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06

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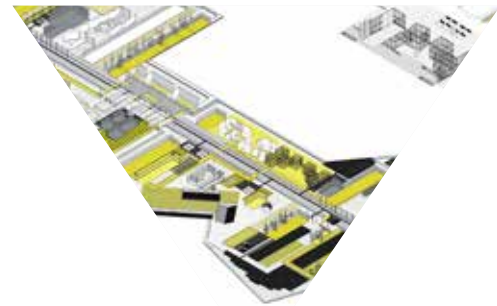
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Slippery slides

A retired professor of my school is invited to give a lecture for PhD candidates: running his power point, when he wants the following slide he doesn't say "next", but "help me". For the first twenty minutes, the younger colleague acting the remote control doesn't understand. Every "help me" there is a pause and then the younger asks: "Next?", rarely obtaining an answer, since the professor is hurrying ahead with his lecture. This repeated misunderstanding gives a little sudden thrill of suspense at every change of slide, and, in that dozy winter afternoon, it's very appreciated by the small audience scattered through the wide empty space of the main hall. I find this misunderstanding curious because I don't recognize where this comes from. The professor is Italian and he is lecturing in his mother language, in the school where he studied and taught for all his life. It is difficult to say how can a so strange and disturbed communication take place between people who work together since years, sharing the same places and, mostly, the same language.

But anyway, avoiding reckless psycho hypothesis, I

think that this heartfelt request of help, thrown over the audience every two-three minutes, was a perfect representation of the communitarian life in a school of architecture. I suppose that, in the schools where other matters are in place, professors don't need any help, they perfectly know what they have to teach and students know quite well what they have to learn and what they are expected to understand.

Then, what a difference with architecture. The old professor, looking at the slides paginated by himself in hours that I guess troubled and uncertain, was exploring the misteries of invention, of creativity and composition, and we all know that for an argument of this kind there is no textbook available. Or, at the opposite, there are so many possible textbooks that you are not allowed to choose just one of them; you should know all, or many of them, and you have to shake all that heterogeneous substance and serve it following the invented rules of your own personal cocktail recipe. In his labored lecture resonated the familiar names of musicians, literates and artists, all evocated as masters of the special art of composition, all of them examined in their longlife quests for new forms of harmony and beauty.

So this old professor, who for his part was, and still is, a great architect and a charismatic menthor, had to climb the sloping and slippery mountains of architectural theory without parachute, risking at any turn, that is at any slide, to loose the line of this discourse, to break his topic against an unpredictable logical obstacle, or to drive his thoughts in a dark cul-de-sac.

These are the reasons why, I suppose, from his heart sprung, unchecked, this repeated monotonous series of "help me". In a field like architecture, every discourse is about, over, below, around, but never really inside the discipline, being the design action the real, undisputate core of the matter.

Dear readers, please share our fatigue and help us, – professors, students, lecturers, – who try to talk, write and discuss of architecture, knowing how fragile, ephemeral and doubtful our thoughts, and words, are.

Alessandro Rocca



Chainsaw Choreographies, a Visiting School at the AA's campus at Hooke Park, Dorset. Photo: Valerie Bennett, Courtesy Architectural Association.

giovanni
corbellini

learning
through
a
distracted
reception

Architecture is a quite elusive discipline, both unleashed and restrained by a perennial calling into question of its own fundamentals, in a continuous and often unhelpful effort to get an external legitimation.

Architects are therefore like dwarfs that tumble down from the shoulders of giants and designing means practising this 'extreme sport': namely taking the risk to imagine new forms, uses, and logics for something perfected in millennia, which already works very well, and people usually love as it is. Crisis deeply marks its scope and social function:¹ it sets up the architect's toolbox and the way its instruments are selected and used; it haunts any architectural thinking processes and even its actual out-

comes. Being and becoming an architect means to cast a doubtful, unsatisfied, interrogative gaze on the world and especially on the world of architecture.² Teaching such a (self)critical discipline is therefore an intrinsically impossible task. Of course, many specific competences play an essential role in the design process and schools' syllabuses include accordingly drawing, history, structures, law, economics, and whatever this process usually involves. But when it comes to integrate them into the architectural project, any fixed framework becomes questionable, and it is precisely this questioning that makes design architectural, offering that necessary potential which can turn mere building into architecture.

In other words, though academic design studios do provide some basics (how to read a context, arrange the programme, collect solutions, manage composition tricks, etc.), they can honestly deliver them only as a very local and provisional knowledge.

The generation of design professors who taught me – born in the modernist 1920s and '30s – took these weak systems of empiric tools as ideological truths, wrapping up their individual poetics with a scientific sounding theoretical package. In the economic miracle of post war Italy, when they were offered plenty opportunities to build, many of them, especially for political reasons, tried to resist professionalism while running their professional practice. This contradictory attitude produced a sort of intellectual architecture, unwilling to negotiate with reality and therefore paradoxically provided with an unassailable, self-referential consistency.

Pretty idiosyncratic languages were imparted as monotheistic religions, bringing into the school the hierarchical organisation of the office, and transmitted through the most effective system in teaching arts: punishment and reward. (Actually, several humiliating comments, ripped up drawings, crashed models thrown

out the window, and rare recompenses: the most you could hope was to produce something beautiful and complete enough to skip the assistants and getting mauled directly from the professor...) As a whole, the array of these ideologised poetics was obviously far from being coherent, even at the school of Venice where faculty's recruitment followed very targeted and specific genealogies. Learning architecture ended up in a sequential mystical experience of different formal languages whose faithful reproduction was time after time the ultimate goal. However, thanks to or in spite of its contradictions, this sort of schizoid journey made some methodological sense, both in pursuing its overt teaching aims and in the unwitting side effects it produced. Taken for granted that any individual growth cannot start from scratch and imitation is an obliged passage for learning the bread and butter of a creative discipline, the exposition to different approaches opened up more possibilities for future architects. Those 'illuminated' by some revelation along this multifaceted educational path could join in the design 'church' they felt closer, starting to build up a self-strengthening system of instruments and especially of intergenerational

relationships with other worshippers (a strategic asset for professional and academic careers). On the other hand, this same coexistence of multiple architectural sects worked as an automatic falsification device. Secular attitudes could stem out from the loose connection between a shared theoretical shibboleth – marked by the Trimurti of composition, language, and typology – and the competing formal approaches it allowed for, which in itself would be fine, unless sold as a paradoxical mix of pseudo-scientific (i.e. deterministic) ambition, formal fundamentalism, and serial outcomes.³

Although many teaching practices still lean on specific languages' reproduction, there are as many reasons, both general and personal, global and local, that put into question its applicability. The major transformations that are affecting the educational exchange – involving identities, conditions, and possibilities – make for instance the power relationship between teachers and students much less asymmetrical than before and, in some cases, even reversed. Those of us who survived the visually conflicting and ideologically monolithic fallout of the 1970s and '80s became resistant to the sirens of self-reference, developing a doubtful disenchantment



Matteo Carsillo, Andrea Pauletich, *Ri-abitare le megalopoli dei Paesi in via di sviluppo: H2ousing* (Piranesi Prize 2015), Master Thesis Project, supervisors Giovanni Corbellini, Giulio Paladini, Trieste University, 2013-14, Piranesi Prize 2015.

that is both cause and consequence of the dramatic lack of charisma we suffer in comparison to the previous generation. Anyway, independently from the teachers' self-esteem and actual reputation, this is a condition further challenged by the recipients' attitude. The average student I am used to deal with finds it difficult to retain in his or her memory the names of well-established living architects, let alone their main works. Apart half a dozen of the most celebrated starchitects, even many Pritzker laureates remain completely unknown to them, and the constant reference to contemporary projects as examples to follow in the studio's exercises does not seem to be helpful. Imagining to count on personal prestige is thus hardly plausible, as well as any more authoritarian approach.

The reorganisation of the European university system through the so-called 'Bologna Process' accelerated this situation. Credits, pretending to measure the students' workload in terms of time, eventually rearranged the weight of the different disciplines, making design experiences, especially in Italy, less and less central.⁴ Besides any consideration about management issues (legal compliance, political choices, composition of the



Guglielmo Cok, *Housing transfrontaliero: intervento residenziale a Gorizia*, Master Thesis Project, supervisor Giovanni Corbellini, Trieste University, 2013-14.

faculty...), it is evident that measurability applies better to those disciplines where the relation between the effort spent and the results obtained is linear. An intrinsically dissipative activity like architectural design, which demands a totalising focus and a continuous reworking of its premises and outcomes, cannot help to fail any quantitative evaluation. Since students are told by the system that an efficient teaching works the other way, they usually find it hard to get in tune with studios that aspire to 'lighting fires and not filling pails.'⁵ This comes out clearly also in the final assessments of the courses by the student, where workload is always considered exaggerated and the previous preparation insufficient.

Ironically, this reciprocity in giving marks is just a minor consequence of the disruption of power structures my generation struggled for, even though the inversion of demographic dynamics probably played here a more decisive role: we were a lot and professors were distant, irritable divinities, while we try now to lure our few and reluctant students like faded beauties. Rude attitudes – so widespread among our masters and, in a retrospective view, more than often crucial in our growth – are no more conceivable. It is not just a matter

of due respect, politeness, or political correctness: acting toughly would turn out very little credible also because the Italian university developed toward 'productivity' a system already geared to ease the possibility of getting a degree. In addition to relatively low enrolment fees and the 'off course' regime (which allows students to attend university courses and take exams virtually forever, year after year, at least six times a year, even if they repeatedly failed them), high education is financed by the State on the basis of the number of students with regular careers. That means that it is very difficult – and potentially self-harming – getting a physiologic selection, promoting the keenest and talented and stopping the laziest. As a result, the very decision about who will graduate in architecture is anticipated at the moment of the admission exam with a multiple choice test that has nothing to do with the practice of architectural design and hardly can forecast future outcomes in terms of aptitude and skill (so that nobody has actually taken the trouble to verify its predictive capacity).

In comparison to the most renowned European schools, where fifteen-thirty percent of the students fails the first year, almost all those who enter Italian high education in

ESTA COMO UNIDAD
tempo, disporre il progetto, architettura



Nina Nenadić, *Una scuola in Ecuador*, Master Thesis Project, supervisor Giovanni Corbellini, Trieste University, 2015-16.

architecture complete their studies.⁶

Perhaps we are very good teachers, certainly we are the most 'productive', in absolute and relative terms, but in a country already stuffed with architects this does not mean automatically good news.⁷ However, the crisis that recently affected the building market put the European schools in a situation similar to the Italian ones, at least from the point of view of the increasing numbers of graduates who will never run a professional practice as architects. Teaching architecture should therefore maintain acceptable levels in the education aimed to the usual disciplinary applications while turning it into a positive asset for those – in Italy a large majority of more than ninety percent – who will spend their design abilities in different, unpredictable manners and fields, hoping they will play a positive role beyond building and for the society at large.

Most of the issues and phenomena here rapidly depicted are intertwined with the revolution in information technologies that the world underwent in the last decades and that impacted architecture and its teaching in many ways. There is a shared sensation among colleagues of being caught up in a paradigm shift in the

way competences and skills can be effectively transmitted and trained. Many of us feel a growing difficulty to get in touch with younger generations and to achieve the usual educational goals. And this occurs indifferently among the 'two cultures', in the scientific and technological disciplines as well as with more ambiguous and elusive fields such as human sciences and arts. It is not just a matter of a transition in which a teaching staff of 'digital migrants' should prepare students grown up in the computer era. Also because the skill gap in managing electronic devices and logics is often reversed – many professors, not only those who teach IT and similar issues, are from this vantage still better equipped than their students. It is something more related to the cultural environment set up by these machines and the attitude they can determine in the crucial years of formation.

For instance, contemporary hyper-connection and multitasking behaviours have probably to do with a general reduction in attention time. The unprecedented pressure of the present that they convey on our devices contributes to a growing 'prosthetic' use of memory, which trusts in easy information retrieval from the web. Since memory is a necessary function for thinking

(providing material, facilitating connections, quickening intuitions, and also assuring faster and more effective interactions with search engines...), the early habit to outsource it slows down the educational exchange, often making it difficult to share a common terrain. Moreover, the ongoing transfer of almost everything on virtual interfaces mediated by touchscreens and keyboards reduces those bodily experiences so decisive in remembering and understanding. Drawing on a piece of paper a plan of an interesting project from a magazine, instead of copy-pasting a link from the web, helps decisively to fix its memory, also thanks to the effort of the hand and its coordination with the eye.

However, this is not the only function or thinking process we are outsourcing to digital applications. Though we are still far from fictional scenarios à la Matrix⁸ (where Trinity is able to upload in seconds in her brain a complete ability to pilot a helicopter), we already rely on algorithms as substitutes of tiring, boring and/or manual, operations. They make our performances more effective and rapid in the short run, but undermining the possibility of learning in the making, even through mistakes or serendipitous encounters. Their efficiency

influences our expectations, especially the less experienced ones, making suspect the trial and error method intrinsic to any architectural design endeavour. This dissipative feature is furthermore endangered by the Internet as a bidirectional communication medium, which watches us while we browse its contents, adapting them to our previous navigations. The huge amount of available and directly accessible on-line knowledge comes therefore tailored around individual desires, confirming inclinations and gathering them in isolated tribes. So that the 'middle class', like in the whole society, is fading away and design studios deal with splintered audiences, where even the most basic tools cannot be taken for granted. For instance, and incredibly enough, despite the pressure and the allure of globalisation, more than half of the students that enrol in my school is far from being fluent in English. Whereas a medium like television provided, for better or worse, the cultural background to a wide community, the current fragmented panorama makes it difficult to rely on cross-referencing, analogy and other metaphorical strategies, so necessary when trying to penetrate and explain the core of an artistic discipline. The scenario here hinted at affects of course architectural

design itself, not only the possibility of its teaching. Artificial intelligence protocols are looming over the horizon and the disciplinary debate already is dealing with its possible consequences.⁹ However, more specialized professions, which seem to better withstand the current situation, are threatened by a greater risk of undergoing a rapid process of automation. Buckminster Fuller, whose geeky attitude took to the extreme the self-criticality of our 'retroactive' discipline, forecasted for it an unexpected resilience. He noted that 'species become extinct through overspecialization and that architects constitute the "last species of comprehensivists." Thanks to the 'multidimensional synthesis at the heart of the field', designers can act 'as incubators of a transformative paradigm shift.'¹⁰ It seems therefore that the same problems that endanger architectural design give it the opportunity to become essential. Teaching it through a nostalgic retreat into the autonomy of the discipline, as some of my masters did, would paradoxically miss its identity as a gaze on the world and as a still effective approach to its transformation. Believing as I do that crisis is the engine of architectural thinking, I tried in the last years to 'design' my teaching

through the contemporary condition, with the intention of making the best of it. I have no major strategies to display, just some tactical, ongoing adjustment of what I felt decisive in my own education. As a background, there are few standpoints and some methodological tricks.

Let's start from the latter.

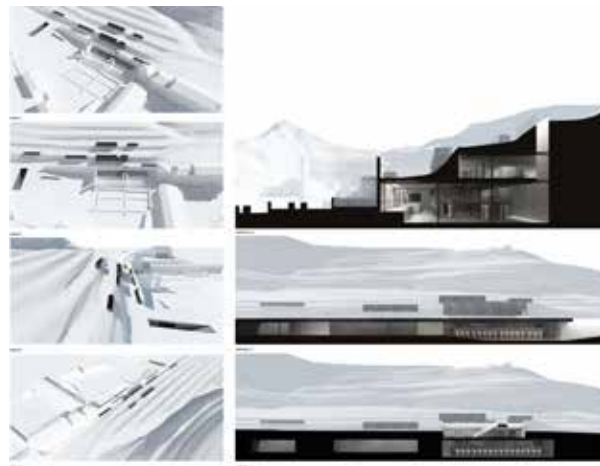
In order to tackle the reduced capacity to pay attention to normal lectures, I fragmented some of them in smaller units alternate with exercises able to verify comprehension and fix immediately the major misunderstandings. Since most of the contents I deliver are published,¹¹ I'm trying right now to substitute some of the lessons with discussions about specific arguments, on which students are supposed to get prepared before (even if, in Italy, this sounds a little hazardous, but it seems to work). It is a simulation of the final exams, organised as a sort of round table with half a dozen of students of which I am the moderator (getting a minimum of competence and clarity in talking about architecture is one of the major aims of my courses). Learning to read usually precedes any writing ability, so copying is the main tool to work out the project. I

provide students with examples delivered in manifold forms, both as consistent individual experiences and compared time after time from specific vantages (manipulation of the program; context interpretation; open spaces management; plan, section, and elevation; representation strategy...). Self-teaching is a condition for architects, who are expected to cope with diversity and produce difference, so students are asked to search and propose examples on their own. Teamwork goes along individual contributions, exploiting collaboration *and* competition. The nuts and bolts of architectural imagination are hardly rationalisable and there is nothing that can substitute a drawing hand in front of you, displaying its thinking power. I usually draw while talking during the critics and my assistants do it too: the unsaid is probably the most important part of a design studio, something invaluable and irreplaceable by any virtual reality.

And here you are the standpoints: a pluralist, interrogative attitude – any solution should be discovered within the design process, finding unstable and contingent consistencies –; a pragmatist (still modernist?) approach, aimed to an economy of form; the attempt to address a

‘superficial complexity’, towards a fabric of connected, even contradictory issues rather than in-depth analyses; a privileged focus on the relationship between words and things, looking for a narrative binding between the architectural projects and their reasons.

This latter is probably the main apparatus of my studios, where I usually teach both theory and design, and deserves some more reflections. Things feed upon words in the whole process of architectural production: within the project experience, where they provide concepts and tools to manage the relationship among the different stakeholders involved; when projects get built, and their outcomes are used, inhabited, commented, criticized; before it all starts, and narratives shift the perception of the world making it possible for certain attitudes to unfold.¹² In this spiralling, mutual relation, it is difficult to think of theory in architecture as an interpretation of the world that can be ‘demonstrated’ with experiments, like in hard sciences. Such a hierarchical framework is unattainable by our field, whose ‘truths’ are always ‘contextual’, woven into specific space-time folds. A good theoretical framework can – and should – yield very different results, while the repeatability and predictability



Filippo Cattapan, Filippo Maria Piovene Porto Godi, *Progetto di una cantina sui colli Berici*, Master Thesis Project, supervisors Giovanni Corbellini, Marcello Mamoli, Leonardo Marotta, IUAV University, 2010-11.

of design solutions is often a sign of something unhealthy. That's why it is perhaps more correct to talk of theories: a plural, contingent, continuously shifting set of devices intertwined with the flows of in-formation and the ways we inflect them towards trans-formation. For the same reason, it is hard to sustain the autonomy of architecture – as a discipline virtually disconnected from 'secular' issues –, and especially that of theory, as a vantage completely independent from the architect's toolbox.¹³

So, one of the main concerns in teaching architectural theories is to integrate them into the design process. Conceptual, textual and discursive practices should act as normal project instruments, with the same dignity and operative potential of drawings, models, digital algorithms, etc., yet being aware of a strategic difference. As highlighted before, there is a core of architectural design that asks to be taught as religion. Believing in precepts, performing rites, following behaviours can get students in touch with the 'mysteries' of a specific approach before they understand them and even without consciously grasping them at all. Theories have to provide vice versa a critical attitude: what design 'builds', architectural theories 'deconstruct', where the

former aims to 'compose' balanced settings, the latter are nurtured by conflicts. They act often as a form of creative destruction, a criticism of existent interpretations and approaches in order to provide running room for new proposals.

This 'philosophical' aspect of architecture is often addressed through its history, which on the one hand makes sense – because of the need to gear beginners with some logical framework. Theory, on the other hand, is about the here and now, shares with design the ambition to set up new interpretations and directions. It can therefore be approached as a problematic issue, starting from the most recent debate, with some interesting consequences or side-effects. Discursive practices, which are intrinsically linear, act as contrast media for space imagination. In other words, they perform a 'critical' function even before a critical attitude has been trained and achieved. This triggers a mutual improvement of the ability to 'read' projects and to 'write' them as sets of logically organized operations. Reviewing books; simulating round-tables; producing video-clips and slide shows; analysing specific textual strategies and re-writing old project presentation texts as 'exercises of

style'; performing role-play sessions (in which adapting arguments to different audiences) are among the exercises my students ran through. My intention is to literally give them words and to enhance their critical, and especially self-critical, ability. By the way, a deeper theoretical awareness – along with the ability to translate the disciplinary toolbox into the mono-dimensional sequence of storytelling – is now crucial for architects also because of the phenomena of virtualization that even this profession so strongly intertwined in materiality is undergoing. The more information technology provides prosthetic applications, erasing distances in time and space, the less built answers and authorial skills will be requested. The export of our specific gaze into the immaterial is therefore strategic to keep us in touch with "reality" and to get commissions. Both of stuff and not.

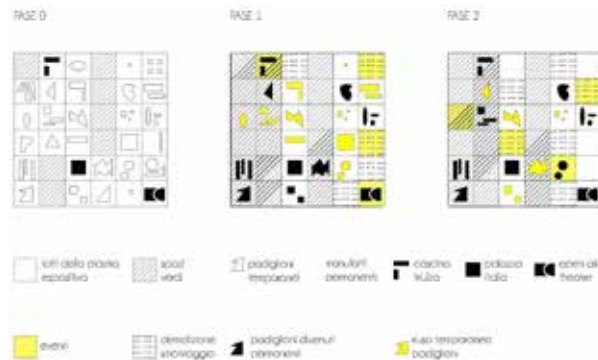
Does this array of tactics work? Not completely and not at once, of course. It is like exposing seeds to radiations (a broad spectrum of theoretical and design radiations) and looking at the mutations that occur. Obviously, my assistants and I manage to get some decent result at the end of the studio, but the real aim of my teaching activity (to arise some critical curiosity) shows its influence,

when it happens, in its aftermath. I can see it sometimes advising degree theses, a traditionally very important moment in architecture schools that has been able to resist better than other aspects at the quantification of the Bologna Process.

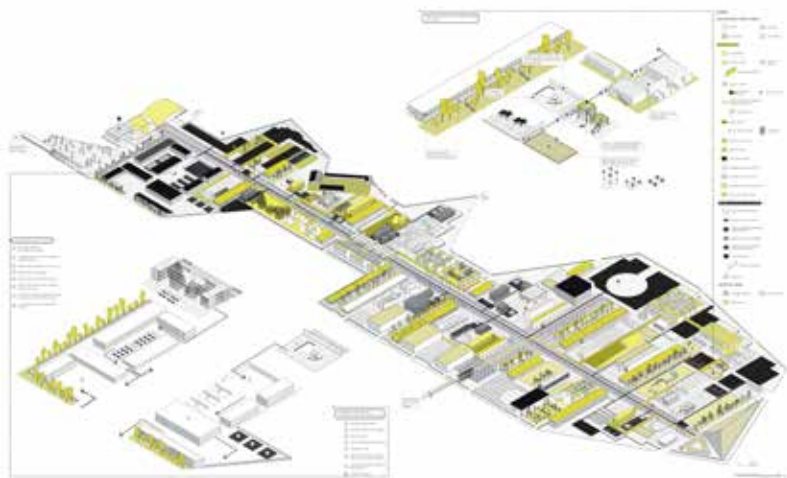
The European recognition procedure of master's degrees in architecture, which ask schools to declare their theses are worked out as architectural projects, confirms the identity role of this final experience. However, what is a normal task beyond the Alps cannot be taken for granted in Italy, where theses explore usually other fields, such as history, representation, technology, etc. This Italian anomaly produces on the one hand an undeniable richness but it reverberates on the other in a weird proliferation of architects evidently less focused on the fundamental instrument of a discipline that the life events might take them to practice or to control, for instance as a civil servant. Yet, having tutored so far one hundred and forty master's and bachelor's theses, I know very well that a final design work does not automatically assure high quality graduates: few are good (some have been able to earn prizes); various weak; most barely acceptable.

Difficult to say how many of them I would ask to design me an ashtray, certainly not a lot.

As I write these notes, my gaze settles on the shelf of theses advised by the colleague with whom I share the office at the school of Gorizia: all in A4 format, bound with hardcover, catalogued and numbered. Mine are square, rectangular, both vertical and horizontal, small and large, with a collection of bindings, colours and materials as varied. Being architects, you can bet that the contents correspond to the containers and I realize that, beyond the different character and disciplinary inclinations, these shelves display two opposite ways to understand the education to the architectural project or, more precisely, to design tout court. My colleague unfolds an essentially normative character, whose technical knowledge can be organized according to repeatable procedures. He accommodates his students on a sort of methodological Procrustean bed, in order to provide them a standard of knowledge and a certain professional solidity. The moment of graduation represents here a sort of last defensive occasion against the educational uncertainty of our schools, where teamwork and monographic courses can easily make normal gaps becoming chasms.



Mariacristina D'Oria, Expost. *Il riciclo dell'evento, l'evento del riciclo*, supervisors Giovanni Corbellini, Claudia Marcon, Giovanni La Varra, Trieste University, 2013-14; third award of the Bracco Foundation Prize 2015; shortlisted Archiprix 2015; honorable mention Architettura Sostenibile Fassa Bortolo Prize 2016.



Mariacristina D'Oria, Expost. *Il riciclo dell'evento, l'evento del riciclo*, supervisors Giovanni Corbellini, Claudia Marcon, Giovanni La Varra, Trieste University, 2013-14.

This appears to me as a major undertaking, which involves an understandable and praiseworthy assumption of responsibility. However, I cannot share its ideology, precisely in relation to the architectural project as an instrument of intervention and, above all, of knowledge. The 'learned and correct' game of architectural design becomes 'magnificent' because its results are always open and the rules that define its limits and processes are continuously negotiated with the conditions of reality and with their interpretation aimed at extracting a potential of transformation. For this reason, in the education of an architect, the acquisition of competences is sterile if it is not accompanied by the formation of an attitude to curiosity, research, experimentation.

The degree thesis – which comes at the interface between education and profession – is the moment when this attitude can and must develop. At the beginning, just to start somewhere, one can also follow a predefined ritual (reading the context, collecting references, defining the program, proposing a scenario...), knowing well that there are no linear procedures capable of guaranteeing interesting results and that any exploration in any direction affects retroactively the role and meaning of

the previous steps. Nothing therefore forbids starting from the end, even from an intuition of detail capable of orienting, according to the paranoiac-critical method, the analytical research of the 'proofs' that will support its meaning. In the most functional cases, the relationship between student and teacher tends to become less asymmetric, up to a paradoxical but effective exchange of roles: to teach –namely trying to organise and transmit a temporarily coherent and personally elaborated discourse – is one of the ways to grasp some bit of knowledge.

I do not know if my bewildered students do fewer damages as architects than the 'square' ones graduated by my colleague, neither I believe there is any reliable parameter to establish it.

For sure, I am learning a lot.

1

'The architect is only invited in when the problem is unclear, with multiple incompatible sets of information preventing the use of any existing toolbox. The real task of the architect is not to solve a problem but to visualize it. The architect suspends a sense of pattern right there in the gaps in collective understanding. Not simply accommodating the everyday but interrupting it in a way that allows the world to be seen. Whether asked or not, the architect crafts a hesitation in the name of overlooked patterns in information.' Mark Wigley, *Buckminster Fuller Inc.: Architecture in the Age of Radio* (Zürich: Lars Müller, 2015), pp. 224-225.

2

'Designers may believe what they like about themselves but they are not God's henchmen and not labourers in the vineyard of being. A designer cannot regard himself or herself only as a curator of what is already there. All design stems from an anti-prayer; it begins with the decision to pose the question of the form and function of things in a new way. The sovereign person is the one who decides on the exception to the rule in questions of form. And when it comes to the form of things, design is the permanent exceptional state – it explains an end to modesty in relation to how things are traditionally constituted, and the spirit of radically questioning the function of a thing and its masters and users is manifested in the will to create new versions of all things.' Peter Sloterdijk, *The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art* (Malden: Polity, 2017), p. 92.

3

I addressed these issues in a couple of recent articles, see: 'Design By Research', *Villardjournal*, 1 (2018, forthcoming); 'Autonomy by Drawing: Gianugo Polesello on Route '66', *Footprint*, 22 (2018, forthcoming).

4

In 2011, preparing the passage of the 3+2 courses in architecture of the University of Trieste to the current five years master, I was in charge to

make some comparisons with other schools. It came out that an Italian graduate in architecture (master level) got his or her degree attending in five years an average of fifty credits in architectural design, while syllabuses abroad usually include at least one hundred credits of the same discipline.

5

'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.' is a famous quote attributed to William Butler Yeats.

6

These data are not based on reliable figures, I just asked colleagues who teach abroad their schools' performances. Without reaching the cruelty of the famous Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm (I read somewhere that they admitted every next year a predetermined number of students narrower than the enrolled ones), a little 'teaching Darwinism' would improve our students' commitment.

7

The section 'Monditalia' of The Venice Biennale 2014, curated by Rem Koolhaas, started with some impressive figures about our profession: Italy, with a ratio of an architect for every four hundred inhabitants, vastly outpaces other similar countries (1/800 Germany; 1/900 Spain; 1/2000 France).

8

Larry (Lana) and Andy (Lilly) Wachowski, *The Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999).

9

Parametric design is probing the margin between an authorial improved control through machine aided design and the technological utopia of an architecture without architects. See Giovanni Corbellini and Cecilia Morassi, *Parametrico nostrano* (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2013).

10

Fuller's thinking is reported by Wigley, p. 71.

11

Usually, my studios deal with collective housing: *Housing is back in town* (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2012) collects a series of lecture about this topic. *Dr. Corbellini's Pills* (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2016 (2010)), now in English too, is an attempt to give students some tips to get tuned with architectural design and make the most practising it.

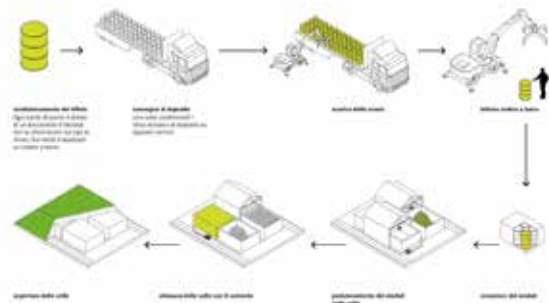
12

I unfolded these topics in mine *Lo spazio dicibile. Architettura e narrativa* (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2016).

13

Some notes about the current fashion of an architectural theory for the sake of theory are in mine 'Design By Research'.

fasi di stoccaggio

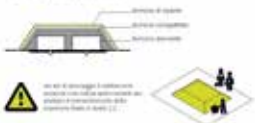


funzionamento del deposito



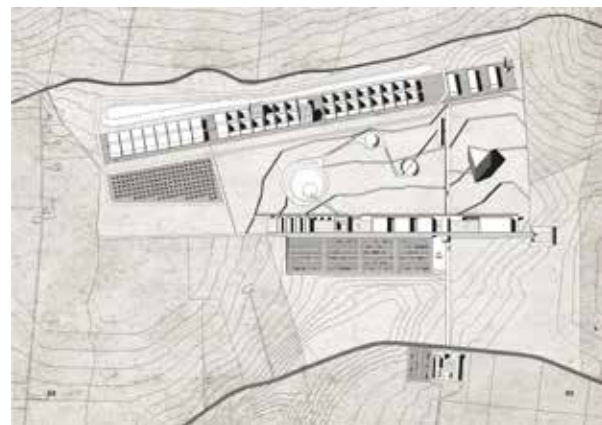
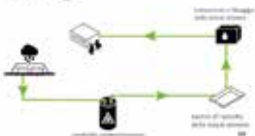
copertura permanente

La copertura permanente ha la funzione di proteggere dal fuoco e prevenire le intrusioni di inquinamento.



gestione delle acque

Una serie di gestione delle acque per il deposito delle acque e per il controllo di inquinamento.



Ariella Sokol, *Remember the Future. Technopark of the National Radioactive Storage Site*. Master Thesis Project, Supervisor Giovanni Corbellini, Trieste University, 2014-15.

costandis kizis,
teresa stoppani
and armando j.
uhia hernandez

it's always a
threesome, or,
on the intricacies
of educating an
architect

In 2016/17 Costandis Kizis and Teresa Stoppani were Armando Uhia Hernandez's teachers at the Leeds School of Architecture, in the first year of the Bachelor of Architecture (with Honours) programme, the first three years of undergraduate architectural education in the United Kingdom.

Costandis was both the design studio tutor and a history and theory lecturer. Teresa lectured in history and theory and often visited the studio. Yet – who put things together, in a wholesome architectural education process? Who taught, and who learned?

This year Armando continues his successful career of Student Architect at the Leeds School of Architecture.

Costandis is Studio Master and History and Theory Lecturer at the Architectural Association in London.

Teresa is co-editor of the *Journal of Architecture* and is completing her book *Unorthodox Ways of Rethinking Architecture* (Routledge, 2018).

Conversations continue. [T]

If this were a play it would start with casting the characters: A meets C meets T. But that would be too easy. This floorplan does not have a legend. It is not even a plan, perhaps it is a map. Memory, temporality, cultural curiosity, navigational imprints are already at stake, before we even sharpen a pencil, or start talking. It's a conversation.

This story gets personal, very. As do design tutorials in the studio, where the unconscious is exposed, as if we were, all, on the psychoanalyst couch. For decency, deontology or mere shyness we pretend not to notice. It is a tacit agreement, the pact that binds minds who want to think together, design together, and grow together. Forget sex. Nothing is more intimate than thinking in tune. [T]

October:

In the design studio we give you a brief and erroneously ask you to be creative. Creative? To be continued. [T]

December:

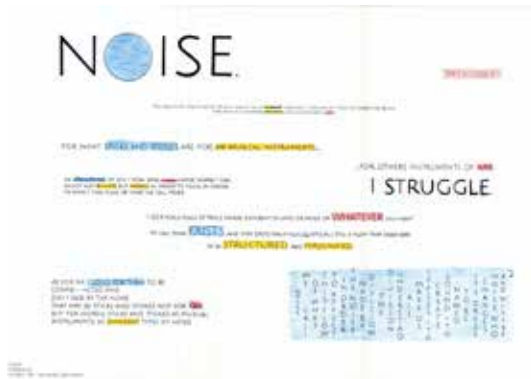
A beach house in Fuerteventura, one that would be looking towards the sunset among the trees. That's what

Armando dreams of. He even posts a picture of a house like that next to his studio desk. Yet the brief is about a temporary structure for Leeds city centre. Armando designs a hanging box over a set of ducts and pipes, and keeps thinking about the beach. In the box one would supposedly find the peaceful environment that he dreams of in the beach house. The result is a horrible design; at the assessment, the project barely passes. There is no relation between the story he tells the jury panel and the design he is presenting. A total disaster.

Nevertheless, the jurors are impressed by the way he talks; the passionate tone and the coherent argument, albeit in front of an incoherent design. The easy assumption is that this is yet another student who's "bullshitting", that is, talk over a project he never produced. Yet, two days earlier Armando had asked the question "what is an architectural narrative?"; and no matter what we told him, it was now obvious that he was more capable of developing a narrative rather than a project. [C]

February:

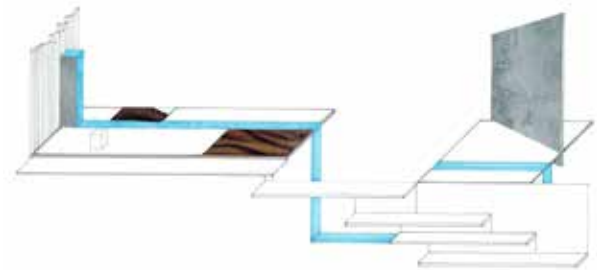
'Students amazed by you. Did you dance for them??? Armando almost in love.' [C]



1. Oral Narratives

March:

Armando's dream and his narrative become architectural concern. In an email he writes: 'There is something missing in today's educational system and that is the active respectful relationship from the Master [read, tutor] to the Apprentice [read, student]. [Lacking t]he benefits of having so is what is stopping some students to develop their maximum potential, and that is sad. The lack of this relationship is the lack of passion in the Master [tutor] and the lack of appreciation and respect from the Apprentice [student]. There are two reason why I am mentioning this: [...] During these times you inspire[d



2. Mies-inspired collage

me] to be better, to push my own boundaries and to develop new "hybrid" ways of thinking with my projects and daily architectural life. [...] I intend to pursue for you passion, education and respect. Both of you are a key part of my future success within Architecture and everything that revolves around it.' [A]

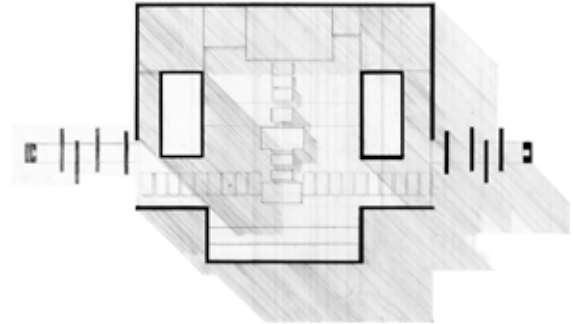
February-April:

Lectures on Postmodern and Modern architecture. Reverse order of a "mission impossible" survey course, from Hadid to Hammurabi in 12 lectures. It makes sense for the first year of architectural studies to start with the



3. Intuitive model of clay and wood

“hot stuff” - it helps in studio! Postmodern and Modern were supposed to be the “easy” lectures. It turns out it was a nightmare. There wouldn't be two continuous minutes of talking without an interruption by Armando, ranging from surprisingly interesting questions to spontaneous comments such as “I don't like this guy” (the “guy” being Le Corbusier). It seems impossible to strike a balance between welcoming one of his comments and making a point in the lecture, and asking him to calm down. At some point, already exhausted, I come to 1929, the Barcelona Pavilion is projected on the screen. Next image, Mies's wonderful collage of it. I move to the next



4. 'Flowing Boundaries'. The plan

slide and there he goes again: “Hey! Can you go back?” He said nothing more, we all just looked at the image for another minute. [C]

April:

‘I would like to take the opportunity to ask you something [...] In one of the surgeries you said the word ‘creating’ was banned in architecture, but why? I have been thinking of this a lot.’ [email] [A]

Now Armando is standing in front of his desk in the studio, wearing a white apron and slicing a pile of wet

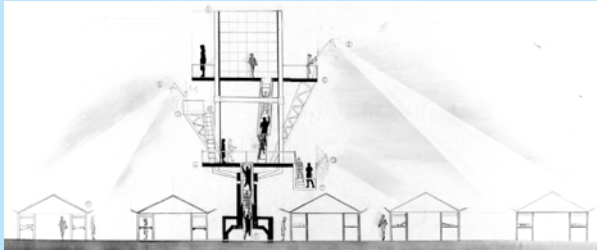


Year 1 Project 1. Orthographic projection, photography, photocopy, collage and model making are used as media for speculating on the expansion of abandoned everyday objects. Studio director: Mohamad Hafeda. Student: Joseph Sudlow.

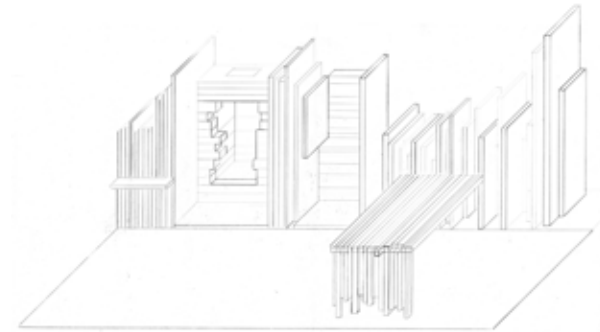
clay with a big knife. He looks like a butcher when cutting meat. He is complaining about the material being heavy and not as malleable. Thin fillets of clay are laid out on the side of the desk, and when you ask him what he's doing he says "I don't know!!!" and bursts out laughing. He doesn't want to say he's creating; that word was recently banned, so he just cuts clay fillets; as accurately as a good butcher, yet equally purposelessly.

On the next day, in the studio he presents a “conceptual model”. He makes no sense when talking about it, but the actual model is the best piece he’s produced so far. A sort of organic terrain made of clay, of almost sculptural quality, intersected by sheer, perfectly cut wooden surfaces, free-standing walls that penetrate and mark the clay. Key moment: Armando talks less and does more. [C]

For the Cultural Context Studies course, Armando writes an essay entitled 'Architecture in the Hands of the Incapable'. It is a polemical paper that 'explores the impact of globalisation, industrialisation and consumerism not only on architecture but on the architect', and reminds us 'of the importance of architecture and the effects it



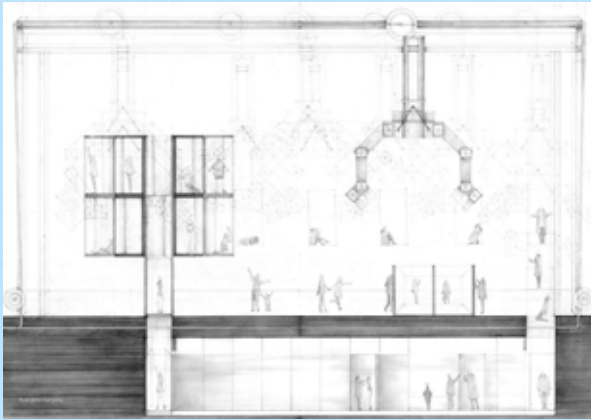
Year 1 Project 2. Exploring the physical and social fabric of public pockets in the city centre of Leeds. New 'break spaces' interrupt current practices of public space and introduce new activities and dynamics. Studio director: Mohamad Hafeda. Student: Shaan Singh.



5. 'Function and texture

has on the context and the world in which architecture is applied'. The concerns and discoveries of one year of experimentation and questioning in the design studio transpire in the essay as well. [T]

'If one desires to research creation in architecture, it is totally inevitable that it would be like trying to play with clay without dirtying one's hands. The overflow of ideas and revelations will compel a honest architect to an immediate sketch or any experimental model making, in order to begin with the eternal passion (always ambivalent) of translating one's project into the palpable



Year 1 Project 3. Proposing double public programmes for the market's outdoor space that go beyond selling and buying and explore the meaning of exchange in relation to site, programme and form. Studio director: Mohamad Hafeda. Student: Ryan John Garganta.



6. 'Flowing Boundaries' Model views.

world? Ultimately, the question/obsession remains, as the essay suggests 'that every architect, at least once a year should ask him/herself the following questions: To what extent are we allowing to control our creativity? To what extent are we allowing our surroundings to control our shape, form or function? What are we afraid of? What is stopping/constraining our vision?'. [A]

May:

The studio brief is about a double programme, of the student's choice. Quite ambitiously (especially for the square footage provided) Armando is designing a



7: 'Flowing Boundaries'. Model views.

Parliament building and an Opera house. It took us some time to convince him that - size wise - it was more of a local council room and a busker's stand ... but isn't the programmatic premise almost the same?

All of a sudden, everything comes together. An argument about collectivity and participation paired with a sensitive narrative about governing and enjoying. A malleable terrain, divided by water and vegetation, reminiscent of his Fuerteventura dream house ambient, is combined with a strict layout of straight walls that defines the double programme. A design process that owed as much to Armando's butcher-like making experiments, as to

his experimentation with collage techniques inspired by those of Mies van der Rohe discovered in the history and theory lectures. An eloquent presentation leaves the jurors breathless, as Armando goes through the pinned-up drawings that occupy half the room. [C]

'Just read Armando's [essay] and I'm actually IMPRESSED!!! Not any more by his passion, but by his progress ... and this comes after good work in studio, where he jumped from D (last semester) to B!!! It's so nice to see that one's work does not go to waste ... I mean, I felt so many times in this school that our teaching has no impact, and then you've got this guy and some more ... For this guy in particular, your impact was beyond expectation, both in his essay and in general; you have woken him up!' [C]

October:

Armando send us images of his work to accompany these words, and writes: 'I am still not only in love but madly in love with architecture. It's the suffering I enjoy the most. ... I deeply miss you [...]

Not only your teaching, but your friendship and those

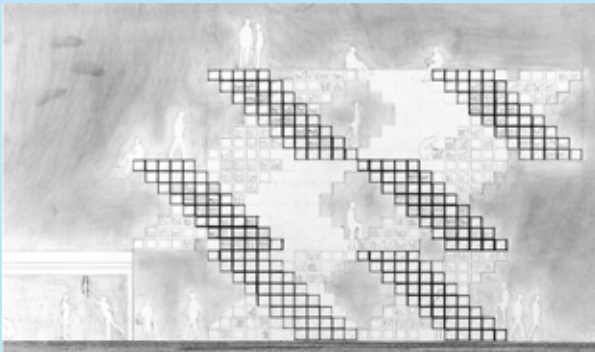
conversations that sparked my creativity.' [A]

Did we really ask you to be creative? [T and C]

Note: Armando, Costandis and Teresa worked together in the first year of the BA (Hons) Architecture Course at the Leeds School of Architecture, Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom, 2016/17. Year Theme 2016/17: 'Temporary Narratives'. Studio tutors: Ashley Ball, Mohamad Hafeda (year coordinator), Costandis Kizis, Francesco Zuddas. History and Theory lecturers: Costandis Kizis and Teresa Stoppani.

In the previous pages:

1. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. From oral to written. Opening narrative for the First Year Studio final project 'Flowing Boundaries'.
2. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. Before form-making. The basic elements and materials of the proposal in a Mies-inspired collage.
3. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. 'Flowing Boundaries'. Intuitive model of clay and wood; first material exploration.
4. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. 'Flowing Boundaries'. The plan; performance and discursive space in a simple double-programme layout.
5. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. Function and texture; the design for a wall that would host different activities of a break space.
- 6-7. Armando J. Uhia Hernandez. 'Flowing Boundaries'. Model views.



Year 1 Project 3. Studio director: Mohamad Hafeda. Student: Nur Isa.

luís
antônio
jorge

to study
architecture
as language
phenomenon

What does it mean to study or analyze the architecture as language phenomenon? How to do it?

In the works here presented the drawing or physical model are used as method of investigation about the interpretation of architecture.

To comprehend architecture as language it is needed to operate with the ways it represents itself.

To think about how to think in architecture it is needed to understand the ways in which thought represents itself.

In other words, it is about thinking about how to make a project – the fundamental question to these few examples presented next.

This epistemological approach originates from the theory of language, the logical of language and Peirce's semiotic.

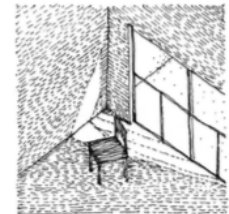
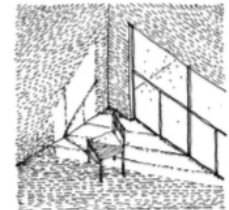
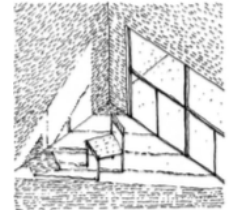
Its objectives are:

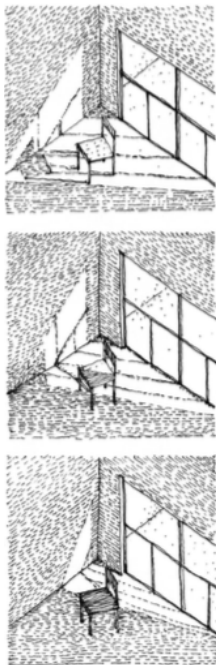
- to reflect on the thought in architecture by its representation;
- to experience the sensation of language's birth in drawing;
- to discover possible paths in the universe of architecture when they become visible or possible to represent;
- to make connections between thought and its representation;
- to be conscious about the relation between sign and object;
- to use the ways of architecture's representation as analytical instruments of paradigmatic works of architectural history and culture.

This set of objectives defines the type of pedagogical work we develop at College of Architecture and Urbanism of University of São Paulo (FAU-USP).

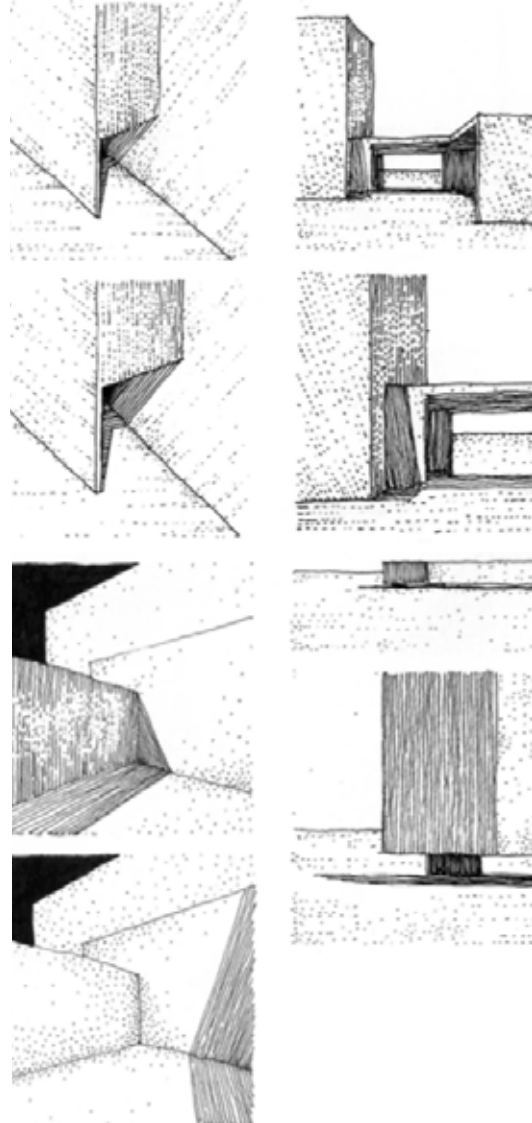
Drawing, imagination and perception in architecture (2012), by the student Bhakta Krpa, is the dialogue of a "draftsman reader" with selected texts of Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor, Maurice Merleau-Pointy, Paul Valéry, Sergej Ėjzenštejn, Arlindo Machado, Pedro Janeiro, and others less central, about the processes of perception, representation and signification, since the general until the specifics precepts of architecture.

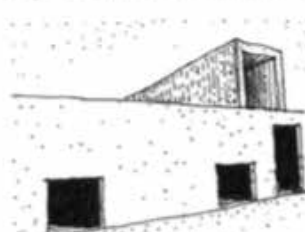
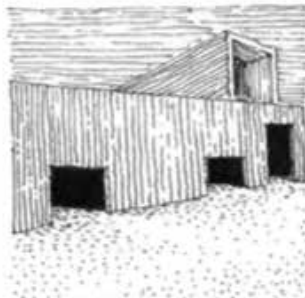
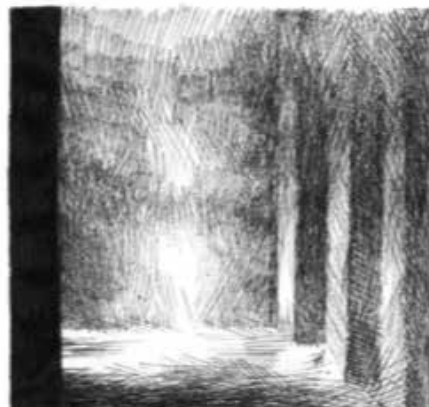
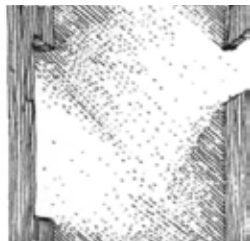
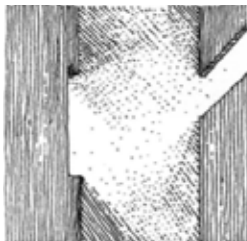
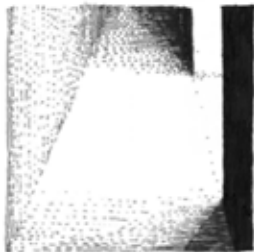
A text was written, in which it is commented, verbally, the consequences of the concepts presented by the authors, in comprehension of architecture's language and, graphically, the representation of an individual's perception of the qualities and meanings of an imaginable space. These drawings are a visual discourse that investigates the perception of architectural qualities and the ways to settle them in drawing.





The drawings do not represent an idea of architectural project, but an assembly made of “latency images” about the signification of architecture as a procedure closer to subjectivity and synthesis than to objectivity and analysis: an imaginative, heuristic, creative use of the drawing associated to the architectural project. They are previous drawings, done before the act of projecting architecture, they are speculations about the qualities of architecture, they are “atmospheres”, registrations of the perceptive experience – that next to the text presents an imagery structure founded in combination, analogous to the cinematographic narrative, in which an image expands, reaffirms, contradicts or completes the signification of another, in a way that image’s space gains duration, dimension, form and direction, by the mental image suggested by what is not drawn.







School of things (2013), by the student Melissa Kawahara, is an investigation about poetic of materials, a tributary idea of the hypothesis that in the ways, in the concrete conditions and properties of the material with which things are made, there are the elements of language. The making, the art and design are ways to unlock the poetry hidden in raw material, besides being also arguments of realization of poetry, by their own nature of doing. Paper, wood and metal are the three materials submitted to the experimental manipulation guided to the construction of modular forms, rhythm structures and able to allow an open architecture, interactive or dialogic, as games and certain artworks such as Lygia Clark's, the Brazilian artist.

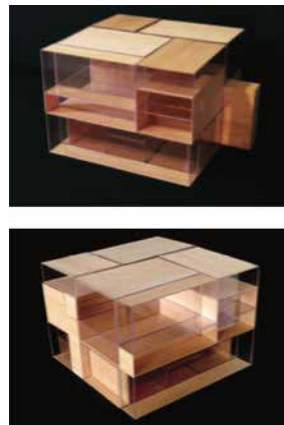
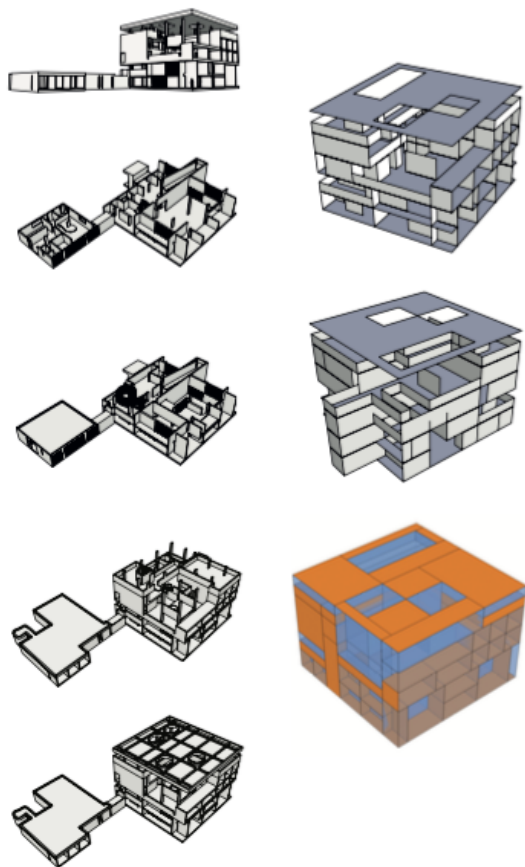




Body and space – Experiments to a modular vestment for the city of São Paulo (2010), by Ítalo Massaru, exemplifies a frequent type of investigation in the disciplines under my responsibility at the Department of Project of FAU-USP: the commitment to the material support of design and the analogical thought as motor of the formulation of hypothesis created in the dialogue of languages.

In the *Parangolés*, name of a series of works by the artist Helio Oiticica and in the *Experiment n° 3* of the artist and architect Flávio de Carvalho, both Brazilian, the body as reference of the perception of space, the contemporary dance and the geometric image of architecture in the city and in the daily life in São Paulo were called to compose the field of analogies that form the idea of vestment as people's shelters: a very simplified construction of vestment, but entirely versatile in a way that each piece can be reconfigured in articulation with other pieces, optimizing the probable uses in the different seasons of the year and in the diverse situations of living in the effusive dynamic of the metropolis of São Paulo.



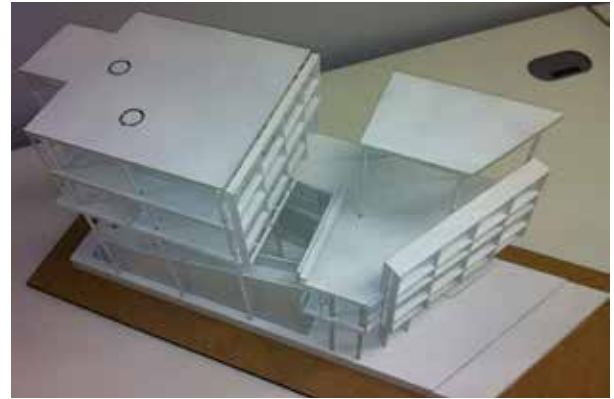


Representations of space in architecture – Vila Shodhan Case (2010), by the student Beatriz Marques de Oliveira, is a study about the ways of representation of the architectural project to use them as analytical instrument of Le Corbusier's residence, concluded in 1957, in Ahmedabad, India. Work of great space complexity, it was exhaustively redrawn to be apprehended and, later, physical and digital models were constructed (of the project and of the actual work executed) - fundamental experiences to know and comprehend the relations of measures in its space and apprehensive forms. Considering theoretical reference the arguments presented in the books "Modulor" and "Modulor 2" of Le Corbusier, interpretative hypothesis were created for Vila Shodhan through the making of the final physical model. This model represents the aesthetic, space and form relations in the language and in the syntax of this modern architecture masterpiece. It is about a possible representation of math present in the architecture, incorporating logic in project knowledge.



With the same objectives, theoretic references and methodology, three other researches were performed about Le Corbusier's architecture to produce physic models to be manipulated with didactic and pedagogical goals. These models were designed and constructed (prototype's level) from the analysis of three selected works of Le Corbusier, to transmit information and content about the spatial relations and rule idea, present on the mentioned books *The Modulor* and *Modulor 2*. The study of these works allow to comprehend and to generalize principles and aesthetic fundamentals presents on the trajectory of this architect, that allied the creative activity in the architecture, urbanism and arts with his theoretic production about his own works.

The physic model as object of representation of the analyzed work has major communicative reach because of its singular propriety of expressing the formal sense of the parts and how they articulate in order to form the whole composition, during its own manipulation. This apprehension is more direct and intuitive if compared to the one



offered by the two-dimensional drawing, whose code demands other levels of abstraction and cognition.

The three mentioned researches are:

1. Le Corbusier's Models – Villa Shodhan (2013) of the student Gabriela Schön Villas Bôas, dedicated to the same work studied in the previous example.

2. Le Corbusier's Models: House Curutchet (2013) of the student Rafael Elias Abifadel Monteiro, analyses the residence/clinic projected and constructed during the years of 1948 and 1953, in the city of La Plata, in Argentina, the only residence of Le Corbusier constructed in Latin America and that represents the five canonical points of his architecture (fenêtre en longueur, pilotis, toit-terrasse, plan libre, façade libre).

This research produced, beyond the physic manipulated model, a video three narrative readings: about the components of the structure, about the systems of circulation (a promenade architecturale) and about the compositional system with all the present architectural elements.

3. Le Corbusier's Models: Unité d'Habitation de Marseille (2010) from the team formed by the students Marina Andrade Leonardi, Aruã Oliveira Wagner, Kim Hoffmann e Marieta Colucci Ribeiro, analyzed this paradigmatic work for architecture and for its implicit city model, designed and constructed between 1945 and 1952. As a result, the research produced a kit with parts possible to manipulate for the user comprehend the application of the principles defined by the architect, associating modular parts to form housing units of various sizes and obtain innumerable results. The objective of this is to put in evidence the infinite possibilities of combination that the spatial model from Le Corbusier presupposes. Exactly in this point, the paradigmatic dimension of the project can be verified.

The making of the project followed three requirements: its fidelity to the principles of the project of the building; its functionality as a didactic object; and its physic quality, respecting the characteristics of the adopted material and the employed technology in the production. Taking the interests of producing on large scale, requirements of serial production were respected. The procedure of the project was based, beyond than in the technical drawing, in the experiments made directly with the materials and the equipment available in the Laboratory of Models e Rehearsals of FAUUSP (LAME). In view of the efficiency of the tridimensional models, like analytic instruments of architectural reasoning, the objective was to create a project that (used in the various schools of the country) could contribute significantly to the teaching of Le Corbusier's work.

These works presented above have in common the recognition of the respective study objects as language phenomena, which assumes the identification of their syntaxes and the use of the drawing as analytic instrument.





enrico
molteni

"One can never know enough.
The unknown and its call
lies even in what we know".
Eduardo Chillida

"I prefer the act of knowing to knowledge"
Eduardo Chillida

the
elements
cycle

Bill Viola, Earth Air Fire Water Martyrs, 2014.

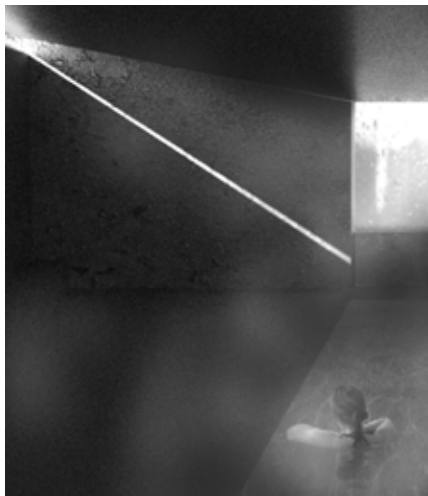
When I was invited at the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture to lead, together with Marc Collomb, a second-year Atelier, the first decision on "what to do" wasn't to think about the one-semester program, but rather about an educational cycle, with a beginning and an end, consisting of four courses corresponding to the expected duration of the assignment. Proposing different courses, one after the other, without a more structured thought, seemed to me a limiting, or even wrong, attitude.

I looked then at the works composed of several pieces: for example the triptych.

Among these, those of Francis Bacon, in which one same subject, for example, Lucien Freud, is portrayed by changing the

point of view in a work performed on three separate canvases. Or in the cinema, the "White-Red-Blue" trilogy by the Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski in which the three colors of one flag, in that case the French one, linked to the revolutionary motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, become a theme developed in three different films, changing the point of view on the subject and organizing the whole work in a single form.

As a chord, composed of four different notes, a sound made up of four sounds, the idea of the didactic cycle had the aim of producing a richer and more complex, but at the same time closely knit, result.



Water: House with Swimming Pool.
Water: Exercise on pitched roofs.



Fire: Atelier House.

The subject, in this case of Mendrisio, was the house, assigned to all the teachers of the second year.¹ Around this common subject I wanted to arrange, like the poles of a tent, or, rather, like the columns of an impluvium, four themes. After some reflections and various doubts I chose the four primordial elements, earth-air-fire-water, identified already by the presocratic Greeks, thus giving shape, for the individual home, to the Elements cycle.

2

I primarily intended the house as the place of architecture, in the Heidegger's interpretation of living.²

I thought of a timeless house, of its original meaning. "Originally home (Heimr in ancient Norwegian, heim in high German, komi in Greek) meant the center of the world – not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense".³

And this center is the place where existence and reality are manifested in their substance and essence. From this point of view the commitment of thinking about the house has expanded, and has sought resonance between the mutable and the immutable elements, between the physical and the ideal, between the specific and the

1

Distinguished in "individual house" and "collective house" for the two semesters of each academic year, while "typologies" was the title of the cycle dedicated to the "collective house" divided into: cluster, temporary, dichotomy and hybrid tower.

2

Martin Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking*, 1951. I also refer to the text of Pep Quetglas, *Habitar*, published in *Pasado a limpio, I* and *Pasado a limpio, II* (Valencia: Pre-textos, 2012).

3

"Mircea Eliade showed that the house was the place from which the world could be founded. (...) The house was the center of the world because it was the intersection point of vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis was the path that led to heaven and to the underworld. The horizontal axis represented the movement of the world, all the possible roads that lead to other places on earth". John Berger, *Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

4

"The specific quality of the house spread over time, that is the constant prevailing of the object use on the form: the house as a tool." in Giorgio Grassi, 'Project for a Small House', *Lotus International* 22, 1979. But even more intimately "Of course I love most of all the small restorations of this lake house where architecture merges with life out of necessity", in Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981).

5

"Archaic means close to the arké, that stays for the origin." But the origin is not only situated in a chronological past: it is contemporary with the historical transformation and it does not cease to operate in this. Historians know that between the archaic and the modern there is a secret appointment", in Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo?* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2008).

6

Karl Kraus, *Worte in versen. Vol I* (Wien: Fackel 1925).

general ones.

A house where you could feel the reality of the universal laws along with the intrinsic value of utility item.⁴ Any house has its origin in another, prior and essential. I wanted rather an archaic house,⁵ so close to us as close to the origin. So I started again from the Greeks. "Is the origin the destination"?⁶

The elemental house, or the house of the elements, is the one I wanted to build at the center of the *impluvium*.

3

"Architecture" is composed, in its etymology, of two parts: arché (from the greek ἀρχή) and tèchne (dal greco τέχνη).

The first part, arché, means "beginning, origin", a term recalling all the Western philosophy: it is that root which makes us understand what is invisible and yet more powerful than the visible, contained in the meaning of the second part, in the tèchne domain. The term arché thus assumes the more general meaning of "foundation" or "reason for being", while tèchne represents the real world, the set of practical norms.

I wanted to combine, and perhaps to overlap, the



Air: House in the Wood.
Air: Shelter House.



Air: plexiglass models.

meaning of the root of the thought-contained in the archè – to that of the root of the world, contained in the primordial elements of the earth-air-fire-water, to give a philosophical foundation to this teaching experience. The attention that I wanted to draw to these elements comes from the current need to understand and reformulate the relationship between architecture and nature. I believe that even if the relationship between architecture and the city is still foundational, in recent years our discipline has once again taken nature as a collective reference. I am not interested in the Minergie standards or in the LEED certificate, nor in the ephemeral and superficial propaganda of the green architecture. Understood as the basic principle giving origin to everything, the classical tetralogy of the elements determined the thought of men and their existence in the world. At the center of the Greek philosophical vision, Empedocles of Agrigento established its canons: primordial matter, root of everything, the elements are the frontier of our physical encounter with the world. Plato later added a fifth element: ether. Aristotle united them in a system of primary and opposite combinations: earth vs. air, fire vs. water. But the use of the notion

of the root of all things aspires first of all to a sense of universality and totality. The elements do not break into parts and are not divisible.

Earth (terra mater) is the matter and the physical laws (the laws of Newton onwards): is the ground on which to build. Air is the immaterial: the wind and the clouds, the sound and the scent, the cold and the heat: it is the visible light. Fire is energy, the mutation of matter, the domestic hearth: it is also destruction. Water is life, a continuous movement in search of horizontality, pleasure, purification and hygiene: it is the rain to shelter from.

In pragmatic terms, in fact, the danger of earthquakes, winds, fires and floods determines the regulations which govern planning and construction standards, while, in historical terms, the wealth and wisdom, distilled over time from tradition and vernacular architecture, can be taken as a manifesto of the relationship with nature and its primordial elements.

The presence of these elements within the methodology of the project is above all an evocative and sensorial presence: it is, even more, a strongly poetic presence. It implies a tension to reach a high value. The aim of

this House of the Elements is to produce a primary and existential encounter with the world, made of amazement and re-discovery. The house of Earth, the house of Air, the house of Fire and the house of Water become its mysterious, attractive names, halfway between intelligence and stupidity.⁷ The resulting disorientation implies a sense of estrangement: who actually lives in that house, how is it made, what is its reason for being. Could it be earth-air-fire-water its absurd inhabitants?

The House of the Elements acts therefore as a device, as a tool, as a theoretical mechanism able to convoke nature and to materialize it in a form of aesthetic, constructive and conceptual reality. It is, to conclude, at the same time visionary (idealistic) and pragmatic (realistic), using the words of Florian Sauter.⁸

4

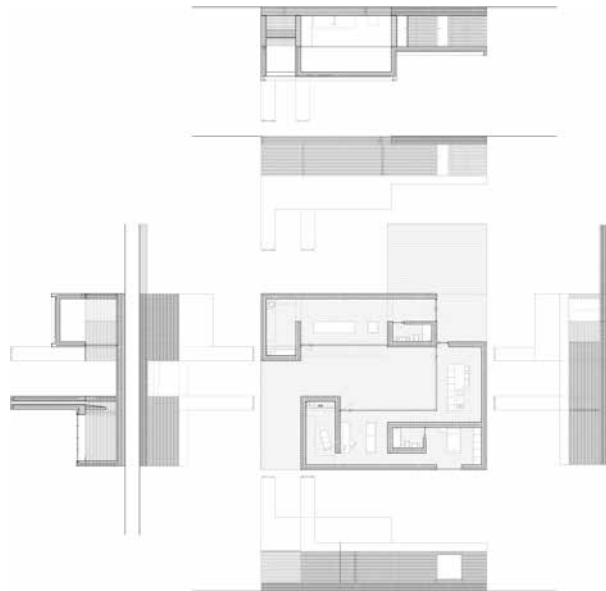
Being at the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture in those years, I had a certain interest in the didactic approach of Valerio Olgiati. He proposed a different motto, a "topic" for each semester: courtyard, brick, piano nobile, column, etc. I understood this way of working as a game whose constricting rules bring the student to face only

7

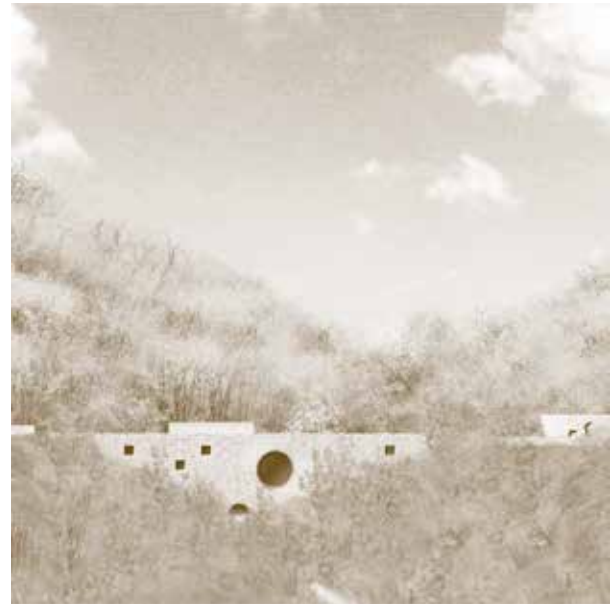
"The technical form does not have, as always does the creative work, that fifty percent of stupidity. The technical form believes too much in what we already know and too little in what we don't know yet, but what we can feel and sense". Heinrich Tessenow, *Housebuilding and Such Things*, 1916.

8

Florian Sauter, *Aristotle Barefoot*, in Josè Luis Mateo, Florian Sauter, *Earth, Water, Air, Fire: The Four Elements and Architecture* (Barcelona: Actar, 2014).



Fire: Chillida House.



Earth: Bridge House.

9

"That field in which modern architecture has shown its versatility and has tested its ambitions". Giorgio Grassi, op.cit.

10

Carlos Martí Aris, *Silencios elocuentes* (Milano: Marinotti 2002). See the distinction between the simple and the elementary in Mies van der Rohe.

11

Among the classical treatises, to refer to the most influent one, in the *Four Books of Architecture* (1570) by Andrea Palladio, the second is dedicated entirely to the elements. Among the modern ones, it is certainly worth mentioning the study of Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture* (1851), in which he defines the fireplace, the roof, the fence and the basement as the fundamental elements of architecture. Among recently published I also mention, though only for the absolute difference of reasoning, Pierluigi Nicolini, *Elements of architecture* (Milano: Skira, 1999). But this educational cycle also comes with Rem Koolhaas' Venice Biennale, eloquently titled "Fundamentals"(2014), whose most relevant aspect is the great and extraordinary research on the elements.

one enemy at a time, looking at him directly. A game that requires attention on one precise and certain aspect of architecture. A simple decision, and in my opinion, pedagogically productive.

With the same attitude, in my case, I associated to each of the four semesters issues, a fundamental element of architecture. No primordial element can exist without the other: it's the same for an architectural element.

With a certain freedom, and discarding other operative possibilities, I translated the notion of land into a wall, the air into a window, the fire into a fireplace and the water into a roof. A wall, a window, a fireplace and a roof. This clearly structured and foundational circle seemed to me even more necessary while tackling again the difficult and insidious theme of the house for, as we know, "its elementary forms have been overloaded by absurd meanings to the point of becoming a mere pretext".⁹

Architecture, like the work of art, "is always a complex construction in which it's possible to recognize the elements composing it"¹⁰. It is an art designed to put things together rather than tearing them apart. The theoretical impulse that established the elements as a foundation, once so strong and conveyed through numerous essays,

gradually weakened but did not disappear completely.¹¹ Because at the moment in which they are translated, conceived and designed from technical into architectural forms, the sense of the elements coincides again with its architectural representation, with the architecture itself. In the validity of the elements is therefore always contained the need to work on them, to transform and to betray them, once again.

We decided to get in and look closely, for example, at the brick walls of Sigurd Lewerentz, all the continuously different ones built in Klippan; to disassemble the wooden window fixed outside the marés stone wall in Utzon's house or to move the sliding ones of one of the houses of Charles Moore in Olinda, that transforms it into an open temple, or even count the bricks of that masterpiece of constructive economy that is the hexagonal window of Melnikov; to enter inside the F. Gehry's fireplace, at the Winton house and in other fireplace spaces, to talk about the precise rules between the fireplace and the flue; and finally climb the roofs of Herzog & de Meuron and follow the path of the rain, to find here and there its traces and the moss on the walls. Perhaps, the undeclared, but intimately desired, dream

was to imagine to simply construct a wall, a window, a chimney and a roof and to inhabit that elementary house, the House of the Elements, which thus would become also a home of architecture.

5

The functional program and the project site of each semester, both aimed to weave the reasoning in strict relation to each element, have defined the concrete limits of doing: what and where.

The activity proposed to the students through a dual practical-theoretical exercise, an in-situ survey carried out during the study trip and a personal and collective research, called *Imaginary, on the wall, window, fireplace and roof*, aimed at giving shape to the infinite field of references, has widened the learning experience of the project in an exploratory way and has widened the students' vision focused too quickly on their project.

Every time I even found, almost by chance, a good road companion: a philosopher, a sculptor, a photographer, a writer, who were able to look at the theme of the semester in a different light. I also brought the stimulations provided by contemporary art on the theme of the

house: the Narrow House by Erwin Wurm and the Trial House by Anne Holtrop, for example, have had a great impact and positively shook the students. As well as the pavilions of Per Kirkeby and Erwin Heerich.

6

The sense of this cycle, however, expands even further, over time, because it produces a much wider number of things. A multitude of 120 students-professors¹², but also places, stories, materials, people and ideas have gathered around our impluvium. All the work, practical and intellectual, was nourished and guided by the presence of that element, strengthened year after year. Each semester thus took its own specific form on the traces of the previous one. I immediately realized, with great satisfaction, that I, the professor, had become substitutable. The form was autonomous and no longer depended on me: I could have passed the baton, as in the 4x100 meters. "A form is good if it is. A form is bad if it seems. This also applies to the form of teaching".¹³ Almost at the end of the cycle, I was happy to discover the video presented in 2014 by Bill Viola in the Cathedral of Saint Paul and entitled *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire,*

Water) that, with a certain amount of vanity, I felt like a personal tribute to my Elements cycle.¹⁴

12

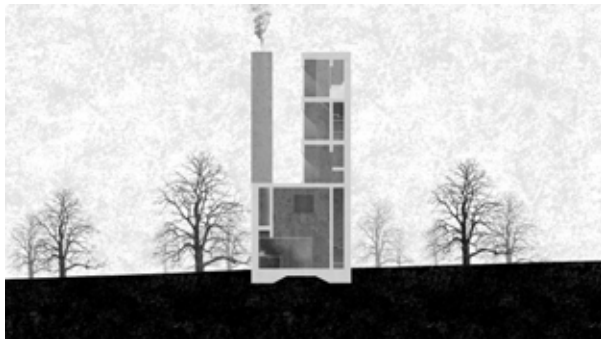
"I believe that thirty students who attend an atelier governed by freedom, are actually thirty teachers". L. Kahn, in Maria Bonaiti, *Architettura è* (Milano: Electa, 2002).

13

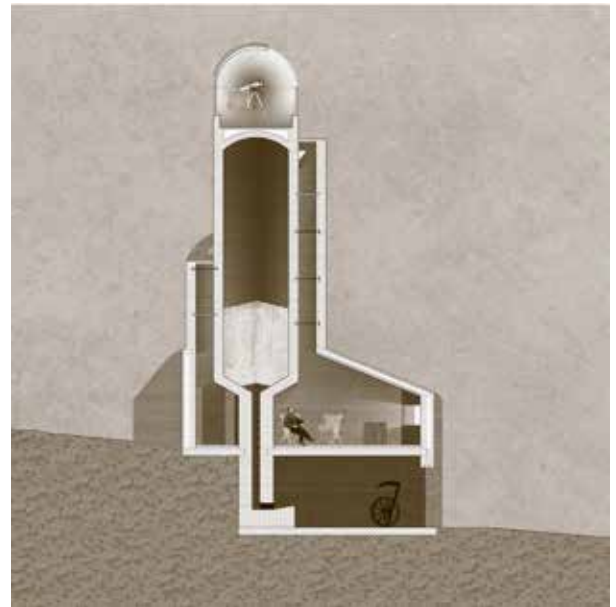
Enzo Mari, *25 modi per piantare un chiodo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2011).

14

I believe that in its own small way, the "Elements cycle" worked out and I would like to deal with others one day: one could be called "Geometric cycle," inspired by the series of Bruno Munari, or "Vitruvian cycle" on the triad Utilitas-Firmitas-Venustas, another could be called "climatic cycle"(tropical, desert, Arctic, Mediterranean, etc..



Fire: Tower House.



Earth: Barn House.

architectural
association
school of
architecture

candidates
for director



Bayley Street to Bedford Square, 2008-10.
Image by Kevin Sheppard, courtesy Architectural Association.

The Search Committee is delighted to present the shortlist for the position of AA Director. There were 73 responses to the call for applications and an initial longlist of 26 candidates, of which 15 were selected for a first round of interviews. In the first round, there were candidates from Australia, North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. There were eight candidates in the second round; four men and four women. At every stage of the process all candidates were assessed on their ability to meet the criteria set out in the job and role descriptions approved by the School Community.

The shortlisted candidates (in alphabetical order) are:

Pippo Ciorra: Senior Curator of MAXXI Ar-

chitettura in Rome; an architect, critic and professor.

Eva Franch i Gilabert: Chief Curator and Executive Director of Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York; an architect, curator and educator.

Robert Mull: Head of Architecture and Design at the University of Brighton; an architect, educator, urbanist and activist.

All three candidates will address the AA School Community in a presentation and Q & A in the week commencing 19 February. This will be followed by an election where all current students, year-out students, academic and administrative staff, and members of Council will vote on their preferred candidate.

pippo ciorra

Pippo Ciorra is an architect, critic and professor, who has served as a member of the editorial board of *Casabella* from 1996 to 2012. He collaborates with journals, reviews and national press and is the author of many essays and publications.

Since 2017, Pippo is founder and chief editor of the scholarly publication *Villard journal* published by Quodlibet and supported by the PhD school of IUAV. In 2011 he published an overview of the conditions of architecture in Italy, *Senza architettura, le ragioni per una crisi* (Laterza) and has published monographic studies on Ludovico Quaroni (Electa, 1989), Peter Eisenman (Electa, 1993), and then essays on museums, city, photography and contemporary Italian architecture. Pippo teaches design and theory at SAAD (University of Camerino) and is the director of the international PhD program 'Villard d'Honnecourt' (IUAV). He has been visiting professor at the school of architecture of IUAV, Ohio State University and Cornell University. He is also a member of CICA (International Committee of Architectural Critics), advisor for the award 'Gold Medal of the Italian architecture' and former advisor for the Mies van der Rohe prize for architecture. He has

also chaired or participated in juries for national and international competitions in the field of architecture, art and design.

After initially participating in the 1982 Biennale of Architecture, he was curator for the Corderie in the 5th Biennale di Architettura di Venezia and involved as curator in many other editions. In 2016, he was part of the jury for the XV Architecture Biennale in Venice. He has curated and designed exhibitions in Italy and abroad. Since 2009, he has been Senior Curator of MAXXI Architettura in Rome. Among his major exhibitions on contemporary architecture, *Re-cycle*, *Energy*, *Erasmus Effect*, *Food*. In 2016 he co-curated the exhibition *The Japanese House: Architecture and Life After 1945*, which was exhibited at MAXXI, The Barbican in London and the MOMAT museum in Tokyo.

Piccole Utopie is a traveling show on ten Italian architects. He curates the Italian branch of YAP, the MoMA PS1 international programme for young architects and the annual festival "Demanio Marittimo km. 278", a project that brings together 70/80 guests and large attendance every year on an Adriatic beach for a night-long marathon in a space designed by students.

Vision Statement

Premise

We are living in a time when architecture as a social discipline and the idea of the architect itself as an active agent of society are both facing threats and undergoing radical changes.

The acceleration of hyper-capitalism on one hand and the expansion of the so-called culture industry on the other – together with survival instinct – push architecture graduates towards the very opposite roles of neutral agents of market processes or of mere theoretical / curatorial / artistic / technological producers. The space in between – once open to culturally conscious and socially sensitive professionals – is narrowing and becoming less and less accessible for young graduates. In many countries it is now a space mostly reserved for a privileged few, legitimised by XXL scale professionalism or some kind of surviving star system. This also affects the AA in many ways. I will recall only two of the many reasons.

The first is the fact that the AA is the perfect inhabitant of that space in between. It is used to training professionals

who are very successful in the market but at the same time are able to preserve the subversive, public role of architecture. The second is that while schools are put under extreme pressure by this polarisation, and are forced to question their historical position as guardians of that 'third part' role, the AA is in a phase of rethinking and redefinition, and therefore is poised to find the best way to react to such challenges.

Tasks

Within this frame the next director has three main tasks for this mandate: first, to consolidate the school's financial and administrative status as a full scale educational institution; second, to confirm and expand its authority and appeal in the global scene by reshaping the features that produce such appeal and authority; and third, to review and adjust its training, research and especially the communication bodies in order to achieve the aforementioned tasks.

Strategies:

- Besides completing the necessary process related to accreditation and degree awarding, the school should

engage in an effort to redefine the geography of its funding sources, opening itself up to more private funders, to grant application processes in the UK, within and around the EU and to those run by international agencies. The school has great assets in terms of urban architecture knowledge, technology, sensibility to landscape value and fabrication. To be awarded with funds, the most important criteria is to be able to create links between the research production of the school and the research tasks of our time.

- The school should engage in reviewing the contents and concepts that define its identity.

Today the AA's identity is still benefiting from an idea of experimentation strongly rooted in the search for 'originality'. It is very likely that originality will not be the central issue for the XXI Century idea of experimentation. Possibly it will have to do with a more intense attitude to technology, philosophy, commons, environment, art, politics and policies, and immateriality. Most of these issues are already strongly present in the life of the school. An effort has to be made to expand them and to set a new paradigm, to understand how they nourish an idea of 'progressive' architecture.

- There is also a third aspect a new director will have to focus on: a number of symbolic actions which have to support the school's profile and reputation. They have to do with the cultural attitude of the school, the place the AA wants to occupy in the search for a future for architecture, and the tools it wants to develop to practice such a search and share it with the global scene.

More practically I would suggest:

1. to start a new habit, that is an open and public meeting taking place at the end of the Spring semester, where the school invites a number of leading thinkers from various disciplines to meet the AA community and contribute in setting tasks – teaching and research – for the following year. Without touching the autonomy of units and teachers, this would help to fuel dialogue and identify unifying elements in the school's direction.
2. to redesign the communication of the school's production and achievements. That is to focus on the production of exhibitions and other media that can circulate the specificity and quality of the school locally and globally.
3. to work for the development of a more established research department, which can on the one hand

contribute to the search for partners and collaborations and on the other feed the 'communication' actions in the field of publishing, exhibiting and conference organisation.

What in your mind makes the AA unique and what core elements of the School do you see as inherent and critical for the AA to retain?

In my opinion, what makes the AA unique is its vocation to form graduates able to preserve a strongly radical, theory-oriented approach and at the same time possessing the tools required to effectively compete in an increasingly selective global professional market. The core elements that allowed the School to retain such a 'paradoxical' feature consistently all along its recent history are: the plurality of approaches offered by the teaching staff and visiting critics; the restless curiosity about the most innovative contributions to architecture thinking and design approaches; its 'natural' attitude to be a 'citizen of the world' by mixing cultures and legacies; and the mosaic of facilities and activities that complete the teaching core commitment of the school, such as exhibitions, publishing, conferences and labs

with state-of-the-art equipment. The variety of outcomes and contributions is clearly a product of the unit system, which must be maintained and made even more robust. The keen interest in architectural innovation is nurtured by the school's lively and accurate selection of visiting critics and young tutors. Already very well managed in the recent history of the school, this activity could be made even more open and oriented towards emerging research avenues.

The openness of the school is certified by the diversity and variety in the body of students and staff. However, since the world makes this challenge increasingly difficult to face – Brexit being only one example – the AA should continue developing strategies to attract international students (Europeans included). It should also guarantee access to outstanding students who cannot easily afford expensive tuition fees. Programmes – such as exhibitions, lectures, publishing – completing what the school can offer beyond its pedagogical commitment have a strong tradition at the AA, but are also a delicate element of its life. They have to be relaunched, strengthened and supported as another essential 'testimonial' of the AA in the world.

The AA consists of a variety of different models and methods of teaching architecture. From the open studios of First Year and the unit system of the Intermediate and Diploma Schools, to a team-based approach in the Graduate School and individual research at the PhD level, what is your attitude towards this plurality? And what changes do you intend to implement, if any, to the current pedagogical approach? As I wrote above, I think that the AA's plurality is to be preserved for the sake of the school. In particular, I am convinced that both the unit system and the variety of the four levels of education are strong assets. I do not think the first phase of a new directorship should introduce significant changes to the curriculum. However, improvements could be made in the Graduate school and in the PhD programme. Referring to the latter, efforts could be devoted to increase its visibility to the academic community and to better integrate it within global research platforms. However, I do not think that the next step to be taken is to modify the format of the curriculum. I would rather create a small number of additional programmes aiming at corroborating the existing pedagogical layout. My first proposal is to set up an annual event hosting an open discussion on the

tasks of the school. Experts from other disciplines would be invited, tutors would have the chance to make their approaches visible, to confront, and to discuss tasks. This event would help both the school's inner community and the larger community of architects to understand the work of the AA. My second proposal is to incentivise all the components of the school's community to work together to create a more organised research framework. If reputation is obviously the currency the AA cannot live without, research is another crucial asset that a school has to develop. Only through research can the school find its place in the world of ideas and education, get prepared to compete for grants and alliances, and enter important networks. The third 'side' proposal is to work on school communication through exhibitions and publications. I think we can only learn from the quality of the publications produced by the school in the last forty years. The Director should work to secure a similarly successful future to this programme. The same applies to the exhibitions' programme, which could be improved to regain momentum and communication power.

The AA is known to be participatory democracy. How do you plan to initiate and engage with the School Community in order to maintain an open and transparent dialogue with all constituencies including academic and administrative staff, council and the student body?

I was aware of the AA's participatory democracy and I am getting more familiar with it now. Such an organisation requires a deep engagement on the part of both the management and the Director. I think a Director has three ways of developing an 'open and transparent' dialogue with the whole body of the school. The more obvious is the appropriate use of the institutionalised spaces of governance – such as meetings, written documents and the highest possible degree of transparency. However, this is often not enough and should be carried over in two additional ways. The first one is related to the proposal I mentioned above of an annual meeting where all the constituencies and members of the school would have the chance to express their views. Such a format may burgeon into smaller and more 'local' meetings, where the Director would have the chance to develop an informal and productive exchange with staff. What I have in mind are the informal brainstorming meetings, which usually

take place in many museums to fuel problem-solving and to stimulate a debate among different departments. Another way for the Director to remain close to the School Community is to participate in its day-to-day life, by teaching some classes, having direct exchanges with students, and eventually contributing to some research. The success of this strategy would depend very much on the specific personality of the Director and her/his attitude to time management, but I consider it as a great opportunity.

How do you feel that your previous professional experience has prepared you for the role of AA Director and how would these positively affect the AA?

I built my career moving back and forth between teaching and writing, from design to organisational duties, from curating to setting up educational and research programmes. In all these roles my final aim has always been to have some – however small – impact on the architectural scene. The media I used (from texts to design studios, from theory classes to exhibitions) changed but the will and consciousness of belonging to the academic community was always present. In the

1970s (as a student) and in the 1980s, I had the chance to spend nearly 100% of my time in schools (IUAV, Ohio State, Camerino). At that time universities were the leading engine of innovation, research, a sense of the future and urban consciousness. Therefore I had the opportunity to learn from and work with very diverse students and academic communities. In the following decade I sensed that museums and cultural institutions were moving towards the centre of the battlefield. I was attracted to them.

I first committed to exhibition design and then to curating. Eventually when I was appointed Senior Curator of MAXXI Architettura, I put aside my professional activity. I think it is now time to bring back cultural power to schools. All along I have been founding (and funding) programmes and leading co-operative groups. In 1999, I co-founded a 'clandestine' travelling school ('Villard'), which still exists. In 2004, I launched the International PhD programme in Venice (with ETSAM, TU Delft, Paris Belleville), funded by the EU. At MAXXI I co-manage a team of people from different backgrounds producing 12-14 exhibitions per year with a very limited budget. Recently, I became the director of

an international research programme on co-existence and living space funded by the German Government and called 'Housing the Human'. My whole career has developed in fields similar to those of the AA. Therefore I strongly believe the school would benefit from my experience of looking at problems from different points of view: both conceptual and the pragmatic, as an institutional figure and as an academic, as an activist and an analyst.

eva franch i gilabert

Eva Franch is an architect, curator, educator and lecturer of experimental forms of art and architectural practice, who specialises in the making of alternative architecture histories and futures. Since 2010, Franch is the Chief Curator and Executive Director of Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York. In 2014, Franch, with the project OfficeUS, an experimental office for the production of history, ideas and work, was selected by the US State Department to represent the US at the XIV Venice Architecture Biennale. Franch is currently professor at The Cooper Union School of Architecture. Franch has taught at Columbia University GSAPP, the IUAV University of Venice, SUNY Buffalo, and Rice University SOA. In 2004, she founded her solo practice OOAA (Office of Architectural Affairs). She has received numerous awards, and her work has been exhibited internationally including FAD Barcelona, the Venice Architecture Biennale, and the Shenzhen Architecture Biennale, among others. She has curated national and international projects including OUT, the 2014 Arquia Proxima biennial competition and Borders, the 2011 Think Space concept competition programme. At Storefront, some of her recent projects include

Architecture Conflicts, Letters to the Mayor, World Wide Storefront, the Competition of Competitions, Storefront TV, the Storefront International Series, and the publication series Manifesto. Exhibitions include Sharing Models; Measure; POP: Protocols, Obsessions, Positions; Aesthetics-Anesthetics; Past Futures, Present, Futures; No Shame: Storefront for Sale; and Beings. Her latest initiative, the New York Architecture Book Fair, will be presented in 2018.

Franch has lectured internationally on art, architecture and the importance of alternative practices in the construction and understanding of public life at more than fifty educational and cultural institutions around the globe. She has been a member of international juries and nominating and advisory boards including the Hong Kong Design Trust, Ideas City, +Pool and the YAP PS1-MoMA in New York. Her work has appeared in the form of articles or interviews in journals, newspapers and publications worldwide. Recent publications include Agenda (2014), Atlas (2015) and Manual (2017) published by Lars Muller as part of OfficeUS. Upcoming publications include The Book of Architecture Books and Letters to the Mayor.

Vision Statement

More than a school, throughout its history the Architectural Association has been the referent – when not the origin – for the production of relevant forms of inquiry, discourse and radical practice in architecture schools, cultural institutions and architecture firms worldwide.

Over the last decade and as a result of new forms of communication, omnipresent market forces and increased global mobility, cultural and educational institutions around the globe have undergone a process of homogenisation. Identities have become brands, citizens have become consumers, and the sense of historical responsibility and radical playfulness within educational and cultural institutions has languished. Architects and architecture institutions have either become too satisfied with commonplace formulations such as sustainability, participation and bottom-up practices, or too hermetic with self-proclaimed avant-gardism and meta-discursive narrative with an aesthetic devoid of any social or political currency.

However, contemporary events within our global context

have to be felt as undeniably urgent and historical. The challenges that we all face today as global citizens and as architects are growing in scale and complexity. We are in more need of new vectors of desire and action than ever. Today, the Architectural Association has the opportunity, and also the responsibility, to articulate what architecture can contribute to the world we live in, and to redefine what the education of an architect should be and can be.

I believe that architecture is the discipline with the privilege and duty to articulate the different desires and realities of society in a specific moment in time. Architecture has the ability to bring together the social, the economic, the political and the technological in a project of collective aspiration. But more importantly, architecture is the discipline that understands society as a whole, being able to advocate for those who are unable to sit down at the decision-making table. Architecture sits for all.

However, many within our field will affirm that architecture has been in crisis. That we are the last ones at the decision-making tables. That we are the last ones to inspire and to move people. That we are the last ones to

engage with the most pressing issues affecting the planet today. That we are the last ones at almost everything, and mostly because, historically speaking, architecture has been slow, very slow, and that we live in a time that works in seconds, in instant gratifications, in tweets.

Architecture might be in crisis; architecture education might be in crisis, cultural institutions might be in crisis. Yet it is in moments of crisis that opportunities for redefinition emerge. I believe the AA is ready to contribute back to a world that needs references about the social, political, technological and material agency that architects are able to produce within the built environment.

What is architecturally urgent today? How do we move towards our future? By producing historiographies capable of giving disciplinary foundations to historically disempowered narratives. By enabling innovative forms of research and design that engage with an increasingly complex world with ever-changing conflicts. By testing labour structures and forms of practice within a global and digital context. By igniting forms of activism, radical engagement and political agency within our field. By pioneering processes of design and material production

in relation to rapidly evolving digital design disciplines. And by envisioning transversal platforms capable of enabling new collectivities, new forms of assembly and knowledge transfer.

Over the last decade, together with a team of collaborators, critics, and agents, I have produced an exuberance of cultural and pedagogical experiments. Going beyond geographical, ideological and disciplinary boundaries, I have tested ideas, formats and methods beyond comfortable arenas and lineages associated to specific individuals, agendas or aesthetics. With the associated successes and failures of experiments, strategic and incisive forms of knowledge have been produced. Focusing on architecture's power and agency to unveil power structures and to affect our built environment, my work as an architect and educator is to make evident the important role that architecture plays within culture, knowledge production and the development of our societies.

I believe in schools and cultural institutions that are anti-institutional even when being one, that act as cultural forums and civic platforms, and that believe in the importance of constantly redefining how we want

to live together. Beyond regulating predefined domains of expertise, the AA has been a space for speculation, friction and resistance. With a highly calibrated relationship between rigour and madness, the AA has been a hotbed for architectural experimentation, and should continue to be.

The challenges facing the future of the AA are complex, and significant. The AA community must come together and build a shared vision to take the AA into its future. While these words may offer glimpses of a possible horizon, they must be read as steps towards creating a space of conversation, discussion and convergence.

What in your mind makes the AA unique and what core elements of the School do you see as inherent and critical for the AA to retain?

There are very few organisations in the world that act as cultural forums and that have the mission to push the boundaries and the status quo of architecture. The AA is one of them.

A democratic imperative, a spirit of independence and experimentation, and a will to excellence, are the three most valuable assets that the school carries. While one

might be able to point to the bar, the bookstore, the unit system, the international body of students, the restaurant or the domestic scale of the school's home as some of its most distinctive and significant elements, the essence of the AA is an idea: an idea that defines democracy as a relentless process; independence as an indefatigable journey in the quest for alternatives; and excellence as a project to be constantly redefined, constructed and produced. The fact that the students, the members, the faculty, the council and the staff have been able to keep this idea alive is something to be celebrated and recognised.

Throughout its history the AA has contributed to the architectural collective imaginary through the work of its students, faculty, staff and directors, but also through seminal exhibitions, publications and public programmes. Empowering students and faculty to produce research and work that resonates and redefines the most pressing challenges within our society; producing exhibitions and works of radical spatial practice able to engage with architecture's history, and most importantly, its future; and enabling critical debates and mechanisms to communicate and challenge oneself

and the entire architecture community, are all agendas embedded within the ethos of the school that should be retained.

The AA is a human edifice that, in conjunction with its material and spatial network – from its body of publications to the city of London, to Hooke Park, to each location of the Visiting School, to Bedford Square – has produced memorable forums for critical discussion and radical engagement. The AA possesses an unparalleled combination of rigour and madness, one that should be nourished and cultivated in order to continue to defy the limits of the possible – and the impossible – and to position the school at the forefront of architectural debates and contemporary culture.

The AA consists of a variety of different models and methods of teaching architecture. From the open studios of First Year and the unit system of the Intermediate and Diploma Schools, to a team-based approach in the Graduate School and individual research at the PhD level, what is your attitude towards this plurality? And what changes do you intend to implement, if any, to the current pedagogical approach?

What do we stand for? How does each studio, unit and

research project contribute to a larger discussion within our field and society at large? This is one of the most urgent tasks within the pedagogical context at the AA and within the architecture field.

Today, it is of seminal urgency to understand the underlying philosophical and ethical agendas, the technological developments and implications, and the local and global consequences of the work developed within any pedagogical experiment. To articulate each obsession into a position within the cultural, social and political contexts implies an effort of synthesis and critical reflection.

The school's multiple pedagogical methods have been designed for and tailored to different stages of learning and knowledge production. The school's multiplicity has allowed for different research agendas to be developed independently or in parallel to the ongoing conversations produced within the public programme of exhibitions, symposiums and publications. While the existing pedagogical approach is a great basis and foundation for the education of an architect – which the ongoing positive reports from the TDAP process confirm – there is a need to produce transversal forms of engagement that bring

together the different forms of expertise, research niches and intellectual conversations occurring within the school, throughout the expanded AA community, and among broader cultural contexts.

The AA, with its intellectual wealth and legacy of radical debates, is strategically situated to produce pedagogical mechanisms to challenge ideas and projects while simultaneously providing a space of protection and intellectual development. To position the AA as a leader in the production of relevant agendas and debates might start by simply producing a global digital archive platform for research topics that conglomerates the investigations of architects, PhD candidates, students and researchers worldwide from inside and outside the AA Community. It is absolutely crucial to continue to consolidate the current pedagogical structure and obtain the necessary tools – TDAP – to continue making the staff and the student body the most diverse and incisive community of architects as is possible. Yet to identify relevant conflicts and agendas, to produce research clusters and platforms, to enable productive disagreements and forums, to laugh, and to share, are immediate agendas on the horizon.

The AA is known to be participatory democracy. How do you plan to initiate and engage with the School Community in order to maintain an open and transparent dialogue with all constituencies including academic and administrative staff, council and the student body?

To envision new forms of governance has been at the forefront of contemporary social and political movements worldwide. Civic forums, and the aesthetics of participation have been used, abused and too often fail to produce genuine public debate and engagement.

Management teams, with the rigidity embedded within administrative structures, often fail to convey the full spectrum of issues involving the communities that they represent. Parties and informal gatherings are filled with visceral opinions, yet often followed by gaps in memory. However, all these models of community engagement fulfil highly important roles within the development, articulation, transmission and execution of ideas within a community. I am passionate about them all.

Every single member of the AA Community is a creative force behind the making of the organisation. In the process of obtaining TDAP, the AA has produced a robust structure of governance, accountability and

communication between the different constituencies of the AA Community. Understanding the roles and the fiduciary responsibilities of each community member is paramount to the success of shared forms of governance. Either as individuals, collectives or as representatives of the Student Forum, the Academic Board, the Council, the SMT, the UMC, the GMC, the Visiting School, the Teaching Committee, the PhD Committee or any ad-hoc committee needed to address the important issues driving the life of the AA Community, every single member should rest assured of my total commitment to ignite a productive forum for debate, discussion and action, where problems, solutions and desires can be articulated easily and effectively.

Student evaluations, surveys, peer reviews, staff and academic reviews and guidance, are all essential parts of the personal and intellectual growth of the school community and should be implemented as part of the creative processes of the school's human edifice and community building.

Operational transparency – not literal and not phenomenal – is one of the most important agendas of our time and I am fully committed to encouraging

honest and direct conversation, participatory processes, and student and staff activism.

How do you feel that your previous professional experience has prepared you for the role of AA Director and how would these positively affect the AA?

Since 2010 I have been at the helm of Storefront for Art and Architecture, an organisation that at its core carries the same spirit of independence, irreverence, experimentation and agitation as the AA.

Storefront's mission to advance innovative and critical ideas that contribute to the design of cities, territories and public life by providing alternative platforms for dialogue and collaboration across disciplinary, geographic and ideological boundaries, is akin to that which has kept the AA at the forefront of architecture's culture and knowledge production.

As the Chief Curator of Storefront I have directed the public programme of exhibitions, events, competitions, publications and projects; as the Executive Director I have overseen its strategic development, membership and fundraising activities. This has allowed me to understand the complexities behind a vision, yet the

importance of having one.

In seven years I have doubled the institution's budget by diversifying its sources of income, obtaining grants from government and private foundations, and partnering with individuals and companies for individual and corporate funding. Together with a team comprised of staff, volunteers, council members, advisory boards, members, colleagues, critics and allies, I have managed to remain incisive and independent, and to further the mission of the organisation in New York and around the world.

Working collaboratively with countless creative minds, I have built a robust international network of individuals and collectives interested in the redefinition of our built environment.

From poets and politicians to hackers, engineers, philosophers and artists, I have worked with a broad range of experts always with the agenda to understand how architecture participates in larger conversations within our contemporary culture.

Over the last decade I have taught and lectured at more than fifty cultural institutions and architecture schools worldwide. This has afforded me a strategic position

from which to assess and examine a wide range of methodologies, pedagogies and research models. In my role as a teacher, I have enjoyed the pleasures of developing ideas with students and enabling the unique ideas that emerge within and throughout each generation that is always looking for a new definition of our future.

robert mull

Robert Mull was a student at the AA, was a member of NATO (Narrative Architecture Today) and taught at the AA first in the Intermediate School and then in Diploma Unit 10 until 1999.

In 2000 he became head of the then UNL School of Architecture and in 2010 led the bringing together of two faculties to form The Cass (Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design) known affectionately as the 'Aldgate Bauhaus' where he was both Dean and Director of Architecture and founding tutor to the Free Unit until 2016.

Robert has taught widely, holding visiting professorships in Vienna and Innsbruck. In 2012 he co-founded the Moscow School of Architecture (MARCH) where he is honorary Professor.

He has also helped architecture schools to evolve and reform: in Seoul, Africa and Sweden and now in the Ukraine and Brighton.

After the Cass, Robert was appointed as Professor of Architecture and Design and Head of School at the University of Brighton and as the Director of Innovation at London-based urban design practice Publica. He is also currently visiting Professor at Umeå University,

Sweden.

In May 2016, Robert co-curated the AF's 'Papers' festival at the Barbican Centre documenting the art, culture and architecture of the refugee crises and also curated two exhibitions about the Calais Jungle in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall. Robert was cocurator of the 'Rip it Up and Start Again' series and helped initiate the 'Turncoats' and 'Twins' debates. Recently Robert has collaborated with Alexander Brodsky for Drawing Matter's 'Sheds' at Hauser and Wirth, Somerset and has co-curated the 'Art as Labour' programme at Nikola Lenivets outside Moscow.

Robert is a trustee of the Architecture Foundation and of the London School of Architecture; he is a former member of AA Council and former head of the body representing UK schools of architecture. He is an active researcher and has overseen research with a particular emphasis on design and practice as research and has judged many research and design awards.

Robert is currently running the Global Free Unit with international educational, NGO and institutional partners focusing on live projects within the refugee crisis and disadvantaged communities and other institutions

such as prisons, schools and arts organisations. Last week saw the launch of the new union supporting architecture workers and students of which Robert is a co-founder.

Vision Statement

Dear Search Committee,

You ask for a vision:

'If the AA did not exist would we need to invent it'? I asked this question at a recent AA staff and council workshop. There was a long silence and then talk of past radicalism, its unique position in architectural education and nostalgia. It was moving – but unconvincing. In fact, I felt angry. As someone who has struggled for change under the most challenging circumstances how could this great institution with so much privilege and freedom not seem to know what to do with it?

So, for me the future of the AA is not just about vision but about values, duties and responsibilities and the tough mechanisms necessary to deliver them. Because if the AA does not evolve, it risks being side-lined – with little impact on or a part to play in addressing the pressing aesthetic, social, political and environmental realities of our local and global culture. If this is the case then my answer is no, the AA does not deserve to exist.

The AA's freedom and independence is so valuable – not least because if TDAP or the appointment of a new

Director goes wrong, then the AA risks giving this, its greatest asset, away. But the freedom I am interested in is not a half-remembered 20th century idea of creative radicalism but a freedom that results in the bravery and independence to change things for the better without self-interest or slavery to any one educational orthodoxy or source of funding.

If the AA is to maintain its freedom and privilege, I will argue that this comes with the responsibility to use this as agency to the benefit of a far greater section of local and global society: to look outwards and to judge ourselves not by the internal logic of the international architectural community but by our impact on others and on society more generally. In a real sense, the AA must be turned inside out.

The vitality of its staff and students can be shared, tested and applied more widely whilst others are invited in, thus creating a responsible and generous institution defined not by its boundaries but by its permeability.

This AA has the ability to lead. It can become the conscience of the discipline: creative, provocative, strident, campaigning but also caring and generous. This AA is needed as it reflects values based on

common purpose, collaboration and debate rather than competition and individuality. Values that reflect the collaborative nature of contemporary practice and the values of a younger generation disenfranchised by the carelessness of ours. But none of these ambitions are credible without a firm understanding of the mechanisms of delivering it. Creative institutional change is hard; I know this first hand. Forming The Cass, helping to found new schools in Seoul and Moscow and now in the Ukraine and Brighton and helping others from Sweden to Africa to reform and evolve; these are the projects that have educated me. But I have also learnt from other contexts. My own 'Free Unit' has taught me to give students greater autonomy and to help them to mobilise their own beliefs and life experience rather than rely on the codified values of any one unit, school or professional orthodoxy. My involvement with Publica has confirmed my belief that the AA must re-engage with London and use London as its extended campus and my work within the European refugee crises has shown me that the AA has a duty to extend its international reach by engaging with areas of deprivation and political change locally and worldwide.

Critically my work with some of the most underprivileged students has convinced me that the AA has a unique opportunity to develop alternative forms of academic delivery and new courses that meet the evolving needs of all students. Including using the potential of the association and alumni to provide practice-based routes to qualification. And my involvement with practice has taught me that we must match student's bravery and creativity with the hard skills necessary to be caring citizens and effective professionals if they are to have stable careers and real impact.

But there is hard operational work required and some tough choices.

If the AA is to become more sustainable and accessible then it must diversify and expand its sources of income, develop a professional research infrastructure, develop a projects capacity to support live projects and paid consultancy and expand its capacity to deliver short courses, CPD and consider supporting and ultimately validating international partners. It also needs to be recognised that the AA's current shape, size, form and economic model represents just one set of priorities and can be changed to reflect new values. In particular, the

relationship between the cost of infrastructure and the level of fees needs to be challenged. TDAP has a key role to play in the AA's future. But my experience at the front line of higher education has shown me that degree awarding powers also represent a risk. The UK higher education system is riven with ideological and political intent and unstable. In joining this system, the Director needs the experience and bravery to insist that the system works for the AA and that the AA is not cowed by it. TEF, REF the implications of the OFS and a host of other responsibilities and duties must be used and challenged. Rather than being brow beaten by the system the AA has the power and I would suggest duty to influence the system for the better.

Finally, a word about how I work. I lead by empowering and trusting others, always assuming they are waving but helping and supporting if they are drowning. I try to lead by example teaching, researching, debating, making and teasing. From a foundation student to the most elevated practitioner, I am interested in them and how their life experience, beliefs and skills can be mobilised to their benefit and for the wider good. My product is people and through them, architecture, cities, institutions and

infrastructure.

I have my own obsessions, hopes and yes prejudices and I am not shy to share them but I see them as one part of an archipelago of diverse positions. I value plurality and foster diversity but also know that in the face of pressing social, environment and human issues that we must also define, articulate and defend common values and beliefs. The AA now has a vital role to play as an engaged, permeable, brave, crusading and caring institution.

And it has a duty to use its unique freedoms to the benefit of all.

The issues are urgent and time is short. I would be honoured to help. Yours sincerely, Robert.

What in your mind makes the AA unique and what core elements of the School do you see as inherent and critical for the AA to retain?

The AA's strengths are subtle. The AA is a combination of restless histories, great people, ambitious students and seemingly anachronistic structures and forms of governance all safeguarded by the special role and agency of the school community. There are external forces that want to tidy this up, codify and rationalise it. They are

wrong and they can be dangerous.

But this ecosystem is not what makes the AA special. What makes the AA unique is what it enables.

At its best the AA harbours a collective bravery played out in a diverse and anarchic ways.

At its best the AA generates a collective suspension of disbelief that nurtures invention. And at its very best it achieves a form of magic realism where the most adventurous and playful strategies impact on tough problems and change the nature of architectural culture and through it the wider society the AA is a part of and serves.

But this AA is at a crucial moment in its history and this AA is at risk and needs to be safeguarded.

TDAP presents great opportunities but also risks and must be shaped to reinforce the particularity and independence of the AA rather than erode it. And it has to be understood that there is a huge challenge ahead to ensure that the AA has a secure and sustainable future that can protect and extend that delicate ecosystem and the magic it can create.

The AA consists of a variety of different models and methods

of teaching architecture. From the open studios of First Year and the unit system of the Intermediate and Diploma Schools, to a teambased approach in the Graduate School and individual research at the PhD level, what is your attitude towards this plurality? And what changes do you intend to implement, if any, to the current pedagogical approach?

I value the pluralism of the AA's academic structures but there are ways they can be strengthened and crucially made more accessible.

Here are some of my starting points:

I would explore different economies and forms of academic delivery to promote wider access to the AA by reducing costs for those who wish to take alternative routes. This would include practice-based routes to qualification delivered in partnership with the association and alumni. I would also consider accelerated courses using the whole calendar year and slower part-time courses based on acquiring credits rather than completing a year. It would include situated learning where students are embedded in 'live project classrooms,' benefiting from reduced costs that come with each context whilst being useful and engaged.

I would explore federal models where the AA partners,

barter and shares with other institutions to provide more choice to students and greater specialist support whilst reducing infrastructure costs and fees thereby widening student access to the AA. I would use the opportunity presented by TDAP to expand access to the AA via strengthened foundation and access courses.

I would support and strengthen the Graduate School by expanding the range of courses on offer and by developing a strong research infrastructure that supports bids and provides funding. I would also use the opportunity presented by TDAP and the UK awards framework to achieve greater integration between the master's courses and the Diploma School to allow students to achieve a specialist masters award in parallel with their diploma and RIBA Part 2.

I would expand the AA's international network beyond the very successful Visiting Schools to include partnerships, validations and satellites which expand student choice and mobility and provide different fee structures and wider access to the AA.

I would place an emphasis on practices that teach, teachers who practise and a school itself that practises. I would develop a professional projects office (an RIBA

chartered practice) that supports staff and students to carry out live projects, practice based research and consultancy and that can support recent graduates as they establish practices, compete for work and build.

I would safeguard and extend analogue and digital making at all scales and work hard to realise Hooke Park's full potential.

I would strengthen the teaching of hard professional, economic and technical skills to empower and give confidence in practice.

I would endorse the strong history and theory teaching and link it closely to the school's research activities.

I would radically expand the AA's programme of short courses, CPD and training and integrate elements of it into the curriculum whilst generating additional income. And last but not least the unit system, which is the aspect of the AA (and Boyarsky's) legacy that I have been proud to draw on. I have introduced or continued unit systems in the schools I have been part of; The Cass had ninety units altogether, teaching students across all its subject areas, from fine art to furniture design. But there are ways the system can evolve and be humanised; in my own teaching in the 'Free Unit', I have adjusted

the balance of power to give students control and agency in their projects and bring them closer to their future forms of practice. This is an important conversation that I would like to bring to the AA.

And of course I would share with you my longstanding commitment to working in areas of deprivation and social change and the teaching strategies I have developed to do so.

These starting points I would bring to the conversation outlined below.

The AA is known to be a participatory democracy. How do you plan to initiate and engage with the School Community in order to maintain an open and transparent dialogue with all constituencies including academic and administrative staff, council and the student body?

I try to lead by empowering and trusting; I am interested in your experiences, beliefs and skills and how they can be used to your benefit and to the good of the school and wider global society. I do not like needless hierarchy and I favour plain speaking and direct action over jargon and obscurantism. I would be present and curious, attending crits and lectures, leading events and talking rather than

typing. And I would teach, in my case as a unit tutor, and be open to the same challenge and insecurities as every other teacher and student.

My priority if elected would be the immediate and ambitious conversation that so many have asked for, a debate that respects plurality but also does the hard work of defining and defending common values and beliefs. The role of the Director in this is to be background and foreground, to be strident and quiet, to be opinionated but mostly to listen and from then on, to match the collective will of the entire school community to tough mechanisms and timescales.

This internal conversation must go hand in hand in with the reinvigoration of the AA's cultural, exhibitions and publications programme; these are important mechanisms by which dialogue takes place, inviting in diverse and challenging voices whilst better sharing the achievements of the school.

The AA as an independent centre of gravity for architectural debate in London and beyond partnering and sharing with multiple others in response to the cultural, social and political change taking place beyond Bedford Square.

Part of this will be the development of a formal research culture and environment focussing and refining the research of the school and testing it against external benchmarks.

How do you feel that your previous professional experience has prepared you for the role of AA Director and how would these positively affect the AA?

At the risk of the very nostalgia I have criticised earlier, I have been you: AA student, unit tutor, external examiner and council member. I have made AA publications, made exhibitions, pitched for students and almost failed thanks to Jim Stirling. But I have also been able to look across from elsewhere and envy the AA its independence and freedom. So I think I understand and feel deep affection for the AA - but it's a tough love.

And toughness is important and I have had to acquire it in the most exacting of academic and professional contexts.

I have led and helped form schools of art, architecture and design, internationally and in the UK.

By prioritising belief rather than expediency, I have been able to navigate the relationship between infrastructure

costs, personnel and fees to the benefit of students and staff.

I have detailed knowledge of the UK Higher education and professional context and know how to adapt its parameters to make space for freedom and creativity. I also know how to resist and when to say no.

I've created and nurtured school cultures though academic structures, cultural programmes, publications, research, situated learning, live projects, consultancy and activism and I've worked with great architects to redesign and deliver the spaces we learn in.

In all of this I think I have won the friendship and trust of a vast local and global community of students, emergent and established practitioners, academics and institutions. But also the marginalised and those currently excluded from this conversation. I would like to share both communities with you and ask that you reach out to them.

And finally and above all I'm a teacher and I understand all that you are experiencing and the precious significance of the time you are investing at the AA.

If elected I would bring this experience to bear on the AA to help and support everyone in the school community

confident that the AA has a role to play now more vital than at any moment in its history as a creative, engaged, permeable, brave, crusading and caring institution. And a duty to use its unique freedoms to the benefit of all.

AA Director Election Results

The AA Search Committee is delighted to announce the result of the ballot for the preferred candidate for new Director.

The AA School Community, comprised by students, academic and admin staff and members of Council has elected Eva Franch i Gilabert the winner, from a short-list of three candidates, by a majority vote of 67%, representing the highest majority received in a contested election since 1990.

A total of 876 members of the School Community voted, giving an election turnout of 81.3%, one of the highest levels of participation in Director elections over the last 30 years. Following this election result, the AA Council will carry out final contractual negotiations and formally announce the appointment of the new AA Director.

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