Kyoto - Tourism, liveability, landscape, heritage

Releasing the virtuality captured in the Real

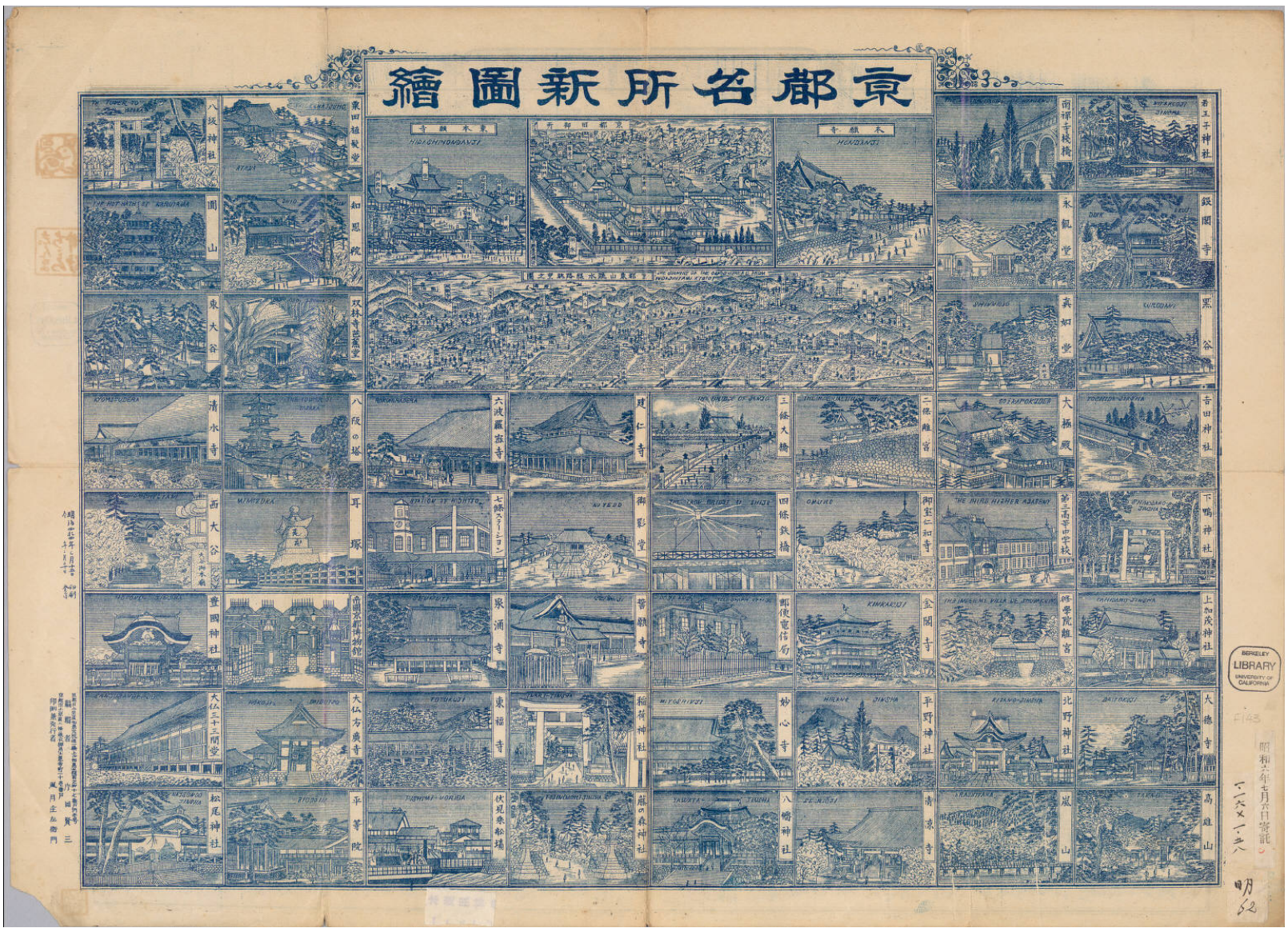
A Performative Architecture Studio by Martine de Maeseneer

In collaboration with : Prof. Tomas Daniell, Department of Architecture and Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University

Title	**Kyoto - Tourism, liveability, landscape, heritage Releasing the virtuality captured in the Real**
Supervisor(s)	prof. Martine De Maeseneer
Campus (BXL/Ghent)	Campus Brussels (recruting/open for students from the Brussels & Ghent campus)
Language (EN/NL)	English
Studio or individual?	Studio, with individual Thesis Projects
If individual: max number of students?	10-15 students max.

"Architecture remains one of the rare expressions in everyday life that provides a continuous experience of those other worlds and their distinct forms of organization and value, and simultaneously lays claim on a future that architecture's particular techniques of projection allow. Architecture is a plastic practice, exactly positioned to enact alternatives: to produce holes in the world, stage breakouts, and release the virtuality captured in the real. The world "as it is" never constitutes a sufficient condition for architecture. And if you propose to "do" architecture - whether producing it, exhibiting it, or writing about it - that should not go without saying."

from "Easier Done Than Said" by The Cameo, in Flat Out, fall 2016



Framework of the Kyoto studio

Exempt from the pandemic, Kyoto, the century-old city and former seat of Japan's imperial court - by many still considered the cultural capital of Japan – had been under severe pressure from its rapidly growing tourism industry. Huge tourist numbers, at times outnumbering its population ten times over, created tensions and conflicts, with the city of Kyoto on one hand benefitting economically from tourism, whilst on the other hand suffocating under its pressure. The term *kango kogai* - tourism pollution - had been making headlines. Locals argued that whilst tourist numbers kept expanding, local infrastructures did not see matched investment, putting pressures on local residents to navigate their daily lives, from overcrowded public transport networks, to shops that catered for tourists rather than locals.
Whilst Kyoto repeatedly ranked number 1 in its cultural assets, it only ranked in the low 50s on the Liveability index (Japan Power City Reports). The economic importance of tourism as one of Japan's key growth sectors was increasingly in danger of becoming a victim of its own success. Then came the pandemic. With it came 'silence'. If in 2019, 8 Mio tourists descended on Kyoto alone, in 2021 the entirety of Japan only received 245,900 foreign visitors, a 99.2% reduction. Suddenly the pressures seemed reversed. Whilst locals embraced the quietness and increased liveability, the tourism and hospitality industries and affiliated industries from shops, museums, boating companies, tea houses and private guest houses, suffered, and (as we write this Brief) are still suffering. Even the city itself is in an increasingly precarious position, with high debts incurred from expensive infrastructure projects, loss of tourism revenue and low tax income. Recently, most tourists came from Japan itself, a strategy that seeks to reign benefits from the void that emerged. In the meanwhile over-tourism returned. Many changes are taking place to adapt to the ongoing crisis and to redress some of the certainties that have recently become uncertain; some are brought about by governmental efforts others emerge through ad-toc initiatives by citizens. Whilst the pandemic may have amplified or reversed some pressures, many of the themes and discussions are not new. The dichotomy between business interests and the needs and wants of the civil society and their respective influence on the future development of the city is an ongoing issue; so is the discussion on tourism, public space, liveability and the relevance of landscape, nature and heritage in a modernising country that faces an uneven pattern of growth, development, expansion, depopulation and shrinking amidst a demographic earthquake, with Japan having the oldest population in the world. In these times of uncertainty and change many new impulses are currently being set. Could the pandemic provide an opportunity to re-negotiate tensions between over- and under-tourism, liveability, landscape, nature, productivity and heritage? Where might potential synergies lie? Which methodologies can be developed to reappropriate, recalibrate and renegotiate?

With the input of student projects undertaken in the former Kyoto Master Studio of Martine de Maeseneer on new spatial strategies for the tourism industry in Kyoto (2021-23) and with the expert assistance of Prof. Daniell and his students from Kyoto University as our on-site experts, and our own Kyoto site visit in the first week of Nov 2025, we will expand the Kyoto studio that hooks into existing narratives whilst seeking new ones. Using Tourism as a vehicle to examine related urban issues, from liveability, over-ageing and heritage to pressures on landscape, nature and the environment, we will explore where synergies or edits could be undertaken to rethink, tapping into a growing catalogue of ideas for re-naturation, re-cultivation,…

During the Kyoto studio, students will engage with this topic in a research-based and explorative manner. As students you will make use of the Kyoto site visit discoveries in the first week of November 2025, and engage to 'hunt' down fissures but also opportunities, assembling and charting their discoveries in a collective catalogue, from sites within the city centre to sites on the periphery. Through a critical reappraisal of your findings, you will set impulses to develop alternative scenarios and strategies that serve as starting points for a critical contemporary debate on Kyoto's tourism and its future. From adaptive re-use, to a reappraisal of current domestic scenarios, to off-set strategies that consider the role and potentials of adjacent regions and rural communities, you will develop test scenarios that question and propose at the same time.
The Kyoto studio will tackle these issues from inside out, by unfolding particularities, unseen potentials but also challenges as they present themselves in the everyday realm. As the global and local scale are inextricably linked, global issues manifest themselves in the urban and spatial patterns of everyday life and vice versa. Students who join for the Kyoto studio will be urged to consider the pressures of tourism in relation to these other overriding pressures.

……

All preparations for this Kyoto site visit will be done from the beginning of August 2025 onwards in online meetings. First task is to book flight tickets & accommodation and apply for the Japan visum asap. Information concerning flights, accommodation and the Japan visum will be shared - we can travel together.
Currently, the cost for a return flight ticket from Brussels (BRU) to Osaka Kansai international airport (KIX) (near Kyoto) is about €800. From Osaka Kansai Int airport we take the train to Kyoto.
-All participants book and pay their personal travel and accommodation costs and agree to be present during the Kyoto study visit in the first week of Nov 1-7, 2025 - at a later communicated meeting point.
-All participants are personally responsible to obtain all legal documents and permits to travel and stay in Japan.

Apply for a scholarship at KU Leuven
KU Leuven provides financial support to students travelling abroad for a short mobility period. The deadline for applications is …. 2025.
For more information, contact: martine.demaeseneer@kuleuven.be

The Kyoto studio is part of the Performative Architecture Studio, which been focussing for several master dissertation studios on hyper-transforming cities - these city studies can be consulted via https://app.box.com/s/kyte0kyit791brg8on7q6tzmtz9ol7vk & https://www.blog-archkuleuven.be/?s=maeseneer
(Research) projects from the former Kyoto studio and summer school can be seen here : https://app.box.com/s/u8bncxuppuik0dkefbs96gurg0tcwf-p2
***For more information, contact:* martine.demaeseneer@kuleuven.be - www.mdma.be**

Partners
Department of Architecture and Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University - https://www.t.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en

The Performative Architecture studio - studio strategy & framework

Since the end of the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century the idea has gradually grown that forms -no longer- come forth out of a 'mental back-up' which is inherited since immemorial times, which was thought to be vital for us - enabling us to speak, to see and to produce. The scenario that has come in its place is where these 'forms' have fled along our body, into the open space, into thin air.
As a result one can also understand how the western fascination for pure geometry descended over projective geometry to topology, fluidums, networks. In philosophy one calls that the downpour of platonic solids. It's a movement that one can witness, happening in the last century. It's a movement wherefrom generations of modern architects could not escape.
But nevertheless the picture still stands of this carrier space, a canvas, an envelope, a kind of background noise at the very least that works further behind or below the visible and reality. Sui Generi 'diagrams', which is the word which was very much in vogue in the second half of the nineties, work at the same time more autonomous and more generalizing.
For the architect/student it is paramount to chase these forms down, to get grip of them if one wants to know in which direction architecture is moving, as well as on a transpatial or spatial local level.

The studio focused on a continuously search for a broader field of 'patterns', 'motives', 'logos', 'plots' and 'timbres'. — Words with an architectural resonance - which are an expression of a social, cultural an political involvement and expertise at large. This kind of (in)directness works.
This kind of architecture will demonstrate itself to us as it will jump from the classical adagio of likelihood ('to like or not' ...) to an architecture where behaviour stands central ('to behave or not' ...). Think then in the given context about the iteration 'to click or not' ..., whereby texts, words, characters become functions in a sort of digital acrostics: just, avoid to stick them together with images in a glossy picturesque of branding of a city.

Timing and organisation of the studio, including study trip in week7 (first week nov2025) to Kyoto

The studio places a high emphasis on using drawings and models not as illustrative methods but as design and research tools that test, evolve and resolve ideas in a rigorous manner. The studio demands a very high engagement from each student to challenge their established working methods and to embrace, often unfamiliar ways of working. The study of key theoretical texts, precedents and theories as well as research into cross-disciplinary fields forms the basis for critical reflection and is key for the formation of a coherent theoretical framework and contextualised position. Research will accompany the city project throughout (not just at “the start”). Process driven work and enquiry will form an integral part of the city project. The intellectual decision-making process as well as the investigative design development will be on-going throughout the project.
For further guidelines, please ensure that you read and understand the Master Dissertation Guidelines.

Key dates
studio hours Brussels : Tuesdays 10h-13h & 14h-18h00 (depending on the base campus of the students, studios can also be organised in Ghent)

semester 3, Week 0: announcement of frameworks by academic promotors
semester 3, Week 7: **in situ research week in Kyoto nov 2025 in collaboration with Department of Architecture and Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University https://www.t.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en**
semester 3, Weeks 10, 11, 12 and 14: research and design sessions (half day a week)
semester 4, Week 1- : **presentations by each student of initial outcomes:** results relevant case studies, literature review, data mining, context and territory analysis, concept and thematical approach and first proposal for architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 2: urban strategy and linked architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 3: urban strategy and linked architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 4: urban strategy and linked architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 5: development of architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 6 : **midterm presentation (internal jury)**
semester 4, Week 7 : **TABLES Midterm Clash Review -** working sessions -
semester 4, Week 8 : development of architectural intervention - The (eventual) Section Day is scheduled in Brussels on April xth, and in Ghent on April xth, right after Easter break.
semester 4, Week 9: development of architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 10: development of architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 11: development of architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 12 : **delivery draft reflection paper**
semester 4, Week 13: architectural intervention and review urban strategy
semester 4, Week 14 : **pre-jury** (intern)
semester 4, Week 15: final development of architectural intervention
semester 4, Week 16: final development of architectural intervention, presentation
semester 4, Week 17 - Tues June x Gnt - Thurs June x Brsls : **final jury** (extern)

Study material

Main Theme

Martine De Maeseneer (2002), *'Back Home – a personal note'* in 'Poetics of Space', edited by Leon van Schaik. London : 'Architectural Design', Academy editions.
http://www.mdma.be/bestanden/downloads/AD%20Poetics%20kleiner.pdf

Moore, Charles. "You have to Pay for the Public Life". 1966

Robert Somol 'the inventor' (2016) "Cartoon Plan', in Flat Out 1, Fall 2016, pp 3, 59-61 (on plan of Wynn/Encore hotel-casino)
Robert Somol (1999), 'The Seduction of the Similar', in Assemblage40, dec 1999, pp.69-79 (on WW's Intracenter)
Robert Somol (1997) "Start Spreading the News", in ANY21, 1997, pp.42-47 (on New York New York casino)
Robert Somol (1987) "…You Put Me in a Happy State", The singularity of Power in Chicago's Loop", in Copyright 1, Fall 1987, pp.98-118 (on State of Illinois/ Thompson Center)

Aphasia and Utopia, - Martine De Maeseneer, lectures at the Faculty of Creative Industries, University of Saint Joseph, Macau, China - Febr13th - http:// www.usj.edu.mo
http://www.mdma.be/bestanden/downloads/Macau_A4_140204_Final_S.pdf

Baudrillard, Jean "The Baubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence", in October20, Spring 1982, pp 3-13 (On Pompidou Center)

Jameson, Fredric "Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", 1991, pp.38-45 (on Bonaventure)
Pope, Albert "Ladders", 1996, pp.101-147 (response to Jameson on Bonaventure)

Koolhaas, Rem "Junkspace", 2002

http://www.evolo.us/category/competition/

Architectural Intelligence
Martine De Maeseneer (1998) 'Peripherie ist überall', edited by Walter Prigge (Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau), Campus Verslag Frankfurt/New York.
Martine De Maeseneer (1996) 'Rear Window' in the book 'The Architect - Reconstructing Her Practice', edited by Francesca Hughes. MIT Press, Cambridge Mass-achusetts.
Martine De Maeseneer (1987) 'How external planes become inside ones - chapel of Ronchamp'. Gent : Sint Lucas.

Robert Somol (2000), 'Nothing matters' in ANY: Architecture New York.
Robert Somol (1991) 'Accidents will happen' in A+U: Architecture and Urbanism no.9 (issue on Eisenman)
Robert Somol (1994) 'Real Abstract' in the Indivisible Space, 'Martine De Maeseneer' exhibition in Antwerp & in Assemblage (23).

Tom Verebes (2013) 'Masterplanning the Adaptive City: Computational Urbanism in the Twenty-first Century' , Routledge

Architectural theory
Leach Neil (1997) *'Rethinking Architecture - a reader in cultural theory'*. London, New York : Routledge.
Gaston Bachelard (1969), Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas. Boston : Beacon Presse.
Frederic Jameson (1981) The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, London: Methuen.

Spatial Morphology and sociology
Bill Hillier (1984) The social logic of Space. Cambridge Univ Press
Bill Hillier (1996) Space is the Machine. Cambridge Univ Press