LATENT TERRITORIES: SPACES FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

In the past decade the expansion of material and immaterial networks of transportation and communication have allowed us to selectively connect to anyone and anything throughout the world, producing profound territorial transformations as well as radical mutations in knowledge exchange and of occupancy. Despite all of these countless exchanges, a counter-effect of these seductive technologies is the contraction and devaluation of the physical public realm and the homogenisation of culture and the built environment. Diploma 17 operates within this critical condition and continues its investigations into the socio-political role of infrastructural and architectural form in defining new modes for coexistence in the contemporary city.

In a world of decentralised and multi-nodal networks the unit seeks to understand and assign meaning to the notion of centrality within the city. We are interested in the changing notion of public space and the conditions by which architectural form is the embodiment of the relationship between the collective and the individual. Therefore we prioritise the performative and behavioural attributes of form for their capacity to materialise relational spaces and re-position the body in society through action and the triggering of senses.

This year will be spent rethinking the organisation and experience of spaces for knowledge exchange conceived beyond institutional and professional frameworks. We will search for architectural forms of integration of multiple design objectives through experimentation with strategies of regrouping and permeability between activities. A greater emphasis will be put on the opportunities and enabling constraints of material and tectonic systems.

As a unit, we will engage with technology not as an end in itself but for it's pivotal role in the way we design and fabricate architecture. Going beyond the status quo we will use contemporary digital design and manufacturing techniques in innovative ways allowing us to escape the limitations of standardisation. Diploma 17 encourages individual explorations and embraces diversity of ideas allowing students to develop their own voice in the field of architecture.
PHASE 1 // PRECEDEMENTS STUDY: SPACES FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE
Week 1-2

IMPORTANT DATES
Presentation and group discussion: Wednesday 8/10

We will start the year with a group survey on a series of seminal projects that address the issue of knowledge exchange through effective socialization models at both the urban and architectural scales. Through these precedents, we will be focusing on analyzing organizational and experiential attributes extracting design criteria, spatial values and more broadly forming an understanding on their role in shaping culture and society. This will serve as a general introduction to the year’s topic while triggering a debate within the unit on the resilience of these institutionalized spatial models in the age of information technologies. We will concurrently survey new practices of knowledge exchange as they infiltrate a broader range of spaces within the city.

OUTPUT: Case study powerpoint, Mapping Diagrams, Drawings.
PHASE 2 // TECTONIC STRATEGY
Week 3 – 10

IMPORTANT DATES
Portfolio Presentation by ex-students: 09/10
Pin-up: 22/10
Pin-up: 12/11
Final Crit: 26/11

During the First term, we will be combining intense design experimentation to instigate a fruitful debate within the unit and trigger individual research agendas. We will concurrently introduce students to the subject interest of the unit through seminars and collective readings followed by group discussions. The first seminar will be on a general introduction on ‘spaces of knowledge exchange’ followed by ‘the body and the workshop’, ‘the common’ and ‘transfer of technologies’ providing theoretical and historical support for the development of the project thesis. An Anthology of selected readings, will complement the reading list. Our first presentations will be organized in public spaces of interest for this year’s unit agenda.

The aim of this eight week exploration is to set out the tectonic and material system for the project but also to substantiate your thesis with a geometrical set of architectural elements through the creation of a construct of an overall multi levelled space. Through intuitive experimentation and continuous critical assessment, we will be developing a series of tectonic studies and prototypes in the form of elaborate digitally designed physical models and drawings. The key emphasis of our explorations will be the performative and behavioural aspects of form and its ability to reposition the body as a central preoccupation for the design of architectural space as well as enhance the collective. Above all, we will pursue geometrical integration that synthesises multiple design objectives such as occupancy, structure, circulation, the organisation of perception and human engagement.

Towards the end of this term, students should have well under control the conceptual argument and design drivers for their project. We will also set out the technical ambitions of the project as inseparable from the development of your design thesis. We ask both 4th years and 5th years to identify and pursue their Design thesis concurrently with a material system. Towards the end of the term students.
DIGITAL DESIGN AND FABRICATION

IMPORTANT DATES
Workshop all day: Week 5
Workshop: 27/10 to 30/10
Pin-up: 30/10

In addition to weekly digital design tutorials that will be running all year, we will be organizing a series of intense four day workshops. During these sessions, we will introduce contemporary digital design techniques (Maya, rhino, Grasshopper and plugins) and fabrication tools that will enable you to have greater eloquence and precision in developing your tectonic investigations and urban scale deployment strategies. Through a series of short seminars we will study architectural projects produced by cutting edge digital manufacturers from the automotive, aerospace and naval industries as part of the unit’s interest in transfer of technologies and large scale digital manufacturing. This will trigger a broader conversation within the unit about the enabling role of technology and its pivotal role in reshaping collaborative design practices as well as their physical output.

PORTFOLIO AND DOCUMENTATION BOOK

IMPORTANT DATES
Submission: 26/11

During week 8 you will be editing, packaging and re-organizing your portfolio’s content and defining a clear and consistent graphic and material identity. This will include well-crafted portfolio pages, quality model photos, composite drawings and models. You will also submit your Thesis Abstract.

TECHNICAL STUDIES (TSS)

IMPORTANT DATES
Submissions: TSS subject presentation 11/12
Interim TS Submission (week 9 Term 2)
Final TS Submission (week 1 Term 3)

As a unit, we will engage with technology not as an end in itself but for its pivotal role in the way we collaborate, design and fabricate architecture. We will aim to innovate with contemporary digital design and manufacturing techniques allowing us to escape the limitations of standardization. This year’s TS will emphasize the role of innovative material technology, production logics as well as the latest analysis and simulation techniques (kangaroo, Galapagos…). We will encourage experimentation in search of greater eloquence in design and as fundamental means to test, prototype and implement our ideas. We do not see TS 5 as a technical requirement separate from the project thesis. On the contrary TS forms an integral part of the design portfolio.
PHASE 3 // PROJECT CONTEXTUALISATION
Week 10 of term 1 to week 2 of term 2

IMPORTANT DATES
End of Term 1 Jury: 17/12
Hand-in: 12/01
Final Jury: 21/01

During this phase you will be defining your individual project briefs and thesis, outlining key issues and interrogations that you will be exploring by design throughout the year. Through your previous investigations and formal explorations you will clearly identify fundamental objectives and constraints. You will collect and curate all relevant information regarding your topic including:

- Data (urban sociology, enabling technology affecting occupancy)
- Social groups
- Program inventory, activities distribution and related information.
- Mapping of important aspects for your project: Land use, Infrastructure, Circulation & networks, massing, typologies.
- Diagrams of comparative studies.
- Site drawings & maps printed to scale
- Quality Photos

You will need to arrive at the beginning of term 2 with a defined organisational proposal of chosen activities with all necessary research and documents to support your architectural claims.

OUTPUT: Printed documentation book, Your Thesis Text, Your organisational proposal of chosen activities developed during the break

// UNIT TRIP
Unit Trip 1 // 14th Venice Biennale - ITALY
Week 6 of term 1. 2 days - 1 night

Unit Trip 2 // FRANCE
Week 5 of term 2

Jean Renaudie, Ivry sur Seine.
Centre Pompidou, Rogers and Piano
As we develop the conceptual drivers for the project we will continue to work concurrently on the tectonic and urban organisation while emphasising the urban strategy. The last decade’s rapid expansion of information technologies and transportation networks has diluted the distinction between working, living and leisure affecting the way we design and experience boundaries in architecture. What has become more critical today is the seamless interconnection between those activities and how they interfere with the public domain. We will rethink and imagine the organisation and experience of spaces for knowledge exchange conceived beyond institutional and professional frameworks. One of the key questions for architects today is to develop new briefs and assign new meanings to physical space that acknowledges those radical changes of occupancy.

The projects will address a densely populated area focusing on the design of a mixed use urban unit that integrates multiple activities of living, working, and learning. We will be shifting our attention from tectonic strategies to the coupling of different programs. A key area of investigation will be to address the versatile notion of public space and the conditions by which architectural form can affect the relationship between the collective and the individual. Based on Spinoza’s idea of plurality of singularities, we will search what creates the conditions for people to create ‘a common’ that would be based on the multiplicity of aspirations and acts of collective intentions.

We will explore the possibilities of urban strategies of incomplete planning, challenge notions of hierarchy, non-determined functionalities and experiment with strategies of regrouping and permeability between those activities. We will emphasise the behavioural attributes of form and its material capacity to re-positioning the body in society, to invent “urban relational spaces” seen for us as the infrastructural “base” of society.
PHASE 5 // FINAL TERM
Week 1 – 6

IMPORTANT DATES
Super Crit: 20/05

During the final term, we will focus on the production of key final documents and elaborate physical models, critically addressing the relation between the tools, the production process and the expression. We will produce graphic presentations not as promotional means but as a way to capture the project’s essence in a limited amount of documents.
Selected Bibliography:

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Commonwealth, 2009
Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, 1977
Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City, 1960
Lina Bo Bardi: The Theory of Architectural Practice
Aldo Van Eyck, Designing For Children, Playgrounds, 2002
Aldo Van Eyck, The Shape of Relativity, 1998
Lefebvre Henri, Rhythmanalysis, Space, Time and Everyday life. 1992
Barthes Roland, Mythologies. Paladin, 1973
Architectures Radicales 1950-2000, XYZ 2003

Unit Staff

Theo Sarantoglou Lalis and Dora Sweijd are the founding Principals of LASSA ARCHITECTS (LASSA-ARCHITECTS.COM), an international architecture and urbanism studio with offices in London and Brussels. LASSA is currently involved with commissions in China, Egypt, Greece, Kuwait and Korea. Theo and dora have been Unit Masters of Diploma 17 at the Architecture Association since 2009 focusing on speculative cities. Theo Sarantoglou Lalis received his masters from the Bartlett school of Architecture in London. He has taught postgraduate studios at Columbia University and Harvard University. Prior to founding LASSA, he held project director positions at Future Systems and project director Asymptote. Dora Sweijd received her masters from the Bartlett School of Architecture in London. She previously worked at a number of practices in Brussels, London and NY. Dora and Theo have lectured internationally, lead workshops and taught undergraduate studios at LTU in Sweden and at the AA.