Transformation
Master's Pathway

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Methods of assessment
- **S7, S8, S9 Project**
  Final jury
- **PFE S10 Project**
  - Continuous assessment and final report
  - Only students who have passed the teaching units of 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

Transformation
Mission Statement

It is most likely that in the years to come the discipline of architecture - as well as the profession of architect - will no longer be guided by the elaboration of a new world. Not because the issues of the present world are stable. We know that the exact opposite is true: the environmental imperative invalidates many of the built situations we inherit, and the expected climate crisis will only increase the extent of this obsolescence. This is the unprecedented paradox in which we are now immersed: we should build a more sustainable, less obsolescent world, but we no longer have the means to do so. We must therefore learn to transform.

The challenge is all the greater as the territories of abandonment have expanded to a singular extent in recent decades. We now have an impressive quantity of neglected and forsaken situations on our hands, resulting from the unlimited devouring of the land by modernity and the globalised economy, which has not ceased, from de-localisation to re-localisation, to redistribute the maps of the world and of places. We are no longer in the 'ordinary' wear and tear of which Françoise Choay spoke 25 years ago, this 'universal cycle of creation/destruction'[1]. The proportion between obsolescence and usefulness has since been largely reversed. Abandonment has been gaining ground ever since the first industrial wastelands were revealed in the 1980s: 'shrinking cities', 'ghost cities', depopulated countryside and villages, partially or totally abandoned industrial zones, voids in the heart of or on the outskirts of neighbourhoods, obsolete transport or energy infrastructures, empty buildings or unused land in dense and compact fabrics, empty spaces within inhabited or working buildings, not to mention all the sites that are exposed to or have recently suffered a natural, human disaster or war. It is these areas of neglect, abandonment, obsolescence and risk that our sector intends to work on as a priority[2]. This is an immense and constantly growing field which will be a priority if we take seriously - as we propose to do - the provisions of the «SCoT factor 4»[3] which favours the recycling of the city on itself and zero hectares of urban extension or the 'immediate and absolute moratorium on the artificialisation of grounds' demanded by Philippe Bihouix. This field is all the more vast as these desolate landscapes are still mostly neglected by architectural and urban thought and action (as long as they escape, as is the case in most situations, the objectives of heritage protection). It is therefore necessary to start by looking at these landscapes 'in the eye', without any detours and without giving in to the sirens of the city and the (increasingly urban) neighbourhoods put forward by elected officials and professionals. It is not easy to escape this principle of hope: the world no longer works as it is, let's make another one! Worried about the effects of expansion and acceleration, we know how harmful obsolescence is, but we are still reluctant to build with the ruins - not on the ruins - of the current world. And the emerging countries, which have often been recycling for a long time, see no reason to continue with this poor person's economy and deprive themselves of what they have long aspired to: a new world, rid of the scraps of the old. Transformation thus leads us to reactivate an imaginary, precisely that of the ruin, which, since the Renaissance, has crystallised reverie, nostalgia and a certain meditation on time.

1. Françoise Choay, L'allégorie du patrimoine [The Allegory of Patrimony], Paris, Seuil, 1992, p.181.
2. Within the framework of the Transformation program, we have begun to explore an inventory of situations of obsolescence.
3. « Axes de progrès pour un SCoT Facteur 4. Quels leviers locaux pour une agglomération post- carbone ? », Assises de l'énergie, Grenoble, 2011 [« Axes of progress for a STCo factor 4. Local Leverage for a Post-carbon region » Grenoble 2011].

Unlike heritage, the ruin has no value as an object: it is rather the effect it generates on the spectator that matters, as Louis Kahn suggests with his concept of 'wrapping ruins around buildings'. Couldn't such a proposal be renewed today with the 'real' ruins of modernity, as soon as we allow the abandoned objects or landscapes of the industrial world the possibility of restoring a sublime dimension, as witnessed by Sesc Pompeia in Sao Paulo or Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in the Ruhr Valley?

Beyond the reactivation of the imaginary of the ruin, the transformation also constitutes a singular way of renewing the relationship between the site and the programme, the analysis and the conceptualisation, the shell and the finish. This approach is not new. Often in history, architecture has been nourished by the theme of transformation. One needs only to consider Leon Battista Alberti's seminal treatise, De re aedificatoria, whose tenth and final (conclusive?) book, entitled 'Restoration of Buildings', is a fine meditation on the relationship between architecture and time, or, four centuries later, the work of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, which is both practical in the field of restoration and theoretical in the field of architectural creation. This concrete way of inscribing contemporary architecture in the traces of time has changed profoundly over the course of the 20th century. Apart from those directly involved in the preservation of monuments of national interest (and those from the school of structural classicism of Auguste Perret), most architects have shown little concern for obsolescence, either of buildings from the past, or of their own future work. With the notable exception of the 'Typical Plan' of office buildings in the first half of the 20th century, retroactively conceptualised by Rem Koolhaas and deployed from the 1960s onwards, from Superstudio to Japanese Metabolism, in a series of projects incorporating a capacity for evolution and regeneration. Faced with the persistent acceleration of obsolescence, many architects today continue to be preoccupied with evolvability, components, indeterminacy or reversibility. Most of them, however, remain with the founding vision of a new world, without any plans for the obsolescent situations they have observed or inherited.

The current challenges of transformation therefore invite us to revisit the history of architecture well beyond the modern period. Pending such an exploration, which is ambitious to say the least, we propose to rely on the 'jurisprudence' of three trends that emerged at the turn of the 1970s and 80s. These are 'analogous architecture' as conceptualised by Aldo Rossi and which continues to influence many architects who graft their work onto an existing building (from Caruso Saint-John to Miroslav Sik); 'architecture as modification' as proposed by Vittorio Gregotti, an approach based on a knowledge and revelation of the sites, and which finds extensions in the 'landscape urbanism' and Alberto Magnaghi's 'local project', whose epigones are numerous in this period of voluntary de-growth, from Rural Studio to the current groups Encore Heureux and Rotor.

These recent traditions of architecture, whose permanence and evolution we can trace far beyond the Italy where they were born, constitute the historical and theoretical framework of our field. Strange association, some would say. What is there in common between Rossi's passion for cities and history, Vittorio Gregotti's fervent defence of territories and geography, and Alberto Magnaghi's commitment to the regional ecosystem?

We propose three lines of convergence, which constitute the common base on which the teachers and students of the pathway will work:

•   A specific attention is paid to description, with a view to bringing together the reality of the situations constructed and their mental representations, rather than simply making an inventory and arranging them typologically.

•   A perspective on the memory of places - which is not to be confused with the genius loci - which can (re)bring into play notions such as the ruin or the sublime.

•   A re-evaluation of building processes from the point of view of the materials and/or know-how chain (economy of means, recycling, etc.) and our capacity to generate new meanings from existing materials and objects.

The injunction to recycle and transform the world as it is, must lead us to reconsider the history and the driving forces of our discipline, to look back on the limits and specificities of our modes of thought and action. In this respect, our Transformation pathway intends to look more to the future than to the past. By engaging in a deliberately prospective vision, we aim to go beyond the current approaches to heritage renovation or rehabilitation. These approaches are often restrictive and contribute, to a large extent, to constantly pushing further the construction of new neighbourhoods, thereby aggravating the phenomena of urban sprawl and energy expenditure. The aim here is to open-up the game of alternatives between demolition, reconversion or conservation and to develop, in an approach that is both rational and holistic, the scenarios best suited to the future of the world 'within its walls'. For the perpetuation of our extensive model, even if just partially, could only accelerate the ecocide we are already working towards. And we will greatly need architecture to get us through the turbulence that lies ahead.