

Foreword

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FOREWORD

by Christophe Girod

The Master of Advanced Studies in Landscape Architecture program took the risk this year of presenting students a vast piece of riparian territory located between three countries for intensive study. The delta of the Rhine on Lake Constance, with its 3000 hectares located at the border between Switzerland and Austria and across from Germany, is indeed an extraordinary laboratory in large scale landscape manipulation, where the forces of nature and of civilization seem caught up in an incessant battle between cataclysms and urban development. The ambition of this landscape design studio was to test actual limits of operative design at a large scale and deliver a clear methodological approach to such territories for students. Several modes of design and intuitive analysis were implemented, ranging from sketching, sampling and video documentation to CNC modelling and computer drafting and visualization. The results displayed in this booklet show an extraordinary range of approaches and sensitivities towards the same site.

The premise of the design studio was that due to the sudden increase in glacial meltdown and sedimentary deposit in Lake Constance, a second correction of the Rhine canal following the first completed at the turn of the 20th century was imminently necessary. Based on this assumption, students initially had to make a first attempt at envisioning the possible changes

to come for the landscape that they had visited. But how could they reasonably materialize a vision that ranged both in space and time far beyond what their eyes could see? On the very flat terrain of the Rhine Delta it was indeed possible to see the Alpine ranges beyond the site, circling the entire lake to the south, east and north, but it was somehow impossible to see or even reach most of the lakeshore itself. The design hypotheses that were first developed sought to bring the lakeshore farther into the delta, thus creating a vast aquatic park of sorts with varying shores, channels, and surfaces according to seasonal water levels. The confrontation between the students' idealized landscape visions and the hard reality of the Rhine floods with their massive sedimentary deposits engendered a form of topographical pragmatism. In this instance, the forces of nature coupled with the forces of modern civilization gave way to an entirely new form of topology for the delta.

Because of this generalized topological approach to the Rhine Delta site, the studio started with various approaches to terrain modeling early-on. Sand models as well as CNC models were developed showing either sectional details or plan details of various sites. These models helped give a sense of measure and scale to most projects. Video also played a significant role in site reconnaissance and site analysis, the range of

video genres corresponding interestingly enough to the range of design projects: projects with a more painterly and artistic approach tended to use the medium as an aesthetic tool of perception capturing depth and movement in nature, while those with a more technical and pragmatic approach used it as a documentary tool for interviews and commentaries on urban sites. This combination of video and modeling from the studio's onset enabled students to materialize strong design hypotheses which lasted throughout its duration. These hypotheses were further distilled through advanced drafting techniques involving plan and sectional drawings, as well as specific visualizations. Some of the most successful projects combined video, modeling, and visualization techniques in innovative ways and delivered stunning results supported by a solid theoretical background. The success of this year's Master of Advanced Studies in Landscape Architecture program is certainly due to the trust and mutual interest that students showed in this project from the outset; but it is due first and foremost to the program's outstanding teaching staff, which helped them understand and master the incredible scale of landscape, of time and complexity that we dealt with throughout the year. I would like to take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank Pia Fricker for the pedagogical leadership and organization of the

MAS LA programme, Susanne Hofer for the teaching and organization of the Video Laboratory and its workshops, James Melsom for the preparation and teaching of the landscape design studio as well as elaboration of specific workshops, Alexandre Kapellos for the organization and follow-up of the CNC milling workshops, Jaqueline Parish for her walking and mapping workshops around Zurich, Maïke van Stiphout and Marc Westhof for their stimulating workshops in landscape design and video respectively, and last but not least, Professor Sébastien Marot without whom the whole lecture series, with its extraordinary palette of invited guests and the high level of discussion that followed, would simply not have been possible. I would also like to mention the following guests who kindly accepted our invitation to come to our critiques throughout the year; Professor Franz Oswald, Elias Zenghelis, Alessandra Ponte and Catherine Mosbach, thank you again for your most precious and fitting comments. The work shown in this booklet represents the first fruits of these combined teaching efforts and should only be understood as the beginning of yet stronger visions in landscape architecture to come.

