

Assignment file Master Dissertation Design Studio

Streetscape Territories: Multiple Readings, Multiple Interventions.

Architectural Interventions for the Hudson Riverfront, Manhattan, NYC

Engagement: Urban Cultures



Photography: Alvin Baltrop, New York, 1971-1991

Semester	Sept 2021-June 2022
Campus	Ghent/Brussels
ECTS Study Points	5 + 25
Titular	Prof. Dr. Arch. Kris Scheerlinck Streetscape Territories
Info	www.streetscapeterritories.org

Assignment file 2019-2020 – Information subject to changes

Learning outcomes

The student is able to make a design based on research.

The student is able to work independently and methodologically in his/her design process.

The student is able to continuously and creatively expand his/her knowledge.

The student is able to critically situate a complex (architecture) design.

The student is able to think and act inter-culturally.

The student is able to communicate his/her research to a wide array of stakeholders (international, cross-disciplinary).

The student is able to communicate his design in a personal way graphically and orally from an artistic and architectural perspective.

The student is able to formulate an own research or project strategy.

Master dissertation framework: Streetscape Territories

Streetscape Territories is the name given to an international practice of research, design and teaching, currently operating from Brussels, Ghent, London and New York.

This practice is used as the academic framework, used to initiate, position and discuss the accepted individual master dissertation projects (see previous years: www.streetscapeterritories.org).

In this research and design framework, we seek to explore the conceptual dimensions of the multi-scalar urban and architectural landscape. Through on-site and remote research and design projects, contemporary streetscapes are recorded, studied and discussed as to unveil their territorial and social understanding and highlight their inherent narrative qualities. As part of these projects, we wonder: who has access to which kind of land, building or infrastructure? How is this access monitored, tested or controlled and how is all this configured in space and time? Is this access inclusive? How do inhabitants understand and use these spaces and how can we achieve higher levels of collectivity as a result of emergent processes of appropriation?

How can contemporary architecture play a constructive role in this?

Keywords: architectural interventions in streetscapes, contemporary landscape, territorial behaviour, multi-scalar approach, narrative spaces, appropriation patterns, inclusiveness

Multi-scalar approach

The scope of research and design is merely defined by multi-scalar translations, as the projects oscillate between different scales, between global and local processes of transformation, that each leave their mark on spatial perceptions and potential uses.

Through the making of architectural projects, we investigate how people and buildings or open space relate to each other, how space is appropriated and local identities are formed, how this contributes to the built and social environment of urban life.

The intermediate scale, that is part of that mentioned scale gradient between the architectural intervention and the urbanistic plan, defines the main research and intervention domain. Within this approach, collective spaces that operate at this intermediate scale in architectural projects, are considered the protagonists of the architectural intervention. They are often characterized by an “between/among” space condition.

Collective spaces in architectural interventions

Collective spaces, and their understanding, have greatly changed due to environmental, economic and social developments in the daily reality. Not strictly public or private but both simultaneously, collective spaces have an interesting ambiguous public-ness, transcending property structure or programmatic requirements. They contain different levels of shared use that are defined by multiple physical, cultural or territorial boundaries and different models of accessibility and permeability. The master dissertation projects will embrace approaches that look for multiple levels of collectivity in urban architectural projects, moving beyond traditional public/private polarizations in the making of contemporary landscapes.

Instead of having a programmatic or formal approach, the research and design approaches focus rather on the spatial qualities or potentials of architecture in the urban landscape, taking into account the socio-cultural impact of an intervention. The level of programmatic specification will be questioned, going against the growing tendency to secure urban projects through programme, leaving no space for multiple interpretation.

Content: program and theme

Alvin Baltrop (1948 – February 1, 2004) was an American photographer whose work focused on the dilapidated Hudson River piers and LGBTQ+ communities during the 1970s and 1980s prior to the AIDS crisis. During decades, he documented the decay of the Hudson riverfront through photography series about the daily life in the streetscapes of this part of Manhattan. Through this photographic documentary, he did not only show the life of a poor and socially rejected community, he also proved how a fastly transforming metropolis needs certain urban areas as social buffer zones, to cherish small pockets of spatial ambiguity or un-definedness that allow struggling communities to claim a necessary presence and habitat within the city. These ambiguous spaces also embody multiplicity in use and users, which can be seen as a quintessential urban condition. In the 1970s and 1980s, the riverfront areas were not programmed for profit-driven development and were left out of functional zoning proposals, void of any architectural intervention, as at that moment the piers and the industrial maritime activity were in decay. Nevertheless, this void in programming allowed suppressed communities to unfold and leave their hiding places, and enabled them to fight to be recognised and play a part in contemporary society, a fight that unfortunately seems to become necessary once again...

During the last decades however, the whole Hudson riverfront area, especially in the lower part (from Greenwich Village to Chelsea), has been fully developed and transformed into a mainstream and high-end urban quarter. Star architects helped to contribute to exclusive

commercial and residential development, while focusing on leisure, sport and culture for the outdoor spaces. In this operation, most pier buildings were sacrificed or transformed for the same purpose. Nevertheless, some pier buildings still exist, unpretentiously configured within the Hudson riverfront park. Since the mentioned redevelopment of the riverfront, minority groups are no more present in the area, due to the high prices of the property and the overprogrammed-ness of the area: it is as if the whole area lost large part of its ambiguity and multiplicity within. There is uncertainty of how this area will further develop, especially in a post-covid19 era...

The master dissertation project within the Streetscape Territories framework will study the existing riverfront landscape and its full and constant transformation and use this to propose multiple architectural interventions on site. The master dissertation studio is divided in two semesters:

During the fall semester, which will happen in remote condition, we will study New York both as a real and as an imaginative construct and look at the city in a broader scope, through movies, documentaries, novels as to grasp its constant transformation that is the base of any intervention. The purpose of this initial conceptual research is to develop “multiple lenses” that lead to “multiple readings” of the city and of the Hudson River area. Developing his/her/their own “lenses and readings” of the area, each student will then build a personal and critical narrative to approach this site in constant transformation.

The visit to the site will happen in between the first and second semester, when the suggested “lenses and readings” will be tested and further developed.

During the spring semester, each individual student will propose and develop multiple architectural or landscape interventions that are the result of the proposed “lenses and readings. The project can have various formats (a series of buildings, of landscape interventions, a curated exhibition, etc)

Studio environment

The studio is part of the NYhub the Faculty of Architecture has set up in New York (see <https://arch.kuleuven.be/english/international/the-new-york-hub>) and will work with local or remote professionals and academics in New York to help develop the projects.

The studio is understood as a platform of discussion, experimentation, production and reflection, where the student itself defines the paradigm, unfolds the methods of research and design and employs coherent tools to achieve the goals. We do not understand the studio as a consult studio but as a working platform. The studio will be of a hybrid nature (partly in presence/ remote) and interactive in its unfolding. The students within this studio will actively engage with the NYhub.

Necessary materials

Good vibes, yearn to learn, work hard and enjoy it!

Timing

The studio requires students being able to travel individually to the site in at least one occasion during at least one week (preferably between the two semesters).

See ECTS and master dissertation guidelines

Procedure of evaluation

See ECTS and master dissertation guidelines

Evaluation criteria

See ECTS and master dissertation guidelines

Output, deadlines and formal criteria

See ECTS and master dissertation guidelines