

GSAPP - ADVANCED STUDIO - SPRING 2019

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RURAL CITY: POST-OCCUPATION OF THE DEPLETED TERRITORIES

SYLLABUS

RURAL CITY, post-occupation of the depleted territories IS A RESEARCH PROJECT THAT SETS OUT TO EXPLORE THE TECHNIQUES –MODELS AND METHODS- WITH WHICH TO RE-THINK AND RE-DESIGN THE RE-OCCUPATION OF THE RURAL TERRITORY.....THE PROGRAMME GIVES THOUGHT TO THE FATE OF BETWEEN-CITY TERRITORIES IF THE CURRENT AND FUTURE EXODUS TO MAJOR URBAN CONGLOMERATES CONDEMNES THEM TO A PICTURESQUE-MYTHOLOGICAL READING AND A FEIGNED USE DRIVEN BY FASCINATION WITH AND NOSTALGIA FOR “THE AUTHENTIC” WHICH HAS BEEN LEFT BEHIND.....FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW, THE USUAL READING OF THE RURAL AS A COUNTERPOINT TO THE URBAN IMPLIES A PATERNALISTIC ATTITUDE WITH UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES IF WE UNDERSTAND THAT MORE THAN 90% OF THE PLANET IS LOSING POPULATION DRAMATICALLY IN FAVOUR OF THE URBAN AREAS.....STERILIZATION OF THE LAND AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, CENTRALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICES IN THE URBAN CONGLOMERATES AND THE LACK OF FUTURE FOR NEW GENERATIONS BUILDS THE DARK SIDE OF THIS PROCESS OF DEPLETION.....AT BEST, SMALL VILLAGES ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO WEEK-END SERVICE CENTRES FOR SPORADIC VISITING URBANITES ELUDING ANY OTHER MORE CONTEMPORARY FORM OF PROGRESS.....THIS SITUATION OF DEPENDENCE CALLS FOR A NEW SENSITIVITY THAT IMPLEMENTS OTHER MODELS OF PROSPERITY IN ORDER TO REDEFINE WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY QUALITY OF LIFE.....ARCHITECTURE HAS MUCH TO SAY IN THIS DESIRABLE PROCESS OF RE-OCCUPATION OF THE RURAL BY ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOAD-BEARING CAPACITY OF ENCLAVES AND PERTINENT CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES, REVIEWING EXISTING AND NEW TYPOLOGIES, INCORPORATING SOCIAL, POLITICAL, INFRASTRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EQUATIONS.....OUR STATEMENT IS THAT THE RURAL IS THE NEW HOLISTIC LABORATORY FOR ARCHITECTURE TO

EXPLORE THE FUTURE WHERE ALL THE INGREDIENTS OF THE PRESENT CAN/NEED TO BE RE-DESCRIBED, RE-INVENTED AND IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT THE HEAVY IMMOBILISM OF THE BIG CITY.....

SUBJECT

Those who predict the extent of foreseeable growth of cities' population seem to assume that the mass migration of people from the country to urban conglomerates is a phenomenon that makes all the sense endorsed by the offer of quality of life, employment opportunities, education and an illusory refuge against natural forces. In the meantime, large-scale corporative-agriculture, tourist exploitation, extensive solar and wind farms, dams and big industrial plants transform the rural in increasingly depopulated stretches of land that act as the city's rear-guard, ecological footprint or, larder, a no-man's land crossed by infrastructures. To make things worse, in the last two decades, life in the rural is being violently affected by the climate change; drought and the floods a good reason to flee. Apparently, nobody today ponders the issue of how to make life far from the city a vital experience that draws equally from both rural and urban cultures but there are some signals that attract our attention that can reveal a great opportunity for architecture to come back to the front line of the design of the future and rethink our methods of working. The interest for the anthropological contents of the rural and its dual condition of natural landscape and its artificial exploitation, together with the need of learning to operate with a completely new environmental conditions, is nowadays a fundamental topic shared by many disciplines. Architecture is called to this conversation because the need of inventing new ways to occupying the countryside as part of a multidisciplinary task. Several XX Century manifestos –ranging from the metabolist mega-structures of the sixties to the cities planned in the nineties from scratch in China- didn't get our validation because they systematically respond to the architects-fantasy of the major-infrastructural-unitary, ex-novo project. XXI Century brought a new sensitivity to approach situations of high complexity with many agents involved that need to be produced on the basis of strategies and operative systems in which hybridisation, sustainability and uncertainty replace mono-functionalism, heroism and specificity of the heroic times. We see ourselves as architects far from the fascination that reads the rural context as the sentimental reservoir of certain forms of simplicity and authenticity. Under the guise of new economic activities, based fundamentally on tourism and on the phenomenon of the second home, incentives of prosperity for small countryside villages is given to a relationship of dependence on the big city limiting the slanted development of these nuclei towards the services-for-visitors sector. Thus, while small towns strive to attain competitiveness in its 'rural' picturesque, its hotel offer, its local festivities and its natural or culinary resources, they cannot offer their permanent residents even the most rudimentary social, cultural, educational or health facilities, given their small scale and limited clientele.

In our view, the rural structure based on very small villages in close proximity to each other allows for a broader, more imaginative reading that would pursue autonomy rather than dependence on the metropolis, more future values for the local young people, greater diversity among the resident population and less polarity between residents and visitors.

WORK AREA AND PROCEDURE

North of the city of Madrid, beyond the influence of the capital's industrial hinterland but less than 90 miles of distance, a large area colloquially known as "The empty Spain" spreads over the provinces of Madrid, Burgos, Soria, Ávila and Guadalajara in which no town or village exceeds a population of 500. There, groups of three students will choose clusters of three-nuclei-triangle urban nuclei as the targets to collect data, mapping and design a strategic joint plan through which to optimize resources and offer progress opportunities for local population. By the midterm, a geographical re-description of the site, a social-economic programme (production and consumption), a form of organization, an image and a time projection (obsolescence and flexibility) and the first architectural schemes of the architectural developments of the plan should be outlined by each group. After the spring break, each group -all together or split- will culminate their work with the design of the main buildings under the guidelines of the plan.

The Studio-trip will be to Madrid and its hinterland. It will include visits to historical and contemporary architecture masterpieces; encounters with students and professors (review) from the Madrid School of Architecture who are working on the same subject; visits to emerging practices; and meetings with regional politicians with authority over the subject.

THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE

What's the role of architecture in an environment that needs to invest a lot of energy to get a significant transformation? Where are the limits of scale, new population and technification of the territory? What are the pertinent typologies, construction systems and preservation protocols? We have already seen enough isolated high-impact constructions killing the landscape, with absolutely no character and clear apathy, and many villages transformed into small theme parks or sterilised complexes overshadowed. Our answer to this background imagines a new generation of low-impact clean industry nurseries, research centres, pedagogical institutions, residential complexes that bring new ways of living, to equip these villages in an endeavour to redefine their character. Such projects will have to take into account the tiny size of the rural nuclei and their delicate relation with nature or agricultural landscapes; the impact of global warming to guide the construction of a second-chance nature; the new ingredients of urban culture difficult to implement in big cities that can find here the best laboratory to test them, from gender policies to the most advanced forms of socialization; from the positive incorporation of the new technologies to the environmental concerns; from the non-romantic reading of nature to the artificial construction of the environment.

In order to address these contradictions, we set out to explore the powerful of design as an instrument with which to read, interpret and describe existing conditions and plan strategies by which to extend the radio of everyday action of the residents of these new complexes. Furthermore, we want to look at what exists -nature and built complexes- as

valuable support from which to develop programmes of recycling in the literal sense of the word. Concepts associated with prepositions (before, below, with, between, without, on...) will develop into architectural operations of occupation, superimposition, infiltration, delimitation and so on. We want to design and build -that's the essence of our work as architects- a new 'rural urban culture' that would take advantage of dualities such as isolation-connection, natural-artificial, hybridisation-specificity, individual-collective, sophisticated-elementary technologies, density-porosity... to set new forms of living, working, leisure and socialisation.

The projects to be produced in the studio will be enriched by a strong critical position and a realistic constructability. Intellectual and technical content of the work will be the two sides of the same coin. Engagement with the present topics and contradictions, elaboration of the narratives, choice and/or design of instruments and methods of representation - graphic materials, models, audio-visual resources- are design operations in themselves. In this context, especial emphasis will be laid on the communicative capacity of the portfolios as documents through which to convey the suitability of the project to third parties.

Countryside

The countryside is now the frontline of transformation. A world formerly dictated by the seasons and the organization of agriculture is now a toxic mix of **genetic experiment, industrial nostalgia, seasonal migration, territorial buying sprees, massive subsidies, incidental inhabitation, tax incentives, political turmoil, digital informers, flex farming, species homogenization...** in other words more volatile than the most accelerated city...

Rem Koolhaas Manifesto of the Countryside (2012)