

Course Syllabus

1. Course Proposition

As the deforestation of the Amazon poses a huge threat to our global environmental balance, indigenous populations have been able to sustain environmental preservation more efficiently than in other parts of the world. In Brazil, it is estimated that deforestation in indigenous areas is eleven times smaller than in other non-indigenous lands, while in the world, indigenous land and communities are responsible for absorbing 37 billion tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. It is clear that the environmental resilience of natural areas is tightly linked to indigenous cultural resilience and practices.

This class will look into how the traditional indigenous practices could inform the urbanization occurring in the Amazon and explore the idea of a “hybrid urbanization” that is structured on alternative solutions arising from the encounter of two imaginaries – that of our modern world and that of the indigenous knowledge. It will be based on theoretical discussion and research through lectures and readings, but also through the exploration of design propositions at different scales, as we try to sketch architectural and urban design alternatives for a *third landscape*. We will use the territory of Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira, a city of 26.000 people in the middle of the Amazon forest and in the Indigenous Territory of the same name, as our laboratory.

2. Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira site

Located at the frontier of Colombia and Venezuela, Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira is one of the largest Brazilian districts, with 109.000 km², almost the area of New York State. Ninety percent of its population is auto-declared indigenous and most of the district is protected by federal law as indigenous territory, in the most well preserved area of the Amazon Forest in Brazil. There are twenty three indigenous ethnicities spread out throughout the basin in a constellation of more than 400 villages and settlements, forming a millenary web interconnected by cultural and economic relationships.

Siting in the middle of this pristine forest, connected to the rest of the country only by air or water, is the city of Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira, an urban area with almost 30 thousand people and all the common characteristics of a poor small Brazilian town. Despite its lush natural context and its rich cultural history, Sao Gabriel follows the western pattern of “civilization”, presenting all of the structural problems seen across the developing world, from lack of sewage and housing to socio-economic divide. As a reflection of the areas long colonization history, with direct attacks to indigenous

cultural identity and inappropriate public policies, Sao Gabriel has acquired gruesome titles, like the Brazilian municipality with the higher juvenile suicide rate in the country.

The juxtaposition of these contrasting realities offer fertile ground for new design and explorations on reimagining the area's development into the future, as we deal with well-known urban maladies through the perspective of an altogether different civilization and imaginary. Based on a different set of premises, indigenous practices can offer a different perspective on how we manage our territories and cities, liberating us from values that appear to be "set in stone", so that we can search to improve urban life and architecture solutions in natural territories in creative and imaginative ways. Some of these premises are:

1. Long term perspective;
2. Close interdependency (material and symbolic) between natural and human;
3. Horizontal and localized political organization;
4. Tight community functioning;
5. Fluid relationships with natural and material assets, with little or no accumulation;
6. Fluid relationships with the territory and its possession ("property rights");
7. Tight relationship (material and symbolic) to water (rivers).

3. Background

In 1970, Henri Lefebvre poses the idea that the "total urbanization of society" is an inevitable process, which will demand new interpretive and perceptual approaches. Indeed, not even fifty years later, more than half of the world population is already living in urban centers. But we need to look beyond cities to understand urbanization's real impact as a global phenomenon: the concept of "extensive urbanization" points to the effects of globalization well beyond urban centers, as it acknowledges its power to restructure areas that are not connected to our idea of urban, altering space, time and societal articulations in affected areas, as it shakes up assumed binary categories such as rural x urban and country x city.

One example is the Amazon region, which has been systematically integrated into the process of urban growth with pressing global demand for its natural resources, in a logic of production and consumption that disregards the health of these resources, as it creates cycles of social and environmental impoverishment. In the last four years, deforestation, due to farming, exploitation of natural resources, always followed and supported by fast urbanization has been kept at an average of 5.000 km² a year and environmental consequences have had global impact. As the largest river basin in the world, with almost a fifth of its available potable water, and 7 million km² in area, the

Amazon forest influences rain patterns in South and Central America and is responsible for absorbing a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide.

On the other hand, while dominant political structures favor short term (and usually private) gains, important preservation movements concerned with the fast degradation of soil and natural riches now see their predicaments spread beyond specialty circles, in a wave of cultural conscience that slowly contaminates the predominant logic. The revival of biological agriculture and the rise of a new farmers' generation that is questioning large-scale chemical food production, as it questions the industrial production system as a whole, has pushed agroforestation and permaculture in Brazil, while academic discussion and society's interest turn to examples of traditional communities' lifestyles to question our own. With social media and ease of communication, we testimony the importance of these communities in protecting our ecosystems, as big-business tries to commodify natural goods we have always taken for granted.

One social group which is amplifying its voice in Brazil is the Indigenous population. Inhabitants of the land for at least six thousand years, they had a central role in the development of South America's biodiversity and landscapes and today hold roughly 15% of the country's land through the demarcation of Indigenous Territories, most of them in important natural environments. In maintaining their traditional ways of life, with strong interdependency with nature, these communities have been able to sustain environmental preservation more efficiently than in other parts. In Brazil, it is estimated that deforestation in indigenous areas is eleven times smaller than in other non-indigenous lands, while in the world, indigenous land and communities are responsible for absorbing 37 billion tons of carbon dioxide.

With this background as starting point, this seminar seeks to discuss how Indigenous practices could inform our own practices of spatial production. In trying to understand how they could influence the construction of new forms of "urbanization", this seminar aims to sketch the backbone for a *third landscape*, where alternative spatial solutions arise from a reflection of our own urban paradigms, specially in those territories where urban and non-urban meet face to face. It will be based on two parallel methods: the discussion of five inquiry points (below), through the discussion of assigned readings and lectures, and the analyses of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, an indigenous territory in Brazil, located at the Black River Basin, in the Northwestern portion of the Amazon forest.

4. Methodology

Lectures and readings will be structured around five topics (below) and students will be assigned a reading for every class. Some videos (documentaries and interviews), will also be part of the seminar. Information about the analyzed territories will come from student's research, as well as from field data collected by the professor.

1. Our Social Imaginary - the Modern Myth and its deconstruction;
2. Extensive Urbanization;
3. Bound to the Land – the Indigenous Imaginary and Resilience;
4. The Indigenous Landscape – Spatial and architectural practices then and today;
5. Ideas for a Third Landscape.

In parallel, students will be divided in groups and asked to analyze the city of Sao Gabriel as a border territory and present their (re)interpretation through the use of 2D and 3D graphics and/or video for a specific area of the city, either in the urban or the architectural scale. Both analysis and interpretative data will then be uploaded into an interactive class map in Google.

Students will be asked to research this territory taking into account not only traditional urban concerns such as density, land parceling, uses, zoning, circulation, production and trade of goods, but also the questioning of their appropriateness and need, as we try to sketch the backbone for a third landscape, where alternative social and spatial solutions arise, as well as a new language for interpretation.

5. Evaluation and Grading:

Will be based on class participation and required readings (40%) + final design assignment (60%).

6. Lectures:

Week 01 – Introduction to content and seminar structure

* Group formation + research and map overview

Week 02 – Where did it start? Construction of our modern imaginary.

(Basic bibliography: Charles Taylor, Benedict Anderson, C. Castoriadis)

*Required Reading/Visuals: Dietzsch, A . A Visit to the Guarani in Sao Paulo + “Economics of Happiness” (movie)

* Suggested Reading: Astor, Maggie and Kingsley, Patrick (NYTimes) + . Taylor, Charles . Modern Social Imaginaries, Chapter 04)

**** Case Studies “Before my Nation”. Student Presentation**

Week 03 – Where is it going? Extensive Urbanization Criticism

+ the Amazon

(Basic bibliography: David Harvey, Georg Simmel, Henry Lefebvre, Roberto Monte-Mor, Eduardo Brondizio, Eduardo Neves)

* Required Reading: Margit, A. pages 05 to 31

* Suggested Reading: Simmel, George . The Metropolis and Mental Life + Monte Mor . “What is Urban Now” + David Harvey and Richard Sennet in Transformations City

**** Research map: layout and distribution**

Week 04 – The perspective of Traditional Communities: intro to the Amerindian presence in Brazil and Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira Territory

(Basic bibliography: Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, Maria Regina Almeida, FOIRN, ISA)

* Required Reading/Visuals: Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo . “Preface: To Become Indian” + ISA, Less Prejudice More Indigenous (video) + Eakin, Marshal . Becoming Brazilian: The making of national identity (audio)

* Suggested Reading: Carneiro da Cunha, M . “Culture” and Culture

**** Analysis/Project Crit**

Week 05 – Open Research Map: Preliminary group presentation

* Overview + discussion on collected material

Week 06 – Where is it going? Proactive criticism and experiences

(Basic bibliography and data from: Agenda Gotsch, Savory Institute, Todd Ecological Design, Martha Hodgkins, Terreform)

* Required Reading: Hodgkins, M . Letters to a Young Farmer (pages 67-71 and 142-153) + Velasquez-Manoff, Moises . “Can Dirt Save the Earth?” (NYTimes)

* Suggested Reading: O’Shaughnessy, Martin . “Thinking about the Common with Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval”

**** Case Studies “Common Experiences”. Student Presentation**

Week 07 – The perspective of Traditional Communities: what does anthropology tells us?

(Basic Bibliography: Levi Strauss, Pierre Clasters, Bruce Mau and Kopenawa, Viveiros de Castro)

* Required Reading: Levi Strauss, Claude. Myth and Meaning (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2) + Clasters, Pierre . Society Against the State (Chapter 1)

* Suggested Reading/Visuals: . Viveiros de Castro . Who is Afriad of the Ontological Wolf? (video)

**** Project Crit**

Week 08 – The perspective of Traditional Communities: Indigenous settlements, houses and villages

(Basic bibliography: Michael Hackenberger, Eduardo Neves, Sylvia Novaes, Roberto Monte-Mor)

* Required Reading: Heckenberger, Michael . “Amazonia 1492: Pristine Forest or Cultural Parkland?”

* Suggested Reading/Visuals: . Goes Neves, E . A Amazonia de 14 mil anos atras (TED video)

**** Project Crit**

Week 09 – Spring Break: no class

Week 10 – Group presentation: Analysis and Conceptual proposition

* Overview + discussion on collected material + project propositions

Week 11 – The perspective of Traditional Communities: Indigenous architecture and modern interpretations

(Basic bibliography: José Afonso Botocarrero, Severiano Porto, Johan Van Lengen)

* Required Reading/Visuals: Oliveira, Almir . Maloca (video)

**** Project Crit**

Week 12 – Group presentation: Project Development

* Overview + discussion on project propositions

Week 13 – Final Group presentations

(Please click on the "Files" button for the complete syllabus)**

[1] Lefebvre, H. *The Urban Revolution*

[2] Monte-Mor, R. *Extended Urbanizations in Brazilian Amazonia*

[3] AcheiUSA . 10/10/16

[4] World Resources Institute

[5] Exame Magazine (<https://exame.abril.com.br/mundo/terras-indigenas-protegem-floresta-e-clima-aponta-estudo/>)