

Project Thesis / Thesis Project
GSD ADV-9203
Spring 2023

Lectures:

Mondays 1:30 – 2:45 Gund 111

Workshops:

Mondays 3:00 – 4:15 Gropius room

Mondays 3:00 – 4:15 Gund 111

Instructors:

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Course summary

As the culminating effort for the Master of Architecture degree, a “Thesis” entails multiple expectations. It is a demonstration: not only of competency and expertise, but of originality and relevance. A thesis is an opportunity to conceive and execute work that is both a specific project (delimited in scope, with a specific set of appropriate deliverables) as well as a declaration of a wider “Project” (possessing disciplinary value, and contributing to a larger discourse). This class will address both valences of the architectural “project,” while providing space for students to develop methodological approaches for their own thesis. Over the course of a series of lectures and seminars, we will study the theory and practice of the architectural thesis by examining its institutional history and disciplinary development, in order to understand the conventions and possibilities of the format. In workshop sessions, as preparation for their own theses, students will work towards the articulation of their topics. Workshop topics will include: identifying relevant precedents and existing literature; defining a site and program (however broad); and working through first iterations of working methods. With these efforts, the aim of the course is for students to be equipped to undertake a thesis project in every sense.

Logistics, expectations, and other important things

- Accessibility*** If you would like accommodations, contact accessibility@gsd.harvard.edu to serve as a liaison. And / or, if you feel comfortable doing so, please let us know what you need. We aim to provide a supportive learning environment that works best for all, as best we can. If you need something to change mid-semester, let us know: there is no deadline for accommodation requests.
- Attendance*** Students are expected to be present for all classes and all workshop sections, and for the duration of each. More than two unexcused absences will result in an automatic failing grade.
- Class etiquette*** Please come to class with more questions than answers. Please do the readings and assignments before class. Be generous towards your colleagues, and to the interlocutors we will encounter on the page.
- Deadlines*** Despite the military origins of the term, deadlines are used here not as a punitive strategy—but rather, as a tool to structure the semester and as a means to hold one another accountable. If you are having trouble meeting an assignment deadline, please set up a time to meet with the course instructors to work out an alternative schedule.
- Grading*** Student performance will be evaluated based on the following breakdown: timely submissions of weekly assignments (25%), participation (25%), and submission of a thesis prep book (50%). Weekly assignments are listed in the course schedule. Participation includes prompt class attendance, reading blog posts, being part of in-class discussions, and participating in the required presentations. The thesis prep book is the final deliverable due in lieu of a final exam. Transformation of numerical grade to pass /fail grades will be according to the schedule below.
- Distinction: Exceptional performance awarded at the sole discretion of faculty
High Pass: 90 – 100
Pass: 75 – 89
Low Pass: 60
- Masking*** The ongoing pandemic continues to affect us each in different ways. In addition to following the university's current masking policies, we ask you to remain flexible and to respect the wishes of colleagues that may need to maintain a masked environment.
- Projects*** Your final project will take the form of a book + a pitch presentation. Your work towards this final deliverable is cumulative throughout the semester; the aim is for you to leave this course with a robust document that will serve as a useful guide in the thesis semester to follow.

Office hours For Lisa: Mondays, 11:00-1:00, or by appointment. In person (485 Broadway, room 205) or on zoom, just let me know. Come with a specific question about the class, or just stop by to talk about architecture, research methods, or any related interests.

For Eric: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:30, or by appointment. In person (485 Broadway, room 206) or on zoom.

Peer review As part of our working process, you will be asked to respond, in various forms, to your colleague's work-in-progress. We will be talking about best practices for peer review, in class, in advance of these assignments.

Plagiarism Nope. Just cite your sources, in whatever style you love best.

Readings Each week you will have the option of selecting one of several short pieces to read and respond to. Responses should take the form of a brief paragraph to be posted to our Canvas site. We ask that reading responses are completed by the Sunday evening (5:00 pm) preceding class.

All course readings will be made available in PDF form, and posted on our canvas site.

GSD Policies Students will be held to all academic policies of the GSD. These can be found at: <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/resources/academic-conduct/>

Schedule (n.b., subject to adjustment as needed)

Part 1 *What?: Framing your questions*

***Wk 1 / 01.23* On Speculation**

Readings (optional, but you won't regret it):

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Number 26 (June 2008)

Benjamin Labatute, "Prussian Blue," in *When We Cease to Understand the World* (2021)

Philippa Lewis, *Stories from Architecture: Behind the Lines at Drawing Matter* (2021)

Emily Ogden, "How to catch a minnow," from *On not Knowing: How to Love and other essays* (2022)

Rebecca Solnit, "The Blue of Distance," in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005)

***Wk 2 / 01.30* What is 'Architecture' (and how do we know it)?**

Readings (pick 1):

Reyner Banham, "A Black Box, The Secret Profession of Architecture"

Peter Collins, "Judgment as rational process" in *Architectural Judgement* (1971)

Charles L Davis II, "Moving Beyond Repair: Constructing a Revisionist History of Architectural Modernity at MoMA," in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness and in America* (2021)

Rem Koolhaas / AMO, *Post Occupancy* (2006)

Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance and Care," *Places Journal* (2018)

Assignment: *A Glossary of 10 Terms (that define architecture for you)*

Wk 3 / 02.06 Influence (Genealogy)

Readings (pick 1):

Ana Miljački, “Introduction,” in *Under the Influence* (2020)

Katherine McKittrick, “Footnotes (books and papers scattered about the floor)” from *Dear Science and Other Stories* (2021)

Max Liboiron, “Acknowledgements” in *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021)

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry* (1997)

Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (2012)

Assignment: *A genealogical map + An annotated bibliography*

Thesis walks #1: A trip to Cambridge public library (find the shelf where you’d want your thesis to live)

Part 2 Why?: Framing a discourse**Wk 4 / 02.13 On Authorship**

Readings (pick 1):

WBYA collective, *Who Builds Your Architecture? A Critical Field Guide* (2017)

Beatriz Colomina, “Manifesto Architecture,” from *After the Manifesto: Writing, Architecture, and media in a New Century* (2011)

Rafael Moneo, “The Solitude of Buildings” (Kenzo Tange lecture, 1985)

Timothy Hyde, “Signature,” in *Under the Influence* (2013)

Ana Miljački & Ann Lui, “Toward a Carrier Bag Theory of Coauthoring,” in *Log 54: Coauthoring* (winter / spring 2022)

Monica Ponce de Leon, “Introduction,” and Antoine Picon, “Conversation with Lucia Allais” in *Authorship*, (2019)

Assignment: *A Manifesto*

Wk 5 / 02.20 President’s day – no class – catch-up week

Wk 6 / 02.27 Guest Lecture (John May and guests)

Assignment: *Refine your terms, update your bibliography*

Wk 7 / 03.06 On Audience

Readings (pick 1):

Alexandra Lange, *Writing about Architecture: mastering the language of buildings and cities* (2012)

Greg Tate, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (2015)

Claire-Louis Bennett, "A Formal Feeling," *Harper's Magazine* (2022)

Édouard Glissant, "Poetics," in *Poetics of Relation* (2010)

Assignment: *A postcard to a loved one, a postcard to the Dean*

Thesis walks #2 : A trip to the post office

~Spring break~

Part 3 *How?*: Means and Methods**Wk 8 / 03.20 Site**

Readings (pick 1):

Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science,"

Yves Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll Around 'Clara Clara,'" in *October* (Summer 1984)

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The idea of Provincializing Europe" in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000)

Derek Gregory, "Geography and cartographic anxiety," in *Geographical Imaginations* (1994)

K-Sue Park, "The *Lightning Field*, the Border, and Real Estate," in *X-tra* (2019)

Samia Henni, "Against the regime of 'emptiness,'" in *Deserts are not Empty* (2022)

Assignment: *The why of your where*

Wk 9 / 03.27 Program

Readings (pick 1):

“Two Architects, 10 questions.” in *Praxis Issue 8*

Penelope Dean, “Program is as Program Does,” in *Praxis Issue 8*

Stan Allen, “Mapping the Unmappable: On Notation,” in *Practice: Architecture, Technique, Representation.*” (2009)

Bernard Tschumi, “Manhattan Transcripts”

Rafael Moneo “On Typology” in *Oppositions* (1974)

Assignment: *Who is there, and how?*

Wk 10 / 4.03 Representation

Readings (pick 1):

Benedict Anderson, “Census, Map, Museum,” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983)

Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2011)

Robin Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building”

Cynthia Davidson, “Notes on a Concept: Model Behavior,” in *Log 50: Model Behavior* (2022)

Edward Said, “Imaginative Geography and its Representations” in *Orientalism* (1994)

Eric Howeler, “Verify in Field, Models and Other Useful Fictions,” in *Log 50: Model Behavior* (2022)

Sarah Ahmed, “Introduction: Find your Way” and “Conclusion: Disorientation and Queer Objects” from *Queer Phenomenology* (2006)

Assignment: *A sketch*

Wk 11 / 4.10 Towards what ends?

Readings (pick 1):

feminist architecture collaborative, “Proposing a C*unter M*vement” in *Log 48: Expanding Modes of Practice* (2020)

Mabel O. Wilson, “Radical Repair,” in *Log 48: Expanding Modes of Practice* (2020)

Lili Carr, Feifei Zhou, and Anna Tsing, “Architects Draw the Anthropocene” in *Perspecta 53* (2022)

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom*

Eva Horn, *The Future as Catastrophe, Imagining the Future in the Modern Age* (2018)

Keller Easterling, *Medium Design, Knowing How to Work on the World* (2021)

Assignment: *A postcard from the future*

Wk 12 / 4.17 Presentations 1**Wk 13 / 4.24 Presentations 2****Wk 14 TBD Presentations 3 (during exam week)**