The Graduation Studio of Complex Projects deals with the design of an emptied pre-industrial site in South Chicago. The 2.4 sq. km site of the former U.S. Steel South Works, located 15 miles south of the center of Chicago and bounded by the Calumet River on the south and Lake Michigan on the east. The adjacent neighborhood on the opposite side of the Lakeshore Drive was once filled with different immigrants who worked at the factory. After the closure of the factory in 1992, the site became inactive and the adjacent neighborhood started to decay due to lack of programmatic and spatial diversity. Several proposals have been made during the years and almost the whole area was emptied. The most recent development was Designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). Yet, only the first phase next to the site is planned for development. The economic crisis, the bad local climate and the overwhelming centrality of Chicago makes the development of this area nearly impossible.

The masterplan starts with the accessibility to the specific areas of the site. We tried to use spatial programmatic stuff as less as possible to define these areas, but focus on obtaining a certain spatial and functional atmosphere. The plan main focus is maximizing existing qualities of South Works, especially those towards the water, and introducing new ones where needed. An example of an introduced qualities is a diagonal border over the whole site. The ‘spine’ allows for a different typological approach on either side, splitting the area towards the city or the water. This phenomenon allows the spine to function as a new spatial diversity and adds new functionality to the center of the site.

The building will focus on different socio-geographical levels that the chosen location has to offer. It functions as a border and opening between different spatial atmospheres. Locally it functions as a catalyst for new industry. In times of crisis, creative entrepreneurship stimulates the involvement of the community for they are part of the creation. The building focuses on the creation of new products by giving the people access to new technologies and facilities and simultaneously functions as a catalyst beacon for South Works. The projects merges production space and public space as an indicator for interaction between maker and user by opening up a hidden sequence of labor plays with the visitors curiosity, turning passive observers intro active users.

Moreover, the building focuses on what the site is and wants to be, instead of what it should be. The building doesn’t focus on complex future scenarios, but tries to understand and boost existing qualities as a basic framework for future modification. The designed framework will condition the surrounding areas, allowing them to be claimables in stead of pre-designed sterile objects.

BREACHING THE BORDERS
A new voice for south works

FIRST FLOOR 1:200

MASTERPLAN 1:2000