Each student will have to fill in the blank with the type of territory that will be organized, claimed or interpreted by the visitor’s center. Different territories will suggest unique relationships between building, territory and public. Choosing a territory is itself an act of design and authorship. A visitor’s center makes a claim for the public. In a way, it says the public has a right to be here, or that the public should be here. What territories demand a visitor’s center? Where are the places that need to be preserved or where the public should belong? Landfills, neighborhoods, borders, cities, farms? Or should a visitor’s center manage a different relationship to territory beyond spectatorship or access?

Visitor

“Visitor” assumes a temporary, mobile public. The visitor needs orientation and information, and the visitor’s center has typically responded by becoming the didactic organizer of what lies beyond itself. The visitor is one form of public citizen, but there are many others. What other publics can have relationships to territories? What programs can operate on territory that are not only about curation and control? Can hybrid programs create hybrid publics? Students will re-imagine the public that will be generated by the building they create and the territory they claim.

Center

This studio will insist on the capacity of buildings to organize territory. How this relationship is articulated will, however, be up for debate. The “center” is one clear model. Conceptually and spatially a hub-and-spoke, the center draws in everyone to itself to organize their relationship to a broader territory before sending them back out to explore with the proper understanding. This is but one model that should sustain some interrogation and alternative models should be proposed. The perimeter, the distribution, the full scale (borges map), etc. Students will explore, parallel to larger institutional and site research, the spatial potentials for buildings to relate to sites much larger than any building could hope to claim.

Recently, the Center for Land Use Interpretation conducted several sold out bus tours of the Puente Hills Landfill near Los Angeles. If nothing else, this tour registers the ongoing interest the public has in infrastructure sites like landfills. In an attempt to explore architecture’s potential role in this phenomenon, this studio was originally titled “Landfill Visitor’s Center.” The idea was to provide a way for the public to experience first hand the visceral reality of a landfill. I have since rethought limiting the site to a landfill, or even the program to a visitor’s center. The visitor’s center will serve as a historical model to be questioned in a process that will articulate a relationship between newly defined territories and the publics they generate.

The creation of National Park visitor’s centers is one clear example. The mobile, middle class outdoor enthusiast never existed in such numbers before the National Parks mobilized this public through its parks and visitor’s centers. This public created demand for, and was created by an ever expanding network of access to scenic natural spaces. The visitor center is what Keller Easterling would call a “spatial product.” Beyond remaining the static result of bureaucratic processes these buildings became actors in the process. Beyond the visitor’s center model, buildings lay claim to territories in all manner of ways. Whether directly through ownership, or indirectly though curation, regulation, jurisdiction, legislation or containment, institutions control territory in the name of invented publics.