

Fragments

Master's Pathway

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Seminar

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Methods of assessment

• S7, S8, S9 Project

Final panel

• PFE S10 Project

- Continuous assessment and final report
- Only students who have passed the teaching units S7, S8, S9 and the PFE are authorised to attend the Viva Voce.

Public PFE Viva Voce

(article 34- decree of 02 July 2005)

• S8 Seminar

1st session: continuous assessment

2nd session: Thesis complement

• S9 Seminar

1st session: Thesis and Viva Voce

2nd session: Thesis complement and Viva Voce

Fragments

Profession of Faith

It is necessary to disperse the universe, to lose respect for the whole.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The role of the Fragments Pathway is to question architecture through its relationship to the metropolis and the territory. The dialogue that we seek, between geography and architectural signs, imposes changes of scale and perspective, assumes a certain distance, and implies a permanent questioning of our project thinking. The focal point of the field is the architectural project. We will thus seek to avoid the opposition between metropolitan contingencies and architectural discipline. We will refuse to choose between design quality and process complexity. Our assumption is that it is possible, and that one can feed and contribute to the other.

The vocation of the Pathway's projects is to produce a metropolitan architecture. We use this term, naturally associated with Rem Koolhaas and OMA, in a profoundly different sense. Rem Koolhaas constantly refers to the great metropolis and great objects. However, the Chaos of contemporary territories on which we will be working is not the intense and spectacular congestion of the Great City of the last century but a «chaotic dispersion of things and subjects, of practices and economies»¹. This grey, diffuse, silent Chaos is a collection of ordinary elements: housing estates, infrastructures, commercial zones, urban fragments...; yet it is in these zones that the future of cities is largely played out.

The students of the Pathway will develop and formulate their own posture towards this Chaos. How to act in this relative opacity? How can architecture deal with a world that is thrown away, sprawling, offered rather than constructed and elaborated²? We will not impose an a priori approach on the students (modest,

monumental or other), but will encourage them to adopt a certain neutrality, allowing them to better apprehend the Chaos that surrounds us.

1 Bernardo Secchi, Première Leçon d'Urbanisme. (Paris : Parenthèses, 2005), 69.

2 Roland Barthes, Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture. (Paris : Seuil, 1953), 28.

1. Europe

The projects of the Pathway will be inscribed in a European framework. Europe, the smallest of the continents, is a fascinating condensation of cultures, languages, infrastructures and urban logics. It is two-thirds the size of Brazil and barely half the size of China or the United States. Europe, however, is unique in the intensity of its internal differences and contrasts³. This rich and heterogeneous spatial framework offers a multitude of conditions and is for us relatively accessible. Several topical questions, such as identity, immigration and climate, are posed with urgency, sometimes violently. We will seek to develop a certain sensitivity and our capacity to read this condition of fragmentation, sedimentation and heterogeneity. Europe, with the notable exception of Paris and London, is not a continent of large metropolises, but one with multiple, very diverse metropolitan forms. Throughout the four semesters that make up the Master's cycle, we will face different territories but also different project conditions.

2. Relationship to the present

The Master's cycle is a key moment, during which the student begins to crystallise a singular view of architecture and the city. It is important to accompany this movement rather than to direct it, to encourage the student to find his/her own relationship to reality rather than to provide a pre-established reading grid. We will encourage students to look at and describe the world around them with a certain indulgence, with fascination. This requires us to follow a double movement: immersion and distancing. Chaos will not be deciphered or deconstructed, but represented and narrated, seeking a fair relationship with the present, attentive and non-arrogant. A core place will be reserved for description: of the city, of the territory, of urban mechanisms, of spaces, of architecture, of objects. This desire to anchor the project work in an urban and political reality should in no way be seen as a rejection of theory in the name of praxis or a celebration of a pragmatic vision. Indeed, what is essential is precisely to articulate a subtle reading of the complexity of the city and the urban realities which we experience with a theoretical distance and a capacity for conceptualisation.

3. Leaps of scale

Is it possible to produce an interesting and idiosyncratic architecture by starting from the large scale and gradually approaching it? This seems difficult, to say the least. This gradual process often produces 'urbanist architecture', i.e., architecture that plays its role within the grand plan but invents little new and does not transcend its initial condition. This is probably the result of the predominance of an urban scale over the architectural scale. The design process is becoming more precise, but its focal point remains the same: that of the guide plan. The different disciplines that share the planning of space (design, urban planning, landscape, architecture) now have their own centres of gravity. Being at ease with sliding between scales requires finding points of entry and reference within these different scales, doing so in an unorthodox and non-linear way, and accepting that each discipline or scale has its own centre of gravity.

The students on the course will have to learn to juggle the different scales and move from one to another with ease while understanding the specific logic and possible levers of each. It is also a matter of becoming aware of the potential for work that exists in the tension and interdependence of the scales and exploring them in various forms. Thus, we will constantly seek to establish and represent non-linear relationships between the different scales, somewhat in the manner of Saul Steinberg, who, through his anamorphoses, creates new relationships between things, between people, the city and the territory. We will not entirely forsake the idea of a multi-scalar coherence, but we will leave it punctually and regularly by changing our point of view.

³ Tony Judy, *Après-Guerre, Une histoire de l'Europe depuis 1945*. (Paris :Pluriel, 2010), 9.

4. Metropolises

Europe, as mentioned above, is not a continent of large metropolises, but a set of more or less metropolitan territories, all historically charged, all with a relative density of infrastructures, but with contrasting spatial attributes and diverse territorial, economic and societal issues. The Fragments Pathway aims to address these different territorial structures without prioritising them. We will thus avoid statements such as: «today one must be interested in the suburbs, the countryside, the coast, the peri-urban ...» in a desire to go beyond an apparent categorisation of territories and with the conviction that there is no weak subject (or territory). The Pathway claims the intellectual right to simply grasp pieces of the world and interrogate them.

The freedom of trial and error and the confrontation of contrasting project conditions provide students with a certain agility of vision. The American essayist Susan Sontag says this about Roland Barthes: 'Put him in front of a cigar box and he would have one, two, many ideas - a little essay. It was not a question of knowledge (he could not have known much about some of the subjects he wrote about) but of alertness, a fastidious transcription about what could be thought about something, once it swam into the stream of attention.'⁴ The Master's programme, despite its condensed nature, should enable students to confront very different territories and project situations. Our objective is not so much to offer a representative sample of European urbanisation - this seems impossible in four semesters - but to provide students with this agility of mind and a lively curiosity.

We will therefore work in a double movement: constantly trying to widen our field of attention but keeping the architectural discipline and the architectural project as our objective and focal point.

5. Fragments

A fragment is a piece of a whole that has been shattered. Unlike the segment, the fragment does not allow for reconstitution, for going backwards; it is a new object, with its own centre of gravity and referents, even if it preserves within it the traces of an original whole.

The name of the Pathway, Fragments, expresses three main concerns.

1. First, a visual concern: the fragment constitutes for us an immediate form of notation of the present, a tenuous element of real, present, concomitant life. It expresses our readiness to capture pieces of the world in the form of small tableaux on both a territorial and architectural scale.
2. Secondly, a methodological concern: observing fragments of reality with patience and precision makes it possible to break with a logic that drowns the particular in the universal.
3. Finally, a projective concern: Our project-thinking is an assembly-thinking. Assembling fragments, constructing spaces, a project, a discourse, in a rhapsodic way, allows us to cultivate a state of permanent experimentation. For us, the project is a matter of articulation, of cutting up and overlapping. The artist or the child, in their curiosity, never respects the order of things. They are delighted to disperse the universe, to lose respect for the whole.

⁴ Susan Sontag, À propos de Barthes dans *Sous le Signe de Sature*. (Paris : Christian Bourgois, 2013), 207.