Fall 2021

Course Number: ARC 386M
Course Title: Architecture Theory: Contemporary Issues
Instructor: David Heymann
Unique Numbers: 010802
Format / Location: Seminar / GOL2.110 (Hybrid format: in-person and online, see below)
Office Hours: By appointment: phone or zoom only
Contact: heymann@utexas.edu

SYLLABUS

Theory Sequence Context:

The Theory of Architecture sequence in the School of Architecture begins with this course on contemporary issues in recent architecture, then moves in the next semester to a history of canonical writings about buildings. The third course in the theory sequence, a required elective, allows for you to pursue your own interests. Most schools put the canonical readings first, then move to contemporary issues and examples. But central to our curriculum is a basic argument: it helps to understand how buildings carry meaning before you discuss what kinds of meaning buildings carry.

There are two other sections of this course, taught by Professors Larry Speck and Martin Haettasch (all three sections are limited to approximately equal enrollment and have equivalent workloads). All three sections focus on relatively recent architecture, but each reflects the particular concerns of the instructor, which is another hallmark of this school. Professor Speck, for example, tends to focus on the body of works of individual architects, and also studies what the architects say or write about their own work. Professor Haettasch tends to focus more specifically on theoretical dilemmas as they are defined academically, and track those issues into multiple buildings. All three classes are among the most highly ranked in the SOA. You really should try to take all three.

Course Description:

This section of Architecture Theory: Contemporary Issues looks at a range of key single buildings, and tries to define what is happening in contemporary critical architecture not through architects’ words, but through the way their buildings frame experience. Central to my course is the proposition that a building is less about the architect’s personal concerns and more precisely a justified negotiation between architect and client about how form can best structure specific meaningfulness with regard to an individual problem, typically posed by the circumstances of the world, that is critically resolved with a building. Many people think that a building is primarily about the architect’s autobiography. But anyone who has worked as or for an architect knows this is simply not
true. The architect may well have a strong opinion, but it can only take its critical stance in the form of the building for someone else through considered reason and negotiation. Buildings are expensive things, rarely made just because of an architect’s whim!

So, in this class, we are less interested in the architect’s words (which often disguise what an architect is actually doing: architects say all kinds of nonsense in order to build what they think is right) than in the world of experience a building organizes for its inhabitants, since that is what an architect has to justify to a client in order for the client to pay the remarkable expense associated with making new buildings. Clients are not fools! Most great architects are able to clearly and maturely the complex reasons why a radical idea makes sense for someone’s specific circumstance, and so doing typically involves a nuanced understanding of what people seek for their lives at any one moment in time, and why they seek that, and how form might best make that happen.

In this scenario, theory is not something applied to a building. Theory in this course (and, to be clear, there are other conceptions of theory) is what you form when you attempt to cohesively order and then justify the sensate condition of dwelling within that building: you struggle to explain why, and, in so doing, posit a framework of meaningfulness. Your intelligence seeks to give order to the knowledge of experience, and that giving some understandable order is the main kind of theory in this class. The first aim of this course is to have you look at buildings to the extent you can through the available documentation, imagine their inhabitation, and try to learn how to value their singular meaning. This is theory as the consequence of a verb: to theorize.

This is a bit harder to do than it sounds, and takes some training. You have to learn to think like an inhabitant — which is a very special kind of thinking that precedes interpretation — not like an architect. Central to this aim of the course is the notion that, when you progress into the next theory class, on readings, you will have an idea of how written theories make the jump to the inhabited framework of experience that buildings offer. Theory so conceived has a primary agenda: to explain a building only to itself, then to see if it is sensible. This differs from a second type of theory that you will often encounter in architecture school: buildings explaining themselves to each other, as proofs of cultural tendencies. No client, of course, cares about that kind of theory, though architects value it very highly (for reasons we will discuss).

The second goal of this course is to explore, through a range of case studies, the major directions that architecture, as a cultural activity, has taken over the past (almost) half-century, starting with the collapse of the Modern. This is the same thing as saying that this course is about the general trends in culture and experience that – while expressed as individual desires by clients – have driven architects to make certain, consistent decisions over this period of time. In so doing the course hopes to allow you to link your singular understanding of artifacts to larger cultural developments of the present day, to ask: why is the meaning I sense in the building actually meaningful? This is an important bit of activity. We are going to look closely at some twenty recent buildings, and indirectly study some twenty to thirty more, over at least three generations of architects (one Post-Modern, two After-Modern). You will see that “value” is clearly an important component of architectural work, but “value” is evolving constantly: it hardly stands still long enough to be adequately described.
Moreover, the past five decades in architecture differ from the full century immediately leading up in that the recent past has not been ruled by the sorts of dogmatic theories and movements that to a great degree defined the 20th century. There is no common agreement about where recent architecture has gone, much less how it can be considered meaningful. That does not mean the architecture of the recent past does not have consistency – of course it does, just look at it! – but this consistency does not stem from any single agreed upon agenda. This is what Rafael Moneo means when he writes (in one of the required books for this course) that architecture of the recent past lacks a theory, that it is instead driven by a series of anxious strategies.

Really what we will be looking at are different arguments about meaningfulness. Each of the buildings chosen for the course (see course schedule, last page) is exemplary of certain primary concerns present in architectural discourse today. But the list is only partial, and, to be sure, it partly reflects my understanding of what is most important (which – to remind you – is the basis of the studio agenda here as well: the instructors confront you with their agendas about meaningfulness in an attempt for you to define your own).

**Class Format:**

Every week, in open, free-form discussions – we are going to make that happen on Zoom – we are going to try to figure out the “why” of an individual building based on the idea that the building is first and foremost a frame for inhabitation, an actual solution to a complex actual problem, not really about the architect’s style, but about how the building’s framing of experience makes sense given the conditions. You will familiarize yourself with the building and the reference buildings before class, and, in order to insure this, the class will be broken into discussion groups, which will be asked to turn in “minutes” of your discussions. Every week I will give you an open question to help guide your discussions, but the question is only meant as a prompt.

You will be asked to imagine yourself dwelling in the buildings, and to work as detectives might search for evidence: parts not understood (“I wouldn’t have done it that way”) or too easily accepted, seeming inconsistencies, etc. The evidence is gathered in group and seminar discussion and the class will attempt to reconstruct each building's conceptual underpinnings in a form of synthetic police work – evidence to motive – based on close reading. Our reconstructions will then be compared with a writings about the building (sometimes the architect's own writings) in order to map out internally and externally developed theoretical models.

The format sounds formal, but it is loose and free-flowing, and the discussions are wide-ranging, exploratory, challenging, and really interesting. Note that as the semester progresses and you get a better handle on the technique, we will often look at two buildings per week. Sometimes one will introduce the other, but often this is to sharpen your sense of the disagreements that run through architectural discourse, though often just below the surface.

See below (Online or In-Person?) for potential format consequences of COVID circumstances to teaching location.
Readings and Required Textbooks:

Up to six types of readings may be given for each building:
1. Drawings and photographs of the building in question;
2. A written description of the building, site, client, etc.;
3. An essay placing the building within a general critical context;
4. Images of +/- three reference buildings engaged in similar concerns;
5. Sometimes an essay, while not necessarily about the building, which expands and explores its critical context.
6. Much of the work we are going to be looking at is from before 2010, but I will also include from more recent buildings in which you can see where and how the issues at play are evolving. On the course schedule these are identified as 3rd generation.

I will post the images (which may include websites), and many of the readings, on UTBOX for you to access. There are five books that you will need to buy (get them at Amazon, where they will be cheapest – they are expensive, but worth it, and these are basic readings that you really should own). Roughly in the order they will be read:

1. **Rafael Moneo: Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects.** This is the primary text, written by a great architect and teacher. Though it covers the work of eight contemporary architects, its purpose in this course is to give you a basic appreciation of the work that immediately precedes the present by a full generation. In the readings course – and architecture history – you will just make it to that moment! Moneo’s chapters serve as a perfect counterpart to the course: each describes the horizontal development of the architects’ work. In contrast, we will be working in a sense perpendicular to these writings, plumbing each building not as a proof of the architect’s intentions, but as a specific framework of experience that in turn suggests how meaning is ordered. You should be able to get this used.

2. **Rem Koolhaas: Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan.** The last real attempt at an architectural manifesto: you can’t move ahead (much less sit at the adult table) without ingesting its argument. And it is a fun read, though far more serious than the apparent perversity of the text seems to suggest. You can definitely buy this used. Start reading it right away: it is LONG. And crucial: I will ask each discussion group to design and present an unknown buildings by OMA as a means to understand the content of Delirious New York, and that project is one you will need to start on a few weeks before that class period (currently scheduled for October 27th).

3. **Herzog & De Meuron: Prada Aoyama Tokyo.** This is perhaps the best book out there describing a design process, and also the curious dispassionate-ness of the design process that so many architects use today (compared, to say, *The Fountainhead*). Beyond invaluable. I would read this the first night you find studio frustrating. This has been in and out of print. Sometimes it is reasonably priced used, sometimes it is ludicrously expensive (last year, just before it was reprinted, it was selling used for $400; as of this writing it is under $100).
4. Peter Zumthor, **Thinking Architecture**. This is a book you will see on many architect’s desks. Zumthor’s ideas also resonate with many people in this school, and professors will refer to this text so often that you just need to read it. You should be able to get this used. And you might, again, read this early in the semester, just as inspiration for studio.

5. William McDonough and Michael Braungart: **Cradle to Cradle**. The whole crisis of sustainability and aesthetics is just beginning to come to a head. This book sets out the problem as clearly as possible. You should be able to get this used.

In addition, you may wish to obtain Peter Eisenman’s **Ten Canonical Buildings**. This text will serve you well for the formal analysis part of the paper assignment; beyond that, it is interesting, but the form of analysis is exactly the OPPOSITE of what we will be focusing on in this class.

I will go over the work associated with this class at the start of the semester. It will involve, beyond the weekly minutes and the OMA group project described above, a graphic analysis and written paper on a recent building, and a “tentative manifesto”. Class participation in discussion is the other primary factor in grades for this course.

**Evaluation:**

Your grade for this course will be assigned on the basis of:

- Paper (graphic and written) 35%
- In-class participation 35%
- OMA group project 15%
- Minutes 5%
- Tentative manifesto 10%

Class participation is key to your grade: you must take part – that means: talk. Attendance is mandatory. One class session is the equivalent of two normal classes, so two absences will constitute a letter grade drop, and with three absences you will be stricken from the roll. Minutes and possible short exercises will account for another 10% of the grade. Finally, and critically, you should keep a “think pad” for this course: a dedicated sketchbook that you use to draw the buildings as we study them. It is not enough to look at photos: you have map the building, draw its section, diagram its logic, reconstruct its details. This form of “studying by hand” will be critical to your success in understanding architecture.

The primary assignment for this course – an analysis paper of a recent building or buildings not included in the class – will be broken into two parts and spread across the semester. The written paper will be +/- 3,000 words. I will explain the "tentative manifesto” in class.
Covid-19 Considerations: We will all need to make some adjustments in order to benefit from in-person classroom interactions in a safe and healthy manner. Our best protections against spreading COVID-19 on campus are masks, worn correctly over mouth and nose, social distancing, and staying home if you are showing symptoms. I recommend every student wear a face-mask properly in class and in all campus buildings at all times. This is not mandatory, but I would ask you consider not only your own rights, but those of the least comfortable or most vulnerable person in the group.

Online or In-Person? Given the circumstances, the specific format for this class – i.e., do we meet in school or online? – will be continually evolving. My first priority is your safety. Typically, safety is a given, and I focus on the overall energy and happiness of the group – which requires working and being in the SOA. But the situation we are in requires a different paradigm, and the Provost has defined in-person teaching as meeting in the same space for 1/3 of the allotted class time, which means: once every three weeks on campus, the other two weeks online. We will discuss this at length, and we will have to figure out exactly how we meet on an ongoing basis, which may vary from week to week, often with short notice. I realize this is not ideal, but we will make it work.

Religious Holy Days sometimes conflict with class schedules. You must notify each of your instructors as far in advance as possible prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

Honor Code:

The UT Honor Code applies to all work undertaken in this course:

“The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness and respect toward peers and community.”

Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and / or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct.

Students With Disabilities: Students with disabilities who require special accommodations need to get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). This letter should be presented to the instructor in each course at the
beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be discussed at that time. Five business
days before an exam the student should remind the instructor of any testing accommodations that will be
needed.

**Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:** No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University’s Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

**FERPA and Class Recordings:**

**Class Recordings:** Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

The calendar is on the following page, which has a different format. It sets out the content, readings, workload, and so forth, will likely change a bit over the course of the semester. We will really be looking at two generations of architects after Post-Modernism. But there is already a 3rd at work, and prominent members of that group are listed in the column second from right. We will only briefly look at some of these buildings, typically after we have completed our discussions.
PART I – THE MODERN PARADIGM AND THE CRISIS OF ITS POSTMODERN OPPOSITE

1.  8.31  Introduction  1.  Note to start reading | Delirious New York


PART II – MANY VECTORS OF AFTER-MODERN CORRECTNESS: FIRST GENERATION SOLUTIONS


PART III – MANY VECTORS OF AFTER-MODERN CORRECTNESS: SECOND GENERATION CONVERSATIONS / ARGUMENTS


11.  11.23  Vancoucare Library, Alberto Kalachi Mexico City, 2010 Mediation, Identity, and the New Institution  1.  Project information  2.  TBA  1.  SANAA, Books Learning Center  2.  Zaha  3.  Hertz & de Murer  4.  Hertz & de Murer  1.  MASA (Multiple works)  2.  Shok Zoro (Children Village)  3.  Frances Kere (Kere School)  4.  Frances Kere (Kere School)  5.  Frances Kere (Kere School)  6.  Frances Kere (Kere School)


*required text book

References

1. Project information
2. Project Information
3. Project information
4. Project information
5. Project information
6. Project information
7. Project information
8. Project information
9. Project information
10. Project information
11. Project information
12. Project information