

Humanizing Brutalism

London's Iconic Southbank Centre in the 21st Century

Hal Hayes

QUESTIONS

Design research focusing on a specific building typology can elucidate basic principles of architecture theory, technology, and practice. Theaters and performing arts buildings of all types are among the most complex typologies, consequently they provide an excellent and challenging subject for the study of advanced and comprehensive architectural design. Design questions students will explore involve key design issues, parameters and processes;

- **OCCUPANCY:** human behavior, and movement through space, including the study of sequence, hierarchy and spatial narrative. Explore and understand the impact of the built environment on human health, safety, and welfare.
- **STRUCTURE & SYSTEMS:** study and understand the established and emerging systems, technologies, and assemblies of building construction with particular focus on theater-specific systems such as lighting, acoustics, projection, and complex long-span structures.
- **URBANISM & HISTORY:** the challenges, opportunities and rewards of design in a richly layered, dense, historically significant site. Study and understand both the historic and emerging social and cultural significance of this site,
- **SUSTAINABILITY:** study and understand the dynamic between built and natural environments to mitigate climate change. Explore ecological, advanced building performance, adaptation, and resilience principles.
- **INCLUSIVITY:** study and understand the diverse cultural and social contexts of this specific site and translate that understanding into built environments that equitably support and include people of different backgrounds, resources, and abilities.
- **COLLABORATION:** introduce work in multidisciplinary student-faculty teams with diverse stakeholder expertise, goals and objectives to solve complex problems.

PROMPT

Most global cultures developed theatrical performance independently, with their own unique forms and traditions. Contemporary theater building design typology has continually evolved with changes in culture, social mores, cross-pollination with other cultures, and the development of new technologies.

Occupants' experience space through their sequence of movement and the changes occurring in the spaces they inhabit. By studying, understanding and interpreting those changes, students will learn to conceive and shape spaces to meaningfully and effectively serve, support and transform the occupants' experience. Simultaneously students will study the essential technologies that support the performances occurring in the theater and explore design to support the creativity and innovation of the producing and performing artists.



The Shed at the National Theatre
Haworth Tompkins (credit: Philip Vile)



Queen Elizabeth Hall & Purcell Room Detail

"We shape our buildings: thereafter they shape us."

- Winston Churchill

"As an architect you design for the present, with an awareness of the past, for a future which is essentially unknown."

- Norman Foster

"Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness."

- Frank Gehry



Hal Hayes, Studio Professor

CONTEXT

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world and is a vibrant capital of global culture. Yet its recovery from the physical destruction and social upheaval of World War II was a long, slow process. The 1951 Festival of Britain was the first major post-war development and symbolized Britain's recovery from the war. Its centerpiece was the Royal Festival Hall, a Grade I listed historic landmark. Now it forms the heart of the Southbank Centre, the largest performing and visual arts complex in Europe, and the project site for this studio.

Two of London's defining characteristics are its cultural tradition of drama and its physical legacy of post-war Brutalist architecture, which the Southbank Centre's 1960s additions, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery, and its neighbor, the National Theatre, typify. Innovations and developments here in the performing arts and architecture resonate around the world. This studio will explore the seminal integration of these two art forms at the Southbank Centre and study how they may be adapted, reinterpreted, and further developed to serve the needs of diverse users and capitalize on the technological opportunities of the 21st century.

PROGRAM

Students will pursue a semester-long individual design project for a new flexible performance chamber. Key goals will be to symbiotically integrate the existing venues and outdoor spaces, renew the Centre's identity as a major mixed-media cultural engine, embrace the rich cultural and social diversity that has grown since its inception, integrate the design of outdoor plaza spaces, and explore the formal spatial dialog with the historic buildings' morphology and surface materiality. Students will begin with a brief master planning exercise studying the Centre's expansion in small teams, creating alternate frameworks within which their individual designs will emerge.

CO-REQUISITES+SITE VISIT

Interdisciplinary collaboration with CFA Drama & Heinz College Arts Management students and faculty in the co-requisite theater architecture class will be the basis for team research, programming and planning for the new chamber.

- 62:408/708 Theater Architecture 1, Mini 3, 6 units, Thursday 9:30-12:20
- 62:418/708 Theater Architecture 2, Mini 4, 3 units, Thursday 9:30-12:20

The studio will offer a week-long trip to visit London over spring break we will tour the site, visit professional offices, see other recent and landmark architecture, and go to performances in the southbank centre and national theatre venues. Full funding to cover student travel and accommodation expenses will be provided by the Theater Architecture Fund and alumnus donor Len Auerbach.