

**MIT Department of Architecture**

**4.s13 / Spring 2026**

**units 3-0-6 / Wed 2-5pm / room 1-136**

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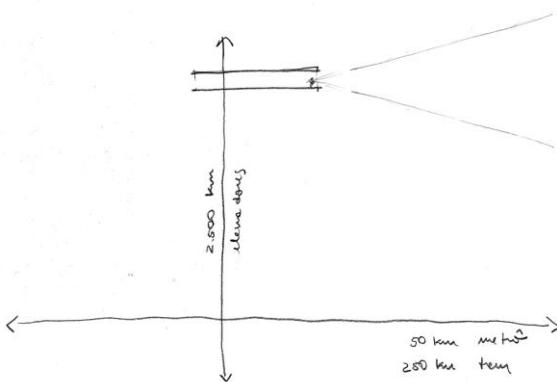
**Paulo Mendes da Rocha, culture versus erudition**





### Description

In 1997, the Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, 2006 Pritzker Prize, was invited to take part in an art exhibition *Sao Paulo Arte Cidade*, curated by Nelson Brissac. The location of his work was a former industrial zone alongside an old railway crossing the downtown area of the city. Mendes da Rocha's proposal was just to install a construction hoist in front of the framework of the abandoned factory as a way to highlight the mechanical dimension of the city (at the time: 50km of subway, 250km of trains and 2,500 km of lifts). That intervention, which went almost unnoticed during the event, was but a brief comment informed by the architect's keen critical vision over the city.



That vision, indeed, was forged by the dialogue between his architectural work and his experience of the city, beyond its mechanical dimension it means the intense experience of the urban everyday life. A way to think in architecture more informed by culture than by erudition. Two notions, culture and erudition, that the architect used to oppose.

## Topics / works

Based on the book 'Paulo Mendes da Rocha Constructed Geographies', by Vanessa Grossman and Jean Louis Cohen, published in 2024 by Casa da Arquitectura and Yale Press, the weekly meetings will follow readings and presentations prepared by students related to each topic below:

- Session 1. introduction
- Session 2. Butantã Houses, 1964-1967, text by Annette Spiro
- Session 3. Patriarca Square, 1992-2002, text by Angelo Bucci
- Session 4. Jaraguá Building, 1984-1988, text by Juliana Braga e João Sodré
- Session 5. Pinacoteca of São Paulo, 1993-1998, text by Ciro Miguel
- Session 6. Jardim Calux School, 1972, text by Alexandre Benoit
- Session 7. MuBE, São Paulo, 1986-1995, text by Sophia da Silva Telles
- Session 8. Arts Quay, Vitória, 2007-2026, text by Ana Vaz Milheiro
- Session 9. Gerber House, Angra dos Reis, 1973-1974, text by Stephanie Bru
- Session 10. SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2000-2017, text by Vanessa Grossman
- Session 11.
- Session 12.
- Session 13.

Frame, Form, Void: The Structural Imagination, by Guy Nordenson

Homo Faber vs. Homo Ludens: The Practice of Detail, by Guilherme Wisnik

The Politics of the Megastructures: by Victor Prospero

## Structure

The dynamic of classes will be:

- after first meeting, each text will be shared in the previous session, to be read by the group
- according to the number of participant and following the sequence of topic (texts and works), each student will be in charge of presenting at least one work by Paulo Mendes da Rocha for discussing in the following week.

## **Pedagogical Objectives**

Highlight the importance of experiencing the city to the process of imagining and designing architecture throughout the work of Paulo Mendes da Rocha.

## **Deliverable products**

- a. weekly reading to follow each session;
- b. to prepare a presentation for the designated session;
- c. a five pages paper at the end of the semester

## **Schedule**

February	04	Session 1, introduction
	11	Session 2, Butantã Houses
	18	Session 3, Patriarca Square
	25	Session 4, Jaraguá Building
March	04	Session 5, Pinacoteca
	11	Session 6, Jardim Calux School
	18	Session 7, MuBE
	25	Spring break
April	01	No class
	08	Session 8, Arts Quay
	15	Session 9, Gerber House
	22	Session 10, SESC 24 de Maio
	29	Session 11
May	06	Session 12
	13	Session 13

### **Three Books:**

Paulo Mendes da Rocha Constructed Geographies', by Vanessa Grossman and Jean Louis Cohen, 2024, Casa da Arquitectura and Yale Press

Paulo Mendes da Rocha, works and projects, by Annette Spiro, 2001, Niggli, Switzerland

Paulo Mendes da Rocha, complete works, by Daniele Pisani and Francesco Dal Co, 2015, Rizzoli, Italy

### **Evaluation Criteria**

The following criteria will be used for the evaluation:

- participation, sharing experiences;
- contributions to class discussion,
- attendance and engagement,

The grading will be according to:

A: Excellent	The work surpasses expectations in terms of inventiveness, appropriateness, verbal and visual ability, conceptual rigor, craft, and personal development. Student pursues concepts and techniques above and beyond what is discussed in class.
B: Above Average	The work is thorough, well researched, diligently pursued, and successfully completed. Student pursues ideas and suggestions presented in class and puts in effort to resolve required projects. The work is complete on all levels and demonstrates potential for excellence.
C: Average	The work meets the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class are not pursued with dedication or rigor. Project is incomplete in one or more areas.
D: Poor	The work is incomplete. Basic skills including graphic skills, model-making skills, verbal clarity or logic of presentation are not level-appropriate. Student does not demonstrate the required design skill and knowledge base.
F: Failure	The work is unresolved. Minimum objectives are not met. Performance is not acceptable. This grade will be assigned when you have excessive unexcused absences.