Pedagogy and Context

“A hut and the house of god presuppose inhabitants, men, images of gods, etc. and have been constructed for them. Thus in the first place a need is there, lying outside art. And its appropriate satisfaction has nothing to do with fine art and does not evoke any works of art … [We] … have on our hands a division in the case of art and architecture.”

Hegel, Aesthetics, 1885.

“Only a tiny part of architecture comes under art: monuments. Everything else, everything that serves some practical purpose, should be ejected …”

Adolf Loos, Architecture, 1910

“There is a tremendous demand for design thinkers today … That’s because innovation often happens not in the center of a discipline but in the space between disciplines …”


The observations by Hegel, Loos and West represent systems of value positioning architecture and design. Combined, the remarks inform the Design Research Track’s (DRT) pedagogical framework.

Hegel’s aesthetic values address the common misconception that architecture holds a privileged position amongst the fine arts. Clearly, it does not. The distinction between art and architecture turns on the rationale that any architectural concept is measured (i.e. limited) by the precondition of human inhabitation. This precondition is the programmatic. The centrality of the programmatic in architectural design and education obscures an essential fact—programming is only a dominant area of routine specialization within a broader field of architectural design. From its center, the programmatic instructs that its view of the discipline is the discipline. Hegel’s comments demonstrate he has fallen victim to its all-encompassing illusion. DRT distinguishes design principles from programmatic fixations. The distinction, countering Hegel, reimagines other architectures as other kinds of art.

Loos’s statement, initially consistent with Hegel’s, identifies an example of architectural otherness—monuments. This “tiny part” of architecture operates without the programmatic. In addition to monuments, one can add cenotaphs, figural constructs, conceptual/literal tools and space-making in the form of pure compositional abstraction. Creative things and processes, opposing the programmatic, reside within the symbolic. Although the symbolic "ejects" architectural necessity, it is not outside architecture.

West’s remarks suggest that distancing one’s creative self from conforming practices offers “real-world” opportunities. The space between disciplines allows one to question, test, and hone design creativity. DRT’s symbolic category doubles as the methodological space between disciplines. Within the in-between, design principles, usually encumbered by the programmatic, are repurposed, refocused and put to new, virtually unexplored, uses.

DRT’s split with normative studio practices provides students an opportunity to reassess and recalibrate their design interests and potential. A substantial portion of the course is devoted to analytical representation and methodology. Within this framework, students construct and execute a design topic. The course’s analytical method requires ongoing resolution at the level of drawing and modeling. A broad topical range is encouraged, including drawing/representation, identity, visual arts, product design, and architecture (symbolic).
Course Structure and Methodology

The seminar (fall 2016) highlights aesthetic techniques through literary and visual case studies. Significant texts are Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* and Claude Levi-Strauss’s “The Science of the Concrete.” Among other readings, these nuanced theories define a comprehensive, yet open, method (i.e. bricolage) through which linguistic, visual and concrete things are arranged, synthesized and repurposed.

Seminar discussion topics are held in a weekly session. Normally, the beginning of the session includes an introduction by the instructor focusing on principles and techniques found in required readings and/or assignments. The remaining portion takes full advantage of the seminar format, seeking to question and propose ideas. Students are evaluated on class participation, preparation, and submission of a final research/design topic. A comprehensive semester schedule is forthcoming.

During spring 2017, intersecting course methodology and design topic, students participate in iterative studio critiques and reviews. Depending on the nature of individual topics and interests, relevant designers, specialists and/or scholars may participate on reviews. A comprehensive semester will be available to enrolled (fall 2016) DRT students.

Pedagogic Objectives

DRT has two primary pedagogic objectives. First, the course’s methodology benefits those wishing to engage advanced design research topics and/or complex “real-world” design problems. The applied technique reveals a formidable conceptual tool moving between and amongst any number of disciplines.

Second, DRT is more methodological than topical. As exemplars of methodological technique, design topics are the responsibility of individual students. Working within the course’s seminar, an interest may arrive preconceived or unknown. The underlying importance resides in the student’s commitment, as a demonstration of independent design thinking, to propose, pursue and fulfill a rigorous series of design research investigations.

Course Electives

In addition to the seminar, two electives for fall 2016 are required. Electives relate to seminar readings and discussions. Depending on design topic, students may propose one elective alternate not listed. Instructor review and approval is required.

In addition to the studio, one elective for spring 2017 is required. The elective supports the intellectual and/or technical realization of the design proposal. Instructor review and approval is required.

An elective listing for fall 2016 and spring 2017 is forthcoming. For additional information, Students may consult the Architecture Major Handbook.