REFLECTION REPORT

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Introduction

This writing aims at collecting, filtering and concluding the work in the graduation studio of Complex Projects. According to the general frame of the studio, each student will develop their project through three phases: collective research, group work on urban strategy, and individual work of design intervention. This short paper will therefore follow these phases and thus mainly cover three parts -- research, urban strategy, and architecture design. Each part has its own scale and approach, and they together will complete the graduation project.

Research: collages of neighborhoods in Midcity

The research of West Chicago (defined as Midcity area by studio), with special focus on the linear urban area near a future subway Lime Line, is a collective work consisting of three aspects: programs, infrastructure, and physical environment. The group I joined was focusing on programmatic analysis of the large urban condition, meaning the people and their living area. In order to understand these large amount of urban area comprehensively, our research was proceeded in a narrative way which collecting historic information, stories, problems and potentials of the area with in total 18 neighborhood districts. These pieces of collages are afterwards concluded into several crucial questions on Midcity area accompanied with maps, diagrams and statistics. Through this bottom-up approach, the history, current condition and possible tendency of the Midcity area are analyzed and predicted.

Urban Strategy: Cluster City

The urban strategy of Midcity area by our group derived from the further analysis of the whole area. Since each of our three students of the new group is from one former group of urban research, we could collaborate the whole previous research and dig out sharper and more crucial problems. We proceeded such further analysis through diverse approaches including writing, collages, modeling, etc., and ended with a conclusion that such vast area in between downtown and suburb of Chicago has a severe lack of quality of positive and systematic urban system. The most urgent symptom is the increasing “urban patchwork” as a result of population decrease. Therefore, we have raised a new type of urban structure, a cluster city, that is more condensed, mixed, and interacted. Such third structure in urban area-- a new formulation of city -- might be born from the
existing clustered change in west Chicago. Deeply rooted in distinct social characteristics from unique culture of those ethnic groups migrating into Chicago from different countries all over the world several decades ago, those cluster identify themselves with much more than just superficial difference with regard to physical appearance. They perfectly represent the diversity of sub-society under the same social mechanism in the US. They are American, but not yet americanized; they are unique, but not segregated; they made contribution in the past, and they deserve a better place in future. This future will be born from a well-planned region, a third city parallel with skyscrapers and suburb houses. It is envisioned as a balance between efficiency and quality; between individual and collective; between diversity and hybridity; between autonomy and collaboration.

![Image](image1.png)

![Image](image2.png)

**Fig. 1: Cluster City, first concept (collage)**

**Fig. 2: Cluster City, final strategy plan.**

**Design Intervention -- architecture as a negotiation, a diverse system of discussion.**

After a certain level of zoom-in urban strategy of one crucial center in one of the clusters in Midcity area, each of our group members raised their own topic to start individual design: Think, Create, and Discuss (my topic). My project started from the analysis of a greatly valuable kind of discussion in American cities: theater. To provide crucial functions including theater within one building is the main aim this project is trying to reach. In order to fulfill this aim, the designed architecture is defined as a container of diverse “territories” including public open spaces, public indoor spaces, collective working ground and individual housing. By bringing all these related but
normally separated part together, this possible type of architectural container will be able to stand in the core of cluster cities and contribute to hold the whole urban structure by intriguing lively and valuable discussion at diverse levels.

The project has two related essential characters, or to say, crucial qualities: discussion and negotiation. These two aspects are expected to go through all phases of the building design -- in programs, spaces, structure, and even climate. However, when developing this complex project, I came across lots of difficulties and sometimes went off the direction. Such progress is indeed inevitable, and I certainly gain lots of knowledge from it. Without these knowledge I will not be able to have a better understanding of the philosophy behind the studio of Complex Projects: to understand how architecture, can improve the performances of urban areas and spots whose potential has not been fully explored yet.