevelopment Project) might be the trigger of this process. Announced not only as a renewed transportation hub but as a new “shopping destination,” the project is a public-private partnership between the Port Authority and the GWBBS Development Venture, which will share the cost reaching \$185 million. We seek solutions to integrate this new center of gravity—closely linked to the Bronx and New Jersey and becoming the Northern gate of Manhattan from up state—with a new comprehensive response to its surrounding context. This should provide a new understanding of the city 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.

CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION: The analysis of the physical conditions and the current relations between architecture and the urban, social, economic and cultural issues will be fundamental as a point of departure for the studio. The concerns of architecture expand to include questions of scale, density, program and construction. We want to consider the relationship between these concerns and other urban parameters and we aim to develop ways to analyze, describe, test and communicate these relationships, as well as to “project” them into the future. The research and representation of existing architectural and urban conditions will be considered as the ground for the project. The deliberate choice of representation systems will allow suggesting continuities between these analyses and the designed reality, granting for the artificial continuities of the city. The selection, implementation, and even invention of those different systems of representation would be a permanent goal of the studio. This does not only concern representation as a registration of facts, but representation as a form of exploration and discovery. The students will consciously use different formats as research instruments, looking for hidden conditions or relations instead of barely registering what is already evident. From the analysis of the existing conditions in its social, cultural and economic coordinates, to the decisions regarding organization, scale, urban implementation and construction, everything would be a reflection around the production processes of the studio.