

# Preparation for SMArchS Urbanism Thesis. MIT 4.288

Fall 2018. Monday 2-5. Room 7-231

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Units/Level :     3-0-6 G

## Class Description and Goals:

In this class we will work with you in order to achieve three main goals:

1. To define with precision what your thesis topic is, your specific research question, and what your thesis outcomes and format will be (or what you will produce with your thesis).
2. To demonstrate that you have a proficient knowledge of your thesis topic and the relevant state of the field.
3. To clarify how your thesis intervenes and challenges existing disciplinary positions.

## General Structure and requirements:

The class combines three parallel strands which are aimed at continuously testing formats, producing deliverables, and generating feedback to the process of formulating a thesis proposal. Each strand works at a different speed. The thesis proposal takes time for you to write, finetune, and for readers to respond to, while a visual presentation of what you are doing should be able to deliver key questions and assumptions in no more than five minutes, and an elevator pitch should capture your audience in no more than two sentences. We have structured the class accordingly.

### **Strand I (semester-long): preparing your thesis proposal.**

Formulating a thesis statement and research plan, and selecting an adviser and readers, is a process that takes time. Accordingly, you will work continuously on refining the thesis proposal.

There will be two presentations of your thesis during the semester. These presentations are scheduled after a week in which we do not have class; you will therefore submit the written part of your thesis proposal before that long weekend, and use the second week to prepare the five-minute presentation.

The final document of the thesis proposal will address the key challenges of Content, Framework, Discipline, Format and Presentation. In other words, it will include a problem statement, state of the field, research questions, methodology, conceptual framework, work plan (timeline and

deliverables), and sources/bibliography (organized thematically). This document will typically have 15 to 20 pages.

The dates of submission of these exercises are indicated in the schedule. The last deliverable will be submitted on Sunday December 9 at 9 pm.

### **Strand II (weekly): interrogating forms evidence and output formats.**

Regardless of your particular topic or whether your thesis is more research based or proposal oriented, there are several key forms of evidence that we all need to consider. In this strand we will ask you to produce weekly Probes in which you will investigate partial aspects of your thesis. The main idea of these weekly Probes is to produce and test with a quick turn around a particular type of evidence and output format.

We will suggest formats for the graphic outputs.

Forms of evidence include, but are not limited to:

- primary sources (archives, people);
- secondary sources (relevant literature);
- data (demographic data, consumer data, cartographies ... );
- cultural records (films, music, ... );
- plans (proposals, projects, ...);
- reports (white papers, analyses, whether governmental or from a think tank or business venture);
- stakeholders (people, organizations, governmental actors, investors, ... );
- physical evidence (buildings, the built environment);
- policy (laws, ordinances, regulations, taxes, .. );
- etc.

Forms of output include, but are not limited to:

- rendering;
- literature review;
- manifesto;
- interview;
- map;
- diagram;
- timeline;
- modeling (physical or interactive);

- financial analysis;
- instruction manual;
- glossary;
- graphic essay;
- etc.

Part of the process of building your thesis proposal requires to address this interrelation between inputs and outputs, and to creatively investigate the possibilities each output format contains.

### **Strand III (hourly): in-class production.**

Finally, we will engage you in on-the-spot production in class. Such exercises might include presenting another student's proposal, responding to an article, or generating an image.

### **Attendance:**

Work in the class will build sequentially. Therefore, student commitment to incremental development on a weekly basis is of great importance. The demanding nature and pace of this class necessitates regular attendance and requires that deadlines are consistently met. Attendance in class and for the duration of all formal reviews is mandatory. Greater than two absences from class without medical excuse supported by a doctor's note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade for the course.

### **Evaluation Criteria:**

33% Attendance and participation in class.

33% Weekly probes.

33% Final thesis proposal.

### **Grading Definition:**

A. Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B. Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C. Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F. Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

### **Academic Integrity and Honesty:**

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: <http://integrity.mit.edu>

### **Writing and Communication Center**

The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers *free* one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. All are all published scholars and writers. Not counting the WCC's director's years (he started the WCC in 1982), the WCC lecturers have a combined 133 years' worth of teaching here at MIT (ranging from 4 to 24 years). The WCC works with undergraduate, graduate students, post-docs, faculty, staff, alums, and spouses. The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing classroom presentations & conference talks as well as designing slides). No matter what department or discipline you are in, the WCC helps you think your way more deeply into your topic, helps you see new implications in your data, research, and ideas. The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice. The WCC is located in E18-233, 50 Ames Street). To guarantee yourself a time, make an appointment. To register with our online scheduler and to make appointments, go to <https://mit.mywconline.com/>. To access the WCC's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/>. Check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours and available appointments.

### **Student Performance Criteria. NAAB:**

Realm A: Critical Thinking and Representation

- A1. Communication Skills: Ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively
- A2. Design Thinking Skills: Ability to raise clear and precise questions, use abstract ideas to interpret information, consider diverse points of view, reach well-reasoned conclusions, and test alternative outcomes against relevant criteria and standards.
- A3. Visual Communication Skills: *Ability to use*

appropriate representational media, such as traditional graphic and digital technology skills, to convey essential formal elements at each stage of the programming and design process. • A5. Investigative Skills: *Ability to* gather, assess, record, apply, and comparatively evaluate relevant information within architectural coursework and design processes.

## Course Schedule

### • Week 1 Monday, September 10

**In Class:** Introduction

**Probe #01. Keyword: Make Terminology Matter.**

Phase: Content. Evidence: Primary and secondary literature.

Goal: Understand the etymology, disciplinary history and the definition of the most critical concept of your thesis. Each student will question the main conceptual presupposition—captured in a single term—on which their thesis relies.

Outcome: Produce a text of 1000-1500 words about this word in which you seek to describe why this term is central, how it is used, how its use has changed over time and why, what unspoken assumptions and contradictions underly its use, and how it differs from other, seemingly similar terms. Begin by selecting a series of terms relevant to your work, and then narrow it down to one.

Due: Sunday, September 16, by midnight.

### **Required reading:**

Adrian Forty. "Context." In *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, 132-136. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

### **Additional references:**

Christian Topalov, and Isabelle Amestoy. *L'aventure des mots de la ville*. Bouquins. Paris: R. Laffont, 2010.

Raymond Williams. *Keywords : A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Rev. and expanded. ed. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983. The book contains references that may be of interest for your thesis topics, such as: collective, community, ecology, ideology, nature, science, and technology.

Center for Urban Pedagogy. *What is Affordable Housing?*  
(<http://welcometocup.org/Projects/EnvisioningDevelopment/WhatIsAffordableHousing>)

• **Week 2 Monday, September 17**

**In Class:** Discussion and Work

**Probe #02:** Framework: Find your own position.

Phase: Framework. Evidence: Primary or secondary literature

Goal: Define your position in relation to the main concept you had previously elaborated. Let's say it is "public good." What is your take on what "public good" means, how to produce it, etc? Select, summarize, and position yourself in relation to three sources on the topic. Ideally, one source is a primary source, one source is a secondary source, and the third is a source you have encountered in your day to day experience.

Outcome: 1500 word essay.

Due: Sunday, September 23, by midnight.

**Required reading:**

Neil Brenner, David Madden, and David Wachsmuth. "Assemblage Urbanism and the Challenges of Critical Urban Theory." *City* 15, no. 2 (2011): 225-40.

**Additional references:**

Pier Vittorio Aureli. "Introduction - Towards the Archipelago: Defining the Political and the Formal in Architecture." In *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*. Writing Architecture. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.

Erik Swingedow. "More-than-Human Constellations as Immuno-Biopolitical Fantasy in the Urbicene." *New Geographies* 09 Posthuman (2018): 20-28.

**Week 3 Monday, September 24**

**In Class:** Discussion and work.

**Probe #03.** Problem: Connect Universal and Specific.

Phase: Content. Evidence: Primary or secondary literature, maps, plans, regulations, other sources of documentation.

Goal: How is the (general) notion that you are exploring present, how is it articulated, how does it affect (or not) the (specific) case you are considering? For

instance, what is the "bottom-up" in the Chinese building, how is it produced, etc?  
Find out: is your case the most relevant one?

Outcome: Visualization. Express graphically the connection between these general notions with the specificity of your cases and give a list of possible resources

Due: Monday, October 1, in class.

**Required reading:**

Paola Vigano. "The Metropolis of the Twenty First Century." *OASE 80* (2009): 91-107.

**Additional references:**

Kiel Moe. *Empire, State & Building*. New York: Actar Publishers, 2017.

Paola Vigano. "The Horizontal Metropolis." In *Infinite Suburbia*, edited by Alan Berger, Joel Kotkin, Celina Balderas Guzman, and MIT Norman B. Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism, 552-559. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2017.

• **Week 4 Monday, October 1**

**In class:** Presentation and discussion.

**For Monday, October 8** or earlier (if you want to maximize your long weekend), submit the written part of your thesis document to the instructors. This will allow us to give specific feedback to you.

**For Monday, October 15**, prepare a succinct, 5-minute audio-visual presentation of your thesis and research plan. In parallel, prepare graphic material, to remain pinned up for the duration of the class.

• **Week 5 Monday, October 8 Columbus Day—NO CLASS**

• **Week 6 Monday, October 15 First Presentation**

**In class:** Presentation and discussion of thesis proposal.

**Probe #04. Question: Ask for the What, How, and Why.**

Phase: Framework/Format. Evidence: Primary or secondary literature.

Goal: Articulate specific research questions and think about what sources you will draw on to answer them. How have others asked questions to find answers to this problem? Explore how these main questions you are facing have been treated by

the discipline, including designers. What are the main precedents, which are your main references to consider, overcome, etc?

Outcome: Graphic essay, combining text and graphics.

Due: Monday, October 22, in class.

### **Required Reading:**

Oswald Mathias Ungers. "Grossform," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. n. 56-57 (1967): 108-113.

### **Additional References:**

Alison Smithson. "How to recognise and read matbuilding. Mainstream architecture as it has developed towards the matbuilding." *Architectural Design*, (September,1974) 373-390.

Hashim Sarkis. "New Geographics: Notes on an Emerging Aesthetic." *New Geographies* 0 (2008): 98-109.

Harold Bloom. "The Necessity of Misreading." In *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 95-126. New York: Continuum, 1984.

## **FIND YOUR ADVISORS DEADLINE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19.**

### **• Week 7 Monday, October 22**

**In class:** Discussion and work.

**Probe #05: Site, scale, territory: Investigate limits and relations.**

Phase: Content/Evidence. Type of evidence: physical evidence, secondary sources, plans, maps, and other forms of visual documentation.

Goal: to represent the site of your thesis and address questions of the different scales affecting it. This site can be literally a place in which you will intervene (the Chinese buildings), or a physical condition you will explore (one of the Utopias, the notion of island).

Outcome: visualization.

Due: Monday, October 29, in class.

### **Required reading:**

James Corner. "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention." In *Mappings*, edited by Denis E. Cosgrove. London: Reaktion Books, 1999.

### **Additional references:**

Manuel de Solà-Morales. "The Culture of Description." *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 16-25.

Stuart Elden. "Land, Terrain, Territory." *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 799–817.

Neil Brenner. "The Urban Question as a Scale Question: Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, Urban Theory and the Politics of Scale." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 361-378.

## • **Week 8 Monday, October 29**

**In class:** Discussion and work.

**Probe #06:** Time: Trace actors, unveil forces.

Phase: Content/Evidence. Type of evidence: primary or secondary sources, This could include an interview with a stakeholder, which would problematize the question of memory; it could include the temporal dimensions of financial considerations (investments, interest rates); it could address questions of material durability (lifespans), maintenance, other types of life cycles, etc. It could include a detangling of what actually happened when and how ("How did we get here?"). Who was relevant when? This include actors, organizations, forces, ...

Goal: to understand the temporal dimension of your work, both in your analysis and in your proposal.

Outcome: visualization, timeline, plan (a palimpsest also talks about time), diagram (as in time-geography diagrams, or Koolhaas for Yokohama).

Due: Monday, November 5, in class.

### **Required reading:**

Errol Morris. "Which Came First: the Chicken or the Egg?" In *Believing is Seeing: Observations in the Mystery of Photography*, 3-71. New York : Penguin Press, 2011.

### **Additional reference**

Edward Eigen. "The Perils of Historical Geography: On a Lost Map to the Sunken Forest of Mount-Saint-Michel." In *On Accident*, 154-168. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.

Albena Yaneva. "Making the Social Hold: Towards an Actor-Network Theory of Design." *Design and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2009): 273-88.

Katharine Arntz Thomas. "Haussmann: Reconsidering His Role in the Transformation of Paris." In *Shapers of Urban Form: Explorations in Morphological Agency*, edited by Peter J. Larkham and Michael P. Conzen. New York: Routledge, 2014.

## **Week 9 Monday, November 5**

**In class:** Discussion and work.

**By Monday, November 12** or earlier, submit your thesis document to instructors, who will share with the guest critics, who will read this document in advance of the presentation on November 19.

**For Monday, November 19,** prepare a succinct, 5-minute presentation of your thesis and research plan.

- **Week 10 Monday, November 12 Veterans Day—NO CLASS**
- **Week 11 Monday, November 19 Second presentation with guests**

**Probe #07: Physics: Abstract ((and/or Quantify)) the Tangible**

Phase: Content/Evidence. Type of evidence: Types of construction, technologies, and materials.

Goal: to understand the materials or technologies that are involved in your research/project, and how they are in turn the result of certain forms of production. To question which are the conditions that make those materials / technologies possible.

Outcome: Charts, Tables, or diagrams—a visualization that helps to quantify and understand the choice of these technologies and materials; that is labor and other cost, sources of raw materials, transportation paths, technologies, etc.

Due: Monday, November 26 in class.

### **Required Reading:**

Andrew Herscher. "Humanitarianism's Housing Question: From Slum Reform to Digital Shelter." *e-flux* 66 (October, 2015). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/66/60745/humanitarianism-s-housing-question-from-slum-reform-to-digital-shelter/>

### **Additional references:**

Pier Vittorio Aureli. "Labor and Architecture: Revisiting Cedric Price's Potteries Thinkbelt." *Log*, no. 23 (2011): 97-118.

Robin Evans. "Figures, Doors, Passages." In *Translations from Drawing to Building and other Essays*, 54-91. London: Architectural Association, 1997.

Dolores Hayden. "Housewives in Harvard Square." In *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, 67-89. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982.

## • Week 12 Monday, November 26

**In class:** Presentation and work.

**Probe #08: Codes and Norms: Materialize the Intangible.**

Phase: Content/Evidence. Types of evidence: laws, regulations, algorithms, ...

Goal: to understand what are the social constraints that may affect your research, and how these are expressed through regulations.

Outcome: short paper, timeline, diagram.

Due: Monday, December 3, in class.

### **Required Reading:**

Daniel M. Abramson. "Urban Obsolescence." In *Obsolescence. An Architectural History*, 38-60. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

### **Additional references:**

Carl H. Nightingale. "Segregation at the Extremes." In *Segregation*, 341-359. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Nicholas de Monchaux. *Local code: 3,659 proposals about data, design & the nature of cities*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2016.

## • Week 13 Monday, December 3

In class: Presentation and work.

For Monday, December 10, in class, submit a full thesis document and documentation of the eight probes.

## • Week 14 Monday, December 10

In class: Wrap up and discussion.

**For Friday, December 14, prepare a presentaton as part of all SMarchS Pre-Thesis Presentations. See separate announcements regarding format and time.**