



## REALITY



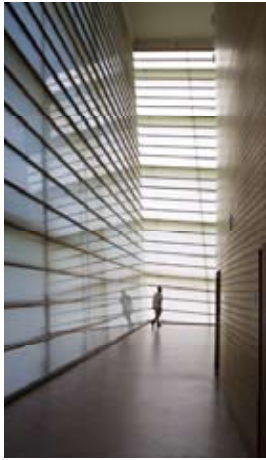
Postmodern apathy, cynicism, and relativism notwithstanding, we are experiencing a fragmented and chaotic reality acted out in massively irresponsible behaviors across the Earth. Our world is shrinking under the merciless assault of our polluting and wasteful habits. Habits that come out of accepting a life in the fast lane under the mantra of more, bigger, faster, better, and cheaper. Habits that keep on failing to provide what they promise and instead deliver only more unmet needs, grief and stress. Despite the promises heralded by the rising digital age, continuous scientific breakthroughs, the prowess of technological evolution, and the myth of infinite growth and rationality, we always find ourselves returning, increasingly more frustrated, to the same ancient existential dilemmas born out of just being alive and trying to attain some peace, security, and contentment. Little, if any, have we advanced in these simple matters. Escaping this fact into the carefully crafted distractions geared to our most superficial desires and exercised through unchecked consumerism, social media, or entertainment never quite works either. Worse still, we are witnessing what some of these habits have brought us: global warming, unspoken poverty co-existing with opulent greed, violence, AIDS, terrorism, war, ecological devastation, and economic instability at a planetary scale. Although it is hard to admit it, we ourselves have been all too often shy accomplices of this state of affairs. Confused, distracted and overwhelmed by the neurotic complexity of it all, we feel little more than irrelevant peons, floating astray in the rough seas of 21st Century civilization.

## ARCHITECTURE



Professing architecture is no light matter in these circumstances. True professing demands that we hold a position, make a vow in the name of a deep seeded passion for architecture, our fellow beings and Earth. But let us not forget that our professing also requires being able to technically and competently respond to architectural challenges. Professing is where belief and knowledge come together in the here and now of present reality. Hence, uncritically adopting off-the shelf Postmodern, Neo-Modern, Deconstructivist, or any other pre-digested style is superficial and irresponsible. So, how are we to profess architecture facing *this* reality? Can we truly make a committed and caring act for the sake of improving whatever is trusted to us as architects? Can we make a difference?

## ON VAS



The studio will take on this question professionally. And, following the two meanings behind professing, it will move simultaneously in two parallel paths of commitment and embodiment.

The philosophical path will offer a *voluntary and critical direction that resists the forces of today's zeitgeist*. The disciplinary path will lead towards *architectural clarity, sustainability, and essentialism as concrete ways to embody this resistance*. The two-path road points towards a renewed aesthetics and ethics of (following Campo Baeza) 'more with less'. It encourages a turn towards the minimal, the fundamentally uncomplicated, the direct and conscious as a potent antidote to our culture of excess, schizophrenia and unconsciousness. The studio will then engage the *hypothesis of simplicity* as a critical, insight seeking, disciplinary and conscious inquiry to confront the professional challenges of today. We are talking of an architecture of presence. We will use Duane Elgin's book "*Voluntary Simplicity*" as a source of clarity and inspiration along this road.

Starting the journey demands that first and foremost, we do it *voluntarily*. We must freely chose it from within and not feel that it is imposed on us from without. Second, this choice has to come out of some *personal realization of its necessity*. In other words, we cannot select it for nostalgic or reactionary reasons. Rather it should *grow out of* our direct experience of the situation itself. "Growing-out-of" means to have been in the midst of it and come out of it by first hand learning and effort. It signifies to embrace (and not to throw away) what has been overcome. In having been intimate with it at one time, we understand it well enough to attempt to transcend it without narrow-minded resentment. In other words, it is not a position arrived by intellectual reasoning or negative emotions. Rather it is a decision founded in a concrete and personal experience of growth.

Thus, choosing simplicity grows out of our direct experience of living under unnecessary complexity. Seeking focus comes out of being tired of living in distraction. Pursuing essentialism grows out of realizing that superficiality offers little. And so on, the desire for clarity grows out of confusion, conservation out of wastefulness, austerity out of excess, integrity out of fragmentation, self-restraint out of empty consumerism and spending, poetry out of crude materialism, presence and slowness out of the fleetingness of a fast life, committed participation out of passive following, and the minimum out of overcrowded and cluttered conditions.

We call the resulting architecture, *Voluntary Architectural Simplicity* or **VAS** for short. The **VAS** Studio is wherein **VAS** is practiced by using essential architectural principles, rules, ideas. Two disclaimers here. First, the **VAS** Studio is consciously naïve in seeking to resist the overwhelming forces of our time. It just makes no sense to do so. Second, the **VAS** Studio is not self-righteous. Although it claims to do what is right, it does not see itself as "the only way" to address today's challenges. It just professes, and in so doing offers, humbly, Voluntary Architectural Simplicity.

ON SSCS



Yet **VAS** is not enough. For there is something unspoken of great power that is pushing us into this path of simplification: *Spirituality*. We "sense" that today's huge problems will never be sincerely addressed (and thus solved) unless we acknowledge the ultimate meaning, wholeness, or transpersonal nature of reality and all beings. While this vision does not require a divinity, it doesn't shy away from the sublime and metaphysical either. In this sense, perhaps, *our most urgent job as architects is to profess the sacredness of all space on Earth* so that land development may be done with care and wisdom. The preservation, respect, and celebration of space can only come when we honor its sacred dimension. By bringing a spiritual sensibility to its fold, architecture may be able to positively affect a world in desperate need for truth, goodness, and beauty.

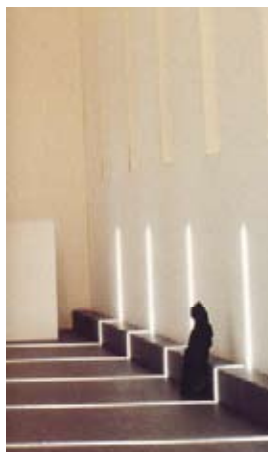
The Sacred Space & Cultural Studies (SSCS) Studio is our learning laboratory to discuss, explore, practice, and advance an architecture that turns what it touches into sacred by the power of design quality

Alberto Campo Baeza



We are extraordinarily fortunate to have world-renown Spanish architect **Alberto Campo Baeza** teaching the **VAS** studio for 3 weeks. He has been one of the greatest inspiration for developing this philosophy and practice of architecture. As the 2012 Walton Critic, he will be also expected to participate in the life of the school at large including lecturing in other classes, taking part in reviews, meeting faculty, and so and so forth. However, don't worry, the main focus of Professor Campo Baeza's residency at CUArch is to teach our studio. Naturally, given this incredible opportunity, we have designed the studio curriculum to offer students the best chance to gain from architect Campo Baeza's experience and presence. We hope students will take full advantage of this situation.

PEDAGOGY & SCHEDULE



The semester will be broken down in 4 pedagogic segments:

Learning Phase	Study/Design Focus	Modality	Duration	Due	Grade
One	Preparation	team	2 Wks	10-Sep	5%
Two	Design Project 1	team	3 Wks	28-Sep	30%
Three	Design Project 2	team	5 Wks	5-Nov	30%
Four	Design Integration + Presentation	team	5 Wks	10-Dec	25%
All	Overall Growth, Participation, Citizenship	individual	n/a	n/a	10%

**Phase 1 (Preparation)** provides the basic intellectual, design, and collaborative footings that students need to develop, critique and apply their architectural discourse. It consists of a precedents analyses of monastic architecture combined with a series of readings. **Phase 2 (Design Project 1)** engages students in the architectural design of a *rural convent*. In this unit, students will study, experiment, and critique the relationships between ar-



chitecture and the subjective, intersubjective, objective, and transcendental dimensions of monastic life. The goal is the reflective making of **VAS** architecture following the guidance of master architect Campo Baeza. **Phase 3 (Design Project 2)** asks for the design of nature observatory through an investigation of how natural processes may be turned into contemplative devices that advance, in a different manner, some of the same issues raised/addressed in Phase 2. **Phase 4 (Design Integration & Presentation)** brings together the design work of Phases 2 and 3 and invites students to communicate orally and visually the work produced throughout the semester. A detailed schedule is attached to this paper. For more please, visit website at [http://faculty.cua.edu/bermudez/courses/bermudez-campo\\_baeza](http://faculty.cua.edu/bermudez/courses/bermudez-campo_baeza)



During the first five weeks of the semester, our studio will be working together with Associate Professor Luis Boza's studio section of arpl 401. While our two studios will work next to each other and thus share the same assignments, lectures, crits, and faculty, the students will remain working within their given studio units.

## READINGS, ETC.



Required readings, bibliographical and web references, particular materials, other resources as well as specific details about studio activities, goals, and expectations will be presented in each specific assignment that follow the four pedagogical phases and schedule described above.

## TEAM WORK



The work will be done in teams. This studio will require a very high level of architectural response, development, and communication. It is just impossible to attain this goal by one individual working alone. This fact reflects actual architectural practice, a largely cooperative enterprise in which different people bring their expertise and ideas into a project. Working in teams will also afford students the opportunity to develop collaborative skills and their own strengths as individuals.

However, since students are individuals with a variety of backgrounds, skills, knowledge, and expectations with some just starting and some finishing graduate education, teams will need to figure out their own way to adjust their members' differences in order to match the required learning outcomes. The faculty will try to assist such effort but it is the students' duty to find appropriate accommodations to diversity and difference.

## REGULATIONS



Specific information regarding grading, support, accessibility, resources, standards, policies and more are included in the OFFICIAL SYLLABUS of this class, as per regulation of The Catholic University of America. All that is included in this SYLLABUS COMPANION falls under the regulations and rules described in the former.

*Now, take this opportunity and make it the best possible. This is your life!*