

**Nerea Calvillo.** Critic  
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# Extreme makeover

## 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 new environmental challenges?

### **> Where > Central Park**

In particular, the studio will focus in Central Park, one of the most famous man-made nature's of the world. The park was built in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a social and political project. Conceived as a public infrastructure, it was envisioned as an instrument to improve the health of city dwellers and the formation of civil society, and therefore a fundamental tool for the consolidation of democracy.

### **> What > Extreme makeovers**

We will study the design, material and technological means used by *Frederick Law Olmsted* and *Calvert Vaux* to construct this artificial recreation of nature, like the Great Lawn, the Zoo, the Belvedere Castle or the Reservoir, and propose alternatives.

To do so we will hack, expand, transform these facilities or create new ones as make overs of the park, 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?**

The studio will bring together critical thinking, design, research, creative and speculative explorations and technical discussions, supported and inspired by guest talks and consultancies with experts or involved people. 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 park we will combine two methods: archival research and ethnographic exploration. We will walk the park, have picnics and meet with experts to have a first-hand experience of it. We will also visit extraordinary archival resources like New York City's Public Library or New York City Archives, to dive into the fascinating history of the Big Lung.

### **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 park.

### **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. Talk or consultancy by expert.

### **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) and unit master at the Architectural Association. She received her MSAAD from GSAPP in 2002 and her PhD from ETSAM in 2014. 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.

**Christopher Gardner** is a recent GSAPP graduate in the MSAAD program. After receiving a professional bachelors in architecture from University of Texas at Austin, Chris moved to New York City where he worked for 4 years with the architecture firm Workshop/APD on projects spanning multiple scales and budgets. His conceptual projects seek to exploit current architectural frameworks in service of finding new modes of architecture.