

# THE CO-WORKING AGORA: DANCE FILM START-UP CAMPUS

***How can social dialogical activities enhance certain communities in public buildings? Can these be prompted within the industrial transitional areas of New York City?***

The density of high-rises and skyscrapers of the New York City overwhelmed. Through studying the history of the city, we get to know its formation through urban and building scales.

The city has grown into enormous scale and complexity since the first discovery of the Dutch traders in the 17th century. In 1811, the commissioner's plan set the rigid layout where the existing densely built environment is formed upon. Unity, efficiency and systemisation are fundamental rules that boost, however, also limit the expansion of the city. Manhattanism, an urbanistic ideology suggested by Rem Koolhaas in his publication 'Delirious New York', has breed the hyper-density metropolitan condition in contemporary urbanism of New York. Withdrawing from the isolation on dominance of the built environment, however, attention on the public spaces was always left behind until William Whyte's initiation on the research of public spaces in 1969 namely the Street Life Project. The social-economic differences provokes interesting and strong inverse on how the city capitalise and how the people live in the Empire Village. Within it in which a dichotomy is identified not only among fast-paced commercial district and village-like residential areas but also between the form of organising the city and people's intension on breaking through of the rigidity. Therefore, the thesis is aiming at outreaching a proposal responding to the following posed problem:

*In an ever changing and densifying metropolitan, economic efficiency & hyper- diversity marginalised vulnerable groups in using public spaces. The weakening of spatial social attachment result in a successive segregation among neighbour and public realm.*

## **WHAT IS THE STATE OF PUBLIC SPACE NOW AND WHAT IS NEEDED BY INHABITANTS?**

Central Park was proposed 40 years after the commissioner's plan which only divided the land into plots with less effort put into the consideration of open space use by inhabitants. Concious planning of public spaces across the city was not done until the New York City Planning Commission in 1969 by William Holly Whyte (1917-1999). Studying human behaviour in urban setting, Whyte began to wonder how newly planned city spaces were actually working out. This curiosity led to the Street Life Project, a pioneering study of pedestrian behaviour and city dynamics. By looking at images in movies, photos and articles, the urban environment of the city reveals an iconic image of alternatives, juxtaposing intended use and

unintended ephemeral use of space due to unbalanced provision of space for both uses. Obviously, streets have now been a popular place, counter to the hyper-dense built environment, for occasional ephemeral activities. Within such urban setting, interest is drawn on the public space where spontaneous ephemeral activities happen. People infuse their emotion and attention into these activities being those who organise, manage and join.

Looking into the city, these activities include events such as protests and festivals which happen once a while in available open spaces. Street performance and daily ritual are also contributing in a smaller time interval. In various ways, the population construct the dynamic 'ephemeral city' in their neighbourhoods to supplement the insufficient and undesirable public spaces.

## **WHAT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF THE TENSION BETWEEN PLACES AND ACTUAL NEEDS?**

Yet, apparently, Manhattan is not built for physical well-being of people, but orientating to maximisation of capital since the first discovery by the Dutch traders in the 17th century. By researching the history of New York, financial influences always take part in decision making on how the city was going to be set up.

As early as the first discovery of the merchant from Dutch company in 17th century, when they establish fur businesses at the lower tip of the Manhattan island, planning facilitating trading was dominating in configuration of the city. Roads and piers supported transportation of trading activities, while the uncontrollable nature was excluded by a city wall. Owing to success in trading, immigrants moved in, the city started expansion along the island. The Council let landowners to make streets, regulate and clean by themselves. The wealthy families owning large pieces of land divided their lands up for renting to small tenants.

At the end of the 18th century, the independence of America accelerated generation of grid system which allow the government to gain full control of the topography of the city. Land was managed by the council as Common Lands, after dividing, to be sold to private owners. As settlements grew denser and denser spreading over the islands, more profits can be gained by vertical development aided by technological improvement. High-rises have then begun their domination originated in New York. Since the 1950s, the introduction of the International Style started to disconnect high-rises from site surrounding due to

technological advancement. Deeper and taller buildings became possible and more welcomed by developers. Taller skyscrapers not only represent corporate power but also advertising. Thus, as Carol Willis states, in the book *Form Follows Finance*, the skyscrapers are “the locus of business and as businesses themselves”.

Often being considered subordinating, public spaces, which themselves do not prone to generation of economic value, were designed or injected as secondary element into the built environment. Historically, the natural geographical environment was out of consideration during the initial survey or design stage of the Commissioner’s Plan. Natural landscape was brutally removed to fit the grid in, the planners did not concern the massive removal of nature harmful until several decades later the proposal of the Central Park. Even, the Madison Square, an important public space in the site, did not initially designed for the public. In contemporary situation, zoning plans regarding to commercial, residential and industrial zoning regulations always promote an exchange of public plaza for more FAR especially for high-rise developments. Public plaza is symbolised as a well being and a means to satisfy intangible needs of people other than basic inhabitation.

### DIFFERENTIATION IN MOTIVES

The motive of city planners and developers are conspicuous. Aiming at higher economic return, the design and spatial distribution of these high-rises follow master strategies responding to the market or regional goals. However, in contrary to the hard landscape, soft landscapes which considered as communication and relaxation sites such as public spaces, plazas, parks and greeneries were not initiated at the early stage of planning. Instead, they were either injected into the grid system as plug in or as trade off for more Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and higher price of better view. In contrast, these spaces can only satisfy public lives in a shallow sense. In some cases, for easier management of the city, the government reduces the number of public spaces which are actually needed by the public or even restrict the way of using these public spaces.

*“So many protest, so little space”*

Taking public plaza as an example where protests usually held, issues across politics, human rights and all range of justice call people out to the street, while these plazas do not seem to be able to accommodate the pace and volume of the crowd. Throughout the years of social unrest in the 1960s and 70s, the Great Lawn in Central Park was

a common ground of collective discontent, including the Anti-nuclear March in 1982. Yet, following by the set up of the Central Park Conservancy, these massive social expression were expelled. In recent decades, the other part of the city also find nowhere to accommodate these events. For instance, the women’s march in New York in 2017 had drew an astonishing 400,000 participants. The point of departure was Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, a small stretch of land between First and Second Avenues in the 40s, which has been a popular site of mass demonstration for many years, and one for which the city has often granted permits. It is a spot both hard to access via public transportation and relatively small, with a capacity of only 8,000 people. The surrounding side streets are narrow and heavily shaded. The planned route for the march, south toward 42nd Street and then west toward Fifth Avenue, was difficult to approach because so many were trapped inside the plaza and eventually not even able to involve in the march.

### WHY ARE EPHEMERAL ACTIVITIES IMPORTANT?

*“Cityness must accommodate these intersections (intersection of differences) which constitute a form of subjectivity and perhaps untranslatable into an immediate tangible outcome.”*

Saskia Sassen

Ephemeral activities combine movement and events contributing to cityness of New York which make it a more inhabitable and healthy city. They encounter expression and reception of public and individuals to the complex community. Within its realm, celebration and riots, support and counteract, interact and withdraw, ... which seem to put parties opposite to each other, are actually constructing the society in a different way. For instance, protest as a form of public expression against policies of the governments, reveals the juxtaposition of destruction and production. Don Mitchell, an emeritus professor of geography at Syracuse University, said “After mass protests, you end up in a slightly different place than you did before, though the power structure is reasserted and cultural life returns to many of its norms, there has been a bit of a shift.” Putting apart the market-driven built environment that most of the people have no power to gain self governance, they contribute and get involved to the society through occasional all scales of spatial intervention, from volumetric to individual through various media.

## EMPIRE VILLAGE

Within the group, a common acknowledgement on Empire Village is raised upon the differentiations among the western commercial zone and its contradistinction to the eastern residential zone and medical city along the East River. As Herman Hertzberger, a Dutch Architect, states, 'The qualification of a building and its city rests on a consequent conduction from big to small, inside and outside and in sequence which will merge fluently'. The situation of dichotomy does not only appear on a single scale, but from zones to avenues, from streets to blocks.

Empire Village, as what is mentioned at the beginning of the article, is a situation identified as the **dichotomy not only among fast-paced commercial district and village-like residential areas but also between the form of organising the city and people's intension on breaking through the rigidity**. The built environment and the ephemeral activities reveal also such dichotomy in the site.

## CONTEXT & RESEARCH QUESTION

The industrial buffer zone located between the Garment and NoMad Districts is considered a suitable testing ground to the challenging opposition. The zone is situated at the least profitable marginal area in the Central Business District that used to accommodate the old wholesale industries. With a close proximity to the commercial zone and touristic area, the buffer zone, within the wider framework of a global city, is neglected through the process of rapid urban development. At the same time, facing the encroachment of tourism and new creative and innovative sectors from the expansion of the adjacent Garment and NoMad districts. Obviously, the declining wholesale industry will all be replaced, while some of the growing communities which sojourn in the industrial buildings are also going to be wiped out. Considering their intersections valuable in reception and expression of small groups and individuals into the complex urban environment, can they be reorganised in new form that is responding to the current situation, meanwhile suggesting a possible future adaption to zones alike, avoiding a total destruction on the existing social hybridity? Therefore, based on these contexts the research question is raised:

*How can social dialogical activities enhance certain communities in public buildings? Can these be prompted within the industrial transitional areas of New York City?*

In order to further develop the research and answer the

question, two sub-questions are to be discussed.

### SUB-QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE SOCIAL DIALOGICAL ACTIVITY(IES) IDENTIFIED WITHIN THE CONEXT?

Owing to cheap rent and generally low-rise buildings in the light-industrial buffer zone, start-up offices occupy many of the plots such as the Nomadworks at the intersection of 31st Street and Broadway. They injected freshness and energy into the buffer zone in which the withered and fallen wholesale shops are incompatible with the busy commercial and touristic districts. These start-up companies usually built with full set of facilities that are welcomed by the young entrepreneurs. Also thanks to the construction of new residential highrises and its proximity to other entertaining and shopping spots such as the Nike Headquarters and Macy's Department Store along the Broadway, Cafes and restaurants also encourage the pedestrianisation of the area.

Seemingly contrasting with the brownish and dull industrial buildings, these activities are making them even more out of place. However, the mapping surprisingly informed that quite a number of dancing and filming studios are renting the empty industrial buildings as their working and workshop spaces. They cluster forming a small community with already some small shows and events are held. And therefore, they are potentially expandable if better facilities and places could be provided. The integration of more related discipline and general public could be able to transform the district into a hub for arts and crafts exchange.

### SUB-QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE SPATIAL AND URBAN CHARACTERS IN THE OLD-TO-NEW INDUSTRIAL TRANSITION AREA?

In previous paragraphs, it has been mentioned that dichotomy within the research site reveals also between avenues and streets.

Although the grid system has unified the built environment in an urban scale, the avenues running northward and the streets running across Hudson Yard and East River diversify the urban formation and pace of developments. Taking the industrial zone as an example, the 5th Avenue, 6th Avenue and the diagonal Broadway are three important axes across the zone, identifying commercial, entertainment and shopping characters. Shopping malls, office highrises, headquarters of popular brands and even the Empire State Building are all identical landmarks that represent the most popular vibrant image of the city.

However, that is exactly the different way along the street. Closer to the intersection with the avenues, more and more new highrises such as hotel and malls are built. Yet, away from those intersections, the center cluster within the block usually contain older and less maintained industrial buildings which can mostly trace back to the beginning of the 20th century. The juxtaposition of these differences stretches the future development of the district further apart, resulting in an unbalanced gentrification. Yet, on the other hand, the forgotten stretch of land across the streets are potential sites which allow for proposals that are not serving the 'Empire' aspect of the city, but the 'Village' side, taking care more the vulnerable groups such as the artists and the growing start-up companies.

Based on these materials, further translation and interpretation are made to formulate the design brief.

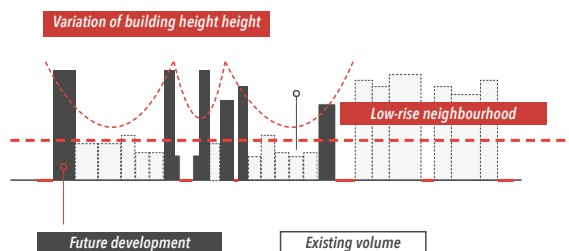
### THE TRANSITIONAL ZONE

The site is constituted by multiple layers. Provided that New York is the cultural, financial and media capital of the world and in the center of New York metropolitan area with high accessibility from all around the world and from other parts of its neighbours. With its tremendous threshold and market, capital flow and skilled labour are attracted. Surrounded by commercial and residential district, the selected site locates itself within the industrial buffer zone which embraced variety of commercial activities comparing to the other commercial districts.

The site itself is surrounded by Garment District and Korean Town on the north, NoMad District on the south, Chelsea District on the west, Kips Bay and Rose Hill on the east. With landmarks such as the Empire State Building, Macy's Department Store, Korean Town and Nike Headquarters on the northern edge, tourism is dominating. While the NoMad District mainly contains the historical site and the rising creative and innovative sectors. Therefore, the site is featured as a transitional zone where needs to deal with the expansion of tourism industries from adjacent districts. Due to its proximity to tourism area, the site is situated between the heavily pedestrianised streets and avenues. Thanks to the high accessibility by mass transit system, people within the district can access different spots by foot and leave by finding its nearest station. It is favouring the future possibility of the area to be a walking district which depends on walking, cycling and other new mode of transportation such as scooters. Social and public activities starting from street level have to taking into consideration in the future

real estate development.

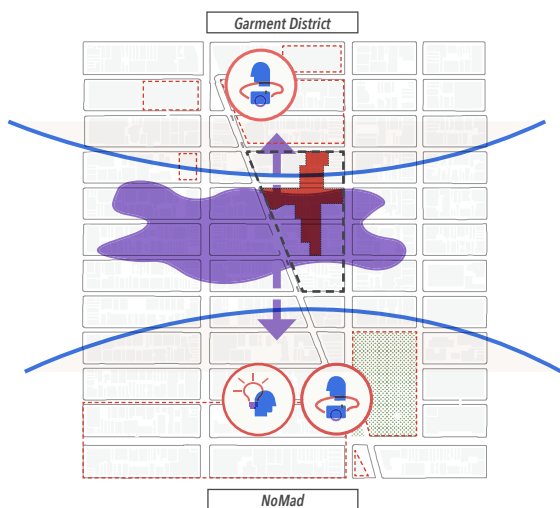
Historical sites and buildings offer constraints on future development. The buildings that are not granted historical preservation status are generally lack of maintenance and have been undergone private alterations which also destroy its original value make these buildings prone to demolition instead of restoration. The site is situated mostly within the industrial zone and a small portion that is situated within the commercial zone. It results in a generally high FAR between 10 to 12. As we can foresee from its new development plan, its surrounding is going to be another cluster of high density high-rises mainly serving the tourism industry and a small amount of residential. Thus, along the 5th Avenue and the Broadway, due to the FAR opportunity, high-rises will become the dominating building form while those along the street will remain low-rises.



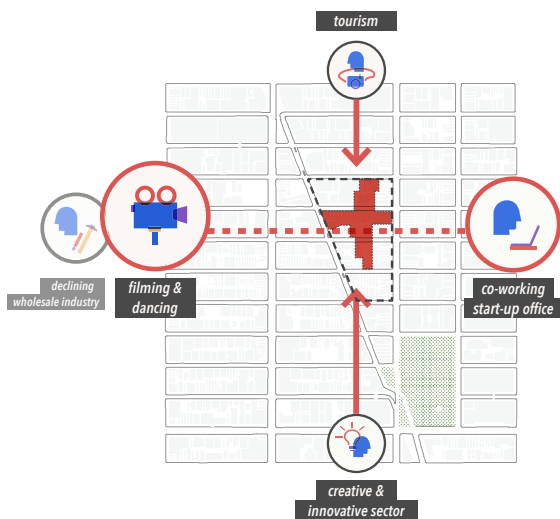
*Avenue-street building height variations.*

### NEIGHBOURHOOD OPPORTUNITY

As we mentioned above, the site is undergoing a transition from the wholesale industry to the new creative sectors. New creative industries such as film production studios and choreography studios are constituting as the major community. Also, start-ups offices are the major form of working occupying the low-rise office buildings. Integrating the start-ups and new creative sectors, what can the new proposal offer? How can the new programs absorb the adjacent tourism and creative sectors, at the same time, forming new public realm that are supported by these new sectors in long run?

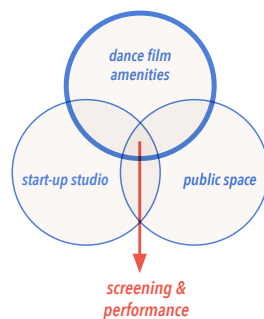


Transitional zone.

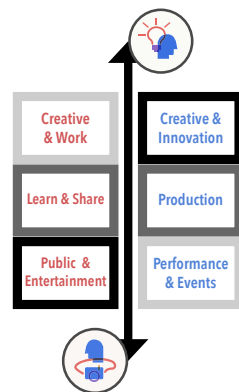


New creative sectors absorbing the expanded sectors from the adjacent districts.

## DESIGN BRIEF



Program concepts.



## PROGRAM & LAYOUT

Referring to the research and its generated result, the thesis will be proposing an Dance Film start-up campus for the Dance Film Association. Due to the fact that arts start-ups usually spend the most on rent and their production equipments, art amenities are the binder between the art community and the public where the public can engage by participating their showcases and events demonstrating their process and outcomes.

As a whole, the building will be positioning itself from two perspectives: helping the dance-film start-up community to promote and preserve, as well as engaging the public into the creative industry.

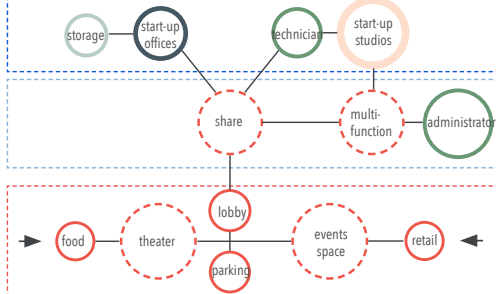
It is going to be revealed on two building typologies, the campus supplemented by offices. For campuses, they are tending to shift from the classical form to new form, which focus on their 'study lives', and shift from classical teaching to form of interactive learning. Recently, campus developed both vertically and horizontally. Vertical campuses focus on the stacking and vertical integration of public and social spaces. While the horizontal campus such as Rolex Learning Center eliminate hierarchical order on plan and replaced by cluster of programs with similar publicity on a continuous circulation plan. These are then resulted in three major design principles of the arts start-up campus — amenity-centered design, vertical social facade and horizontal non-hierarchical plan. In addition to that, new trends of city —collaboration and co-working, new mode

of transport and sharing, are also taken into account during the design process. Therefore, as a whole, these elements decided the nature of programs and also their corresponding weighting as shown below. In dark blue is represented the office program which less interactive with the public. The lighter blue are shared amenities that shared by the start-ups including offices and studios. The lightest blue is art studios that are relatively closed-off to the public in terms of physical accessibility. The reds are spaces which are fully opened to the general public, constituting as part of the public life for different users.

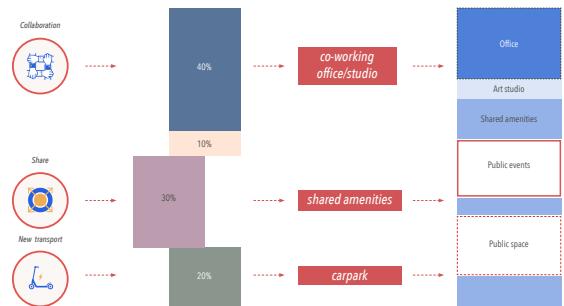
Office is occupying the largest part of the program as a profitable model of the scheme. Apart from that, shared amenities are then occupying the second largest proportion of the program. Auditoriums and open theaters for performance, open cinemas for the on screen films and informal performance stages are major spaces that allow socialising among the artists and also the public.

Therefore, the program layout is mainly divided into two parts, the undisrupted central public realm and the offices and studios linking to the social spine. The public supportive amenities becomes the center of public realm leading to the main spot of dispersal (the lobby).

The imagination of spatial arrangement is reflected on the section. Analysis of the existing buildings on site reveals the ground floor street headline at 5-8 meters, social podium at 15 meters and average height of existing building at 46 meters. They are dedicated to vehicular circulation, continuous amenity plinth and maximum height of the art start-up studios. While to maximise the FAR, ranging from 10-12, in both commercial and industrial zones, the office buildings can reach the height of 155 meters without yet considering the extra air-right left by the proposed low-rises across the streets, from 28th Street to 31st Street.



Program layout.



Programs & their nature responding to current trends.

## SITE STRATEGY & PROGRAM MASSING

Borrowing the arcade typology which facilitate passages through dense building blocks, the site is composed by a shape of cross across 4 street between 28th and 31st Street. Offices highrises are located along the Broadway and the 5th Avenue adapting to their future tendency along more profitable avenues, while the low-rise dance film campus will develop across the streets forming a new form of enclosed 'street'.

In total, the site area is 13300 square meters appearing in a cross shape with 215 meters in the longest side and 12 meters in its shortest exposure to the street. Its scale is comparable to that of the Architecture Faculty of TUDelft. The site strategy is envisioned considering also its adjacent plots. Historical sites and buildings remain its existing height and state while the plots occupied by the old and undesirable buildings, that are aged more than 110 years, are prone to demolition. Learning from the local evidences, they will be replaced by new high-rises featuring touristic functions. While some of the plots have already left empty for future developments. The lower plot of land now used for parking is situated within the Historical Building Site which does not allow new construction.

In short, the selected site across the streets will be left empty and developed as a continuous site. Responding to its publicity to the users and the pedestrian-heavy streets, the two plots exposed to the 31st street and 28th streets will be left open.



The massing studies are initiated by the cross shape of the selected site. Integrating height restrictions, land value variations along avenues and streets, working mode of campus and public encounters, the final massing carries the character of a mixture of high-rise and low-rise, cluster of smaller building mass and linkage by plazas.

### ARCHITECTURE AMBITION

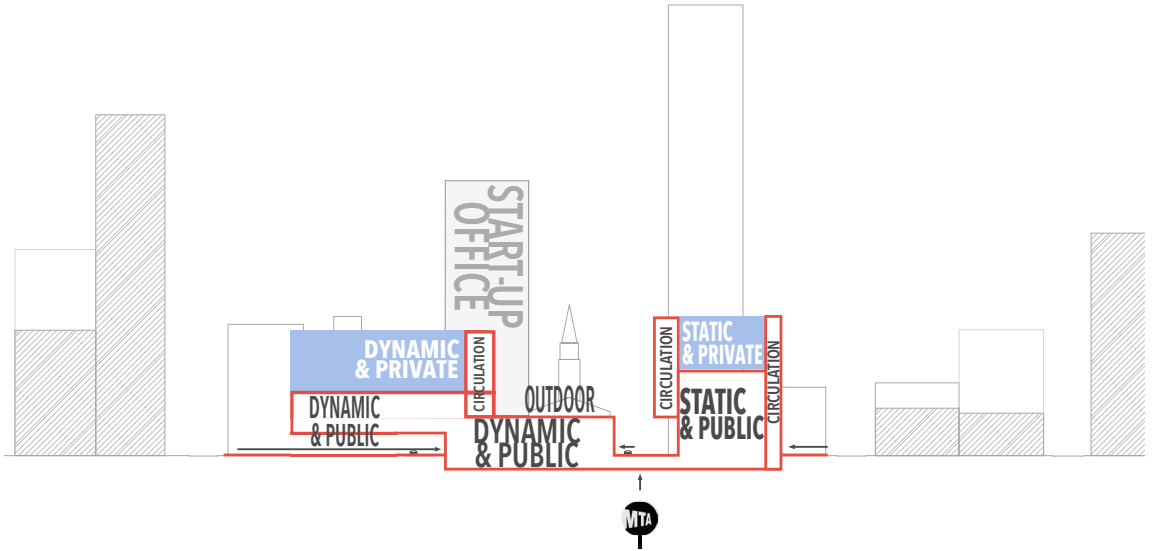
The group is visioning a further densification of the existing commercial zones, respecting the village like character inside the metropolis and maintaining the diversity in the industrial buffer zone. In the context of Manhattan that its complexity is comprised of multiple layers and depth of space, the idea of 'Superflat' is introduced to reduce the depth of space and ordering hierarchy between the users,

functions and spaces.

The idea of Superflat was a post-modern art movement found by the artist Takashi Murakami, influenced by manga and anime. The idea was borrowed by Japanese architects such as Toyo Ito and Sanaa. The idea stresses on the transparency and permeability of perception through spaces including outside and inside as well as the endlessness of space. Emphasising on facade, 'Superflat' reduces the internal inter-connection while emphasis the strong linkage with the ever-changing urban environment and people. Materiality which enhance transparency are more preferred in the project in order to stress the blurring of boundary between public and buildings. Therefore, the existing bleak materiality on site are rejected. While a flatness between spaces is going to be introduced and studied in the MSc 4 through various examples naming the Parc de la Villette,



*Form and materiality.*



*Architecture responds to context.*

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