



Urban Legends

Martigny Highlands

Gay Menzel Studio addresses the complexity of the context as a source of development of a narrative linked to the site itself.

This highlighting tool reveals the inherent qualities of the place and integrates projections or personal aspirations into it, with the broad ambition of reconnection to the environment.

Urban legends are short fictions that come close to myths, urban tales, contemporary legends, which spread in popular culture by oral transmission and proliferate through social networks.

These stories that circulate and that everyone knows. Your uncle told you about that alligator living in the sewers of New York, your father's girlfriend confirmed it.

These legends are mysterious, terrifying or funny. They are adapted to the local folklore by word of mouth, through hearsay. Each city produces these murmurs. Like an echo.



The Making of Sense

In this time of crisis, and in the post-confinement, a reassessment of our way of life is essential.

The quality of our relationship with nature, with the territory, with our way of living is questioned. Maybe a solution would be “resonance”, of which the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa speaks, proposing us to redefine our relationship with the world, to create what he calls the axes of resonance?

*Is it the “care” that Heidegger talks about that induces an exchange with the environment?
Are there other ways to be explored?*

Architects are actors at the heart of this fundamental problem. They have a role to play in implementing the vision of how to live / inhabit of the society as well as in shaping the context:

to establish a link, between people by promoting the social,
to reconsider the relationship to the built and the non-built,
to think of new strategies, in order to generate quality and meaning, in the current responsible and sustainable context.



Unveiling Narratives

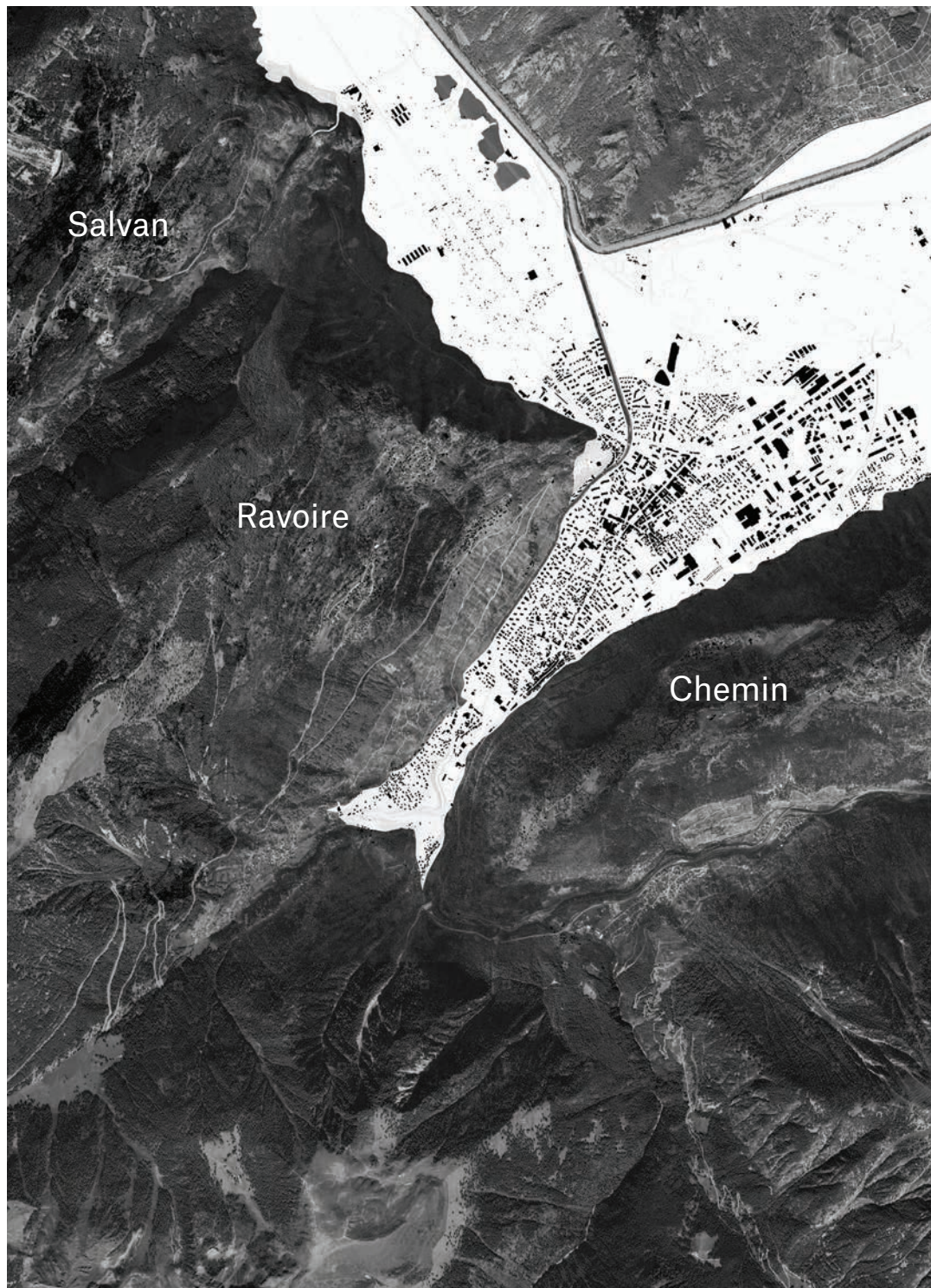
The development of a project strategy is addressed through the narrative, as a crystallization of personal imagination and understanding of the site. How does the architect generate anchor points to make places legible, porous and appropriable in order to give them meaning?

The studio explores the way the project operates, studies how the design process is constructed, develops reading keys for the establishment of a coherent discourse. The narrative becomes the tool that allows to develop a practical approach to projection in architecture.

The objective is to develop the observation, the reading of site complexity, the imagination, and the ambition to create, in spite of all the constraints of the project, an architecture which refers to something and which revives collective and shared experiences.

As we did during the last semester, investigating the lowlands, the Martigny Highlands studio develops a coherent idea of a project starting from the territory and its landscape. The architectural scale is reduced, however, focussing on wood construction. The collaboration with an ENAC engineer is envisioned, yet needs to be confirmed. The project is thought through all the way up to the very detail.

A prototype will reflect influences and enable evocation. This is an opportunity for you, students, to assess what you can contribute to architecture by revealing your secrets.



In the Highlands

The region of Martigny in the Valais lies at the crossroads, between the inflection of the Rhône plain and the valleys leading to the mountain passes crossing over to Italy or to France. In this Alpine landscape, where extreme topography, historical passages and infrastructures go hand in hand, a cultural and economic community formed over the ages. It occupies the territory in a dispersed manner, following a vernacular logic. Although these mountain settlements are distinct entities, they remain in close relationship, dependency or interaction with Martigny. These communities of the alpine periphery constitute a strong potential for new forms of dwelling, in symbiosis with the greater landscape and the town close by.

Historically many iterations were made of occupying the highlands and the lowlands. The Celts first inhabited the strategic hill of St-Jean, then in the first century AD the Romans settled on the higher plain of the torrent Dranse, still at a safe distance from the river Rhône. At the end of the Roman era the city declined due to wars, floods and epidemics. The diminished population withdrew to the hills before recolonising the plain when the wetlands were dried in the 19th century.

We will investigate three sites in the highlands of Martigny, which illustrate different forms of alpine settlements: Ravoire, as a constellation of hamlets in a forest, Chemin on the ridge overlooking the Catogne Montain, and Salvan located on a sunny plateau.

The semester Martigny Highlands explores the notions of identity, of sharing and of how to provide new forms of housing and production. It is about a respectful, resilient and sustainable occupation of the territory, articulated through the architectural project.