METHODS OF ASSEMBLY

BA Architecture
@ EPFL

Winter 2022

Overview
THEME: The Land We Live In

Modernity promoted a compelling vision of urban intensification as the most efficient and effective way of improving conditions for society. But our deepening ecological crisis requires that we re-examine the relationship between urban centres and rural situations, questioning the perspective of increasing urbanity as the inevitable path forward and reorchestrating the relationship between our urban and rural environments.

Rural places and the communities that sustain their cultural and economic life are often thought of as less turbulent and more stable places than our urban centres. Yet in contrast to this perception of rural communities as enclaves of conservative thought and resistance to change, they have often provided the conditions in which radical and different political, social and economic ideas and projects have fomented and taken shape.

Our work this year will focus on the future of these places, developing strategies and projects that have the capacity to improve rural situations through design of environments, buildings and components.

Teachers:
Amy Perkins
James Binning
and members of Assemble

Teaching Assistant:
Camille Sineau
The Effects of Good Government on the Country-side

Emmanuel Pinard, Architectures du Reel
CONTENT & OBJECTIVES
This year our studio will work closely with local institutions and residents in Vaud and the wider region to develop design research and produce speculative, compelling and credible proposals for the future of rural settlements, landscapes and communities.

These proposals will be grounded in working partnerships with people that have a stake in the place we are working, the village of Burtigny. Throughout the year a variety of briefs will enable us to develop the relationships and knowledge required to act carefully, intelligently and resourcefully.
Walter Segal, The Self-Built Revolution

Roland Freymond, Mobile Sawmill Les 2 rivières
Our tools are those of architecture and design practice but we will also employ other approaches and techniques. Through social research and direct action, community organising and advocacy allied to critical thinking, business planning and storytelling.

The studio will have a strong focus on how we make use of local material resources to build in ways that carefully consider the impact of construction on the local and wider environment, and through an understanding of existing forms of cultural knowledge and technological infrastructure, how we can produce projects that are economical and efficient, but also distinctive and special.
Burtigny, Vaud, Switzerland

During both semesters we will be based between Lausanne and Burtigny in the Jura Vaudois. We will study both the physical and the socio-economic context to enable us to develop diverse proposals for projects and buildings that can improve local life, economy and the environment.

We will work with a close understanding of local resources, particularly timber, to develop approaches to making architecture which utilise and celebrate local materials, skills and industry.
Burtigny in Winter
We will combine rigorous research and design with hands-on 1:1 prototyping and material exploration. We will explore how existing materials, infrastructure and people could be mobilized to create exciting new materials and models of building.

We think that architectural practice should combine critical thinking and direct making. This approach underpins the work of our practice, Assemble, and will inform the tactics and teaching of this studio.
Cairns Street, Construction Site, Assemble

Left: Kamikatsu, Japan, Assemble
TEACHING PRINCIPLES

a) Situated Practice

We are interested in the capacity that the varied tools of architectural practice have to enable intelligent, resourceful and responsible action to improve situations. As a studio want to work in a specific place in a sustained way and with recognition that in doing this, we need to offer something equal to what we are getting from the situation ourselves. Drawing on the work of people like Tim Ingold, we want to develop approaches to working in a place which is not extractive or exploitative, which is based on there being a mutual and equitable exchange of knowledge and information.

b) A Collaborative Approach

We are interested in working in larger groups, of 5-6 students, with the belief that it allows for a richer, more open dialogue with students and more focussed work on skills. It offers more scope and space for different skills within a group to be valued, while in practice the ability to co-operate effectively, take responsibility for specific aspects of a project and trust in the judgement and capacity of others are critical skills. By organising a large student group a smaller number of larger groups, it is possible to have longer discussions with each that more closely replicate the way that we approached early projects within Assemble, where a group is large enough to allow the room required for individual autonomy and to encourage a culture in which the contributions of others are valued but small enough to be specific about roles and responsibilities on a weekly basis. By aiming to produce a smaller number of projects that have a greater degree of resolution and depth, we are able to make work as a studio group that also has the depth and rigour to inform conversations beyond the school.

Hiking to start the term, Winter 2021
c) Tools of the Trade

We will place an emphasis on developing students’ ability to draw and model clearly, capably and efficiently. Specific sessions run by assistants or guests at the start of each semester in technical drawing and modelling techniques will be organised to ensure that all the students have a solid grounding in basic principles of drawing and representation of space and construction. A clear set of expectations and guidelines about good practice - eg. line weights, annotations, level of detail at different scales etc, will be given to enable students to have a clear understanding of standards and expectations within the studio and to develop good practice that will set them up well for further study and make time and space for more discussion about project work rather than basic technique.

d) Models

Models will play an important role in our approach to teaching - they are intuitive and intelligible in a way that more codified and abstract drawing is not, and through the production of models at various scales as the primary tool through which we encourage design development we are able to encourage students to develop their spatial skills, knowledge of construction, an interest in the way that things are made. They also enable a different way of thinking about production - models are suggestive, ie. interpretable and describe an intent, while drawings are instructive, i.e. they issue a precise instruction. The studio will consider the role of models as a tool for enabling different kinds of construction knowledge to inform design decisions that allow other professionals, craftspeople or communities involved in construction greater agency and autonomy in decisions about how buildings are made.
e) Scales

In principle we want to work with a range of key scales at 1:1, 1:5, 1:25, 1:100, 1:500 and 1:2500, with a primary focus on making really large scale study and propositional models and full scale samples and prototypes. We see the model as uniquely able to combine expression of an idea, describe composition, construction and material and an almost universal degree of spatial understanding. Setting clear scales through which we develop projects and study precedents will enable us to consistently improve and refine teaching tools, build a bank of good examples and give a clear set of expectations to students about our working method.

f) Technique

Technique is highly transferable. A skill acquired and refined in one discipline can be applied to others, but technical skill in making is now relatively rare in students studying architecture. As an extension of the programme, we want provide the tools and material to enable students to participate in a weekly or bi-weekly evening session in ceramics or joinery, providing an opportunity for students to develop their level of technical skill over the course of the semester, producing some beautiful and well-made things for themselves in addition to having acquired an understanding of material characteristics, how to use tools, and how to work with patience, care and a clear process.
Assemble Studio, The Rules of Production
LAST YEAR

Sawing the tree for the term with Roland, Mobile Sawmill 2 Rivières, Burtigny

Felling the tree for the term, Burtigny
Tree sawn for the semester

Felling the tree for the term with Jean-Pierre, Burtigny
Models and Model Photos
Projects by Chiara Kemper, Luana Ferrari, Hannah Kraus, Sonja Fritz
Winter Semester 2021
1:10 Model, Project by Ben Begon & Nanda Nugraha
BRIEF 1

THE LAND AS IT IS

We will begin with a series of workshops and exercises that will give us a good understanding of the context we will be working in throughout the year.

The first 3 weeks will involve the production of models, photographic surveys and detailed, descriptive analytical drawings we will build our knowledge of the physical geography, form and fabric of the specific context that we are working in. Working in groups across varied scales and with diverse interests we will produce an in-depth and eclectic portrait of the territory and Burtigny’s position within it.

For the next 3 weeks we will carry out social research including interviews, conversations, and archival research. This will build our understanding of the cultural, social and economic issues at play in these kinds of situations generally and in Burtigny specifically.

The culmination of the 1st Brief will be a presentation and discussion of the challenges and opportunities.
BRIEF 2

THE LAND AS IT MIGHT BE

We will build on this early work to begin developing a series of missions and agendas - broad strategies that are described through compelling imagery and which are developed into project proposals that will be taken forward in the 2nd Semester.

This will begin with group work over a two week period to developing scenarios that describe a positive, credible and compelling vision for the future of Burtigny and its communities and stakeholders - an attempt to sketch out a new initiative, organisation, enterprise or project with the potential to improve the situation and address local or wider social, economic and environmental challenges.

Through an extended workshop with Assemble partner Maria Lisogorskaya, these scenarios will be refined and given depth and specificity.

They will also be represented, with each group collaborating on the production of an ambitious, large-scale allegorical drawing. Describing a variety of different visions for Burtigny’s future, these are imagined as beautiful, and beautifully made, images that give weight to the ideas that are emerging in your projects.

These drawings will form the centrepiece of a final, public presentation of the work of the Semester, where groups will present project proposals that set out a programme, scale and time-frame that will you will develop as a project throughout the second term.
BRIEF 3

COPY, COLLAGE, CONSTRUCT

The second Semester will begin by looking at a range of architectural projects that we will study before using key ideas and aspects of their spatial organisation and construction to develop our own architecture projects in Burtigny.

We will kick off with the study of a significant reference project in your project groups.

Through investigation of the architect’s intent and ideas for a given project and the production of a set of detailed drawings, axonometric views, a site model, structural model and construction model an understanding of the relationship between the ambitions of the project and it’s architecture will be fostered.

Using this body of work as a starting point for our own design proposals, we will begin through a series of exercises designing at different scales to give our projects a more definite architecture form.

There will be an emphasis on working with local and low-carbon materials, processes and systems of construction to make buildings that meet contemporary standards but which are economical, intelligent and unusual.
BRIEF 4

PROJECTS FOR BURTIGNY

The project proposals will be developed through architectural workshops and seminars to provide technical expertise, culminating in a public presentation of the work in Burtigny.

The final 10 weeks of the term will be structured as a series of workshops developing techniques and approaches to different aspects of your projects - from the massing of your projects and their relationship to landscape and context to the organisation of the key spaces and programmes in plan, we will go on to intensively develop each project’s specific approach to facade composition, construction, structure, materials and finishes.

Final production will involve the construction of large-scale models and 1:1 components, samples and finishes, with an emphasis on hands-on making and production a critical part of the way that we will work with you to develop projects that are rich and inventive.

The final projects will be exhibited in Burtigny and the final review will take the form of a public conversation about the work and its implications for the community and environment.
COLLECTIVE PRACTICE
& STUDIO CULTURE

The teaching this year will emphasise the value of collaboration and co-production. We will actively develop the capacity of students to work in groups and making time within the studio to discuss collaborative approaches, communication and organisation of work will form an important part of the way that we collectively work within the studio.

We believe this approach is the best means of supporting students to develop the skills and confidence to work together effectively, believing that the complex challenges we face today require the profession to move beyond the narrow conception of the architect as an individual author.

The visiting professors will be in the studio in person each week throughout the term. We will begin with a studio walk in the Jura Vaudois, visiting local forests and meeting local people that will maintain a presence throughout the year including the Mayor, Valerie and the forester of the local community-managed woodland, Jean-Pierre.

At Easter, we will go on a short study visit, likely to Marseille and the South of France, which will include visits to different projects and buildings.

As a young teaching group we believe the best way to build good working relationships and an enjoyable and productive studio culture is through good communication, clear expectations and a shared sense of responsibility for making good work in a positive and supportive environment.

To enable this, we will begin the Year with an exercise to co-author a ‘Constitution’ for the studio that we - the teaching group, and students - will agree on and sign. We hope that this will establish a common set of expectations for what we want to achieve together and how we want to go about our work over the next 9 months as colleagues and collaborators.
Interior Photograph, Project by Flavien Ducor, Antoine Prat and Beate Zavadska
1:20 Model, Project by Anais Pestalozzi and Matthias Haffenstein
EVALUATION

Evaluation will be based on the work produced throughout the year and presented at each of the final reviews for each of the 4 Briefs.

The studio places an emphasis on working in groups and the evaluation will reflect the strength of the work of your group project, but will also consider an individual students engagement, individual production and wider contribution to the studio culture and atmosphere.

Briefs are given the following weighting as part of the evaluation.

- Brief 1 - 15%
- Brief 2 - 25%
- Brief 3 - 25%
- Brief 4 - 35%

Students will receive individual narrative written feedback at the end of each Semester.
TIMETABLE

Week 1 – 19.9.22
Mon – Public Holiday - no teaching
Tue – General introduction to the term, timetable and different briefs.
   Talks by Guest speakers

Week 2 – 26.9.22 / EPFL
Mon – Tutorials*
Tue – Workshop (AM only)

Week 3 – 3.10.22 / EPFL
Mon – Collective Review of Work-in-Progress
Tue – Workshop (AM only)

Week 4 – 10.10.22
Mon – Final review of Brief 1.1/Introduction Brief 1.2
Tue – Workshop (AM only)

Week 5 – 17.10.22 / EPFL
Mon – Tutorials*
Tue – Workshop (AM only)

Week 6 – 24.10.22 / EPFL
Mon – Collective Review of Work-in-Progress
Tue – Workshop (AM only)

Week 7 – 31.10.22 / EPFL
Mon – Final review of Brief 1.2
Tue – Introduction Brief 2.1
Week 8 – 7.11.22 / EPFL
Mon – Working Groups
Tue – Workshop

Week 9 – 14.11.22
Mon – Tutorials
Tue – Final review of Brief 2.1/Introduction Brief 2.2

Week 10 – 21.11.22
Mon – Workshop
Tue – Workshop continues

Week 11 – 28.11.22
Mon – Collective Review of Work-in-Progress
Tue – Tutorials

Week 12 – 5.12.22
Mon – Final review of Brief 2.2/Introduction Brief 2.3
Tue – Workshop

Week 13 – 12.12.22
Mon – Tutorials
Tue – Collective Review of Work-in-Progress

Week 14 – 19.12.22 - Burtigny
Mon – Production and preparation for Final Review
Tue – FINAL REVIEW
Rural Studio, Collective Building, Alabama, USA