

M.ARCH THESIS

Graduate Independent Thesis Collective Studio

HEATHER BIZON

“Disposition, in common parlance, usually describes an unfolding relationship between potentials. It describes a tendency, activity, faculty, or property in either beings or objects—a propensity within a context.”

Keller Easterling, Extrastatecraft



Graduate Thesis, Master of Architecture

An architectural thesis is a proposition. A proposition that results from a critique and re-examination of the role of architecture as a critical participant in the conditioning of (public) space. A thesis demands that the student take a position and have something to say, something to contribute to the ongoing discourse in the widening sphere of architecture.

In this studio, students are expected to engage and develop a wide range of interrelated capacities, including critical thinking, analytical writing and reflective design production; ranging from building construction, design research, emerging technologies and materiality, social issues, landscape, urbanism, spatial perception and methods of conceptual thinking.

Thesis culminates with a presentation and public exhibition of a holistically-researched architectural proposition. Marking the transition between academic and professional practices, the thesis project is an opportunity to define an individual position relative to the discipline of architecture.



IMAGE ABOVE
Alexandra Arènes, Atelier SOC
(www.s-o-c.fr)

IMAGE LEFT
Kacper Kowalski, *Secondary Effects*, 2005

Organization

The M.Arch thesis studio will be conducted to support each individual student's independent thesis through both readings, discussion groups, and collective exchanges. As a cohort, the studio will interrogate broader sets of collective questions that concurrently inform thesis research. Through a series of “Thesis Talks,” students will reflect and collectively frame issues and topics relating to their theses. Outside critics and guests will be invited to participate and engage to encourage broad discussion.

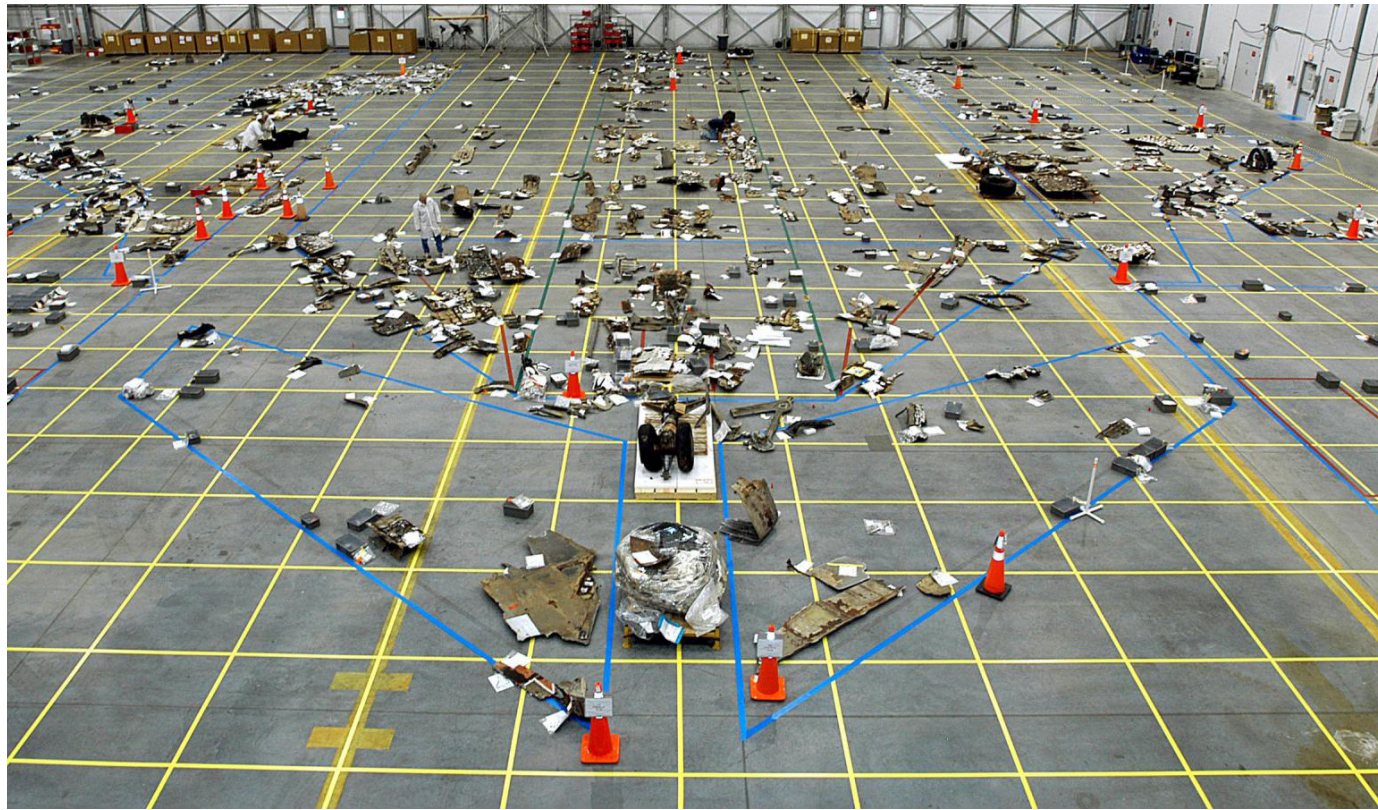
Design Research & Representation

Architecture is a cultural project that contributes to a developing understanding of how tradition and identity affect our built environment. An architectural argument is supported not only through the design and research, but through the expression of the idea through representation and presentation. As such, this thesis based studio will focus heavily on the representation of each student's thesis.

The thesis projects will be fully represented through sets of architectural representations. It is necessary for a cultural practice such as architecture to deeply investigate questions of aesthetics. How architects have made aesthetic arguments through a variety of different mediums is of crucial importance for the discipline of architecture.

Exhibition & Symposium

An architectural thesis demonstrating such creative understanding would be able to sustain critique at various levels of interpretation and enquiry. In a symposium-like forum to consider, debate, and dispute emerging questions in architecture, students will present and exhibit their thesis projects to the public. Students will articulate, propose, and defend their ideas and positions on architecture as well as engage with professionals as peers and colleagues.



Learning Outcomes

The course is designed for students to produce a semester long, studio based project. The course will hinge around the transition from the prerequisite thesis seminar to the articulation of the architectural argument into a design proposition.

- Articulate a clear argument; translate the design ideas into cohesive design based argument.
- Leverage verbal, written, and visual forms of communication to describe complex ideas.
- Transition research based design to projective design processes.
- Understand how the choice of design media, method and representations relates to your thesis topic.
- Development and execution of design methodology.
- Production of final materials for the Thesis Exhibition and Symposium.

IMAGE ABOVE
Hangar at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, March 7, 2003, photo © NASA/Getty Images n NASA crash investigators place debris from the Space Shuttle Columbia onto a grid on the floor of a hangar.

IMAGE RIGHT, TOP
Philipp Schaerer, Bildbauten, 2012

IMAGE RIGHT, CENTER
Bernd and Hilla Becher, "Typologies"

IMAGE RIGHT, BOTTOM
Keith Krumwiede, Atlas of Another America: An Architectural Fiction



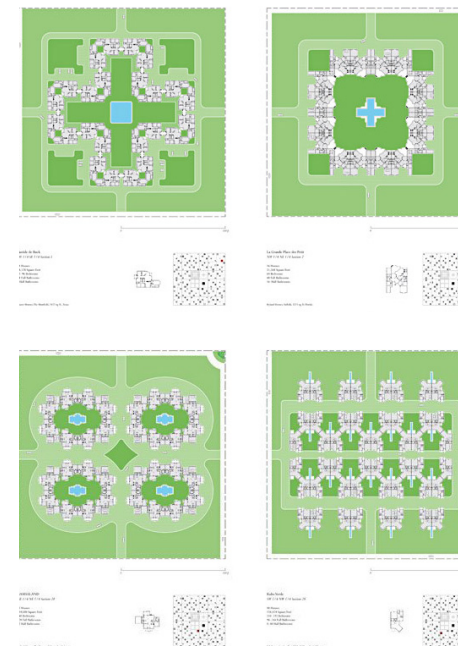
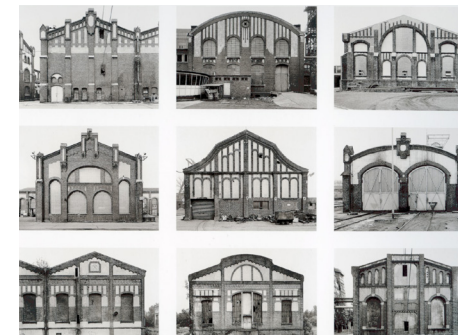
Selected References

Easterling, Keller. "Extrastatecraft." Verso, London, England; 2004

Latour, Bruno, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public"; Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy, MIT Press, 2005.

Latour, Bruno in H.Kulick (editor). "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present, Fai Press vol. 6, pp. 1-40

Gage, Mark Foster ed.; Aesthetics and Politics; 2018



BArch THESIS

Critical Inquiries,
Observations, and
Provocations through
Architecture

SARAH RAFSON

“Choose carefully the site of rebellion.”

—Terence van Elslander

“Writing a thesis requires a student to organize ideas and data, to work methodically, and to build an ‘object’ that in principle will serve others. ... With time, a writer becomes more astute and knowledgeable, but how he uses his knowledge will always depend on how he originally researched the many things he did not know.”

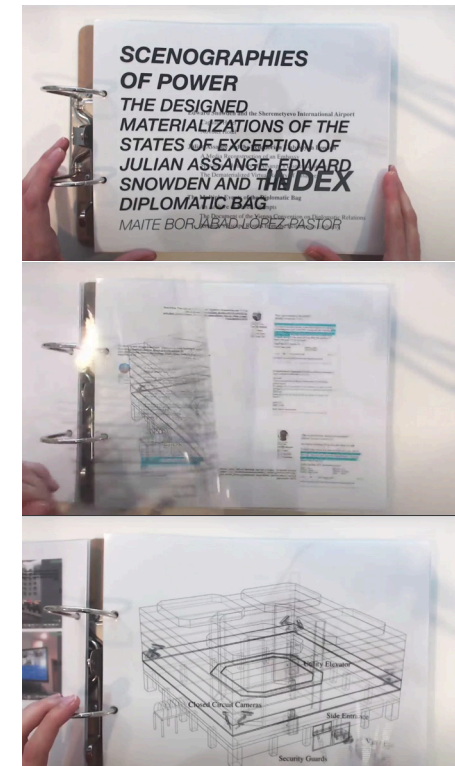
—How to Write a Thesis, Umberto Eco, 1977

Background

What is a thesis? There are many different answers to the question depending on who you ask.

This course is an opportunity to create a project entirely your own; original research through design. With guidance from a carefully selected group of advisors and mentors, you have the chance to deepen your engagement with architecture on your own terms, exploring a topic you are passionate about. Informed by your unique background and perspective, your thesis will contribute something new to the architectural discipline through a thesis book and exhibition.

Thesis projects may be particularly beneficial for students who wish to specialize or pursue further research after graduation, but for any student the studio will offer the chance to develop a project that you will carry with you throughout your career.



2016 thesis book by Maite Borjabad Lopez Pastor, for her project entitled “Scenographies of Power: The Designed Materializations of the States of Exception of Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, and the Diplomatic Bag.” Borjabad’s thesis, completed as part of the Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture at Columbia University GSAPP, examined how architecture materializes political apparatuses and legal frameworks. It later became an exhibition at the Casa Encendida in 2017.

Privacy_

All architecture is political. An important aspect of this thesis studio is understanding how your project engages with networks of power, and the many ways you as a designer might intervene. In regards to privacy, for example, how might an architect provide cover for the vulnerable or increase transparency of authority? In framing an impactful thesis, you will carefully examine a particular social, economic, political, or cultural context and articulate your stance on privacy as part of your intervention.

Context

In defining your thesis project, you are also defining a place for yourself in the architectural landscape. You are testing ways of working, and modes of engagement. To that end, part of the semester is devoted to reviewing existing design and research related to your chosen topic, including published writings and built work. You will critically reflect on the work of others, and also practice self-reflection in order to build a sense of creative autonomy. You will be working under the guidance of dedicated, trusted advisors, but the project is ultimately your own. Throughout the process of completing a thesis, you will strengthen your skills in writing, research, time management, organization, and communication, which will be invaluable throughout your career. At the end of the year, you will be rewarded by having completed a personally, intellectually, and aesthetically satisfying project that will also reap dividends after graduation.

Program

Class time will be devoted to:

- Developing a thesis exhibition and publication
- Desk critiques to ensure the timely development of your work
- Group discussions to review project milestones, requirements, and ideas
- Reviews with advisors and outside critics to refine design projects and exhibition design strategies
- Independent design, research, and writing



Learning Outcomes

- Refining research skills in architecture and design
- Developing and expressing a critical outlook and perspective on architecture practice
- Designing and installing an exhibition of work
- Writing, editing, and designing a thesis book that compiles the outcomes of the research and design process
- Sustaining and managing a long-term independent project
- Polishing verbal and visual presentation skills

The Installation view of Fulfilled, an exhibition and symposium at Ohio State University curated by Ashley Bigham and designed by Outpost Office in February 2020. The exhibition explores the role of architecture in a culture shaped by excessive manufacture and assuagement of desire—from warehouses, suburban homes, cardboard boxes, shopping malls, to shipping containers and material life cycles.



A selection of spring 2020 SoA BArch thesis projects. From top—Designing Pro-Compassion: Conceptualizing Destigmatized Spaces for Independent Abortion Providers (Alina Kramkova), Superimposed Landscapes: Adapting the Community Garden Model to Vertical Urban Landscapes (Cotey Anderegg), RE_VISION: A Resource for Community Organizers + Housing Advocates (Alison Katz & Alex Lin), too little TOO MUCH: Looking at Existing Sensory Therapy Practices to Inform Spatial Experience through an Expanded Definition of Access (Michael Powell). See more on the online thesis exhibition, "System Reboot?," at thesis.soa.cmu.edu.

