

# Master Thesis HS23

## Architectures of Correspondence

“If, today, our world is in crisis, it is because we have forgotten how to correspond.”  
Tim Ingold, *Correspondences*. Cambridge: Polity, 2021

The city of Zurich, and all the buildings that compose it, can be understood as a concentration of resources. Their construction, their maintenance, their operation, and even their dismantling imply ceaselessly reaching far and wide into the territory of Switzerland and across the globe to keep fuelling the life and growth of this urban environment. Following the suggestion to reflect on ‘Enough’ and focus on plenty and limits, we propose to explore the reciprocal relationships and *correspondences* established by Zurich with the resources it depends upon. Those can be regarded as commons — resources both natural and cultural that affect the whole of a community — and following the classification proposed by commons theorist Michel Bauwens, can be material, immaterial, inherited or man-made.

A stone that clads a Zurich building is thus extracted in the Alps, then processed by human craftsmanship and machinery, stored, transported to the city, and finally used in a construction process. Buildings and architectural cultures creates ripples, touching sites of extraction and production, practices of refining, transport, transformation of resources, affecting forests, quarries and gravel pits, needing reservoirs, dams, train stations, factories, highways and human skills. Anything that is built *here* creates holes, buildings, infrastructures and myriads of impacts *there*. Together, we will observe and map the sequence of spaces implied in specific resource flows, going back and forth between their points of origin, the intermediate spaces of transit or transformation they create, the city and buildings they give substance to. While taking into consideration some of the globalized implications of resource consumption, this master thesis will primarily focus on the territory of Switzerland, to allow first hand observations and visits of key locations, helping to produce situated research.

This investigation will enable you to critically reflect upon a resource flow as well as its correlated spatialities, and to take a position through the development of an architectural strategy *corresponding* and reacting to the resource in question and its manifold aspects. Your projects will focus on developing ‘spaces of resources’ and will investigate design questions such as: How to imagine new programs or institutions dealing with a specific resource and its use in architecture? How to make a given resource and its use more visible in the city, possibly by monumentalising or exposing what is usually kept hidden? How to inhabit, convert, reuse defunct sites of resource extraction and transformation such as disused quarries or concrete factories? What architectural interventions could help support and strengthen flows of new resources whose use should gain momentum in a context of ecological transition? Can rethinking our relations — or *correspondences* — to resources through architecture, going from extractive to reciprocal, also help us renegotiate the divide between nature and culture that is consistently exacerbated by the built environment?

Over the course of a few months, this reflection on buildings and their *correspondences* will cultivate a broad resource literacy, serving as a substrate for master thesis projects emerging from an awareness of how a building always affects the world way beyond its visible urban surroundings.

*In case of questions, feel free to ask them to:*  
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Chair of Affective Architectures (An Fonteyne)  
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## Preparation phase

- Make an in-depth analysis of a resource flow directly related to the architecture and city of Zürich, selecting a specific resource whose trajectory will be retraced, and taking into consideration the intersection of its material, immaterial, inherited or man-made dimensions.
- Contribute to a collective mapping effort and the elaboration of a 'material literacy'. Reflect on a graphical mode suitable to represent the sequence of spaces and correspondences implied by a specific resource trajectory, including extraction sites, transportation and storage infrastructures, transformation and production facilities, and urban presence (or lack thereof).
- Situate the research and the resource, address the stakeholders involved in the resource flow, the architects, contractors and users involved in the point of departure (or arrival) in Zurich, visit the spaces and architectures supporting it, document by means of text, photography, drawing, models.
- Contextualize the selected resource beyond Zurich and Switzerland, informing yourselves on how it relates to global flows of that same resource, and how it connects to topics of scarcity, plenty, limits, over-extraction, exploitative neocolonial dynamics, potential for the ecological transition, changing energy standard, etc.
- Identify the segment of the resource trajectory you would like to intervene on, the building, site or infrastructure to design or redesign, to program or reprogram, and sketch out your intentions and brief.

## Elaboration phase

- Develop a design proposal critically reacting to a specific resource flow, and correspondence built between the city of Zurich and the Swiss territory.
- Imagine a design strategy as well as an architectural language and expression elaborating on a specific kind of resource literacy assembled during the preparation phase.
- Redefine the agency of the architect when working on the question of resources. What kinds of projects can one propose to curb, visualize, rethink or encourage the use of specific resources in architecture?
- Elaborate on the initial mapping, and on its graphical language, to represent your design and embed it as a new component in the resource trajectory you will have studied.
- Respond to the brief you will have set in the preparation phase, use your architectural design to articulate a clear and concise master thesis argument.

## Work to be done in preparation phase

### Teaching formats

- Collective walks & visits;
- Readings and discussions;
- Reviews;
- Lectures;
- Regular step-ins from specialists in the field of resource use, management, and abuse.

### Research and working formats

- Historical, archival, statistical & technical research;
- Discourse analysis & theory reading;
- Site survey or analysis through walking, observing, inhabiting, interviewing;
- Mapping, drawings, photographing, model-building, in situ intervention for selected segments of the resource trajectory.

## Expected outcome

- During the preparation phase you will be asked to draw a map of your resource trajectory, which will participate in a shared mapping effort to show the resource dependencies and correspondences of Zurich, and to compile a storybook out of your research, which will:
- formulate a series of narratives that reflect, in words, drawings, plans, images, the various explorations and reflections on one particular trajectory that you will have decided to focus on;
  - uncover complex discussions on the correspondences established between buildings and urban environments on the one hand, and possibly remote Swiss territories and environments on the other;
  - bring in examples or references on how architecture has already engaged with the topics at stake;
  - outline architectural scenarios to further elaborate on in the elaboration phase.

## Ratio of grading by cooperation partners

Preparation phase: Chair An Fonteyne: 50% / Chair Tom Avermaete: 50%

Elaboration phase: Chair An Fonteyne: 50% / Chair Tom Avermaete: 50%