

The Anarchist Gardener: Connections between *cityZENs* from Japan, Finland, and Puerto Rico

For an upper-level Design studio, architecture students from *Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico* and an architect from Finland explored suburbia's possibilities through the interpretation of Zen philosophy and the writings of Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Finnish contemporary social critic, also translator of medieval Arabic literature. Myriad explorations culminated in the development of a master plan for a most "aggressive" metropolitan/urban context in the Caribbean island, and the design and construction of ephemeral installations around different locations within its capital city.¹

An intensive charrette turned students into "*anarchist gardeners*" committed to increase public awareness of the car as an act of imposition in Puerto Rico, where geography makes urban space scarce. A six-hour walk through one of San Juan's most congested automobile routes – at peak hour - provided the opportunity to publicly decry the lack of an effective urban pedestrian network and to engage in a symbolic reclaiming of space now devoted to parking in the city. *Ad-hoc* (and short-lived) Zen gardens were erected along the route: their 2.6 x 5.5 meters proportion made reference to the standard parking space which, in contrast, pollutes the land with asphalt.

The anarchist gardeners advocated *planting a new "human" layer in the city* - one of *kindness* - in clear distance from today's self-infected stress and dominance of invented powers indifferent to true human concerns. Being now deprived of kindness by material nonsense, we need to fill the void in today's valueless society with ethics, no matter how naïve, *passé* or merely schmalzty it may seem.

City dwellers view *urbanity* through the lens of a deep-rooted anti-urbanism. Urban life is generally understood as a disturbance of the carefully negotiated balance between the individual and society, between part and whole. In Puerto Rico's capital city, *disturbances* are the result of understanding the metropolis in terms of its process of diffuse suburbanization. Conflictive elements come into play; long routes are traveled between suburb and work, relying heavily on cars and not on urban spaces of flow, cohabitation and correlation.

For eight years now, Puerto Rico has been engaged in its most ambitious urban project ever, the establishment of a *Light-Rail Train System* in San Juan, a first for the Island's capital. The so-called *Tren Urbano* Initiative has provided a unique background to understand how change unfolds in the city: demolitions, roads retraced, vistas both discarded and newly opened, land abandoned, lots reclaimed... the pedestrian forgotten, large areas of suburbia ignored. Being confronted with this condition, students devised a master plan through which a tramway system would be integrated to the urban train project, in the interest of connecting the so-called Bayamón area to San Juan, in order to compensate for the difficulties which arise from urban sprawl and pedestrian disconnection.

The *Tren Urbano* project aims at appeasing growth and sprawl problems plaguing the city, the impact of parking, and other environmental and traffic congestion dilemmas. However, in order for this scheme to succeed, elements in the vicinity of the train stations must be integrated to the proposed plan. Even though, the train project will implement bus circulation and parking infrastructure around the stations, little attention has been given to the re-structuring of pedestrian alternatives in the city. Those who live far from the train stations or have to walk through obstacles to reach it (avenues, freeways or car territories) will be discouraged from using the system if no alternative is offered to them..

The *Anarchist Gardeners* developed a project that integrates a light tramway system to that of *Tren Urbano*, thus reducing walking distances to a minimum. Several routes connected diverse areas and stations. All of these were to be accompanied by an express line and a circuit line which would link the suburbs and important commercial and activity sectors to the diverse train stations. The tramway would arrive in intervals of 3 to 5 minutes to foster the use of the train system and reduce the impact of the car in the city. In our urban landscape, the complexities and factors which define its patterns and behaviors are greatly influenced by external forces. These include economical and social conditions which, more than often, are beyond the architect's hands. Urban ecology, social exclusion, crime, local economics, community development and urban culture, all influence the outcome and general conception of the city.

Faced with said situation, the students (*Anarchist Gardeners*) (re)created themselves as *cityZENs* committed to participate in a rich, fluid and multilayered dialogue to improve the city's urban fabric. As a first strategy to rescue territories for the pedestrian, a process of *detritorializing* areas was promoted. Single uses were discouraged, exclusivity in purpose denied. Car and pedestrian were (re)conceived in terms of possible vertical relationships.⁴ Clear distinctions between the territories of the car and the pedestrian were studied. Elevated and underground walkways underlined the empowerment of the city's multiple possible levels, diminishing the conflict between humans and their surroundings. Zones and territories of the pedestrian and the car were weaved to generate an environment of mutual respect. If the car recognizes the need to coexist with the pedestrian and, in some instances, even share spaces with him, a feeling of coexistence and harmony can befall the city. Zen gardens were chosen to best represent such possibility.

After rehearsing it, students engaged the public in a six-hour+ walk across the city's most car-congested routes, to denounce the lack of an urban pedestrian network of significance in San Juan. Sporting black uniforms with the phrase "Who cares wins", students paraded several kilometers in total silence, adding to the ritualistic nature of the event. Red umbrellas, opened and closed in unison, highlighted their presence at all locations. Finnish architect Marco Casagrande disguised himself as *Hernando*, an allegorical figure representing the pedestrian today ignored by planning. The march of the Anarchist Gardeners lasted from early afternoon until past sunset.

Encounters with bystanders, drivers and even the police, were many. Having previously hidden equipment and materials near each chosen garden location, the gardeners could quickly set up each Zen installation as if choreographed. Each garden a different theme and name: *Genesis* (where the event started); *Money* (next to a banking institution); *Lost* (under an overpass); *Roof* (below elevated train tracks); *Flux* (fighting traffic with ice); *Shopping* (in proximity to a mall); *Park(ed)* (at a parking area); *Lost Link* (validating an unused street segment; and *Promised Land* (the last garden, in a community originally named Israel). Tectonics underlined the message: straw, wood, sand, glass, rust, found metal objects, fire and ice, were among key garden construction materials.

Tram, walkways and Zen gardens introduced a new layer to the existing urban context: a human layer. An organic matrix of “democratic” infrastructure was thus installed over the existing city, supporting humanity and sustainable development - a culture of slowness, communication, conversation, and contemplation. The Anarchist Gardeners urged their audience to distance itself from overproductivity, self-inflicted stress and the dominance of invented powers which are destroying the ecological balance and mental health of modern man. When the car no longer dominates urban planning and urban space, there is room for people and humanism. This leads to kindness. Slogan-like expressions like this one impacted the public.

How did this project come about? Architect Marco Casagrande, from Finland, led the effort in Puerto Rico. He is a partner of Casagrande & Rintala, a firm based in Helsinki, noted for translating ideas originated in other fields of knowledge into works of architecture. Casagrande was one of several avant-garde artists invited to an international event held last October in San Juan, Puerto Rico, concerning linkages between conceptual art and contemporary architecture. He worked together with students from The New School of Architecture at Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico: Marel Del Toro-Cabrera, Omar Muñiz-Muñoz, Francisco Arco-Alonso, Ferdinand Rodríguez-Santiago, Marcelo López-Dinardi, Luis Maldonado-Amill, Heryk Tomassini-Suro, Josué Rivera-Gandía, Ronny Marini-Goris, Pedro Claudio-Montalvo, and Oscar Oliver-Didier.

ILLUSTRATIONS



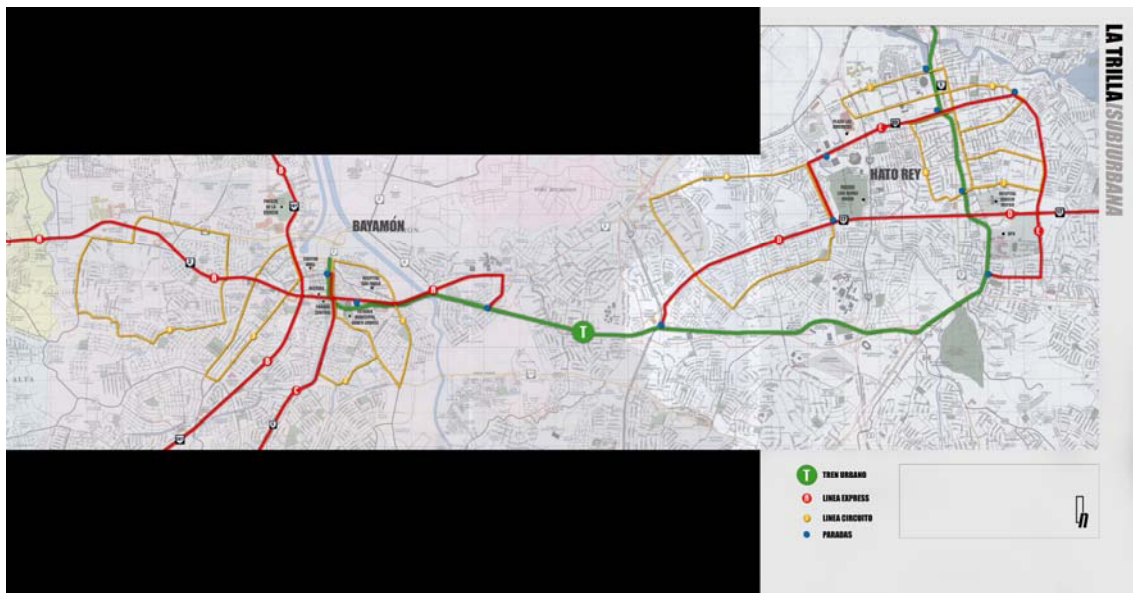
Illust. 1: Paths of conflict: the problems of car and pedestrian intertwined in the city are represented by architecture students at the starting line of everyday life in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



Illust. 2: The aggressive nature of the urban realm in Puerto Rico renders street and road crossings as a dangerous activity, full of deadly surprises. [student photomontage]



Illust. 3: Underused spaces are plentiful in San Juan; swings and complementary recreational equipment is recommended as palliative to nothingness.
[student photomontage]



Illust. 4: Master Plan Proposal linking the light rail system and the Tram route;
Anarchist Gardeners walked most of the route.



"Jardineros anarquistas" invaden Bayamón

□ Por Jorge Rodríguez
Redactor ESCENARIO

Un grupo de estudiantes de quinto año de La Nueva Escuela de Arquitectura de la Universidad Politécnica de Puerto Rico invadirán a partir de

Posponen muestra de teatro en Madrid

□ Por Jorge Rodríguez
Redactor ESCENARIO

Ara María Ballesteros, directora del Patronato de Teatro, que creó junto al crítico e arte Antonio J. Molino y el actor Raúl Carbonell, anunció la postergación de la Muestra de Teatro Puertorriqueño en Madrid y Valladolid para el próximo año 2003.

Para ello vamos a abrir en Madrid una delegación del Patronato del Teatro con una oficina y nos gustaría que el gobierno nos pudiera ayudar en una labor", dijo Ballesteros, quien ha trabajado en producciones como "Premio a tres días antes de amor", "Coplas por la muerte de Juana Mariana" y "Ocho días de amor" del Odeón Rodríguez, que se presenta actualmente por diferentes recintos universitarios.

El equipo de Ballesteros planea llevar a España, la obra "La Madonna con el corazón de piedra", de Abner Morat.



□ Estudiantes de arquitectura de la Universidad Politécnica de Puerto Rico se lanzarán hoy al rescate de los espacios peatonales de Bayamón.

hoy sábado, a las 3:00 p.m., con una caminata al municipio de Bayamón, vestidos como unos "Jardineros Anarquistas", título por donde de su proyecto de intervención en la ciudad como parte de la programación de MAM Proyectos.

Osmar Meliá, uno de los jardineros, explica que este proyecto parte de la iniciativa de crear un espacio humano en la ciudad de donde el peatón ha sido excluido totalmente por el vehículo, creando una ruta de recuperación del espacio olvidado además por un trazo que recorrerá la ruta pasada dentro de su proyecto.

"El espacio de estacionamiento que es de nuestro por 18, y como parte de la iniciativa muestra de que fuimos de la arquitectura o el arte, recuperamos y recuperamos la ciudad", declarará

incorporar esta nueva estraza humana perdida a la ciudad. Mañana se creará la segunda parte del proyecto al intervenir dentro de la ruta que trabajamos a nivel macro, el sitio donde vamos a intervenir áreas dentro de nuestro recorrido desde Bayamón hasta Hato Rey", declaró Meliá.

El público asistirá con estos jardineros a conquistar 12 espacios que arrebatarán a los automóviles, ayudados por su conceptualidad y profesor visitante de arquitectura, el filandante Marco Casagrande. El punto de reunión será la calle 18 de la urbanización Brindley-Durán, frente al parque Jungla, detrás del Bayamón Shopping Center. También el público se podrá unir a los jardineros del proyecto anarquista que da lugar a la obra.

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EL NUEVO DÍA - SÁBADO, 12 DE OCTUBRE DE 2002

Arquitectos jóvenes al rescate

Por la Redacción de Por Dentro

Estudiantes de arquitectura de la Universidad Politécnica de Puerto Rico han convocado un grupo denominado *Jardineros Anarquistas* para denunciar la poca importancia que muestra ciudades otorgan al peatón. Sus actividades están dirigidas por el arquitecto Marco Casagrande, de la firma Casagrande y Rinaldi, de Filadelfia.

El grupo efectuará una presentación e simulación pública hoy a las 3:00 p.m., partiendo del Parque Yagga que queda dentro del Bayamón Shopping Center. Este evento forma parte del Proyecto PR-02 que organiza MAM Proyectos, bajo la curaduría de MAM Proyectos.

La percepción que altera el trabajo de los *Jardineros Anarquistas* se centra en la necesidad de humanizar el espacio urbano de Bayamón, recordando que peatones y condiciones inhumanas del de-

trabajo el balance ecológico y la salud del hombre contemporáneo. La aspiración final es reducir la "hipertrofia" de una ciudad más green.

El evento presentará música física y simbólica en la que el sitio por el cual se

Finaliza "Exodo"

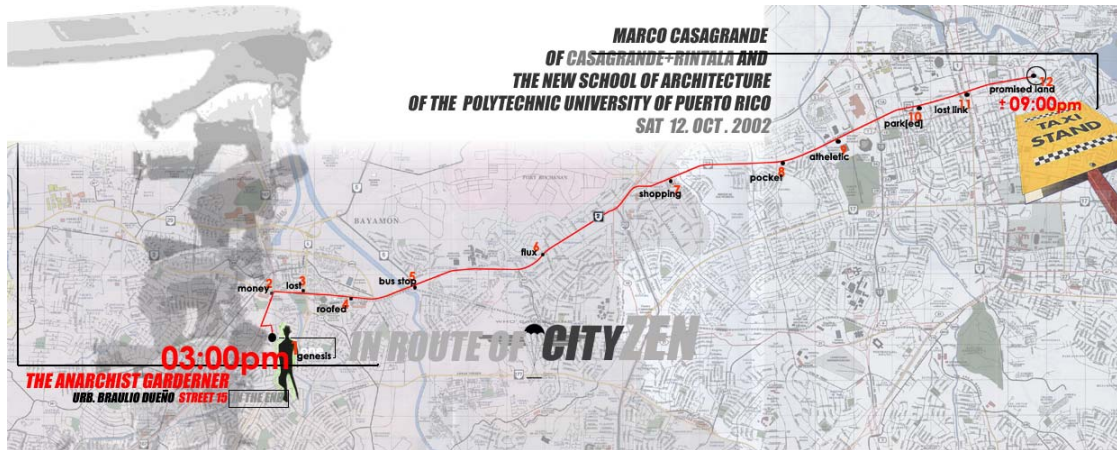
La exhibición de fotografías *Exodo*, del reconocido fotógrafo israelí Shabtai Shalev, llega a su fin. El 20 del mes en curso es el último día que permanecerá abierta al público.

La exposición presenta fotografías de la humanidad en tránsito. Dividida en cuatro partes, se explora la vida de los emigrantes y refugiados, de las diversas regiones del mundo.

La muestra permanecerá abierta en las salas 2 & 3 del Museo de las Américas. El Museo está ubicado en el segundo piso del Antiguo Cuartel de Infantería de Bayamón, en el Viejo San Juan, en horario de martes a domingo de 10am a 6pm.



En la foto, un concepto artístico de las complicaciones que viven los peatones.





Illust. 9: public and pedestrians watched the Anarchist gardeners in action, as they marked down the space occupied by the car, in preparation for laying out a garden.



Illust. 10: One of the many finished Zen gardens, this one with rust and rusted pieces.



Illust. 11: Ephemeral gardens challenged traffic, while simultaneously making their presence evident within the city, in this case, with smoke.



Illust. 12: Ice and chalk dust proved to be an effective “garden” in the middle of a heavily congested highway. Hernando sits tired, drinking some water.

