In architecture, as in man, the measurable and the un-measurable meet.

Louis Kahn

If you hear it, you forget.
If you see it, you remember.
If you do it, you understand.

Chinese Proverb

INTRODUCTION

The current architectural scene is signified by the lack of a commonly agreed-upon definition and direction of architecture. Instead it consists of a multitude of personal beliefs and corresponding, architectonic expressions, depending on whether social concerns, functionality, technology, aesthetics or sustainability are seen as the foremost criterion of architecture.

However, there are also a number of more theoretically and philosophically based movements, ranging from phenomenology to rationalism, deconstruction and post-structuralism, that attempt to put architecture on a more sophisticated footing.

To study how architecture – and the question of meaning – is addressed and explored by some of the currently leading architects, representing a spectrum of differing, theoretical and philosophical viewpoints and approaches, through an in-depth, intellectual and physical analysis of their work, is thus the primary focus of the course.

While the interpretation and analysis of meaning embodied in the form, order and expression of a work of architecture is quite common in both architectural history and theory, what is generally neglected is the creative process – the thought and design process - through which this meaning is defined, formed and expressed in physical form. Yet, one could reasonably argue that this process is ultimately the deciding factor in determining the success and quality of the work. Or, to say it differently, it is through design that a work of architecture - and its meaning - comes into being, i.e. thought, ideas and meaning are evolved, explored and given material presence in architectonic space, form and order.

Consequently, premise, process and product are inextricably linked and highly interdependent. Design for most of the leading architects is not a question of merely “solving a particular building program” or “problem”, or “translating” a certain ideological position into a
corresponding architectural expression, but a theoretical discourse through which larger philosophical or conceptual issues are pursued while at the same time a “language” or canon of architectonic form and order is explored for its capacity to make these issues physically manifest.

Since architecture, unlike most works of art, is almost never created in real time and space, but mediated through some form of representation, media, tools and techniques of representation play a crucial role in designing a work of architecture. The same holds true for its analysis. Since each mode of representation impacts the nature and range of information being processed, to find and develop appropriate tools and techniques to uncover and make explicit the underlying thought and conceptual notions poses a special challenge. To explore potential means of representation for the analytical studies is, therefore, also an important part of the seminar.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

• to bridge the gap between theory and design, between thought, meaning and physical form
• to become familiar with, and gain in-depth understanding of, some of the foremost philosophical and theoretical viewpoints and approaches to contemporary architecture
• to analyze how these paradigms and premises inform and become manifest in a respective canon of architectural form and order and define its meaning
• to personally engage a particular philosophical/theoretical viewpoint and approach through an exploratory design/analysis process in order to understand its architectural and design implications not merely intellectually, but also physically
• to explore potentially useful “diagnostic” tools and modes of representation to make explicit and “visible” underlying concepts and potential meaning

COURSE CONTENT, STRUCTURE & MODE OF INQUIRY

The seminar will study and analyze a limited number of works by currently leading architects whose oeuvre represents a distinct, theoretical or philosophical position and approach to architecture. Analysis in this context means to investigate and understand the work from a designer’s point of view and reasoning rather than that of a critic, i.e. to become personally physically engaged in the respective author’s thought and design process, i.e. his/her exploratory discourse between thought and form, rather than the mere analytical de-composition of the physical object and the intellectual, verbal or written explication of its form and concepts!

Consequently, the studies will focus on the primary sources – the work itself, the author’s developmental studies and personal statements – and will be explored through a designer’s eye and means, i.e. primarily in the form of serial models, drawings and other visual forms of representation (e.g. diagrams, axons, photographs, etc.) The use of the digital camera and
computer modeling are also strongly encouraged (though not at the exclusion of, or substitution for, physical modeling).

The analysis will involve the following four phases:

PHASE 1: INFORMATION GATHERING, DOCUMENTATION & PRESENTATION OF WORK UNDER STUDY

Quality take-apart replica model of the work under study, plus collection and concise documentation of relevant information on the building, the architect, quotes of his/her philosophical and/or theoretical position, contemporary and/or historic influences etc., and formal presentation of this material, including a replica model of the work, to the other course participants.

PHASE 2: ANALYTICAL DE-COMPOSITION OF CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS & CORRESPONDING ARCHITECTONIC FORM & ORDER OF THE PARTICULAR PROJECT

Identification and analytical decomposition of the underlying conceptual organization and corresponding architectural order and formal vocabulary that generated the particular work under study (e.g. premise, program, site and context, function, space, light, structure, form etc.).

PHASE 3: ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHICAL/THEORETICAL PREMISES, PROCESSES AND CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF TYPICAL CANON OF FORM & ORDER, AND POTENTIAL MEANING

'analytical design' exploration of the work in terms of the underlying, philosophical and theoretical premises, corresponding conceptual issues, typical canon of architectonic form and order, and implicit or explicit set of "moves" and/or "rules" (the particular project as a representative vehicle to uncover and explore the more fundamental, general questions and theoretical issues the respective designer pursues in all his/her work; and meaning explored that transcends the specific work under study).

PHASE 4: CONCLUSIONS, FINAL PRESENTATION, REVIEW AND DISPLAY OF ALL THE STUDIES

Formal presentation, review and discussion of the studies with a number of invited guests, and display of all the work in the court.

LITERATURE

The studies will mostly focus on primary sources of information, i.e. the particular work of architecture under investigation, the author’s other oeuvre and his/her personal writings and developmental images, models and drawings.
(LITERATURE CTD.)

Readings on the relevant, philosophical and/or theoretical viewpoint will also be required (cf. attached Reading List). These may vary with the projects under study.

COURSE & GRADING PROCEDURES

The class will meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1:30 – 5:30 PM

Depending on the size of the class, each student/team is required to formally present work in progress for review and discussion at the end of each phase. In addition there will also be (ungraded) Work-in-Progress / Pin-Up Reviews.

Starting with Phase 1, each of the four presentations will be graded. The final grade will be computed from the results of the four interim presentations (Phase 1, 2 and 3), plus the Final Presentation of the material and conclusions at the end of the course (each valued at 25% of the total grade). Participation and contribution to the in-class discussions will also be considered for the final grade, especially if the numerical grade falls between two letter grades. Though the evaluation criteria of each phase will vary to some degree, they will typically emphasize *comprehensiveness and substance of content, *richness and rigor of exploration, *creativity in use of modes and media of representation, *and quality of visual and verbal presentation.

Incompletes will be given only for legitimate reasons (e.g. serious illness or emergency) and only if the work is already at an advanced stage and can be completed within a reasonable time frame.

At the end of the module all students are required to submit a CD or DVD of their work produced during their investigation including documentation of their final presentation.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are required to attend all class and review periods and be present at reviews.

There is a zero unexcused absence policy for all modules. The final course grade will be lowered for even one unexcused absence, or for repeated late arrivals/early departures. In case of an emergency, contact your instructor immediately (ideally before the class period missed.) Absence from any scheduled review is very serious and should be avoided. Any students with three or more excused absences may be asked to withdraw from the course if the instructor feels they are falling too far behind.

OTHER RELEVANT UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE & SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE POLICIES

For these policies, such as Disabilities, Scholastic Misconduct, Sexual Harassment, Intellectual Property etc., please refer to the Graduate Student Handbook.
ANALYTICAL STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY WORKS OF ARCHITECTURE

Required Reading

M. Heidegger  'Building Dwelling Thinking'
Essay in Poetry, Language and Thought, Hofstadter, ed.
also in Rethinking Architecture, Neil Leach, ed.
or in Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture, Kate Nesbitt, ed.

Michel Foucault  ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’
Article in Rethinking Architecture, Neil Leach, ed.

Geoffrey Broadbent  ‘The Philosophy of Deconstruction’
Chapter II in Deconstruction: A Student Guide

Recommended Reading

All three chapters

Neil Leach, ed.  Rethinking Architecture (Routledge, 1997)
PART II PHENOMENOLOGY
PART V POSTSTRUCTURALISM

CHAPTER 3 POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION
CHAPTER 9 PHENOMENOLOGY: OF MEANING AND PLACE