

DE ARCHITECTURA

LIBER IX

AETAS



After all, what is a law of nature as such for us? We are not acquainted with it in itself, but only with its effects, which means in its relation to other laws of nature which, in turn, are known to us only as sums of relations. ¹

The awareness of human activity as one of the main forces of transformation of the earth system has recently introduced us to a new geological era: the Anthropocene. At the dawn of understanding this paradigm shift, the concepts of nature and culture are now being revisited, which poses as many questions as it elicits opportunities for our discipline, calling for a repositioning of architecture amidst both nascent and exigent challenges.

Technology is no mere means.

Technology is a way of revealing. ²

Negotiating the implicit relocation of the Anthropos and mirroring the inexorable technological acceleration, will an architecture considered as a material assemblage, a set of devices that is traversed by energy flows, be able to reveal other types of relationship with our built and non-built environment? Will it be able to claim a decidedly hybrid character, assuming its potential as an agent capable of engaging emerging new ecologies; between humans and non-humans, subjects and objects, existing and new?

Every subject spins out, like the spiders threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence. ³

In order to overcome the perilous anthropocentric perspective on our environment, allowing excursions in unknowable worlds, a disciplinary understanding of architecture is put forward that acknowledges the superimposing functional relations between subjects, objects and quasi-objects. Investigating their visible and invisible effects, built structures are described and designed as parts of networks of multifarious interdependencies, which exceed any attempt to grasp them in their totality, yet exclude deliberate autonomy.

No Ideas but in Things. ⁴

Transversal and generalist in essence, located at the interface of different knowledges, architecture is understood as the art of composition. Its essential function is based on its ability to construct a proportion between things and people, bringing together knowledge and material. In a deductive process of critical interpretation an architectural project is established from increasingly specific constraints, a nexus of interrelations, an actualization of presumed effects.

Whatever we call reality, it is revealed to us only through the active construction in which we participate. ⁵

Straddling reality and fiction, incapable of carrying out the entire process of transforming reality on its own, architecture is fundamentally dependent on the representations it produces. Starting out from geometry as its main tool, architecture uses reality as a projective force. It understands itself as a science of representation; as a place of the imaginary, a redistribution of the sensible, and, sometimes, a constitutive element of our collective remembrance.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche; On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense

² Martin Heidegger; The Question concerning Technology

³ Jakob Johann von Uexküll; A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans

⁴ William Carlos Williams; Paterson

⁵ Isabelle Stengers, Ilya Prigogine; Order out of Chaos

Studio BAUKUNST

The studio Baukunst at EPFL is conceived as an investigation into the archetypical elements of architecture in light of the challenges of our present age. By imbricating the contemporary and the fundamental a framework is set up in which a critical reflection on what architecture might be today can take shape. Research is envisaged as a project and the project is envisaged as research. Establishing a critical viewpoint is therefore regarded as the primary act of building an architectural proposal. Stemming from the overarching approach of Vitruvius's Ten Books, the studio addresses a different theme each academic year. After Performative Objects in 19/20, Elements of Climate in 20/21 and Umwelt in 21/22, Firmitas in 22/23, in 23/24 the theme of Aetas will be dealt with. Aetas i.e. lifetime or lifespan addresses the often suppressed fourth dimension of building, understood more as a verb than a noun, investigates how time can be utilized in the making of architectural projects. The studios are always split up in two parts of different character, each semester another aspect of the overarching theme is addressed.



Part I - Three Times No Project

What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know. ⁶

In Part I, a few case studies will be analysed regarding their history, followed by a speculation on their future. Going back and forth in time, we will try to understand and manipulate the agency of time in architecture. As time eludes conceivability as such, but only appears in relation to other agents, we will seek to utilize it through time-filtered investigations of construction, context, and program. Architecture will cease to appear immutable and invariable; it will be put in motion. Asking whether we must think of buildings as ever possibly completed, we may conceive of architectural projects not as desperately static objects but as perpetual construction sites, ever unfinished.

The semester will be organized in exercises, alternating individual and group-work. From the 7th to the 10th of October, we will embark on a field trip to Rome. The successive formats of Part I will be plans, models, and images. They serve both as working documents and as final representations, meaning that both process and result, narrative and argument, the disciplinary and the non-disciplinary are valued. The evaluation of the work will focus on the commitment, inventiveness, and quality displayed in the works, as well as the critical reflection that informs them.

PART II

THREE TIMES

THREE PROJECTS

Part II - Three Times Three Projects

*Time is construction.*⁷

In Part II we will attempt to make use of the insights of Part I to tackle a task more common for swiss architects, but in a somewhat uncommon manner. While given site and program will be nothing unusual, we will attempt to insert the project in an active temporal matrix. Obsolescence, incompleteness and impermanence won't be considered adversarial forces, they will assume agency in the development of the projects. As a certain precarity spreads in the building sector a different approach to architecture might come about and this approach might entail the utilization of time as a compensation strategy for the increasing lack of material, energetic, programmatic, and financial stability that pervades the condition of our times.

The semester will be organized as one exercise in groups of three, punctured by two midterms and more importantly a set of workshops. At the very beginning of the semester we will embark on a field trip to Basel. The formats of Part II will be once again plans, models, and images and as previously they serve both as working documents and as final representations, meaning that both process and result, narrative and argument, the disciplinary and the non-disciplinary are valued. The evaluation of the work will focus on the commitment, inventiveness, and quality displayed in the works, as well as the critical reflection that informs them.