

Intermediate Unit 3

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Narrating Infrastructures

What turns action into history? Who writes it?

Narrative differs from story. A story is a composition made of spaces (places) and events (time), a narrative is the act of compositing. The act of compositing (*emplotment*), framing events into a story to make sense of scattered information, is part of our way to understand the world – as narrators. So narrative is not an academic artifact but rather a way that we all use to organise what we see, think and then explain to others. It implies the existence of a narrator, actors (being narrated) and facts/events, fictional or historical ones. So to describe the world in a narrative way is to interpret it from a first person point of view and take decisions to each act/event to include or exclude into a story or history. The act of *narrating* is fundamental to our explanation of the world around us because it touches the decisions taken to reach a story and shed light on important creative questions. The gerund “ing” is a paramount part of this act. It implies a process of formation, an explanation of the method and therefore an act undertaken by someone. Consequently it highlights the existence of authorship and fabrication of meaning in every cultural manifestation. An interesting example can be found in Turkey’s recent historical discussions. When Literature Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk mentioned the unwritten history of the supposed genocide of Armenians during World War 1 and its absence of Turkish history books, he infuriated a vast part of the Turkish opinion. The authenticity of the establishment of history and its writers is here caught by the necessity for revision and reflection. Nothing is final, narratives are constantly rewritten.

Intermediate Unit 3 uses this method to re-create and explore alternative ways to re-think infrastructures within urban context, more specifically productive infrastructures. As mentioned in the unit’s introductory text for the 2008/09 academic year, Inter 3

“...will investigate the contemporary production and consumption of goods. It is well known how the proliferation of material goods has turned to nauseating proportion during the XX century usurping from religious narratives the dictation of collective desires and individual expectations. In the western world this exponential material growth was paralleled to mass migration from country to cities, generated new challenges upon urban infrastructures and stressed, even further, the separation from production (fabrication, farming, manufacture) and the consumer (us!).”

The re-creation of industrial landscapes, productive infrastructures and fields, when gigantic supply chains (with gigantic impacts!) become productive urban micro typologies related to a group/community, is where the act of narrating starts. The compositing of human and social subsistence (products/goods) articulated/emplot by a conscious narrator (you!) is where societal needs can and should crossbreed the poetic with efficient modes. The act of narrating and taking design decisions based on the freedom to act upon your subjects of interest say as much about the narrator as the subject itself. The blend of efficient programmes - typical of productive infrastructures/farms, and the poetics of space – the fragility of human habitat plus the lens of the narrator is what turns the process of narrating infrastructures into a challenging, invigorating and relevant architectural project. Architecture should enable us to situate ourselves within our time not only as fabricators of space but also as designers of a diverse and participative environment.

Referring back to our extended year long brief (which we suppose you all read in order to choose this unit):

“Inter 3 will investigate and propose through a series of semi-independent briefs how production and consumption can not only be effective (the well oiled machine myth) but also culturally provocative and aesthetically daring.”

So a potential answer to the question *“What turns action into history?”* in the architectural field could be the rephrase of the question: *“Who turns actions into histories?”* As teachers we see this answer being given every single time from ambitious and independent mind students who produce audacious design projects that lead to innovation and contemporary ways of rethinking current alienation. Let’s discuss it via design!

“Inter 3 explores via a strong design oriented agenda the crossbreeding of industrial landscape and architecture.”