

I AM CONTEXTUAL

USC ARCH 202A

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays

2:00 - 6:00

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CONTEXT

First things first: what do we mean as architects when we use the word “context?” We hear the word used so casually that we might assume its meaning to be so obvious as to not require a definition. But it is a complex term that over the course of time has been taken for granted.

We are perhaps most familiar with the term as it relates to linguistics, to the text or speech surrounding an expression - a word or a sentence. Verbal context informs the way a word or sentence is interpreted and understood. For this reason we understand the problem of quotes being “taken out of context.”

From this we might gather that context - not just as it relates to linguistics, but generally - is a sort of “frame that surrounds the event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation.”¹ Two people throwing punches within a boxing ring, for instance, is a sport; two people throwing punches in the middle of the street is something else all together.

Context in this sense is a relative concept, requiring the definition of both a

frame (the extents of the information used to evaluate an event) and a focal event - or statement, or idea, or building.

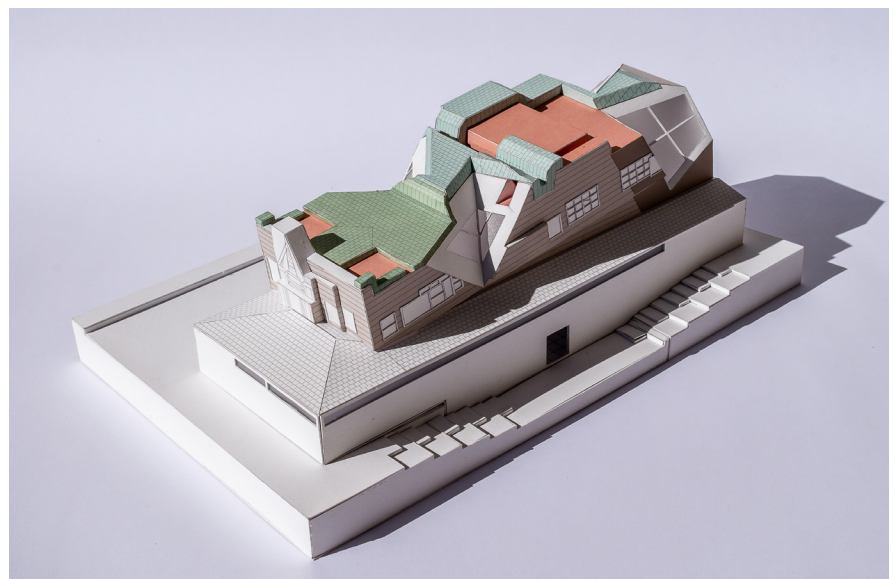
We might understand context as it relates to architecture to be those circumstances that surround and frame a building. Such circumstances might be social, political, economic or cultural. For the purposes of this studio, however, we will consider context first and foremost in terms of the formal, scalar, material and representational qualities of the built environment; in

short, what buildings within a defined locale look like and how they relate to one another.

Through the development of a sited architectural project, students will develop their own positions for what it means to be contextual.

As context is a relative concept, we will not assume that there is a singular way to define it. Instead, we will recognize that such an evaluation would stem from the ways in which we each identify - and in turn author

202A Studio Work, Fall 2018, Juan Villatoro.



1. Goodwin, Charles. “Rethinking Context: An Introduction.” Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon. Cambridge University Press, 1992.



Taipei 101 Tower.

- the characteristics and circumstances of the built environment surrounding our proposed buildings. That is to say we will not all see the same site in the same way, and that is more than okay.

OUR AGENDA

Speaking about context in architecture hasn't been in vogue for quite some time.

In his catalog essay for MoMA's 1988 Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition, Mark Wigley stated that "contextualism has been used as an excuse for mediocrity, for a dumb servility to the familiar." Wigley's opinion on the matter was not singular; many of his neo-avant-garde colleagues shared the sentiment: context was the stuff of traditionalists and conformists; the territory of the practical, not the critical; an ingredient for the conventional, rather than the experimental.

Once the subject of productive disciplinary debate, context has slipped into the background of architectural

discourse since its dismissal in the 1980s. Lacking a disciplinary audience to fuel the foundations of a critical agenda, conversations around context have stagnated around problems of "looking-like" and "fitting in," around strategies of symbolic form making and decoration. Think here of projects like the Taipei 101 tower, a massive skyscraper that stands out against a backdrop of much smaller buildings, but whose pagoda-like form is meant to lend it an air of cultural sensitivity.

While these sorts of project recall the terminology of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's "ducks" and "decorated sheds," they do not seem to be developed with the sort of self-awareness that those terms would demand. There is a heavy-handedness to them that leads one to wonder if they are not so much concerned with contextual sensitivity as they are with the image or representation of such (some might rightly ask, what's the difference?).

While there are those who would dismiss these projects as superficial, we

will engage them. We will critically - not casually - embrace the symbolic and the decorative, looking at precedents in an effort to develop an understanding of their tropes and clichés in order to recombine them in a manner that produces qualities that challenge or comment on our expectations of what it means for architecture to be contextual today: What is a contextual building supposed to look like? Does it have to clearly look like anything at all? In asking ourselves these questions, we will do our best to reengage the problem of context and produce something other than the familiar.

OUR CONTEXT

Our exploration will be grounded in Los Angeles, a city that is an un-selfconscious menagerie of collected identities where heterogeneity and homogeneity become synonyms without much anxiety. Within this city, it is hard to say what the difference is exactly between "fitting in" and "standing out." To that end, it is an ideal territory within which to evaluate the complexities of what a term like context might mean as it relates to architectural production.

Specifically, our site is located in Frogtown, a "secret and self-contained"² neighborhood in north-east Los Angeles whose identity shifts depending on which direction you're looking: look one way and it appears to be a single-family residential neighborhood; look the other and it's an industrial park.

This site presents a number of intriguing problems including, but not limited to, the intricacies of a corner lot (which face is the front?), the presence of an existing building (to preserve

or not to preserve?), and the concurrence of multiple building types, scales and styles.

OUR PROJECT

Through three interrelated projects, students will develop a proposal for a duplex housing complex on the given site. In addition to the private housing program, students will introduce a public program component of their choosing to the project.

Throughout this semester we will be introduced to issues related to typology and precedent, methods of site analysis and disciplinary conversations related to context, image and representation.

In Project 1 we will consider the question of building type, studying a selection of buildings native to Los Angeles from which we will extract a set of shared typological principles and develop an archive of dimensioned elevations and roof plans to be shared within each studio.

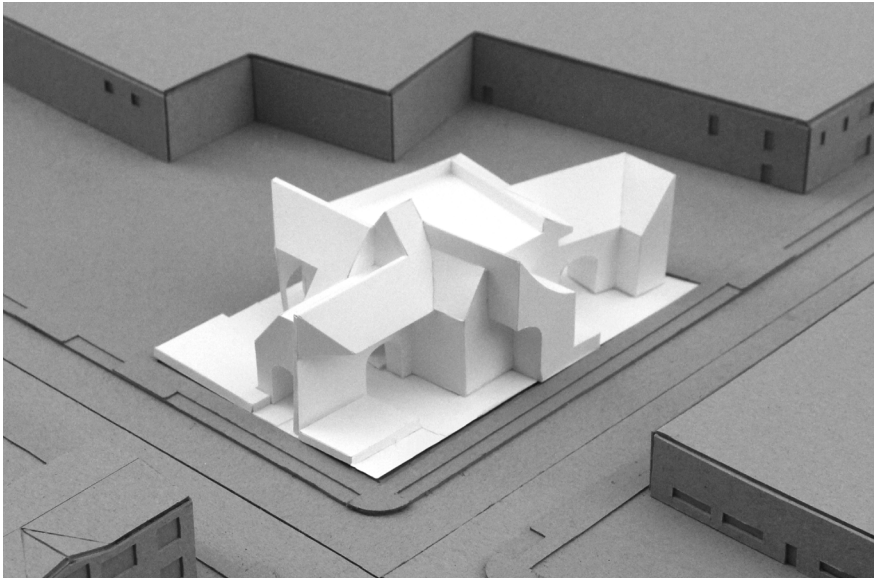
With these measured drawings, each student will produce a series of hybrid building types that will be developed in axonometric drawing, unfolded elevation and model.\

In Project 2 we will work with a given site and program. Working closely with precedent, students will explore the ways in which certain site strategies might be used in conjunction with a specified program to produce a series of initial proposals for a sited architectural project.

In Project 3 students will synthesize their work from Projects 1 and 2 to produce a fully developed sited building proposal. In addition to issues related to site and program, students will engage issues related to scale, typology and vernacular. Students will develop a final sited architectural project through plan, section, elevation and model.

Murals along Clearwater St., Frogtown, Los Angeles.





202A Studio Work, Fall 2018, Raul Lopes de Menezes.

STUDIO INSTRUCTIONS

Readings

Readings will be assigned throughout the semester to provide important insight, historical background and theoretical frameworks for topics addressed this semester. Individual studio discussions will occur as stipulated in the Course Schedule.

Lectures

Lectures will be held in Harris 101 on designated Friday class sessions from 4:00 - 5:50 throughout the semester. Lecture topics will relate directly to the course curriculum. As such, attendance is mandatory and students are required to take notes during lectures for later reference.

Research and Analysis

Precedent studies will be paired with studio assignments and projects throughout the semester. Each student is

expected to use the library on a regular basis to investigate ideas and projects relevant to course content.

Desk Crits and Pinups

Individual desk crits and pinups with the studio instructor will occur regularly throughout the semester. The success and quality of these one-on-one dialogues is contingent upon the student's preparation and timely production. Students who are not properly prepared at the beginning of class will be graded accordingly.

Reviews

Studio reviews will be held regularly throughout the semester and are indicated in the Course Schedule. These group discussions are designed to provide students with varied perspectives and insights from fellow instructors' and invited jurors' comments and criticisms. In addition, these discussions provide valuable insight into the work of your colleagues. Full attendance and participation is required

and expected for all reviews, and is a factor in each student's final evaluation under the heading "Efforts and Improvement" listed below.

Portfolio

Each student will be required to submit a portfolio at the end of the semester. The content should be thoughtfully presented in an 8 1/2" x 11" maximum-size portfolio. Since all assignments must be included in the portfolio, regular documentation throughout the semester is highly recommended. Portfolio guidelines will be distributed.

Studio Culture

We expect that all students take advantage of the studio workspace and the collective knowledge of their fellow students and work in Studio rather than alone at home. The studio culture that develops if as a group everyone participates is beneficial and one of the most unique aspects of architecture school. Studies have proven that a studio that works together prospers together.

Evaluation and Grading

Each studio instructor will monitor and evaluate the progress and performance of their students throughout the semester. Individual assignment grades will be issued within one week after assignments are reviewed. The criteria for evaluation and grading will be outlined in each assignment handout and evaluation form. A faculty-student mid-term conference will be held with students to provide an overview of their progress and to evaluate the quality of the work. Upon completion of the semester,

all second-year instructors will review together the final performance and evaluation of each student to assure evaluation standards are consistent throughout the studio-at-large. A minimum semester grade of a C is required to continue to the next studio sequence. Students performing at or below this minimum standard will be notified in writing. Students should consult the University policies for the Incomplete (IN) grade and should be keenly aware of the semester schedule for key withdrawal dates as established by the University. The final semester grade will be determined by the following requirements and their respective percentages:

Project 1: 20%

Project 2: 30%

Project 3: 40%

Readings/Portfolio/
Participation 10%

Total 100%

Assignments that do not reflect adequate progress or completion will not be discussed during desk crits,

pinups and reviews.

Attendance

Attending classes is a basic responsibility of every USC student who is enrolled in courses at the School of Architecture. In studio courses, the central learning experience is through direct contact between the student and the faculty which advances a student's understanding of architecture through shared exploration. As most all of our enrolled students are completing accredited professional degree programs, regular and punctual class attendance is considered an essential part of satisfying both the NAAB and LAAB accreditation requirements.

As our curriculum is composed of a variety of learning environments, it is important that each instructor has authority over the precise terms of their own attendance policy as outlined in each course syllabus. The following points are to be considered the School of Architecture's collective policy to be referenced in all syllabi, or unless otherwise outlined with

individual faculty variation within a particular course syllabus:

The School of Architecture's attendance policy is to allow a student to miss the equivalent of one week of class sessions (three classes if the course meets three times/week, etc) without directly affecting the student's grade and ability to complete the course. If additional absences are required for a personal illness/family emergency, pre-approved academic reason/religious observance, the situation should be discussed and evaluated with the faculty member and appropriate Chair on a case-by-case basis. For each absence over that allowed number, the student's letter grade can be lowered up to one full letter grade.

Any student not in class within the first 10 minutes is considered tardy, and any student absent (in any form including sleep, technological distraction, or by leaving mid class for a long bathroom/water break) for more than 1/3 of the class time can be considered fully absent. If arriving late, a student must be respectful of a class in session and do everything possible to minimize the disruption caused by a late arrival. It is always the student's responsibility to seek means (if possible) to make up work missed due to absences, not the instructor's, although such recourse is not always an option due to the nature of the material covered. A mid term or final review is to be treated the same as a final exam as outlined and expected by the University. Students must understand that days allocated for their studio final in the syllabus are considered an examination period. If they are absent or tardy on any review day and miss their opportunity to

202A Studio Work, Fall 2018, Amanda Tian.



present, this is considered equal to missing a final exam.

NAAB Accreditation

The USC School of Architecture's five year BARCH degree and the two year M.ARCH degree are accredited professional architectural degree programs. All students can access and review the NAAB Conditions of Accreditation (including the Student Performance Criteria) on the NAAB Website, http://www.naab.org/accreditation/2004_Conditions.aspx.

A.4 Architectural Design Skills:

Ability to effectively use basic formal, organizational and environmental principles and the capacity of each to inform two- and three-dimensional design.

To be addressed in Projects 1,2 + 3

A.5 Ordering Systems:

Ability to apply the fundamentals of both natural and formal ordering systems and the capacity of each to inform two- and three-dimensional design.

To be addressed in Projects 1 + 3

A.6 Use of Precedents:

Ability to examine and comprehend the fundamental principles present in relevant precedents and to make informed choices about the incorporation of such principles into architecture and urban design projects.

To be addressed in Projects 1,2 + 3

B.2 Site Design:

Ability to respond to site characteristics, including urban context and developmental patterning, historical fabric, soil, topography, ecology, climate, and building orientation, in the development of a project design.

To be addressed in Project 2

D.1 Stakeholder Roles in Architecture:

Understanding of the relationships among key stakeholders in the design process—client, contractor, architect, user groups, local community—and the architect's role to reconcile stakeholder needs.

To be addressed in Projects 2 + 3

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual

assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academic-support/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

FALL 2019 SCHEDULE

Week 1: Project 1

- August 26: STUDIO INTRODUCTION
PROJECT 1 INTRODUCTION

Building Types Assigned
- August 28: Reading discussion and presentation

Moneo, Raphael, "On Typology," *Oppositions* 13. Summer, 1978.

Banham, Reyner, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Pelican Books, 1971.

Desk Crits
- August 30: Desk Crits

Week 2: Project 1

- September 2: LABOR DAY
- September 4: Desk Crits
- September 6: Pin-Up

Week 3: Project 1

- September 9: Desk Crits
- September 11: Paired Studio Pin-Up
- September 13: Desk Crits

LECTURE 1: DUCKS AND DECORATED SHEDS (Emily Mohr)

Required Reading:

Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. "Ugly and Ordinary Architecture, or the Decorated Shed." *Learning From Las Vegas*. MIT Press, 1972.

Week 4: Project 1

- September 16: Desk Crits
- September 18: Desk Crits
- September 20: PROJECT 1 FINAL REVIEW

PROJECT 2 INTRODUCTION

LECTURE 2: SITE STRATEGIES (Myrna Ayoub)

Required Reading:

Burns, Carol. "On Site: Architectural Preoccupations." *Body, Image, Text* (Ed. Andrea Kahn). Princeton Architectural Press, 1991.

Week 5: Project 2

- September 23: SITE VISIT: FROGTOWN

September 25: MID REVIEW (Paired Pin Up)

September 27: MID REVIEW (Paired Pin Up)

LECTURE 3: PROGRAM (TBD)

Required Reading:

Tschumi, Bernard. "Spaces and Events." Architecture and Disjunction. MIT Press, 1996.

Week 6: Project 2

September 30: Desk Crits

October 2: Desk Crits

October 4: Pin Up

LECTURE 4: GROUND (Farnoosh Rafaie)

Required Reading:

Kraus, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." October, Vol. 8. Spring, 1979.

Week 7: Project 2

October 7: Desk Crits

October 9: Paired Pin Ups

October 11: Desk Crits

Week 8: Project 2

October 14: Desk Crits

October 16: PROJECT 2 FINAL REVIEW

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT 3

October 18: FALL RECESS

Week 9: Project 3

October 21: Desk Crits

October 23: Desk Crits

October 25: Pin Up

Week 10: Project 3

October 28: Desk Crits

October 30: Desk Crits

November 1: Pin Up

Week 11: Project 3

November 4: Desk Crits
November 6: Desk Crits
November 8: Paired Pin Up

Week 12: Project 3

November 11: Desk Crits
November 13: Desk Crits
November 15: Pin Up

Week 13: Project 3

November 18: Desk Crits
November 20: Desk Crits
November 22: Pin Up

Week 14: Project 3

November 25: Desk Crits
November 27: THANKSGIVING BREAK
November 29: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15: Project 3

December 2: Desk Crits
December 4: FINAL REVIEW
December 6: FINAL REVIEW

Week 16: Portfolio

December 9: Portfolios Due (Exact Time and Date TBD)