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# ARCHITECTURAL THEORY AND CRITICISM

**INSTRUCTORS**  
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## ISSUE

Writing long dissertations is a notoriously unpopular task in architectural schools. Most, after all, did not study architecture in order to spend their time writing. At the same time, it is an essential part of your formation as an architect and graduate. The key problem perhaps lies in the search for a question. What kind of question is suitable for architectural research? How can it best be elaborated? How do we find an audience? And can writing, in the end, also be understood as a form of architectural production?

## DESCRIPTION

Architectural Theory and Criticism is a course designed to re-acquaint you with writing as a reflective practice, as a means of communication, and as a scientific resource. Like drawing, writing is a fundamental tool of architecture. Furthermore, the class will teach you practices of research and of dissertation preparation, both strengthening your identity as an architect, and equipping you to do further research in broader architectural contexts, such as historical and social research. This is a required course for all Masters of Architecture candidates.

## IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

This class will transform your relationship to writing and to research. It will teach you the fundamentals of research methods, how to formulate a research question, and how to use your own personal interests as the engine for an ultimately scientific dissertation.

## METHODS

The class will be in three phases. In the first phase, you will be expected to freely engage in your own writing. You do not need to restrict yourself to a topic or a style, but do need to be prepared to read your writing out loud to your peers. In the second phase, you will encounter rigorous research methods from a range of contemporary scholars. Presentations from ex-students, architecture journalists, junior and senior researchers, in which they explain something of their own development as writers. In the final phase, you will develop and complete your own dissertations. This part of the course will be conducted over the summer break. There will be no input or group meetings, but you may meet with your individual.

## DELIVERABLES

The three phases correspond to the three assessments. The first assessment is a submission of your own piece of free writing (10%). It is expressive and personal, and there are no objective criteria that can be explained — you must simply do your best. It will be graded by one of the teaching assistants. The second assessment is due after Easter, on the 5th of April. It consists of a submission of a project abstract (10%) and bibliography (20%). The abstract should be 500 words long. The abstract should contain a summary of the intended research, and should make both the intended method, and the subject of inquiry, completely clear. The final project may differ greatly from the abstract, but there should still be an understandable connection between them. The annotated bibliography should contain at least 20 entries. They should include books published by scholarly presses, peer reviewed journal articles, and ideally some original material from archives (plans, historical photos, documents). No more than one or two websites should be included in this list (to avoid over-dependence on easily

accessible online resources). The bibliography should be consistent and error free. “Annotation” means that for each entry, you include three sentences. One sentence explains why the book or article is important (who wrote it, what is its ambition, or who cited it, what is its influence?), a second sentence summarises its content (what is it about?). A third sentence explains why you used this book, what it does for your research (does it agree or contradict other positions that you refer to, or does it inform you on a very particular question, or did it motivate you to follow an unexpected line of inquiry?). You can vary the order of these three sentences. The third assessment is your completed dissertation of 6–8,000 words (including footnotes). It is due on the 30th of August. It should contain an abstract, a main essay, and a final bibliography. You may also wish to include a section called “methodology,” but this is optional, and only necessary where you are also conducting original empirical research (such as studying the built environment or observing the behaviour of people).

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this course, you will have a complete dissertation on a question of your choice, written to a scientific and, ideally, of publishable standard. For some students, this class will prepare them for careers in academic research. For others, this class will simply improve their written communication skills. The ability to write about architecture, however, is not just a distraction from your basic training: it is central to your development as an architect. Being able to communicate clearly and lucidly in prose is a force multiplier, to use an (unfortunately) military term. Writing, conjunction with intelligent, articulate drawings, will be your primary tool for communicating your ideas.

1. Ability to formulate and develop a research question.
2. Improved understanding of the cultural and technical histories of architectural design.
3. Capacity to select and apply methods of research (including the collection of primary and secondary evidence).
4. Ability to critically weigh and apply evidence and arguments in research.
5. Improvement in written expression.
6. Correct application of the conventions of scholarly research.

## ASSESSMENT SCHEME

- 01 \_Free text submission (no word count). 10%
- 02 \_Abstract (500 words) and annotated bibliography. 30%
- 03 \_Final research submission (5,000-8,000 words). 60%

**Total: 100%**

## IMPORTANT DATES

- 13/03 Free text submission (no word count).
- 05/04 Abstract (500 words) and annotated bibliography.
- 03/08 Final research submission (5,000-8,000 words).

## IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS

### Expectations for Professional Conduct

The motto of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is “Through learning and temperance to virtue”. This motto places equal emphasis on the intellectual and moral education of students. In addition to pursuing academic excellence, students of CUHK are expected to maintain and uphold the highest standard of integrity and honesty in their academic and personal lives, respect the rights of others and abide by the law. More information on Postgraduate studies can be found in the PG Student Handbook. <https://www.gs.cuhk.edu.hk/>

### Attendance

Class attendance is required in all courses. For an excused absence, the instructor must be notified and presented with documentation of illness or personal matter. Please note: **Three (3)** or more unexcused absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

### Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students may be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

### Third-Party Assistance

All intellectual work essential to the design project must be completed by the student and cannot, under any circumstance, be outsourced to a third party (including, but not limited to a company, consultant, alumni, and/or friend).

In the design studio context, students may utilize external resources, such as printing services for presentation materials, and/or laser cutting and 3D printing services for prototyping purposes. Use of such third-party services constitutes non-intellectual work done by others. It is only permitted with prior written consent from the studio tutor and acknowledgment of such work done by the third party.

Assistance from other students or friends for aspects of project production also constitutes non-intellectual work done by others; this is allowed only if declared and acknowledged in a written statement attached to any such work that has received assistance.

Under all circumstances, students must declare all work done by others by completing the school's designated form before assessment. This form must include a detailed explanation of the third party's identity (name and relationship to the student), when and how they were utilized, and the specific tasks they performed in the project. The completed form, signed by the student, must be endorsed by the tutor and presented during the final review. The school will collect and retain this form for record-keeping purposes.

Failure to follow this code of conduct may be considered a case of academic dishonesty, to be reviewed by a disciplinary board, and possible failure of the course.

### Artificial Intelligence

Unless approved by the Programme or School Director, any use of AI tools such as ChatGPT or image generation tools (Midjourney) etc. is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action in accordance with university policy on academic honesty. Students may refer to the CUHK 'Use of Artificial Intelligence tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessments' – A Guide for Students.

### Student Work

Submission of studio documentation must be complete and correctly formatted. Missing or incomplete submission of the documentation folder will result in the grade for the course being withheld. This will prevent registration for the following term or delay graduation. In addition, a grade deduction of *one letter grade* will be made.

## GRADE DESCRIPTOR

Grade	Descriptor	Criteria	Points
A	Excellent	Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.	4
A-	Very Good	Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.	3.7
B+	Good	Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.	3.3
B			3
B-			2.7
C+	Fair	Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.	2.3
C			2
C-			1.7
D+	Pass	Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.	1.3
D			1
F	Failure	Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.	0

**Term 2: 6 January 2025 (Monday) – 19 April 2025 (Saturday)**

<b>WEEK 01</b>		
10.01		Introduction – History and Diagrams
<b>WEEK 02</b>		
17.01	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Free writing workshop
<b>WEEK 03</b>		
24.01	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Free writing workshop
<b>WEEK 04</b>		
31.01	<b>NO CLASS</b>	Chinese New Year
<b>WEEK 05</b>		
07.02	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Free writing workshop
<b>WEEK 06</b>		
21.02	<b>LECTURE AND WORKSHOP</b>	<b>Umberto Eco: How to Write a Thesis</b> Umberto Eco, How to Write a Thesis (Boston: MIT Press, 2015), excerpt 1
<b>WEEK 07</b>		
28.02	<b>LECTURE AND WORKSHOP</b>	<b>Umberto Eco: How to Write a Thesis</b> Umberto Eco, How to Write a Thesis (Boston: MIT Press, 2015), excerpt 2 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, London: Hogarth Press, 1929 Presentations from Ivan Chi (former student) and Antje Stahl (architecture journalist).
<b>WEEK 08</b>		
06.03	<b>LECTURE AND WORKSHOP</b>	<b>Mark Jarzombek: [What is] a Thesis?</b> Mark Jarzombek. "A Thesis." Thresholds, no. 12 (Spring 1996): 6-8.
<b>WEEK 09</b>		
13.03	<b>REVIEW WEEK</b>	Free writing Sample Due
<b>WEEK 10</b>		
20.03	<b>LECTURE AND WORKSHOP</b>	<b>Letham: The Ecstasy of Influence</b> Jonathan Letham. "The Ecstasy of Influence." Harper's Magazine, 2011
<b>WEEK 11</b>		
27.03	<b>LECTURE</b>	<b>Arata Isozaki: The Paradox of Writing.</b> Isozaki, Arata. "The Demiourgos and the Paradox of Writing." ANY: Architecture New York, 1993, 14–15.
<b>WEEK 12</b>		
25.03		
<b>WEEK 13</b>		
03.04	<b>LECTURE</b>	<b>Anthony Grafton: The Footnote from De Thou to Ranke</b> History and Theory, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 53-76
<b>WEEK 14</b>		
08.04	<b>NO CLASS</b>	Pre-Final Week
<b>WEEK 15</b>		
15.05	<b>NO CLASS</b>	Final Review Week

## Written Feedback to Students

Term: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Course: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Studio Tutor: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_

### Feedback from Studio Tutor:

Achievements:

Challenges: