Cedric Price once said that “architecture is everything architects make.” Sure, we could dismiss this as an unhelpful, overly empirical and even tautological statement. But instead, we will take it as a form of reinforcement for this class’s aim, we will take it to mean that architecture manifests itself in buildings, certainly, but also in drawings, in writing, in broadcasts, postures, experiments, social and professional organizations and modes of practice. In fact, it is the discursive, cultural, personal, historical, technological circumstances that give architecture its value, not by following some simple—one, two, base, superstructure—principle of causality, but often far more entangled routes of relation. It is far easier, of course, for an established and wise (and humorous) architect, to look back and say “architecture is everything architects make,” than it is for someone beginning in the field of architecture to feel reassured by that statement. In Critical Precedents, we will be open to various definitions of architecture and of criticality so as to light up possible paths through the discipline and the profession, both taken and previously unthinkable. To that end in this class we will acquaint ourselves with the characters, language and concerns that greet us upon entering the field.

The key objective of this seminar then is to produce a map of contemporary architectural practice and to develop tools for scrutinizing that map, through formal reading, understanding of popular culture and politics, and by using our general grasp of the recent history of architectural thinking.

The seminar will open by examining several collective attempts at theorizing the current situation in architectural discourse, published in Hunch, Log, the last issue of Assemblage, Harvard Design Magazine, and more recently in The Avery Review and elsewhere. Drawing out the most salient themes from these, the course is structured in terms of 6 coupled themes: City → Global Economy, Urban Plan → Map of Operations, Program → Performance (Relations, Effects, Atmospheres), Drawing → Scripting, Image → Surface, Utopia → Projection. These are examined in terms of the recent history of the coupled subjects – as topics that are in the process of definition, rather than as strictly demarcated themes. Although the course proposes that these paired topics are in a historical relationship of sorts, they are not seen here as opposed to each other. Although the partially genealogical relationship between the two topics would suggest that the second theme in each heading has more contemporary currency than its predecessor, it would be wrong to think that we will be discussing examples of absolute evolution, where one theme is also more advanced as a result of its novelty, or for that matter that it has completely replaced the theme that in some way anticipated and prefigured it.

In order to set up each topic we consider a combination of texts and recent architectural work. A map of contemporary practice and discourse emerges as the course unfolds and as our terms/themes accumulate, allowing us to consider certain works through a variety of lenses and forcing us to invent lenses to accommodate new relationships that inevitably emerge from our discussion. We dedicate a large portion of our time to situating projects within a disciplinary and cultural context,
which involves formal reading of buildings in conjunction with the reading of relevant texts.

**STRUCTURE:**

Each of the six themes for the course are ideally developed over a period of two weeks. Each class begins with a lecture/presentation by the instructor of the contemporary writings outlining the topic of the debate (and some of its earlier variations) and a presentation of architectural work. The second portion of the class is devoted to student presentations assigned for that meeting, followed by an open discussion intended to question the issues and topics introduced in the session.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

- attending the weekly seminar session,
- completing all readings in time for respective class discussions,
- posting one question/comment weekly on Stellar (by midnight before class)
- delivering two 20 min. presentations over the course of the term (each presentation will deal with a specific theme, or body of work chosen in a short discussion with the instructor),
- producing a visual dossier on a theme, or body of work, that is of a particular interest to the student, which has to include a critical analysis/text of 1000-2000 words. The final form of this “deliverable” will be determined in conversation with the instructor.

**BASIS FOR THE GRADE:**

- class presentations (and handouts) in groups of 3 (25%)
- quality of your posting in the Class Forum on Stellar (20%)
- contribution to class discussions (25%)
- the visual dossier (30%)

**WEEKLY READINGS:**

All the required readings will be available on the Stellar course site as pdf files. Also, all the books I am recommending you peruse will be available on reserve at the library.

**WRITING:**

You will be writing every week on forum, and we will discuss some of the writing live, but you will also have to produce at least a 1000-word framing essay for your dossiers. 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: Kai Alexis Smith, kaias@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.)

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered
to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu
COURSE SCHEDULE + THEMES AND MATERIAL

Introduction: Stories and Maps

1. September 4

Read:
Mark Jarzombek, “Un-messy Realism and the Decline of the Architectural Mind,” Perspecta 40, Monster, pp. 82-84.

Recommended:
Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” The Politics of Truth (Semiotext(e), 2007).

+ think about the projects you might want to present in class

2. September 11

Read:
Pier Vittorio Aureli, “A project is a lifelong thing; if you see it, you will only see it at the end,” LOG28: Stocktaking, Summer 2013.
Elizabeth Diller, “Architecture is a technology that has not yet discovered its agency,” LOG28: Stocktaking, Summer 2013.

Recommended:
Stan Allen, “Revising Our Expertise,” Hunch 6/7, pp. 64-66
Winy Maas, “Architecture is a Device,” Hunch 6/7, pp. 321-324
Laura Kurgan, “Trying not to avoid propositions altogether,” Assemblage 41, p. 37
Peruse:
* Hunch, The Berlage Institute report, no. 6/7, Summer 2003
* Assemblage 41, April 2000
* Log 5, guest editors R.E. Somol and Sarah Whiting, Spring 2005
* Harvard Design Magazine 20, Spring/Summer 2004: Stocktaking
* e-flux, Positions series (for example), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/positions/

City → Global Economy

3. September 18

Read:

* Sam Jacob, “Postmodernism’s real qualities are mean and difficult, yet also psychedelically positive,” Dezeen, August 2015, http://www.dezeen.com/2015/08/13/sam-jacob-opinion-postmodernism-revival-we-are-all-postmodern-now/ [-40]

Projects presented:
Corb’s Paris Plans and Chandigarh, the early work of Venturi and Scott Brown
Students present: Learning from Las Vegas – the books
Peter Eisenman – the Cannaregio Project (and House 11a)

Recommended:
Rafael Moneo, Chapter on Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategy in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects (Barcelona: Actar, 2004), pp. 51–100.

Peruse:

4. September 25

Read:

**Projects presented:**
The early work of Rem Koolhaas and OMA (+ 2 recent super xl works)
Students present: FOA the Yokohama Terminal
SHoP, SOM, OfficeUS
Dogma - Stop City

**Recommended:**

**Peruse:**
*Praxis 5: After Capitalism*, 2003

**Urban Plan --> Map of operations**

**5. October 2**

**Due: One possible idea for your Dossier projects**

**Read:**

Projects presented:
La Villette competition entries
Students present: Manhattan Transcripts (+ one building by Tschumi)
Atelier Bow Wow: Found in Tokyo (+ one building by Bow Wow)
Keith Krumwiede: Freedomland (book)

Recommended:

Peruse:

6. October 9

Read:

Projects presented:
James Corner’s maps, Stan Allen’s Barcelona Manual, UN Studio maps
Students present: Downview Park Competition
Andres Jaque – Office of Political Innovation – Ikea Disobedients + 12 Actions
Kate Orff – Scape

Recommended:

Peruse:
Program → Performance (Relations, Effects, Atmospheres)

7. October 16

Read:

Projects presented:
An example of early modern functionalist thinking, Eisenman, Colin Rowe's diagrams, Alison and Peter Smithson Drawings, Archigram drawings, Philip Rahm
Students present: OMA: Seattle Public Library + Tres Grande Bibliotheque
MVRDV or BIG or WORK AC or REX
SANAA

Recommended:
Arch +, Issue 188: Form Follows Performance, July 2008.

8. October 23


Projects presented:
Ito’s Mediatheque, WW, Interloop, Howeller+Yoon
Students present: PS 1 finalists
R&Sie Architects
Philip Rahm Projects
Forensic Architecture

Recommended:
Arch +, Issue 188: Form Follows Performance, July 2008

Peruse:
Ben Van Berkel and Caroline Bos, MOVE‘(Amsterdam: UN Studio and Goose Press, 1999)

### Drawing → Scripting

#### 9. October 30

**Read:**

**Projects presented:**
Students present: Peter Eisenman: Early Houses (pick 2)
Diller and Scofidio early work (drawings) and ICA Boston
Steven Holl early drawings and the Simmons Hall at MIT / or Hejduk’s houses

**Recommended:**
 “Newish Media,” A conversation between Lucia Allais and John May at GSD, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqCUh16R4yw

**Peruse:**

#### 10. November 6

**Due: Fast Dossier Pin up (Title, Bibliography, Sample Spreads)**

**Read:**

[~49]
Projects presented:
Seeing MVRDV as scripting, or La Villette projects as scripting + Gregg Lynn's work, Aranda+Lash work, and the “Non-Standard Architecture Show”
Students present: Ali Rahim or Hernan Diaz or Mark Gage
The Living

Recommended:

Peruse:
From Control to Design: Parametric/Algorithmic Architecture (Actar, 2008)

Image —> Surface

11. November 13

Read:
Pier Vittorio Aureli, “Architecture and Content, Who is Afraid of Object-Form?” [-54]

Projects presented:
Aldo Rossi’s early work, Site (James Wines)
Students present: Zaha Hadid: The Vitra Fire Station and the BMW plant
LoTEK or FAT
Jurgen Meyer or Johnston Marklee

Recommended:
Rafael Moneo, Chapter on Aldo Rossi, Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategy in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects (Barcelona: Actar, 2004), pp. 101–142.

**Peruse:**

### 12. November 20

**Read:**
Alejandro Zaera Polo, "The Politics of the Envelope," *Volume* 17, pp. 76–105. > skim only [-31+39]

**Projects presented:**
Mies’s Seagram’s façade, Herzog and Demeuron’s early work
Students present: Jean Nouvel Foundation Cartier or Barkow Leibinger Facades
Herzog and Demeuron American works

**Recommended:**
Herzog and de Meuron, *Natural History*, Lars Muller Publisher 2003.

**Peruse:**

**November 27 – NO CLASS**

### Utopia –> Projection

### 13. December 4

**Due: Revised Dossier Title, Bibliography, Introduction**

**Read:**

[~40]

**Recommended:**
Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 147–158.

---

**December 11 – NO CLASS** (final studio review week + help thesis students)

**December 18 – Dossiers due + final review with guests (TBC)**