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Urban Lab
2050 MidCity Central

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COMPLEX PROJECTS

The Chair of Complex Projects (CP) targets all scales of the architectural thinking, details, building, city, and region. Expanding the knowledge about design and dense urban areas development, broads the mind and thinking of future architects.

Cities are increasingly transformed by strategic interventions rather than stable long-term Master plans. Those interventions result in complex developments where multiple public and private interests must be investigated and negotiated simultaneously. The decreasing role of the Public entity, after the liberal policy especially in old Europe and US economies, has stimulated the emergence of public-private partnerships with the aim to develop interventionism. This gave rise to projects that redefine traditional urban and architectural aspects of our professional reality.

Transportation, universities, healthcare centers, architectural and urban interventions on outskirts or on former industrial areas and harbors are examples of Complex Projects. Those allow private interest to exploit commercial opportunities by dealing with public interest, which demands resources to improve and develop strategic city sites. However, to achieve balance, projects must have a way to manage and negotiate diverse factors. Due to this reality, the design becomes a communication tool where the designer takes a planner role, spokesperson or communicator, and eventually, an Architect.

As a result, the approach of the Chair challenges the strict distinction between Architecture, Urbanism, Planning and their traditional, perhaps linear roles. Studies on the emergence and development of urban areas through Architectural Projects give an understanding of the dynamics and the reasoning involved in these highly complex processes. The ultimate goal is generating analytical and critical thinking skills next to the traditional design, allowing future architects to successfully engage the multiple Complex Project demands.

- Prof. if. Kees Kaan
Introduction

In which we understand the reality around us or, as architects and architectural theorists, how we can read and interpret the Urbanity that constitutes our everyday life and therefore the context of our own reflections and interventions. After the fall of the modernist quest for an architectural Truth, the nowadays practice is struggling in the articulation of new urban questions, capable to unveil the sensational complexity and the astonishing dynamism of the contemporary cities. But is there room for meaning in the frame of the society, of this our society, which is the basis, the structuring force in the Urbanity of the XXIst century? And what if behind the appearance of such acknowledged qualities, what is to be discovered is indeed a pervasive yet concealed condition of homogenizing sameness, in its paralysing simplicity powerful expression of the global networks era in which we have entered?

In the alienation of this global negation of identity, in the uniformization led by the overexposure of activities and networks, in the totalizing ascent of the non-places, I claim that there is still space left for the specific, the different, the otherness. Could Foucault’s Other place theory challenge the borderless sameness of the non-relational contemporary urban space?
THE ARCHITECTURE OF AN URBANITY

Non-places and the Heterotopias within the frame of the “Surmodernité”

While formulating his own position in the process of framing the possibility for an “Architecture of the City”, the Italian architect Aldo Rossi defined from the very beginning the metropolis as a reality that constructs itself around an evolving, differentiated yet specific society, manifestation of its own time. A reasoning elaborated over the notion of the urban artefact and its social expression as the rational keys to approach and therefore to understand the complexity of the City in the XXth century, a genuine way, I would say, to rationally react towards a former Modernist understanding of an Urbanity no longer considered effective in coping with the contemporary questions of an urban reality: a tactic, indeed, that reclaims its time, its being different, its postmodernity.

But what if now is the postmodernity that has to be overcome, in virtue of that principle of evolution of a reality and the need of more coherent answers from the newly enhanced critical awareness? And so, in the always broader theoretical thinking over these “new urban questions”, which societal manifestations are going to redefine, reshape or even replace the cultural role of the Urban fragment as elementary unit, fundamental notion of a “no more reducible” space in the acknowledgement and interpretation of the city? Is there a chance, a possibility for a contemporary Architecture of the Urbanity?

Surmodernité, or a step beyond the post-modernist emptiness

The question arises spontaneously once we metabolize the global culture in which we live, with which the City has to deal with, and from which a new awareness of the Urbanity is produced. The dawn of a world where all the forms of exclusion will be abolished, the no-longer-utopic ideal of a borderless reality, the first stage of a culture of the worldwide, pure expression of a globalisation of networks that expand, if not overcome, the spatial frontiers of our society.

A condition that the French philosopher Marc Augé qualifies as “surmodernité”, a further evolution in the human achievement of different heterogenic perspectives more than a specific periodization, which desinence, this unexpected sur-, renders in a powerful way not the progression through time, but the shift operated in an interpretative thinking: supermodernity (as John Howe transposed this French neologism) supersedes the contemporaneous post-modernist “despair over the felt meaningless” to arise with a different interpretation of the human status as a reality of overabundance of spaces and overload of events. A shift intended to overcome the “destructive tautology” of emptiness brought by the postmodernism scepticism over the modernist metanarratives, in the direction of permitting again the construction of new significant from the excess expressed by a reality getting always more global.
A step that allows us to relink the notion of urba-
nity as derivation and tangible expression of a spe-
cific society, which cultural apparatus is no longer
defined by the self-willed research of truth values ,
but rather as connection and its participation in
the global network of communication and informa-
tion : the contemporaneity as the urbanization of
the single immense conurbation, of the illusion of
the world-city and its relativization within the spa-
ce of the city-world . And therefore, Architecture
can be again the intimate expression of the system,
thus of the Society.

**A rhetoric over the urban space: the emergence of
the non-places**

The ontological reformulation advocated by Augè
allows a further step in the connotation of the con-
temporary city: unlinked from a master narrative
and projected in the plan of the global interactions,
which erase frontiers but in return flatten the ur-
ban locality in a worldwide borderless homogeni-
zation, the emergent primal elements of an urba-
nity as our sources of knowledge are then related
to all those artefacts that exploit the connection of
city-world with the world-city. The spaces of “cir-
culation, consumption and communication” ari-
se in an unprecedented intensification, therefore
reinforcing and concretely making visible networks
of global relations as the places where the super-
modernist Urbanity can finally unfold freely. Pla-
ces, though, defined by the “wordlessly commu-
nicaton”, surrendered to “solitary individuality, to
the fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral” .

In the age of the excess, the networks that reduce
distances simultaneously produce a number of
places, a plurality which most obvious consequence
consequence is the “vaguely” discernible, a perva-
sive feeling of disorientation, a vortex of alienations
where therefore the relation between the “specta-
tor” and its surrounding is no longer defined by
social interaction, but as a process of mediation
through words of text, the “system of signs” that
produce virtual, illusionary images, which lead the
individual in the space “of the established and sym-
bolized sense” . Thereafter, the consequential que-

The surmodern contemporaneity supersedes with
its networks a categorization and thus a knowledge
of the world in whatever could be understood as
“Urban” or, in opposition, as “not urban”: indeed,
transcending the physical dimension of the urban
fragment, the intensity of the social relations con-
sumed within a space is assumed as the key to
decode the fragment, the places of the city-world.
But when such social relations are impossible to
decipher, neither the signs of belonging to a sort
of collectivity nor the possibility of having expe-
rience of shared stories, then what we will come
up with would not be defined as a place, but as its
opposite, a non-place , negation of the qualities of
the former. Augè, who first theorized the notion of
a non-place, is even more explicit in emphasizing
it as the space of the “cannot be relational, histo-
rical”, nor “concerned with identity” . Attributes
nevertheless recognized as ontologically characte-
rizing a notion of space therefore defined as “an-
thropological place”, but yet a space trapped in a
network which is always less integration, but on
reverse, a classification towards homogeneity and marginalisation. Referring to the space of memory, the monument, Augè himself claims how the frame fostered by the non-place era doesn’t incorporate, but indeed isolates the monument as “places of memory”, circumscribing its essence to a specificity of a limited locus.

In an epoch defined by the structure of technology and the networks of communications, the non-place is the product of a society where the relations are mandated to the realm of words and images and through which the space is defined. The interactions come to be classified as “mutual contracts” with individuals perceived as costumers, users, and the social game is restricted to be consumed at its borders, in the act of “entering or leaving” the space of the paradox, where the sense of a place is not given by the framing relations fostered by the aggregation of people, but indeed by their efficient annihilation. While around the exaggeration of time, of space, of networks flatten all the rest.

The quest of the heterotopia: striving for the “place to be”

In such a scenario of a globality of non-places, is not unintelligible the consequential feeling of constriction, the anxiety that rises from a condition of uniformity, of world-wide sameness, and the existential struggle for the possibility to choose beyond a conforming Manichean categorization, to differ, to search for an otherness. In this perspective it becomes legit to seek for an alternative theoretical approach: not a repudiation of the former, I would argue, as expression of a sociologic or anthropologic background considered generally valid if not even true, but indeed the individuation of an apparatus capable to compenetrate this dominant frame, to create space for different understandings or conclusions, discovering expressions of immanent specificity in the flatness of the global networks era.

Contemporary post-modernists sought first a way to escape the homogenization of the new prevailing episteme brought by the era of supermodernity. In an anxiety concerned about the elaboration of spaces, they assumed the Heterotopia elaborated by Foucault as the liberating, salvific “different”, the “other” in a world considered as harmed by the non-space homogeneity and conformation. A notion of spatiality, the heterotopia, indeed deeply concerned in the relationality with a surrounding, but “in such a way as to suspend, neutralize or invert the set of relations” designated, mirrored or reflected by it. A physical place, real and effective, “linked with all the others”, a sort of “realized utopia” in which the “other emplacements”, the reality around them, was not only represented, but even inverted and contested, in a process delineating a presence as an “institutionalised contradiction and interruption” of a continuity assumed to be the norm, the conventionally accepted. Foucault’s heterotopia was then presenting the “otherness” instrumental to counter the hegemony of the non-space network.

But although a “systematic description through six precepts”, in its multiplicity of significances while allowing evolution and transformations in its meaning, the heterotopias celebrating a sense of alterity or a ‘heterogeneity’ gradually opened the field to broader opportunities of interpretation, focused on the spatial possibilities suggested within the rough understanding of the notion “des espace autres”, where the paradigm slowly shifted from
the metaphysical reasoning to the urban investigation, from the opposition with an utopia towards, indeed, the prevailing physical homotopia of the global networks.

Asserting such a reading was already in se a perilous misunderstanding, as what was considered and then acknowledged within the notion of “spaces of emplacement” was only a partial, subjective interpretation of a complex, evocative yet ambiguous urban elaboration. The “disturbing function”, the essential deviant nature, the pivotal abnormality passed in the background once the heterotopia was accepted as otherwise, the “place of exception”, the Trojan Horse for the subversion of the uniform civilization, the “antidote” against the global affirmation of the “sordid non-place that conforms the postmodern landscapes”, overcoming the intrinsic ambiguity, the exclusion, the marginalization embedded in the very notion of the original heterotopias.

Therefore, despite the spatial struggles within the frame of a surmoderne society, devoid of the consequential postmodernism misconception and abuses around the term, is then Foucault’s “other space” still a valid or at least the correct instrument to question the contemporary homologating, restraining grid of networks emerged within Auge’s theory of non-places?

According to Foucault himself, heterotopias could still fulfil and achieve a counterpart against the perceived global sameness, once their founding paradigm evolves in the awareness of an altered society and the unfolding of its history. Following the second principle in the Foucault’ systematic description of the Other Space, the possibility “to function through time in very different and even contradictory ways” becomes the key to overcome the former conceptual postmodern weakness. Instead of persisting over the assumption of heterotopia as producing exceptionalities in the sameness, the debate should find again its validity in reconsidering the position of the two measured elements, the normal and thus the deviant, the hegemonic and therefore the heterotopic, in a theoretical process intended to actualize a radical shift of roles around a contrast as alive as ever. If the autre espace counters a dominant logic, a perceived normality into the “reverse”, the “anomalous”, what would happen to its ontological condition if it’s the very reigning culture, the normally accepted indeed the atypical and the deviant? What could be represented as a heterotopia in such a scenario, if not the subversion of the network flatness, but in the true perspective of the supermodern civilization, and thus of a non-space made of impersonal places?

Assumed this reformulated paradigm as true, then the otherness would no longer be the exotic different, but the negation of the non-place, the immanent reality of a relation, of an experience, of the being. In the atypicalness of the global sameness, in the predominance of impersonal, of fictional, the heterotopia in its opposition individuates real spaces, anthropological places that rediscover a relationality, that simulate common experiences, “places to be in the non-place realm”. The postmodern strive for the unexplored, outstanding, extreme otherness will remain an ineffective, incomplete positivised distortion until the acknowledgement and the appropriation of “real” place as a subversive force. In a society where the network prevail, and thus the non-place, the otherness of the heterotopia is no longer represented by the generic different,
but with the space of the relational, of the historical, of the concerned with identity, or a simulation thereof: heterotopias become the attempt to make real, immanent places, or at least their replication.

Fully “unlocking” such “topos”, and thus reformulating “effective” urban questions, it will be then possible to theorize and individuate those “alternative urban formations”, those “structures” that could represent effective otherness, the realm where the “exceptional” may “emerge and strive”, finally fostering a change, specific differentiations or subversive conclusions for the supermodern world of the global, uniform networks.

In extremis...

The surmodernité, with the abundance of space and time provided through borderless worldwide networks, stress the former episteme behind the notion of urban fragment, as depicted by Rossi in its Architettura della Città, to open, engage and foster a debate on a different level, absorbing the novelty of a world where the concept of Urbanity is no longer limited to the city, but exploit the rise of a civilization of City-world in a World-city, in a vastness of meanings and possibilities not experienced before. But what seems to be the basis for a new inspiring ontology, turned out to be the root of a homogenizing process, where the city defined by social appropriations drowns in the global network of fictional, illusory impersonal relations, ending in the totalizing sameness of the “spaces that are not”, of the non-place. But in such a set of interactions, of urban speculations, heterotopias claim a pivotal role, essential as in Foucault’s ambitions in delivering a complete comprehensive frame of nowadays society, but in an opposition of “normality” and its reverse completely inverted.

Despite postmodern misunderstandings, in the contemporary reality of our society heterotopias could represent the possible subversion of the realm of impersonal networks and flows in a simulation of immanent sociality: a sort of return to an anthropological space, the identification of a place to stay, to be, in the frame of the struggles caused by the overabundance of our time. The heterotopia of the XXlst century has the opportunity to evolve, to challenge its malleability by contesting the diffused atypical instead of the disappearing standard, replicating a normality in the place of the deviant while still being a space of opposition, suspension and interruption, a contingency capable to mirror and invert the set of relations and represented interactions. Then, and only then, it’ll become clear how this will not represent a quest for otherness in se, but an attempt to unlock the possibility for the identification of effective meanings in a reality that seems flattened by growing process of globalization, and therefore the opportunity for more investigations, for new, appropriate, actual urban questions.
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INVESTIGATING MIDCITY C
What is assumed to be MidCity Central, now is simply known as Garfield Park. One of the 17 neighborhoods that define West Side, Garfield Park is specific as the center of this geographic area and leading representation of all the issue and the distrust of Chicago western pheripheries.

Even if connected with the Loop with two transit train lines, the area is suffering an ever ending decay, social as much as physical, in a continuous loop with no perspectives. Abandoned buildings, decaying local infrastructure and empty almost wild lots are the stage for an accelerating devolution of society, where the authorities are replaced by the violence of the gang rules and violence.
SOCIAL SITUATION

Black migrants from southern states arrived to the western suburbs in the 1950s and 60s. They were attracted by industrial jobs. Today, West Garfield Park is one the last ‘all-black’ neighborhoods in the West.

No job opportunities, lack of schooling and investments are illustrative for this area nowadays.
GANG VIOLENCE

Due to scarce funds, the city of Chicago closed dozens of public schools in the whole city area in recent years. West Side’s Tilton School was supposed to be one of these schools, but escaped closure in 2011 after intervention by parents and teachers. Near West Side’s Tilton School four street gangs are active, and closing West Side’s Tilton and sending its students to another school nearby would have led to children of different street gangs attending the same school.

Teachers and parents feared violence between street gangs could affect their children. Closing Tilton School would have forced children to walk through and into opposing gangs turf.
Due to the changed social conditions, the urban fabric of Garfield started to deteriorate as the lower budget of low-income families was not enough to maintain and restore the buildings. Therefore, the middle-class slowly moved out of the district, leaving behind houses and apartments almost impossible to sell due to the already rising worsening reputation of the area. Even real estate agencies are stuck with property assets that are almost falling down in pieces, due to the comprehensible absence of interested clients and developers.

What is left, it’s a dangerous, affecting space for squatting and illicit traffic.
EMPTINESS

When the situation gets too bad, and the municipality finds funds to intervene, the vacancies are torn down, and the leftovers, until the day those families will resist, becomes solitary monuments, standing alone totem of what the Garfield Park used to be
GARFIELD
MAPS
GARFIELD PARK
LAND MANAGEMENT

- RESIDENTIAL
- RETAIL
- MIXED COMMERCIAL
- MANUFACTURING
GARFIELD PARK
URBAN ORGANIZATION
GARFIELD PARK

VACANCIES AND ABANDONMENT

VACANCY  ABANDONED
HOW TO LINK THE CURRENT SCENARIO WITH THE TRIGGERED AND EXPECTED REVOLUTION OF MIDCITY CENTRAL?
THE MANIFESTO

STRATEGY
MIDCITY CENTRAL
CLUSTER DEFINITION

The area itself works as a connector between the Lime Line and the Green Necklace. But simultaneously, these two zones work as a border for MidCity Central. Also, the area is bound by two large infrastructural lines, going to the Loop and the suburbs.

Thus the borders on the side will work as a buffer zone, while the north- and southern border function as hard separating borders.
THE CURRENT SITUATION

MIDCITY BOUNDARIES

HARD INFRASTRUCTURAL BORDERS

PARK AND LANSCAPED BORDERS
THE PARKS ACT AS A **SOFT TRANSITION ZONE** OR GATHERING PLACE, WHILE THE INFRASTRUCTURE BINDS THE AREA, THOUGH ALSO **CONNECTS IT WITH THE LOOP AND THE SUBURBS.**
In order to stay connected with the adjacent areas, the major avenues are continued within MidCity Central. In the area itself, a hierarchical system is implemented to support inner movement.
THE MIDCITY GRID SYSTEM PROVIDES **DIFFERENTIATION** IN QUALITIES AND ORIENTATION.
Firstly the main existing roads are being continued through MidCity. Secondly a rotated grid is implemented into the site.

Resulting in an infrastructure system that connects with the large scale systems and also provides local distribution with non-equal characteristics for the surroundings.
HIGH SPEED cars, train

MEDIUM SPEED transit, bikes

LOW SPEED pedestrians
MIDCITY CENTRAL
GREEN SPACE

The green environment take progressively shape from the pattern of the nowadays abandoned building / vacant plots scattered all around Garfield Park. The porosity of such operation goes alongside the suggested directionality of the green boulevards, instrumnetal to create a link between the future two corridors of the western Lime Line and the eastern Green Necklace.
NEW LIME LINE PARK CORRIDOR

CONNECTIONS WITH THE EXISTING NECKLACE

DRIVEN FRAMING AXIS

OPPORTUNITY OF GREEN NETWORK FROM VACANT PLOTS
Along the internal circulation, there is a high concentration of green- and public space together with important (civic) buildings. The internal ring is not just a place for movement, but a place to go to and/or to stay. It is here where the quality of living in MidCity will be experienced the most.
The future scenario is not a low-scale/low-density world: indeed, the masterplan aims to accommodate even higher density, in the respect of the parameters imposed by the sustainable principles hereby adopted.

**Total Inhabitants:** 251,900

54 inhab./ha → 422 inhab./ha
MIDCITY CENTRAL

PHASING
MIDCITY
CENTRAL
U LAB DISTRICT
MidCity Central is a future condensed core of the new urbanity prospected by the Chicago 2050 Manifesto. It consist in a block of 1,7x1,2 km, with a total extension of 2 km². Given the dimension, a general strategy and reactive schemes have been laid down, but the actuation of all the indications is limited to sub-areas of which every student has been entitled to work with.

This approach is finalised to achieve the wider and best possibilities of translation of the theoretical approach into pragmatic actions, in a differentiation that could enrich the possibilities and the essence itself beyond the MidCity Central vision.
MIDCITY CENTRAL
Q1 - URBAN LAB DISTRICT
In order to apply the Manifesto lines in the most creative way, MidCity Central has been divided in four different district of analysis, according to the specific vocation and vision of the area. The North-Western quadrant is therefore identified as the space were the new economic activities will start to appear and establish, given the proximity and accessibility with all the main infrastructural lines here condensed
URBAN ORGANIZATION
I. CITY CONNECTIONS

II. LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

III. INNER PATHS

IV. MAIN CATALYST
LIME LINE, LAKE STREET WITH THE CTA GREEN LINE, THE METRA TRAIN AS CITY WIDE SCALE CONNECTORS

LOCAL SCALE STREETS AND REDUCED ROADS CONNECTS MIDCITY WITH THE IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS

PERVERSIVE NETWORK OD PUBLIC TRANSPORT, BIKE AND PEDESTRAIN PATHS LINKING ALL THE AREAS TOGETHER

MAIN PUBLIC FACILITIES AND URBAN CATALYST SET IN THE BETWEEN OF THE CITY CONNECTORS AND THE LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE
URBAN ORGANIZATION
THE HEAVY CARS TRAFFIC IS LIMITED TO THE PHERIPHERAL CITY CONNECTORS AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

PUBLIC TRANSPORT BRIDGE THE CIRCULATION FROM THE CITY CONNECTORS TO ALL MIDCITY

RESERVED BIKE PATHS GO ALONGSIDE THE MAIN AXIS, AND MIXED PEDESTRIAN AND BIKE USE IS ALLOWED IN THE INNER BLOCKS STREETS

PEDESTRIAN CAN MOVE FREELY AND SAFELY ALL AROUND, ON FOOT OR BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT.
LAND MANAGEMENT
I.  NATURAL LANDSCAPE

II.  WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

III.  PRODUCTIVE FIELDS

IV.  COMMUNAL SPACES
As relevance as for the built environment is given to open green space, privileging wide fields and in the side park even forests.

Water management infrastructure is introduced to cope with Chicago frequent flood and provide natural reserve for watering and other uses.

Collective urban farming fields are scattered all over in the between spaces, providing a capillar network of urban and production gardens.

Communal area represent the other category of organised or furnish spaces where to gather.
SUSTAINABLE EFFICIENCY
FROM THE FIELDS TO THE BUILDINGS, EVERYTHING IS PART OF ENERGY PRODUCTION CYCLES, AS BIOMASSES, SOLAR THERMAL AND PHOTOVOLTAIC, WIND ENERGY

OPEN SPACES AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS TOGETHER TO COLLECT, STORE AND CLEAN THE RAIN RUNOFF AND STORMWATER

URBAN FARMING PROVIDE AN EFFICIENT WAY TO INTRODUCE GREEN INSIDE THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, DELIVERING A SELF-PRODUCTION ATTITUDE AND RELINK PEOPLE WITH NATURE AND HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE

MOBILITY IS AIMED TO REDUCE THE CAR TRAFFIC INSIDE THE QUADRANT, FOCUSING ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT, ELECTRIC MOBILITY OR MAN POWERED AS BIKES
SUSTAINABLE EFFICIENCY