Portland Architecture Program . University of Oregon
Arch 683 . Option II Graduate Design Studio . Fall 2013
Instructors:  Gerald Gast, Suenn Ho

Alberta Neighborhood Library and Mediatheque. Portland

Musashino Art University Library. Tokyo

Studio Introduction: Architecture 683.

This design studio is an introduction to the Portland Track II (2-year) Graduate Architecture Program. It combines elements of architecture and urban design. The studio explores theoretical ideas and their translation into architectural and urban spaces. Building tectonics are developed as they support and reinforce design concepts.

Educational Themes of the Studio

Neighborhood-Scale Civic Architecture. The project focuses on a neighborhood library and mediatheque for the Alberta neighborhood in Northeast Portland. The studies will include an urban design charrette to develop an understanding of neighborhood physical structure and design issues.

The Spaces Between: Collective Space / Social Space. The studio will examine issues of “collective space and social space” as discussed in Herman Hertzberger’s book Space and the Architect, a series of essays on architecture which explore “in between space” and the city.

Creative Design Inquiry. As a graduate design studio, participants are expected to engage in rigorous design research and inquiry, seeking sources beyond those assigned. Students are encouraged to expand their design skills to explore the conceptual “boundaries” of the project, developing an experimental design process.
Comprehensive Design. The University of Oregon’s Graduate Program emphasizes a comprehensive design process: the integration of studies in theory, history, design skills, human factors, sustainability and tectonics (structure, construction and environmental systems) in design studio work. The studio organization and project will be guided by this philosophy.

Environmentally Sustainable Design. The studio places high priority on sustainable design that conserves energy, reduces carbon emissions and promotes the use of non-toxic and recyclable building materials. Students will be expected to document the sustainability performance of their proposals.

The Project

Neighborhood

The Alberta neighborhood has experienced an impressive regeneration during the past 10 years as a result of City actions and community initiatives. Although gentrification has been an issue, Alberta is one of the most diverse residential districts in the city, a true “Jane Jacobs neighborhood with active street life, pedestrian orientation and a rich variety of destinations one can walk to.

Purpose and Client

The Alberta Library and Mediatheque is envisioned as a new neighborhood public place in Alberta.

The primary design question you will need to ask and answer, paraphrasing Louis Kahn’s words, “What does this building want to be?” This is both a programming and design issue. A short period of research and program development will precede conceptual design studies.

The French word “mediatheque” signifies a “media library”. It may include traditional media such as books, magazines and photographs, as well as emerging digital media in film, video and other formats. A Library and Mediatheque may represent different concepts in different communities. You will need to clearly define the building in the context of its client and location. This will require careful study of the neighborhood context, site and community to shape the building program and design.

Precedents

Sendai Mediatheque

Sendai Mediatheque. Toyo Ito

Toyo Ito describes the Sendai Mediatheque as rooted in the idea of “fluid” space of technology and nature. Rather than viewing media as a foreign element to nature, he considers new media an integral part of the contemporary urban environment. The building was conceived as a transparent cube through which thin floor plates float suspended on organic “tubes.” The cube is meant to be read as a small representative element of
an infinite information space, with the four edges sealed with glass facades. Through their reflections, the facades allow the building to alternately dematerialize or repeat, creating a kind of ephemeral connection with infinite space.

This concept of ephemeral space is intimately linked with the Mediatheque’s mission to be barrier-free, in the sense of providing specialized services to those with visual, auditory or other physical impairments. Ito considers the new library, as its role in the city shifts from a place of mere access to text-based information, requires a corresponding shift in the meaning of the term barrier-free to include a removal of architectural barriers which dictate how a space must be used.

The Sendai Mediatheque is informed by Mies' Barcelona Pavillion and Le Corbusier’s Domino house as precedents.

**Mt. Angel Abbey Library.** Mt Angel, Oregon. Alvar Aalto

Mt Angel Abbey Library. Mt Angel, Oregon

Aalto’s seminary library at Mt Angel, Oregon is one of his few buildings in the United States and a design masterpiece that represents one of his best efforts in a series of libraries for small cities and communities in Finland. The building cascades down a steep hillside making three levels of books and study spaces. The interior daylighting, in true Aalto fashion, is splendid in its orchestration of natural light with changing patterns during the different seasons and times of day.
Seattle Public Library

Although the Seattle Library is a much larger precedent than the project at hand, it demonstrates the potential of a library to serve as a compelling public place that transcends its function. The building is an especially welcome winter oasis in the dark rainy northwest climate of Seattle. Interior spaces represent a wide range of scales from public to individual and small group settings.

The Ideas Store. London

The “Ideas Store”, located in the Borough of Tower Hamlets, London, combines the activities of a traditional library with community education classrooms, a dance studio, childcare center, café, and retail shops. The concept was carefully tailored to the specific needs of the community it serves. The neighborhood residents include new immigrants in need of education and language skills, poorer and less educated residents, and persons needing job skills and education. This precedent is most useful in terms of its program, less important in terms of the building design.
Delft University Library

Although not a city library, Delft breaks new ground in providing an open, light-filled gathering space that is the symbolic and activity center of the university. Students come to study, meet in study groups, socialize, “hang out”. Book stacks are located in a lower level, allowing the main level to be free for maximum use and human interaction.

The Work of Josep Llinas, Barcelona

The work of Josep Llinas in Barcelona demonstrates an unusually excellent body of neighborhood libraries that develop sensitive relationships to their context and careful orchestration of interior spaces. The work is illustrated in La Disolucion de la Imagen / Dissolving the Image: Josep Llinas. El Croquis, 2005.

Biblioteca Vila de Gracia. Barcelona

Stockholm Central Library

Gunnar Asplund’s Stockholm Central Library is considered a masterpiece of modern architecture. Accompanied by a public plaza and park, the library’s open and accessible space symbolizes democratic access to knowledge while making a public place of high civic value. The building has a gentle monumentality that reflects both the importance of the individual and larger community of the city.

Musashino Art University Library

Although a vast size compared to a local neighborhood library, the Mushashino example is an outstanding exploration of interior space. As symbolism, the seemingly infinite walls of bookshelves define spaces in a spiral plan that encourages exploration, gathering and choices of places to study.
Information/Questions:

Gerry Gast  geraldgast@gmail.com

**Gerald Gast** is an architect / urban designer and Associate Professor in the University of Oregon Portland Architecture Program. He is a founding principal of Gast-Hillmer Urban Design in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**Suenn Ho** is Senior Design Associate at Mulvanny G2 Architecture in San Francisco and an Adjunct faculty member in the Portland Architecture Program.