COMPLEX GRADUATION STUDIO  CHICAGO SOUTHWORKS

P4 REFLECTION

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The P4 is coming soon, which means my studio time is on its last stage. The Complex Graduation Studio-Chicago southworks starts in September of 2013 and now one year has past. We spent half of a year focus on the research of Chicago Southworks from history, culture, economic, etc, including a ten-day visit in Chicago. Then we split into groups and focus on each topic. From general research to the theme, from group strategy to individual design, my design keeps moving on step by step, until it becomes a mature and detailed architecture.

Aspect 1
The relationship between research and design

Without the research, the design does not exist at all.

Chicago southworks has a long history of being a steel industry called the US Steel. At that time the southworks is an anchor, radiating its surrounding neighborhoods from traffic, culture, employment, etc. On the site there were many factory buildings and the southworks was in its fast development. However, the industry bankrupted. Thousands of workers were unemployed and nowadays the land is totally vacant, leaving only four huge ore walls, represents its past and waiting to witness the future.

The whole southern part of Chicago has a clear contrast with the northern part. Unemployment is the current biggest problem in this area, accompanied by the crime issues and poor economical development. Education is another problem that huge amounts of children are unable to get qualified education in south Chicago. On the other hand the area is suffering from serious health crisis as Aids, obesity, drinking, and the threatening from violence.

Our group combine the research on the policy from Chicago government and the specific situation of southworks together to develop our own strategy. In August 16, 2011 the government established the Chicago public health agenda to achievement the healthy Chicago goal. This policy is a continuous project with stable investment. Several related projects in small scales has been put into practice. In the following years, the policy needs a place to build a strong and centralized public health base, which is the top-down strategy.

Based on the research, our group established the Health city strategy and define the components of Health city, including, environment, food supplyment, healthcare, research, business, employment, etc. In the urban design of southworks, we divide the site into the combination of healthy community and the health science campus. The central health campus is the core of the whole strategy and it is also the first stage of development.

My individual architecture design is based on the previous research and the group strategy. In the definition of health city, the need of healthy body is essential. Physical fitness is the basic factor to achieve any other behavior. Sports is always the best way to achieve the healthy body. People in the southworks are encouraged to play any sports items at their convenience. The surrounding neighborhoods are also welcomed to join the building because there are not enough facilities in this area. A sports complex is needed based on the group strategy.
Aspect 2
The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

Complex is the theme of the studio. Complex means to find a balance in the chaos and result in a combination which organizes everything quite well. In the site of Chicago southworks, the place does need an anchor to activate the whole area because it has been sleeping for years.

The most significant characteristics of the site is the huge and long ore walls. After the general research, some groups demolish the ore walls in their proposal, but our group decide to keep them. The walls are the heritage of the past US steel company and now the factory has gone but left them alone on the site. Same as my group members, my project is also lying in the ore walls. We all agree to keep the heritage because the walls has witnessed the past, it has right to witness the future also. On the other hand, the walls are excellent elements to develop our imagination on creating space based on the walls. It seems easier to design space in a site with several elements on it instead of a bare land.

Based on the group Health City strategy, my project is a sports complex, coming from the definition of the health city. Physical fitness is needed by everyone. The project is not only a container of sports facilities, but also a place to offering children and disabled people enough space to train their body and enjoy it. Sports related issues as sports retailing and healthy diet restaurant is also inside of the building. Indoor basketball, swimming pool and fitness center is the three main functions of the project because these facilities are popular in Chicago but in shortage of southworks area. From architectural perspective, the project also creates some interesting space within the site, especially with the ore walls. The sports complex is in the first stage of our strategy and will become a nice place to absorb people and improve their physical fitness to achieve the health city goal.

Aspect 3
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Step by step is the essential method to develop the whole project, from typology case studies to the group urban design, from the large and general site analysis to the group strategy, then into the individual architecture design and result in 1:5 details. Spending half of a year on the research of the project is very helpful. Only go deep into the project itself from several perspectives, we have a better understanding of the situation we are facing. From large to small scales provides a reseasonable line to avoid jumping too fast.

No architecture can exist without the site, especially in those places with significant characteristics on the land. The central area of Chicago southworks is located between the walls. The ore walls are 8m high and 700m long, which looks like a big challenge to handle with. But on the other hand, it also provides many possibilities of interesting space. Sketches, models are helpful to develop the building itself. When go deep into the project, details are needed to work better. 1:200, 1:100, 1:50, 1:20 and finally 1:5, the developing progress is still step by step from large to small, from general to detailed.
Aspect 4
The relationship between the project and the wider social context

Chicago southworks was a well developed factory before, but after its decadence, the large site became a vacant land, waiting for new exploring and investment. If a strong anchor can not be placed in this area, the south Chicago will still be suffering in the current situation. Similar issues happen everywhere in the world. If the Chicago southworks successfully bring the area back to the right track, it will become a nice reference project. Since SOM has designd the whole area, the southworks is waiting for development. This will take years, but time will finally prove whether the strategy succeed or not.

The society is steping fast, but sometimes it is going too fast to handle the left part. Chicago southworks is a good reference. It became vacant in 1994 with all the houses demolished at that time, but after 20 years it finally waits a new development strategy. Without the punch from a complex project, the surroundings are still staying in the terrible status. Chicago southworks was shining before, but decandence made the place fall in to terrible situation. Such kind of issues also happen a lot in developing country. Unemployment, crime, health and education problems are accompanied by the bad condition of local economic.

The complex graduation studio helps to develop feasible proposals to apply in vacant area, and also helps to train the research and design ability. Based lots of analysis and following a complete schedule line, the project finally hatches.