PREPARATION FOR MARCH THESIS

4.189 | Spring 2016 | F 9-12, 5-232
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DESCRIPTION:

Thesis prep is the first part of a two semester long process of preparing and executing the MArch thesis project. Consisting of independent research, group workshops, seminar sessions and progress presentations, the class is dedicated to a process of situating, proposing and refining the parameters of a projective thesis project. The goal of the class is to guide students in the development of research and design methodologies founded in historical understanding of the discipline and in conversation with contemporary cultural and architectural developments. Within the first three weeks of the Spring semester students are expected to begin working with their thesis advisor in parallel to the thesis prep class in order to further focus the substance and the methodology of their thesis projects.

At the conclusion of the class students are expected to produce a visual and written dossier: a thesis proposal. This document will clearly define the argument/hypothesis and the criteria of the thesis project, establish the scale, site, program, and disciplinary lineages, i.e. the methods and terms of critique underwriting the design thesis proposal for the next semester. The thesis proposal will be submitted to the thesis coordinator and thesis advisor for signed approval before advancing to the final thesis semester.

FORMAT:

Thesis Prep is pursued both [a] in the Course and [b] under the guidance of a Thesis Advisor.
[a] The Course meets weekly for three hours. The class is organized in four thematic sections, each conceived to help advance the thesis proposal research and further develop the thesis proposal document. Each of the sections - frameworks, lineages, storytelling and tests - will be introduced through a set of readings that situate these issues within contemporary architectural discourse. Each thematic section will also prompt a new (and increasingly more refined) draft of the thesis proposal, will involve MIT faculty in different ways and will occasionally include an in-class working session. The pre-thesis class will thus follow several different formats ranging from seminar sessions, through reading groups to workshops and pecha-kucha presentations.

[b] Students will also work with their Thesis Advisor in order to further focus the specific intentions, substance and the methodology of their Thesis Project. You should identify your Thesis Advisor and hold their first meeting no later than the week of March 16. It is expected that students hold no less than three meetings with their Advisors before submitting the Thesis Proposal document. No one automatically gets to do a thesis, if the proposal does not fulfill the requirements or is not accepted by the Advisor, thesis will be conducted within a studio in the Fall.

Reading groups: after the first three sessions of thesis prep we will agree on a set of reading groups, and will provide a set of key readings and everyone belonging to a reading group (i.e. whose thesis project can be discursively situated within a particular territory we collectively outline) will be responsible for those readings over the course of the semester. The intent of reading groups is to help focus smaller conversations amongst the thesis class, to direct students towards each other, and to ensure that there is both a collective awareness about a disciplinary vocabulary circumscribing certain topics and facility at using that (soon shared) vocabulary.
REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in thesis prep
  (More than two excused absences will result in a failing grade).
- Students need to complete the course assignments in a timely manner, need to be prepared to discuss the
  assigned readings and are expected to actively participate in all pecha-kucha presentations.
- The final requirement of the class is the Thesis Proposal document.

GRADING:

- 30% Participation in class discussions
- 30% Pecha-kucha Presentations and Interim production
- 40% Final Thesis prep presentation and dossier

In all cases the grading will be determined based on students’ command of disciplinary and cultural material,
conceptual clarity, and craft and care with which the deliverables (including arguments) are produced.

WRITING:

Writing will take up a large portion of your thesis document (min. 2000 words). Your thesis proposal will, of course,
also include visualizations of your research, descriptions of your site and content constraints, and architectural
tests, but this is the first time that you will have to produce a significant piece of writing within design context.
While we will spend time on the macro scale of that writing (concepts, argument, references), if you need help with
grammar, exposition, style, and tone, please consult the writing center at MIT:

“Go to http://writing.mit.edu/wcc and click on “Appointment.” If you cannot find an open appointment slot, click on
the clock in the upper left-hand corner of each day’s block. When a cancellation occurs that day, you will be
automatically notified by email. Because several people might receive that same message, go online ASAP to
schedule that open spot; 96% of clients who want an appointment end up with one if they use the Wait List. The
best way to guarantee yourself an appointment is to schedule early!”

OTHER RESOURCES

MIT Rotch Architectural Design Resources (Architecture and Art Librarian: Lareese Hall, lareese@mit.edu)
MIT Thesis Database: DSpace (https://dspace.mit.edu/)
Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Lab on the third floor of the Rotch Library
Geocoding tutorials, census data, map projections, citation guidelines also part of the GIS lab
(http://libguides.mit.edu/c.php?g=176295&p=1161396)
MIT Architecture Lectures and other online lecture videos (AA, GSD, Rice, GSAPP, etc.)
4.189 S16 SCHEDULE:

FRAMEWORKS > CONTEXTS AND CONTENTS

2/05  Week 1: A Hunch (AVT)

Due: 2 Tests (Images + Statements)

Optional Watch:
2 cinematic allegories of the creative process:
Jan Svankmajer, Conspirators of Pleasure
Andrei Tarkovsky, Stalker

2/12  Week 2: What is A (thesis) Project? (5-232)

Read:
Michael Meredith, Some Notes to those Beginning the Discipline of Architecture, 2006. (Bp)
Pier Vittorio Aureli, “A project is a lifelong thing; if you see it, you will only see it at the end,” Log 28:
Stocktaking, Summer 2013
“Serious play: Sam Jacob “ Interview with Tania Davidge for ArchitectureAU, April 15, 2015
http://architectureau.com/articles/interview-sam-jacob/
Timothy Hyde, “Turning the Black Box into a Great Gizmo,” ACSA conference proceedings. (5)

Due: Bring in your favorite MIT theses for a discussion (in groups of 2)

Recommended:
Review our syllabus for Precedents in Critical Practice
but concentrate on pgs 14-18 - a generational response to postmodernism).
Sarah Whiting, “Welcome to the Banquet (or, How to Increase the Relative Happiness of the M.Arch
Thesis Student),” in Dana Cuff and John Wriedt, (eds.), Architecture from the Outside In: Selected Essays

2/19  Week 3: Architecture’s Agency (5-232)

MIT Thesis survivors present their “Aha” and “Ugh” moments for an hour

Read:
Elizabeth Diller, “Architecture is a technology that has not yet discovered its agency,” Log 28:
Stocktaking, Summer 2013.
Pier Vittorio Aureli, “Architecture and Content: Who is afraid of the Form-Object?” Log 3, Fall
2004, pp. 29-36.
Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia: Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” Science Fiction Studies, Vol.
9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 147-158.
Due: “Manifesto” posted on Stellar
Your top three choices of faculty advisors
5 groups each bring an architectural project to present and discuss
(If you have a hard time choosing from the infinite archive, pick from this contemporary bunch: FAT, MOS, Dogma, one of the Foreclosed entries, Andres Jaque, Johnston Marklee, Salotobuono, Lateral Architecture, Junney Ishigami, or this historical bunch: Jean-Jaque LeQueu, Adolf Loos, Lina Bobardi, Luis Barragan, Kisho Kurokawa, John Hejduk, Archizoom, Cedric Price)

Recommended:

2/26 Week 4: Frames (5-232)

“Editorial” and Mark Lee “Two Deserted Islands,” San Rocco #1: Islands, Winter 2011
“Editorial,” San Rocco # 7: Indifference
MOS, Everything All at Once (PAP Press, 2012), excerpt.

Recommended:
Sam Jacob, “Faster, But Slower,” Log 29, pp. 145-152.

LINEAGES > DISCIPLINARITY AND ORIGINALITY

3/4 Week 5: Alies/Straw Men and Other Relevant Taxonomies

Read:
Bryani Roberts and Dora Epstein-Jones, “The New Ancients” editorial, Log 31: The New Ancients,
Due: A polemical analysis of at least 3 relevant disciplinary “allies” and “enemies” redrawn by you in terms of your thesis interests. Please post on Stellar for our class discussion.

Recommended:

3/11 Week 6: Review with MIT Faculty in groups (AVT)

Due: Statement framing a disciplinary argument through precedents and your research thus far.

STORYTELLING > REPRESENTATION AND TEMPORALITY

3/18 Week 7: When and How


Due: revise and get further excited about your project

Recommended:
Mark Wigley, “Storytime,” Assemblage 27 (Fall 1995).
Volume 17: Content Management
Volume 20: Storytelling

3/25 Week 8: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
4/1 Week 9: Powers of Ten

Ana

Due: A Panorama - Conceptualize, research and represent the “site” of your thesis

4/8 Week 10: Library visit with specific research assignments (Ana @ SAH)

4/15 Week 11: Elevator pitch pecha-kucha (5-234 or AVT)

Due: The Trailer - A linear visual and verbal narrative, a story or a preview of your project
(feel free to play with the genre and structure of this story)

SPECULATIONS> PROJECTIONS AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

4/22 Week 12: Peer review: Update on the state of your shared concerns in groups and production of a collective reading list

4/29 Week 13: Design Test proposals and discussion

5/6 Week 14: Due: Design Test

5/13 NO OFFICIAL CLASS: Optional and final consultations with Melina and Ana

5/17 FINAL DOSSIERS DUE - EXHIBITION OF THESIS PROPOSALS