



This is not a prison farm. Vacant farmland for the settlement of an imperfect community.

Carcerality and agriculture have held a strategic partnership in modern history, starting with processes of internal colonisation and land enclosures. In 19th century Flanders, ‘Colonies of Benevolence’ were established to subject the rural domain to the Dutch free-market economy, putting the marginalised and criminalised pauper class to work in the creation of arable lands from marshes and feudal commons. 21st century global food chains still depend on the exploitation of cheap labour and natural resources.

This studio will question what alternatives of care are possible to reduce the scope of carcerality in our society and what models of rural development can be pursued that do not depend on the exploitation of nature and human labour for capital growth. Using Flanders as our site of investigation and design, the studio will reconceptualise care as a practice of cohabitation capable of including conflict, and even uneasiness; and will reconceptualise farming as a practice of care capable of escaping its role in the support of constant economic growth.

Carcerality

Critics have called for the abolition of the prison and the penal system, redirecting funds towards other social uses and imagining not only alternative institutions but also practices of living together that operate outside carcerality – among these restorative justice. But carcerality is a dominant paradigm, in continuous search of larger spaces and more sophisticated protocols for the domestication, normalisation, and control of human beings through structures of immobility and dispossession. Students will critically investigate concepts of carcerality beyond the prison, considering larger systems of housing and agriculture.

Countryside and vacant farms in Flanders

We will look at the countryside not only as the marginal site where exploitation continues to occur in the shadow of the city, but as a realm where a moment of suspension is possible from practices that – like carcerality – have become so pervasive in modern societies. Rural regions of Flanders currently face several challenges as suburban sprawl, ecological deterioration, and food market logics threaten agricultural productivity and ecology. Students will investigate these regions and engage with local and governmental agencies in charge of the Flemish countryside.

Project

Declining commercial farms that would otherwise be subject to suburban development or decay will be considered as sites for experimental collective settlements: not utopias, but imperfect communities where conflicts occur, capable of generating new conditions of conviviality that also include the exceptional and out-of-the-norm ‘categories’ of society. Students will design a residential farm that, by adapting abandoned farmhouses and farmland in Flanders, will accommodate farmers and suburbanites as well as the ‘otherwise criminalised’ – individuals that are usually marginalised for not fitting into our ‘normal’ canon. We will consider how alternatives to the prison system, urban landscape modification, and food production might coexist, in an architectural proposal that will theoretically address and develop new understandings of concepts such as carcerality and nature.

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Bios

Sabrina Puddu is an architect and researcher, and currently a post-doc Marie Curie Research Fellow at KULeuven. She received a PhD from the University of Cagliari and an MA in Housing and Urbanism from the Architectural Association, and she has been Visiting Scholar at GSAPP, Columbia University. Her research focuses on the role of major public institutions across the divide of the contemporary urban and rural conditions, with her more recent studies being on prisons and agrarian penal colonies. She has thought design and history and theory at several institutions (Royal College of Arts, the Architectural Association School of Architecture, Central Saint Martins, Leeds Beckett University, University of Cagliari). Sabrina has co-authored two books and publishes regularly on architectural magazines and journals, and has worked as correspondent for the architectural magazine Domus.

Jesse Honsa is an architect and PhD researcher at KU Leuven. He has a global outlook, having practiced with OOZE Architects in Rotterdam, DB Mimarlik in Istanbul, Rutz Architekten and AGPS architecture in Zürich, and Aardvarchitecture in New York City. He holds degrees from The Berlage at TU Delft and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in the United States. With a strong background in large-scale housing, his interests lie in the economic, political and cultural forces that form the built environment. His PhD project entitled *Economies of Scale: Housing Crises and the Architecture of Large-Scale Responses* is supervised by Martino Tattara and considers how the scale of organisations and projects can influence the living unit while addressing housing crises.

Illustration: Lithograph of the Colony of Benevolence in Wortel, L. Gorby, 1904. Credits: Erfgoedcel Noorderkempen (Historical Association Noorderkempen)