HYBRID RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURES IN MANHATTAN:

OCCUPYING CHINATOWN

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In our 2015 Summer Studio, we will work on five decisive issues addressing the present challenges of architecture practice:

URBAN CONTEXT: As architects we are responsible not only for the construction of new architectures, but also for the management of the built environment at large. In previous studios we have selected 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* even if apparently architecture has finished its work there. This agenda demands going beyond conventional strategies used in processes of urban transformation —normally addressed building by building— and inventing more comprehensive, integrated and open *big scale strategies*, without falling into the glib fascination with megastructure conceptions. The operational laboratory of the studio will again be the neighborhood of Manhattan-Chinatown as a perfect case study for our program. In fact, it works like a dynamic city in its own right, comprised of residential, productive, commercial and cultural sectors where most of the buildings are over a hundred years old and have never been renovated, but the area is still very much alive.

TYPOLOGICAL CORRECTION: Where it seems like architecture has nothing to say, we propose urban recycling solutions primarily based on residential use, to be superimposed onto the current urban tissue and addressing the neighborhood's current challenges. We will work both considering the benefits of occupying these structures but also the positive consequences of their transformation. Addressing the characteristics of the existing structures, their relations and their underlying potentials, each project will design a Typological Correction activating process of re-programing, re-densifying, re-scaling, re-activating, etc. These architectural operations will seek to not only transform the physical reality of the existing buildings, but will also aim to understand the social, economic and cultural changes in the neighborhood where they are located.

OCCUPATION: The intervention within existing neighborhoods requires a critical understanding of the way in which structures have been occupied by different groups of populations along the time, appropriated with different programs, and mobilized with different meanings, in order to suggest alternative connections between them – inhabitants, programs and meanings- and explore new processes of signification. Considering these relations in recent Post-Occupational studies, we do not aim to established fix relationships between existing (or new) typologies and their uses or meanings, but rather precisely to demystify this relationship. After their design (and many times in the absence of additional authorial intention) buildings operate in relation to different agents, institutions and technologies, and become meaningful only in

relation to other circulating messages. In the case of Chinatown, the original structures of the neighborhood are independent from the arrival of its current inhabitants, and have been consistently transformed anonymously with new interior distributions and exterior additions, allowing for the incorporation of news programs and meanings. Our goal is to simultaneously understand the way in which the invisible logics of architecture make different occupations possible and to transform it.

TRANSFORMATION AND GENTRIFICATION: The transformation of increasing number of areas of the city into new grounds for real estate expansion has been a constant in the recent 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 agenda of renovation and expansion of the city, these processes many times result in the sterilization of the historical fabric, the social segregation of the population and the loss of identity in favor of gentrification. This studio understands that if the processes of urban transformation are an area of intervention for architects, it is mandatory of our agenda to search for alternatives to the processes of gentrification led exclusively by economic forces. Density, programmatic hybridization, construction systems and new ways of living are equations of the same system to be set by each project from a critical position that will try to be as far from the shiny future offered by real estate renders as from any fascination with the *problematic* current conditions of the neighborhood. Following these protocols, 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 its re-contextualization.

CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION: The analysis of the relations between the architectures of the city and their occupations will be fundamental as a point of departure for the studio. We aim to consider the multiple scales at which architecture operates, and the multiple media that allow for its different occupations. To *occupy* will be considered broadly, as a way of linking architecture's organization, scale, image and construction to its social, economic and cultural consequences—and as a way of undoing those links as well. We want to develop ways to analyze, describe, test and communicate these relationships, as well as to *project* them into the future. The deliberate choice or invention of representation systems will allow suggesting continuities between these analyses and the designed reality. We will benefit from the proximity of our object of study in order to produce specific observations, and will alternatively take distance from it in order to simultaneously advance the production of more general knowledge about the architectures of the city, their typologies and their occupations