Magic and Architecture

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed."  Albert Einstein

Overview
This course will expose students to the many productive parallels between architecture and magic. Both architects and magicians employ props (bricks and boxes) and rely on masterful craft to create effects that transcend the world of physical things. Those effects, if well conceived and executed, have the potential to evoke in the spectator a state of wonder. The verb wonder has two opposing definitions. To wonder means to be curious, suggesting an engagement of the intellect. But to wonder also means just the opposite: to be in awe, to be in a state of astonishment where the mind has nowhere left to go. In this course we will explore the oscillation between these two conditions, between knowing and not knowing. This flickering will be our working definition of magic.

By studying the magician's art of deception, students of architecture can learn both the mechanical secrets and the psychological ploys of illusion design. But first, in order to approach this art, we have to shed our inherited bias towards honesty in architecture, trusting that the truthful deployment of materials, structural purity and transparency have all been highly overstated and overrated. Upon close examination, one will discover that the modern masters demonstrated through their work that the aim of architecture is not honesty—certainly not in the bare-all way we have come to interpret it—but rather the achievement of genuine expression or effect. They showed us that it does not matter what happens in the thickness of walls, or what is hidden from our view; our perception of the world is based on surface readings.

The deceiver, whether an architect or a magician, is a student of perception, with a keen understanding of how our embodied experiences inform our perception and conception of the world around us. As a student of human behavior, s/he anticipates the expectations and assumptions of the audience and uses those to create beautiful, and even productive, misperceptions.

Methodology
Students will be exposed to this topic through presentations, short readings, group discussions, and project reviews (both individual desk crits and group pin-ups.) There will be three projects, each promoting the development of different skills: research and analysis presented in computer-generated graphics, observational skills in hard-lined drawings, and design skills in a construction.

Learning Objectives
By the end of the course, students should be able to:
• demonstrate a basic familiarity with graphic programs (Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop)
• conduct research efficiently, productively and creatively
• conceive and draw elegant diagrams
• demonstrate an increased awareness of illusions in architecture
• conceptualize, compose, draft and craft a precise drawing
• design and craft an object, working in harmony with the materials
Grades
Students will be evaluated throughout the semester on their 1) curiosity and the depth of their demonstrated interest in opening up the topic of magic and architecture, 2) active participation in group discussions, 3) ability to "output" their imagination with conceptual rigor and 4) willingness to engage in precision craft. Naturally, poor attendance and/or wimpy participation will negatively affect the final course grade. No late work will be accepted except under approved circumstances.

Project 1: 25%, 1.5 weeks
Project 2: 25%, 2.0 weeks
Project 3: 50%, 3.5 weeks

Attendance
Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. Each unexcused absence may be grounds for lowering the final course grade by one mark (i.e. A to A-, B+ to B, . . . .) Three absences are grounds for dropping a student from the course. This policy is particularly serious in half-term workshops. Students should notify the instructor in advance of any excused absences such as sports tournaments or religious holidays. In the case of emergencies and unexpected absences, please notify the instructor by e-mail or phone immediately and be prepared to bring documentation upon your return. This fall, as dictated by university policy, any student contracting the H1N1 flu is asked to notify their instructor and kindly stay home until they are past a state of contagion.

The code for entering Rapson 251 is: 4726. PLEASE do not share this with any non-BDA/BA students.

Instructor Contact
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612.275.9822 cell/home
Please do not leave messages on my university office phone. I do not pick them up regularly.

Schedule
Wed 10.28 Class meets in Room 225 at 9:00. Introductory lecture. Assign Project 1
Mon 11.2 Class meets in Room 225 at 9:00.
Ozayr Saloojee will lead the class. Bring laptops. (Leslie at UC Berkeley External Review)
Wed 11.4 Ozayr Saloojee will lead the class. Bring laptops. (Leslie at UC Berkeley External Review)
Mon 11.9 Final review of Project 1. Assign Project 2
Wed 11.11 Desk crits
Mon 11.16 Pin-up
Wed 11.18 Desk crits
Mon 11.23 Final review of Project 2. Assign Project 3
Wed 11.25 Desk crits
Mon 11.30 Pin-up
Wed 12.2 Desk crits
Mon 12.7 Pin-up
Wed 12.9 Desk crits
Mon 12.14 Desk crits
Wed 12.16 Final review of Project 3.