

TEACHING

# THE FORM OF DENSITY

*Columbia GSAPP Spring 2017  
Advanced Studio VI  
Syllabus*

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## THE FORM OF DENSITY



### 1. THE FORM OF DENSITY

Paris is the densest city in Europe, and one of the five densest in the world. Yet, for being such a highly built-up landscape, Parisian density is far from unbearable or unlivable. In fact, it is even viewed positively. Density is an endogenous trait of Haussmann's Paris, which covers 75% of the capital city.

The urban fabric of Paris provides us with an answer to the question, "How do we create positive density?" through all levels of its formal singularity. There is so much we can learn today from the history of the city's layout, blocks, and buildings.

At a time when the issue of demographic growth reveals the true extent of human, land, and financial needs that arise from the the grouping of urban and suburban elements into greater metropolitan complexes, it is more important than ever that we develop the tools to be used in the creation of this dense urban factory.

This studio class will investigate the relationship between urban form and density on the basis of the

experiences students will garner from two current projects in Paris.

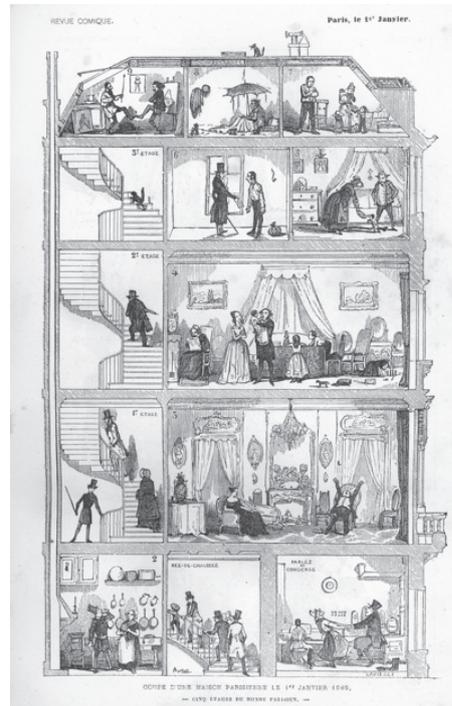
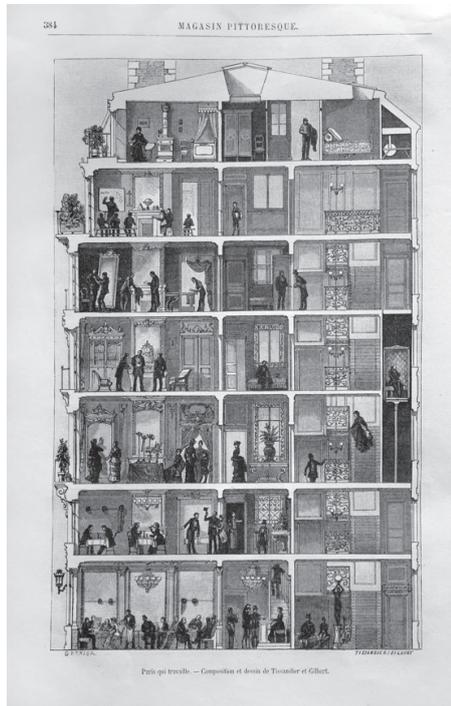
The goal is to establish a reciprocal link between the architecture and the city, and to thereby consider the architectural project as part of a larger composition where each piece expresses the values of the whole.

This is not an urban planning class, or a dogmatic exercise in the notion of context. Throughout this semester, we will erase the limits between the different scales and disciplines to place the architectural project once again at the center of urban challenges and opportunities.

*"We realize that architecture only constitutes one aspect of a more complex reality, or a particular structure. At the same time, for being the most recent verifiable data of this reality, it represents the most concrete perspective possible for dealing with this challenge."*

A Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, trans. L. Venuti, Opposition Books, Cambridge, 1984. p. 29

## METHOD: THE ARCHEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE



### 2. THE ARCHEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

Archeology is the scientific study of past cultures and ways of living through an analysis of their material vestiges. It is a science that ranges from art history to anthropology, ethnology, paleontology, geology, ecology, the physical sciences, and beyond.

Archeologists work at the intersection of all these disciplines. They must understand their essential nature to interpret the results yielded by objects.

With the same acuity, architects dig through the layers of the present, looking for the traces of questions that will give birth to the future. They search for visions of the future that they will design in function of their sensibilities.

The term “*project*” which etymologically means “*throwing something forward*” contains the entire ambitions of our profession.

The key to a project’s success resides in the lucidity of its vision, or more precisely, “*in the basis for the question that engenders this vision.*”

All students will participate in this process of “*archaeological research.*” Students will be asked to put forth a series of questions that, based on the contemporary debate around the concepts of resilience, frugality, identity, beauty, appropriation, and connectivity, will demarcate the intellectual territory that legitimizes their projects.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND STUDIO



### 3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The goal of this studio class is to develop a critical perspective that will help students to assume a clear, subjective posture in their design process. The underlying notion is to consider an architectural project not simply as a response to a need, a function, or a program, rather as a tool for civic and political engagement.

The class will alternate between theory and practice.

The theoretical segments will explore three avenues:

- the architecture of the city;
- the autonomy of form;
- narrative development.

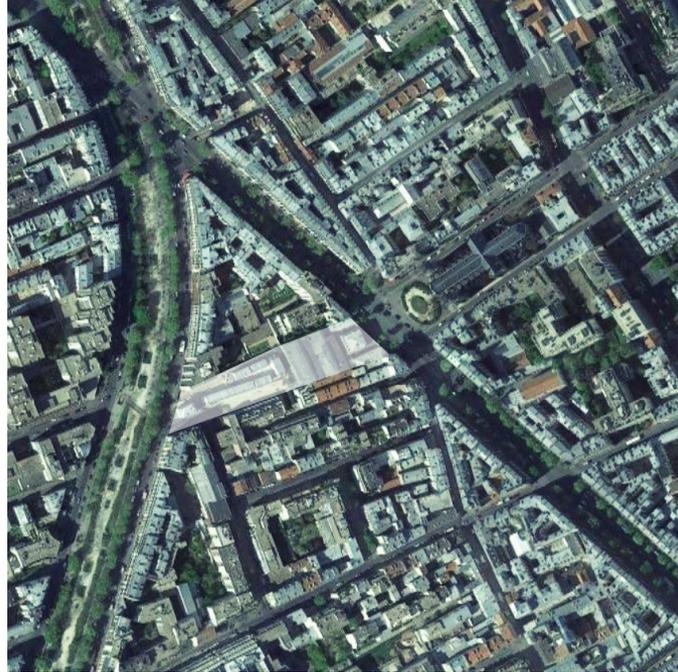
### 4. THE STUDIO

In practical terms, the project will be applied to two Parisian projects using an extremely realistic approach. Students will be provided with precise programs, urban planning regulations, accessibility requirements, and fire safety regulations for the sites. Students will start with “*a real framework*” to learn to step outside it, to find their own freedom within this very constrained system.

The elements that students will have to submit will be the same as for an architectural competition:

- analysis of the main issues and challenges, and the conclusions
- model of the project in its site
- images of insertions
- site plan at 1:500
- plan for the ground and intermediate floors and facades at 1:100
- technical details at 1:20

## SITE 01 – LA FRICHE TRUILLOT



### 5. SITE 01 – LA FRICHE TRUILLOT

66 boulevard Richard-Lenoir  
75011 Paris, FR  
Size: 5,600m<sup>2</sup>

The first project will be developed until March. It involves designing an ensemble of housing units, offices, and commercial spaces on a currently empty parcel in Paris' 11th arrondissement.

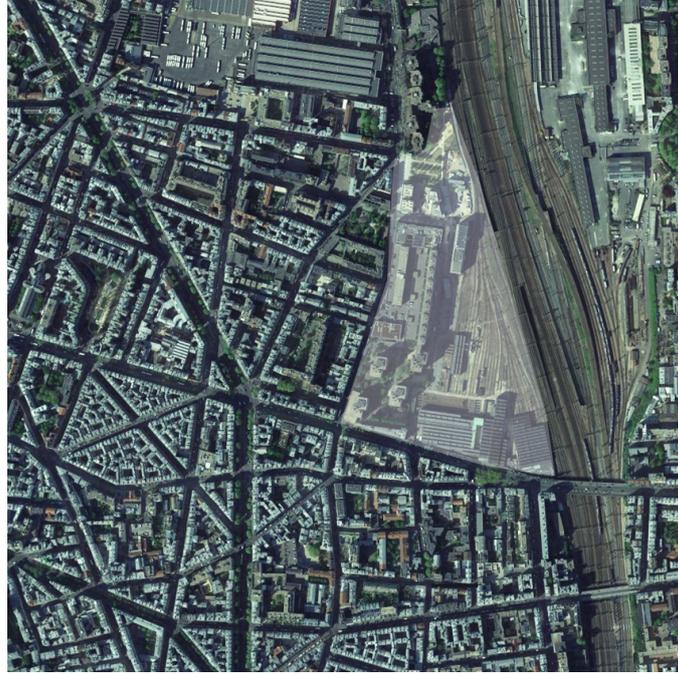
Following the dismantling of an industrial site, in 2015 the city of Paris freed up an area of 5,600m<sup>2</sup> deeply embedded within the Haussmann fabric, between the boulevards Richard-Lenoir and Voltaire.

The scale of this exercise will familiarize students with Paris' urban fabric and context. Its location in the city will echo the theoretical segments of the class, especially with regard to its formal singularity at all levels (the layouts, blocks, and buildings).

### **Organization of the studio class**

Students will split up into two groups to analyze the project, and then they will build a site model at a 1:500 scale together. Then, each student will provide an individual response, based on his/her project group's analysis.

## SITE 02 – ORDENER POISSONNIERS



### 6. SITE 02 – ORDENER POISSONNIERS

Dépôt Chapelle, rue Ordener  
75018 Paris, FR  
Size : 50 000m<sup>2</sup>

The second project is more complex and takes place at the edge of the city. The scale is larger for this mixed usage program of housing, offices, and various social and commercial activities.

The former *La Chapelle* train depot closed in 2013, freeing up 50,000m<sup>2</sup> in ground to be repurposed. The main challenge is to open up this ex-industrial site and connect it to its surrounding urban context, which is both Haussmann and modern. The site also presents a significant difference in height between the level of the tracks and that of the adjoining streets.

The Kinne Travel will allow students to visit the site and collect important information for their analysis.

### **Organization of the studio**

Students will split up into two groups to analyze the project, and then they will build a site model at a 1:500 scale together. Students will split up further into 3-4 groups to create projects on the basis of the analysis made by their project group.

## SITE 01 – LA FRICHE TRUILLOT



## SITE 02 – ORDENER POISSONNIERS



## SCHEDULE

### 7. SCHEDULE

**Jan 20** Studio Introduction

**Jan 23 - Feb 20** Site 01  
Analysis  
Theoretical Lessons  
Exercices and Project

**Feb 23 - Feb 24** Mid Review - Site 01

**Feb 27 - Mar 2** Introduction Site 02  
Analysis preparation

**Mar 06 - Mar 17** Kinne Travel and Spring Break

**Mar 20 - Apr 24** Site 02  
Analysis  
Theoretical Lessons  
Exercices and project

**Apr 27 - Apr 28** Final Review

### 8. KINNE TRAVEL

The Kinne Travel will take the students to Paris. It will serve as both the conclusion of the study of the first site (visit and comparison with what is really there), and as an introduction to the second project on rue Ordener. The visit to the second site will provide students with the opportunity for in-depth analysis (through pictures, layouts, environmental drawings) so that they can begin working on the project when they return.

Several on-site visits will also be organized to clarify the theoretical segments of the class at the beginning of the year by using actual examples of Haussmann and contemporary Parisian urban development.

## REFERENCES

### 09. SELECTED REFERENCES

#### Readings :

**Pier Vittorio Aureli**, The Project of Autonomy : Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism, 2012

**Alessandro Baricco**, The Barbarians: An Essay On the Mutation of Culture, 2014

**Francoise Choay**, The Modern City: Planning in the 19th Century, 1996

**LAN**, Catalogue of the Hausmann exhibition at “Pavillon de l’Arsenal”  
To be released in January 2017

**LAN**, Traces, 2013

**Jacques Lucan**, Composition, Non-Composition : Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 2012

**Aldo Rossi**, The Architecture of the City, 1982

**Ivor Samuels, Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex**, Urban Forms, The Death and Life of the Urban Block, 2016

**Camillo Sitte**, the Birth of Modern City Planning, 2006

#### Films :

**Claude Lelouch**, C’était un rendez vous, 1976

**Stan Neumann**, Paris, Roman d’une ville, 1991

