Introduction

This is a thesis studio of self-defined projects within the framework of the topical focus: “Places Full of Time”. The design studio is preceded by a Fall term preparatory research seminar. During the 9-month process, students select the final “capstone” project of their professional education, conduct in-depth research, prepare a design program, and develop rigorous design studies that include a high level of tectonic development. The emphasis of the studio is development of a comprehensive architectural project backed by a creative and rigorous research effort.

“Places Full of Time”

Renzo Piano recently remarked that the projects he found most stimulating were those dealing with existing structures, or projects with a depth of physical and cultural site history. They often require reworking or adding to an existing building, transforming / recycling a derelict site to create a renewed place, or recovering the roots of a culture that is associated with the history of a site or neighborhood.
Despite his genius as an architect, Le Corbusier’s 1923 vision of the “Radiant City”, which swept away two thousand years of urban collective memory in favor of the lure of the “new”, has been widely discredited as a viable cultural, social and environmental process for re-building cities. From the late 1960’s forward, the influence of Jane Jacobs’ prolific book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, the growing interest in preservation and conservation, and the environmental movement have all converged to orient urban architecture toward a more time-layered approach.

In his book and drawings, *Radical Reconstruction*, Lebbeus Woods advocates retaining scars of the past, including tragic ones with unpleasant memories. In the German Ruhr, one of the most environmentally-devastated industrial districts in the world, an ambitious regeneration effort emphasizes retaining the archeology of abandoned factories and industrial sites as part of a “green” environmental and economic revitalization at a regional scale. Closer to home, revival of historic public places, cultural landmarks, and neighborhoods that experienced post WW2 decline, have invigorated city centers with new energy. Sensitive community-based efforts in small rural places, exemplified by the work of Rural Studio in Alabama, demonstrate that exceptional architecture need not be limited to high-end budgets and new signature museums by star architects.

We take it for granted that historically-significant buildings and districts are worth preserving, but what about the archeology of more ordinary urban places, sites and buildings?

**Narrative Space**

The urban sociologist and historian Richard Sennett, in his book *The Conscience of the Eye*, advances the idea of “narrative space” in the city. Narrative space is the opposite of “form follows function”. It is space that provokes invention and discovery, ambiguity and surprise. He uses the example of New York children playing on the loading docks in TriBeCa, ignoring the designer playgrounds in their neighborhoods.

Narrative space is often encoded with history and time, changing over time as different generations of users appropriate urban spaces and buildings for new uses. A building with narrative qualities has spaces and forms that could serve many programs over time. It is often a “loose fit” that anticipates and invites change.

Projects that interface history and modernity can develop expressive relationships between centuries and generations, archeology and modern activities, provoking thought about the past, present and future.

Norman Foster Associates. Rebuilding of the German Reichstag. Berlin
Project Selection and Precedents

The studio anticipates a few different potential project types:

- Rehabilitation/reuse of an older structure for a new use. The seminal work of Carlo Scarpa; projects such as Renzo Piano’s Parma Opera House and Torino Fiat Factory; Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in San Francisco; MASS MOCA in North Adams, Mass, Herzog & deMeuron’s Tate Modern in London, Foster’s rebuilding of the German Reichstag serve as precedents. Our home base at the UO Portland Center is another.
- A new addition to an existing structure, or a new building that incorporates an existing building into a new composition, creatively engaging history by layering new and old. Peter Zumthor’s Diocesan Museum in Cologne, Renzo Piano’s California Academy of Sciences (which retains a wing of the pre-existing Academy), and Jean Nouvel’s Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid are notable examples.

Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid. Jean Nouvel

- A project that probes deeply into the history and “archeology” of a site. Giancarlo de Carlo’s work in Urbino, Renzo Piano’s “urban reclamation” of the old Port in Genoa, and Enric Miralles’ Santa Caterina Market in Barcelona are outstanding “catalyst” projects which employ site history to regenerate a neighborhood or district. Rural Studio’s work in Alabama builds on community history and local culture to creatively build modest new structures that serve the needs of a poor rural population.

The architecture of the historic Port. Genoa, Italy. Renzo Piano Building Workshop. The linkage of historic and new infill buildings, public spaces and paths of movement create a new symbolic and economic center to regenerate the historic port and harbor.
The project must be visionary in the way it explores theoretical and real-world issues. Ideally, it should experiment with new building and site typologies. While the project may learn from precedents around the world, it should clearly demonstrate that it has probed critical design issues in an original way.

The project includes both a building and site spaces treated as an integrated design whole. The building type and size are open. Urban design is a part of the total effort, but the scope of the urban design study should be limited in time so the architecture can be thoroughly-developed.

Site Selection

Project sites may be selected in one of two ways. First, projects may be located in one of four cities and districts that have been chosen due to revitalization efforts currently underway. These locations offer opportunities for catalyst projects that advance district urban design goals. Second, project sites may be selected in other locations of special interest to students. In the past, many students have had interests or experiences in specific cities or neighborhoods where they would like to do a project. Ideally, the studio will have at least two students working in the same district, so there may be collaboration on context analysis and urban design work.

- **Selected Cities and Districts.** These are particular locations with rich and engaging history that are currently, or soon to be, in the process of regeneration:

  **Old Town/Chinatown, Portland.** Despite recent improvement efforts, Old Town / Chinatown lags behind other parts of Downtown Portland in its revitalization. As the city’s oldest neighborhood, it is rich in physical and cultural history, waiting to achieve its full potential.

  **The Pier 70 / Union Ironworks District, San Francisco.** As the oldest surviving industrial district in San Francisco, Pier 70 has been in a state of decay for several years following the decline of the maritime, shipbuilding and industrial activities that have historically dominated the area. A new effort by the City and Port of San Francisco envisions a regeneration of the neighborhood as a mixed use waterfront district of new maritime activity, workplaces, housing and waterfront recreation. See [www.pier70sf.org](http://www.pier70sf.org)
Red Hook. Brooklyn, New York. Historic Red Hook has been in a process of revitalization in recent years. Historically an industrial, maritime and workers’ housing district, the neighborhood is now facing pressures of gentrification while trying to preserve its industrial heritage and affordable living conditions. See [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/redhookjustice/redhook.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/redhookjustice/redhook.html)

El Raval, Barcelona. As one of Barcelona’s oldest and most central neighborhoods, El Raval has historically been a troubled low income neighborhood dating back to its earliest days as Barcelona’s repository of undesirable activities. In recent years, the neighborhood has been revitalizing into an interesting and diverse mix of urban life and conditions. It contains a wide spectrum of fabric ranging from very low income tenements to Richard Meier’s white Barcelona Museum of Contemporary art. Although pockets of the neighborhood are gentrifying, half of El Raval’s population are low income immigrants, many from Muslim countries. The challenge facing the neighborhood is promote regeneration without gentrification and displacement of existing residents. See [http://geographyfieldwork.com/ElRaval.htm](http://geographyfieldwork.com/ElRaval.htm)

Open Site Selection. Students may propose sites in other cities. If you select a site outside Portland, you must have visited the city (not necessarily the site) at some time in the past, or plan to do so during the course of the school year while you are working on the project. It is highly desirable that you visit the site before the studio begins in January, although in some cases this may not be necessary. During the past few years, sites in my thesis studios have been located in Portland (approximately half), Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Montana, Vancouver and
other places in North America; as well as in Berlin, Amsterdam, Rome, Spain, Cyprus, China, Korea and other locations abroad.

The topic holds the studio together, while the diversity of sites creates a rich mix of places to compare and contrast.

Is a Self Selected Thesis for You?

A self-defined thesis may not be the best option for everyone. From past experience, approximately 80% of students who have been through this experience feel they benefited from the opportunity to select and define their own project. Most of this group felt strongly about this path, as opposed to a project, program and site being chosen by the instructor. About 15-20% of students in my studios may have benefited from the latter option, however, since they were not certain what they wanted to do, and felt they needed more direction in selecting a project. By national comparison, most of the best schools in the country have a thesis, “capstone” or final comprehensive project that is self-defined. Faculty members each have their own opinion on the matter. I believe the self-defined project is a far superior professional challenge and experience for the student, since it prepares the student for the open situation of the professional world, encouraging creativity and resourcefulness.

Following project selection, research and programming in Fall term, the design studio process is rigorously structured during the Winter and Spring terms.

Preparation During Summer

Studio participants should arrive at the beginning of Fall term with a preliminary project proposal (1-2 page statement), including a general description of the topic, building type and city where the site is to be located. The specific site may be selected during Fall term. The preliminary proposal will serve as a basis for discussion with the instructor, and we will work together to finalize the location and project selection.

Thesis Preparation Seminar: Fall Term

All students in the studio are required to enroll in the Arch 407/507 Thesis Prep Seminar (3 units). The seminar will focus on the theoretical and conceptual issues of the studio, and provide an opportunity for preparatory research. A “Thesis Statement” and Program document are prepared as a product of the seminar. Additional credits may be earned for project-related research by enrolling in independent studies with the instructor.

Architectural Programming Course

The architectural programming course taught by Jean Von Bargen is highly recommended if you have not previously prepared a building program. The Thesis Prep Seminar assumes students are conversant with research methodology and programming methods. If you are not, it is important to enroll in the programming course.

Studio Structure. Winter + Spring Terms

- Regular design studies with pin-ups take place every week to ten days during the term.

- Media selection is generally up to the student, with study guidelines issued for each pin-up and phase of work. In addition to the use of traditional and digital media, physical study models at different scales, including tectonic models, are emphasized throughout
both quarters. Physical models will be important study tools for this studio. For persons who are reluctant or do not want to build study models, this studio is not your best option.

- During the term, each student will have a specific, regular individual critique time each week. These sessions are normally 45 minute conferences. The regular weekly schedule enables the student to know exactly when she/he will meet with the instructor, timing preparation of drawings and models for the conference. Additional critique times are always available by appointment.

**Project Book / Monograph**

A project monograph / portfolio presentation is required as a final product at the end of Spring term, in addition to the traditional gallery review.

In addition, a class publication is anticipated and being planned with grant support. This will be a scholarly and graphically-imaginative monograph that documents the work of the studio as a whole.

**Information / Questions**

You are encouraged to contact me with any questions you may have, or if you want to discuss your interests, before studio preferencing. I will be out of the country May 18-June 18 but will be in contact by e-mail during that period. It would be helpful for me to know student interests in advance of the studio placements. Although final placement in studios is made by the Department Head in Eugene, instructors may have some input. If so, I would like to attract students who are genuinely interested in the topic and studio.

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Gerald Gast is an architect and urban designer, a member of the University of Oregon Portland Architecture faculty, and Visiting Associate Professor in the Program on Urban Studies at Stanford University. He is a founding principal of Gast-Hillmer Urban Design in the San Francisco Bay Area. Current projects include design of the new Stryisky Park campus for the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine; and the urban design component of the General Plan for the City of Redwood City, California.

Professor Gast has been on sabbatical leave from the University of Oregon during the 2008-09 academic year, focusing on research, writing and professional practice. He has been a Visiting Scholar at Stanford during the year and has traveled to the Middle East and Europe to conduct project research. Research interests focus on recent seminal and controversial urban design work, including a comparative study of projects in Vancouver, Baltimore, Berlin, the German Ruhr, Barcelona and Curitiba, Brazil.