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 Failed Fall, 2008
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 Photo: Roman Ondak



Follow the DIRT

Tutor(s): Thierry Berlemont and Guests

Semester: 1

Engagement: Mediating Tactics & The Brussels Way

Open for Interior Architecture

Language: English

Campus: Brussels

'No doubt dirt of various kinds has been at work in architecture from its dark beginnings, registered in the first moment that some dirt was cleared to create the ground on which human life could commence its performances. Some ground is cleared, a circle is demarcated, what is considered foreign is removed, and as a result a rarefied space is secured'
 (Frichot 2019, p.14)

//MAINFRAME

SurrenderResistance is a design studio centred on experiment and speculation. It proposes an extended moment of re-orientation or re-set at a critical hinge-moment in a learning process and aims at a reflection on critical points of architectural interest. The core of the studio's approach is the relation of the student with a phenomenon, problem or experience, and its associated critical point or singularity, where known laws no longer apply, become extreme, or even contradictory.

This is expressed by the twin-concept **SurrenderResistance** that signifies an apprehension of issues from the perspective of ambivalence and paradox. It is joined by a partner-concept that provides topical support and an additional means for orientation. This year's edition departs from a statement, i.e. **'Follow the DIRT'**, and the argument of philosopher Michel Serres that 'dirt and its distributions play a fundamental role in relation to the basic questions: How do the living inhabit a place? How do they establish it, recognise it? The answer he gives is that 'appropriation takes place through dirt' (Serres 2011, pp.2-3) The opening call is to '... move past our disgust, to work with the dirt', because 'this is an imperative for coping with our dusty, dirty, defiled world. To think with it, not against it. Dirt never emerges from nowhere, ex nihilo, but from beneath your feet, from under your fingernails, from encounters and relations and from the accumulated odds and sods that compose any mode of life. A life, where it is not stultified as nature morte, is inevitably dirty, messy, buffeted by contingencies' (Frichot 2019, p.14).

Both sets constitute the reference for the calibration and balancing of one's own position. This position is dynamic, but not pre-defined or pre-supposed. The studio aims at providing the space to let it take shape, grow, transform and mature within a process of questioning by means of design and making. A general question to consider is how we can, from an architectural perspective, give shape to something that we do not yet know or understand, but that is nonetheless critical and highly space-time oriented? How does this affect our perception of existing relationships, and how does it lead to new ones? How can we, by means of this process, reveal something crucial, necessary, helpful or relevant about and for architecture and architectural practice? Do we, as architects, have a responsibility regarding the issues under scrutiny, and if so, how can we contribute to them? Do we enthusiastically join a given movement or tendency, or do we interrupt it, build an opposition and join the resistance? It is also an opportunity for finding new sources, and r(e-)orient personal fields of interest or commitment towards architecture and society more in general.

//PROCEDURE

The student generates and implements architectural topics and strategies by means of simulations and tangible material installations. Those will be produced on a weekly basis and used as means of conversation and assessment of ideas and proposals. The studio provides both a material and social space – including cooking and sharing the table – for a process-oriented development that is organised in chapters:

- REVELATION: The excavation of themes
- IMMERSION: The intensive examination of the theme and the mapping of the field
- EXTRACTION: The extraction of sub-themes, existing or untouched, that show the potential to be developed more in depth. This is named “X”. The extraction-phase leads to a first viewing halfway the semester to which external participants will be invited.
- PRODUCTION: The speculative process of defining and developing the X
- RELEASE: This is the process of making public, i.e. delivery, disclosure and transmission of the newly projected and constructed architectural substance in a spatial form still unknown and to be created.

//OUTPUT

The end of the process will be organised as a week-long residency in January at l'Escaut (<https://escaut.org/hosting>), from Monday 10 to Friday 14 January 2022, and will close as an exhibition that opens the studio to an exterior world, and goes into conversation with it. This event will take place at the site of residency on Friday evening.

//ASSUMPTIONS

A participation in the studio requires skills in expression, media, mixed media, techniques/technology, construction and theory of architecture. It also demands an open inquisitive mind, curiosity, a genuine dedication towards learning, an experimental attitude and a capacity to use design and making as primary tools.

Surrender/Resistance is part of the Master-Engagement 'Mediating Tactics', in which the discipline and practice of architecture, and the role of the architect in contemporary society, is critically questioned. This studio was conceived in close collaboration with Marc Godts and Wim Van der Vurst, and is facilitated by l'Escaut (www.escaut.org).