

Columbia University
GSAPP
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Critic: Jeffrey Johnson

Megablock Urbanism 4.0 Lincoln Center Reconsidered New York, NY USA



Lincoln Center - Original Architects
Image: archrecord.construction.com

Intro:

The world continues to urbanize, in many regions at an astonishing pace, and we as architects must find ways to intervene in its physical metamorphosis. We are for the first time in history more urban than rural. Existing cities are expanding and new ones are being formed without historic precedent. How we continue to urbanize is of huge consequence. And, how we understand this phenomenon is critical to our ability to participate in the future urbanization of the world. This means we must invent new ways of thinking about cities and be agile enough to continuously modify and/or discard even the most recently developed theories and strategies. What possible socially and ecologically sustainable solutions can be invented for accommodating future urban growth? What role does architecture play in these newly-formed megacities?

Superblock / Megablock:

For many cities around the world, large-scale superblock development provides the default solution for accommodating urban growth. Superblocks, in their contemporary form, are byproducts of modernism – from Le Corbusier; to Soviet *microrayons*; to Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia; to Mao's *danwei* (factory units); to Steven Holl's Linked Hybrid in Beijing. Varying in size from 8 hectares to over 50 hectares, with populations from 1,000's to over 100,000, superblocks are spatial instruments with social, cultural, environmental, and economic implications, operating between the scales of architecture and the city.

Over the past 5 years, China Megacities Lab has been focusing much of its research on the 'Megablock.' What we hope to accomplish with our research is to redefine these superblocks--or 'Megablocks'—as laboratories for the consequences, opportunities, and potential global proliferation of large-scale urban models. We hope to discover through our research unique and emerging urbanisms that can be deployed in a multiplicity of urban contexts. The studio provides the 'speculative' and 'projective' component to the research - the design of the 'Megablock' becomes the experiment. How can the 'Megablock' become a socially and ecologically sustainable prototype for future urbanization?

Megablock Urbanism 4.0 – Manhattan

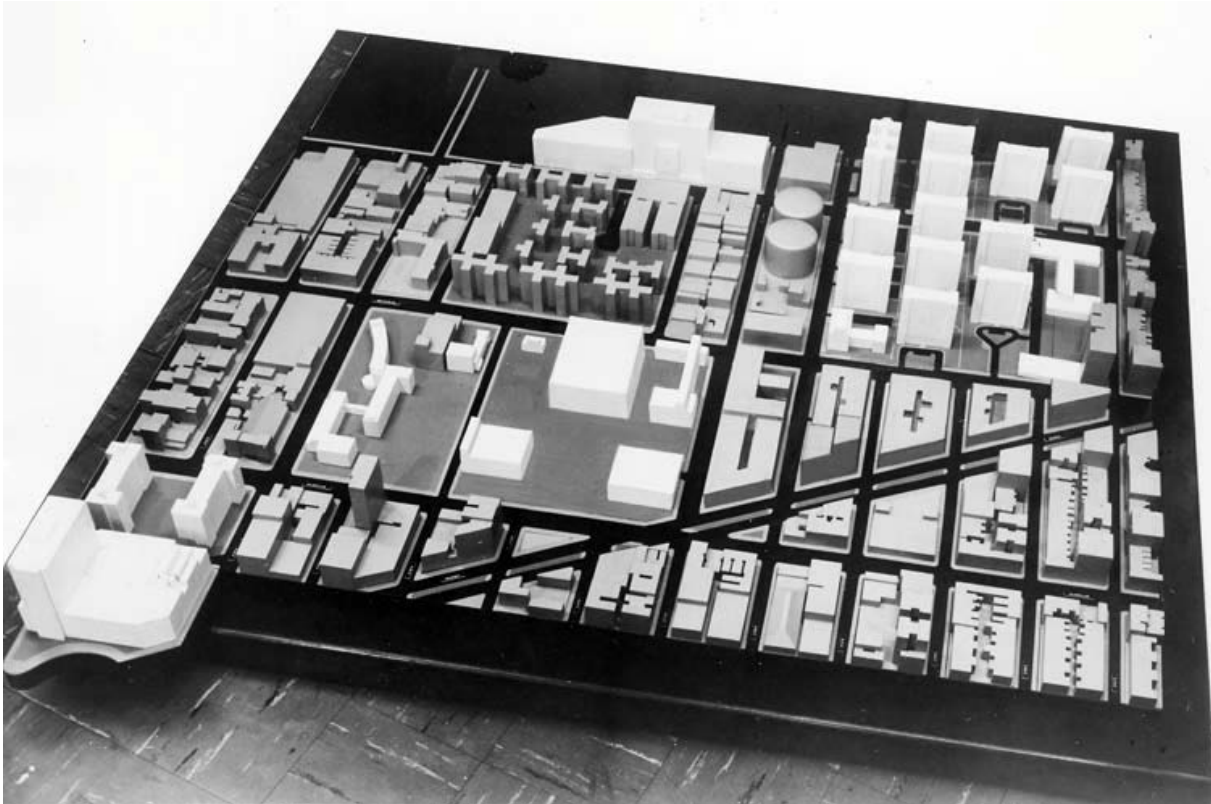


Rockefeller Center
Image: wirednewyork.com



Lincoln Center
Image: Keithyorkcity.com

The studio will focus on a Manhattan superblock. The ubiquitous Manhattan grid was established in 1811. The grid created oblong-shaped blocks, varying slightly in size (approx. 200' x 1,000'), comprised of a repetition of parcels organized linearly and back-to-back (approx. 25' x 100'). With the advance of technology and the ability to build bigger, the single parcel proved too constraining to accommodate the more ambitious projects. With the introduction of mega-projects in the 20th century, even whole blocks proved inadequate. As a result, multiple blocks were combined to accommodate a new 'mega' scale. Is the superblock still a relevant model for urban development?



Lincoln Center - Original Master Plan
Image: nycgovparks.gov

Project:
Lincoln Center Reconsidered

The challenge of the studio is to re-conceptualize Lincoln Center in New York City as a 'Cultural Megablock.'

The studio will be divided into two main phases.

Phase I: Urban

The first phase will focus on the urban scale. Collectively, or in 2 or 3 groups, the studio will re-plan Lincoln Center at the urban scale. As a starting point, the project will return to the site configuration that existed at the conception of the original project planning. The new master plan(s) will provide the context for architectural proposals.

Phase II: Architecture

The second phase will focus on the architectural scale. Each student, or small team, will select one building from the master plan to design in detail. The building must be predominantly cultural, but can include a mixture of functions as determined by the new master plan.

Lincoln Center

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts was built to foster the arts of music, dance and drama and to encourage the enjoyment of them by the public. It was established and built between the years of 1955 to 1970.¹ It was one of a number of large-scale projects in New York City that combined an agglomeration of blocks together to form a superblock. Other notable examples include Rockefeller Center in 1931-1939; Stuyvesant Town in 1947; and the World Trade Center in 1966-1973. The complex is considered to be the first centralized collection of major cultural institutions in an American city.

The 17-block (16.3-acre (6.6-hectare)) Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project was originally conceived as part of the 'Slum Clearance' program under the chairmanship of Robert Moses and the New York Mayor Robert Wagner in 1955.² The area of Lincoln Square was mostly constructed of 4-7 story residential buildings typical of the surrounding neighborhoods that had fallen victim to overcrowding and lack of upkeep. The project is indicative of many urban renewal projects that radically transformed the social and physical landscape of US cities after WWII. Large portions of cities were deemed blighted and in need of renewal. Controversially, whole neighborhoods would be demolished and communities relocated to make way for 'new' and 'improved' buildings and infrastructure.

Moses first envisioned the project as a mixture of commercial and cooperative real estate development, middle-income housing, a university center, a small public park, stores and commercial property along Broadway, and several new theaters – including a new opera. The final plan for Lincoln Center only came about after a series of fortuitous agreements were made with the various cultural institutions. The Metropolitan Opera was the first to sign on as per the original Moses plan. Then, also seeking the benefit of a site for a new home, the New York Philharmonic followed marking the beginning of a new direction for the project – a center for cultural. Soon thereafter the New York City Ballet was added and also given a building site. With the desire to not only provide for the performance of the arts but also in the education and training of artists, a New York Public Library dedicated to the performing arts was added as was the Juilliard School of Music. Many other performing arts institutions and venues followed as well as other support functions, commercial and retail, restaurants and cafes, etc.

Today, Lincoln Center is still very much a cultural hub for the performing arts in New York City. Through its numerous revisions and renovations (see list of architects below), most notably the recent work by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, it is home to dozens of performance venues, restaurants and cafes, education and research, and provides a platform in its plaza for public performances, art projects and fashion shows. Although some of the original major venues have met with criticism, both technically and aesthetically, Lincoln Center has

¹ See Edgar B. Young's *Lincoln Center: The Building of an Institution* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1980.)

² Ibid

maintained a central position in the arts and has arguably fulfilled its original mission.

However, perhaps a more important criticism (one which DS+R attempts to respond to in their recent project) is that Lincoln Center, even with all of its dedicated open public space, is very uninviting to a general public. It arguably represents a place of 'high' culture that can be considered elitist, through both its urban form - formal layout and elevated plaza – and its highly classical 'civic' architecture. Aside from its entry into the plaza up the public steps off of Columbus Avenue, the entire block is quite isolated from the public streets and sidewalks. Its relationship with the public is not helped by the massive size of the buildings with their windowless 'back-of-house' functions organized along the streets and the giant plinth they sit on that houses the parking and services.

Architects who designed buildings at the center include:

- Max Abramovitz: Avery Fisher Hall
- Pietro Belluschi: The Juilliard School (including Alice Tully Hall). Modified by Diller Scofidio + Renfro in association with FX Fowle
- Gordon Bunshaft: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
- Wallace Harrison: the center's master plan and the Metropolitan Opera House
- Lee S Jablin: 3 Lincoln Center, the adjacent condominium built by a private developer
- Philip Johnson: New York State Theater, now known as the David H. Koch Theater
- Eero Saarinen: Vivian Beaumont Theater
- Davis, Brody and Associates: The Samuel B. and David Rose Building.
- Billie Tsien, Tod William: The David Rubenstein Atrium
- Hugh Hardy/H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture LLC: The Claire Tow Theater

Cultural Centers / Districts

As stated above, Lincoln Center is thought to be the first centralized collection of major cultural institutions in an American city. But cultural districts are not just modern and contemporary inventions. They can be found throughout the world in different forms - some being planned and others developed more spontaneously.

Since Lincoln Center's completion, cities throughout the world increasingly have recognized the many advantages and opportunities that cultural districts can have. Many of these are planned at a grand scale with global ambitions. Culture can be a catalyst for development and for promoting civic identity. Certainly since Guggenheim Bilbao, cities and their governments recognize the value culture can have in the development of their cities. Today there is a great deal of political capital being invested in creating cultural center and districts in cities of all sizes.

Each planned cultural center/district is driven by a number of motivations. If you peel back the layers of good intentions, it is not too difficult to perceive some

cultural districts as instruments of power. Today we see this trend even further exaggerated in China and the Middle East, with some cultural districts equaling the size of mini-cities. The studio will consider the current global context of culture and the grand government-initiated cultural megaprojects, like Lincoln Center, in hopes of establishing a contemporary context for the project.

As the studio rethinks Lincoln Center, what can be learned from past cultural districts – both planned and spontaneous – that can be applied to a contemporary condition? What can it contribute to urban and civic life in New York City?

Project Program Requirements:

As a starting point to the project, the program requirements will match what exists currently. During the urban Scale phase, the studio can challenge those programs and offer an alternative proposal. The overall area of the project cannot shrink. However, it can increase in size with additional programs.

The studio will inventory and analyze (graphically) the existing functions and programs to determine the minimum requirements. The list below includes the major functions.

Performance Spaces:

- Metropolitan Opera House: 800,000 SF – 3,900-seat opera house
- Avery Fisher Hall: 2,738-seat concert hall
- Alice Tully Hall: 1,095-seat concert hall
- David H. Koch Theater: 2,713-seat theater
- Vivian Beaumont Theater: 1,080-seat theater
- Walter Reade Theater: 268-seat movie theater

Education:

- Juilliard School of Music:
- New York Public Library for the Performing Arts:

Services:

- Parking Garage:
- Restaurants & Cafes:
- Retail:

Residential

- Lincoln Towers: 4000 units
- Lincoln Guild Cooperative: 400 units

Other additions to the program are encouraged and at the discretion of the designer/team.

Research

The studio will undertake research on the following topics at the beginning of the semester. Research will be conducted in teams. Each team will be assigned one or two topics to research and present to the studio during week two (see schedule).

- NYC: Site + Context + grid (Master Plan of 1811)
- Lincoln Center: History; programs; etc
- Local zoning laws
- Superblock/Megablock / Megastructure precedents
- Cultural Center precedents
- Performing Arts / Cultural Building precedents

Deliverables

Urban:

- Program: Requirements + Analysis
- Concept Drawings and Renderings
- Master Plan: Scale TBD
- Site Sections: Scale TBD
- Site Model: Scale TBD
- Site Analysis

Architecture:

- Building Floor Plans: Scale TBD
- Building Sections: Scale TBD
- Building Site Plan: Scale TBD
- Renderings: Interior and Exterior
- Massing Model (physical): Scale TBD – to fit on studio master plan site model
- Building Model (physical): $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'-0''$

Schedule:

June 11 (Wed)	First Class – Studio Introduction
June 16 (Mon)	Research Presentation
June 27 (Mon)	Urban Scale / Master Plan Presentation
July 9 (Wed)	Mid-Review
July 25 (Fri)	$\frac{3}{4}$ Review
Aug 6 (Wed)	Final Review

Selected References:

Essays:

- Pope, Albert. "From Form to Space," in *Fast Forward Urbanism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011) pp. 143-175.
- Shane, David Grahame. "Block, Superblock and megablock, A Short History. <http://www.arcduecitta.it/world/2014/01/block-superblock-and-megablock-a-short-history/>
- "The Superblock," in *Arquitectura moderna y cambio historico: Ensayos: 1962-1976* (Editorial Gustavo Gili: 1978) pp. 94-112.

New York:

- Ballon, Hillary (ed.). *The Greatest Grid: The Master Plan of Manhattan 1811-2011* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.)
- Koolhaas, Rem. *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (The Monacelli Press, December 1, 1997.)
- Stern, Robert A.M. and David Fishman and Thomas Mellins. *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: The Monacelli Press; 2nd edition, October 1, 1997.)

Lincoln Center:

- Diller Scofidio + Renfro. *Lincoln Center Inside Out: An Architectural Account* (Damiani, April 30, 2013.)
- Stamas, Stephan and Sharon Zane. *Lincoln Center: A Promise Realized, 1979-2006* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007.)
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Urbanism:

- Banham, Reyner. *Megastructures: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.)
- Koolhaas, Rem and Hans Ulrich Obrist. *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* (Cologne: Taschen, 2011.)
- Lehnerer, Alex. *Grand Urban Rules* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009.)
- Lin, Zhongjie. *Kenzo Tange and the Metabolist Movement: Urban Utopias of Modern Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2010.)
- Shane, David Grahame. *Urban Design since 1945 – A Global Perspective* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2011.)

Periodicals:

- Oosterman, Arjen (Editor-in-Chief). Volume: *The Block*, v.21, no.3 (2009).