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Thesis

Reflection

Studio:

New York Mid-town

Themes:

**grid restructure, neighbour adaptive,
cultural & social exchange**

Title:

**A co-working Agora: Dance-film startup
Campus**

The dance film campus locating across the 31st and 28th Streets between Broadway and the Fifth Avenue, is aiming at an intimate relationship to the future development of the district and urban linkages. It is an open campus that restructure the existing grid form, absorbing tourism and creative industrial expansion from adjacent areas, facing newly formed industry to the public, so as to create an urban form of contemporary agora. The project is tackling the common issue of Manhattan, undesirable public space, that neglect neighbours from its redevelopment and gentrification of old industrial district in mid-town.

The relationship between research and design:

In the graduation studio of the Complex Project, the primary research is given considerable attention. Historical research, urban analysis and social-economical forces are heavily relevant to the topic. Knowing the fundamental formation of the condition of the public space, the dichotomy between public life and built environment rest on the further research of ephemeral activities such as festivals, protests, concluded as 'social dialogical activities'.

The focus of the project on public engagement of the rising creative industry is then formed by the result of the site - a transitional zone with proximity to the central business district and absorbing future expansion of the adjacent districts. The research dealt with the sociological aspect of the use of public spaces rely much on research of local examples of how people use and transform spaces with similar, different, exotic or novel natures within public buildings and open areas. Pointing out a common mismatch between planning motives and actual use, a desirable public space depends highly on engagement with its neighbours, together with accessibility and both the history and future development of its urban periphery including new mobilities, renewing industries and level of pedestrianisation. These all influence the urban gesture of the project and level of dependence to its surrounding (streets, avenues, blocks) and implementation of spatial typology (access, penetration, linkage). Research on spatial typology and the use of relevant architectural elements helps in achieving the 'social dialogical' notion within artists and among them to the public especially in a vertical urban campus.

Meanwhile, sustainability performance of structure and climate issues integrate with spatial quality and future vertical expansion of the plot. Targeting the project a future-

proof proposal, the possibilities of timber is explored in high-density urban condition with integration of a collection of materials, such as concrete (foundation structure), corrugated glass (facade feature) and steel (transparent truss core), that were developed base on case studies of performing art related projects, campus and timber urban mid-rise.

The relationship between graduation topic, research topic and master architecture track:

'Midtown remains as the corporate centre with its glory inherited from the previous century'

from the studio brief

The studio is dealing with the complexity of New York in urban density, market driven intensity and other new urban challenges such as transition from historical industries to new industrial sectors, gentrification and new mobilities. The topic dealing with both neglected publicity and the declining area in the land-intensive mid-town is highly relevant. Throughout the research, the understanding on the past glory and the transitions of atmosphere of the district is extremely important to derive a suitable neighbour-dependent program across the rigid blocks. The program of dance film do not only consider the existing rise of local creative industry but also the historical meaning and image as entertainment district of the area and along Broadway. The graduation topic provides a rich background for my own research topic to revolve. The diverse context tightly link all aspects of the research topic with the proposal.

Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevancy of the work:

The research intensity and methods of the Complex Projects are incomparable to other studios and project I have worked on before. The studio requires a more structured, diverse and realistic way in approaching a project. Jumping forth and back from all scales and from groups to individuals. During MSc 3, through handling large amount of data, mapping, articles, essays and lectures, much outcomes are compiled into a research book regarding to initial group research assignment, each of our developed research topics and an individual design brief. Other comprehensive set of tools and outcomes are developed such as research book, personal articles, group models and movies in P2.

Interdisciplinary approach that reach wideness and to reach in depth understanding of all relevant topics. Precedent study and continuous wrapping up through power-points to get ready for presentation and keep developing a clear image on presentable practicality and implementation of concept. Systematic research through reaching to wider sources of literature and typological studies give reasons and foundation to all decisions towards the outcome. Although the continuous production and generation of research outcome and conclusions are intense especially at the early stage of the studio, it provides opportunity to keep revealing back to what have been done and to be done next. Thus, every decision is made by a combination of solid analysis and trained intuition which benefits myself a lot.

Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework,

touching upon the transferability of the project results :

The project dealt with new implication of block structure on the existing urban grid of New York. The long developed relationship between block, street and avenue determine the existing skinny towers in Manhattan. However, in the contemporary city, population gain is inevitable. The existing adaption to the grid is limiting the development of spaces within the block and across the streets, also only favouring large enterprises but not the vulnerable groups which contribute a lot to the vitality of city life ('cityness' as defined by Saskia Sassen). Spotting this situation specifically a typical situation in many post-industrial districts in New York, therefore the project is looking for alternative ways to reconstruct the commercialised city, avoiding Manhattan to develop as a cluster of Hudson Yard which I think is beneficial to the 'Empire' aspect of the city but destroying the lively 'Village' aspect.

The project proposed a solution specifically in its location between the Broadway and the Fifth Avenue which is popular by their entertainment and tourism industries. This new development proposal orients towards a certain local neighbourhood locating at the transitional border of rapid commercial development zone and the passively developed declining zone. This border condition on one hand can easily be found in other old industrial area of Manhattan, however, the group of neighbour varies. On the other hand, although knowing that the Manhattan grid is unified further up along the East River, the diversity it embraced is also tremendous. A project that its restructuring depends highly on its immediate surrounding, historical character and atmosphere is hardly duplicatable. Also, due to the nature of program, using arcade, stair and ramps as spacial typology favouring the collaboration and exchange of users as well as responds to the pedestrianised

surrounding. Therefore, the project in general is developing a site specific approach to deal with the urban transformation. Similar grid restructuring principle can be partly transferable to other grid cities that also embrace the similar relationships between blocks, streets and avenues. However, the rest of the project can only be used as reference on its spacial and programatic strategies.

On the other hand, most of the retail and wholesale shops at the existing plots are run by families. These buildings are expected to be replaced sooner or later due to the market forces, while the proposal spot this as possibilities for the future. How about inhabitants that have been there for decades or even generations? A new development not seemingly lead to a relocation, but a close down of their family business. Is architect capable to deal with this situation sympathetically?

Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii) elaborating the design, (iii) potential applications of the results in practice:

(i) Through out the year, a general design sequence is used, from site analysis to program decisions and proportion to spacial typology. Yet, design an unusual cross shape in complex and dense urban environment in midtown Manhattan, i realise, lately tho, the study of form typology out weight the rest at initial stage of design, with typology system specified, design process will be much smoother. Secondly, a complex project in metropolitan requires a clear system or certain level of modularity to efficiently design and build in a restricted time, that's why the tailor made dance film campus causes me more time than its scale to produce and design on plans

The project requires a complete wipe off of existing empty plots at first place to constitute the optimal form of a cross that unobstructed the internal linkage to the urban fabric. Also, the strategy of lengthening access across plazas to the entrance resist development of certain plots. The issue regarding to stakeholders revolved. Is the strategy market-acceptable?