WILD LIFE: Institute for Hybrid Ecology

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Typical definitions of the term "wild" are often negative in structure: wild animals are u*n*domesticated or *un*tamed, plants are *un*cultivated, spaces and landscapes are *un*inhabited, and people are *un*governed. Embedded in the very structure of language, the *wild* or the "natural" order of the world is set in opposition to human habitation. Nature is wild, while human nature is cultured, civilized, ordered, controlled. This binary view of *human* versus *nature* is overly reductive and destructive because it positions humans outside of, and detached from, nature [1]. This detachment allows humans to argue that the appropriation, extraction, and exploitation of natural resources, other species, and people is reasonable and inevitable, justifying actions that lead to ecosystem collapse and environmental injustice [2].

Reprogramming this binary is a critical step towards a future where human interaction with the environment moves towards what Timothy Morton terms "symbiotic real" [3]. To address this problematic binary and its consequences, some argue for developing logics of *hybridity* that view reality as a co-produced and entangled web of social, ecological, and material processes. Hybrid thinking seeks intersectional analyses of ecology, recentering alternative subjects like plants, humans, animals, and cyborgs, and mapping interrelated webs of material flows and policy to better understand their impacts [4]. Architecture and landscape serve as a particularly powerful frame to address these hybrid processes. Operating at the psychological and material thresholds that structure social and ecological relationships, architecture creates boundaries or encourages interaction between interior worlds and exterior habitats while helping to determine our domestic, familial, and collective proclivities. Architectural material systems, technologies, and

Figure 1. *Human/Non-Human Collaboration Labs (H.N.H.C.L.),* After 100 Years. Edwin Barajas, Mariana Galvan, and Ferdous Kabir.
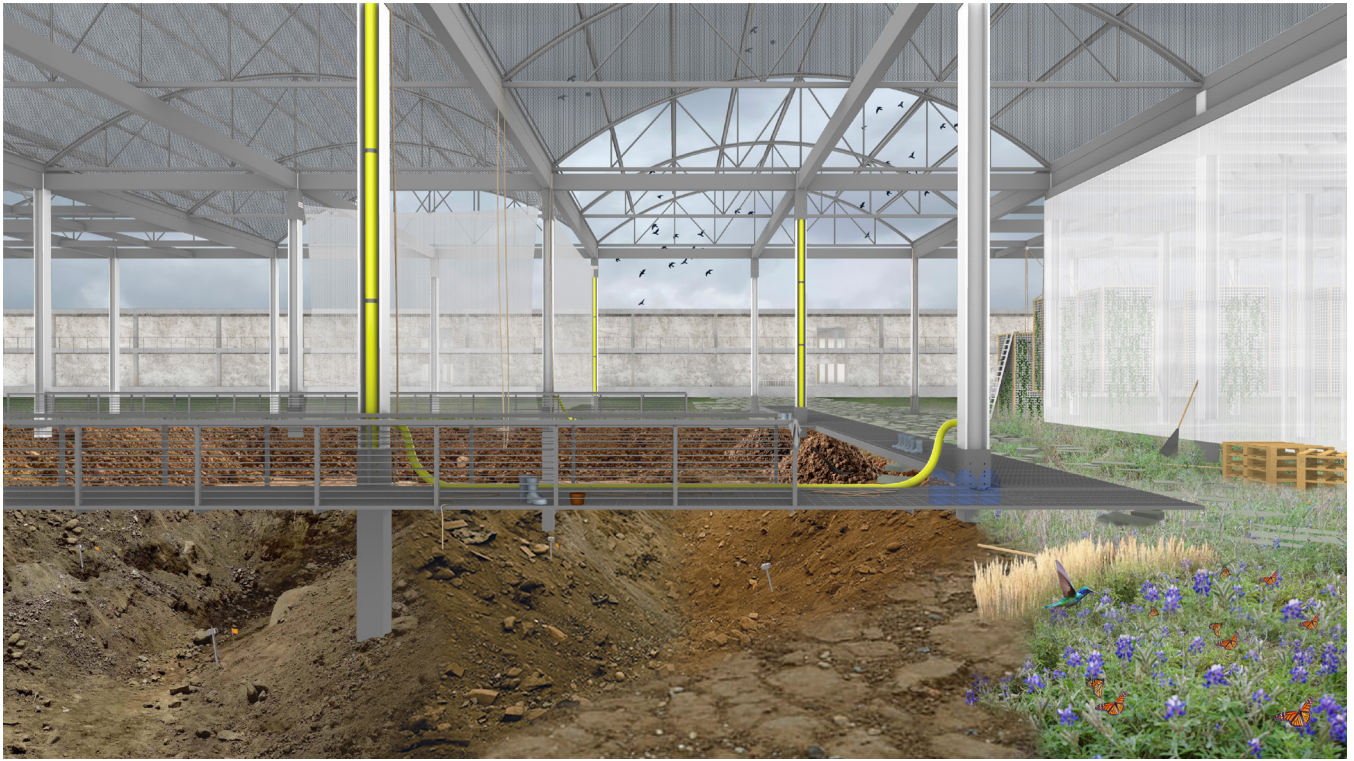
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Figure 2. *Human/Non-Human Collaboration Labs (H.N.H.C.L.),* Interior. Edwin Barajas, Mariana Galvan, and Ferdous Kabir.

Figure 3. *Human/Non-Human Collaboration Labs (H.N.H.C.L.),* Interior. Edwin Barajas, Mariana Galvan, and Ferdous Kabir.
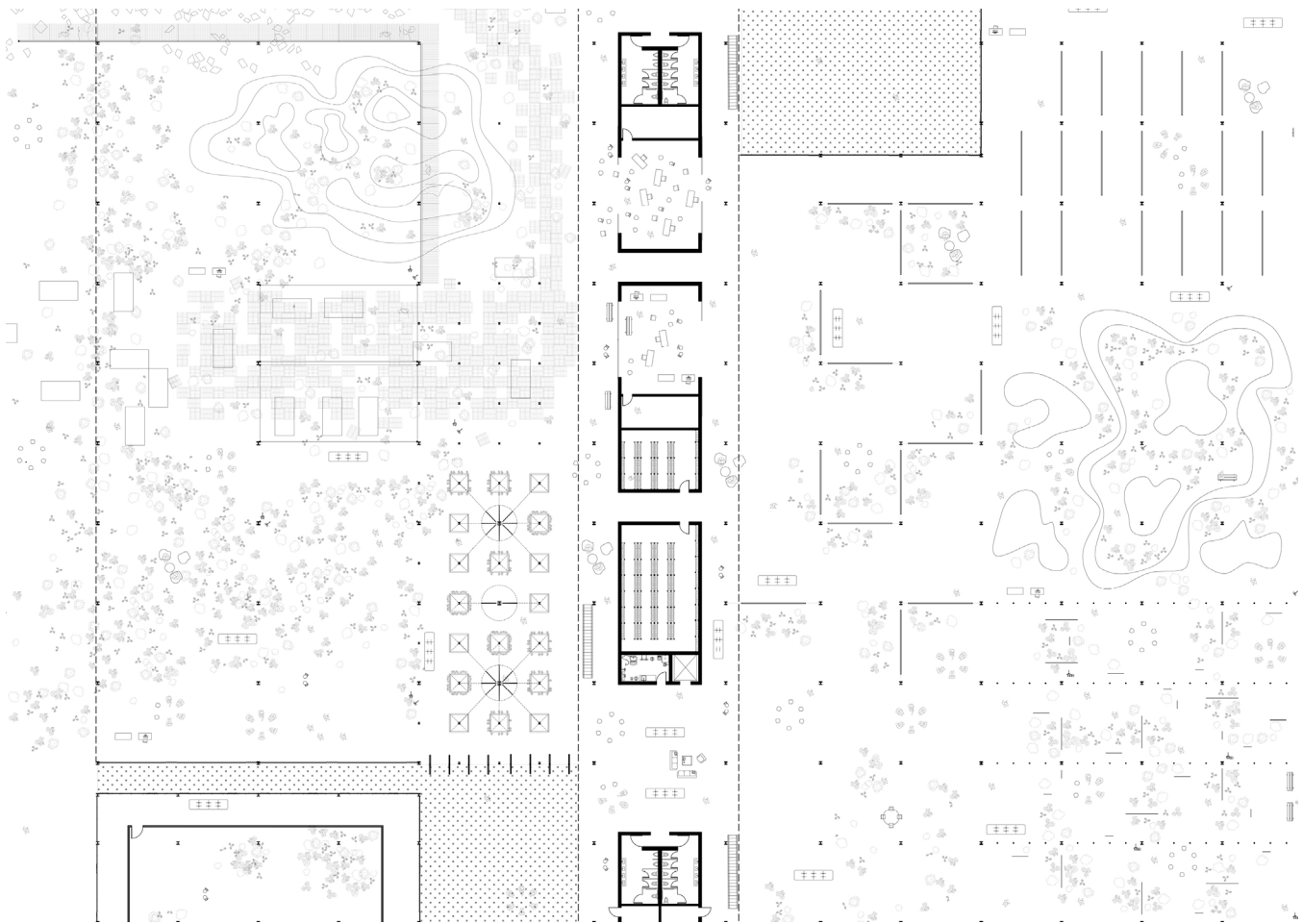
Figure 4. *Human/Non-Human Collaboration Labs (H.N.H.C.L.),* Interior. Edwin Barajas, Mariana Galvan, and Ferdous Kabir.

spatial practices can also alienate and isolate us from the physical space of "nature" and the psychological state of *being wild*: not only keeping us apart, but domesticating and cleansing the landscape of any evidence of *wildness*. Complex socio-technical practices have succeeded in isolating the architectural interior from exterior: rejecting the incursion of other organisms and ideologies into the human domain. From the dominance of the airtight, watertight, and hermetic architectural enclosure, to the many urban and suburban morphologies that assist in this process of individuation and alienation: not only keeping us apart from each other, but also domesticating and depoliticizing our environments. So, how wild are we willing to become?

As a reaction to this dominant state of being, WILD LIFE is a provocation to experiment with new modes of living in and observing a rewilding world. The studio program sought to define and propose a residency and research space for the ecological sciences and humanities: an institutional prototype for new interfaces with environments, systems, and wild spaces. The studio method began with research and mapping at the scale of the site and territory to critically question assumptions about nature, property, geology, ecology, atmosphere, and governance

that help define the site. The method for this initial research phase was data-driven and journalistic: student teams gathered information from a variety of local and municipal sources, collating historical and contemporary maps and data, doing in person fieldwork, and assembling an archaeological document of the site through various forms of visualization. Teams interrogated the current "wild" conditions of the site (an abandoned 1.2 million SF site formerly containing a petroleum storage facility), from its ground and atmospheric toxicity, to its relationship to water and flooding, to its past and existing flora and fauna, and current institutional oversight. Teams considered how ecological systems overlay with this landscape, studying multi-scalar and multi-dimensional ecological processes, material flows, and impacts that occur when architecture is brought to bear on a site.

One project, *Human/Non-Human Collaboration Labs (H.N.H.C.L.)* proposed a participatory research institute for developing new methods of land tenure through the collaborative experimentation with phytoremediation processes. H.N.H.C.L. deployed a linear residency space for artists and ecological scientists/ humanities researchers constructed in phases across the site. Adjacent to this more permanent linear dwelling, a patchwork
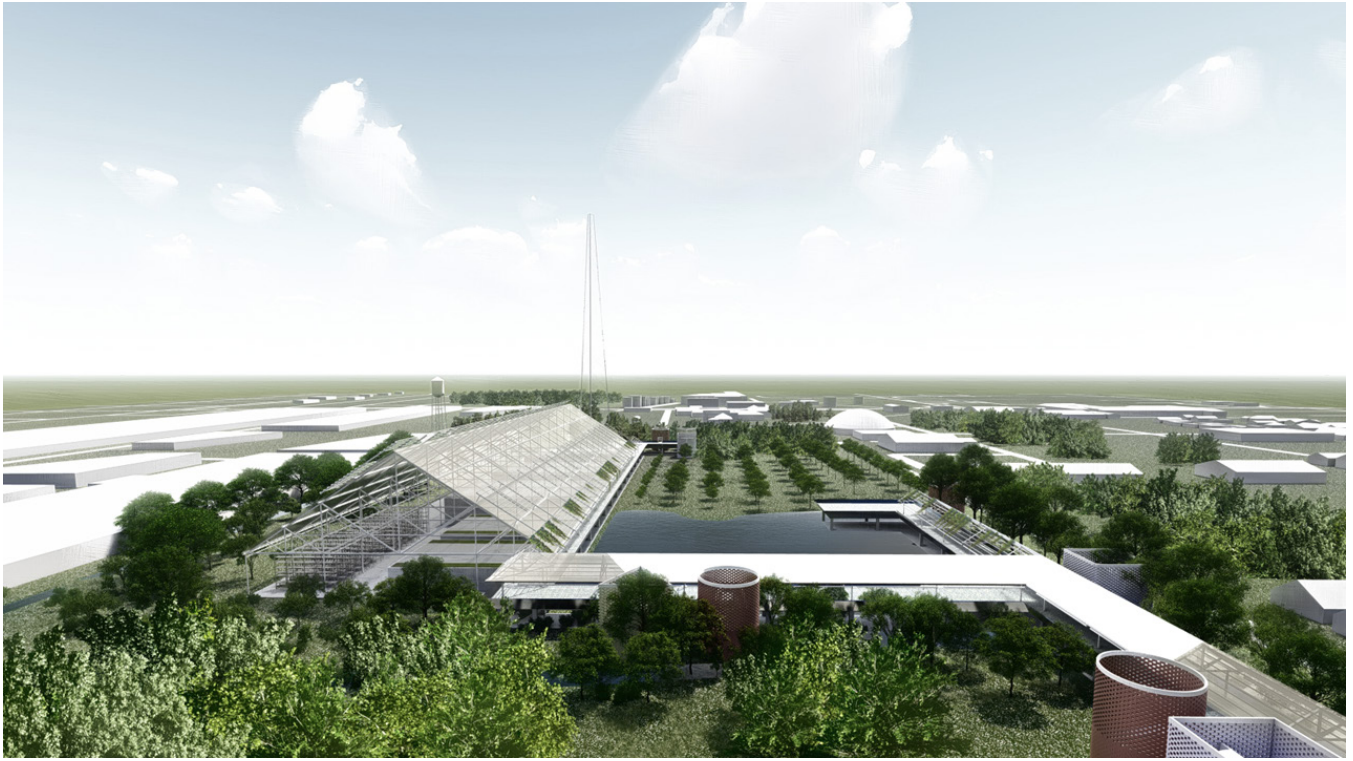
Figure 5. *The Center for Applied Resource Ecology (C.A.R.E.),* Aerial View. Zynab Al-Helfi, Jesus Guillen, and Ana Peralta.

Figure 6. *The Center for Applied Resource Ecology (C.A.R.E.),* Viaduct View. Zynab Al-Helfi, Jesus Guillen, and Ana Peralta.

Figure 7. *Trade Ecological Remediation Agency (T.E.R.A.),* Interior Domestic View. Lisa Evans and Kathleen Healy.

Figure 8. *Trade Ecological Remediation Agency (T.E.R.A.),* Exterior Classroom View. Lisa Evans and Kathleen Healy.

of ephemeral structures based in contemporary greenhouse design housed immersive environments, landscapes, and experiment halls. The architecture could expand and shrink its footprint over time, and the project anticipated and imaged a future of remediated ground and remnant, decaying architecture. Another project, *The Center for Applied Resource Ecology (C.A.R.E.)* created an infrastructure for resource commoning for the people, flora, and fauna in the community and city. C.A.R.E. harvests solar power, rainwater, produces timber, grows crops in greenhouses, ameliorates flooding through retention basins, and supports wildlife and ecosystemic health by fostering a variety of habitats. The project proposed an infrastructural "viaduct" which conveys resources and services such as water, electricity, habitats, nesting grounds, internet, food sources, and other materials across the site and ties into existing ecosystems and city services. And finally, the *Trade Ecological Remediation Agency (T.E.R.A.)* proposed a trade school under a future Civilian Climate Corps program focusing on pedagogy about ecological remediation in a local urban context. T.E.R.A. sought to revitalize the toxic site through an immersive educational and domestic infrastructure: a series of bar buildings, remediating, and wilding, grounds transects the site, with the architecture and landscape based on indigenous longhouse types and stewardship models. The bar buildings alternate between educational programming and housing, each questioning the relationship of the interior to exterior through a careful reconfiguration of the architectural interface with the ground and facade.
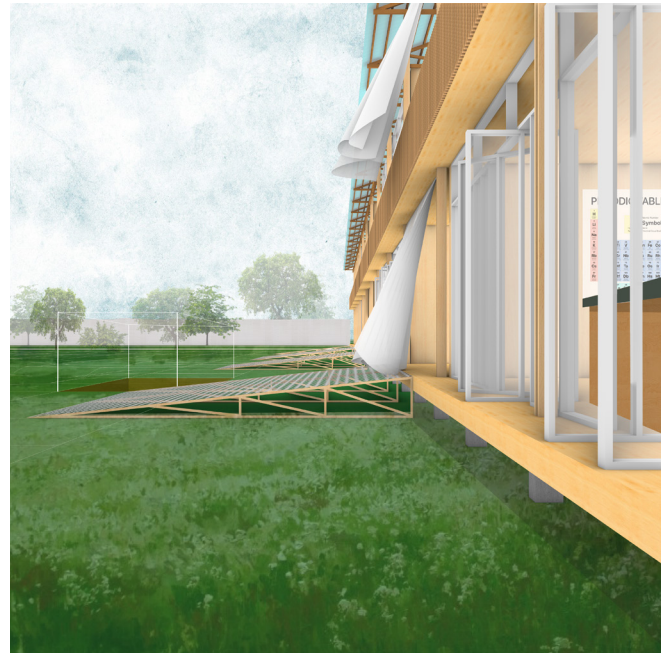
In conclusion, these institutional prototypes served to question normative ideas of architectural, urban, and landscape types: curating new relationships between organisms, ecosystems, communities, and urban infrastructures. Projects questioned the idea of the institution itself through de-centering the human through alternative structures of governance, land commons, cooperatives, and alternative systems of barter and use. The studio asked: how do we situate ourselves—as designers, as people—within these ecological and material processes? How do we foster new sensibilities, symbioses, and ethics of care for each other and the environment? Collectively, the studio reflected on possibilities for hybrid alliances between these varied actors towards a more wild life.

ENDNOTES

1. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, 1995.

2. On detachment of society from nature under Capitalism, see: Jason Moore, "The End of Cheap Nature. Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about 'The' Environment and Love the Crisis of Capitalism," 2014.

3. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press: 2009).

4. For more on Hybridity see the work of Donna Haraway, Ulrich Beck, and Bruno Latour. For a summary see: Damian White, Alan Rudy, and Brian Gareau, "Hybridities and Agencies" in *Environments, Natures, and Social Theory* (Palgrave: London, 2016) 115-143.

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