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Borders and Territories

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On the north side of Mtatsminda, Holy Mountain, in Tbilisi, an intervention starts to grow. An intervention that, unlike the spectacular theme park on the top of the hill and the tumultuous city below, creates a place for reflection. As the mechanical structures above and concrete structures below blur and distance themselves from the natural world, the project creates understanding and mutual respect between the human and the more-than-human world, if there even really is a real difference between the two.

The intervention focuses on making the mountainside accessible and creates a walkway lifted above the terrain. The lifted pathway allows the eroded landscape below to undergo a replanting process.

Wandering along the pathway, one might get disoriented. Unlike the machines above, the pathway traces the topography of the land; it does not cut across the folds of the site but rides them. Speeding up and slowing down as the switchbacks come closer and get further away from each other. A pathway that focuses on making the visitor aware of the site.

Focuses on nurturing the site back to health and closely monitoring the healing process so it can grow and start healing more of the mountain and the mountains around. Becoming a prototype for rehabilitation.

Neo-upper Tbilisi is a hiking trail, lifted off the ground to create minimal ecological impact on the terrain. Distributed along the trail are monitoring stations, terraced meeting grounds and points of entry onto the mountain. The monitoring stations observe the planting of trees, the erosion and formation of soil, shifts in weather patterns and the life on the mountain around the trail. The switchbacks along the walkway absorb most of the momentum created on the path, and as they catch these forces, they unfold into a platformed structure. In these places, the movement stops and is replaced by social and cultural gatherings.

An intervention that is not a destination, it is an instrument that restores and invites, a scaffolding of ecological recovery opening for ecological reflection.

1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My graduation project critically engages with themes of artificiality, post-nature design, ecological awareness and spatial experience within the public domain. It becomes a material and spatial articulation of escapism and environmental care. My project is located on the northern side of Mtatsminda mountain, a layered site shifting between a religious sanctuary and an amusement park. The spatial experience of the amusement park at the top of the mountain is influenced by the contrast between artificial and natural. My project investigates how an architectural (artificial) intervention can mediate in the entangled relationship between nature and artifice on this site. An architectural language is proposed that embraces disorientation, rhythm, and attention, creating an ecological stage where cultural activity, research and leisure blossom without high impact on the terrain.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

I started my research from an interest in the artificiality of nature and the relation between human, the artificial and nature. Investigating post-nature theory (Morton, Haraway) in my theoretical paper 'Artificial Nature and the Transplantation of Trees' led me to investigate public 'natural' spaces (parks) in Tbilisi, ending up at Mtatsminda Park. The paper provided a conceptual framework for understanding the site as not just historically layered between natural and artificial, but as a nature-culture assemblage. Understanding that there is no way to transform the mountain back to a 'purely natural state', but to find a way to re-articulate the interplay of the post-natural, and to raise ecological awareness and care through an architectural intervention. The project has in turn, refined my understanding of how to look at post-nature as a material space. The project started to unfold naturally and as the project grew my idea of how to translate and what to interpret as artifice started to grow with it.

3. How do you assess the value of the way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

In my methodology, I combined research-by-design, critical theory, and spatial storytelling. Mapping and ecological readings. This approach helped me to switch between theory and analysis, and site. Through these methods, I translated more abstract concepts like escapism, momentum, ritual, and care into material, architectural interventions. The design methods helped me speculate how these ideas could or may be grounded on the site. Drawing from the form, movement and rhythm of amusement park rides, I abstracted the disorientation and thus the escape these rides provide. Walking on the path becomes a spatial narrative, not just a mode of movement. In my approach, I did not only look at spatial logic, but also at emotional and societal logic, adding the dimension of growing care and a new way of inhabiting the mountainside by not only human life but all life.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

Academically and societal value of the project lies in the way the project proposes a low environmental but high cultural impact. The project integrates and fosters ecological and spatial awareness through cultural gathering. The project advocates for a shared ecological stewardship without becoming a commodified space. Slow observation, critical reflection and common stewardship over nature are central themes in the path's goals. Artificiality is not hidden; it is foregrounded, making it a tool to foster reflection on the spatial context. The project rejects exclusionary privatisation and commercialisation of 'natural' public space, and in contrast, aims to make it more accessible, inviting the public to wander over the mountainside.

5. How do you assess the value of transferability of your project results?

The project is highly transferable into a different context, especially if this context is undergoing the same type of problematics. The need for escape can be found in every city, and raising awareness for environmental problems is important everywhere in the world. Not everywhere the method should be to make the place accessible, but to create ecological awareness over circulation and consumption of the space.

The principles of the path and the way it cares for the site it is placed over can be

6. How does the design explore the act of wandering as a spatial and political gesture?

Wandering or getting lost is a deliberate choice in the project. The path that crosses, meanders, and the switchbacks resist linearity and destination-based logic. There is no destination, wandering is a goal. The wandering becomes a mode of escaping the fast-paced and busyness of the city. It resists the idea that public spaces must be organised as efficient and profitable, it allows for imagination. Along the path there are moments, not destinations, that allow for a break from wandering and focus on care. Care for nature in the form of planting zones and care for people in form of cultural meeting places. These places offer meditative breaks from the movement of the path, creating a conscious connection between the visitor and the site. It is not only about being lost, it is a choreography of attention and movement.

7. What were some of the main challenges and struggles encountered during the project, and how did they shape my understanding of the topic and your role as a designer?

One of the core challenges during the design phase of the project was making the conceptual ambitions clear in the spatial implementation. I was often uncertain if the project was becoming too vague or abstract, and then at the same time, when considering the built forms, I worried about flattening or oversimplifying the complexity of the theoretical concepts behind them.

Looking at design not as a way of saving the world, as a solution to problems, but as a proposal and iterative act, one that not only answers questions but also works into shaping questions through spatial expression, helped me move further in the designing of the project. These challenges were essential in shaping the project and evolving the concept to what it is now.