PRECEDE NTS IN CRITICAL PRACTICE
4.210
Fall 2015 SA+P MIT
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Wednesday 2-5pm, Room 9-451

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The objective of this seminar is to produce a map of contemporary architectural practice and to develop tools for scrutinizing that map, through formal reading, an 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 (relatively) recently in Hunch, Log, the last issue of Assemblage, and in the Harvard Design Magazine. 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 paired topics are in a historical relationship of sorts, they are not seen here as entirely opposed to each other. Similarly, even though 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 new 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 a conversation with the instructor.

BASIS FOR THE GRADE:

- class presentations (and handouts) in pairs (or 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: 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.)

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

1. September 7

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

Recommended:

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

2. September 14

Read:
Alejandro Zaera Polo, “A Scientific Autobiography,” Harvard Design Magazine 21, pp. 5-15
Reinhold Martin, “Double Agency,” Assemblage 41, p. 49
Laura Kurgan, “Trying not to avoid propositions altogether,” Assemblage 41. p. 37
Roemer Van Torn, “Beyond Wonderland,” Hunch 6/7, summer 2003, p. 10
Wiel Arets, “Different Strategies,” Hunch 6/7, p. 67 –71
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
Elizabeth Diller, “Architecture is a technology that has not yet discovered its agency,” LOG 28: 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

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
**City → Global Economy**

3. September 21

**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:**
Corbs’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:**


**Peruse:**


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**September 28 – NO CLASS, BUT ORGANIZED LIBRARY VISIT POSSIBLE**

4. October 5

**Read:**


[-56]
Projects presented:
The early work of Rem Koolhaas and OMA (+ 2 recent super xl works)
Students present: FOA the Yokohama Terminal
Dogma - Stop City

Recommended:

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

Urban Plan → Map of operations

5. October 12

Due: One possible idea for your Dossier projects

Read:
[−49]

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)

Recommended:

Peruse:
6. October 19

Read:
Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva, “Give me a gun and I will Make All Buildings Move – An ANT’s View of Architecture,” in Reto Geiser (ed.) Explorations in Architecture (Birkhauser, 2008), pp. 80–89. [-50]

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

Recommended:

Peruse:

Program -> Performance (Relations, Effects, Atmospheres)

7. October 26

Read:
[-46]

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
R&Sie Architects
SANAA

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

8. November 2


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

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

Peruse:

**Drawing -> Scripting**  

9. November 9

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 Simons Hall at MIT / or Hejduk’s houses
Recommended:

Peruse:

10. November 16

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

Read:
[~46]

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 23

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:

Peruse:
Andrew Kovacs’s Website, http://www.andrew-kovacs.com/

12. November 30

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 Fondation Cartier or Barkow Leibinger Facades
Herzog and Demeuron American works

Recommended:
Herzog and de Meuron, *Natural History*, Lars Muller Publisher 2003.
Sanford Kwinter, “Playboys of the Western World,” ANY no.13, 1996.

Peruse:

Utopia → Projection

13. December 7

Due: Revised Dossier Title, Bibliography, Introduction

Read:
[–40]

Recommended:
Terry Eagleton, After Theory (Basic Books, 2004).
Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 147–158.

December 14 – No class / final studio review week

December 21 – Dossiers due + final review (TBC)