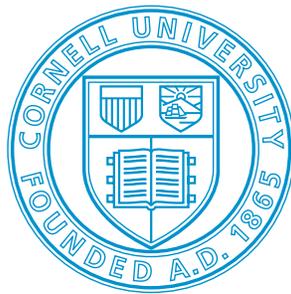


COLLEGE *of* ARCHITECTURE, ART & PLANNING  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

**SPRING 2012  
OPTION STUDIOS**



*Cornell University*

## Syllabus

**Prof. Arthur Ovaska & Marili Santos-Munné**  
**Arch 4101,4102,5101,5116 - Option Studio**

### **"Collective Form and Landscape - Densities in Helvetia"**

"All the designs are similar - yet none is the same. The chorus suggests a common law."  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 - 1832)

Spring 2012  
Milstein Hall Studio  
MWF 12:30-4:30  
Instructors:

Prof. Arthur Ovaska, office: B54A East Sibley tel., 255-8820  
V.C. Marili Santos-Munné

Office Hours:  
Grading:

Wed 10:00 - 12:00 or TBA  
Letter grade, 6 credits



## **I. Rationale**

Most architects will, at some point in their career, design and build some form of housing. The premise of this advanced option studio is that the study of housing in dense contexts is essential to the education of an architect.

While shifting economic trends may determine the volume of housing built in this country, in more densely settled locations like Switzerland, housing construction is an everyday matter. The U.S.A. has a population density of 84 persons per square mile, while that of Switzerland is 490 persons per sq. mile, 5.8 times as dense as the U.S., yet much of Switzerland is unbuildable due to the amount of mountainous terrain.

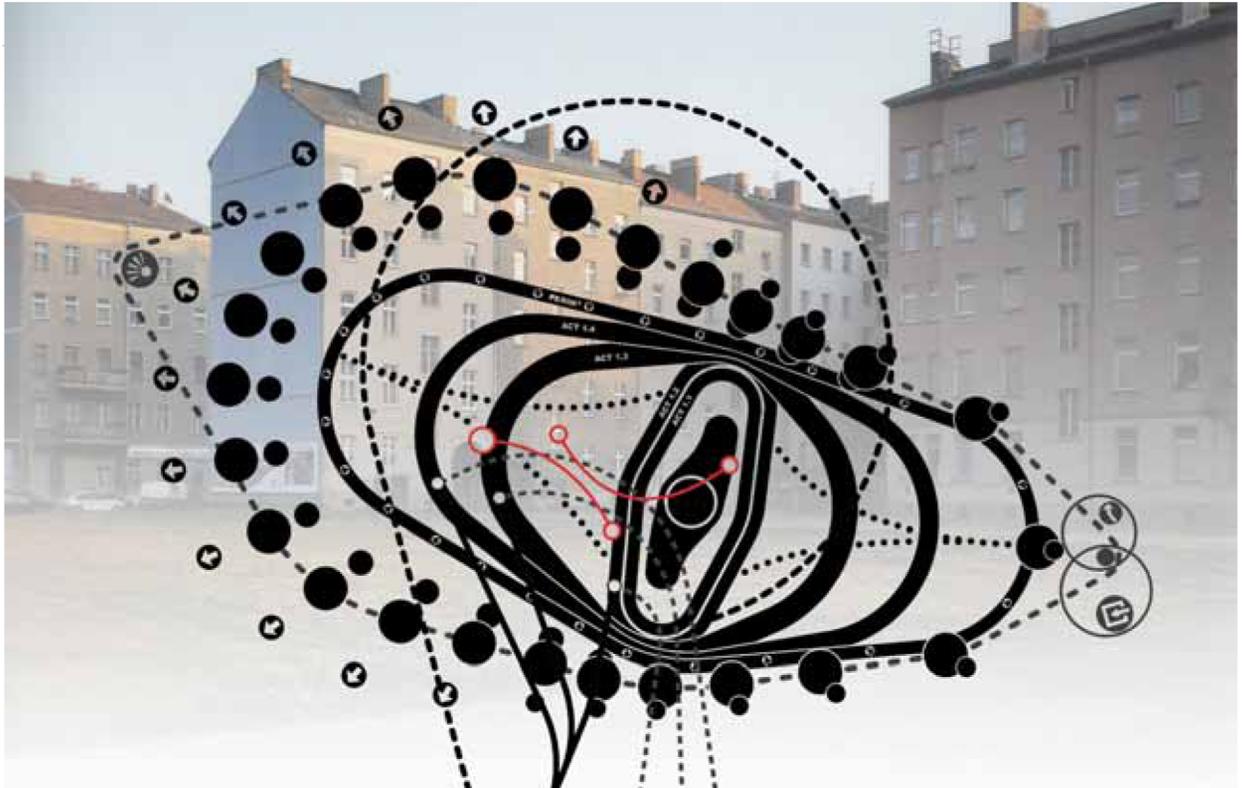
## **II. Course Aims and Objectives**

### **Aims**

Students will learn, through working in alternatives, to generate concepts for various collective dwelling types on an urban scale and in different context scenarios. Through these investigations on type, group form, and variation, students will achieve a broader understanding of the nature and scope of housing, in the urban, sub-urban, and in the landscape context.

### **Specific Learning Objectives:**

The department is required by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), as part of the accreditation process, to collect specific course material for each course taught. This course fulfills NAAB requirements as noted.



**MID-WAY-UP -- Berlin, open by design**

Bottom-up vs. top-down, informal vs. formal, open-source vs. copyright--contemporary discourse shows an increasing interest in time-based, tactical, appropriative and distributed modes of building and design. Indeed, for a large part, cities are being built autonomously, buildings are iterated constantly over time, the tactics of "acting within" and the self-organizing practices of the many are more agile and resilient than the sober planning of a few in power. Some of the most inspiring contemporary design proposals have been developed within and with a thorough understanding of informal contexts.

What does that mean for the design and planning professions, supposedly in control of space and form? The bi-polar structuring of formal and informal, professional and layman, support and infill, type and adaptation, small projects and big differences, and so on, has long been conceptualized--and criticized. Yet, what if designers and planners could import bottom-up practices into formal cultures and establish the notion of acting within, of indeterminacy, usage and multitudes at the very core of design professions? What if the layman's knowledge of locality, interactive rules and acting in time were to fuse with professional techniques of overview, structure and foresight? In today's increasingly contested and saturated environments, this third path of operating might open up possibilities and potentialities while embracing the lively dynamics and improbabilities of the everyday. This studio explores these very questions in seeking develop design techniques that merge, mingle and surpass the dichotomy of bottom-up and top-down: Mid-way-up.

The studio's test case will be Berlin. The German capital is known as an open city: it is cheap, vacant and full of possibilities. It has been branded as "poor but sexy." A culture of in-between usages and micro-practices have emerged, attracting and supported by a global art scene with its associated quality of life -- triggering both intense real estate investments and tourism. With increasing gentrification and congestion, how can possibilities, imagination and urban openness be maintained? Usually, when architects and planners intervene, everyday imagination comes to a standstill, and urban access and diversity narrowed to select constituencies. Can we think of built-up sites maintaining openness--physically, programmatically and socially--today and tomorrow? While Berlin still has a number of vacant buildings and spaces, due largely to the German separation and reunification, they are usually too large, too prominent or considered too valuable to be left open to the small scale and dispersed micro-practices that characterize Berlin's spatial cultures. Strong alliances - including architects - and proactive methods need to be formed to keep the city open.

**B Cloepfil | B Linden**  
CU AAP | Spring 2012



#### AMPLIFIER: Three Acts of Immanent Architecture

This studio proposes to examine three distinct sites in the Pacific Northwest - and the cultural, environmental, and experiential landscapes manifested in them - with the intent of developing resultant and responsive acts of propositional architecture.

The studio will be charged with the task of indentifying local conditions and concentrating those forces acting upon each site, to create a new built form of ritual and communal architecture for a cultural institution that supports both individual and collective uses for the purpose of celebration, contemplation, and ceremony. This architecture will manifest an *absolutely specific* response to context with a distinct new purpose/function. Through acts of eminent domain, we will select sites, explore their potential, and propose new architecture that will amplify understanding, experience, and purpose.

Arch 4102/5116 Option Studio Spring 2012

# Nature Does Not Exist

Claudia Pasquero, Marco Poletto, Kevin Pratt

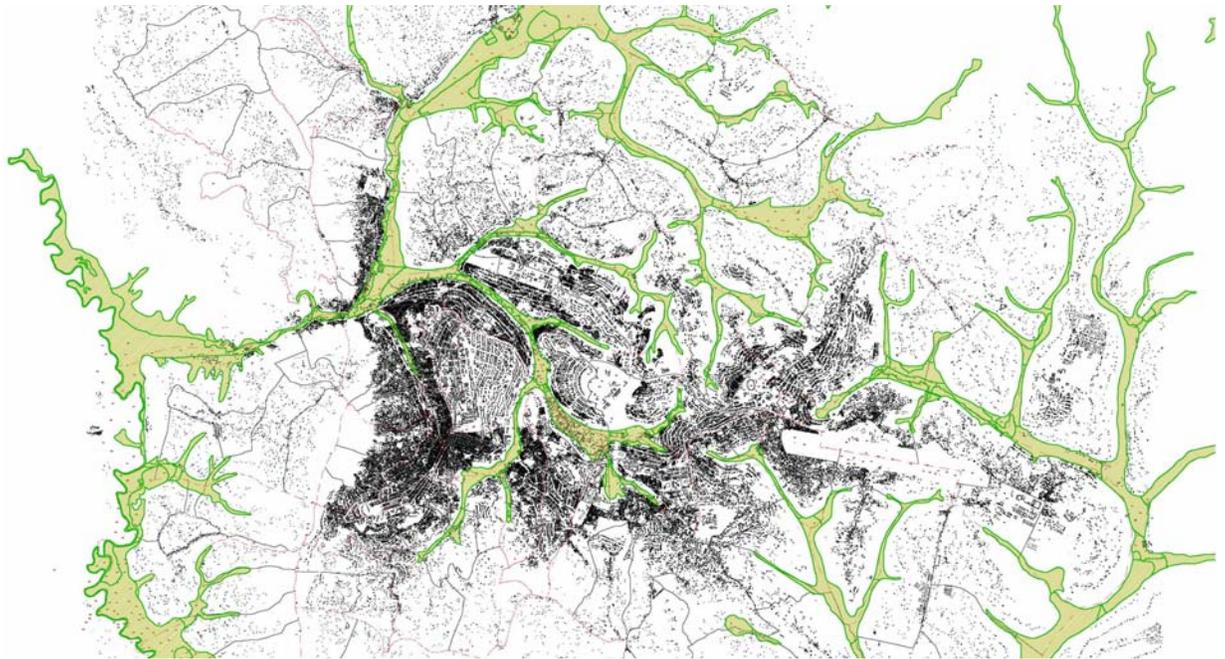


TetraHedron City, B. Fuller, 1968

*//Premise// As human impact on the world's biosphere reaches critical levels, we should recognize and accept the fact that "nature no longer exists"; at least not as that untamed plane of reference where forces re-circulate in a balanced and harmonious way; in the words of Slavoj Zizek, nature is crazy, catastrophic and brutal. Such acceptance will help us avoiding the contemporary cultural pitfall promoted by what we should define "ecologic ideology". At the same time it will liberate a much more radical attitude towards the development of new models of transformation of the environment, new design practices for the reconfiguration of the city and the role of architecture in this process.*

**ARCH 8913 Kigali studio : urban wetlands**

**Instructor** Tomà Berlanda ph.d., Visiting Critic  
**Meeting times** Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 12:30pm-4:30pm  
**Office Hours** Friday 9-11am, and by appointment  
**Contact** 201A Rand, tb367@cornell.edu  
**Grading** 9 credits



Kigali wetland system and urban fabric, 2010

**African urbanisation: the case of Rwanda**

The fast and growing urbanisation process which is radically transforming Sub Saharan Africa will increase in the next decades. Rwanda not only is no exception to this process, but can be considered a paradigmatic laboratory of accelerated modernisation.

A small, landlocked country, with its 10.5 million inhabitants occupying the 26'400 sq.km surface, Rwanda is Africa's most densely populated, averaging 400 inhabitants/sq.km. A fertile country, rich in water, almost entirely cultivated, yielding two harvests per year, it is struggling with producing enough food for the subsistence of the population. Its altitude (the lowest point sits at 1300m above sea level) mitigates the tropical climate, and the topography is characterised by a hilly landscape. One third of the cultivated ground sits on slopes steeper than 20%, and the traditional settlement model is not based on a network of villages, but on a multitude of isolated dwellings on the hillsides which the inhabitants consider their communities. 85% of the population lives in rural areas and only 8% live in Kigali, the capital city. Therefore the common definition of Rwanda as the "land of the thousand hills" is more than a mere geographical description, since every hill is an element of social and productive organisation.

In official documents the transformation of its territory and landscape is considered a goal to be pursued and encouraged through the reorganization of agricultural activities, the concentration of investments in urban centres, the adoption of measures aimed at moving and grouping population. This direction is apparent in policies and programmatic indications at national level and is further confirmed in documents at the local level, from district plans to master plans. Besides having many economic, social, environmental implications, the theme raises specific questions to those engaged in the analysis and design of the territory.

**ARCH 4101/4102/5101/5116**

**Andrea Simitch w/ Steve Christer & Margrét Harðadóttir**



**option studio spring semester 2012 Department of Architecture Cornell University**

The taming of nature has been fundamental in the development of man, the most pervasive species on planet earth. This program seeks to address the identity, future and image of farming and how it might develop to serve not only the needs of mankind but also augment the natural environment.

The work of the studio is sited on the island of Engey in Faxi Bay Iceland, 2,5km from the capital, Reykjavík and will be realized through three, interlinked, research projects.

Engey is the second largest island on the Kolla Bay. Its name is most likely derived from its meadows, which were used for haymaking. The Sturlunga Saga mentions the transport of dried fish and grain from the island in 1226, which suggests fishing outfits and grain crops cultivation on the island. The Njal's Saga tells us about the ownership of the island at the time.

The first church there was consecrated in 1379 and the last one was desecrated in 1765. The last farmhouses had decayed for years and become a blemish at the entrance of the capital from the sea in the sixties. They were painted and stood like that for several years before they were burnt down.

An outlaw thief, Arnes Pálsson, who had accompanied the country's outlaws in uninhabited areas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and spent his last years on social welfare on the island, died there in 1805. Specially shaped boats, popular on the Faxi Bay, were built on and named after the island after 1880. Such boats were more stable and better sailers than others.

Among the public figures, who traced their ancestry to the islands, were Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson and Rev. Bjarni Pálsson. The poet Grimur Thomsen owned the island for a while before it became the property of the government. In 1978 it was transferred to the municipality. The lighthouse on its northern end was originally built in 1902 and restored in 1937.

[http://www.nat.is/travelguideeng/island\\_engey.htm](http://www.nat.is/travelguideeng/island_engey.htm)

