IDEAS TAKE ROOT

INTRODUCTION: 17 September 2019
Tue, 10 am, Station Zürich Brunau
aot@arch.ethz.ch
www.topalovic.arch.ethz.ch

GENEVA UNBUILT

Joseph Beuys, 7000 Eichen, Dokumenta Kassel 1982
Can we rethink the future of the urban around the notions of the Built and the Unbuilt? How are they related in the present, and should their relationship be imagined differently? By rethinking the relationship between the Built and the Unbuilt, can we tackle the urgent challenges of the contemporary city, of urbanisation and ecological crisis?

Geneva is one of the most desirable cities in the world, yet its metropolitan territory is characterised by great inequalities. Extending across the border, the city-region has always been a union of perceived polar opposites—Swiss-French, protestant-catholic, international-local, urban-rural. At the same time, Geneva has been an extraordinary source of culture throughout its history, being home to some of Europe’s most avant-garde philosophers and finest arts and crafts. Since the mid-20th century however, increasing political and economic dominance of the city centre has led to an absorption of considerable population increase in the French periphery. Here, in the so-called ‘Other Geneva’, the sprawling and weakly regulated agglomeration continues to consume vital land and landscapes.

Architects are often confronted with questions on the future of the urban: ‘How should our cities look like in 2050?’; ‘How can they become sustainable and resilient?’; ‘How can they respond to the effects of climate change?’ Can we actually take these questions seriously and consider them beyond the usual answers, beyond empty phrases? In this semester project we invite you to test, together with us, the following hypothesis: The future of the urban can be rethought through the notions of the Built and the Unbuilt. These notions will serve as entry points through which we will study and rethink the built environment under ecological terms. As Joseph Beuys already made clear, the Built and the Unbuilt should be brought into a new balance. The act of cultivation of land is equal to the cultivation of society. The making of the territory is as much social and political, as it is an ecological project. This will be our starting point for a new metropolitan vision.

From historical garden cities and public housing projects in the heart of Geneva, through the protective green belts of the Cité Internationale and the Palais de Nations, and the metropolitan countrysides at the foot of Jura, up to the mountain park of Geneva’s ‘Hausberg’ Salève—we have selected a range of diverse, yet typical sites, representative for the entire metropolitan region. We will study systematically and thoroughly these diverse sites of Geneva’s metropolitan organism under the light of the Built and Unbuilt. We will deploy a range of performative methods, including investigative walkabouts, experimental cartography, pin-hole photography, riso printing and more. We will provoke the students to rethink their relationship with the future and, with visionary thinking in architecture and urbanism, beyond cliches. All of the sites need new ideas and careful approaches. Each student project will form a crucial contribution to a common vision for the whole metropolitan territory.