

GSAAP ADVANCED STUDIO SPRING 2021

# HYBRID RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURES IN HARLEM FOR THE “LIVING TOGETHER”

TYPOLOGICAL CORRECTIONS and RE-OCCUPATIONS of “THE PROJECTS”

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**A CONTEMPORARY QUESTION:** The world is going through a deep environmental and social crisis that impacts everyone and everything. In this context, the built city works as a complex system that enforces the processes of granting privileges, consolidating supremacies, and avoiding responsibilities. Environmental crises with consequences such as climate change, migration, pandemics, and the degradation of vital ecosystems; and social crises such as racial inequality, justice, and the erosion of human rights, have pushed architecture against the ropes, generating a completely new agenda to work on.

**DESIGN PROBLEM:** Beyond the usual operating from scratch, or refurbishing buildings preserving their core and shell, the management of existing structures and the built environment at large arises as the great battlefield of the future of the (existing) city. This agenda, a design problem in itself, demands going beyond conventional architectural strategies and develop more comprehensive, integrated, and open big scale approaches. In previous studios, under the figure of the “Typological Corrections” we have explored a series of case studies located in central and consolidated areas of the city that are either in bad condition, infra-utilized or significantly vacant to offer them a second chance. This semester, we will work on a number of social housing developments, popularly known as Projects, in Harlem-NYC.

Harlem is our neighborhood. It is also a physical fabric full of qualities in need of being rethought to address its current stigmatization and lack of real urban-social-environmental integration. A new feeling of belonging to this portion of Manhattan with a convulsive and highly contradictory history wants to identify it as a laboratory of experimentation so close and valuable to Columbia’s campus that we have failed to appreciate its value.

**TYPOLOGICAL CORRECTIONS:** In already built contexts where it seems that architecture has nothing else to say, we propose recycling solutions of the existing structures to address the city’s current challenges. In this speculative context, each project will design a series of Typological Corrections of the Projects activating processes of re-programming, re-densifying, re-scaling, re-signifying, seeking the architectural content of the “Living Together” ideals. These architectural transformations will explore not only the update of the physical conditions of the buildings, but also the social, economic, and cultural networks they host and articulate. The agenda of the proposed Typological Corrections will include the concerns and engagements demanded by the Climate Change, Social Justice and Racial Integration, as well as a universal right to the city that we need to host and articulate to keep architecture as a democratic discipline fighting for the best future for all.

**URBAN OCCUPATIONS. TRANSFORMATION AND GENTRIFICATION:** Because of its apparent neutrality and politically correct social intention, the Projects have been subject to a kind of opaque invisibility that requires a critical understanding of the way in which they were designed, built, and occupied through time in order to suggest alternative connections between inhabitants, programs and meanings considering the cohabitation of the individual and the collective as part of the design questions asking for contemporary configurations that only architecture can integrate. On the other hand, the transformation of an increasing number of areas of the city into new grounds for real estate expansion has been a pervasive dynamic in the history of NYC. Developers take these areas at low prices and transform them to create markets for new neighbors.

Beyond the benefits of a general renovation agenda for the city, these processes many times result in the sterilization of the historical fabric, social segregation and displacement of the local population and the loss of identity. This studio will explore alternative dynamics for these processes of urban transformation aimed by forces other than the real estate business with the apparently only option of a dramatic gentrification. The borough offers a high-quality architectural fabric with a significant collection of buildings that show its past splendor and that coexist with other large infrastructural pieces and social housing islands. Density, programmatic hybridization, new construction technologies, and alternative ways of “living together” will be explored to participate in the development of projects that should be as far from the shiny future offered by real estate renders as from any fascination with the challenges of the current conditions of the neighborhood. The aim of the studio is to provide a new understanding of the city that allows both the new and the old residents to build new affections for their immediate environment, and to set a new ground for its re-contextualization.

**GROUPS, TOOLS, METHODS AND TRIP:** Students will work in groups of three, if possible, combining one student staying abroad with two being in NYC. The intention of this combination in pairs is to be benefit from the proximity of our object of study to produce specific observations and alternatively take distance from it to simultaneously advance the production of more general knowledge about the architectures of the city’s next generation, their typologies, and their occupations.

Each team will define their own working protocol, which should particularly address the links between architecture’s organization, image, and construction systems, with the social, economic, and cultural processes that the selected Projects host.

The selection or invention of the systems of representation will be crucial both to reveal and analyze the existing conditions, as well as to explore the opportunities offered by new typologies within the new city.

**Juan Herreros and Oskar Orn Amorson will attend classes remotely while it is impossible to travel to NYC from Europe.** Thu 9am-1pm is, by the moment, the only weekly fixed class online hours. Anyway, on first day of class, weekly meetings will be scheduled considering the different locations of the students. If the circumstances change, a hybrid combination of remote and in person teaching will be scheduled. Remote teaching makes it possible to invite experts in the matter and have international jurors for reviews, so we will take seriously this advantage.

In anticipation that the **studio trip** cannot be carried out outside of New York City, a series of urban explorations -physical or/and virtual- will be programmed through different neighborhoods to discover places, people, buildings, associations, and ways of life that are usually outside the focus that homologates the reality to what is already known.

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