

HAU ATHENS STUDIO BRIEF JUNE-JULY 2020

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(All images are from previous studios students' projects)

INTRODUCTION

Athens provokes two simultaneous and apparently contradictory feelings: on one hand, it is a highly **homogeneous** city and on the other, few cities seem more spread out and more **fragmented**. This 'imaginary' distancing is a condition of existence in Athens. The totality of the city is perceived only in fragments, albeit perfectly articulated. Space here should be measured by state of mind and by the character of each district, each neighborhood, not by how many meters separate them. Here each fragment is a whole.

Athens has no exteriors. The city is surrounded by four mountains and the sea. It is this natural topography that defines it. Here everything is stone and concrete; everything is built. Yet, this city can be **natural**. Nature is trapped in the remnants of the landscape amongst the buildings.

Athens is an **interior**, because there is no outside and because it is complete in itself. This is what creates that 'endless imaginary fragmentation': the narrow becomes wide, the near becomes far, the limited becomes infinite, the identical becomes distinct, the timeless becomes transient.

In 2020, the city celebrates a unique anniversary: 2,500 years since the Battle of Salamis.

Salamis is the little island in the Saronic Gulf on the west coast of the city. It was a naval battle between the Greeks and the Persians. Ten years earlier (490 BC), the Athenians fought and won, together with a small force of Eretrians, the Battle of **Marathon**. The Persian Empire was until then invincible. These two battles mark the beginning of an era in Greek history which culminated in Athens with the emergence of democracy and the flourishing of philosophy and the arts. Many historians believe that if the Greeks had lost the battle at Salamis the whole development of the Western World would not have taken place.



PROGRAM (The program is common to both the elective and the design studio.)

The project will seek to examine the two coasts of the Attica peninsula, **Marathon** in the east and **Eleusina** with the island of **Salamina** in the west. What are both areas today? What kind of situations can we map to help us envision a new future for them?

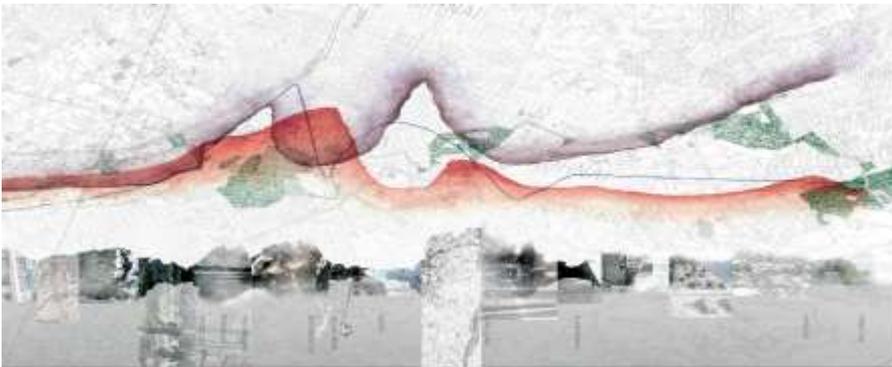
This studio could be seen essentially as an **archaeology of the present**, or a projection of a possible future from the traces embedded in the present: the challenge is to transcend the shallowness of a tourist perception of place by observing how people really use space and appropriate it, and how multiple places can co-exist within the same space.

You will design a **fragment of a city** within one of the two areas of Athens (Marathon and Salamina/Eleusina), based upon your psycho-geographical **mapping** of your urban section. The fragment will also be the site of your **'postcard'**. This fragment should encapsulate all the qualities of your city within the city—a microcosm of the whole—and be based upon your **narrative**. You must define the location of the fragment yourself. The fragment needs to be a persuasive architectural intervention that will define elements to be retained and adapted, and elements to be introduced. Your insertions might be stealthy or overt. They need to be productive of the new city. The fragment will have a materiality and should be explored experientially (think Tarkovsky's film: *Stalker*).

STAGE 1: MAPPING (ELECTIVE AND DESIGN STUDIO)

You will be divided into **groups** and asked to investigate either Marathon or Salamina/Eleusina. We will set out as cartographers, to explore a complex entity, the city. You will need to traverse experiential sections through your area in order to discover and create sites for intervention. While on site, you must seek to register the way in which certain spaces, streets or buildings resonate with your state of mind. Identify anything other than physical, situations, peculiarities, activities...

AFTER...all the above components will come together to appear in a **'SECTION'** composed by each group.



STAGE 2: A PERSONAL NARRATIVE (ELECTIVE AND DESIGN STUDIO)

Driving your project will be the **narrative** you will have developed through your personal, experiential mapping, discovering "the transient, the fleeting and the contingent in modern life".

This is the use of memory:

For liberation – not less of love but expanding

Of love beyond desire, and so liberation

From the future as well as the past....

...History may be servitude,

History may be freedom

- From T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

The outcome of this stage will be a set of drawings and field notes that record your **personal narrative** / journey, in 2,3 and 4 dimensions, (i.e. duration), and a **'postcard'**, that must encapsulate a part or all of it.



STAGE 3: BRIEF AND SITE (ELECTIVE AND DESIGN STUDIO)

You will undertake the following tasks:

1. *'The identification and selection of those 'islands' – areas, affected by the two sites – that already have a strong existing entity that deserves to be preserved and reinforced.*

Enclaves... that have the potential to embody in a pure and legible form ideas and concepts, so that the history of architecture may coincide with the history of ideas once more.'

These fragments will form the nuclei for the future city.

2. *'The completion of the preserved fragments...*

The objective needs of each 'island' will be identified once and for all and will be met through the insertion of a series of social condensers to answer the particular needs of each district.

The architectural intervention will consist in interpreting and completing the configuration and life of each of the identified islands... writing a brief for their new life, programming for urban intensity.

The aim... maximising social benefit.'

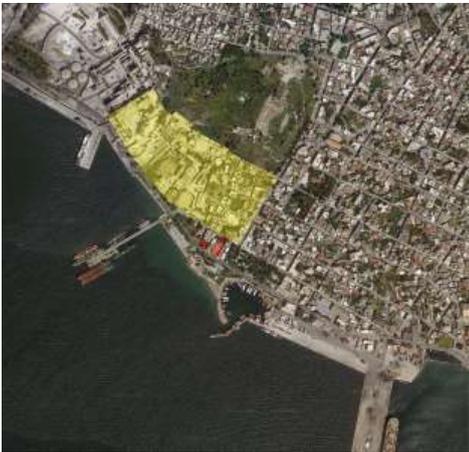
'Berlin: A Green Archipelago / The city in a city', A Manifesto (1977) by Oswald Matthias Ungers and Rem Koolhaas with Peter Rieman, Hans Kollhof, and Arthur Ovasca. A critical edition by Florian and Sebastian Marot. UAA Ungers Archives for Architectural Research. Lars Mueller Publishers



The supplements or 'completions' will inject new programs into the study area that will increase urban intensity and diversity. Some starting points to consider:

ELEUSINA / SALAMINA:

- the little houses neighborhood (the refugees from Asia Minor of 1922), a little city within the city, waiting to be rediscovered.
- the post-industrial zone next to the archaeological site; one epoch meets another on common ground: a shared museum perhaps.
- the island has become a new suburb of the modern city. Can it be connected to it in a better way or should it become totally autonomous?



Elefsina: Site between Eleusina archaeological park and Gulf of Salamina

MARATHON:

- the plain, where the battle took place, is now used for agricultural purposes, a fertile ground to grow crops. Is this an area to propose a new beginning for the city?
- the traces of the past are almost invisible in the flat landscape; a higher ground to improve 'visibility' both into the past as well as the future?



Marathon: [Athenian soldiers' Burial Ground](#)

FOR BOTH AREAS:

-the coast line itself; how could the liminal zone between land and water be transformed over time (life began in the water).

The outcome of this stage will be the writing of one's own **brief** and the choice of **site/sites**.



STAGE 4: THE CONCEPT (ELECTIVE AND DESIGN STUDIO)

Combine temporary programs and activities with permanent ones—which elements will remain the same in ten years, 50 years, and which will change with the next economic shift?

CIAM thought the city could be reduced to four elements: Work, Dwelling, Recreation, Transport/ circulation. In the modernist city these were to be dispersed and separated. In Athens, this is neither possible nor desirable, each fragment could combine Work, Dwelling, Recreation, Transport.

Work

Future forms of work will in some cases differ from the present and will adapt to new technologies and world markets. Could the city become the new economic centre for the Middle East? There is currently massive youth unemployment in Athens. This cannot be allowed to continue. Think of creative new possibilities: university city, digital start-ups, stopping the brain-drain. New forms of market or exchange might be envisaged. How do these get implemented in your area?

Dwelling

The inhabitants of a future Athens may include the present inhabitants and newcomers--Athens has always accepted newcomers. What might they bring to the new city as refugees, pioneers, visitors, settlers, students, radicals? What might their needs be, and how can the city accommodate, transform and be transformed by their desires? There need to be safe streets—businesses need to be able to operate. Positive activities need to take place at most times, so there needs to be density and diversity. Other not so legal activities may still take place in the background but will not be allowed to take over the street.

Residents need green spaces—parks, gardens, children’s play areas, urban wilderness. This can occur at street level or up in the air on terraces or on rooftops. Residents need clean air, access to public transport and bicycle paths, pedestrian paths etc. Could this be part of the ‘green’? How might the city cope with the annual influx of tourists while maintaining the amenity of the inhabitants?

Recreation

If Athens develops as an education hub, with a population of students, young workers and start-ups, and the city could become more attractive for tourists, which in its turn would create a market for service industries- bars, cafes, restaurants, music clubs, privately run museums, cabarets, casinos. Athens could become the Las Vegas for Europe and the Middle East. Theatres could spring up- maybe arts centers where events and exhibitions can take place. Urban circus? Circus school? Pleasure garden? Creation of ‘green corridors’ for passive and active recreation. Popular culture could meet elite culture. It might be a good place for music festivals and venues for visiting companies to rehearse and stay, perhaps new film studios will be created to take advantage of the good weather, the cheap labour and the varied landscape.

Circulation

Communication could be physical and virtual. Wire the entire area - free internet. Keep car traffic on the periphery by sinking car-parking below ground or outside the quarter. Connect places and spaces together. Let locals move freely through their territory, unobstructed by cars, walls and gates. Let people move vertically, connecting territories on different levels... move horizontally, above, on and below the street level. Public scape on the street. Pedestrianize large areas. Create urban forests for people to ‘get lost’ in. Walled wilderness.



Program Menu

The hospital/monastery

The museum/department store

The inhabited bridge

The garden/swimming pool-gymnasium

The urban villa/ *polykatoikia* reconsidered (*oikos* = house)

The square/market

The cemetery/holiday complex

Kindergarten/old people's home

Police station/youth club

Bazaar, arcades and street markets/circus and theatre

Bars, cafes and nightclubs/ workshops

Migrant cultural center/slaughter-house

Monastery/medrese

Arts and crafts workshops and school/urban farm

Caravanserai/single people's housing

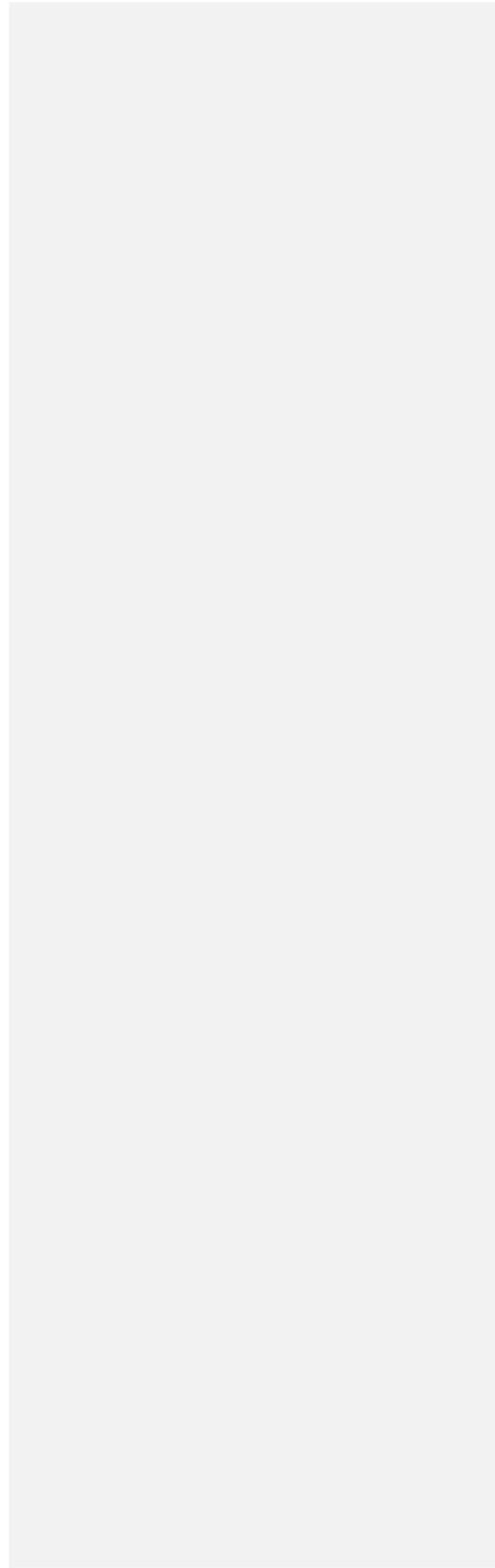
Hanging gardens

Water elements

Urban forest

Programs of your devising etc.

Your **concept** must be presented in a way best suited to your ideas building upon your mapping, narrative and chosen site; as a series of photographs or collages, a set of drawings, models or a sketchbook.



STAGE 5: THE DESIGN (DESIGN STUDIO)

Objectives:

Architecture is about the construction, addition or rebuilding of cities.

Architectural form is not an unrelated object, but always pertains to an ancient language of urban form and structure.

Consider: to what extent will your project bring into being an **urban condition**, a complexity and richness of experience?

Experimentation:

You will need to experiment in the design process.

The first proposition will not necessarily be the most appropriate, (think: form, typology, topology, analogy).

Multiplicity:

The project will need to work on several layers: urban form and context, external spatial form and building form, then will focus upon the life and complexity of the interior.

It is interesting to again have the opportunity to engage in paper architecture, and to produce propositional realities, rather than just real propositions.

What spaces do the current contradictions of Athens open up, to think beyond the current status quo?

Project Requirements:

You will produce the following:

Locality plan	1:2000
Site plan	1:500
Project plans (depending on project)	1:100 , 1:200
Sections	1:100, 1:200
Detailed section through critical land-water element of your project	1:100, 1:50
Vignettes showing spatial design of project:	minimum 4
project model in digital form	

The final submission format will be digital (nominal A1 format unless other sizes suit concept), so that work can be easily communicated.

Giorgos Seferis: Mythistorima – excerpts

Our country is closed in, all mountains
that day and night have the low sky as their roof.
We have no rivers, we have no wells, we have no springs,
only a few cisterns — and these empty — that echo, and that we worship.

A stagnant hollow sound, the same as our loneliness
the same as our love, the same as our bodies.
We find it strange that once we were able to build
our houses, huts and sheep-folds.

And our marriages, the cool coronals and the fingers,
become enigmas inexplicable to our soul.

How were our children born, how did they grow strong?

Our country is closed in. The two black
Symplegades*¹ close it in. When we go down

to the harbours on Sunday to breathe freely
we see, lit in the sunset,

the broken planks from voyages that never ended,
bodies that no longer know how to love.

Bottle in the sea

Three rocks, a few burnt pines, a lone chapel
and farther above

the same landscape repeated starts again:
three rocks in the shape of a gateway, rusted,
a few burnt pines, black and yellow,

and a square hut buried in whitewash;
and still farther above, many times over,
the same landscape recurs level after level
to the horizon, to the twilight sky.

Here we moored the ship to splice the broken oars,
to drink water and to sleep.

The sea that embittered us is deep and unexplored
and unfolds a boundless calm.

Here among the pebbles we found a coin
and threw dice for it.

The youngest won it and disappeared.

We put to sea again with our broken oars.

¹ two rocks at the entrance to the Black Sea

Hydra

Dolphins banners and the sound of cannons.

The sea once so bitter to your soul

bore the many-coloured and glittering ships

it swayed, rolled and tossed them, all blue with white wings,
once so bitter to your soul

now full of colours in the sun.

White sails and sunlight and wet oars
struck with a rhythm of drums on stilled waves.

Your eyes, watching, would be beautiful,
your arms, reaching out, would glow,
your lips would come alive, as they used to,
at such a miracle:

that's what you were looking for
what were you looking for in front of ashes
or in the rain in the fog in the wind
even when the lights were growing dim
and the city was sinking and on the stone pavement
the Nazarene showed you his heart,
what were you looking for? why don't you come? what were you looking for?

Astyanax

Now that you are leaving, take the boy with you as well,
the boy who saw the light under the plane tree,

one day when trumpets resounded and weapons shone
and the sweating horses

bent to the trough to touch with wet nostrils the
green surface of the water.

The olive trees with the wrinkles of our fathers
the rocks with the wisdom of our fathers

and our brother's blood alive on the earth
were a vital joy, a rich pattern

for the souls who knew their prayer.

Now that you are leaving, now that the day of payment
dawns, now that no one knows
whom he will kill and how he will die, take
with you the boy who saw the light under
the leaves of that plane tree
and teach him to study the trees.

Even if the wind blows it doesn't cool us
and the shade is meagre under the cypress trees
and all around slopes ascending to the mountains;
they're a burden for us

the friends who no longer know how to die.

A little farther

we will see the almond trees blossoming
the marble gleaming in the sun

the sea breaking into waves

a little farther,
let us rise a little higher.

