

Techniques (Your Techniques)

What work does technique perform in the process of design?

As you look through websites like ArchDaily, Dezeen, Suckerpunch, professional trade journals online and in print, and all the architecture books of buildings and representations across time and across the globe, there are projects that catch your eye. That catch your attention through the attentions manifest in the work. Either because they intrigue you or you are really bothered by them — both of which are telling about what gets your attention. This studio provides the opportunity for you to analyze your forms of attention and to experiment through the techniques that are manifest in the works that get your attention.

There are many different ways to experiment on your intentions and attentions in architecture.

There may be a mode of design you feel is significant but that has not evolved enough, so you want to push it even further.

Or a mode of design that is intensive in its response to one aspect of design (form, program, structure, site, tectonic detail) but unresponsive in other aspects, so you want to evolve it to engage some of these other aspects. Like Diller Scofidio + Renfro pushing the single-surface formal problem to engage program in their Eyebeam Museum, further evolving it in their more recent The Museum of Image & Sound in Rio and their Columbia University Education Center.

Or there is a cultural circumstance that no one seems to be noticing that you think can bring a new dimension to design (like Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown analyzing Las Vegas to study forms of architectural communication or Rem Koolhaas focusing on China or Lagos or shopping).

Or a mode from another discipline. There may be a new or old art form whose techniques you think could revitalizing architecture (John Hejduk looking at cubism, David Ruy looking at glitch art). Or a scientific formation from biology, physics, or mathematics (Greg Lynn and Tom Wiscombe looking at distinct aspects of complexity theory).



Messe Basel New Hall/ Herzog & De Meuron



VitraHaus/ Herzog & De Meuron



Prada Tokyo/ Herzog & De Meuron



Or perhaps you might recognize in your work two seemingly opposed techniques that you might synthesize, creating a fusion of two seemingly opposite formal approaches into one building. Like SANAA mixing their collective “pure” geometric mode and their plastic form mode together in their Rolex Learning Center). Or Herzog and de Meuron mixing their diagrid membrane mode and their modular stack mode together in their Prada Tokyo.

What are the techniques that you are developing in your designs?

In the first class, we will start by looking through your portfolio to see what techniques you have already been working with in your designs, in order to start a conversation about your sense of their potentials and limitations. These discussions will provide an initial framework to develop an analysis of the techniques of a range of other architect’s projects — from any time and place — that have caught your attention.

One reason why New York may have caught your attention is to see the museums here, but often you’ll complete your intensive AAD year without seeing even one. To remedy that, the first weekend will be dedicated to visit a number of museums, because the program for the semester through which you can explore your techniques will be a museum of your choice. Why a museum? Because museums are spatialized catalogues and taxonomies of the techniques that are manifest in cultural or natural artifacts. Previous studios in this series have explored these issues at the Museum of Natural History (on the Upper West Side), the Museum of the City of New York (located on the Upper East Side), a Film Museum (located next to the Anthology Film Archive in the East Village), a Museum of Animation (located between Soho and Chinatown, in other words, between western cartoons and anime), and an addition to the Metropolitan Museum (at their Fifth Avenue Upper East Side location, as with their other locations on the Upper East Side (Met Breuer) and on the uppermost West Side (the Cloisters). You can select one of these museums and sites, or a new building for (or an addition to) one of the many other museums in the five boroughs of New York City.

So in the second week, your selection of your museum and site follows, with an analysis of its current spatial organization, its collection, its curatorial agenda and how it could evolve through your new design. Your evolving ideas regarding technique will provide new perspectives on these matters as well as tools for your analysis. In turn some of the techniques manifest in the artifacts of your museum may suggest further transformations in your exploration of your own techniques as



The Metropolitan Museum



The Museum of Natural History



The Met Breuer



The New Museum

you design your museum throughout the semester. If you have chosen a particular museum of collection, it is because there is something about the techniques in its artifacts that catches your attention. And analyzing these object techniques can reveal aspects of your own techniques in more articulated and surprising ways. Thus in this week you will select two artifacts from your collection to see how they may be transformed into each other to analyze the techniques of their figuration, how form and meaning becomes manifest in objects.

Having now identified complimentary and contrasting techniques — in your own work, the work of other architects, and in the artifacts of your chosen museum collections — in the third week will engage a series of experiments through the hybrid fusion of these complimentary and contrasting techniques in the first iterations of your museum design. Techniques do not develop unless they have some work to do, something that engages and pushes their capabilities in surprising and innovative ways. To evolve these modes as forms of organization means to engage these modes not as merely aesthetically formal techniques but as transformative formations of cultural techniques.

Your experiments will now be developing and evolving at the building and urban scale. In addition, at the scale of display architecture, the museum environment is particularly geared to evolve ways that these technologies can provide interpretative information and multi-media visualization as the viewer looks through fixed and mobile screens at artifacts, models, paintings, or period rooms. Each of your collections pose distinct opportunities to configure and evolve more engaging uses of both technologies and tectonics — as curatorial systems within and between the diverse collections and the public spaces of the museum (cafes, circulation, gift shops, lobbies), but also as interpretative interface membranes between interior and exterior environments. Each has the capability to be more interactive, more consciously self-reflexive in and through its own form. Your chosen collection and its informational membranes, having already expanded into the public spaces, can now expand out to engage its context in ways that can expand the very fundamental ideas — the categories, taxonomies, and typologies — of museums, your techniques having provided the agency to develop new forms and formations of culture.

