



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE,
PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE

ARCH 702 | Senior Research Studio
Winter 2022 | MTWF 14:00 – 20:10

Dan Hapton
daniel.hapton@ucalgary.ca

“ABSURD REALISM”

Comedy as Creative Tactic and Corrective Measure to Architecture’s Serious Problem(s)



One Week, Buster Keaton, 1920

“Architecture's self-serious tragedy has been written and rewritten ad nauseam. I'd prefer something else, something I can relate to. You know what I mean. I guess what I've been trying to say, if it wasn't clear already, is that someone should really write a manifesto, a manifesto for the absurd. It's probably the most earnest thing to write. At this moment we don't need a manifesto for the competent or the sustainable. Those have already been written and they're so completely boring and so totally obvious. This yet-to-be-written manifesto should be called "Absurd Realism," so that people would know that it's not simply solipsistic ironic winking but that it's engaged in the world. It is not against Realism or Humanism. It's not against Abstraction or Formal Logic or Positivism. It's not art for art's sake, and it's not about heteronomy of life, of urbanism, of function. It's for both and neither. "Absurd Realism" would be extreme in its parallel, multiple ontologies. The more I think of it though, the more I realize I can't write it, I wouldn't know how to begin...”

- Michael Meredith in “For the Absurd” Log 22 pp.9

INTRODUCTION

Architecture does not solve problems, it has problems. Today’s average architect is a self-serious tragedy—limited in their ability to engage meaningfully with the world by the field’s longstanding, arcane, and codified pursuit of truth. One notorious historian reflected:

Architects — almost uniquely among modern design professionals-propose to assume responsibility for all... aspects of good building... and to be legally answerable to the client for their proper delivery. Other professions (such as electrical and mechanical engineering) notoriously avoid such [impossible] responsibilities, preferring to remain at one remove from the wrath of clients as "consultants"; hired guns who, like minor war criminals, "were only carrying out orders".¹

While this noble-enlightenment-ambition—the pursuit of truth and goodness through the masterful use of reason—has garnered admiration for architects in various ill-informed literary and pop-cultural representations historically, it would be considered an act of philosophical suicide in nearly any other creative/intellectual field today. Thus *ARCH 702 “Absurd Realism”* proposes architectural research not as an expansion of the architect’s mastery out into the world, but as an opportunity to look inward and interrogate architecture’s own disciplinary apparatus, problems, and limitations. Researching the tactics of comedy—a cultural mode of entertainment and critique apt in disarming seriousness and its toxic effects in society—will be a central theme. This lens will enable us to experiment with architecture by loosening the fields’ abject seriousness from within. Just as disarming the serious can enable a political comedian to speak truth to power, it can enable architects to speak truth to themselves. Surprising, incongruent, and absurd architectural operations will offer us access to new subjectivities and forms of engagement. Comedy will be our creative tactic and corrective measure.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop and demonstrate master’s level critical understandings of the architectural field, its reaches, and limitations.
- To develop a research agenda motivated by critique and genuine experimentation capable of operating within and against the strictures that define architecture’s production.
- To develop advanced skills in technical analysis, diagramming, modeling, and architectural design
- To develop the visual and verbal skills to communicate critical ideas and illicit feedback across a multiplicity of diverse audiences.
- To prepare graduating students to transition into the next phase of their careers

¹ See “A Black Box” by Reynar Banham pp. 294

CONTENT: TOPIC AREAS & CLASS SCHEDULE (Subject to change)

Detailed class schedules, phase topics and project weighting will be provided at the start of each phase.

PHASE ONE	Jan 11 – Jan 31	20%
ARCHITECTURE'S SERIOUS PROBLEM(S) DIAGRAMS & CRITIQUES		
PHASE TWO	Jan 31 – Feb 18	10%
COMEDY AS TACTIC DIAGRAMMING THE JOKE		
PHASE THREE	Mar 01 – Mar 11	20%
BUILDING LAUGHTER ARCHITECTURAL EXPERIMENTS & PROCEDURES		
PHASE FOUR	Mar 22 – Apr 19	40%
SYNTHESIS PROJECTS FOR THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE		
PHASE FIVE		
DOCUMENTATION STUDIO MONOGRAPH		10%

READINGS

A selection of required and suggested readings that will be assigned throughout the course. This list is subject to change and might be expanded to include additional essays, books, films and podcasts.

Andrew Atwood | *Not Interesting: On the Limits of Criticism in Architecture*

Pier Vittorio Aureli | *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*

Bair, Balliet, Fure, Miller | *Possible Mediums*

Henri Bergson | *Laughter*

Rem Koolhaas | *Delirious New York*

Adam Kotsko | *Awkwardness*

Michael Meredith | *For the Absurd*

Robert Venturi | *Complexity and Contradiction In Architecture*

Andrew Zago | *Awkward Position*

TEACHING APPROACH

The studio will be conducted in a blended format. In person sessions combined with on-line session via Zoom and Miro and will utilize a series of assigned readings, tutorials, desk reviews, design charrettes, informal and formal reviews and guest resources. Detailed assignments with corresponding deliverables and deadlines will be disseminated at the beginning of each phase. Studio success will rely on the development and execution of phase specific methodologies, iterative exploration, observation, and critical reflection. Students are expected to produce new work in advance of all classes, with all new work uploaded to the studio Miro board prior to the start of class. Students should come to all scheduled meetings prepared to discuss their work and constructively critique the work of their peers.

EMAIL POLICY

Please note that all course communications must occur through your @ucalgary email, and the teaching team will respond to emails sent via the student's @ucalgary email within 48 hours.

MEANS OF EVALUATION

Specific deliverables and their corresponding due-dates will be provided at the commencement of each project phase. Students are expected to complete all required work by the assigned dates and show up to all scheduled desk reviews, lectures and presentations on time and ready to discuss their work. Unless otherwise noted, all grades will take into consideration:

- *Participation & Completeness* – all project deliverables are present, completed and submitted on time following a coherent naming convention. Students present and actively participate in all desk reviews and discussions.
- *Graphics & Communication* - all visualizations and produced artifacts are carefully considered in their production and their presentation.
- *Technique & Craft* - The project demonstrates proficiency in the tools, workflows and methods introduced. All techniques are rigorously and iteratively deployed to solve problems. All project deliverables are well-crafted, overall care is evident.
- *Critical Thinking & Iteration* – Students utilize an iterative workflow based on exploration, critical thinking and reflection. The student's work challenges the subject matter and takes a position.

GRADING SCALE

The SAPL standard grading scale will be used in all evaluations for this course.

A+ (95.0-100.0); **A** (90.0-94.99); **A-** (85-89.99); **B+** (80.0-84.99); **B** (75.0-79.99); **B-** (70.0-74.99); **C+** (65.0-69.99); **C** (60.0-64.99); **C-** (55.0-59.99); **D+** (50.0-55.99); **D** (45.0-49.99); **F** (0-44.99).

Final grades will be reported as letter grades, with the final grade calculated according to the 4-point range." All project phases will be evaluated by percentage grades, with their letter grade equivalents as shown.

NOTE: A student who receives a "C+" or lower in any one course will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average (GPA) unless the program recommends otherwise. If the program permits the student to retake a failed course, the second grade will replace the initial grade in the calculation of the GPA, and both grades will appear on the transcript. If a student receives a grade less than B- for any assignment worth 30% or more, the student will receive an F grade for the course.

CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL CERTIFICATION BOARD (CACB) STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA (SPC)

The following CACB Student Performance Criteria will be covered in this course at a *primary* level:

A1. Design Theories, Precedents, and Methods

The student must demonstrate an *ability* to articulate a design process grounded in theory and practice, an understanding of design principles and methods, and the critical analysis of architectural precedents.

A2. Design Skills

The student must demonstrate an *ability* to apply design theories, methods and precedents to the conception, configurations, and design of buildings, spaces, building elements, and tectonic components.

A3. Design Tools

The student must demonstrate an ability to use the broad range of design tools available to the architectural discipline, including a range of techniques for two-dimensional and three-dimensional representation, computational design, modeling, simulation, and fabrication.

B1. Critical Thinking and Communication

The student must demonstrate an ability to reach clear and precise questions; record, assess and comparatively evaluate information; synthesize research findings and test potential alternative outcomes against relevant criteria and standard; reach well-supported conclusions related to a specific project or assignment; and write, speak, and use visual media effectively to appropriately communicate on subject matter related to the architectural discipline with the profession and general public.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

In order to successfully engage in their learning experiences at the University of Calgary, students taking online, remote and blended courses are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection
- Software:
 - Blender (+ assignment specific plugins)
 - Rhino / Grasshopper (+ assignment specific plugins)
 - Adobe Suite (Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, etc.)

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM CONDUCT AND RELATED INFORMATION

Guidelines for Zoom Sessions in Online Classes

Students are expected to participate actively in all Zoom sessions and to turn on their webcam. Please join our class in a quiet space that will allow you to be fully present and engaged in the Zoom sessions. Students must behave in a professional manner during the session, including paying attention to their Zoom background [whether real or virtual]. Students, employees, and academic staff are also expected to demonstrate behaviour in class that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment.

To help ensure Zoom sessions are private, do not share the Zoom link or password with others, or on any social media platforms. Zoom links and passwords are only intended for students registered in the

course. Zoom recordings and materials presented in Zoom, including any teaching materials, must not be shared, distributed or published without the instructor's permission.

Zoom is a video conferencing program that will allow us to meet at specific times for a "live" video conference, so that we can have the opportunity to meet each other virtually and discuss relevant course topics as a learning community.

The use of video conferencing programs relies on participants to act ethically, honestly and with integrity; and in accordance with the principles of fairness, good faith, and respect (as per the [Code of Conduct](#)). When entering Zoom or other video conferencing sessions (such as MS Teams), you play a role in helping create an effective, safe and respectful learning environment. Please be mindful of how your behaviour in these sessions may affect others. Participants are required to use names officially associated with their UCID (legal or preferred names listed in the Student Centre) when engaging in these activities. Instructors/moderators can remove those whose names do not appear on class rosters. Non-compliance may be investigated under relevant University of Calgary conduct policies (e.g [Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](#)). If participants have difficulties complying with this requirement, they should email the instructor of the class explaining why, so the instructor may consider whether to grant an exception, and on what terms. For more information on how to get the most out of your zoom sessions visit: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/guidelines-for-zoom/>

If you are unable to attend a Zoom session, please contact your instructor in advance to arrange an alternative activity for the missed session (e.g., to review the recorded session). Please be prepared, as best as you are able, to join class in a quiet space that will allow you to be fully present and engaged in Zoom sessions. Students will be advised by their instructor when they are expected to turn on their webcam (for group work, presentations, etc.).

The instructor may record online Zoom class sessions for the purposes of supporting student learning in this class – such as making the recording available for review of the session or for students who miss a session. Students will be advised before the instructor initiates a recording of a Zoom session. These recordings will be used to support student learning only and will not be shared or used for any other purpose.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY POLICIES AND SUPPORTS

COVID-19 PROCEDURE FOR SICK STUDENTS: <https://ucalgary.ca/risk/sites/default/files/Covid-19%20Folder/COVID-19-Procedure-for-Sick-Students.pdf>

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures listed below. The Student Accommodations policy is available at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/access/prospective-students/academic-accommodations>. Students needing an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf>). Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than Disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic Misconduct refers to student behavior which compromises proper assessment of a student's academic activities and includes: cheating; fabrication; falsification; plagiarism; unauthorized assistance; failure to comply with an instructor's expectations regarding conduct required of students completing academic assessments in their courses; and failure to comply with exam regulations applied by the Registrar.

For information on the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure please visit:

<https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-policy.pdf>

<https://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-academic-misconduct-procedure.pdf>

Additional information is available on the Academic Integrity Website at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/learning/academic-integrity>.

COPYRIGHT LEGISLATION:

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorised sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>).

INSTRUCTOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Course materials created by instructors (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Student information will be collected in accordance with typical (or usual) classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty. Private information

related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE POLICY

The University recognizes that all members of the University Community should be able to learn, work, teach and live in an environment where they are free from harassment, discrimination, and violence. The University of Calgary's sexual violence policy guides us in how we respond to incidents of sexual violence, including supports available to those who have experienced or witnessed sexual violence, or those who are alleged to have committed sexual violence. It provides clear response procedures and timelines, defines complex concepts, and addresses incidents that occur off-campus in certain circumstances. Please see the policy available at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/sexual-violence-policy.pdf>

UNIVERSITY STUDENT APPEALS OFFICE: If a student has a concern about the course, academic matter, or a grade that they have been assigned, they must first communicate this concern with the instructor. If the concern cannot be resolved with the instructor, the student can proceed with an academic appeal, which normally begins with the Faculty. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/student-appeals>

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Please visit the Registrar's website at: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for additional important information on the following:

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

MEDIA AND RECORDING IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Part 1

University Calendar: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html>

Recording of lectures (other than audio recordings that are pre-arranged as part of an authorized accommodation) is not permitted. Students may not record any portion of a lecture, class discussion or course-related learning activity without the prior and explicit written permission of the course instructor or authorization from Student Accessibility Services. For any other use, whether by duplication, transcription, publication, sale or transfer of recordings, written approval must be obtained from the instructor for the specific use proposed. Any use other than that described above constitutes academic misconduct and may result in suspension or expulsion.

Part 2

The instructor may use media recordings to capture the delivery of a lecture. The instructor will notify all students and guests in the class that the event is being recorded. If a student or guest wants to take steps to protect privacy, and does not want to be recorded, the instructor will provide the individual (s) with an alternative means of participating and asking questions (e.g., passing written notes with questions). Students cannot be penalized for choosing not to be recorded in situations where participation is part of the course. Students must be offered other ways of earning participation credit that do not involve recording. Any video-recording would be intended to only capture the instructor and the front of the classroom. Students/other participants would not necessarily be visible on video recordings.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY POLICIES AND SUPPORTS Academic Accommodation

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student

Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when: (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work, (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author, (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or, (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved. While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offence. Any suspicion of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean, and dealt with as per the regulations in the University of Calgary Graduate Calendar. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary

Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

COPYRIGHT LEGISLATION

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-

[bycopyright.pdf](#)) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorised sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Student information will be collected in accordance with typical (or usual) classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

UNIVERSITY STUDENT APPEALS OFFICE: If a student has a concern about the course, academic matter, or a grade that they have been assigned, they must first communicate this concern with the instructor. If the concern cannot be resolved with the instructor, the student can proceed with an academic appeal, which normally begins with the Faculty. <https://ucalgary.ca/student-appeals/>

More student support and resources (e.g. safety and wellness) can be found here: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines>