

4.288 | Spring 2024
Preparation for SMArchS (AD) Thesis
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3-329 | M 2-5pm

SMARCHS (AD) PRE-T

Course Description:

Intended for SMArchS AD students in the preliminary stages of their thesis explorations, 4.288 is a preparatory research workshop leading to a well-conceived proposal, and eventually a public presentation. 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, design research 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 and discourse. By the end of the semester students are expected to also begin working with their thesis advisors, in parallel to the thesis prep class, in order to further focus the substance and the methodology of their thesis projects. The class will include a final discussion, but the public presentation of thesis proposals will take place with all other SMArchS students in December 2024.

By the conclusion of the class students are expected to produce a visual and written dossier: a thesis proposal. This document will define the argument/hypothesis and the key criteria of the thesis project, establishing the scale and nature of its intervention in the field, and in the process, demonstrating clear understanding of the particular corner of the discipline in which the project is intervening.

What is design research?

Nearly three decades ago, late French historian of science and philosopher, Bruno Latour proposed that our time is characterized by a transition from the culture of science to the culture of research. Research, he said, creates controversies, it does not resolve disputes, as science presumably did. And, in the last decade, all reasonably good (hip) schools of architecture in the US and Europe have been advertising their promise of contribution to the field and beyond by enumerating their research labs. But while the lab may indeed be the most popular contemporary format for producing new knowledge, the discipline of architecture has relied on research (exactly in terms in which it interests Latour) throughout modernity. Research that produces controversies, and renders objects familiar, as well as unfamiliar through narrating them, is in part what drew Latour to architecture, which, unlike science, has never claimed to have trafficked in truths, but in various types of discursive bargains. It is not surprising then, that there is little consensus in the field about what constitutes “design research.” In the pages of one of very few peer reviewed architectural journals (peer review being one of the marks of legitimate “research”) in the US, *Journal of Architectural Education*, since the mid 1940s, “design research” has meant many different things, from positivist, quantitative measurements, through behaviorist claims, to postmodernist work on language and signification, and back through environmental math, tectonic and material detailing, to data visualization, worlding etc. We will consider some of these definitions as we need them. They will be important only insofar as specific formulations of your topics might need to

be tested against specific types of evidence and claim-making. We will use the fact that definition of “design research” is not exact, or set, as an opportunity.

Format:

Thesis Preparation is pursued both [a] in this course and eventually [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 speculations - 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, and will involve MIT faculty in different ways and often proceed through in-class work sessions. The pre-thesis class will thus follow several different formats ranging from seminar sessions, through book clubs, to workshops and presentations. [b] We hope to engage different faculty based on interests in this small group of students, and to also begin working with them in the role of Thesis advisors by the end of this course.

Our Book Club:

Since we are a small group, we can tailor the readings we do in this class to support your specific interests and to also help stitch between them, fostering a small intellectual community this way, and combating the “loneliness of the project.”

Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in thesis prep.

(More than two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade).

Students will 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 presentations.

The final requirement of the class is the Thesis Proposal document.

Academic Integrity:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and knowledge. At MIT, students will be given unusual opportunities to do research and undertake scholarship that will advance knowledge in different fields of study. Students will also face many challenges. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute’s policies regarding academic integrity, which are available at the Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students.

Writing:

Writing will take up a large portion of your thesis prep document (min. 2000 words). Some of it we hope travels forward with your project. Your thesis proposal will, of course, also include visualizations of your research, descriptions of your disciplinary context and content, possibly different types of tests, but this may be 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:

The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. The WCC also helps with all English

as Second Language issues, and is located in E18-233, 50 Ames Street. To guarantee yourself a time, make an appointment here > <https://mit.mywconline.com/>.

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.)

Diversity:

MIT values an inclusive environment. We hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider it to be a place where you will be treated with respect. We welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with us.

Grading:

1. Class Participation and Weekly Assignments 50%
2. Thesis Dossier 50%

The final grade will represent the balance of attendance, participation, engagement in class discussions, incorporating feedback, completion of assignments, individual growth over the semester and quality of work produced in the class, with an emphasis on clarity and originality. The following criteria will be used for assessment and evaluation:

- A - Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.
- B - Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.
- C - Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.
- D - Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.
- F - Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

4.288 S24 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:
(subject to our collective adjustments)

FRAMEWORKS > CONTEXTS AND CONTENTS

2/05 Week 1: A Hunch

Due: 2-3 Images (+ statements to go with them)

2/12 Week 2: What is A (Thesis) Project?

Due: An Artifact (that embodies the topic you are interested in)

Also bring old MIT SMArchS thesis books you are most interested in, for all of us flip through and discuss.

Check this out for your artifact: John May with Peter Galison, "The Revelation of Secrets: Peter Galison and John May on Artifacts of Surveillance," *Thresholds* 43: Scandalous (2012): 136-153.

Read:

Timothy Hyde, "Turning the Black Box into a Great Gizmo," ACSA conference proceedings. (5)

Michael Meredith, "Toward the Body of Work," *Log* 35 (Fall 2014): 11-14.

Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1998): 85-103.

Recommended:

Michael Meredith, *Some Notes to those Beginning the Discipline of Architecture*, 2006 (8p).

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.

Sam Jacob and Tania Davidge interview "Serious play," *ArchitectureAU*, April 15, 2015,

<http://architectureau.com/articles/interview-sam-jacob/>

Stan Allen, "Practice vs. Project," *Practice: Architecture, Technique and Representation*, (London: Routledge, 2009).

Check out: <https://arpajournal.net/>

2/19 Week 3: President's Day: Holiday. Tuesday 2/20 is Monday schedule (but there will be no class this week)

2/26 Week 4: What is Architectural Research? On Method

Due: A Panorama (On a triptych of 11x17s)

Check this out for your Panorama: Bruno Latour: "Panoramas," *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford University Press, 2005): 183-190.

Read:

Bruno Latour, "From the World of Science to the World of Research Science," *Science*, V. 280, n. 5361 (April 1998): 208-209.

Stanford Anderson, "Architectural Design as a System of Research Programs," *Design Studies* 5.3 (1984), 145-150.

David Joselit, "The Epistemology of Search," *ARPA* journal. 7 pages

Rem Koolhaas, "Dali and the Le Corbusier; The Paranoid-Critical Method," *Architectural Design* 48 (1978): 152-163.

3/4 Week 5: What is an Archive?

Due: A Collection (100 items: images and text with citations)

Check out for your Collection: Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of a Poor Image" e-flux 10 (2009): 9 pages and John May, "Everything is Already an Image," *Log* 40, pp. 9-26.

Read:

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Number 26, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2008).
Ariella Azoulay, "Archive," *Political Concepts: A Lexicon*

Recommended:

Achille Mbembe, "Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 2002), 19-26.
Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, c. 1972).
Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995): 9-63.

This week we may also work with Marija Marić a guest hosted by the Critical Broadcasting Lab

LINEAGES > DISCIPLINARITY AND ORIGINALITY

3/11 Week 6: Comrades, Allies, Straw Men and Other Relevant Taxonomies

Due: 4 Analytical Plates (diagrams that read 4 relevant items in terms of your project, each on 11x17)

Read:

Michael Baxandal, "Excursus Against Influence," in *Patterns of Intention* (1985), pp. 57-60.
Ana Miljacki, "Introduction," *Under the Influence* (SA+P Press, 2014).
Ana Miljacki and Ann Lui, "Toward a Carrier Bag Theory of Coauthoring," *Log* 54: *Coauthoring*, Spring 2022.
Jonathan Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence," *Harper's Magazine* (February 2007).

For your assignment check out:

Alison Smithson, "How to Recognize and Read Mat-Building," and Timothy Hyde, "How to Construct an Architectural Genealogy," *CASE: Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital and the Mat-Building Revival*, ed. Hashim Sarkis, Pablo Allard and Timothy Hyde (Munich, Prestel, 2002), pp. 90-117.

Recommended:

Michel Foucault, "Preface," *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv-xxiv.
Bryoni Roberts and Dora Epstein-Jones, "The New Ancients" editorial, *Log* 31: *The New Ancients*, Spring/Summer 2014
Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford University Press, 1973).

3/18 Week 7: Defining the Field

Due: A Linear Presentation (PDF or PPT) + **A Research Statement** (that we will keep revising)

Read:

Timothy Hyde, "Proximate Utopia, Or the Semblance of the Future," *Harvard Design Magazine* 31, FW 2009/10.
Andy Merrifield, "Magical Marxism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, 2009, pp.

381-386.

Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 147-158.

Jaques Ranciere, "Thinking Between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge," *Parhesis*, n.1 2006, pp. 1-12.

For your assignment check out:

Ursula le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"

Recommended:

Donna Haraway, "Sowing worlds: a seed bag for terraforming with earth others," *Beyond the Cyborg: adventures with Donna Haraway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 137-146.

3/25 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

STORYTELLING > REPRESENTATION AND TEMPORALITY

4/1 Week 8: When, How Big, Where and for Whom?

Due: A Trailer (A premature minimum 1min video of your project)

For your assignment check out:

Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," *Image Music Text* (Fontana Press, 1977): 52-68.

Brett Story, "How Does it End? Story and the Property of Form," *World Records* v. 5 (2021).

Read:

El Hadi Jazairy, "Toward a Plastic Conception of Scale," *New Geographies* 4: Scales of the Earth, 2011.

Timothy Morton, "The End of The World," *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minnesota Press, 2013).

Recommended:

Donna Haraway, "Sowing worlds: a seed bag for terraforming with earth others," *Beyond the Cyborg: adventures with Donna Haraway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 137-146.

Pierre Bélanger, "out of time," *a+t issues* 46, *Organization or Design?* (Fall 2015): 20-33.

Volume 17: Content Management

Volume 20: Storytelling

Praxis 14: True Stories

4/8 Week 9: Share your readings

Due: A Timeline / A Map

4/15 Week 10: Patriot's Day: NO CLASS

Due: Updated Statement

SPECULATIONS> PROJECTIONS AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

4/22 Week 11: Peer review

Due: Dossier Draft

4/29 Week 12: Testing Tests, Revisiting Research Methods

5/6 Week 13: Research Statement

5/13 Week 14: Conversation with Friends

5/20 **DUE: *FINAL* 11x17 THESIS PREP DOSSIERS**