

Instructors

Kiel Moe, Visiting Professor
Mohamad Nahleh, Teaching Fellow

kielmoe@mit.edu
nahle@mit.edu

Teaching Assistants

Jensen Johnson
Zachary Schumacher

jensenaj@mit.edu
zschumac@mit.edu

MIT Architecture Course Description

Preparatory research development leading to a well-conceived proposition for the MArch design thesis. Students formulate a cohesive thesis argument and critical project using supportive research and case studies through a variety of representational media, critical traditions, and architectural/artistic conventions. Group study in seminar and studio format, with periodic reviews supplemented by conference with faculty and a designated committee member for each individual thesis.

2022 Expanded Course Description

Consider this course, and the next several months of work extending into your last semester, less as a *final* project and more of the *initial* framing of a design practice. The most important thing you will design in a school of architecture is what and how you will design when you leave that school of architecture: what that practice is, who it is for, what issues it addresses, its manifold environments and techniques, its spatial politics, its desired outcomes, etc. This framing most certainly entails the production of a “well-conceived proposition” per the official course description. However, we will not delimit that proposition to a thesis developed in the short-term for a degree requirement, but rather as propositions for design practices that are fit for the non-simple, non-stable horizon of design and life in the coming decades. To that end, this course is not really about the ending of your M.Arch program, but rather it is about the beginning of a five or ten year practice.

Thesis projects in architecture traditionally obsess over the recent past of disciplinary preoccupation, and in the best cases offer clever—but often minor—inflections as the endgame. The larger outcome of this tradition is thousands of PDFs, silently filed on hard drives. We wonder if that tradition serves you well because the lives and careers of current and future students will simply be unlike the lives and careers of current architecture faculty and practicing architects. The lives and careers of current and future students will be shaped and impacted by systemic transformations—some of which are entirely welcome and necessary; and some of which will be quick, shocking, and even devastating. The lives and careers of current students are arguably better served by the consideration and elaboration of practices fit for the storms of this century.

So, in a gush of goodwill, this course is conceived not merely as “Thesis Prep”, but rather an opportunity to prepare a new set of design practices, to reason and imagine your next steps as an architect/citizen designer. This will most certainly entail a thesis—*a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved*—but charges that cognitive activity with future oriented opportunities and obligations. To do so, you will most certainly evince your command of architecture as a discipline: its discourses and techniques. But that command is *never* an end unto itself. This course is, in this sense, a generous opportunity to frame and trial novel practices that deepen and extend architecture’s role—*as well as your role*—in this century.

A thesis entails overtly independent work. Yet we will simultaneously recognize that the best thesis works are independent endeavors that nonetheless are reliant on a range of voices and perspectives: peers, mentors, instructors, advisors, readers, and likely a range of non-academic voices. Independent but reliant. So part of your work is to cultivate knowledge communities for your work, and actively contribute to that of your peers. To this end, you will work with and through a range of groups as you develop your thesis.

At the conclusion of the class students are expected to produce a dossier of varied media. This document will clearly define the practice and its method, media, histories and futures, its constituencies, contexts, and ultimately, its outcomes. The thesis proposal will be submitted to the thesis coordinator and thesis advisor for signed approval before advancing to the final thesis semester.

Format

Thesis Prep is pursued in multiple ways [a] in class; [b] in content groups; and [c] under the guidance of a Thesis Advisor. The Thesis Prep class will thus follow several different formats ranging from workshops sessions, through working groups to individual meetings and progress presentations.

[a] Thesis Prep Class: The Course meets weekly for three hours. The class is organized in nine modules conceived to help advance the design research and further develop the thesis proposal document.

[b] Thesis Content Group (“Cogs”): Groups of 4 to 6 students focus smaller and more targeted conversations within the thesis cohort. The Cog group will identify and develop a Commons: a body of methods, readings, and projects to outline an area of discourse and practice over the course of the semester and establish a disciplinary vocabulary and conversation. Cogs are required to meet weekly and prior to the class meeting with the Teaching Assistants.

[c] Thesis Advisor: Students will work with their Thesis Advisor in the final third of the semester to further focus the specific argument, content, and methodology of their Thesis Project. You should hold your first meeting no later than March 31. It is recommended that students hold two meetings with their Advisors before submitting the Thesis Proposal document.

Completion Requirements

- **Participation:** includes prompt class attendance and being part of the in-class and working group discussions. More than two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
- **Meetings with Thesis Advisor**, once they have been assigned
- **Completion of weekly course assignments** (“Protocols”) in a timely manner. Work in the class will build sequentially. Therefore, regular and incremental development is of great importance. All weekly assignments are to be posted to course CANVAS by 11:00 pm Tuesday.
- **Cog Group** meeting participation and support of peer work
- **Individual Thesis Proposal Dossier/Book.**

Evaluation Criteria & Grading

- **50% Presentations** (15% mid-review, 15% progress, 20% final presentation)
- **25% Participation** in class, weekly Protocol submissions, Cogs, responsiveness to feedback
- **25% Final Thesis Prep Proposal Book**

The following criteria will be used for the evaluation of your work, both in terms of helping your progress and in final grading:

- 1. Thesis Articulation:** How clearly are you articulating the premise and relevance of your thesis to the discipline and to salient issues of this century?
- 2. Design Research and Media:** How well do your media and method decisions help clarify and advance your research?
- 3. Participation:** How actively and how constructively are you involved in class discussions and Cog Group conversations?
- 4. Response to Criticism:** How effectively do you take advantage of criticism from instructors, Cog members, outside jurors, and your own self-critique?

Learning Culture

The Department of Architecture promotes a learning environment that supports the diverse values of the entire MIT community of students, faculty, administration, staff and guests. Fundamental to the mission of architectural education is the stewardship of this diversity in a positive and respectful learning environment that promotes the highest intellectual integrity.

Academic Integrity/Honesty

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and action. At MIT, students will be given unusual opportunities to do research and undertake scholarship that will advance knowledge in different fields of study. Students will also face many challenges. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute's policies regarding academic integrity, which is available at *Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students*.

Cognition in the Wild



Practice | Project



Method | Media



Immediate | Mediate



Know | Now



Knew | New



Constituency | Constitution



Site | Cite



Effects | Affects

Course Schedule

1 Feb 2 COGNITION IN THE WILD

Reading:

- 1.) Hutchins, Edwin. "Welcome Aboard." Introduction. In *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. [read before first class]

Protocol 1 [due Feb 9]

2 Feb 9 PRACTICE | PROJECT

Reading:

- 1.) Allen, Stan. "PRACTICE vs PROJECT." *PRAXIS: Journal of Writing + Building* 1, no. (1999): 112–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24328803>.
- 2.) Graeber, David, and D. Wengrow. "Wicked Liberty: The Indigenous Critique and the Myth of Progress." In *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.

Protocol 2

3 Feb 16 MEDIA | METHOD

Reading:

- 1.) Meindertsma, Christien. *Pig 05049* <<https://christienmeindertsma.com/PIG-0504>>
- 2.) McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994.

Protocol 3

4 Feb 23 IMMEDIATE | MEDIATE

Reading:

- 1.) Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. "What's Left?" In *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.
- 2.) Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/research/centres/blackstudies/venus_in_two_acts.pdf

Protocol 4

5 Mar 2 KNOW | NOW

Reading:

- 1.) Shotwell, Alexis. "Conclusion: The Point, However, Is to Change It." In *Against Purity Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021.
- 2.) Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory." In *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited by William Zinsser. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- 3.) Kolbert, Elizabeth. "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds." *The New Yorker*. February 27, 2017

Protocol 5

6 Mar 9 KNEW | NEW

Reading:

- 1.) Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." In *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York (N.Y.): Oxford University Press, 1997.
- 2.) Schalansky, Judith. "Tuanaki." In *An Inventory of Losses*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2021.

Protocol 6

7 Mar 16 CONSTITUTION | CONSTITUENCY

Reading:

- 1.) Illich, Ivan. "Disabling Professions." In *Disabling Professions*. London: Boyars, 2011.
- 2.) Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009.
- 3.) Brown, Kate. "Learning to Read the Great Chernobyl Acceleration." In *Current Anthropology* 60, no. S20 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1086/702901>.

Protocol 7

- Mar 23 **Spring Break**

8 Mar 30 Mid-term Presentations

Reading: n/a

Protocol 8

9 Apr 6 SITE | CITE

Reading:

- 1.) Lopez, Barry. "Ice and Light." In *Arctic Dreams*. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.
- 2.) Tuck, Eve and Young, Wayne. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." In *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, V. 1, n. 1 (2012), 1-40.
- 3.) Wright, Alexis. "The Inward Migration in Apocalyptic Times." In *Emergence Magazine*, January 27, 2021. <<https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-inward-migration-in-apocalyptic-times/>>

Protocol 9

10 Apr 13 EFFECTS | AFFECTS

Reading:

- 1.) Saval, Nikil. "Design for the Future When the Future is Bleak." *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, September 28, 2020
- 2.) Serpell, Namwali. "The Banality of Empathy," *New York Review of Books*, March 2, 2019

Protocol 10

11 Apr 20 PROGRESS VIDEO {no large class}

Reading: n/a

Protocol 11

12 Apr 27 X-COG WORKSHOPS {no large class}

Reading: n/a

Protocol 12

13 May 4 FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Reading: n/a

Protocol 13

14 May 18 FINAL THESIS DOSSIER SUBMISSION

Submit final Thesis dossier PDF/media