

4.288 Preparation for SMArchS Urbanism Thesis

MIT Architecture Fall 2024

Units: 3-0-6

Tuesdays 2-5, Location 1-277

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Course Description

This course is a semester-long, structured process and conversation that will support each individual student's definition of a thesis proposal.

In this class sets to achieve three main goals:

1. To develop a thesis proposal: that is, to define your thesis topic, research questions, conceptual framework, methods and sources, as well outcomes and format.
2. To test a range of research methods and theoretical approaches to your thesis topic through short, weekly exercises.
3. To sharpen your ability to critically analyze and comment on a range of evidence in written, verbal, and visual form.

Structure and Requirements

1. Constructing a proposal through **weekly exercises** (wks 1-5)
2. Midterm presentation and **thesis proposal document** to share with potential advisors (wks 7-8)
3. Meeting with and **matching with a thesis advisor**
4. Plan and facilitate **an in-class workshop** (activity/exercise/conversation) that helps you think about or work on your thesis (wks 9-13)
5. **Final Proposal Document** and presentation.

Completion Requirements

- Participation: includes prompt class attendance, participation in class, leading your workshop. Two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
- Completion and submitting of weekly exercises. Unless otherwise noted or discussed, weekly assignments are to be saved to dropbox folder by 5:00 pm Monday before following class.
- Individual/paired Thesis documents (at midterm and final).

Evaluation Criteria & Grading

60% Milestones (20% midterm presentation, 20% student-led workshop, 20% final presentation)

20% Attendance and participation

20% Mid and Final Thesis Documents

Resources

<https://archthesis.mit.edu/>

<https://architecture.mit.edu/graduate-programs#thesis>

Writing and Communication Center

<https://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/>

E18-233, 50 Ames Street

- Individual Consultations on oral, visual, and written projects
- Workshops on various aspects of academic writing
- Writing Together Online program
- Peer-review Group for Creative Writers

Weekly Schedule and Assignments

W1

Tues. 9/10 Introduction / Visual Thoughts

- topics: research, idea/concept, field/context/discipline, constructing relevance, visual thinking, process/method, discourse/conversation/sharing, transformation/expansion
- forms: building, circulating media (drawings, publications, images), language
- method: keywords, questions, word/image, bibliography, conversation

For Tues. 9/17

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

Meetings: Sign up for individual check-in with AU and RS (separately)

Assignment: Concept and Keywords

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 500-750 words 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 in English and other languages, if applicable. Also consider the particular ways you mean to use the word within architecture and urbanism, how it embodies certain values, and becomes operative in what you are working towards. Begin by selecting a series of terms relevant to your work, and then narrow it down to one. From the series of terms, include up to 10 relevant ones as a list at the end of your document.

Due to dropbox on Monday 9/16, by 5pm.

W2

Tues. 9/17

Concept and Keywords

Discuss Concept and Keywords and upcoming exercise

Presentation:

Cheng Hsin Chan (SMArchS Urbanism 2024, Advisor: Shieh)

Damp Skin: Portraits of Taiwanese Domesticity, Resilience, and Otherness

For Tues. 9/24:

Reading: Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts,"

"...the subjunctive is a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities." – Hartman, 11

Assignment: Question as method

Goals: Use questioning as a form of zeroing in on the main topics, themes, and propositions you are exploring. What do you want to know and how will you frame your work? Think of questions as ways to imagine (What if?) that lead to potential actions (If -, then -? Or?). Use questioning as a means to find the direction of your work, its methods and process.

Outcome: Start by writing whatever questions your thesis is asking, you are asking with your thesis, what questions you have about the assumptions you are making, one after the other. This is a kind of "free write" as a way of getting as much as you can on the page, to think on the page, through the form of questions and what they beget, that then lead to more, "better" questions. If you are sometimes inclined to answer your own questions, go ahead and do so in full sentences, or with other questions, and if you change your mind afterwards, do not erase or delete, but state why and then adjust and keep moving. Some questions may lead to other questions, some may suggest more than one alternative response. Find a way to write it all down, keeping each portion to 1-2 lines. Select, edit and order this as list of 8-15 questions (1-2 lines each).

Due to dropbox on Monday 9/23, by 5pm.

W3

Tues. 9/24

Questions

Discuss Questions and upcoming exercise

Guest Presentation:

Sarine Vosgueritchian (SMArchS Urbanism 2023, Advisor: Gupta and Salgueiro)

Looking for Pirdoudan: The Past, Present, and Future of Mining in Armenia **TBC**

For Tues. 10/1

Reading:

Maria S. Giudici, "Alone Like the Horn of a Rhino: Reproduction, Affective Labor, and the Contemporary Boarding House in South Korea," *Harvard Design Magazine*, No 46 (Fall/Winter 2018), 34-41.

Arthur Jafa in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist (2016):

<https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/arthur-jafa/arthur-jafa-hans-ulrich-obrist/>

Assignment: Invisible and Visible

Goal: To understand the intangible often hidden forces, social and legal constraints—not immediately represented in built form, but embedded in regulations, codes, laws, habits, customs that shape built form—that may affect your research and project.

Outcome: Prepare no more than 10 slides of images and 1-2 sentences per slide, that takes a fragment of your research as a point of departure to identify, uncover and present the otherwise intangible forces.

Due to dropbox on Monday 9/30, by 5pm.

W4

Tues. 10/1

10 Images

Share 10 images and discuss upcoming exercise

Guest Presentation:

Malcolm Rio (SMArchS Urbanism 2019, Advisor: Dutta) – **remote: RM 3-329**

Drag hinge : "reading" the scales between architecture and urbanism

For Tues. 10/8

Reading: Ursula LeGuin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, 165-170. Grove Press, 1989.

Assignment: Annotated Bibliography

Goal: Understand the different sources that you will need to consider in your work, the relation between them, and the role they will play in your thesis.

Outcome: Select 10 to 20 sources that will inform your thesis. Consider which are your primary sources (archival material, people), secondary sources (relevant literature), and what other documents are important for you (data, plans, reports, policy documents, etc.). Annotate each source in a short 1-2 sentences describing its main contribution to your work. Present your findings visually through a timeline and/or other graphic representation showing the relationship between the different documents. In the citations, adhere to standards. Chicago Manual of Style is recommended.

Due to dropbox on Monday 10/7, by 5pm.

W5

Tues. 10/8

Annotated Bibliography

Discuss Annotated Bibliography, upcoming exercise, and midterm presentations

Guest Presentation:

Gabriela Degetau Zanders (SMArchS AD 2022, Advisor Ghosn)

The Afterlife of Wells, from oil to soil in the Amazonia

For Tues. 10/14

Reading: Pier Vittorio Aureli. "Introduction, Towards the Archipelago: Defining the Political and the Formal in Architecture." In *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, 1–46. MIT Press/Writing Architecture Series, 2011.

Assignment: Position

Goal: To understand the current debates about the main question you are exploring (which could be, for instance, around the concept you dealt with in assignment 1) and define your own position in relation to these debates. Try to articulate the relationship between your position and your main research questions. What do you want to know and how will you frame your work?

Outcome: 500 - 1000 word essay, organized around your research questions (one primary question, and between two and four secondary questions) and the state of discourse in relevant fields.

Due to dropbox Monday 10/21, by 5pm.

W6

Tues. 10/15 NO CLASS – Student holiday

W7

**Tues. 10/22 Presentation – group A w/guests
Individual meetings outside of class – group B + RS / Group A + AU**

For Group 1

- Meet with AU+RS in preparation for 11/5
Deadline: Monday 10/28
- Sends reading/viewing/project assignment to the class
Deadline: Tuesday 10/29 midnight

W8

**Tues. 10/29 Presentation – group B w/guests
Individual meetings outside of class – group A + RS / Group B + AU**

For Tues. 11/5

- Make contact with 2-3 potential advisors, set up to meet them within 2 weeks.
- Read/watch Group 1 assigned list
Deadline: Tuesday, 11/5

For Group 2

- Meet with AU+RS in preparation for 11/5
Deadline: Monday 11/4
- Sends reading/viewing/project assignment to the class
Deadline: Tuesday 11/5 midnight

****Deadline to Confirm Thesis Advisor by 11/1****

W9

Tues. 11/5 Workshopping - group 1

For Tues. 11/12

- Read/watch Group 2 assigned list

For Group 3

- Meet with AU+RS in preparation for 11/19
Deadline: Monday 11/11
- Sends reading/viewing/project assignment to the class
Deadline: Tuesday 11/13 midnight

W10

Tues. 11/12 Workshopping - group 2

For Tues. 11/19

- Read/watch Group 2 assigned list

For Group 4

- Meet with AU+RS in preparation for 11/19
Deadline: Monday 11/18
- Sends reading/viewing/project assignment to the class
Deadline: Tuesday 11/19 midnight

W11

Tues. 11/19 Workshopping - group 3

For Tues. 12/3

- Read/watch Group 4 assigned list

W12

Tues. 11/26 NO CLASS

W13

Tues. 12/3 Workshopping - group 4

For Tues. 12/10

Assignment: Abstract

Write a 250 word abstract description of your thesis and select a single image to represent it, with a title.

Due Monday 12/9 by 5pm.

W14

Tues. 12/10 Abstracts

Review of abstracts and test run for final.

Thurs. 12/12 Final Presentation and conversation w/guests (time and location TBC)