MANHATTAN NOW

Architecture is the will of the age conceived in spatial terms. Living. Changing. New.

Mies van der Rohe 1923

If I could sketch out for architects a task list addressing the urgent problems of cities in the developed countries, it would certainly include—at the top of the list—the design of spaces serving human complexity and diversity in new ways.

These spaces will not be characterized by ideas of indoor and outdoor, public and private, and a host of other commonly accepted distinctions. Instead, they will be conceived as elements in continually shifting urban fields that maintain a delicate balance between order and anarchy, between knowledge and the unknown.

Lebbeus Woods 2009

This studio will reimagine the city of New York in the midst of the current global pandemic and social revolution. Within this period of rapid movement, massive disruptions in our physical and social infrastructure have revealed the systems and

institutions that fail us. Institutions form the bedrock of a democratic society, and it is clear that the current institutional structures do not serve everyone. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the flow of social and economic exchange and has rendered some of our infrastructure obsolete. The 19th century myth of continuous upward progress has ground to a halt and has ushered a rapid transformation of our systems, institutions, and physical infrastructure while we invent and propose new methods of communication, contact and exchange.

The physical and social genetic code of Manhattan is rapidly being modified. How can architecture and architectural programming direct this genetic modification? In this studio, we will research and analyze the existing New York City fabric and human condition; from physical and social infrastructure, visible and invisible systems, and plans and sections of the city as a total piece of architecture. Each student will mine the city for its latent histories, redacted stories, myths, tensions, erasures, and social patterns. Students will propose and author an architectural program – an institution - that has transformational capacities. How do we construct and cultivate a strong and healthy democracy? What is an institution? How do we measure institutional value? How do ethics shape the institutions that democracy needs to flourish? How do we transform the levers of democracy to build a more equitable society?

Students will reimagine the elements of Manhattan to serve human complexity and diversity. The elements include but are not limited to the city block, the tower, the waterfront, parks, housing, privacy, poverty, homelessness, healthcare, museums, transportation, and education.

Sotirios Kotoulas