arch601 Graduate Topical Design Studio  spring 2015  Michael A. Ambrose, AIA - Clinical Associate Professor

aesthetics | media | politics

defining an architecture for the expression of a free press

This studio will address issues concerning architecture in the city – specifically the nature, character, and performance of various forms of public space and the relationship(s) between the intervening urban figure and the resultant spatial field. Students will be asked to privilege the idea of retaining the void - the beauty of emptiness – while producing a charged and meaningful contemporary urban environment. The studio will promote a periscopic sensibility as we will focus simultaneously on a series of independent [ultimately interdependently linked] architectural design agendas: aesthetics | media | politics

Specifically, the studio will consider:

A| the opportunity | responsibility of architecture as a political act
provide the framework or armature for the transmission and exchange of cultural ideas and information by acting in a dual capacity as the repository + transmitter of cultural content -sociopolitical implications of architecture

B| the nature/condition/type/ of aesthetic quality of public space [and form]
the city as produced through the intervention of the public-minded urban compound and the opportunities afforded by the symbiotic relationship between building and city

C| the design potential of digital | physical | hybrid media concepts and techniques
ways of thinking and making that provoke and probe biases, assumptions and conventions of architectural design and the contemporary production of architecture and architectural representation

celebrating the plastic possibilities of architecture

As an advanced studio students are expected to synthesize a broad range of research, analysis, media and design investigations into the design of a building that reflects the engagement of the sociocultural criteria as the basis for the polemic advanced by the architecture. Applied Design Research will be developed along three topic areas: aesthetics | media | politics

The primary objective of the studio is to enable the student to examine the relationship between intent and interpretation in an exploration of the design process as both a iterative and dialectic construct that alternates and oscillates between intuitive and cognitive actions in pursuit of embedding meaning through form. The studio seeks to question the means and modes of interpreting and constructing an architectural design polemic. The course views design as a social construct and promotes an inquiry into the relationship of physical and cultural identities as they engage issues of contemporary culture. Design projects will encourage translation and interpretation of concepts of space, place and time as related to an understanding of the architectural implications of program and site. Another principle concern of the course will be the investigation and expression of visual representation as both threshold and boundary of understanding and communication of intent and interpretation. The making of the design process and design product, the bounding of meaningful, inhabited space, will be engaged at both the scale of representation and building. Architects are ‘makers’ both in their drawings and in terms of that which their drawings project. Architectural constructs can be understood as the projection of ideas through the drawing of buildings. The studio will examine the development of an architectural contention and intellectual argument through the projection of ideas, principally through the devices and processes of both traditional and experimental architectural representation.
The Studio examines complex interfaces between architecture and landscape, emphasizing the integration of built form, urban, and landscape environments through the “design agency.” The studio explores urban landscapes as green infrastructure as a potentially life-sustaining and life-enhancing phenomenon – considering local precedents (disappearing wetlands, historic water systems) and integrating innovative technologies. Architecture-landscape is envisioned as hybrid/integrated spatial entity.

Colombo, Sri Lanka, is a case study of three overlapping challenges shared by cities across the globe: climate change, rapid urbanization, and rising inequality. This studio explores the role of the architect in addressing these challenges, informed by trans-disciplinary design thinking and research.

The studio is part of a multi-year collaboration with the World Bank's Metropolitan Colombo project, the University of Moratuwa School of Architecture, and government partners and stakeholders in Colombo. It is run in partnership with the World Bank and offers a real-world opportunity to have an impact at a Global scale.

This studio is a laboratory to:
• explore and test new models and methods of architectural practice to tackle complex urban challenges;
• utilize design thinking at multiple scales, integrating urban form, building, landscape, and water;
• develop innovative design solutions, which are both site-specific and replicable;
• initiate a cross-cultural forum on climate change and sustainable urbanism.

**Issues/Concepts:**
- Design Agency
- Trans-Scalar Design Thinking
- Trans-Cultural Design
- Trans-Ecological Exchanges
- System Thinking
- Integrated Urbanism
- Natural/Cultural Heritage
- Ecological Democracy
- Landscape Urbanism
- Green Infrastructure
- Building as Landscape
- Micro-Environments
- Landscape Fabrication
- Green Technologies

**Process:**
- Research, urban analysis, and mapping
  • Evolution of urban form, culture, and ecology
  • Contemporary urban morphology, including settlement patterns and infrastructure
  • Socio-economic, demographic, spatial analysis; existing policies and stakeholder priorities
- Scale I: Urban-Landscape design
  Develop a green infrastructure planning/vision
- Scale II: Landscape-Architecture design
  Site-specific design strategies, building strategies
- Scale III: Architecture-Detail design
  Building development, built-in green (bio)technologies
Although it is evident that no political or urban system functions solely on the basis of formal and structured processes, and despite its crucial role in the formation and growth of contemporary cities, informality remains mostly peripheral to debates in urban studies.

The [in] FORMAL urban and architectural strategies ARCH 601 Studio seeks to explore the ‘interconnection’ between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ methods of conceptualizing and constructing the socio-urban project. The course will emphasize the study of the following thematic dichotomies in relationship to the political position of the profession:

- formal :: informal
- centrality :: periphery
- legal :: illegal
- static :: dynamic
- structured :: unstructured
- predictable :: unpredictable
- power :: empowerment
- isolation :: interaction
- traditional :: radical
- institutions :: social movements

The course will be divided into 3 parts:

- **theory _research** :: understanding of the formal/informal dichotomy.
- **case studies _analysis** :: learning from previous experiences in Brazil, Medellin, Costa Rica.
- **application _design** :: an urban and architectural design project in southwest Baltimore in collaboration with GENSLER Baltimore and the Southwest Partnership.

Who should take this studio? Anyone interested in:

- spatial agency
- the social/political implications of architecture and urban design
- multi-scalar, holistic design processes: from the urban to the architectural
- strategies of urban articulation and urban acupuncture
- experimental housing strategies
- the Global South
- the urban landscapes of favelas, barrios, ghettos, etc.

If you have any questions, contact Professor Luis Quiros: ldquiros@umd.edu

Images: Best Thesis Award: Urban Interventions: Architecture as a Mechanism for Inclusion, Carolina Uechi