The Lung of Phnom Penh - Maya Laitinen
What is Inter 3?

“A scientist may deplore the notion that there is any link between science and fantasy, but fantasy always comes first. It is the creature of imagination, and without imagination, there would be no science. Every intention is the result of fantasy.”

--- Things That Never Were, Robert Ingpen and Michael Page

Inter 3 is an Intermediate Unit at the Architectural Association run by Nannette Jackowski and Ricardo de Ostos since 2007. We are a unit strongly based on design, we like drawing, making and visualising speculation. We utilise architectural experimentation, literary poetic and interactive technologies to reconfigure infrastructures as social experiences.

Student’s projects from Inter 3 have been widely exhibited across Europe and the world. In 2011 Inter 3 student Basmah Kaki was awarded the RIBA BRONZE MEDAL for the best Part 01 project worldwide.

Students work individually but we enjoy a healthy group dynamic and a friendly environment for creativity and rigour to emerge naturally.
“Existence is random. Has no pattern save what we imagine after staring at it for too long. No meaning save what we choose to impose. This rudderless world is not shaped by vague metaphysical forces. It is not God who kills the children. Not fate that butchers them or destiny that feeds them to the dogs. It’s us. Only us. Streets stank of fire. The void breathed hard on my heart, turning its illusions to ice, shattering them. Was reborn then, free to scrawl own design on this morally blank world.”

--- Watchmen, Alan Moore

(Environmental) complexity and (social) participation are Inter 3’s main research concerns when exploring infrastructures and social conditions. Technological pre/post digital possibilities are growing rapidly, getting ever more complex and multiplying our ways to interact with each other and with the urban and natural surroundings exponentially. However our understanding of the environment around us does not match the same speed. While we seem to long for organic food, recycle our waste, despise blood diamonds, buy fair-trade coffee, tweet our hearts online, upload our intimacy on corporate I-Clouds and strive for ‘different interactions and experiences’ we, 21st century global citizen, can hardly grasp the environments we create, alter and re-shape simply by being. In this scenario technological action and social reaction are not that straight forward and transparent, they are ambiguous at best.

This techno-social charade is a contemporary condition. While individuals might ignore or do not suspect the complexity and implications of piling up landfills on the outskirts of their towns, growing e-waste landscapes in distant worlds, exhausted abandoned mines, underground sweat factories, non-recyclable nuclear sites, ... How does the public participate? Beyond the basic concept of the social and the public, that is ‘giving shelter’, architecture can and should also speculate about possibilities of how spaces and cities will adapt to the techno-social condition. Tales of wondrous unnatural opportunities, unexpected man-machine symbiosis, prototyped visions and cautionary stories about unforeseen catastrophic scenarios Inter 3 will explore many ways to create architectural spaces and enrich ambiguous situations.
Strange Land Mirage

“Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.”

--- Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

From the far corners of the earth to the undisputed urban miasma of today’s metropolis, the value of land goes beyond metric figures, dimensions and price; it is the blood meridian of mankind. Whole societies have built their traditions, symbols, identities and myths upon the expansion of blazing desert landscapes, soaked lush forest valleys or convoluted rusted cities, and this is where Inter 3 begins: promised land, cursed land, wonderland and no man’s land – all these territories will form our horizon as we gaze into the future of our own planetary condition.

Stories, myths and folklore have been used for centuries to communicate knowledge about the environment we inhabit. Living predominantly in a digital and science based world we tend to believe in technology rather than myths but instead to choose one or the other we will investigate how both can be used in order to discuss how we, as architects, can perceive, share and evolve an understanding of land. But what is land? We will first look at the immediate physical space we occupy, the topographical and geological crust, but that shall not be the limit. Our search for a new definition of land will also consider psychological and affective characteristics, how people relate to their habitat. Very few people would die for their country nowadays, however many would still fight to defend their land. In this sense land also implies defence of livelihoods, relationships, memories (past and future) and the question of ownership. The future of land is intrinsically connected to how else we may understand it, not only as a monetary commodity to build buildings. We will see the future of land as a new horizon of possibilities where its value is also associated with a complex ecology of land conditions, myths and adventurous urban scenarios.
Inter 3 is open to individual talents/skills and multiple forms of design/presentation methods, however, three aspects shall unify the rather diverse research and output:

1- The production of an interdisciplinary interactive architecture being able to transit between effective and poetic modes (documented through process and identified in the final product), architectural spaces and infrastructural fields;

2- A personal and inquisitive view of architecture, engaged with broader societal issues;

3- Fictional and literary inspirations informing process and/or programme (including video games, graphic novels, sci-fi films and classic fiction).

Most importantly, we are a design unit. If design was a language how would you express yourselves? The unit will continue having a strong focus on atmospheric expressive drawings and series of working prototypes. How can drawings ‘talk’ and express passion, disagreement, tolerance, refusal and criticism? Ambient drawing involves material choices, light conditions, space qualities and human emotions, sensual experiences. We highly encourage students to develop a very personal working method, design obsession and virtuosity.

A series of workshops, talks and individual tutorials will clarify how digital drawings and physical models can define a project’s ambience and ambition. We will empower students with a carefully selected toolkit in order to assist you with the right skills for the right task at the right time.

Students are encouraged to research precedents not only in architecture but also in art, science, games and literature. Bearing in mind the intense research led attitude of Inter 3, students will be asked to constantly challenge the role of research and references within their portfolio (enough of Google pictures!).
**01: Genesis/ Destruction/ Rebirth**

“No judges had they then, but lived secure.
No pine had yet, on its high mountain felled,
Descended to the sea to find strange lands
Afar; men knew no shores except their own.”

--- Ovid, The Metamorphoses

How can we create an environment without limiting our architectural possibilities to environmental strategies of buildings including solar panels, recycled materials and specialist consultants? To what extent can architecture and land - building and surrounding ecosystem of natural and artificial elements – learn from the past but also discover a new future, a new lore of science and fiction where not only new spaces can be uncovered but also new ways to own, share and live together?

If fiction is the start of every reality, with a fiction we shall then begin.

In the book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' author Joseph Campbell discusses how all stories in the world are in fact ever recurring narratives. From the quest journey and the transformation of the hero to destruction/rebirth tales Campbell articulates great narratives as part of archetypical trunks that have been reinterpreted over centuries. Instead of using Campbell's concept as theory/truth we will vocalise his ideas in relationship to land canons and their big recurrent structures.

Utilising literature, architectural projects, paintings and contemporary game designs as investigative ground we will study key concepts of land based on the following three thematics:
- promised land: genesis, the idea of a perfect future world historically inherited;
- cursed land: destruction, dystopia, cataclysm, disaster;
- wonderland: alternative, delirious, dream like places that respond to the logic of imagination

From architect Paolo Soleri’s massive earth city of Arcosanti and Ballard's science fiction disaster novels (The Drowned World, The Drought, Crystal World) to Bioshock's multi-coloured delirium, game design of a suspended city called Columbia. Between creative environment design and science fiction we will begin to speculate inside these worlds. From digital painting and mapping to character creation we will imagine what makes those spaces, what they are and how they could be explored further by inserting first concepts into those studied land narratives.
02: No Man’s Land?

“Science fiction is now the only place were the future survives, just as television costume dramas are the only places where the past survives.”

--- Miracles of Life - An Autobiography, JG Ballard

In the search for specific land conditions we will travel to Sri Lanka, one of the richest ecosystems of the world but also a country with a complex and bloody history of land ownership. Located in the Indian Ocean the island of Sri Lanka encompasses many of the archetypes studied before - with its fast pacing economy and large ongoing infrastructural projects promising a better future, cultural and sacred holy grounds for unique forms of religious worship in a delirium wonderland of sorts while also having a brutal history of colonisation and civil war that transformed a beautiful country into a cursed disputed ground. Furthermore we will find sites of No Man’s Land where ownership is called into question, livelihood cut, economies on hold and the future uncertain.

Now in peace and progress Sri Lanka is dealing with its history and present problems. We will investigate the fissures left by such a complex social environmental cocktail and visit empty paradisiacal sites claimed by the military, displaced communities due to climate change, rise in sea level and temperature increase, a thick warm tropical forest claimed by Buddhist monks, colossal monocultures of tea and rubber plantations and an urban cauldron of planned and self-organised cityscapes like Colombo. We will study portions of the land where sometimes areas are paradise for a selected few or no man’s land for many.

We will meet architects, activists and researchers and talk to the people that live, hope and build the future of land use. We will alienate the familiar and bring the strange into a new familiarity.

Students will observe, sketch, survey, interview, record and film. Each student will assemble a travel diary with notes, photos and collected materials. The collected data will be part of the evidence of interest that will aid students to construct the universe of references for the final project. Like in a detective story about to be take shape this is as much a curatorial task as the beginning of your case: the final design project.
Term 2  [11 weeks: 12|01 - 27|03|2015] 
+ 
Term 3  [9 weeks: 27|04 - 26|06|2015]

03: Strange Land Mirage and the No Man’s Land

"Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot."


For the final project students will design a speculative architectural project that addresses the opportunities of future land use in Sri Lanka. Concepts like community/user, technology/adaptation and environment/livelihood will be utilised in order to create provocative new ways of understanding the concept of land.

In 'Strange Land Mirage' the familiar and unfamiliar will coexist and be part of the reinterpretation of land archetypes from the delirious of wonderland to the hope of a better world of promised land. As a horizon of possibilities the projects will often be clear buildings, sometimes elusive like mirages in a desert dune but always with an imaginative architectural design.

Being mainly a design unit, all projects will be very well resolved in terms of space, form and context while at the same time drawn using evocative and atmospheric techniques. Drawings, renderings and three-dimensional sections will be part of the visual repertoire of Inter 3.
3rd Years Technical Studies

Inter 3 offers a unique platform for bespoke and innovative Technical Studies. Based on each student’s individual project the TS3 will be a creative research focusing on the development of working prototypes mixing both low and high tech methods.

Third year students will develop one technical aspect of the project as prototypes in order to connect unit work and Technical Studies. Inter 3 has a rich history of fantastic TS documents in which students utilise ingenuity and creativity to experiment with interactive technology, environmental studies and material tests. Successful past Inter 3 TS projects involved wind/acoustic energy generation, tidal forces, robotic buildings and aquacultures among many others. Reoccurring TS themes are interactive technology, artificial environments and sensorial ambience (light, atmospheric effects, performative spaces).

Specialists from different fields will be involved in order to debate concepts and give specific input on the technicality of the project. The goal of the TS at Inter 3 is to enable students to produce a fresh and creative document based on the need and interest of each student and project.

It is hard work but fun and rewarding!
Unit Key Points

Through the interaction of talks, individual tutorials, workshops, etc. we aim to stimulate architectural debates based on constant production – with ideas being shaped into elegant drawings and models.

Tutorials. Tutorials are held twice weekly on an individual basis throughout the year.

Talks. The unit will promote a series of talks held by us as well as specialist guests in order to explore a variety of spatial narratives and literary inspirations.

Specialist Consultants. A part of the unit’s budget is retained to invite specialist consultants to give talks/lectures, form part of juries and/or hold individual tutorials.

Juries. Unit internal pin ups and critics are constantly held throughout the year in order to practice and further your presentation skills – graphically, physically and verbally. Juries with high profile guests will take place at least at the end of each term.

Portfolios. The process of a project is of high importance to us. Portfolios are expected to contain every stage of development of your project of each term rather than the final product only. They should include all sorts of representation material - drawings, sketches, photographs, collages, renderings, etc. From the first term on you will be encouraged to develop your own unique portfolio language specifically tailored to your project. Our aim is to increase individual diversity and reduce homogeneous architectural output; therefore we will also emphasize a research into drawing and other techniques based on the studied object.

Models. 3d computer models are essential to present your project, but we also emphasize physical models and installations of all kinds, scales and stages as they will help you to explore your project from a different angle.
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--- more to come