

The Politics of Skin Grafting

This unit explores skin grafting as a sociopolitical tool able to infiltrate subjectivity into the urban fabric. Politics, as it relates to contemporary cities, no longer conceives the social as a cohesive force but as a loose association of individual experiences scattered across the different surfaces that shape the urban experience. Design issues are no longer addressed to constituencies and social groups but to individuals and audiences. In this context, direct and reciprocal relations between individuals and building skins can provide the potential for political activation. Grafting processes, exchanges in flesh and skin – transposition and translation into multiple layers of action, inscription and projection of interests interwoven with the surface of the urban fabric – define intricate hybrid construction processes for active political inquiry.

The work of the unit will be framed by a specific, politically charged urban condition, La Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, Cuba, a place where city and national politics are particularly bound to everyday experience. This urban location embodies a richness of scales, social practices and political conflict, epitomised by the presence of the iconic Ministry of Internal Affairs. Constructed under the Batista dictatorship, the building is an archetypal example of colonial modernism (now turned into a

monument to Ernesto Che Guevara). The unit will take the Ministry as the ideal platform for showcasing plural responses to democratisation and political processes in Cuba.

Students are expected to work individually in developing rigorous investigation through consistent portfolios, although collaborative and group work will be also required. They will develop a range of skin proposals for the Ministry, working across various phases of production. Projects will address sociopolitical urban issues in combination with specific fabrication methods, continuously shifting from the urban scale to the level of fabrication, moving towards a final collapsing of both into a hybrid scalar practice. The unit encourages material experimentation only in relation to specific intellectual and theoretical inquiries. All students will be required to submit a mock-up of their final proposals.

Unit Staff
Francisco Gonzalez de Canales studied architecture at ETSA Seville, ETSA Barcelona and Harvard University, and worked for Foster + Partners and Rafael Moneo before establishing Canales & Lombardero. An active architectural critic,

he has previously lectured in England, Mexico, Spain and the USA, collaborated and worked in different architectural publications, and is currently the AACP coordinator. He has recently completed his PhD on the radical domestic self-experimentations of the 1940s and 1950s.

Nuria Alvarez Lombardero studied architecture at ETSA Madrid and the Housing and Urbanism MA at the AA. She has worked for Machado & Silvetti in Boston, and was part of the editorial board of *Neutra* magazine. She has co-directed Canales & Lombardero since 2003

and has lectured at the University of Seville and worked as a researcher at Harvard University, the University of Cambridge and the AA. She is currently finalising her PhD on the dissolution of boundaries traced by modern urban planning.



Cuban Ministry of Internal Affairs, Havana