COLUMBIA GSAPP Advanced Architecture Studio

SPACES THAT LEARN: FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT

Giancarlo Mazzanti
Carlos Medellín
TA: Andrea Chiney

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This studio will be taught by Giancarlo Mazzanti (El Equipo Mazzanti) and Carlos Medellín (horizontal) on Mondays and Thursdays, and will include fieldworks in Queens, and a hand by hand transdisciplinary work with an artist, a social scientist and a video producer. Our local partner will be the Queens Museum, through their New New Yorkers Program.

ARCHITECTURE, IN OUR VIEW, IS ACTION

1. ABOUT THE STUDIO

SPACES THAT LEARN

This is an advanced architecture studio that seeks to identify existing synergies and complementary methodological approaches between art, architecture, design and social sciences as communication entities, that can be applied transversally into problem solving scenarios.

Through an interactive exchange between the students and a specific community, this class aims to provide methodological tools to be applied to the design process. The studio will use Queens, NY as a case study to explore how spaces can be designed through the understanding of its users. Therefor challenging the idea of architecture as object transforming into subject.

We will explore research methodologies including: ethnographic techniques, asset based- methodology and design thinking applied in participatory games/toys, in addition to cognitive mapping and knowledge exchange strategies. These will allow us to gain different forms of understanding and identifying social practices that inform place-making processes on site (Jackson Heights, Corona and Flushing, Queens). And will enable a ludic and diverse engagement with the new proposed architecture and urban interventions.

El Equipo Mazzanti: Milano Triennale - 2016

1.1 KEY CONCEPTS

EDUCATION – LEARNING – DIVERSITY – INTERSECTIONALITY – INEQUALITY
COMMUNICATION PROCESSES – TRANSLATION – DIALOGUE – PLAY
HETEROTOPIAS – INFORMAL LEARNING PROCESSES – PARTICIPATION
ARTIFACTS – POROSITY – CO-CREATION – SPACES THAT LEARN
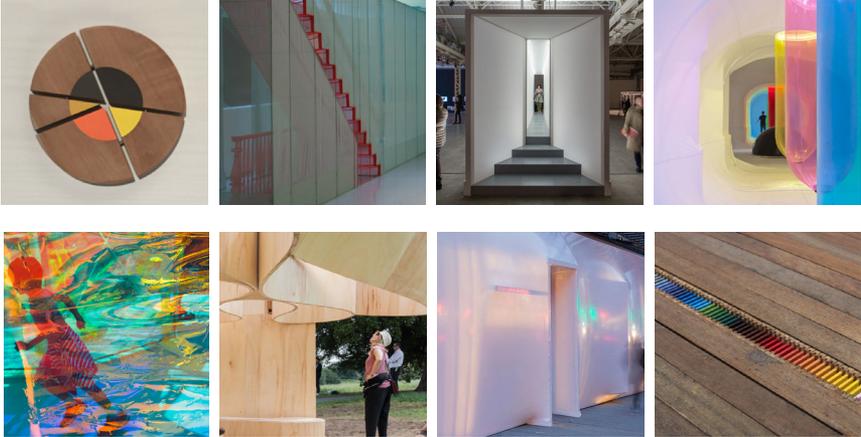
2. VISION

Learning
ˈləːnɪŋ/
noun
1. The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught.

Space
speɪs/
noun
2. The dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move.

We can easily recognize the way in which architecture modifies and shapes behaviors; therefore opening spaces for actions and foster interactions. It seems obvious as well, how architecture can control and operate as an instrument of power. In other words, we have become aware that to build is to govern, that is to say, to organize, direct and control.

A paradigmatic example is the Panopticon, a space for control. As a penitentiary typology that allows for a 360-degree field of vision, it allows the guard to see the entirety of the inmate population. The Panopticon aims for a psychological effect: to feel that you are being watched day and night. This can be translated into the idea of a society that in its totality, through its institutions, observes and controls its members. Is it surprising, as already Foucault pointed out, that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks and hospitals.1 Architecture has become more and
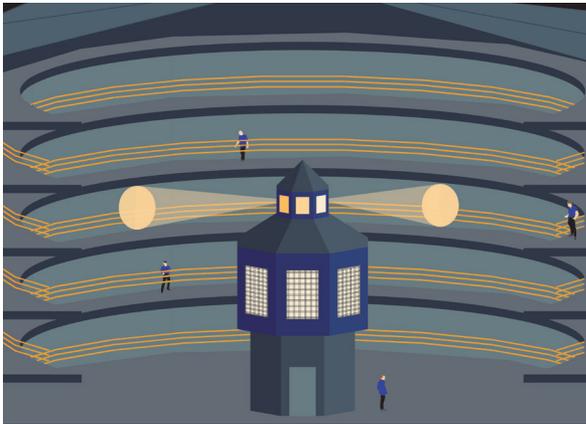
Panopticon illustration: Sebastián Rivera

From this perspective, architecture can be thought of as the design of spaces that "teach" us something, i.e: behaviors, actions, interactions, feelings, sensations. It is as simple as saying that built spaces affect humans and the way in which they relate to each other and their environment. But what does it mean, then, to talk about spaces that learn? It means, first of all, to change the epistemological perspective of the architectural analysis, that is to say, to rethink the relationship between the architect and/or the user, inhabitant or visitor –the subject– and the built space –the object–.

The epistemological shift we propose is that of observing the learning process of architecture and to show this process' emancipatory nature. It is precisely through this analysis that we can understand how architecture can open up possibilities of emancipation in repressive or inequal contexts, or scenarios where under-represented groups and minorities can find a safe space. In other words, how the other, in an individualistic society, can find a place to affirm themselves within a society where space has been built in many cases precisely to exclude them.
Then again, perhaps to talk about spaces that learn can mean to talk about the moment when architecture loses its sheer character of object and becomes a "subject".

3. QUEENS, THE CONTEXT:

PROCESS OF LEARNING TO LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY

Queens is one of the most diverse communities in the world. There are more than one hundred and fifty different languages spoken in the borough, which makes it one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse counties in New York. Queens used to be an undeveloped and rural area organized by Dutch and English settlers in 1635, constantly redefining it's borders and the towns that made part of its territory, until it was officially established as a borough in 1898. Transportation between Queens and Manhattan, usually by ferry or bridges in Brooklyn, changed in 1909 when the Queensboro bridge was finished, it wasn't until 1915 that most of the borough became connected to the New York City Subway system. Additionally, the creation of two airports in 1939 and 1948 made it the center of the NYC gateway and attracted migrants from other communities. Because of these infrastructural changes the population of Queens grew rapidly in the following years.
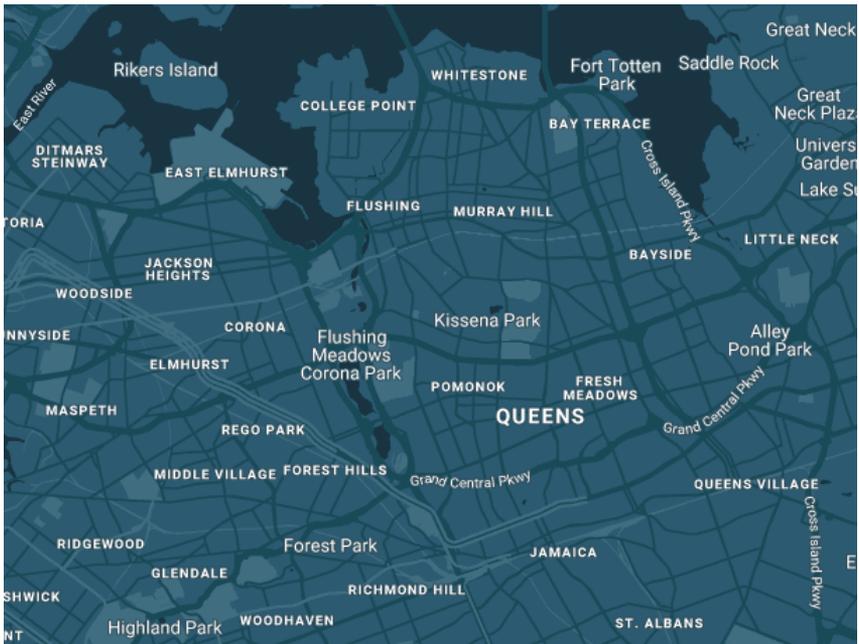
Queens. Snazzy Maps.

Jackson Heights. 2015. Jay Santiago.

One of the most defining events in the reconfiguration of Queens as an immigrant community was the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, which changed the immigration policies that gave preference o certain nationalities while restricting others. The hange of immigration law resulted in massive demographic changes that increased the number of the migrant Hispanic and Asian population. Nowadays, Queen's spatial configuration has been deeply influenced by all of the migrant flows and dynamics inside the borough, the organization of communities with different backgrounds, inside the same territory, has led to a great diversity not only of ethnicity but of gender, religion and culture, that has been consolidated through community based organizations, educational initiatives and art spaces.

Although it is the largest borough of New York and the second most populated, we will focus on the area of three specific neighborhoods: Jackson Heights, Corona and Elmhurst. This area will work as a living laboratory for ideas, that intend to highlight the community's ability to learn through culture and art. Inside these neighborhoods we will address public space as a space for encounter, conversation and collective creation, where the artifacts created for the study and observation of the community will become intertwined with the everyday interactions that these spaces already promote. For this case we have selected two public plazas, the Diversity Plaza in Jackson Heights and the Corona Plaza in Corona. These plazas have both been intervened by the local government and community to adapt to the cultural diversity found in the neighborhood.

The Diversity Plaza is considered by many as one of the most important centers for encounter in Jackson Heights; Since it has been a place for community gathering since 2011, the site's importance predates the renovation and construction of the formal plaza, done by the NYC department of transportation.[1] On the other hand, Corona Plaza has been part of a large project of transformation, programming and re-design, working with actors such as the Queens Museum that promote activities that aim to engage the different immigrant communities through an act of co-creation of public space.[2]

These plazas are a clear example of public space that has been appropriated by its users and adapted to their needs and desires as a community.

Initiatives like the Queens Museum New New Yorkers program[3] that offers free multilingual classes to adult immigrants emphasize on subjects like painting, photography, performance and crafts, as activities that change perceptions and interactions, using personal creative expression as an outlet for identity construction.

Diversity Plaza Groundbreaking Ceremony. 2017. New York City DOT.

[1] Mayor de Blasio Announces Start of Diversity Plaza Construction in Jackson Heights. (2018). Retrieved from https://www1.nyc.gov/officeof-the-mayor/news/508-17/mayorde-blasio-start-diversity-plazaconstruction-jackson-heights#/0
[2] Queens Museum. (2018). Retrieved from http://queensmuseum.org/2016/01/15288
[3] Queens Museum. (2018). Retrieved from http://queensmuseum.org/2016/01/15288

4. THE PROJECT

ARCHITECTURE AS A LEARNING PROCESS RATHER THAN A RESULT

Communication systems are processes that structure the relations between people and the environment. They become key elements as we absorb culture, costumes and behavior, as part of formal and informal processes of learning and crating identity. They rule the way in which we understand each other and define the way we relate to spaces we inhabit.

There are different types of systems of communication, the most used by society are: verbal, non-verbal and visual communication.

We consider architecture as a process of translation, creating a space that learns and changes from its users interactions, means a space that is transformed through dialog. Communication between people, objects and space.

The aim of the project will be to understand how it is possible to create architectures that are defined by experiences, life stories, wishes, values, beliefs and perspectives of the different actors involved in a context. The main task will be to think about spaces that can learn from those communities or individuals that inhabits them.

The project will be divided into three parts, each part will work as an act of translation between different dialogs, media, materials, and disciplines. Thus, the final part will result in an architecture through process, by intersecting different lenses and systems of communication learned from its possible users.

4.1 FIRST EXERCISE

FROM ¨OTHER¨ SPACES

¨MICHEL FOUCAULT INTRODUCED THE TERM 'HETEROTOPIA' IN A LECTURE FOR ARCHITECTS IN 1967. POINTING TO VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND PLACES THAT INTERRUPT THE APPARENT CONTINUITY AND NORMALITY OF ORDINARY EVERYDAY SPACE. BECAUSE THEY INJECT ALTERITY INTO THE SAMENESS. THE COMMONPLACE. THE TOPICALITY OF EVERYDAY SOCIETY. FOUCAULT CALLED THESE PLACES 'HETERO-TOPIAS' – LITERALLY 'OTHER PLACES'.¨ [4]

[4] Foucault, M. (1984). Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias. Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité.

This first exercise wants to find spaces (buildings) or times (moments) in which normality is suspended in order to give a place to 'the rest'.

By using architecture as the main source of analysis, the students must find successful meeting places in the city, may they be real or imagined or hidden behind common sites. The idea is to understand how the sacred, the taboo, the eccentric, the abnormal, the monstrous, the secret, the extraordinary, the grandiose, the genius, the irrational, the transgressive, the frivolous or simply the aimless, can somehow have a place within the city.

The analysis will have as an outcome, design tools, that will foster the development of the second exercise.

Other Spaces. Chad F.
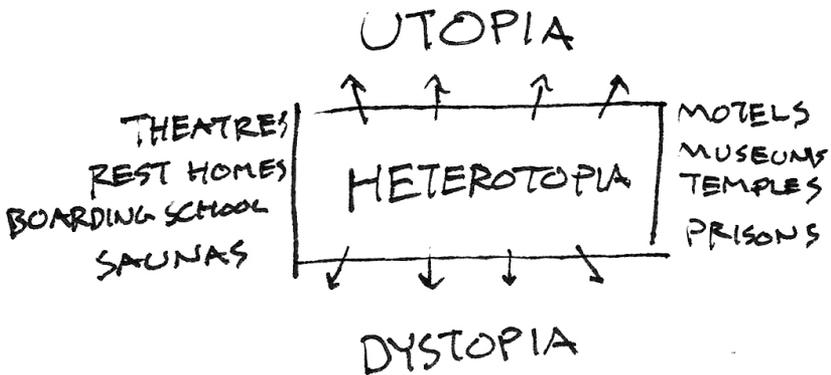
4.2 SECOND EXERCISE

A TOY FOR "THE OTHER"

"THE SPIRIT OF PLAYFUL COMPETITION IS, AS A SOCIAL IMPULSE, OLDER THAN CULTURE ITSELF AND PERVADES ALL LIFE LIKE A VERITABLE FERMENT. RITUAL GREW UP IN SACRED PLAY; POETRY WAS BORN IN PLAY AND NOURISHED ON PLAY; MUSIC AND DANCING WERE PURE PLAY....WE HAVE TO CONCLUDE, THEREFORE, THAT CIVILIZATION IS, IN ITS EARLIEST PHASES, PLAYED. IT DOES NOT COME FROM PLAY...IT ARISES IN AND AS PLAY, AND NEVER LEAVES IT."[5]

[5] Huizinga, J. (2016). Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture. Angelico Press..

Aware of the cultural differences that exist in the context, "playing" can become a common language to build abnormal moments of interaction, that can take citizens to intimate environments to foster more genuine and critical dialogues.

Students will design toys/games to facilitate interaction with people from diverse immigrant communities, and to promote the collection of experiences, life stories, wishes, values, beliefs and perspectives. The objective is for the students to learn from "the other", as they would be researching different comprehensions, meanings and limits within six common topics that affect everyday life as a way of learning how to live in the New York City:

- **HOW DO WE CELEBRATE?**
- **HOW DO WE GROW?**
- **HOW DO WE LOVE?**
- **HOW DO WE SOLVE CONFLICTS?**
- **HOW DO WE MOBILIZE?**
- **HOW DO WE PRODUCE?**

*THIS IS A SHARING EXPERIENCE, THE TOY/GAME IS AN EXCUSE TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, SO IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT BOTH STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES WILL WIN.

1. PEDRO REYES: Collective Hat

2. NICOLÁS PARIS
Herramientas para diálogos erráticos
o asociaciones por simpatía

3. YONA FRIEDMAN: Le Musée du Quotidien

4. EL EQUIPO MAZZANTI: We play, they play. Exhibition
Pompidou, Paris.

5. SOL ARAMENDI: Migrant Camera.

4.3 THIRD EXERCISE

INTERSECTIONAL DEVICES FOR COMMUNICATION

"INTERSECTIONALITY IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE INTERCONNECTED NATURE OF SOCIAL CATEGO-RIZATIONS SUCH AS CLASS, RACE, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AGE, DISABILITY AND GENDER, AS THEY APPLY TO A GIVEN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP, REGARDED AS CREATING OVERLAPPING AND INTERDEPENDENT SYSTEMS OF DISCRIMINATION OR DISADVANTAGE" [6]

[6] Intersectionality. (2018). In The Oxford English dictionary (3d edition). Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/intersectionality

Even though there are common points within communities, each individual's identity consists of multiple intersecting factors, and in fact, some prefer to use the plural word "identities", emphasizing that identity is fluid and changes throughout one's life.

From this point of view, and aware that difference and diversity are a multilayered catalyst, the idea of this third exercise is to explore the topics funded with the toy, by proposing devices able to foster dialog in an intersectional way.

By using the New New Yorkers program from the Queens Museum as a starting point, the students will propose communication tools and exercises that will work as opportunities to build, together with the citizens, narratives about the singularities within the different issues and limits that Queens and its inhabitants face.

This devices aim to build an understanding of common points within communities and individuals, inside the different range of comprehensions about specific situations that one can have.
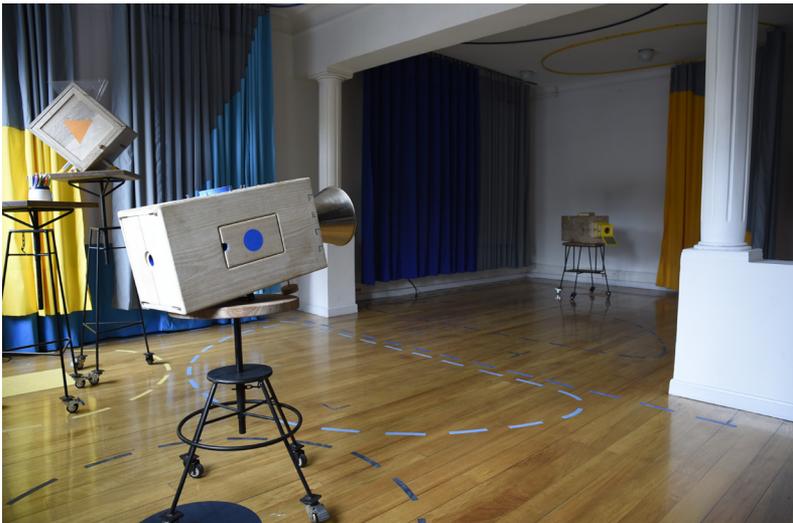
"Restorative Justice communication devices" by horizontal + Nicolás París.

THE DEVICE MUST BE BASED ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF THREE SYSTEMS OF COMMUNICATION:

1. VERBAL:

Verbal communication is when information is shared by using speech.

Language learning
Discourses
Singing

2. NON-VERBAL:

Non-verbal communication consists in the use of body language or the changes in tone of voice.

Dance
Crafts
Performance

3. VISUAL:

Visual communication is when symbols and signs are used, such as writing or the use of images.

Video
Writing
Signage

... AND SUPPORT ONE OF THIS ESTABLISHED CLASSES:

Painting, book making, crafts, photography, video editing, performance, graphic design, web design, computer literacy, arts literacy or english for speakers of other languages.
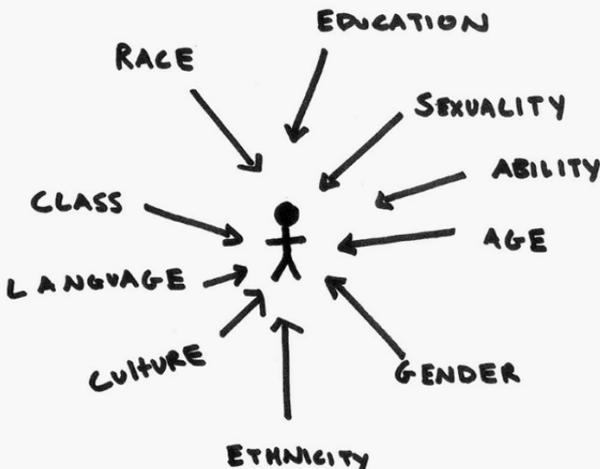
Intersectionality. Taken from https://iwda.org.au/what-does-intersectional-feminism-actually-mean/

*THE IDEA IS THAT THE DEVICE CAN BE DESIGNED TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE FINDINGS OF THE SECOND EXERCISES AND POSSIBLE DIALOGS WITH THE TEA-CHERS OF THE DIFFERENT PROGRAMS.

SOME EXAMPLES:

1. HALPRIN WORKSHOPS:
Driftwood Village Community

2. MARINA ABRAMOVIC:
The artist is present
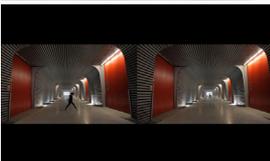
3. LUIS URCULO: AIC video

4.4 FOURTH EXERCISE

ARCHITECTURE THAT LEARNS FROM THE LIMITS

The exercise proposes to design architectures that should work as a tool for mediation, by bringing together the possibility of constructing an intermediate and intermediating space. In such space, limits should be broken, and citizens should have a place to negotiate their ways to behave, without losing their fundamental identity values.

The material and conceptual framework will be to think of buildings able to engender a double condition: (i) a new space that is constructed by visions in conflict; and (ii) that is simultaneously a "hollow" in a solid physical condition. These conditions will allow the construction of interactions, interchanges, and encounters between different points of view and antagonistic standpoints.

A way of understanding a limit breaking design is a "porous space". This kind of architecture is always in conflict and conciliation, it is a point of encounter and contradiction, that is ambiguous by definition and simultaneous in its use. The multiplicity of encounters based on porosity, allows us to integrate, into the infrastructure, new actions, attitudes and performances.

"Cubetas prototipo Barrancabermeja". El Equipo Mazzanti.

"Parque educativo de Marinilla" El Equipo Mazzanti + Horizontal + Nicolás París.

Rather than designing "buildings" we want to produce growing and changing "artifacts", according to particular or temporal circumstances. The space itself must be a strategy that admits changes, accidents and interchangeability, thought more as a method than as a permanent shape. The project should become a strategy to create dynamic spaces that will learn how to react to people's behaviors.

Additionally, students will create an audio-visual to document their projects, and to be able to show spaces in alternative ways, that goes beyond architecture practice, and that can find ways to speak to any public. Using video as a common language that affects space as well; the decisions made when composing an image act as the lines that trace an imaginary space.

This final task aims to expand the understanding of architecture, by moving away from just looking at it from its function or aesthetics, as an object, and pushing the boundaries to explore it as a pedagogical process, that focuses open opportunities for new ways to relate, new forms of use and new types of space.

Four exercises:

1.
from "other"
spaces

2.
a toy for "the other"

3.
intersectional devises
for communication

4.
architecture that learns ...

The project: concept | **data collection and analysis** | **schematic design and program** | **project** | **detailed project and video**

lottery day
sept 5th

toy fair
to be defined

mid term review
oct 26th

3/4 review
to be defined

final review
dic 13th
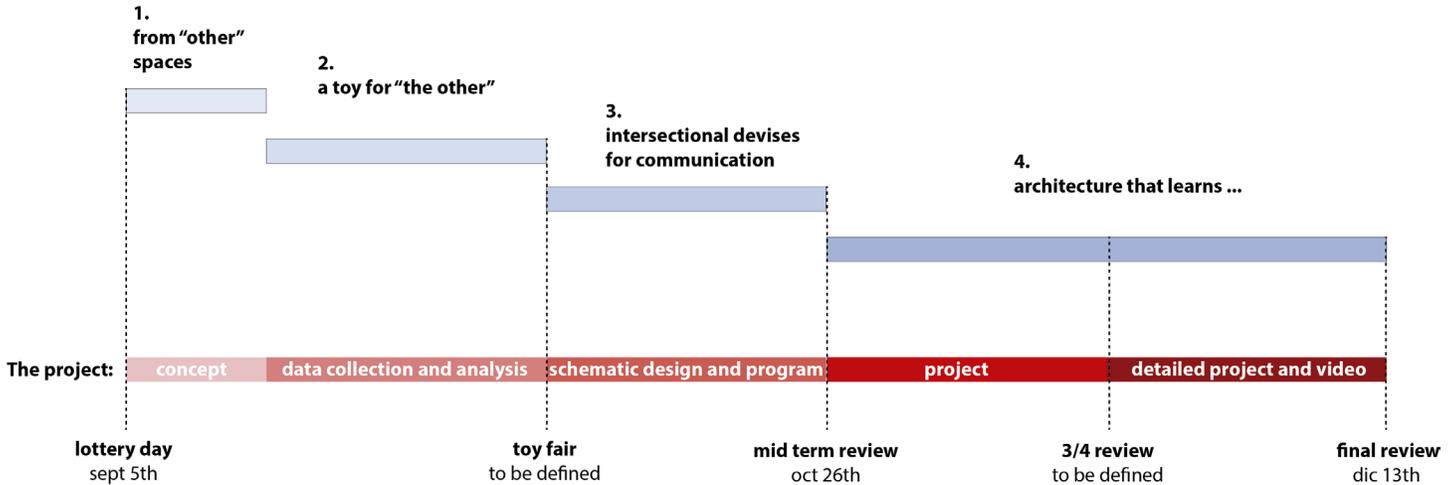
Spaces that learn will have two parallel processes.

(i) The project and **(ii) four exercises.**
The studio will produce deliverables with specific objectives, which will guide de architecture design process step by step

COLUMBIA
GSAPP