



## PART 02: RESEARCH: PRECEDENTS, PROGRAMMING & SITE

### OBJECTIVE

Now that you have consciously professed your alliance to **VAS** and the relevance of spirituality in architecture, you can take on the responsibility of making architecture. First, however, you will consider the impact of three essential forces affecting the design of your building: precedents, program, and site. In fact, type, function and context have traditionally been three of the most popular design methods followed by architects.

Yet, the **VAS** studio asks you not to blindly give into what history, place and activity want. On the contrary, it is imperative that **VAS** be not 'neutral' but, instead, offers a better way. Are memory and reference important for *your VAS*? How do/did previous (successful) projects solve the dialogue between place, program, and form? Does **VAS** imply a particular 're-construction' or 're-conceptualization' of the program in line with its critical resistance to contemporary customs? How does **VAS** see the roles and intersections between nature, culture, and spirituality? Are natural forces constrains to follow, reject, or resist? **VAS** must be present in your interpretation of precedent, site and program. The fact that you will be doing these three analyses simultaneously allows you to apply your **VAS** manifesto to all at once, while learning their characters and relationships.

### SITUATION

*There are three fundamental directions or foci in which one's life may advance: doing, having, or being.*

We live in a world that expects from us continuous productive or consumption activity. Be it at work, in the market, or at school, we are being asked to do more and more. Doing, it seems, is the ticket to success. After all, the saying goes, you haven't seen anybody getting places by staying sit on their butt. We love to boast about how much we have accomplished and, better still, how much there still remains to do! Who can really deny that we are competing with each other (and with ourselves) as to who is the one most overwhelmed with work? So, doing, getting-things-done is the

mantra running our daily lives. We accordingly pack our days from dawn to dusk with activities aimed at achieving maximum benefit. And, naturally, we transfer this lifestyle to our kids' whose schedules are so busy with extra-curricular activities (designed to put them ahead in adult life) that they have no time to ... play! Our 'try-to-keep-busy' stoic attitude also cuts into our leisure time (i.e., we come back from vacation more tired than we left), the gym (Oh, boy! Do you know how much I lifted today!? ... and that's nothing to what I still have to do in the coming weeks according to my new work-out routine), and even spiritual practices (i.e., guess who is getting more enlightened, righteous, or closer to God?).

Of course, the strife for doing is only one side of the coin. The other side is the simultaneous expectation for uncritical consumption. Buying, getting, using up, having are not just legitimate ways in which to spend our free time, but a socially accepted (and surely needed) mechanism of psychological compensation. And more, much more. In fact, it has taken on patriotic value: the best contribution a concerned citizen could do right after 9-11 (as requested by the President himself) was ... to go shopping! The message is clear and loud. If we are not busy doing, then be busy consuming, but be busy. Don't stop! Just keep on going.

Indeed, living in America today means to be 24/7 busy. So accustomed have we grown to this situation that even when we are not busy we feel in the need to fake that we are. Who hasn't found oneself simulating to be busy at somebody's gaze? It is as if the more it is demanded from us, the more we do, the more we buy or have, the busier we are, the higher is our self worth and placement in society and, supposedly, the better we feel.

The socially-accepted way to escape this onslaught is media. We are allowed to (often expected to) leave the busy and consumption cycles and plunge into digital entertainment and connections. Who hasn't be relieved to receive a phone call in the middle of some uncomfortable waiting or silent time? Who hasn't quickly turned to our blueberry or iphone seeking some unnecessary information (so we can remain occupied)? TV, the internet, flics, radio, twitter, videogames — you name it— are ways for us to leave behind the little reality left in our lives lest we kill the spell and return to some ugly, unacceptable, frightening world. Media consumption, *the* adult pacifier/drug par excellence, keeps us 'entertained' (i.e, from Latin: being in between, i.e., in limbo) and, in doing so, maintain us in a fabricated trance: comfortably numb, asleep.

Those people, practices, activities, discourses, or beliefs critical to or not fitting in this picture are quickly spotted and discredited. In our extreme neo-puritan ethics, hanging-out, idling, not doing are seen as parasitical, aberrant if not plain subversive acts. Not having a cell phone or TV/internet at home are looked down: what kind of weirdo are you? Not joining the shopping way of life risks socialist or anti-American condemnation. In short, social labels and judgments are readily available to explain any and all of these non-sense attitudes: ignorance, psychological disturbance, immaturity, naïve idealism, religious fundamentalism, leftist anarchism ... We just need to keep the system going and for this, we are reassured over and over again, we must have the productive, consumption, and media machinery running undisturbed (now globally). Never mind the results of these actions.

*Doing and having have won the day.*

## PROGRAM\*\*

Faced with this state of affairs, a community of committed Trappist lay and ordained people have decided to open a place where to practice an alternative so that people can begin to heal and awake from this collective hallucination. For this purpose, they have acquired an unique and isolated piece of land within the beautiful and empty redrock country of southern Utah (around Moab).

The place (the *Being-Affirming Desert Center*) is to offer visitors experiential opportunities that focus on *'being'* rather than *'doing'* or *'having'*. By stopping the enslaving cycles of unchecked production and consumption (material or virtual) this institution is to allow visitors a space in which to freely step back and become aware of their own circumstances. Architecture is to become a sanctuary for guiltless idling, a place to find, enjoy and expand being. Put it differently, by silencing the pressures to be busy, materialism, and media avoidance, the dweller will be pushed to notice their own functioning self. The place will foster and celebrate not-doing, not-having, stopping, letting be. As such the building will provide with a necessary retreat from real world dis-ease and promote healing, both at the individual and social levels. It will be a place where people go to stop and find themselves in the here and now of their lives.

Given its intense focus on being, this building demands a great a level of design quality in order to highlight phenomenological presence at all levels and scales. Developing *being* means to offer architectural pedagogies directed to the subjective (personal, individual self), intersubjective (social, collective self), and objective (environmental, no-self) dimensions of human experience. This translates into practices directed to observing, studying, exercising, and expressing being's mind, body, and connectivity to others and nature. And while these aspects of being do not occur in isolation, it is appropriate to focus on one or the other to foster particular developmental gains. Hence, this building demands programmatic separation *and* connection, that is, dedicated places to work on our physique or inner mental-scape as well as areas where we can come together in community and nature. For this reason, this place seeks to establish fluid yet carefully crafted relationships between exterior and interior, culture and nature, self and others, and so on. In the spirit of healing and growing being, the building professes sustainability understood in its widest and deepest sense: the affirmation, appreciation, and support of all life.

In seeking to treat-rehabilitate individuals caught in consumption addiction (focused on materialism and media), the *Being-Affirming Desert Center* run its operation based on OCSO's strict yet liberating living precepts. The teaching of Thomas Merton (so congenial to those of Voluntary Simplicity) will be followed,

A program for the *Being-Affirming Desert Center* is attached. In addition to your studies conducted during the manifesto assignment, you are to review the following series of references:

---

\*\* The program for this building is partially based on the 2010 AISC/ACSA Steel competition. Professor Bermudez worked with Professor Ryan Smith (University of Utah) in writing such program. However, this idea and much of the articulation comes from work produced by Bermudez in 2003.

<http://www.ocso.org/>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trappists>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy\\_Cross\\_Abbey,\\_Virginia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Cross_Abbey,_Virginia)  
<http://www.cistercianfamily.org/index.asp?language=english>  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15024a.htm>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Merton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Merton)  
<http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/acs/> (The Architecture, Culture and Spirituality Forum)  
<http://www.contemplativemind.org/> (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society)  
<http://www.sarcc.org/> (The Society for the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture)

### References

Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964) (Introduction and chapters 8 and 9)  
 Michael Benedikt, *For an Architecture of Reality* (New York: Lumen Books, 1987)  
 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York Harper & Row Publishers, 1971) (Chapter: Building, Dwelling, Thinking)  
 Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Questions of: Phenomenology of Architecture* (William K Stout Pub, 2007)  
 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley, 2005)

### WORK

You will use your site and precedent research to draft your **VAS** program. You will establish your ideological position regarding the given functional requirements. In this way, you will elaborate a **VAS program parti** containing an overarching organization of your program. This means you will have to edit the programmatic needs so that they fit a voluntary simplicity and spiritual worldview. Questions you may ask are: Is what the client demands too much? How do I make the program appropriate and consistent to what the local/global communities and the environment need? How can architecture embody/assist in the pedagogy function of a “Being-Affirming Desert Center”? What does that mean? How will the program embody your **VAS** manifesto? What is your right to profess **VAS** to somebody else? Write your program parti acknowledging all these concerns. (*interim: Monday Sept. 20*) (*due: Fri Sept. 24*)

**Spatial Relationship diagram(s) (including indoor-outdoor):** Define the type of spatial interactions between program elements. This diagram should also include issues of hierarchy, order, adjacencies, scale, and sustainable potential. Finally, adjust your previous **VAS program parti** to acknowledge the insights gained. Use appropriate labeling and color-coding and 11”x17” prints. (*due: Mon Sept. 27*)

Digitize these diagrams (if they are not already in electronic format) and save them in a folder called “Program Analysis”. Eventually, you’ll turn all this in digitally.

### TEAM

2 students

**SITE**

There are two very different sites. You will get one assigned by lottery. Both locations are within Utah southeastern desert environment of remarkable beauty. The red-rock country, as this area is often called, is a great example of the power and fragility of nature. It is imperative that you become acquainted with it at all levels. Site information is being given by your instructor (i.e., Geological Survey maps, DVDs, photography and more). Please, This consider as many issues and dimensions as you can: space, scale, materials, accessibility, vegetation, visibility and views, local and regional landmarks, textures, seasonal and daily rhythms, cosmological themes, local and regional culture and history, and so on.

Your approach to the site should open new insights. The existing natural conditions vis-à-vis the architectural program and cultural circumstances offer you the opportunity to reflect on your **VAS** conviction, which, actually, should frame your understanding of the site. Use your manifesto to jump-start your study.

**WORK**

**Documentation:** Use the provided photographic record to understand first and then expand and re-interpret the real/normal/ordinary/obvious. Correlate photos and site plans as well as other appropriate information (orientation, distances, etc.). (*due: Mon Sept. 20*)

**Conceptual Site Models:** Build quick gesture/conceptual models of the site with the intention of understanding the fundamental conditions and issues at play. You 'reading' is essential. (*due: Wed Sept. 22*)

**Study/Analysis:** Utilize diagrammatic, orthographics, conceptual, or tectonic AD models and drawings as well as notations to carry out and communicate your analytical work. Do not forget that this analysis must reflect your **VAS** attitude/position towards contextual pressures.<sup>1</sup> Format and media is up to you. (*interim: Mon Sept. 27*) (*due: Friday Oct.1*)

**Note:** so you know. We will eventually build a physical model for each site that everyone will use.

**TEAM**

2 students

---

<sup>1</sup> Environmental considerations include: climate, weather, microclimate, sunlight and daylight, noise, air quality, energy, water and waste, soil, green space (vegetation, open space, etc.), and structure (e.g., earthquake).

**SITE  
PLANNING**

You will complete the research phase by providing a synthesis that summarizes the analytical insights gained thus far. All the work should be done using diagrams and at 1"=32' scale.

**WORK**

**Site-Program Scale diagram:** Study in plan the size and scale impact of the program on the site. (*due: Monday Sept 20*)

**Conceptual Massing diagram:** 3D investigation of the design opportunities of your **VAS program parti** in combination with your **VAS Site Analysis**. Could you condense it to a few key sections? (*due: Wed 29 Sept*)

**VAS Site-Planning Parti.** Based on your analytical work thus far, produce a synthesis of 3 site plan schemes. Be ready to defend them (*due: Fri Oct. 1*)

Produce digital versions of all these diagrams/models as necessary and save them in appropriate folder.

**TEAM**

2 students

**PRECEDENTS REVIEW** The building program for this semester is a *retreat center in an isolated site* condition. The site has no property boundaries and an important issue will be to decide on how to intervene. You will need to engage in studies of a diversity of architectural sources covering:

Four-corner area architecture and art (vernacular and not). Relevant examples include the ancient native American settlements of the area (Anasazi, Chaco, Mesa Verde, etc.), contemporary architects (e.g., Antoine Predock, Rick Joy, Will Bruder), and artists (Georgia O'Keefe, James Turrell)

Typological precedents, special Cistercian architecture (e.g., Le Corbusier La Tourette) but extending to other examples: <http://www.christdesert.org/>

Literature/Philosophical views. What is the desert and how does it inform, inspire, and extend us? Reference to Terrence Tempest Williams and Thomas Merton (his "Wisdom of the Desert"). Remember the role of the desert in all three monotheistic traditions.

Important questions include: what is the role of the building's engagement of nature (local, regional, cosmological)? How does contemporary architecture respond to the ancient monastic type? Is symbolism/language an important force at play? How are spirituality and sustainability invoked/related? What is healing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Can you see ideology through the diverse responses you are considering, and if so, where and how? Remember that you are reviewing all this material through the looking glass of **VAS**. This brings an important question for you: How do you distill the lessons of tradition and novelty into a **VAS** framework?

**WORK** Produce appropriate visual and text-based work responding to these and your own questions. Utilize an 11x17" sheet format. (*interim: Mon Sept. 20*) (*due: Fri Sept. 24*)

**TEAM** 4 students

- JURY** You will discuss your precedent, program, and site studies in a 30 minute long presentation. Focus should be geared towards how such studies lead you to the three proposed **VAS Site-Planning Partis**. Allow for a 10 minute discussion afterward. You are also to submit an organized digital version of your work.
- GRADE** Part 02, Research (Precedents, Programming, & Site) counts for 15 % of the course grade
- ADVICE** Simplify ... Choose to Simplify !

### Part 02 - Research: Schedule

Wk	DAY		Job Due
1	<b>M</b>	15-Sep	Hand-out project
1	<b>W</b>	20-Sep	<b>DUE: Site Documentation. DUE: Site-Program Scale Diagram.</b> Program parti (interim).
1	<b>F</b>	22-Sep	<b>DUE: Conceptual Site Model</b>
2	<b>M</b>	24-Sep	<b>DUE: Conceptual Site Model + Program Parti.</b>
2	<b>W</b>	27-Sep	<b>DUE: Program Spatial Diagram Program.</b> Site Analysis (interim)
2	<b>F</b>	29-Sept	<b>DUE: Conceptual Massing Diagram</b>
3	<b>M</b>	1-Oct	<b>JURY – DUE: All + three Site Planning Partis</b>