



OMA, Jussieu Library, 1991



Office dA, Banq 2008

The orthographic triad of plan, section and elevation drawing has been the dominant way to conceptualize and describe built form since the role of the architect became distinct from that of the builder in the 15th century. Although digital simulation and parametric modeling software are now routinely used to create and evaluate the form and performance of buildings, the two-dimensional horizontal and vertical slice of a proposed structure remains a resilient element of design communication and process.

Historically the plan has held the higher status in our discipline due to its inherent abstraction and comprehensive vision. The academic tradition of the 19th century favored the art of the plan, as did Le Corbusier in his critique of that tradition. His spatial concept was encapsulated in the words “plan libre” and its accompanying iconic sketches. Since the 1920s, the freedom offered by vertical visual and physical movement has been probed and strategized by a number of architects but seldom called out as a distinct spatial practice. This neglected history requires scrutiny due to the remarkable reversal in the importance of plan and section in our discipline.

The plan has historically been seen as the expression of compositional order. As it traces the gaze of the eye through the assembly of walls and rooms it records the structural supports but is not obligated to detail constructional specifics of connection to ground or the form of the roof that provides shelter. The section, however, records such detail at a specific instance in the building and is therefore less comprehensive in its gaze. The hierarchy of these representations characteristics is in some ways reversed. The programming and servicing imperatives of contemporary buildings seldom allow a plan spatial purity while the careful choice of the section cut allows the architect to tell a more clear spatial story. In addition contemporary buildings frequently seek to pull ground planes and their associated public life up to and through the building in ways that would not be understood in plan.

The course will combine lectures, reading, discussion, speculation and fabrication to explore these topics.

- Overlapping double height spaces
- Spatial overlaps along a promenade (le Corbusier) or trajectory (OMA)
- Sloped ground planes interconnecting floor plates –building as a spiral ramp
- Folding ground plane combined with overlapping double height space
- Ribbon section
- Staggered subtraction to create vertical visual trajectory
- Contrasting thermal and atmospheric qualities
- Landform buildings
- Sectioning in digital fabrication



Marble Fairbanks, FIT, 2003