

# Architecture & Experience Master's Program

# Program Director

## Eric Lapierre

## Studio

Tristan Chadney  
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Assisted by  
Antoine Collet

## Seminar

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Mariabruna Fabrizi  
Fosco Lucarelli

Assisted by  
N. N.

### Grading

- **Studio 7th, 8th, 9th semesters**  
Final jury

- **Studio Final Project 10th semester**  
Classwork, participation and Final Project  
Only students having passed all 7th, 8th, 9th credits as well as the Final Project will be allowed to have a thesis defense.
- Public defense of Final Project  
(article 34-arrêté du 02 juillet 2005)

### • Seminar, 8th Semester

- 1st session : Classwork, participation
- 2nd session : Additional thesis development

### • Seminar, 9th Semester

- 1st session : Thesis and its defense
- 2nd session : Additional thesis development and defense

# Architecture & Experience

## Profession of Faith

According to John Cage, “an experimental action” is one “the outcome of which is not foreseen.” Titling this course Architecture & Experience celebrates on the one hand its attachment to the question of high architecture as a discipline forged in historical and theoretical projects and, on the other, the experimental nature of an explorative approach that has been an operative concept of said discipline ever since the Renaissance – explorative, but still grounded in concrete reality as the perspective corrections made at the Parthenon and the borderline limits applied to Gothic structures, just to give a couple examples, would attest.

To have meaning, this course’s experimental aspect entails the kind of conceptual and theoretical approach to which it, as an outgrowth of the Theory and Project program, remains necessarily attached. Theory, by identifying the working principles of various constructions and eras, makes possible every kind of parallel while transforming every sort of question into a potential architectural problematics.

As such, it is the filter through which history can truly function in the conception of a project: contrary to popular belief, theory is absolutely connected to practice as evidenced by the word’s Greek root linking it to the notion of observation. Throughout history, the better part of great architectural theoreticians also practiced the art, and it was theory that, in the end, enabled them to make well thought-out decisions when it came to a building’s layout.

With the French word *expérience* also translating as scientific test, using it here underlines how architectural objects are meant to be experimented with concretely and phenomenologically in all dimensions of perception. The vocation of Architecture and Experience is thus anchored in both the domain of ideas and that of concrete material spaces.

And finally, experience also refers to the necessarily experimental ambition of master-level education: we perform pedagogical experiments to be able to then effectively carry out architectural experiments. Despite the clearly theoretical ambition of our approach, we also assume the empirical side of its nature.

### **Elucidating the everyday conditions of our time**

The aim of Architecture and Experience is to apprehend the manner in which architecture might function as a sophisticated medium in contemporary everyday conditions. In the layout of a given construction, architecture gives voice to a mass of mute materials. It is its formal coherence that guarantees the intelligibility of said construction: set in the realm of high architecture, it conveys a set of shared values and it is thus that architecture imparts a collective nature to a work, while for five centuries or so, classical architecture functioned as a readily manipulable language only intelligible to the happy few.

It was in this way that it attained a high level of sophistication and was considerably strengthened as a scholarly discipline grounded in a corpus of historical references and theoretical concepts. Following the aesthetic crisis born of the collapse of classical architecture with the shock of the Industrial Revolution, the 20th century struggled with the issue of architecture no longer a unified common language. Modern architects sought to

write a new grammar of industrial inspiration that would be as international as that of classical architecture and, in their wake, post-modern historicists toyed with reactivating the language of the past like children playing pirates with plastic swords, while phenomenologists and deconstructionists of every sort maintained that architecture would be reborn from its very negation as a fully constituted culture.

But the crisis resulting from the industrial revolution was so deep that it took a paradigm shift for architecture to continue to exist in a credible manner in its time. To maintain architecture as a system of meaning in construction, it was necessary to jettison, on one hand, the idea that it could one day become a single language again and, on the other, the idea that renewal of old forms made sterile by the collapse of the systems of production that had helped father them be a serious option, as well as the idea that things might have meaning simply by their presence or strangeness outside of any pre-existing cultural domain.

The only goal of high architecture for quite some time was exceptional constructions. The superhuman impact of the industrial revolution modified reality quantitatively in a matter of decades like no other phenomenon to date, carrying the discipline into a torrent of endless massification: there were more structures erected in the 20th century than in all of previous history. This displacement of the center of gravity from the exceptional to the massive modified the very definition of architecture, bringing on a crisis with regard to a number of its principles. Moreover, this massification has played and continues to play a major role in the decline of the quality of life on earth and the depletion of natural resources, and Architecture & Experience will posit hypotheses regarding these issues in an effort to produce alternatives to the hyper-technical methods most often employed in the implementation of today's programs. Beyond that, among many other questions, we'll be raising those concerning the monumental, typology, the relationship between high and ordinary production, architecture as language, possible answers to the question of diversity, and the capacity of contemporary systems of construction to participate in architectural expression... Question all caught up in today's crisis of massification.

It's to elucidate the architectural consequences of a situation unique in history placing architecture, as it were, on its own brink that Architecture & Experience will be devoted.

How to make an architecture founded on the massive rather than the exceptional relevant as regards contemporary requisites –embodiment of the increasingly dispersed city, environmental responsibility, expression of contemporary aesthetic

values in particular – while still falling into the historical and theoretical dynamic of architecture as a sophisticated cultural discipline? What remains permanent in the contemporary condition, and how can this permanence be reinvented? How to remain subtle and authentically complex while still massive? *Se la forma scompara la sua radice è eterna* – while the form disappears, its root is eternal – Mario Merz entitled one of his works. It's to the search for this root that our research is dedicated.

Architecture & Experience sees this situation as a positive opportunity to update architectural issues rather than a danger to the discipline. Architecture cannot be simply dissolved into planning and environmental considerations: the architectural object constitutes, in fine, the focus of this course, but these considerations will naturally also inform our study of said object.

Given the impossibility of credibly reworking a pre-existing shared vocabulary, as well as the necessity of building with means both economical and current, theory finds itself naturally established as the central theme in high architecture of the ordinary condition; it will stand out neither for its intelligibility nor for its exceptional performances, and it will have to give up certain forms of traditional beauty in order to legitimize others. Theory is the military wing of such an architecture, it enables it to take on this condition seemingly corrosive for the scholarly discipline. As Tancredi Falconeri put it in "The Leopard": "for everything to stay the way it was, everything has to change." Born of an order whose ancient character didn't bar him access to the intelligence of his times in order to preserve what was essential to him, he's the impassioned hero under whose auspices we place our instruction.