Throughout this year, Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary commemorations extend across the Indian geography. In a time of growing national socio-political polarization, Gandhi’s legacy continues to be appropriated, celebrated and problematized, scrutinizing his views on religious pluralism, environmental stewardship, activism, caste, and race. The city of Ahmedabad holds a special significance as Gandhi’s karmabhumi during the formative years of his political and spiritual leadership. It was on the banks of the Sabarmati River, between the British jail and the crematorium grounds, that he settled the Sabarmati (Harjan) Ashram in 1917. Embracing Satyagraha, holding on to truth and nonviolent resistance, the Ashram served as the strategic center for the Indian freedom struggle. Gandhi lived there until 1930, when he departed for the Salt March, never to return.

This October, speaking in Ahmedabad on the occasion of the anniversary, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the plans for remaking the Sabarmati Ashram into a 32-acre “world-class memorial.” Calling it a land grab, activists warn the redevelopment will alter the spirit of the institution and involve the demolition of 200 houses and the eviction of 2,500 residents, whose ancestors joined Gandhi’s mission and have lived there ever since. With this transformation, many fear the ideals of simplicity and austerity that once defined the Ashram will be forever lost and the site of pilgrimage will turn into yet another tourist resort.

In a time of global unrest, with citizens across the world turning cities into fields of action to exercise dissent and assert their rights, this studio section proposes to learn from the Gandhian legacy in the city of Ahmedabad to inspire more just and inclusive development practices. As protesters develop increasingly sophisticated spatial tactics and appropriate symbolic locations to render their claims visible, the studio will instigate urban strategies that negotiate a plurality of ideas and interests in the making of new collective and civic institutions.

Over the course of the semester, students will formulate compelling research design strategies and urban proposals that integrate architecture, landscape, and urbanistic concepts across multiple temporal and physical scales. Through readings, discussions, and the development of mappings and other visual narratives, the first phase of the semester will examine the city in a larger socio-spatial and geopolitical context. We will then turn to the Sabarmati Ashram to document its current condition and project alternatives to the redevelopment plans, considering a multiplicity of modes of urban intervention.

This studio section is open to MArch and MUD students interested in interdisciplinary design and highly collaborative studio environments. The research and design proposals will be developed through incremental assignments and collected into an e-book. Students will contribute to the collective studio goals while also developing specific areas of individual disciplinary interest.

Students in this studio section will travel to Ahmedabad between February 28 and March 14. During these two weeks, students will participate in the Vastu-Shilpa Foundation’s International Habitat Design Studio (VS-IHDS) 2020. Activities include working sessions with Professor Balkrishna Doshi, Rajeev Kathpalia and other distinguished faculty, a lecture series from distinguished academics and practitioners, visits to important urban and architectural sites, directed field work, and intensive studio sessions focusing on the Sabarmati Ashram site.

The activities will take place at the Mill Owners’ Association Building by Le Corbusier and the Sabarmati Ashram premises. Studio costs per student include a $1,350 VS-IHDS 2020 workshop fee, plus visa, flight, and accommodation costs (roughly an additional $1,300). Each participant will receive the $1,000 International Taubman College Travel Fund, which combined with the $600 lab fee will help cover some of the travel expenses. The instructor has requested additional funding support from the DEI Fund.
something in common

Taubman College of Architecture & Urban Planning
Winter 2020

Anya Sirota, Associate Professor

INTRODUCTION

The studio is concerned with the concept of “urban commons” as a political framework and speculative design methodology. Over the course of an intensive seven-week exploration, we will address the rising contemporary affinity for participatory and resistant forms of process-based urban and architectural design by offering a critical alternative to the conventional dichotomy between private and public space. Collectively owned land and services will serve as the situational backdrop for the spatial investigation, testing how commoning may be extended to influence the workings of experimental institutions and neighborhood-scaled projects.

BACKGROUND

With ongoing battles raging over neoliberal development and its impact on cities, a growing cadre of architects, activists, and urban designers are championing the emancipatory potentials of commoning as a paradigm for greater social inclusivity. Building on the theoretical work of Silke Helfrich, David Bollier, Gibson-Graham, David Harvey, Elinor Ostrom, and Stavros Dravides, among others, the approach asks designers to consider the commons not only as a resource and management strategy, but as a set of rules capable of producing novel spatial outcomes. In this scenario, the designer occupies the role of negotiator and tactician, carving out accessibility and scenarios of inclusion in cities with increasing enclosures and endless zones of enterprise.

SITE & RATIONALE

To explore how alternate forms of land ownership and collective management can yield new urban morphologies, we will focus our study on the Cuauhtemoc borough of Mexico City. Our site will be located at the Conjunto Urbano Nonoalco Tlatelolco, a storied housing complex realized in 1965 by architect Mario Pani. The project, an ambitious expression of functionalist ideals, will serve as a critical framework to counter the conventional dichotomy between private and public space. Collectively owned land and services will serve as the situational backdrop for the spatial investigation, testing how commoning may be extended to influence the workings of experimental institutions and neighborhood-scaled projects.


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Originally composed of a sprawling network of 102 apartment buildings, parks, schools, hospitals, stores, and cultural centers, today Tlatelolco has deteriorated considerably. A casualty of political strife[1] and seismic disaster[2]; this notorious site of frustrated utopia is challenged by extended vacancy, public disinvestment, and real estate depreciation. At the same time, Tlatelolco’s residents and partners have generated a network of cultural spaces and efforts, energizing a renewed sense of possibility in the neighborhood. Rigorous spatial and historical analysis, coupled with an inventory of emergent programs on site, will serve as a framework for our speculative, interventionist exploration.

PUBLIC SPACE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PRODUCT OF A CERTAIN AUTHORITY… A CONDITION UNDER WHICH CONTROL IS BEING IMPARTED, AND CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH FORMS AND HABITS ARE BEING EXPLORED… WHEREAS COMMONS SPACE IS A CHALLENGE TO DOMINANT ENCLAVES THROUGH PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

-Savros Stavridis

In the spirit of commoning, students will work in teams to understand the potentials of the urban commons not only as a method of collective resource management, but equally as a connected system of particular spatial practices, social relationships, and forms of governance. The first two weeks will be devoted to theoretical and historical research along with a four-day site visit to Mexico City. Analytical drawings will be used to explore available resources for designing new urban imaginaries, and precedent studies with Mexican interventionist art practices will offer a catalogue of techniques as springboards for conceptual thinking. The remainder of the semester will be devoted to the development of projects that address the economic, ecological, and cultural opportunities available through alternate methods of resource management.

While commoning is most often associated with the self-organized pooling of assets and the bottom-up transformation of cities, this course will require designers to assume a position of agency by contributing to new architectural and urban forms. Embracing contextually-rooted modes of artistic expression, we will bridge the commonly perceived divide between social and aesthetic practice.

PARTNERSHIP

The course is developed in collaboration with Graciela Kasep, director of the CENTRO Investigación de Economía Creativa, the HUB de Diseño Social at CENTRO Universitario Mexico, and in coordination with CENTRO’s Maestria en Ciudad. Each Taubman College design team will consult with graduate students from Mexico City in order to expedite contextually-rooted design understanding.

[1] The 1968 Mexico City Olympics sparked a summer of demonstrations, which culminated in the Massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. The Mexican army opened fire on crowds of unarmed civilians at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco. An undetermined number of people, likely in the hundreds, were killed on site.

[2] Earthquakes in 1985 and 1993 caused significant infrastructural damage and loss of life leading to the demolition of a number of housing units at the Tlatelolco site.
AQUATECTURE Studio is a response to the global quest for adequate urban living solutions under current threats and challenges through flooding caused by climate change. Rising seawater levels and severe storm water occurrences cause infrastructure failures, social and economic disruptions, environmental disturbances and create safety and health risks. Entire coastal regions are endangered, and potable water for their inhabitants are at risk.

AQUATECTURE is a studio to investigate of how societies deal with this current threat and how planners and architects, together with engineers, scientists and politicians develop different measures of mitigating this situation.

As one of the most involved societies in dealing with hydrological challenges since several hundred years, the Dutch became adapt to dealing with water in all it's forms and found solutions to turn threats into assets. Architects in The Netherlands developed new ways of construction, planners developed innovative solutions and landscape architects react with inspiring environments.

The studio will have the opportunity to travel to The Netherlands to learn about challenges, innovations, and technologies in storm water management, their environmental impact, and it's relation to architecture and urbanism. We will have the chance to meet local professionals and participate in the ongoing discourse about the necessity of water management worldwide.

The Great Lakes Region faces similar conditions and especially Detroit is in need of adequate storm water and planning solutions. Through learning form the Dutch, students will propose a thesis utilizing water management as a key tool for the creation of innovative strategies and new exploratory urbanism for Detroit.

AQUATECTURE is promoting innovation in strategic planning, urban design, architecture and landscape architecture and will ultimately seek a discourse with local and regional entities in discussions and presentations.

This is an accredited studio for MUD students who are invited to participate.

Total travel cost for students will be approximately $1,000. Travel to The Netherlands is planned from January 23 to February 1 (subject to change).

Participation in organized visits to Detroit and The Netherlands is mandatory.
On October 10th 2019 the global real estate services company Cushman & Wakefield published its annual report. The document examined global commercial real estate investment activity, ranking the most profitable markets and predicting which would be the key themes for property development in 2020. As in previous years, it showcased the predictable growth of major capitals worldwide, and it would have gone unnoticed if it hadn’t been for one anomaly: foreign real estate investment in the city of Madrid had increased 202% in one year, the highest rise ever registered in this classification, from a 19th place in 2018 to now 4th, just behind global financial capitals like New York, London and Paris.

While investors and public administrations are arguing that such exponential growth is derived from Madrid’s attractive cultural offer and financial stability, the reality is much more complex. Liberal tax incentives and property laws resulted from economic measures taken during the 2008 crisis have turned the city of Madrid into a sealed heaven for real estate speculation, uncontrollably rising market prices and skyrocketing the mortgage per capita ratio to pre-recession numbers.

In a land where the belief in private ownership is an inalienable national right and property laws bolt personal gain over public interest, Madrid’s unforeseen hyperaccumulation should not be a shock. While its unprecedented scale kicked off with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, and the subsequent deregulated privatization of capital markets, Spain’s reliance on private property and profit goes back as far as several millennia to the establishment of Roman Civil Law. Therefore, if we follow the precept in that the origin of private property is in fact the origin of owning the means of work and production and the claiming of its profitability, could we imagine an architecture that cannot be exploited, an architecture without value, without ownership?

Through the careful study of civil laws and economic models, students will develop during the first weeks of the semester prototypes that offer alternative property rights and financial structures to Madrid’s speculative derail, later to be collectively applied in the development of architectural proposals implemented across the city. The studio will travel to Madrid from the 3rd to the 10th of February. Travel, lodging and main activities will be covered by the Taubman Fund.

LEX CAPITA
ARCH 562 Eduardo Mediero Mon Thu 1-6 pm
This past September, the world witnessed the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people, mostly young, protesting the political, corporate, and institutional inaction regarding climate change. The UN Climate Change summit concluded with little significant action pledged. Yet climate change and environmental violence are not merely technical problems in search of “action” or a “fix”. They are also problems of the imagination and require realignments of thinking humankind’s relationship to the planet and to other species; different attunements to the matters we are entangled with, and the need for new narratives and imaginaries we tell to ourselves. It behooves architects and urban designers to offer much more to the transformation of culture than technical solutions. In particular to use our specific media—drawings, models, videos, material constructs—to make climate change, so often represented in the incomprehensible abstraction of big data graphs and charts, feel instead visceral, intimate, and present as a cultural condition and matter of design.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway)

We will start with stories that make worlds: climate SF novels by authors such as Ursula K Le Guin, JG Ballard, Octavia E Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Margaret Atwood, Bruce Sterling, Barbara Kingslover. We will consider these texts not as futurisms but as “the realism of our time” (Robinson). They critically explore not only the possibilities of technology but the political, social, ideological, and ecological systems within which it is enmeshed. We will immerse ourselves in the space of these narratives as a design site and milieu. We will work tendril-like in multiple directions to develop “diegetic prototypes” for architectures, objects, and urbanisms in the condition of climate SF.

This studio will be taught in two 7-week modules, beginning January 9 and March 9 respectively. Both modules will be similarly structured and will start with the same texts and frameworks; the variation will come from the conversation and initiatives of the participants. Students will work in pairs, and the studio as a whole will workshop ideas for how to experiment incrementally and develop new fragments of the possible.
The Floor

“But for eons, the floor was simply the surface of the earth or a technical, architectural response to make that surface more habitable or useful. It has also sometimes been a muted registration of cultural practices and construction technologies. From prayer rugs to tatami grids to basketball courts, the floor has established a few presumed, if unspoken, rules of the game.”

Since ancient times the hardened or paved ground, in cultures all around the world, was a place of work but also a place of gathering, dancing, ritual and worship. Not only in myths and ancient palaces but also in domestic, religious and court architecture, the floor as an elevated platform has been a universal technology for separating the clean from the dirty, the sacred from the profane, and the ruling from the ruled. Advances in building materials and structural systems freed the floor from its relationships to the ground and offered the opportunity to house several programs in one building. The stacking of floors and infrastructures defined the sectional metropolis of the industrial revolution and has played a significant role in the conceptualization of urban life. With the rise of populations living in closer proximity and tight quarters, the floor evolved as a critical means to legislate urban politics, map systemic control above and below ground and express market ambitions. With the creation of maximum marketable area on a given area of land as well as the horizontal growth of site coverage in sub-urban settlements, the floor represents some of our most pressing urban problems- rampant gentrification, ruinous carbon pollution, acute housing shortages and absurd commuting times.

The Floor is equally interested in “ground” as an essential element of architectural space making as in it’s potential to represent cultural practices, market ambitions and our consumption of earth’s natural resources. How can the ‘floor’ serve as a starting point to investigate architectural and urban design strategies that use natural and financial resources more wisely? How can the ‘floor’ operate on the relationships of the needs of the individual and the values of a larger collective? How can the ‘floor’ rethink the idea of architecture as a means of restraint, division, and exclusion and become a tool for allowing the emergence of unprecedented events and social life?

The studio will conduct research into the historic,cultural, economic and political contexts of territory, site, floors, ceilings and roofs and will work on the design of The Floor in various scales from the material scale to urban interventions. Students will individually develop their own body of research in relation to the studio topic that will inform the scope and scale of their final project. Curiosity, open mindedness and the active engagement in studio discussions are prerequisites for this section.

2 The manual of section, Paul Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki, David J. Lewis, 2016