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### Barcelona's Tres Turons: three hills and three cruelties

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Abstract:	<p>As uncertainty increasingly characterises urbanisation processes, critically addressing a design project as an isolated object after completion does not satisfy the need for criticism to reflect larger urban transformation projects during their unfolding. On the example of the Tres Turons Park project in Barcelona this critique attempts to stage criticism 'in the meantime', benefitting from a moment in which the project is on hold. The authors involved students of two consecutive master courses into the enquiry and the formulation of a grounded position. Proffered by methods extracted from literary theory and site thinking the authors build an argument to challenge the boldness of the project's ecological narrative which they claim stands in the way of a more fruitful urban transformation. This knowledge raised is proposed to be reintroduced into the ongoing process, to possibly allow for improvement of the project.</p>

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3 **main text (now 5070 words incl endnotes and biblio refs)**

4 Urban transformation often unfolds over long time spans, with opportunities for single design  
5 projects arising one after another, often incrementally within larger geographical frames, under  
6 different authorities, with changing contexts, conditions, and concerns. Two decades into the 21<sup>st</sup>  
7 century, an epoch in which uncertainty increasingly characterises urbanisation processes, critically  
8 addressing a design project as an isolated object does not satisfy the need for criticism to reflect  
9 larger urban transformation projects. Those complex projects invite for pushing criticism far beyond  
10 work analysis. To do so, the authors expand on previous critiques of urban transformation projects  
11 published in this journal's UTS section: The critique of the High Line in New York City (De Block et al.  
12 2019: 4-7) reflects both the design project of the very site (Gulsrud and Steiner: 82-87) and the  
13 urban upgrading strategy which has spurred similar projects elsewhere (Davis and Gray: 74-81); this  
14 two-tier critique proposes to comprehend the complexity of the High Line from two different  
15 vantage points. The critique of the Ile de Nantes in the French city of Nantes uses a transformation  
16 analysis, composed by situational micro-narratives and semiotic interpretation, to evaluate this  
17 project's evolutionary design as a 'method for the meantime' of the emerging urban district,  
18 between the active port and lively neighbourhood (Diedrich and Dahl 2016: 72-83).

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22 The present critique of the Tres Turons project in Barcelona aims to evaluate the ongoing urban  
23 transformation of a sequence of small hills, partly built-up, partly overgrown, situated on the edge of  
24 Barcelona's districts Horta-Guinardó and Gràcia. It turns the authors' frustration about the pending  
25 status of the project into an opportunity for conceptualising 'critique in the meantime', i.e. in the  
26 absence of decisions following up on a design competition, judged in April 2019. Instead of waiting  
27 for the project to take shape and afford critique in the conventional sense, the authors decided to  
28 shape critique to afford a project-in-the-becoming – they combine designerly site thinking with an  
29 approach from literature studies and affect theory to expand landscape architectural design  
30 criticism. Acknowledging that projects in a state of limbo are common in urban transformation  
31 nowadays, the authors intend to test how academic critique could capitalise on this 'meantime' to  
32 raise knowledge for improving future project trajectories. So doing the authors hope to contribute to  
33 the development of academic critique as a heuristic technique to accompany long-term urban  
34 transformation practice (Kahn and Diedrich 2019: 10–17), extracting and reinjecting into this  
35 practice' knowledge on the go' (Bylund 2019: 40-47) or 'working knowledges' (Nowotny et al. 2003  
36 and 2001, Pickstone 2007: 489-516). Such forms of knowledge, the authors speculate, can trigger  
37 qualified adjustments of projects' while underway', when their contexts, conditions and concerns  
38 have changed over time. Academic critique being understood as impartial (i.e. not subject to  
39 stakeholders' views) but positioned (i.e. not subject to the presumed objectivism of science) may  
40 then offer guidance to practice and can be seen in the context of transdisciplinary, even  
41 transformative science (Nowotny 2016; Schneidewind and Singer-Brodowski: 2013), targeted to  
42 raise change-oriented knowledge in response to the societal challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### 43 44 45 46 47 Activating the impasse

48  
49 In September 2018, Barcelona's municipal government announced an international competition (1)  
50 to define a unique masterplan for the Tres Turons based on the planning requirements of drafted in  
51 the current Barcelona Masterplan (2). This urban planning modification (3) suggests conceiving a  
52 future park embracing the hilltops of Carmel, Rovira and Creueta del Coll, asking for green structures  
53 and biodiversity development, leisure activities, water and energy issues; and it also supports the  
54 erasure of the informal settlement built in the seventies and expelling residents to a new  
55 development area nearby, in Can Baró, one of the eleven neighborhood of the Horta Guinardó  
56 district. This brief seemed compelling enough to the authors to invite their students to critically  
57 investigate the Tres Turons project in the autumn of 2018 (4), at the same moment as nine invited  
58 competitors (5) were working on their entries. During the next course iteration in the autumn of  
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3 2019, the authors did so again. By then, three winners had been announced (6), each for one of  
4 three sections the authorities had created within the competition site (7). Until the time of writing,  
5 the process has been pending, and during the course the full competition material was not publicly  
6 available. That is why the authors invited representatives of the competing teams to lecture for the  
7 students, to share drawings and explanations for educational purposes. The present critique is built  
8 upon insights from these sources.  
9

### 10 Site stories and site thinking

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13 This critique kickstarts knowledge generation through the reading of the Tres Turons project as  
14 being stuck. This status is termed an 'impasse' by literary scholar Lauren Berlant (2011), who draws  
15 on theories of affect to conceive of the present in new ways and forge responses to it, eventually  
16 ways out of the impasse – which is what the authors expect to offer to those involved in the project.  
17

18  
19 In a situation of impasse, Berlant observes relations of 'cruel optimism', a theoretical concept the  
20 authors will use to track forces at play in the Tres Turons project. In affect theory, optimism is the  
21 attachment to an idea of the future, a dream of a better life, a fantasy about how the world could  
22 improve. Optimism is cruel when that very fantasy stands in the way of turning life to the better, if  
23 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant 2011: 1). At the start of 21<sup>st</sup>  
24 century, dominated by economic, ecological, and social turbulences, Berlant takes stock with the  
25 'good life' promises of European and US-American post-war boom-times, of upward mobility, job  
26 security, political and social equality. She scrutinises our attachment to this fantasy and the cruelty it  
27 produces when reality does not add up to it, when 'we dream of swimming toward a beautiful  
28 horizon, but in truth, we are constantly "dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain  
29 obscure."' (Hsu 2018) Still, Berlant values the impasse as a 'temporary housing' (Berlant 2011: 5), a  
30 moment of withholding in which it is possible to notice and judge the cruelty of optimistic  
31 attachment – how much suffering? What legitimises it? When to question its fundamentals? This is  
32 how adjustments surface, first in getting beyond the impassivity the impasse imposes, then in  
33 identifying, discarding, or replacing good-life fantasies. Following Berlant's literary techniques, the  
34 authors retell the story of the Tres Turons while pointing at three cruelties and distinguishing a  
35 good-life fantasy, to prompt discussion, and possibly, adjustment.  
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38  
39 Site thinking methodology as defined by Burns and Kahn (2005) has guided the enquiry of the  
40 empirical material, i.e. the competition brief, the nine competitors' entries, the site today as  
41 experienced through site visits, its larger geographical environment, its recent design interventions  
42 and its longer urban history. Even if designers commonly address 'site' as the plot they receive from  
43 a client to shape and build, with clear boundaries and no permission to intervene anywhere beyond,  
44 Burns and Kahn point out that designers generally direct their attention to features, systems and  
45 spheres that lie out of the delimited area of intervention – on the one hand, because those larger  
46 areas influence the plot given to the designers, and, on the other hand, because the designers'  
47 creative acts have an effect on areas beyond the locale slated for design. To comprehend all three  
48 areas when studying the Tres Turons site from a designerly vantage point, the authors adopt Burns  
49 and Kahn's terminology and call the site in its property lines the area of control, the other two  
50 respectively the areas of influence and of effect, while also acknowledging that neither of the two  
51 latter need be physical alone – in this critique immaterial realms such as history, memory, and  
52 societal convictions surface as forces to include into the scrutiny.  
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### 55 A tale of seven hills

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58 The 2019 winners' announcement (6) shows a rendering which situates the competition site within  
59 its larger environment (fig. 1): a series of hills within a dense urban fabric, situated on a broad slope,  
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3 reaching from the Collserola Mountains to the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, this view embraces the  
4 particular topography, vegetation cover, and urban practices of seven hills that have given rise, over  
5 the last century, to a series of parks (fig. 2-4): Guinardó Park was built in 1918 on the Carmel hillside,  
6 Park Güell 1926 on the Turó de la Rovira hillside, Parc de Monterols in 1947 on the Monterols  
7 hilltop, Parc dels Tres Turons in 1953 on the Carmel and La Rovira hilltops. Guinardó Park was  
8 renovated in 1977, Parc del Putxet was created in 1978 on the Putxet hilltop, and Parc de la Creueta  
9 del Coll in 1987 on the El Coll hilltop. Each park relates to a hill as a figure of its own right, as an area  
10 of control relating to the larger landscape as an area of influence (the series of hills, the slope, the  
11 mountains) while generating areas of effect reaching from the nearby districts and their residents (to  
12 which the parks provide health, wellbeing, and space for leisure activities), to the city as a whole (in  
13 offering viewpoints and routes for tourists), to the Catalan society (as symbols of identification for a  
14 particular urbanism). (fig. xx-xx) To understand the current project's relationship to site, it is  
15 elucidating to stage it within the panorama of previous designerly activities that have so far shaped  
16 the seven hills, and to unpack the site reading practices of the involved designers.

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20 *Topography, watercourses, vegetation cover, and agricultural landscapes* have been main areas of  
21 influence for Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier's and Nicolas Maria Rubió i Tudurí's historical Guinardó  
22 Park, designed as one of the first leisure parks in Barcelona at the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The  
23 classicism-inspired Mediterranean garden focuses on water and terraces as the main feature, using  
24 vineyards to reverence the agricultural past of the site, while structuring an uphill path along the axis  
25 of an old stream, flowing through various channels, fountains, basins and pools. The Park remains a  
26 magnificent work of terraces, stairs and passages that performs the transition from the city's heavily  
27 built-up terrain, sloping up to the surrounding mountains, to the Mitja Lluna and the Sant Joan  
28 viewpoints, which offer impressive and yet little exploited views of Barcelona.

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31 Gaudí's accurate site reading of the *watershed and topography* of the Carmel hillside in early 20<sup>th</sup>  
32 century has been internationally praised, contributing to Park Güell's notoriety (Hale 2017).  
33 Forestier's and Rubió's historic Guinardó Park, although less well known, takes up an important  
34 cultural heritage with its path to the Cuento Fountain, a spring of the traditional fontades (8) system,  
35 dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which provided water and leisure to the neighbourhoods  
36 around.

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39 Physical traces of *industrial activities* also inspired some designers in more recent times. This is  
40 particularly true for the team of Martorell, Bohigas & Mackay who shaped the Park of Creueta del  
41 Coll (1987), reusing an old quarry to become a public swimming pool. This project was the victory of  
42 neighbourhood activism, preventing the development of a parking lot. Instead, a place for leisure  
43 and events arose, also featuring public art (one of Eduardo Chillida's wind comb sculptures and a  
44 monolith by Ellsworth Kelly are positioned in the park). It gained international recognition as a  
45 symbol of the city's renewal in the wake of the Olympic Games of 1992, clearly witnessing the city's  
46 ambition to 'monumentalise' the periphery (9). This park's area of effect reaches far beyond its  
47 physical limits and its physicality, encompassing the whole of the city as a network of public spaces,  
48 laid out as landmarks of landscape architecture and urban design, while impacting urban  
49 development ideas internationally, and the international tourism economy.

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52 Two contemporary design projects, realised prior to the Tres Turons competition, actively refer to  
53 site-specific *occupations and social practices*, namely the Batteries Park by Imma Jansana, Conchita  
54 de la Villa & Robert de Paauw, built in 2011, and the Street Square by Bosch Capdeferro, completed  
55 in 2016. Both projects have been appraised internationally (10), and they clearly shape the hilltop of  
56 the Rovira hill, the most prominent of the three hills forming the Tres Turons.

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3 Just as the Park of Creueta del Coll, which 'reaches' into the district of Gràcia by means of a historic  
4 tramway connection and turning this district into its area of effect, the Batteries Park features areas  
5 of effect near and far: the city's leisure landscape has been enriched for the local population as  
6 much as for international visitors, in particular young people investing the Rovira hilltop for hanging  
7 out while also staging themselves and the site's overwhelming view over the city on social media. As  
8 the park's attractivity had unexpectedly changed the flows of visitors towards the hilltop, it sparked  
9 yet another project. Visitors on their way up had to pass a small residential pocket, resulting from  
10 earlier informal settlement, whose intimate spaces along its main artery, Marià Labèrnia street,  
11 were not made for hosting the frenetic pilgrimage. An urban intervention aimed to mitigate the  
12 growing contrast between the public hilltop and the private neighborhood. Bosch Capdeferro  
13 Architects transformed Marià Labèrnia street into a viable spatial transition in reinterpreting  
14 traditional Mediterranean open space typologies and elaborating the nuances between public and  
15 private realms through a street lined by small squares on terraces – turning it into a 'Street Square'.  
16 This reveals the project's areas of effect: the street channels the flux of visitors on their way to the  
17 hilltop, and it impacts urban mobility in a tourist city; the succession of terraced squares offers  
18 spaces for retreat and rest, so that the project also caters for an improved public space for local and  
19 other audiences, adding to the network of open urban spaces Barcelona is famous for. Further, the  
20 designers managed to transform the settlement around Maria Labèrnia street with a minimum of  
21 means – no buildings were erased or replaced, no residents expelled – because the prime areas of  
22 influence were everything that existed on site, be it topography, tourism flows or residential  
23 practices.  
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28 Allowed to encompass 'their hill' as an area of control, the designers responded by creatively  
29 relating to an array of areas of influence, from natural situations to social practices, which in turn  
30 prompted the activation of various areas of effect, reaching from the very local to the international,  
31 from the physical to the immaterial.  
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#### 34 Cruelty One: chopping up the site

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36 It is easy to imagine how the relational attitude of the previously described design works could have  
37 been adopted again for the Tres Turons, distinguishing the three hills of Turó del Coll, Turó del  
38 Carmel and Turó de la Rovira as areas of control to be composed by three individual park figures.  
39 This was already stated in the 1953 Regional Plan (11). The designs could have referred to various  
40 areas of influence and of effect within the larger urban landscape and the spheres of international  
41 urban development and tourism. Instead, the competition brief represses the recognition of each hill  
42 as a geomorphological unit and merges them into an artificial entity which in turn is chopped up into  
43 three different sectors: sector 1 comprises the structure of paths around the hills, sector two the  
44 edges of the Park, and sector three the former Can Baró quarry slated to accommodate a new  
45 residential district. Reconceptualising the Tres Turons this way means reducing them into  
46 functionally bound areas of control – paths, edges, houses – that do not stage the three hills in the  
47 first place. This fragmentation prevents rather than it encourages the designers to relate to wider  
48 areas of influence. Instead, it invites to focus on aspects of the future park and its closest surrounds,  
49 and it dissuades from looking at the urban landscape of hills, slopes, and mountains, and at larger  
50 societal systems and worlds of thought. Indeed, only two finalists of the competition, the teams of  
51 Jansana, de la Villa & de Paauw, and of Jornet Llop Pastor, dared to challenge the brief in their  
52 proposals, transgressing the limits of the competition with suggestive strategies. They did not qualify  
53 for a winning ticket. Prompted by the definition of three sectors of intervention, the client chose  
54 three winners, one for each sector, contributing to even further disintegration of the site. Needless  
55 to say that all three winning projects have played 'by the rules' and worked within the limits of the  
56 brief. It remains unclear, as of now, how to get the puzzle back together, how to lend the urban  
57 spaces of the Tres Turons the same power as the most lauded park precedents on the seven hills.  
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3 Giving up on a powerful concept for an area of control reduced the site into fragmented bits and  
4 bears the risk to foreclose areas of effect on the urban and international level.  
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6 A history of practices and resources  
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9 Apart from their unique geography and park design the Tres Turons play a role in the history of  
10 Barcelona, with numerous links to the human settlements around the Mediterranean, of  
11 colonisation and decolonisation, of European political ideologies and conflicts, and of the resulting  
12 social practices. From a site thinking point of view, these are also areas of influence, i.e. realms and  
13 reasons for which the site got shaped by other actors than designers, over time (fig 5). It is  
14 elucidating to unpack how some designers have included the conflicts and contradictions of history  
15 into their projects while asking if and how this mindset could translate into the actual project.  
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17  
18 The seven hills have historically been considered as providing ecosystem services to the city: food,  
19 wood, water, goods. When the Rovira hilltop was excavated as an archaeological site in 1931 (12), it  
20 revealed the remains of a walled prehistoric town. Laietans are thought to have been dwelling all  
21 three hills crowns exploiting its natural resources, namely natural water fountains, bronze mines  
22 and local flora and fauna. After this prehistoric residential activity, the hills remained mostly free  
23 from human settlements but came to be exploited as quarries and as agricultural grounds for  
24 vineyards and timber providing forests (Giravent I Sunyer, 1998). As late as in the 18th century the  
25 first summerhouses of the Barcelona bourgeoisie spread along the sunny side of the foothills looking  
26 for better living conditions beyond the walled old town. The proximity to historically exploited  
27 springs (fontades), the fresh sea breeze and the open views to the city soon sparked real state  
28 pressure over agricultural land uses. Urbanisation especially invested sites around the fontades  
29 downgrading the rest of the hills' terrain to exploitation purposes.  
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31  
32 At the hilltop of the Turó de la Rovira a set of military infrastructures were built during the War of  
33 Cuba in 1898, even though this exceptional location was not used for military purposes until four  
34 decades later. Following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1937, Republicans took advantage of the  
35 existing structures and built defences to react to fascist attacks, first coming from the Francoist army  
36 and later by the Italian and German aircraft. After the war, the anti-aircraft batteries were  
37 abandoned until a wave of the mass immigration of 1950 transformed this enclave and the whole of  
38 the hill into a slum settlement, called 'the three canons' (los tres cañones). This post-war migration  
39 instigated further settlements on vacant land in and around Barcelona, indifferently occupying hills  
40 crests, beaches, riversides, and green spaces. The city administration partially recognised the thread  
41 of informal housing both for the city and its population. It developed new districts of high-density  
42 social housing under the CIAM architectural guidelines (Miquel, 1952) while approving new town  
43 planning aiming at the consolidation of the former green areas (Pla Comarcal de 1953). Those  
44 measures were however minor in regards of the phenomena of 'barraquismo', the spreading of  
45 slums taking place in the city until the 1990s. Over time, the slum settlers gradually consolidated and  
46 upgraded the initial shacks into self-constructed places of living, using community spirit and hands-  
47 on efforts to define a distinct way of building up the city, local infrastructure, and public spaces.  
48 Communitarians if not rebels the resulting neighbourhoods managed to achieve political acceptance,  
49 and when democracy was instated after Franco's death in 1975 many informal districts were  
50 legalised, except the ensembles built on hilltops which according to the urban planning regulations  
51 were defined as green spaces – those were slated for demolition.  
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56 When the Batteries Park was built the designers used physical traces of the slums which had been  
57 built into the former military structure. With sensitivity, precision and respect the team around  
58 Jansana selected what to remove and what to preserve, to enhance public access to the crest of the  
59 Carmel hill. Whatever would not endanger accessibility, was maintained in its rough quality and now  
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3 reveals the former occupations: pavements and tiles of the slum houses, concrete foundations and  
4 thick walls of the anti-aircraft batteries. Interpretation panels informing about the details of its  
5 history have been added by the Historic Museum of Barcelona (13), who runs the site. This history  
6 constitutes the area of influence of the Batteries Park. Yet, its topical use as a popular hilltop park  
7 has impacted the way history is apprehended – on-site instead of in a closed museum.  
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#### 10 Cruelty Two: hiding history

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12 It is astonishing to notice how history as an area of influence has been overlooked in the topical Tres  
13 Turons project: the winners' announcement highlights leisure, green structure development,  
14 biodiversity, water and energy issues while leaving the site's multi-faceted historical values and  
15 physical realities unnoticed. Arguably, the urban fabric of an intimate neighbourhood along the main  
16 tourist itinerary might seem uncomfortable if not inappropriate. Its rebel inhabitants and its status  
17 of being devoted for demolition by a former planning regulation does accentuate this idea.  
18 Nevertheless, as a project in extension of the Batteries Park, were the experience of historical  
19 conflicts got staged, it is cruel to see how an astonishing aspect of the settling history of this site is  
20 sacrificed for the sake of the popular yet ahistorical narrative of wellbeing and lush nature.  
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#### 23 Cruelty Three: wasting resources

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25 Even when mobilising some sympathy for the removal of small-scale residential functions on the  
26 hilltop of la Rovira, which for its prominent situation might better suit public uses, the removal of  
27 the physical structures altogether remains questionable. Again, one of the previous design projects –  
28 which is slated for demolition with the settlement it meant to improve – delivers an example for  
29 how to avoid wasting resources. The Street Square project was driven by an economy of means and  
30 showcases how to cater for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century sustainability agenda. Not only have existing buildings  
31 and infrastructures an economic value worth preserving, they also materialise the efforts of the  
32 many who have shaped this place, from quarry to slum to district, from paths to streets to Square  
33 Street, with a future in sight that could capitalise on these resources instead of throwing them out in  
34 order to build 'nature'.  
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#### 37 The green lung - a fantasy?

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40 What motivates the three cruelties? The Tres Turons project brief forwards nature as the prime  
41 concern of the future Park, exemplified by the metaphor of becoming its 'green lung' or its second  
42 green lung to be accurate. The quote's brief echoes the title of the winning proposal for the  
43 Ciutadella Park back in 1872 where Josep Fontserè stated that gardens are to cities what lungs are to  
44 the human body. Metabolistic terminology points at an organicist world view, popular in current  
45 times of ecological crisis (De Block et al. 2019: 4-7). This prompts a question: Why should the Tres  
46 Turons act as the city's green lung? After scrutiny of the broader urban landscape, with its seven  
47 hills, the urbanised slope and the surrounding mountains, the future Park seems a minor green  
48 structural element. The affordance for vegetation, oxygen production and urban climate  
49 improvement would be much higher on the Collserola and Montjuic mountains. Organicistic  
50 approaches are known for their risk to leave socio-cultural concerns unaccounted. What if the site's  
51 heavy history were inspiring future tourism itineraries and cater for experiences beyond sheer  
52 merriment? (fig. x Ana Zabala). What if residential and touristic uses would be spatially  
53 renegotiated? (fig. x Eva coexistence, Rebecca association) What if tourism would generate new  
54 local economies? (fig. x Stella Maria Latas Love story) Such trajectories do not evolve from a green  
55 lung vision. They would, however, dim the cruelties observed above. According to Lauren Berlant,  
56 cruel optimism calls for revisiting its foundational fantasies – especially during times of impasse:  
57 what if the 'green lung' were a fantasy worth adjusting?  
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'Maybe relinquishing or recalibrating our fantasies of the good life does not lead to absolute darkness. It can simply be a matter of coming to grips with different possibilities of communion, figuring out who benefits from our collective weariness.' (Hsu 2018)

For Peer Review Only

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4 Submission for JoLA/ Under The Sky  
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8 Title  
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10 Barcelona's Tres Turons: three hills and three cruelties  
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29 biographies (max. 100 words)  
30

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44 **abstract (150w)**

45 As uncertainty increasingly characterises urbanisation processes, critically addressing a design  
46 project as an isolated object after completion does not satisfy the need for criticism to reflect  
47 larger urban transformation projects during their unfolding. On the example of the Tres Turons  
48 Park project in Barcelona this critique attempts to stage criticism 'in the meantime', benefitting  
49 from a moment in which the project is on hold. The authors involved students of two  
50 consecutive master courses into the enquiry and the formulation of a grounded position.  
51 Proffered by methods extracted from literary theory and site thinking the authors build an  
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4 argument to challenge the boldness of the project's ecological narrative which they claim stands  
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6 in the way of a more fruitful urban transformation. This knowledge raised is proposed to be  
7  
8 reintroduced into the ongoing process, to possibly allow for improvement of the project.  
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13 **keywords (5)**

14 urban transformation, green infrastructure, heritage, site thinking, cruel optimism  
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19 **project data**

20  
21 *Project name*

22  
23 Tres Turons

24  
25 *Location*

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27 Barcelona, Catalonia

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29 *Client*

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31 Municipality of Barcelona

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33 *Surface area*

34  
35 122 hectares

36  
37 *Designers*

38  
39 Winners

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41 — Agence Ter, Ana Coello de Llobet, SLP, i AudingIntraesa, SA *Cohabitar natures / cohabiting*  
42  
43 *natures*  
44

45  
46 — Estudi Martí Franch Arquitectura del Paisatge, SL *Ordre i aventura / Order and adventure*  
47

48  
49 — IRBIS, SCOB, Idom Consulting *El camí és la natura / Nature is the path*

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51 Finalists, in complement to the above mentioned winners

52  
53 — AldayJover

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55 — BatlleRoig

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57 — Isabel Benasser  
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4 — Henrich, Data, Domingo, Aguiló and Cíclica

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6 — Jansana, de la Villa, de Paauw

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8 — JornetLlopPastor

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10 *Design period*

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12 Competition launched September 2018, prequalification of the nine teams December 2018,  
13  
14 three winners announced April 2019, ongoing

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25 *main text (now 5900 words incl endnotes)*

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30 Urban transformation often unfolds over long time spans, with opportunities for single design  
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32 projects arising one after another, often incrementally within larger geographical frames, under  
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34 different authorities, with changing contexts, conditions, and concerns. Two decades into the  
35  
36 21<sup>st</sup> century, an epoch in which uncertainty increasingly characterises urbanisation processes,  
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38 critically addressing a design project as an isolated object after completion does not satisfy the  
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40 need for criticism to reflect larger urban transformation projects during their unfolding. Those  
41  
42 complex projects invite for pushing criticism far beyond the classical work analysis of  
43  
44 completed projects, unlocking its potential for reflecting upon projects *before* their completion,  
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46 using the long timespans of multi-stakeholder negotiation processes to offer critical thought and  
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48 guidance from academia, in particular from design research, to co-create urban spaces.

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53 The present critique aims to evaluate the project of the Tres Turons (meaning 'three hills' in  
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55 Catalan), a project whose emergence the authors have observed over the past years as design  
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57 researchers and teachers. In September 2018, Barcelona's municipal government announced an  
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4 international competition [1] to define a masterplan for the Tres Turons based on the planning  
5 requirements drafted in the current Barcelona Masterplan [2]. This urban planning modification  
6  
7 [3] suggested conceiving a unique park embracing the three hilltops of Carmel, Rovira and  
8  
9 Creueta del Coll, situated on the edge of Barcelona's districts Horta-Guinardó and Gràcia, half  
10  
11 way between the coast and the Collserola mountains on the city's sloping terrain (Fig. 1).  
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14 Topographically these hilltops form part of a series of seven hills (Fig. 2).  
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19  
20 The 2018 competition brief asked for green structures and biodiversity development, leisure  
21 activities, integration of water and energy issues; the resulting park should become the city's  
22  
23 'green lung', a metaphor that was heavily communicated by the client. The brief also supported  
24  
25 the erasure of informal housing and a recently redesigned residential ensemble at Maria  
26  
27 Làbernia street while asking for the design of new homes for the expelled families in the Can  
28  
29 Baró district, at the foot of one of the hills. For its complexity of ecological, infrastructural and  
30  
31 social topics the brief seemed compelling enough to the authors to invite their students to  
32  
33 critically investigate the Tres Turons project in the autumn of 2018 [4], at the same moment as  
34  
35 nine invited competitors [5] were working on their design proposals. During the next course  
36  
37 iteration in the autumn of 2019, the authors did so again. By then, the client had divided the  
38  
39 competition site into three thematic sectors; and three winners had been announced, one for  
40  
41 each sector [6]. As the process was pending the full competition material was not publicly  
42  
43 available. Therefore, the authors invited representatives of the competing teams to lecture for  
44  
45 their students and share drawings for educational purposes. Until the time of writing no progress  
46  
47 occurred, and no competition material could be published.  
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53 Instead of cultivating unproductive frustration about the status of the project, pending since one  
54  
55 and a half years, the authors decided to use the opportunity and conceptualise 'critique in the  
56  
57 meantime'. In the absence of decisions for how the three winners would merge their proposal  
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59 into one park design and implement it, the authors refrained from waiting for the completed  
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4 project to afford critique in the conventional sense; instead they opted to adapt critique to a  
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6 project-in-the-becoming. On the one hand, they did so through their teaching, in sensibilising  
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8 the forthcoming generation of designers to develop critical mindsets, learn techniques of  
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10 criticism and raise their voices exactly in the period when the future is still open, when  
11  
12 discursive processes can help improve the development of a project – some of this paper's  
13  
14 visuals showcase the students' positions. On the other hand, the authors combine designerly site  
15  
16 thinking with an approach from literature studies and affect theory, easing the interpretation of  
17  
18 interactions between space, narratives, and human attachment to ideas. Acknowledging that  
19  
20 projects in a longer state of limbo are common in urban transformation nowadays, the authors  
21  
22 intend to test how academic critique could capitalise on this 'meantime' to raise knowledge for  
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24 improving the course of the very project it deals with (instead of learning lessons through  
25  
26 critique from one completed project to a next one). So doing the authors hope to contribute to  
27  
28 the development of academic critique as a heuristic technique to accompany long-term urban  
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30 transformation practice [7], extracting and reinjecting into this practice 'knowledge on the go' [8]  
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32 or 'working knowledges'[9]. Such forms of knowledge, the authors speculate, can trigger  
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34 qualified adjustments of projects 'while underway', when their contexts, conditions and concerns  
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36 change over time. Academic critique being understood as impartial (i.e. not subject to  
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38 stakeholders' views) but positioned (i.e. not subject to scientific claims of objectivity [10] may  
39  
40 then offer guidance to practice and can be seen in the context of transdisciplinary, even  
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42 transformative science [11], targeted to raise change-oriented knowledge in response to the  
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44 societal challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.  
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### 50 **Activating the impasse**

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54 This critique kickstarts knowledge generation through the reading of the Tres Turons project as  
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56 being stuck: with three winners expected to forge one project, with a conflict-laden demolition  
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58 of recently redesigned spaces, with a simplistic ecological narrative. This status prompts  
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4 interpretation as an 'impasse', as defined by literary scholar Lauren Berlant [12], who draws on  
5 theories of affect to conceive of the present in new ways and forge responses to it, eventually  
6 ways out of the impasse – which is what the authors expect to offer to those involved in the Tres  
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Turons project.

In a situation of impasse, Berlant observes relations of 'cruel optimism', a theoretical concept the authors will use to track forces at play in the Tres Turons project. In affect theory, optimism is the attachment to an idea of the future, a dream of a better life, a fantasy about how the world could improve. Optimism is cruel when that very fantasy stands in the way of turning life to the better, if 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'[13]. At the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century, dominated by economic, ecological, and social turbulences, Berlant takes stock of the 'good life' promises of European and US-American post-war boom-times, of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality. She scrutinises our attachment to this fantasy and the cruelty it produces when reality does not add up to it, when 'we dream of swimming toward a beautiful horizon, but in truth, we are constantly "dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure." [14] Still, Berlant values the impasse as a 'temporary housing'[15], a moment of withholding in which it is possible to notice and judge the cruelty of optimistic attachment – how much suffering? What legitimises it? When to question its fundamentals? This is how adjustments surface, first in getting beyond the impassivity the impasse imposes, then in identifying, discarding, or replacing good-life fantasies.

Transposing Berlant's literary technique into the world of urban planning and design, the authors retell the story of the Tres Turons along three cruelties and a good-life fantasy. These concepts are used as vehicles to critically review the actions emanating from the brief's intended end-scenario. They unfold their agency as mind openers, to help see the project in a new light, to revalue actions and objectives, to prompt discussion and readjust next steps before moving out of the impasse. This means that the impasse turns into the perfect moment for critique 'in the

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4 meantime'. It loses its connotation as a moment of frustration in which nothing advances and  
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6 instead allows to distinguish what might have slipped the radar of the client, the designers, the  
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8 public, in the frenzy of the process, namely the optimistic attachment to an overarching idea that  
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10 motivates dubious interventions. The chopping up of the site into spatial fractions, the hiding of  
11  
12 its historical conflicts, the wasting of its material and cultural resources seems cruel to the  
13  
14 authors. Theory of affect allows them to take seriously their emotional reactions to what  
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16 happens to the three hills and their relation to the people who inhabit or visit them. Spurred by  
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18 Berlant's theoretical framework the authors come to question the underlying ecological narrative  
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20 of the hill's development into the city's green lung, wondering if it does not stand in the way of a  
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22 more advantageous development and if considering it as a good-life fantasy would not help  
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24 move out of the impasse and open up for adjustments.  
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### 29 **Site stories and site thinking**

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33 To complement their analysis of narratives the authors needed a design research methodology to  
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35 grasp and interpret spatial qualities and relationships. Site thinking as defined by Burns and  
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37 Kahn [16] has guided their enquiry of the empirical material, more specifically the competition  
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39 brief, the nine competitors' entries, the site today as experienced through site visits, its larger  
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41 geographical environment, its recent design interventions and its longer urban history. Even if  
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43 designers commonly address 'site' as the plot they receive from a client to shape and build, with  
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45 clear boundaries and no permission to intervene anywhere beyond, Burns and Kahn point out  
46  
47 that designers generally direct their attention to features, systems and spheres that lie out of the  
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49 delimited area of intervention – on the one hand, because those larger areas influence the plot  
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51 given to the designers, and, on the other hand, because the designers' creative acts impact areas  
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53 beyond the locale slated for design. To comprehend all three areas when studying the Tres  
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55 Turons site from a designerly vantage point, the authors adopt Burns and Kahn's terminology  
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57 and call the site in its property lines the area of control, the other two respectively the areas of  
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4 influence and of effect [17], while also acknowledging that neither of the two latter need be  
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6 physical alone – in this critique immaterial realms such as history, memory, and societal  
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8 convictions surface as forces to include into the scrutiny, linking up to the literary interpretation  
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10 framework.  
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### 15 **A tale of seven hills**

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19 The 2019 winners' announcement shows a rendering which situates the competition site within  
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21 its urban environment (Fig. 3, 4) without however providing a panoramic view that would allow  
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23 to grasp the spatial relationships of the particular topography and its vegetation cover to the  
24  
25 surrounding city. The authors offer this view in this paper (Fig. 5-8). The brief also lacks  
26  
27 information about the urban practices, including design interventions, that have unfolded over  
28  
29 history on and around the hills, considered paramount by the authors and offered in this  
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31 paragraph. The project's critique in the light of cruel optimism relies precisely on the site's  
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33 socio-spatial complexity. Indeed the particular topographic situation of the hills has given rise,  
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35 over the last century, to a series of parks accommodating for various ecological functions, urban  
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37 practices and affective relationships: Guinardó Park was built in 1918 on the Rovira hillside  
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39 (and renovated in 1977), Park Güell 1926 on the Turó del Carmel hillside, Parc de Monterols in  
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41 1947 on the Monterols hilltop, Parc dels Tres Turons in 1953 on the Carmel and La Rovira  
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43 hilltops. Parc del Putxet was created in 1978 on the Putxet hilltop, and Parc de la Creueta del  
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45 Coll in 1987 on the El Coll hilltop. (Fig. 9-15) Each park relates to a hill as a figure of its own  
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47 right, as an area of control that links to the larger physical landscape as an area of influence (the  
48  
49 series of seven hills, the slope, the mountains) while generating socio-spatial areas of effect  
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51 reaching from the nearby districts and their residents (to which the parks provide health,  
52  
53 wellbeing, and space for leisure activities), to the city as a whole (in offering viewpoints and  
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55 routes for tourists), and to the Catalan society (as symbols of identification for a particular  
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57 urbanism). To understand the current project's cruel optimism, it is elucidating to situate it  
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4 within the sequence of previous projects and point at some crucial designerly narratives and  
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6 actions that have so far shaped the seven hills and their urban practices.  
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10 *The hills as local gardens and cultural landscapes.* Gaudí's accurate site reading of the  
11 watershed and topography of the Carmel hillside in early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been internationally  
12 praised, contributing to Park Güell's notoriety [18] (Fig. 12-14). Similarly, topography,  
13 watercourses, vegetation cover, and agricultural landscapes have been main areas of influence  
14 for Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier's and Nicolas Maria Rubió i Tudurí's historical Guinardó  
15 Park, designed as one of the first leisure parks in Barcelona at the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 9-  
16 11). The classicism-inspired Mediterranean garden focuses on water and terraces as the main  
17 feature, using vineyards to reverence the agricultural past of the site, while structuring an uphill  
18 path along the axis of an old stream, flowing through various channels, fountains, basins and  
19 pools. The Park remains a magnificent work of terraces, stairs and passages that performs the  
20 transition from the city's heavily built-up terrain, sloping up to the surrounding mountains and  
21 the Mitja Lluna and Sant Joan viewpoints, which offer impressive and yet little exploited views  
22 of Barcelona. Although less well known than Park Güell, the historic Guinardó Park takes up an  
23 important cultural heritage with its path to the Cuento Fountain, a spring of the traditional  
24 fontades [19] system, dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which provided water and leisure to  
25 the neighbourhoods around.  
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46 *The hills as post-industrial urban landscapes.* Physical traces of industrial activities also  
47 inspired some designers in more recent times. This is particularly true for the team of  
48 Martorell, Bohigas & Mackay who shaped the Park of Creueta del Coll (1987), reusing an old  
49 quarry to create a public swimming pool. This project was the victory of neighbourhood  
50 activism, preventing the development of a parking lot. Instead, a place for leisure and events  
51 arose, also featuring public art (one of Eduardo Chillida's wind comb sculptures and a monolith  
52 by Ellsworth Kelly are positioned in the park). It gained international recognition as a symbol of  
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4 the city's renewal in the wake of the Olympic Games of 1992, clearly witnessing the city's  
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6 ambition to 'monumentalise' the periphery [20]. This park's area of effect reaches far beyond its  
7  
8 physical limits and its physicality, encompassing the whole of the city as a network of public  
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10 spaces, laid out as landmarks of landscape architecture and urban design, while impacting urban  
11  
12 development ideas internationally, and the international tourism economy.  
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17 *The hills as trans-scalar places of encounter.* Two contemporary design projects, realised  
18  
19 shortly prior to the Tres Turons competition, actively refer to site-specific occupations and  
20  
21 social practices, namely the Batteries Park by Imma Jansana, Conchita de la Villa & Robert de  
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23 Paauw, built in 2011 (Fig. 16), and the Street Square by Bosch Capdeferro, completed in 2016  
24  
25 (Fig. 17-19). Both projects have been appraised internationally [21], and they characterise today  
26  
27 the hilltop of the Rovira hill, the most prominent of the three hills forming the Tres Turons.  
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31 Just as the Park of Creueta del Coll, which 'reaches' into the district of Gràcia by means of a  
32  
33 historic tramway connection, turning this district into its nearest-by area of effect, while also  
34  
35 attracting the international audiences of the post-Olympic Barcelona, the Batteries Park features  
36  
37 areas of effect near and far: it has enriched the city's leisure landscape for the local population as  
38  
39 much as for international visitors; in particular young people invest the Rovira hilltop for  
40  
41 hanging out while also staging themselves and the site's overwhelming view over the city on  
42  
43 social media. As the park's attractivity had unexpectedly changed the flows of visitors towards  
44  
45 the hilltop, it sparked yet another project. Visitors on their way up had to pass a small residential  
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47 pocket, a consolidated former informal settlement, whose intimate spaces unfold along its main  
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49 artery, Marià Labèrnia street. They were not made for hosting the frenetic pilgrimage and so an  
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51 urban intervention aimed to mitigate the growing contrast between the public hilltop and the  
52  
53 private neighborhood. Bosch Capdeferro Architects transformed Marià Labèrnia street into a  
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55 viable spatial transition in reinterpreting traditional Mediterranean open space typologies and  
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57 elaborating the nuances between public and private realms through a street lined by small  
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4 squares on terraces – turning it into a 'Street Square'. This reveals the project's areas of effect:  
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6 the street channels the flux of visitors on their way to the hilltop, and it impacts urban mobility  
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8 in a tourist city; the succession of terraced squares offers spaces for retreat and rest, so that the  
9  
10 project also caters for an improved public space for local and other audiences, adding to the  
11  
12 network of open urban spaces Barcelona is famous for. Further, the designers managed to  
13  
14 transform the settlement around Maria Labèrnia street with a minimum of means – no buildings  
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16 were erased or replaced, no residents expelled – because the prime areas of influence were  
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18 everything that existed on site, be it topography, tourism flows or residential practices.  
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23 In each of these projects the designers were allowed to encompass 'their hill' as an area of  
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25 control of its own right, with whatever they might find within it to respond creatively and  
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27 establishing an array of areas of influence, from natural situations to social practices, local or  
28  
29 international. These multi- and trans-scalar socio-spatial relationships in turn prompted the  
30  
31 activation of various areas of effect, reaching from the very local to the international, from the  
32  
33 physical to the immaterial. The respective narratives, of gardens and cultural landscapes, of  
34  
35 post-industrial urban spaces, of places of encounter between history and present, for locals and  
36  
37 visitors, seem to have been supported by an optimism that generated design interventions in  
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39 support of the hills' flourishing.  
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#### 44 **Cruelty One: chopping up the site**

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48 It is easy to imagine how the relational attitude of the previously described design works could  
49  
50 have been adopted again for the Tres Turons (Fig. 20), distinguishing the three hills of Turó del  
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52 Coll, Turó del Carmel and Turó de la Rovira as areas of control to be composed by three individual  
53  
54 park designs, as stated in the 1953 Regional Plan [22]. The designs could have referred to various  
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56 areas of influence and of effect within the larger urban landscape and the spheres of international  
57  
58 urban development and tourism. Instead, the 2018 competition brief represses the recognition of  
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4 each hill as a topographical unit and merges them into an artificial entity which however  
5  
6 distinguishes three functional sectors: sector one comprises the structure of paths around the hills,  
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8 sector two the edges of the Park, and sector three the former Can Baró quarry slated to  
9  
10 accommodate a new residential district. Reconceptualising the Tres Turons this way means  
11  
12 reducing them into mono-functional areas of control – paths, edges, and houses – that do not stage  
13  
14 the three hills any longer as complex socio-spatial realities within the Barcelona metropolis. This  
15  
16 fragmentation prevents rather than encourages the designers to relate to wider areas of influence.  
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18 Instead, it invites them to focus on aspects of the future park and its closest surrounds, and it  
19  
20 dissuades them from looking at the socio-spatial relationships of the hills, slopes, mountains,  
21  
22 metropolitan landscapes with their larger societal systems and worlds of thought. Indeed, only  
23  
24 two finalists of the competition, the teams of Jansana, de la Villa & de Paauw, and of Jornet Llop  
25  
26 Pastor, dared to challenge the brief in their proposals, transgressing the limits of the competition  
27  
28 with suggestive strategies: the first including the historical parks into a broader green  
29  
30 infrastructure to serve the nine districts around the hills and its neighbours, the second considering  
31  
32 Barcelona's seven hills and two mountains, Collserola and Montjuïc, to develop a serious  
33  
34 landscape ecology based management. They did not qualify for a winning ticket. Possibly  
35  
36 prompted by the definition of the three mono-functional sectors, the client chose three winners,  
37  
38 one for each sector, risking further disintegration of the site. All three winning projects played 'by  
39  
40 the rules' and worked within the limits of the brief, even if each project offers the potential to go  
41  
42 beyond. "Nature is the Path" provides a management project considering environmental aspects  
43  
44 and biodiversity preservation for the hilltops, "Order and Adventure" shines for its delicate  
45  
46 consideration of the small green patches on the hillside to be animated and co-produced by the  
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48 neighbouring communities, and "Cohabiting Natures" gives accurate responses to how the Can  
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50 Baró district could be designed and equipped with new dwellings to serve as the entrance to the  
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52 Tres Turons Park. It remains unclear, as of now, how to get the individual pieces back into the  
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54 puzzle, and consequently, how to lend the design of the Tres Turons the same power as the pre-  
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56 existing parks on the seven hills. The wish to focus on functions (paths, edges, and houses),  
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4 supporting an overall good-life fantasy, has led the client to give up on a powerful concept (each  
5 hill as an area of control). Reducing the site into fragmented bits and pieces does not only appear  
6 as cruel, it also bears the risk to foreclose powerful effects on metropolitan and international  
7 levels. This park could offer more than fixes to three functional issues.  
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### 14 **Cruelty Two: hiding the history of practices**

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19 Largely unnoticed in the competition brief, the three hills play a prominent role in the history of  
20 Barcelona, linked to human settlements around the Mediterranean, to colonisation and  
21 decolonisation, to European political ideologies and conflicts. From a site thinking point of  
22 view, these are also areas of influence, i.e. realms and reasons for which the site got shaped by  
23 various actors, over time. It is elucidating to unpack how some designers have included the  
24 conflicts and contradictions of history into their projects while asking if and how this mindset  
25 could translate into the actual project.  
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36 The seven hills have historically been considered as providing ecosystem services to the city:  
37 food, wood, water, goods. When the Rovira hilltop was excavated as an archaeological site in  
38 1931 [23], it revealed the remains of a walled prehistoric town. Laietans are thought to have  
39 been dwelling all three hill crowns exploiting its natural resources, namely natural water  
40 fountains, bronze mines and local flora and fauna. After this prehistoric residential activity, the  
41 hills remained mostly free from human settlements but came to be exploited as quarries and as  
42 agricultural grounds for vineyards and timber providing forests [24]. In the 18th century the first  
43 summerhouses of the Barcelona bourgeoisie spread along the sunny side of the foothills looking  
44 for better living conditions beyond the walled old town. The proximity to the fontades springs,  
45 the fresh sea breeze and the open views to the city soon sparked real state pressure over  
46 agricultural land uses. Investors especially selected building sites around the fontades while  
47 downgrading the rest of the hills' terrain to exploitation purposes.  
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6 At the hilltop of the Turó de la Rovira a set of military infrastructures was built during the War  
7 of Cuba in 1898, even though this exceptional location was not used for military purposes until  
8 four decades later. Following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1937, Republicans took  
9 advantage of the existing structures and built defences to react to fascist attacks, first coming  
10 from the Francoist army and later by Italian and German aircraft. After the war, the anti-aircraft  
11 batteries were abandoned until in 1950 a wave of the mass immigration transformed this enclave  
12 and the whole of the hill into a slum settlement, called 'the three canons' (los tres cañones). This  
13 post-war migration instigated further settlements on vacant land in and around Barcelona,  
14 indifferently occupying hills crests, beaches, riversides, and green spaces. The city  
15 administration partially recognised the threat of informal housing both for the city and its  
16 population. It developed new districts of high-density social housing under the CIAM guidelines  
17 [25] while approving new urban planning policies aiming at the consolidation of the former  
18 green areas [26]. Those measures were however minor in regards of the phenomena of  
19 'barraquismo', the spreading of slums taking place in the city until the 1990s. Over time, the  
20 slum settlers gradually consolidated and upgraded the initial shacks into self-constructed places  
21 of living, using community spirit and hands-on efforts to define a distinct way of building up  
22 neighbourhoods, local infrastructure, and public space. Communitarian if not insurgent, the  
23 resulting neighbourhoods managed to achieve political acceptance, and when democracy was  
24 instated after Franco's death in 1975 many informal districts were legalised, except the  
25 ensembles built on hilltops which according to the urban planning regulations were defined as  
26 green spaces – those were slated for demolition.

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53 When the Batteries Park was realised in 2011 the designers incorporated into their design the  
54 physical traces of the slums that had been built onto the former military structure. With  
55 sensitivity, precision and respect the team around Jansana selected what to remove and what to  
56 preserve, to improve public access to the crest of the Carmel hill and its viewpoints. Whatever  
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4 would not endanger accessibility was maintained in its rough quality, and now reveals the  
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6 former occupation: pavements and tiles of the slum houses, concrete foundations and thick  
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8 walls of the anti-aircraft batteries. Interpretation panels informing about the details of its history  
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10 have been added by the Historic Museum of Barcelona [27], that runs the site. This history  
11  
12 constitutes the area of influence of the Batteries Park. Yet, its topical use as a popular hilltop  
13  
14 park has impacted the way history is apprehended – on-site instead of in a closed museum.  
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19 To the contrary, history as an area of influence has been overlooked in the topical Tres Turons  
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21 project: the winners' announcement praises the designers' services to ecological and leisure  
22  
23 functions while leaving the site's historical traces unnoticed. Arguably, the intimate  
24  
25 neighbourhood along the main tourist itinerary of Maria Llàbernia street might seem unsightly if  
26  
27 not inappropriate. Its rebel inhabitants and its status of being devoted for demolition by a former  
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29 planning regulation does accentuate the unease of integrating it into any design. Nevertheless, as  
30  
31 a project in extension of the Batteries Park, were the experience of historical conflicts got  
32  
33 staged, it appears as cruel to see how an astonishing aspect of the unsettling history of this site is  
34  
35 sacrificed for the sake of the popular yet ahistorical narrative of wellbeing and lush nature.  
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### 40 **Cruelty Three: wasting resources**

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45 Even when mobilising some sympathy for the removal of small-scale residential uses on the  
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47 hilltop of la Rovira, which for its prominent situation might better suit public uses, the removal  
48  
49 of the physical structures altogether remains questionable. The material and cultural resources  
50  
51 activated to shape this ensemble in the course of history are not recognised as an area of  
52  
53 influence, allowing for their suppression in favour of 'renaturing' the hilltop, to comply with the  
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55 ecological narrative of the green lung. This is all the more cruel as the redesign of the hilltop,  
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57 the Street Square of Maria Llàbernia, had only been realised four years ago, as a project that  
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59 demonstrates how to accept material structures and informal social practices as areas of  
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4 influence in order to value them as resources (i.e. existing materials such as buildings, outdoor  
5 spaces, vegetation; and existing cultures of self-organisation, auto-construction, usages of  
6 space). Driven by an economy of means this design caters for the community as much as for the  
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11 21<sup>st</sup>-century sustainability agenda, identifying them as areas of effect on distinct levels. Not only  
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13 have existing buildings and infrastructures an economic value, they also materialise the efforts  
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15 and attachment of the many who have shaped this place, from quarry to slum to district, from  
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17 paths to streets to Square Street. To date this area is slated for demolition. The authors wish for  
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19 a future that would capitalise on these resources instead of throwing them out to build 'nature'.  
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### 23 **The green lung - a fantasy?**

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27 What motivates the three cruelties? The Tres Turons project brief forwards nature as the prime  
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29 concern of the future Park, exemplified by the metaphor of becoming the city's 'green lung'. The  
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31 idea itself is built upon a historic precedent. The quote's brief echoes the title of the winning  
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33 proposal for the Ciutadella Park back in 1872 where the Catalan architect and urban designer  
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35 Josep Fontserè stated that gardens are to cities what lungs are to the human body. At the time,  
36  
37 this metabolistic explanation had undoubtedly raised awareness for designing cities as complex  
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39 living systems, instead of as an accumulation of independent objects. Today systems thinking is  
40  
41 certainly still valid. However, coupled with a bold ecological narrative it opens the door for  
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43 organicist positions which are increasingly criticised by scholars of political ecology, science  
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45 and technology studies, and critical urban theory, for their ignorance of complex societal  
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47 realities in times of globalisation and climate change [28]. Socio-cultural concerns are often  
48  
49 neglected in the attempt to 'solve' pressing ecological problems first and foremost – a cruel  
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51 optimism?  
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57 This prompts a question on the project level: why should the Tres Turons Park act as the city's  
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59 green lung? A minor element of Barcelona's green structure, compared to the Collserola and  
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4 Montjuic mountains, the park would most likely fail to deliver considerable (quantifiable)  
5 ecosystem services. One of the authors' students proposed a visual critique in combining a  
6 topical photo of the Rovira hilltop with a romantic landscape painting (Fig. 21), pointing at the  
7 idealisation of green as the scenery for a pleasant life while providing highest ecological  
8 performance – a fantasy. According to Lauren Berlant, cruel optimism calls for revisiting its  
9 foundational fantasies: what if the 'green lung' were a fantasy worth adjusting, right now, in the  
10 impasse?  
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21 The authors' students rejected the optimistic attachment to the green lung vision, they  
22 understood how it had generated the cruelties described above. Instead they engaged in  
23 suggesting ways out of the impasse: they discussed how the site's heavy history could inspire  
24 future tourism itineraries and cater for experiences beyond sheer merriment. (Fig. 21). They  
25 investigated how residential and touristic uses could be spatially renegotiated through designing  
26 coexistence, and through new forms of collective care for public places. (Fig. 22, 23, 24) They  
27 carried out on-site interventions to prototype and evaluate ideas to turn aspects of tourism into  
28 new local economies. (Fig. 25-26). Their optimism, less cruel, targeted a site-responsive  
29 transformation of the Tres Turons, inspired by some of the design approaches of the preceding  
30 projects: working with the entire cross-section of the hills, instead of with thematic sectors, to  
31 shape spaces, master water, create microclimates, bridge to the larger urban ecosystem;  
32 arranging zones of encounter, instead of rejecting zones of conflict, such as the former slum  
33 settlement; developing creativity and new formal languages with what is pre-existing, instead of  
34 tearing down entire ensembles to replace them by fancier new vegetation and buildings.  
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53 'Maybe relinquishing or recalibrating our fantasies of the good life does not lead to absolute  
54 darkness', writes literature scholar Hua Hsu in the New Yorker, 'It can simply be a matter of  
55 coming to grips with different possibilities of communion, figuring out who benefits from our  
56 collective weariness.' (2018) Simplistic green narratives, like the green lung fantasy, sustain this  
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4 weariness. Promising paradise easily serves as a selling ticket to clients, designers, audiences, to  
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6 whoever prefers intellectual laziness over critically engaging with the particularities of sites and  
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8 ways of working with their complexity. No doubt this takes effort and time – often available  
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10 when contemporary urban projects traverse phases of limbo and sometimes get stuck in an  
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12 impasse. Critique in the meantime, practised by design researchers, can help advance the  
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14 process and improve the project, the one under critique, and – if training the next generation –  
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16 future ones.  
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31  
32  
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37 Josep Mercadé, Agata Buscemi and Maria Jesús Huarte, for intellectually engaging in the  
38  
39 endeavour of following up on long-term project over various iterations. We would also like to  
40  
41 thank all the students of the master courses of 2018 and 2019 for their commitment to engage in  
42  
43 understanding the realities and narratives of the Tres Turons. Finally, we are deeply grateful for  
44  
45 having had the opportunity to listen to the designers' presentations of their competition entries in  
46  
47 the classroom, and to access their materials for educational purpose.  
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### 55 Notes

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35 4 Since 2017 the authors have been jointly teaching the theoretical module *Crítica de proyectos*  
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48 5 The competing teams include: (1) Agence Ter, Ana Coello de Llobet, SLP, i AudingIntraesa,  
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50 SA; (2) Estudi Martí Franch Arquitectura del Paisatge, SL ; (3) IRBIS, SCOB, Idom Consulting;  
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52 (4) AldayJover; (5) BatlleRoig; (6) Isabel Benasser estudi d'arquitectura i paisatge; (7) Henrich,  
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54 DATA, Domingo, Aguiló and Cíclica; (8) Jansana, de la Villa, de Paauw; (9) JornetLlopPastor  
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4 6 Ajuntament de Barcelona Press Service: The winning offices include: (1).Agence Ter, Ana  
5 Coello de Llobet, SLP, i AudingIntraesa, SA with the project entitled "Cohabitar natures"  
6 /Cohabiting Natures; (2)Estudi Martí Franch Arquitectura del Paisatge, SL with the project  
7 entitled "Ordre i aventura"/ Order and Adventure; (3) IRBIS, SCOB, Idom Consulting with the  
8 project entitled "El camí és la natura" / Nature is the way. The official press announcement with  
9 selected drawings and descriptions is published on Barcelona's website [website],  
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10 Claims of scientific objectivity still get voiced on a daily basis in landscape departments  
belonging to scientific universities, despite half a century of epistemological and  
methodological refinement of the genre of critique in the design disciplines, to which landscape  
architecture belongs.

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52 19 Fontada is a historic Catalan term for informal assemblies around fountains. It literally  
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54 means gathering people by a fountain for food and fun.  
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4 20 Quote from an Interview to Oriol Bohigas In Vilaweb on the 5th February 2010. “Como  
5 delegado de Urbanismo del primer ayuntamiento democrático definió las tres grandes ideas que  
6 transformaron la ciudad: recuperar el mar, monumentalizar la periferia, e higienizar el barrio  
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17 21 *Batteries Park* received the *European Prize for Urban Public Space* 2012, the 2013 *Silver*  
18 *Medals of the Domus International Award for Restoration and Preservation* and in 2014 the  
19 project was among the finalists to the *XII Bienal española de Arquitectura y Urbanismo*.  
20  
21 The *Street Square* received the *Public Opinion FAD AWARD* 2018 Premi FAD 2018; it was  
22 awarded by the *XIV Spanish Bienial of Architecture and Urbanism* 2018 and by the  
23 *Architecture Simon Prize* 2018, it counted among the finalists to the *European Prize for Urban*  
24 *Public Space* 2018 and the *Living places Award*.  
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## 25 Figures

26  
27 Fig. 1 Barcelona slope from the Collserola ridge to the sea, integrating the location of its seven  
28 hills in a 2019 aerial view. Highlighting by the authors.  
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33 Fig. 2 Location of the seven hills distinguishing the three hills regarded by the Three Hills  
34 competition brief. Highlighting by the authors.  
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40 Fig. 3, 4 Images of the three hills competition project brief defining an area of the intervention  
41 in red and delivering an aerial view of the hills, in the press kit release, April 2019.  
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53 Fig. 5 Panoramic view of Barcelona characteristic slope to the sea, revealing the topographic  
54 profile of the turons. From left to right: Creueta del Coll, Carmel, la Rovira and Putxet's crests  
55 and hillsides. Highlighting and photomontage by the authors.  
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4 Fig. 6 Panoramic view towards the old city, with the sea framed between the Turó de la Rovira  
5 and Montjuïc Mountain. Highlighting and photomontage by the authors.  
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10 Fig. 7 Views from the Creueta del Coll hilltop, displaying the sea framed between the Turó del  
11 Putxet and the Collserola ridge on the right and the Carmel turó on the left. Highlighting and  
12 photomontage by the authors.  
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17 Fig. 8 Panoramic view from the Carmel turó towards the Collserola Ridge and the Creueta del  
18 Coll hilltop. Highlighting and photomontage by the authors.  
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23 Fig. 9. Image of the Guinardó Park (Forestier & Tudurí, 1918), sitting in turó de la Rovira  
24 hillside. Detail of the path along the terraced hillside reinterpreting the historic agricultural  
25 landscapes. Images by the authors.  
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32 Fig. 10. Guinardó Park in turó de la Rovira hillside. Detail of the water system controlling  
33 drainage and water management along with the hillside profile. Views are overlooking the sea.  
34 (Forestier & Tudurí, 1918). Images by the authors.  
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41 Fig. 11. Detail of pedestrian path in Guinardó Park (Forestier & Tudurí, 1918) after recent  
42 urbanisation restoration by Jansana&de la Villa&DePaaw. (2014) Images by the authors.  
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48 Fig. 12 Authors image of the Park Güell (Gaudí, 1926), located in turó del Carmel hillside.  
49 Detail of the terrace sustaining the main square and viewpoint in the hillside profile.  
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54 Fig. 13. Authors image from Park Güell elevated walkways and passages drafting new profile  
55 for the Carmell hillside, minimising the slopes and mastering water management and  
56 accessibility to the Gaudí's garden city.  
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Fig. 14. Authors image from the Park Güell main square, overlooking the sea from the turó del Carmel hillside. (Gaudí, 1926).

Fig. 15 Authors image of the Creueta del Coll hill overlooking the open-air swimming pool through MBM project in 1987. Images by the authors.

Fig. 16. Panoramic view of Barcelona from the Batteries Park project (Jansana&delaVilla&dePaaw,2011) displaying the remains of the military anti aerial batteries, in an awarded exercise to reconcile urbanisations and historical memory. Highlighting and photomontage by the authors.

Fig 17. Panoramic view of the street square project (Bosch&Capdeferro, 2016) from the Batteries site projects (Jansana&delaVilla&DePaaw,2016). Images by the authors.

Fig. 18. Detail of the street square project urbanisation reconciling public space for visitors and dwellers inhabiting the informal housing to be demolished with the three hills new project. (Bosch&Capdeferro, 2016). Images by the authors.

Fig. 19. Detail of the Marià Labernia project urbanisation reconciling public space for visitors and dwellers inhabiting the informal housing to be demolished with the three hills new project. (Bosch&Capdeferro, 2016). Images by the authors.

Fig. 20. Location of park projects of relevance for the Tres Turons. Highlighting by the authors.

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4 Fig. 21. Image from a student's interpretation of the site. "The great green lung, a competition  
5 for Barcelona tres turons" was the approach made by Eva Beristianou, reconsidering the  
6 environmental profit, the idealisation of the green and the social costs of the intervention.  
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15 August 2020. ©Fundació Politècnica de Catalunya FPC-Barcelona Tech, Evanthia Beristianou.  
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21 Fig. 22. Images from a student's interpretation of the site. "Tourism? Yes!" was the approach  
22 made by Ana Zabala analysing the impact of tourism in the decision making for the competition  
23 brief. Contemporary landscapes critique course, [website], <

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30 2020. ©Fundació Politècnica de Catalunya FPC-Barcelona Tech, Ana Zabala.  
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36 Fig. 23. Image from student's interpretation of the site. "The great green lung, a competition for  
37 Barcelona tres turons" was the approach made by Eva Beristianou, drafting an alternative future  
38 coexistence between the existing informal housing, the tourist visiting the site and city  
39 inhabitants routes. Contemporary landscapes critique course, [website], <

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53 Fig. 24. Image from student's interpretation of the site. The approach by Rebeca Nuevo entitled:  
54 "Who are the 3 turons?" reviews the existing initiatives addressing the three turons identity to  
55 leverage a social response to the project development. Contemporary landscapes critique course,  
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8 2020. ©Fundació Politèctica de Catalunya FPC-Barcelona Tech, Rebeca Nuevo.  
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13 Fig. 26. Images from student's interpretation of the site. Stella-Zoë Schmidler and Maria de  
14 Lluç Salas Vicens approached the site with a critique and short video entitled "Lata love story"  
15 revealing the informal uses of the Bateria Park while elaborating on how to raise awareness of  
16 the massive waste of cans left behind onsite. Contemporary landscapes critique course,  
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26 Tech, Stella-Zoë Schmidler and Maria de Lluç Salas Vicens.  
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31 Fig. 27. Images from student's interpretation of the site. Stella-Zoë Schmidler and Maria de  
32 Lluç Salas Vicens designed an onsite intervention entitled "lata love story" transforming the  
33 massive waste of cans left behind onsite to new gates framing the accesses to the site and its  
34 outstanding views. Contemporary landscapes critique course, [website], <  
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39 [https://www.masterpaisajebarcelona.com/ca/students-work/contemporary-landscapes-projects-](https://www.masterpaisajebarcelona.com/ca/students-work/contemporary-landscapes-projects-critique/)  
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42 Tech, Stella-Zoë Schmidler and Maria de Lluç Salas Vicens.  
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