



Syllabus Companion

The Catholic University of America
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School of Architecture and Planning
Fall Semester 2011

Sacred Space & Cultural Studies

studio

Bermudez / Pallasmaa

REALITY



Postmodern apathy 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



Such conditions threaten the art of architecture in two opposite ways. One reduces buildings to mere utility and economy whereas the other to pure representation or aestheticization. In these reductions the fundamental historicity, as well as mental and affective essence of the architectural impact is lost. When buildings are viewed as aestheticized constructions or pragmatic objects, they lose their emotive, empathetic, and spiritual qualities. Yet, the profound task of architecture is to create horizons and frames for human experience and understanding, and to give even mundane acts and situations of life their meaning and dignity.

Unfortunately architecture has been rationalized and instrumentalized



through processes of modernization to such an extent that it has also lost its cosmic, metaphysical, and symbolic content. Yet, ever since its beginnings, a fundamental role of architecture has been to mediate between the cosmic and human realms, Gods and mortals, the transitory and the eternal. In so doing, architectural structures also mediated and concretised the deepest emotions: grief and ecstasy, loss and hope, veneration and awe. If architecture is to help alleviate if not heal the many serious ills affecting our civilization, we need to deepen its commitments to respond to our existential condition of embodied, emotional, social, and spiritual beings. Hence, the sacred role of architecture is bigger than doing religious buildings. It is to participate in the creation of a good, true, and beautiful world. It is to emotionally and spiritually awaken visitors/users into dwelling in the Real.

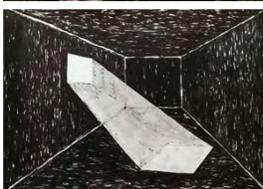
ON SSCS



Put it differently, today's huge problems will never be sincerely addressed (and thus solved) unless we acknowledge the ultimate meaning, wholeness, or trans-personal 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

TOPIC: DEATH



During the modern era, western culture has gradually eliminated the reality of death from ordinary consciousness and emotion. Today, death usually takes place in hospitals, and the entire process of burial is managed by specialized firms. The elimination of death from our conscious lives has given rise to a surreal attitude of fear and repugnance. On the other hand, death has been fictionalised and turned into a revolting theme, or downright entertainment in cinema, theatre, comics, and computer games. Through this process of secularisation and de-mythicization death has lost its deep metaphysical significance and human dignity, its essential connection with life.

Alvar Aalto often spoke of the necessity to design for “man at his weakest”, or in the case of a hospitalised patient, for “the horizontal man”. In addition to the condition of illness, we experience heightened weakness and helplessness when facing the death of a friend or relative. The design of a funeral chapel or funerary object, such as a casket, urn, grave marker and monument, calls for special sensitivity, understanding, tact, and compassion. Funerary architecture and design has to be consoling and dignifying without being sentimental or patronizing.

STUDIO TASK



The Studio assignment is to design an intimate *urban, non-denominational or ecumenical burial chapel* which does not include the technical facilities for cremation.

The project site and design program will be decided in detail collectively after Professor Pallasmaa's arrival in Washington D.C.. The required presentation material at various phases of the project will be determined after the site has been decided.

The focus of the project will be the emotional and spiritual dimensions of architecture. The expressive potential of materiality, light, color and proportionality are to be especially studied. In order to identify a personal emotive ground for the design of the funerary chapel, the studio process includes special exercises, lectures and conversations on the emotional and poetic essences of architecture and the arts.

As other artforms seem to contain stronger emotional meanings than architecture, examples of various arts will be initially studied (Part 02 of the Semester) for the purpose of identifying how emotion is evoked and suggesting ways in which architectural language could be emotionally intensified.

Juhani Pallasmaa
(2011 Walton Critic)



We are extraordinarily fortunate to have world-renown Finnish architect **Juhani Pallasmaa** teaching the studio for 4 weeks. As the 2011 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 Pallasmaa 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 Pallasmaa's experience and presence. We hope students take full advantage of this situation.

PEDAGOGY & SCHEDULE



The semester will be broken down in 3 pedagogic segments with the following general characteristics:

Learning Phase	Study/Design Focus	Teams	Duration	Due	Grade %
Part 01	Design Foundation — Project 1	team	2 Wks	19-Sep	15%
	Project 2	individual	2 Wks	21-Sep	15%
Part 02	Schematic Design	team	7 Wks	11-Nov	35%
Part 03	Design Development & Presentation	team	4 Wks	12-Dec	35%

The objective of **Part 01 (Design Foundation)** is to make students familiar with fundamental concepts, philosophies, procedures and design methods related to the studio topic. It includes explorations of artforms and object



design geared to discover ways in which architecture's phenomenology may be emotionally and spiritually enhanced. **Part 02 (Schematic Design)** engages students in the architectural investigation of the given problem using a design method based on analog-digital media migrations. The goal is devising a schematic design that follows yet transcends what was learned in the previous learning unit. **Part 03 (Design Development & Presentation)** is devoted to the development of the schematic design by focusing on experiential and tectonics issues. Special attention will be paid to presentation and communication issues. A detailed schedule of the studio is attached to this paper. For more please, visit course website at <http://faculty.cua.edu/bermudez/courses/bermudez-pallasmaa>

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.

Since this is a vertical studio, there will be a variety of skills and knowledge among the students. The instructors are aware of this situation and will adjust the level of expectation accordingly. Still, teams that are composed of graduate and undergraduate students will have to meet with the faculty so this situation is clear to all the parties involved.

SYMPOSIUM



The symposium "*Transcending Architecture*", chaired by Prof. Bermudez and in which Prof. Pallasmaa will deliver the keynote speech, is to take place October 6-8. Since this event has total relevancy to the interests of this studio, students will be expected to attend it in its entirety. Please, make appropriate plans. For more on this symposium, visit the website at <http://www.sacred-space.net/symposium/>

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!