

*“The environments we have made and saved and the environments we are now making offer (the most) persistent evidence of what is important to us and what we believe in. By these environmental means we continuously enculturate the young, orient both visitor and habitué in time and space, articulate attitudes, express feelings, and cue individual and social behavior. Our thoughts are nourished, our feelings conditioned, and our actions guided by our interpretations of the signals inherent in our surroundings. Our self-made environment is the soil supporting our culture and feeding its roots. In an infinite number of ways the built environment serves as a universal channel of social communication, and through its use a commonwealth of denotative, connotative, and prescriptive images becomes established. This is a prerequisite to a cooperative social life”* Philip Thiel

## Contemporary Issues in Design

### Design: Ideas, Innovation & Change

The design and construction of architecture arise out of particular social, political, economic and aesthetic ideas, values and/or beliefs (culture). Ideas about buildings and buildings themselves can change culture.

This design thesis seminar and studio’s approach is based on the belief that design is a form of argument and persuasion for ideas about how the world should change. A good design is a good idea for change.

Design is a form of innovation. Innovation is the introduction of a new idea or method of doing something or the application of an existing idea in a new way.

Design is also a form of research that articulates and advances a hypothesis and philosophical position (an argument) and uncovers facts and issues related to the situation the design is intended to address.

### The Seminar and the Studio

Students formulate projects in the Fall quarter seminar to complete the design of in the three quarter thesis design studio. Projects are invited that attempt to respond to selected “**Contemporary Issues in Design**”. Projects which seek to address issues of **housing and urban community design** are particularly welcome. Thesis projects should be “visionary” in that they propose things which could affect the evolution of culture and which could raise consciousness, but they should also be plausible and useful, seeking to address a “real” place, situation, and set of issues, which a client entity might even advocate and try to carry forward.

A completed thesis project will comprehensively answer three simple questions:

- (1) What are the place, situation and project that you are concerned with?
- (2) What are the issues? Why are you concerned? Why is it important that we be interested?
- (3) What design response have you proposed and why?

Your answers will be maintained by argument and evidence and tested through dialectic.

Your thesis proposition will make assertions. Your design and supporting materials will illuminate the validity and significance of your proposition and vice versa. The success of your project will depend on the clarity and fertility of the proposition and the quality and relevance of the design and arguments constructed to substantiate and support it.

### Some Useful Definitions

What is a “thesis” and why do we use this word to describe the project students will undertake?

A few definitions from Webster’s Dictionary may be helpful.

**hypothesis, n. 1.a:** An assumption or concession made for the sake of argument. **b:** An interpretation of a practical situation or condition taken as the ground for action.

**thesis, n. 1.** A position or proposition that a person (such as a candidate for scholastic honors or academic degree) advances and offers to maintain by argument **4.** The first stage of dialectic...

**dialectic, n.** 1. discussion and reasoning by dialogue as a method of intellectual investigation, the Socratic techniques of exposing false beliefs and eliciting truth. **5.a:** any systematic reasoning, exposition, or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict **b:** an intellectual exchange of ideas

**synthesis, n.** **2.a:** deductive reasoning **b:** the dialectic combination of thesis and antithesis into a higher stage of truth.

**culture, n, 5.a :** the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, and artifacts and depends upon humankind's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

### **Tasks**

Students present and defend their design projects to the studio, to the faculty, and to the public in at least three formal juried presentations and two exhibitions.

At the end of each quarter students submit project "books" in both hard copy and digital form.

The submittal (deliverables) of the Design Thesis will be in four forms. All four are required. They are:

1. **Public presentation/exhibition** of your completed design thesis project.
2. Two complete copies of a well written, informative, illustrated, interesting **Design Thesis Project "book."**
3. A copy of the Design Thesis Project documentation "book" in electronic/digital format on a **CD**.
4. Two page illustrated Design Thesis Project summary/abstract in a specified format for publication.

### **Field Trips**

For an architect, travel is always a form of research. It is essential and transformative to experience other places and buildings firsthand. We will take at least two and possibly three field trips during the year. Field trip destinations will be selected by studio consensus.

So far we have taken excellent field trips to Seattle, Los Angeles, Boston, and New York.

Students are also encouraged to travel on their own in order to do research for their projects if necessary and feasible. In the past, students have traveled to places such as Washington DC, Copenhagen, Argentina, Alaska, Las Vegas, and many other cities in the west for information related to their projects.

### **Schedule**

**Fall Quarter 2004:** Research Present Topic, Issues, Precedents, Site, and Design Constraints & Possibilities

#### **Seminar:**

Read a series of writings on contemporary issues in design and participate in discussions with the group. Select and research a topic of interest which will be appropriate around which to develop and complete an architectural design thesis project. Write a series of abstracts on the topic and then develop the thesis program/proposal through a series of drafts and outlines to culminate in a document setting forth the critical position, precedents, and program. Present the project informally for discussion by the group.

#### **Pre-Design and Schematic Design Studio:**

Begin with a short design project to investigate issues.

Do thorough research on and prepare presentation of topic, issues, and precedents.

Do thorough site documentation, analysis and modeling. Determine size and scope of project.

Complete enough schematic design to illustrate constraints and possibilities.

Present/defend the thesis project and research in a juried review.

Submit first edition of Design Thesis Project documentation "book."

#### **Winter Quarter 2005: Design and Design Development Studio**

Develop design thesis project and present/defend in three reviews.

Submit second edition of thesis "book" to include design work to date.

#### **Spring Quarter 2005: Design Development, Presentation, and Documentation Studio**

Complete design thesis project and present it in at least one (possibly two) public exhibition(s).

Submit final edition of thesis "book" in both two physical and one digital form including documentation of all design work.

## **More About the Subject: What are “Contemporary Issues in Design”?**

By way of **example**, consider the following propositions:

1. Architecture is deontic and affirmative; it is an expression of values and beliefs.
2. Architecture is strategic. It is designed to help make something happen; practically and/or culturally.
3. Architecture is material. It is designed to be buildable, and therefore relies on expertise in the full spectrum of technologies required for implementation: communicating and making.
4. Architecture is conceptual. It is a system of understanding. It is an idea that exists only for those who understand it.
5. Architecture is rooted in consideration of the place, time, and culture of its construction.

How do these propositions relate to the current “post-modern” condition of trying to create architecture in the context of the commodity driven commercial culture leftover from late 20th century capitalism?

A context in which the value placed on quality design is negligible at best, in which technological changes have placed as much value on the vicarious and derivative as on the authentic and original, in which image is material, seeing replaces being, in which culture is becoming both more global and homogenized, in which the exigencies of the degradation of the natural, social and built environment call for an increasing understanding of wholistic complexity, but the political system is driven by over-simplification and a return to fundamentalism, and in which power to shape the built environment still lies for the most part outside the discipline of architecture (as it always has).

We will attempt to list many of the contemporary issues that provide the context in which we make design propositions in the world and we will investigate and present the thesis projects in relation to these issues.

Readings for the seminar will be selected to support the projects undertaken.

### **The Kind of Projects We Do**

We have had a large variety of excellent and creative projects in the past three years.

Some of these projects have been very influential outside of the school. Some are more speculative and some are more practical. One characteristic that virtually all of the projects in this studio share is that they propose new ideas and new ways of looking at things. The projects challenge assumptions and provoke response. They are idea-rich.

### **2003-04 Projects**

*“Cycles”* Interpretive Intervention in Poly Canyon

This is a design/build project for the first intervention in Poly Canyon the sole purpose of which is interpretation of the canyon itself.

*“Architecture As Prosthetic”* Cambodia

Design for a floating clinic on a lake in Cambodia for the treatment and care of victims of land mines.

*“Intensification”* Mixed-Use Campus Core Cal Poly SLO

Strongly influenced by Copenhagen, this is a proposal for a more urbanized spatially rich and sustainably designed campus core to include housing.

*“Trans Bay “Green” Transit Tower”* San Francisco

Design of a mixed-use high-rise building adjacent to the Trans Bay Terminal incorporating green sky lobbies and influenced by the work of Ken Yeang, Morphosis, and Charles Correa among others.

*“Institutional Intervention”* Middle East Cultural Center LA

The design of a center to resist cultural stereotypes and bring accurate information and urban identity to a high-profile site in downtown in LA.

*“Indicator: Stormwater Treatment & Interpretive Center”* Dana Point, California

An infrastructure function normally considered mundane, designed here as a provocative, educational, and transcendent experience of nature, place and purpose.

*“SLO Living”* Mixed-Use Housing In Downtown San Luis Obispo

A critical, visionary, yet practical project demonstrating the need, value, and feasibility of mixed-use urban infill housing in downtown San Luis Obispo.

*“Affordable Multi-family Housing in Downtown Los Angeles”*

Incorporating both a small tower and townhouses on a podium, this project proposes a family friendly mixed-use, mixed income housing project on a high profile site in downtown LA.

*“Synergy: Revitalization of Fulton Mall”* Fresno, California

An urban design intervention into one of the fastest growing and most needy communities in California which incorporates infill housing, cultural diversity, transit, and a new interpretation of the mall as tools for revitalization of urbanity.

*“Enhancing Community Spirit”* Jamestown Children’s Community Center San Francisco

State and federal support for education of children continues to decline. This design project envisions a much needed facility for a real community service provider client in San Francisco.

*“The Evolving California House & Open Space Planning”* Morro Bay, California

Can single family housing developments every really be considered “green” anymore? This project attempts to illustrate the potential for new kinds of low density housing developments. It is based on the work of Randall Arendt, the “case-study house” program, and San Luis Obispo’s own “Mome” project among others.

*“Mixed-Use Urban Housing and Great Urban Space”* San Diego, California

This project proposes how a strategically located mixed-use building can also bring dramatic public open space to a city.

*“Dis Lodge: Hostel & Public Space Along Sacramento River”* Redding, California

Proposed for a site adjacent to the new bridge designed by Santiago Calatrava, this project brings new ideas about connections to nature, to the rest of the world, and within the town itself to this city.

*“A-V:MNRS Palimpsest: Urban Infill Housing”* San Francisco, California

When the freeway was taken down very interesting sites for development emerged. This project proposes unique forms of housing for these sites and is being worked on in conjunction with a local community group.

*“Emotion in Architecture: A Healing Center”* San Luis Obispo, California

How the special evocative qualities of architecture can enhance key emotions and promote healing.

*“Liberations: A School for English as a Second Language”* San Francisco, California

A historic bank building, built by earlier “new Americans” is transformed in this adaptive re-use project into a language school and service center for contemporary “new Americans.”

*“Marketplace: Public Market on a recovered “Big Dig” site”* Boston, Massachusetts

An international competition entry design for a food market hall influenced by market halls around the world such as Firenze’s Mercato Centrale, Seattle’s Pike Place Market, and others; and as a key urban design intervention.

## **2002-03 Projects**

*“Exploratorium of Human Arts”* Artist’s Housing in San Francisco

Proposal for newly constructed artist’s live/work housing influenced by projects in Paris, Seattle, Los Angeles, Boston, New York, and San Francisco. This project asserts that artists are essential to the culture and argues for a public commitment of support for artist housing.

*“Incrustation’: Architecture + Clothing”*

This is primarily a theory project that compares ideas about architecture and structure with ideas about clothing and the body in relation to the work of Gottfried Semper.

*“re:THINKING! The Spatial Organization of CAED”*

All of the CAED facilities are scheduled to be renovated and changed in the next few years. This student acted as a “project architect” for the college and succeeded in transforming the process the college had set up to plan for those changes. This project has succeeded in articulating a persuasive vision for the college facilities that is both innovative and feasible. This project will probably have a huge impact on the future design of the CAED.

*“Harmonious Living Environment at Orcutt in SLO”*

In SLO valuable farmland is rapidly disappearing under tract home developments while the hills have been off-limits for development. This project turns conventional thinking on its head and demonstrates one way valuable farm land can be preserved, yet the housing supply increased through the design of a beautiful, dense “hill-town” for San Luis Obispo.

*“Link: 101 Freeway Lid for SLO”*

This project proposes a “lid” over the 101 freeway in San Luis Obispo which would generate almost 40 acres of very strategically located developable land for housing that would serve both the campus and the town. The project is informed by the world-wide trend called “freeway mitigation” to repair freeway damaged urban fabric in cities by putting freeways in cities under “lids.”

*“Advanced Science Research Ctr. @ Columbia Univ., NYC”*

How common circulation space can improve human interaction and idea exchange. This project proposes the design of a vertical circulation atrium and upper story horizontal connection between 3 research buildings at Columbia University in New York which would improve social interaction among the researchers and better connect them to the campus and the city.

*“Capitol Milling Bldg. Adaptive Re-use, L.A., CA”*

Many older buildings have a much better material quality than many newer buildings. This project proposes how a great old building in Los Angeles “Chinatown” can be adapted to future uses through design interventions that both improve it and celebrate its materiality. This project is influenced by the work of Carlos Scarpa and others.

*“Surfrider Foundation Center at Newport Pier”*

The Newport (California) pier is in an extraordinary setting. This project proposes that the entire pier should be transformed into an instrument for increasing understanding and focusing awareness about the qualities and value of the natural environment of the ocean beaches and how they should be preserved. The project attempts to do for perception of the ocean beach what James Turrell does for perception of the sky.

*“Ephemeral Settlements: Mobile Emergency Community”*

Disasters, both natural and man-made, often produce large numbers of displaced people (refugees). This project proposes how basic services, housing, sanitation, and communication can be quickly provided for people in this situation.

*“L.A.: Connecting Spaces of Flow with Spaces of Place”*

Los Angeles is an extraordinary city that illustrates contemporary problems and potentials of urban design. Starting with an analysis of L.A. in terms of spaces and flows, this project seeks to transform a site adjacent to MacArthur Park into a combination subway station and community center. The project illustrates how an architectural intervention can organize and accentuate myriad flows of people and commerce, and connect those flows creating a place which serves a community.

*“Shellhouse: S.C. de Bariloche Rowing Club”*

This project uses the design of a rowing club building in Argentina to illustrate the qualities of rowing as a form of exercise and meditation.

*“Urban Dwellings: Environments & Space in Spokane Washington”*

Combining urban connectedness with strong climatic responsive design in a large building in the city generates surprising and unconventional forms.

*“Family Friendly Urban Living in San Diego, CA”*

This project proposes how to make the city more family friendly and includes provocative proposals for adaptive re-use of existing office buildings as family housing.

*“Entertainment Architecture”*

This project examines, through the design of an experimental performing arts center on the riverfront in Chattanooga Tennessee, how large scale performance and architecture both relate to concepts of spectacle.

*“Bringing Urbanity to the Small City”*

Project proposes how small central valley California cities can be greatly improved through development of mixed-use buildings.

*“The One Mile Spine”*

A mile-long connecting and organizing circulation arcade structure for Cal Expo in Sacramento.

**Selected 2001-02 projects**

*“Succession: Evolution & Adaptive Re-Use of Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant”*

The Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant will be de-commissioned by about 2050. What will happen to the “indestructible” construction there after it is no longer a power plant? This project examined the facility’s extraordinary size and construction and proposed its transformation into a world heritage site dedicated to understanding the ocean.

*“The Democratic Institution Abroad: A New American Embassy for the People of Afghanistan”*

When everyone was talking about building on the World Trade Center Site, this project looked at problems with how the United States is represented by its embassies and how the design of the U.S. embassy could better represent the best ideals of our country abroad.

*“Spa at San Simeon point/counterpoint to Hearst Castle”*

Hearst Castle represents a very materialistic and manipulative attitude about nature and culture. This project, influenced by the traditions of the Japanese tea ceremony, proposed a spa nearby that would exemplify a more ascetic and integrated approach to nature and culture.

*“Volume: Perception of Sound as a Model for Perception of Space”*

In the tradition of Bill Viola, Robert Irwin, James Turrell, and others, This project proposed an intervention in a very large parking garage in San Francisco for sound art installations and enhanced perception of space.

*“re:05: Major Surgery on Cal Poly Architecture Building #5 inc. Student Housing”*

This project addressed the special housing needs and opportunities for fifth year architecture students at Cal Poly and proposed the addition of 150 apartments on top of Building #5 and #21, major redesign of both buildings, and change in the way Cal Poly works as a living/learning community by transforming the campus into more of an “urban village.”

*“process[R]evolution: Urban Infill Community in Las Vegas”*

This was a two-person team project which critically examined the phenomenon of Las Vegas and proposed a whole new “hidden” neighborhood for people who actually live and work in Las Vegas. The project was influenced by sources as varied as Adbusters magazine, the Kasbah in Marrakech, Morocco, and Harry Potter’s “Diagon Alley.”

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if you have any questions about this prospectus.