

Heat



Richard Wentworth, Making Do and Getting By, London, c. early 21st Century

Heat, which is both a description of energy in transfer in thermodynamics and a measure of temperature and comfort, is without scale. From the sun's near infinite source to the pain of frozen finger tips, it is everywhere. Architecture, as well as protecting us from the elements and hostile beings, has evolved to manage the capture, storage or exclusion of heat. Shading, insulating, ventilating, heating, cooling have all directed the transformation of material into architectural culture.

Heat or lack of is a natural component of place. Regions developed their own architectural traditions which manifested in construction and architectural articulation. Carefully balanced environments extended into the social rituals they would host. Industrialisation fundamentally upset the natural order, opening the era of fossil fuels with dire consequences for the environment and public health. Modernism, seeking to end the injustice and ill health of industrial society turned to the sun, fresh air and sanitation to heal. Heat and coolness were no longer the preserve of nature but transactable just like all the fruits of industrial society.

Today it is Modernism that needs healing just as much as the environment it sought to emulate. But despite the contemporary crisis, our cities are full of great works of architecture, still willing to serve. Buildings are full of grey energy as well as the energies of the architectural imagination, innovation, and optimism.

Zurich has an enviable tradition of Modern architecture. Located near the river Sihl, Flora Steiger-Crawford, the first woman to graduate in architecture at ETH, Rudolf Steiger, and Carl Hubacher designed the Zett-Haus with all the elegance promised by the new architecture of the 1930's. Yet much of the innovative concrete structure, fine glazing and cinema with retractable roof has been effaced in successive refurbishments.

Both the Zett-Haus itself and the neighbourhood in which it stands oscillate from heat loss to heat gain. Our design method will start carefully, incrementally. We shall survey the building, examine archives to reconstitute its origins, using drawings, photographs and mock ups to describe as fully as possible the promise of the new. We shall excavate the contemporary condition until we find the spaces ready for tomorrow, re-assembling a re-newed version adjusted to a new climate, a new society, a wider ecology.

We will conclude the semester under the warming rays of spring working together in the garden. Continuing to create a life support system ready to host the transplanted 6-year old garden. A network system to collect and channel rainwater and snow melt will nourish the soil, adding new threads to the rich tapestry of the last semesters' projects.