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Borderline Extreme makeovers

or how nature can be built otherwise

We are living in an environmental crisis, with climate change, systemic pollution and environmental injustice all across the globe. In this context, scientists, anthropologists, philosophers or economists are suggesting that taking the environment seriously requires a reformulation of our forms of life and production. We need to imagine alternative futures. Isn't architecture well equipped to do so?

However, the way in which architecture has dealt so far with the environmental crisis is through 'sustainable solutions': solar panels, efficiency standards, or smart buildings, amongst others, to reduce the negative impact of buildings in the environment. These 'solutions' might be useful but, are they all we can do as architects?

>>> The studio claims the need to explore new imaginaries, typologies, technologies and forms of inhabiting that change the focus from polluting less, to contributing to the environment in a positive and optimistic way.

This claim stands on two premises that will be discussed in class:

>Dealing with the environment is not only about technological solutions, but requires dealing with the environment *and* cultural, social and political issues.

>Designing *for* the environment is a tool to expand our ways of thinking about how the environment is constructed, and to trigger new architectural strategies.

To explore these topics and as part of an ongoing research and studio series, we will use urban parks as a case study, because they are at the same time built objects and environments. And yet, they have mostly been designed to satisfy human needs -often as escapes to the everyday rush of the city- and neglecting their ecosystemic capabilities. What kind of makeover do they need to adapt to the current environmental challenges?

> Where > Borderline Manhattan parks

If last year the studio focused on Central Park, as the laboratory for urban large scale green spaces perforated in the centre of cities for social reform, this year we will look at the parks that have been emerging throughout the centuries at the edges between Manhattan's urban fabric and the rivers. They are borderline environments, many of them grown on top of previous infrastructures (military, commercial, educational, etc), or on real state leftover land. They are spaces that used to be in the edges, but which have now become extremely valuable and constantly redeveloped. They have different forms of management, uses, and visitors, and are configured by diverse natural environments. They are centric peripheries, borderline assemblages. And yet, they share with Central Park that they are all artificial recreations of nature that have been changing until the present.

> What > Extreme makeovers

We will study the design, material and technological means used to build these parks (Battery, Hudson River, East River, etc) and propose alternatives.

To do so we will hack, expand, transform some of their facilities -or create new ones- as make overs of the parks, to speculate with alternative forms of living through realistic architecture projects that put the environment at the centre, whilst taking humans into consideration.

We will ask:

>> How can we design/build environments from this framework?

>> How can we put efficiency to the side and design for excess, redundancy or playfulness?

>> How do environments perform as borders?

The studio will bring together transdisciplinary critical thinking, design, research, creative and speculative explorations and technical discussions, supported and inspired by guest talks and consultancies with experts or involved people from different

backgrounds, including the social sciences, art, philosophy or ecocriticism, among others. It will also emphasize a variety of skills and means of representation, including conceptual thinking, personal aesthetics, architecture drawings, collective editing and collaboration.

Calendar

Week 1> Exploration

To get to know the design, cultural, social, environmental and material histories of the parks we will combine two methods: archival research and ethnographic exploration. We will walk the parks, have picnics and meet with experts to have a first-hand experience of them. We will also visit extraordinary archival resources like New York City's Public Library, New York City Archives, or the Avery archives, to dive into their fascinating histories.

Week 2> Catalogue I

Analysis and discussion of the knowledge acquired, and synthesis in a collective catalogue through detailed drawings, the representation of the main actors involved and the key research findings that help to frame the questions, controversies and challenges of the most interesting existing facilities of the parks.

Week 3> Proliferations

Proliferation of ideas of how to intervene in the existing facilities through "design-storming". Discussion of their conceptual and architectural contributions, to set up the projects' agenda.

Week 4> Makeovers for the environment

Design development of the architectural interventions, focusing on how they contribute to different aspects of the environment.

Week 5> MIDTERM

Presentation of the architectural interventions inserted in the debates and histories identified as a response to their catalogues produced.

Week 6> Extreme

Quantification and adjustment of the scale of the project and adaptation to human use. Talk or consultancy by expert.

Week 7> Effects

Amplification and expansion of the performance of the projects by taking into consideration more agents.

Week 8> Catalogue II and edition

Addition of the makeovers to the Catalogue. Drawings development, portfolio editing and presentation rehearsals.

Week 9. FINAL REVIEW and celebration

Nerea Calvillo is an architect and researcher, assistant professor at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies (University of Warwick). She received her MSAAD from GSAPP in 2002 and her PhD from ETSAM in 2014, and has taught at the Architectural Association and the GSD, among others. The work produced at her office, *C+ arquitectos*, and her environmental visualization projects like *In the Air* have been presented, exhibited and published at international venues. She is a Poiesis Fellow (NYU) and a Mellon Researcher (Canadian Centre for Architecture). Her research investigates the material, technological, political and social dimensions of environmental pollution working at the intersection between architecture, science and technology and feminist studies, new materialisms and urban political ecologies.

Marcos García Mouronte graduated from ETSAM - School of Architecture of Madrid. Thanks to a "laCaixa" fellowship, he was awarded a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design in 2019 with a William Ware Prize for Excellence in Design / Saul Kaplan Traveling Fellowship, a William Kinne Fellows Traveling Prize and a Lucille Smyser Lowenfish Memorial Prize. He has joined offices like MVRDV and Soriano&Asociados and his work has been published in Archdaily and Afasia.