JEREMY MAGNER
THESIS STUDIO
PROSPECTUS

RADICAL – HUMANE

(LOOKING FOR TROUBLE, MAKING A MESS)

ARCH 481-492
2019-20

jmmagner@calpoly.edu

@000jeremy
Studio Thesis Show, May 2019

Studio 107 was completely moved into the stair court where we performed our work for a day.

The empty studio was turned into a gallery for the display of final models and piles of process artifacts.
WHAT A THESIS ISN'T...

5TH YEAR IS NOT SIMPLY AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE THAT YOU ARE A FULLY FORMED, AUTONOMOUS DESIGNER (THOUGH YOUR AUTONOMY WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST). IT IS AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN WHAT IT TAKES TO DEVELOP NEW LEVELS OF DEPTH, COMPLEXITY, AND MEANING IN YOUR WORK BEYOND THOSE AFFORDED TO YOU THUS FAR.

There is a lot left to learn. You aren't totally prepared for this, and the best thesis students are those that are hungry to learn more and push the limits of their own abilities. 10 week studios and even double-quarter have allowed you to scratch the surface of your creativity and the development of layered complexity that define the architectural act. Thesis is not a drawn out 10 or 20 week project. Thesis asks you to explain on all of the things you have learned so far into uncharted territory and I am here to guide you. If you are interested in this studio, it is because you are interested in learning by exploring this uncharted territory of development.

At its core, your thesis will be judged by your ability to make connections between research, theory and architectural acts communicated primarily through models as well as drawings. Perhaps you have done a bit of research in order to write a critical essay, or have been introduced to the lineage of theory in architectural discourse. Certainly you have designed a building to a certain extent. Thesis is an opportunity to cultivate new ways for architecture to face the limits of their own abilities. 10 week studios and even double-quarter have allowed you to scratch the surface of your creativity and the development of layered complexity that define the architectural act. Thesis is not a drawn out 10 or 20 week project. Thesis asks you to explain on all of the things you have learned so far into uncharted territory and I am here to guide you. If you are interested in this studio, it is because you are interested in learning by exploring this uncharted territory of development.

Beyond patience and endurance I will introduce techniques and processes for breaking through systematic design into equally speculative design development. Our year will be structured by 3 distinct quarters that will define 3 stages of design allowing you a stable path through the unknown producing collections of artifacts along the way. I hope this will liberate you to explore further, to take more risks knowing that the process will guide experimentation towards a coherent result in the spring.

It is my ultimate goal to expose you to these higher level relationships in order for you to become your own teacher. To allow you to think and make with fluidity and confidence while minimizing doubt and anxiety. To empower you to evaluate your own work and make decisions more urgently, to work with an urgency and poise. To communicate your speculative positions in a compelling, credible way. To argue better and stronger about the work and through the work. To make arguments with models as much as words...
The path to a successful thesis can be fairly straightforward. As long as you are willing to suffer a bit. But by now you are no stranger to these sacrifices. It means letting yourself be a little uncomfortable, a little anxious as you grapple with big ideas and the struggle to materialize them. But don’t worry, we are in this together and I will be a confident guide. The only guarantee is that hard work and commitment will pay off every time. Here are four commitments you will need to make in order to produce a successful thesis:

1. Uncomfortable
   Do not look for purified, ready-made problems to tackle. Do not assume the role of a solver. Speculative projects will always be a little uncomfortable, a little ambiguous. The project (models, drawings) will become the tool through which you make these arguments.

2. Ambitious/Speculative/experimental
   There is more at stake with your thesis than any other project you have undertaken here. An ambitious thesis does not necessarily mean a big project, or one that claims to change the world or solve massive problems. Ambition is more relative to how far you are willing to push yourself and take chances as a designer.

3. Specific/Arguable
   The challenge in the fall will be to clearly articulate the problem that your project is demonstrating so that you will be able to effectively evaluate its development. This will allow you to slowly become your own teacher.

4. Personal/Curious/Urgent
   A personal endeavor will allow you to attack your thesis with a sense of urgency. This sustained effort and engagement is crucial to remaining productive and inspired over the long haul of 5th year.

Loops of process images were projected onto a layered mass of translucent plastic. Images were crisp at the edges and totally diffused at the center. A flickering fog of collective intelligence.
I have spent my professional career working directly through the model, making, fabricating, wielding the model as the most powerful tool for making arguments and inspiring passion, consensus, solving problems, developing complexity and beauty, channeling intuition and confidence. I come to understand the deep untapped relationships between modeling and building during my time as a designer, fabricator, and teacher. This is by far the most powerful thing I can offer you.

The work begins by asking questions and questioning the limits of your own skills and knowledge. Seeking problems and developing intuition. Then testing the application of models, as strategies, to problems. A project emerges that specifies a time and place and population. The models then crash down to earth and are radically reconfigured on site - architecture has made its first appearance. This is where you have typically stopped in the past, but we will push on into uncharted territory of complexity and detail - a full immersion into the speculative.

We will begin and end with models. We will use these models to develop technical facility and divergent thinking that will make you an incredibly valuable young designer. Each model will come faster and more full of life than the next, I will introduce to you methods of iteration and production that will facilitate this improvement. From this collection, arguments will be made leading to a selection process, a narrowing of possibility towards a specific project, an appearance of architecture as a demonstration of your thesis. Quickly you will then begin the construction of one or two large models that will capture the development of richness and complexity as a process of addition/accumulation. We will not wait until we are ‘done’ designing to build a model. This is just not how it works. The project grows and evolves from a series of provisional commitments, layers added and integrated at progressively finer scales.

No squeaky clean white models, only models that grow, that are alive, that sing to you their accumulation of intelligence, mistakes, changes in direction. No squeaky clean models that pop directly out of Rhino, only models that challenge you to improvise as you go.

Tentacles reach out and grab things, bringing them together to make trouble. In our case we will reach a tentacle or two outside of the discipline of architecture and grab a few things that matter to you, or at least spark some personal curiosity. The trouble with these tentacular connections is that, when done well, they almost always produce a paradox or some deep ambiguity. This is a good sign. This is how you know you are on the right track to a substantial thesis and worthy project. Don’t run from the trouble, don’t fear paradox. This is an ultimate value of design - to give form to the messy complexity of life without needing to purify, or unify/universalize. With these tentacular connection you should aim to make a bit of a mess. To create a new definition of a problem for design to tackle. You should be seeking complexity in the paradox as this will sponsor the most meaningful project in these uncertain times. Architecture is not a solution to a problem directly, but as an instrument able to reframe a question into something more pertinent, more urgent, more timely.

We will craft arguments from these tentacular, messy ambiguities via seminar in the fall. We will begin to demonstrate these arguments through design in the fall and winter. But where to start?

How does architecture matter to you? Articulating a response to this question will come first. The answer should not reference any matters of fact about the discipline, but more likely the untapped possibility it offers. Something hinted at, something not yet. Crafting a new argument for value begins with a curiosity about the world that architecture becomes a tool for exploring. This is another commitment I will ask you to make - a commitment to wonder. We will take wonder very seriously. We will wonder about things first. To wonder is to observe things in a way that leads you to question your beliefs, limited knowledge, and the relevance thereof.

The dogmatist needs to first decide if something is incontrovertibly true or false in order to understand its value. We will suspend this urge to judgment in order to give ourselves the opportunity for making meaningful, optimistic, higher order connections between things. Wonder will allow us to be compassionate to the world in which we operate rather than hostile or reactionary. Wonder allows us to be sympathetic rather than moral. It will allow us the poise to make new connections between things that we may have otherwise brushed aside. In wonder we can be naive and create knowledge through process rather than rely on ready-made structures of value found in ideology.

Haydyn Jones  
Process for 'Great Lakes Works'

Amanda Yee  
Process for 'Miracle Mile'
ARCH 481 - STUDIO

FALL - ABSTRACTION & ORGANIZATION

Research and immersion into theoretical text will happen simultaneously with energetic making of speculative objects. We will first aim to model ideas that are organizational before they can be architecturally formal and rub up against the physicality of materials and tools. By the End of the Quarter you will have conducted various experiments attempting to translate these material strategies in a series of steps to problems you have theoretically defined and present them as preliminary arguments that define your thesis clearly.

You will feel lost, anxious, and a bit insecure. We all will and we will embrace this energy in taking risks and making bold claims, making bold things. We will practice methods that aim to translate this anxious energy into productive continuous output beginning day 1. By the end of fall you will have developed your thesis and defined your project with initial architectural acts of translation from concept to object.

WINTER - VARIATION & FORM

Translating organizational models into formal schemes that rub up against contextual and humane realities of place. Working through increasingly finer scales, development of complexity and expression unfolds as an additive process. We will also take a trip, TBD (last year New Orleans)

You may feel overwhelmed with the prospect of developing a specific project in light of the immensity and broad range of your research topics. We will embrace this power for a single limited architectural act to make connections with these profound, far ranging issues. By the end of winter you will have substantially completed the development of your project and have begun to experiment with bold new representation techniques.

SPRING - DETAIL & MATERIAL

Spring will focus exclusively on the development of your project through speculative representation. Models and images will be as experimental and speculative as the project itself.

You may feel odd that there is so much time left just to build a model or two and make a few compelling images. Could this be because you have never really built a model that does justice to your work? In reality there is never enough time and this will be no different. Design will not stop once you begin making these models and images, it will simply proceed through a different medium. No squeaky clean white models, Just scrappy, precise models as palimpsest, as accumulation of intelligence.

ARCH 492 - SEMINAR

We will use the seminar in the fall as a workshop for crafting your thesis research and text from the ground up. My goal will be to challenge your assumptions and break your habits of thought. The 4 topics will give you the ingredients needed for a thesis that meets the expectations outlined in the preceding pages. They represent a step by step guide for discovering, organizing, and developing the thought that will allow you to hit the ground running with testing in fall and winter studios.

1. HOW TO THESIS (THE STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENT - 2 weeks)

What can a thesis be? How can it be valuable to your practice and the discipline as a whole? What are the modes that a thesis might operate in? What makes for a convincing argument? What can we learn from other disciplines for crafting arguments and narratives in support of my thesis? What literary or rhetorical devices are our there for me to employ?

2. THINKING ABOUT THOUGHT: CONCEPTS OF EXPERIENCE AND EXISTENCE (DESTABILIZATION-GROUNDING - 2 weeks)

Why would an architect need to consider these topics of philosophy/science? How have relationships between art, science and philosophy evolved throughout history and what can we learn from their artifacts? What is the current dominant intellectual paradigm? How have architects taken influence from philosophy/science in the past/currently? How will I begin to use these ideas in my thesis?

3. PERFORMANCE OF THE ARCHITECT (CURRENT STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE - 2 weeks)

How have architects used theses to define their value throughout history? How have they taken cues from other disciplines (philosophy, sciences, etc) to argue for value? What can we learn by comparing various architectural theses/ideology? What is the dominant architectural ideology today? How can I begin to position my thesis within this framework?

4. MEANS AND METHODS (CRAFT - 2 weeks)

How will I begin to test my thesis? What modes of architectural craft and representation are relevant to my speculation? What modes of craft and representation outside of architecture are relevant to my speculation? How can technique give rigor and control to an experimental project without limiting possibility?
Research and immersion into theoretical text will happen simultaneously with energetic making of speculative objects. We will first aim to model ideas that are organizational before they can be architecturally formal and rub up against the physicality of materials and tools. By the end of the quarter you will have conducted various experiments attempting to translate these material strategies in a series of steps to problems you have theoretically defined and present them as preliminary arguments that define your thesis clearly. You will feel lost, anxious, and a bit insecure. We all will and we will embrace this energy in taking risks and making bold claims, making bold things. We will practice methods that aim to translate this anxious energy into productive continuous output beginning day 1. By the end of fall you will have developed your thesis and defined your project with initial architectural acts of translation from concept to object.

Winter - Variation & Form
Translating organizational models into formal schemes that rub up against contextual and humane realities of place. Working through increasingly finer scales, development of complexity and expression unfolds as an additive process. We will also take a trip, TBD (last year - New Orleans)
You may feel overwhelmed with the prospect of developing a specific project in light of the immensity and broad range of your research topics. We will embrace this power for a single limited architectural act to make connections with these profound, far ranging issues. By the end of winter you will have substantially completed the development of your project and have begun to experiment with bold new representation techniques.

Spring - Detail & Material
Spring will focus exclusively on the development of your project through speculative representation. Models and images will be as experimental and speculative as the project itself.
You may feel odd that there is so much time left just to build a model or two and make a few compelling images. Could this be because you have never really built a model that does justice to your work? In reality there is never enough time and this will be no different. Design will not stop once you begin making these models and images, it will simply proceed through a different medium. No squeaky clean white models, Just scrappy, precise models as palimpsest, as accumulation of intelligence.
ABOUT ME

I have worked in 3 person offices, 300 person offices and several in between. I spent just as much time in fabrication shops and on job sites alongside robots and craftsmen. This wide range of experience has inspired me with more questions than answers, and a desire to connect these worlds in new ways. Below is a timeline exhibiting as much:

Radical-Humane, Rigor & Enigma, and Animal-Mechanical represent 3 'buckets' of thinking and speculation that define my own interests as they have emerged over time. I have been practicing on my own and with partners at small scales since 2015 and began teaching in 2016. I am committed to a radical, joyful interpretation of architecture (thanks, Mack and Merrill). One that is militantly optimistic and progressive (thanks, Thom). I am at peace with the WORK required to champion this point of view in a harsh world oblivious to its unheralded value. This calls into question my viability as a businessperson, but more than anything I hope to honor the generosity of my mentors through my commitment to the cause.

Teaching allows me to test strategies and prototype arguments for value in ways that clients rarely indulge. This has been an incredibly rewarding opportunity to push the limits of my thinking and practice through collaboration with students. I hope to continue to supplement teaching with practice, and practice with teaching as long as these questions remain unanswered (they will). It is now impossible for me to imagine one without the other.