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Course Content

'I define the Neutral as that which outplays the paradigm, or rather I call Neutral everything that baffles paradigm' Roland Barthes

Taking Barthes' notion of neutral as an active, positive space as a starting point, we will investigate possibilities offered by the in between. Situated in and around Bergen, our course will seek out and work with spaces of an ambiguous or amorphous nature; thresholds, transitions, liminalities and architectural situations that spatially or programmatically belong to neither one thing nor the other.

These in betweens both connect and separate more distinct places, functions and states: public and private, inside and out, work and leisure, self and other... We will explore ways of making more productive relationships between well-defined entities, but also look to investigate how irresolution can itself be productive. We will persist in the in between, and explore ways of developing its active qualities and conditions.

'I have tried several times to think of an apartment in which there would be a useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless... For all my efforts, I found it impossible to follow this idea through to the end. Language itself, seemingly, proved unsuitable to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful and function' Georges Perec

The course aims to identify meaningful fields of interest within which to develop relevant, consequential interventions across multiple scales. It has a particular emphasis on process, aimed at managing an intermingling of scales and approaches within a dynamic dialogue. The course is structured to develop the skills required to look back and forth and navigate productive synergies of analysis and design, thinking and making, the map and the territory. The precise proposals that materialise will collectively establish a set of possibilities for ways in which interstitial spaces can play a more productive part in everyday urban life.

Learning outcomes

Competence and Skills

Elaborating the architectural skills of establishing a relevant strategy / program of **what to do** in parallel with working out the ways and means of exploring **how to do it**

Developing analytical and explorative methods of research; mappings, registrations, 1:1, artistic and participatory practices, and setting these in dialogue with design. Developing design processes, artistic representation, schematic drawings, diagrams, models, through to tectonic representation. Managing overlapping and interdependent processes from research through to final design.

Knowledge and Understanding

Understanding of the complex relationships around intervening in context; between building, community and site. Connecting the very local / intimate to a broader urban context and discourse. Critical readings of texts and introduction to social sciences. An ever deeper understanding and application of interdependent processes that are necessary not only to produce, but to precisely present projects with a high degree of complexity, reflection and resolution.

Judgement and Approach

Establishing scope and intentions through the intermingling of social science, written, experimental and architectural investigations. Following initial investigations and workshops students will work in small groups for the majority of the semester and develop their approaches out of common production, discussion, negotiation and regular tutorial input, along with contributions from Landscape architecture and universal design.

Analysis

Be prepared to understand, describe and analyse the local and urban context with attention to:

- 1 – Physical urban context that should integrate the urban system, infrastructures, the landscape, urban spaces, urban uses, buildings and the relationship between buildings and public space.
- 2 – Urban life with special focus on social characteristics, demographic dynamics and living conditions.
- 3 – Local actors from different areas and with different concerns.

Design and Methodology

Be prepared to develop a project proposal with attention to:

- 1 – The context where the project is situated, as a way to develop a project with urban understanding.
- 2 – Integration of the different tools, methods, techniques, as an exploratory way for the project development process. Reciprocity and Integration of research and design phases.
- 3 – Emphasis on models and drawings as an exploratory way for the process project development. Drawing / modelling as thinking, as well as communicating.
- 4 – Integration of DAV and 1/1 as a means of understanding context, reflecting, revealing, discovering, challenging, and speculating on ways of acting.

Expected Deliveries

- 1 – Individually written essays reflecting on the themes introduced via Social Science lectures and initial research. These essays are started at the beginning of the course and revisited later, in order to be an ongoing and reflective tool to develop and critically situate the projects as they evolve.
- 2 – A range of process and presentation material such as models, 1:1 explorations, sketches, schemes, diagrams, drawings in various types of media.
- 3 – ‘Booklet’ for each group work that synthesizes various types of process material, the opportunity, the methodology and the relevance of the project in the local and urban context.
- 4 – Exhibition and open verbal presentations of the work using a selection of the process material and using different types of media.
- 5 – A series of presentations and pinups in line with the work phasing and different workshops.

The course is studio centred and requires full-time engagement. Students are expected to be present throughout and to deliver material in relation to workshops, lectures, crits and tutorials that will be organised throughout the semester. Students will work in groups, in which all members must be fully engaged and contribute equally.

Semester Structure

- 1 – **Fields of interests / initial intentions** (various days) In the first three weeks
- 2 – **Anthropology** (3x2 days) across the semester
- 3 – **Study Trip: Berlin** (one week)
- 4 – **Aims and intentions** (one week)
- 5 – **Means and Approaches** (two weeks)
- 6 – **Project option I** (one and half week)
- 7 – **Project Option II** (one and half week)
- 8 – **Final Project I** (one and half week)
- 9 – **Final Project II** (one and half week)
- 10 – **Communication** (one week)
- 11 – **Reflection/Finalisation** (one week)

Study Trip

The study trip takes place in early September to Berlin (tbc)

Reading List (in progress)

Roland Barthes *The Neutral*

Rebecca Solnit *A field guide to getting lost*

