Architecture and Philosophy

Subject area: Civil Engineering/Architecture

University: TU/e
Level: MA1, MA2, MA all years
Teaching mode: hybrid: some students participate online, other students attend real-life
Instructor(s): Jacob Voorthuis & Andreas Spahn

Short description

Each design decision needs to be justified against an idea of what is desired and each desire must in turn be justified against experience and hope, preferably in the form of compelling (scientific) evidence. The course will draw from different subfields of philosophy (epistemology, aesthetics, philosophy of technology, ethics, political philosophy etc.) to investigate how design choices can be understood using philosophical ideas.

Full description

Design accommodates people in their environment so that both may flourish. Architectural design thus facilitates activity, modifies climate and thinks about the making. In all this it delights users in whichever way they use the building. The big challenge of design is its freedom: anything is possible, however a lot of what is possible is not very sensible. This means that every design decision however it is arrived at, has to be properly justified in order to be applied. We need to know why we want to do this, rather than that and how we want to achieve what we want. Design then, is a social institution; it concerns itself with applying the requisite technology and know-how to the production of a social space that answers our aspirations. Each design decision needs to be justified against an idea of what is desired and each desire must in turn be justified against experience and hope, preferably in the form of compelling (scientific) evidence. The course will draw from different subfields of philosophy (epistemology, aesthetics, philosophy of technology, ethics, political philosophy etc.) to investigate how design choices could both be understood and be properly reasoned and justified using philosophical ideas.

Any designer, to come to a refined view of what might be a good design, needs to develop their frame of reference and be able to justify their choices sensibly. For this purpose the essay/position paper has proved itself a wonderful medium. It allows us to document and compare the experiences and ideas of others and to nuance these relative to a specific situation or problem that is our own specific concern. It is, as such crucial that a designer learns to formulate their attitude to a design task on the basis of a careful weighing of alternative views, opinions and facts. This is why this course is important to you. The course is built up of three elements:

1. A course of lectures by Andreas Spahn and Jacob Voorthuis in which various themes relevant to the selected literature are introduced and used for discussion.

2. The reading, analysis and critique of one of the selected texts for the course by a group of 3 students.

Each group will give a short 15 minute presentation on the content of their chosen text and relate what they have read explicitly to the design of architecture in the form of lessons learnt. The presentation will give answers to the following questions:

How does the text fit into a wider intellectual context? Is the author member of a particular approach in philosophy? And what does that mean for the way the author approaches the subject? What is the main question/problem/challenge the author is trying to address in the text? How is the text built up as a series of arguments? What are the main conclusions of the text? What do you think it means for you? (i.e. How does it require us to change our outlook and maybe change the way you behave)? How might what the author says be relevant to your understanding of architecture and architectural design?

This presentation needs to be reworked as a collective paper. (ca. 1500 words)

Before the final draft of the paper is handed in on canvas it needs to be peer-reviewed by one of the other groups. The peer reviewers need to take this feed table

3. The writing of a short individual essay under exam conditions which will ask you to relate the content of the course (literature and lectures) to the subject of architectural design (see the quizzes tab)

Learning outcomes

Through the concrete examination and critique of specific buildings, designs and urban agglomerations from a specific point of view, namely that of the text your are required to study and present, you will, at the end of the course, be in a position to place your own efforts in design and design thinking within an increasingly refined and well-practised frame of reference, helping you to make considered design decisions within social space and thereby undertake and undergo the odyssey of the design process with greater awareness. The purpose of this course is to give you the opportunity to learn to:

Analyse and critique a given piece of philosophical literature, seeking out its main argument, finding the reasons for that argument an applying the argument to the question of (architectural) design with the help of the analysis of concrete examples.

Present your analysis and application of the literature in the form of a group presentation showing a clear structure and giving a well-rounded narrative

Write an essay/position paper exploring your own theoretical position relative to a chosen topic in an exam setting.

Explain your choice for this topic in relation to your own ambitions as a practitioner.

Formulate a specific research question which can be investigated using literature as well as concrete examples from the built environment in order to form a thoroughly argued attitude to the design process.

Contextualise the topic within the current debate about the built environment.

Summarise the positions of (two) other authors on this topic.

Nuance their theoretical positions and take up a position within the debate.

Define and underpin their own position with arguments and examples.

Perform research according to the accepted criteria of scholarship.

General information

Contact hours per week: 6

Total workload:	144 (in student hours for the whole course)
ECTS credits:	5
Language:	English

Course start date:	06 February 2023
Course end date:	23 April 2023
Add. info about start date:	The exact timeslots will be known nearer the time
Weekly teaching day/time:	One set of lectures and one seminar gathering for presentations and discussion
Time zone:	CET (Denmark, Germany, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Czech Republic)
Further information:	

Prerequisites:	The course requires certain kinds of knowledge and skills, which we assume you already have:
	The ability to participate actively in discussions about the relationship between design, building and thought, through the study of specific cases.
	The ability to find relevant literature, read it critically, to summarise its core points and to find the arguments supporting its position. (Help in finding literature can be had from the library staff)
	The ability to describe architecture and explain concepts and subject both to critical reflection. (This skill will of course be practised during this course but it is hoped you have had a little more experience in such things)
	The ability to formulate and defend a position relative to the subject chosen and to formulate those arguments in such a way that together they become a coherent whole, leading to a conclusion in which the main arguments are summarised and the practical consequences of a position are explored.

Activities and methods:	Lectures, Seminars, Group work, Self-study
Presence on campus:	

Final examination

Form:	written
Date:	
Location/format:	online
Re-sit possibility:	yes

Transcript available:	within 15 working days of sitting the exam
Add. info/requirements:	An open Exam Question in which you will be asked to write a short essay reflecting on a number of issues covered during the course. We shall mark the essay according to a rubric that you will be able to view from the start of the course

Registration

To register for this course, follow the registration requirements of your **home university** as specified here: www.euroteq.eu/courses-registration.

Administration

Number of places:	20
Minimum participants:	
Internal course code:	7QX6M0
Contact:	j.c.t.voorthuis@tue.nl

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This course is part of the EuroTeQ Engineering University joint course catalogue 2023. This is a collaborative activity of the partner universities DTU, L'X, TU/e, TalTech, CTU, TUM as well as Technion. Students from these universities can participate in the offered courses. It is the responsibility of the student to check if you fulfil the requirements to participate in a specific course. Students are also advised to check with their home institution how to get recognition of the ECTS credits gained in courses of the EuroTeQ course catalogue. For further information about EuroTeQ Engineering University, visit www.euroteq.eu or get in touch with the above-mentioned point of contact.