In its purest form, arbitrage is risk free. This studio will explore the architectural potential of arbitrage.

Architectural Arbitrage will inspect the spatial implications of non-architectural factors in the past and future shapings of the built environment. This investigative studio will work through analytic research and generative exercises that cultivate a mastery of translation between the abstract and the material.

The objective of the studio is to demonstrate:
1) That space and material are mediums with enormous agency;
2) How architects can act as representatives of these mediums in order to effect change, rather than only as respondents to a set of predetermined demands. Thus, concepts such as “fairness”, when considered through an architectural lens, can begin to redefine the decision making of society at large.
Syllabus Gibraltar 2012
Taubman College

A: Irene Hwang
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A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture
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University of Michigan
2000 Bonisteel Boulevard
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2069 USA

COURSE DESCRIPTION: (Outlined in Four Parts)

1. Location:
The site of the studio is located and structured along the two coasts that flank the Strait of Gibraltar. For millennia, this region has been the locus of shifting (swapping) religious, political, cultural, linguistic, climatic, and economic regimes. Yet, unlike other regions of such contrasts, such incongruities have managed to strike a provocative balance that is imbedded in the physical and non-physical space of the area. Moreover, given the region’s long and ongoing heterogeneous character, it contains abundant and irrefutable evidence of the mutual influence of the built environment with religious, political, legal, and financial processes.

North of the Strait, we find Gibraltar, a territory that is both British and Spanish, and neither. Its location has made it a crucial military asset; yet, its continued survival rests on its ability to be open and non-strategic, a destination for tourism and banking. Immediately to the South of the Strait, in an act of a geographic mirroring, we find Ceuta, a Spanish city that is not in Spain at all, but in the unusual place between two nations (Spain and Morocco) and two continents (Africa and Europe).

The actual geographic and political situation of these places is far from straightforward: the accumulation of millennia of social, cultural, and religious dysplasia provides the studio with an incredible territory for conducting an investigation into architectural arbitrage. In its purest form, arbitrage is risk free: it produces profit through the exploitation of differences in the price of a particular asset. It is the objective of the studio to identify and record the spatial and material outcomes of this dysplasia and to grasp the opportunity to occupy this arbitrage space as a means to not only expand the potential products of architectural activity, but also to expand the agency of the discipline in contemporary society. By understanding first-hand, the spatial and material consequences of the various social, cultural, or economic factors that have shaped the built environment of and around Gibraltar’s extremely layered contexts, students will work to translate between the traditional artifacts of architectural agency and the contexts within which they operate.

2. Pedagogic Intent:
The studio is primarily concerned with the act of translation—as a means and an end: students will learn how to operate in both the abstract and the concrete, moving back and forth, from one to another. Students will reinforce their ability develop a self-critical, intellectual project of architecture through the shaping of space and material. Through a series of action driven, spatial exercises, students will acquire a series of conceptual skills that deal directly with space making through a consideration of shifting and competing contexts.

3. Outcomes and Deliverables:
For the duration of the course, students will speculate and develop abstract concepts through spatial and material definition. At various sites along the Strait, students will be asked to examine their physical surroundings through an initial documentation of the site’s non-material and physical characteristics. This documentation will take on the form of two glossaries: one verbal and one visual. Next, students will execute a series of spatially driven, design projects to produce multiple, but specific outcomes. Students will pair an abstract concept (i.e. closeness, comfort, public, private) to a specific design project (i.e. plaza, entryway, passageway, courtyard, kiosk, boundary, threshold). What are the formal characteristics of “comfort” defined in house located in the desert versus a temperate climate? How is “sacred” understood when a mosque is re-appropriated as a church? How is “community” interpreted in a Christian, versus Muslim residential neighborhood? What does a study of “closeness” yield in terms of medina architecture (old city), vernacular residences, and cultural practices? How private is a riad (traditional house) under a restrictive political regime versus a tourist governance?

4. Long-term Objectives:
As professionals, architects are held accountable for affecting/impacting the wellbeing of society, historically exercising their agency through the making of buildings. Yet, space and material, mediums of tremendous agency, still remain extremely underrepresented in society’s decision-making. “Architectural Arbitrage” hopes to increase the discipline’s agency not through an understanding of how to make a better building, but rather through a development of skills that refine the architect’s ability to communicate the agency of space and material itself. Whereby architects and architecture are involved in decision making at the level of policy: imagine a welfare state that no longer distributes wealth under an accounting-based formula of “fairness” that dictates that each citizen receives the same dollar amount; a type of accounting that would drastically change if it were to consider the cost differentials of a person living in a city versus one in the countryside.

By understanding the multiple spatial/material outcomes for a common abstract concept, students will lay the groundwork for demonstrating how spatial thinking, or the particulars of an architectural mindset, can exert influence beyond the immediate and traditional domain of the discipline.
The area occupied around and along the Strait of Gibraltar is a highly contested territory that is unexpectedly balanced.

Centuries of political, religious, and economic shifts have resulted in an incredibly rich and layered built environment that is unreplicated anywhere else in the world. These shears and shifts are the subject of our inquiry.

There is a surprising dearth of recent inquiry into the spatial and material consequences of the territories along the Strait. Elsewhere these conflicts have created tears (both liquid and rips) in the social and physical fabric of the communities that endure such radical changes. Yet in this area, there is a certain spatial co-existence that begs to be documented and unpacked.

In the tradition of anthropological fieldwork, we will be acting as observers and our task is to act as ghostwriters of the spatial narratives of the region.

Take for example the paired photos featured on this page: Granada and Fez - two cities that bridge two continents and two religions are equilateral in terms of their architectural DNA, but how the two cites operate at a finer grain of communal space and building, lies at the heart of our intellectual inquiry.

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Africa and Europe --
They don’t look so different.
The Strait is not so straight.

Even as young architects, we know that a building design is the cumulative result of thousands and thousands of design decisions. Contrary to what non-architects think, space is not empty.

The objective of Studio Arbitrage, is to understand the complicated processes of translation that lies at the core of our discipline and profession. Simply: how does architecture transform the abstract into concrete material and space? How do we know when what we’ve done is correct? How do we know when what we’ve built is comfortable? What makes the same space private for one community and public for another?

Nowhere is this condition of shifting abstractions as present as in the area along the Strait of Gibraltar. Millenia of shifts in governments, religions, and markets have specific architectural consequences that we will be examining at great detail.

Both historical and contemporary examples (at all scales) will form the focus of our work: churches, palace-museums, house-hotels, countries-within-other-countries, to name a few.
THE POWER OF THE ARCHITECTURAL MINDSET

What is a dollar worth?

As professionals, architects are held accountable for affecting the wellbeing of society, historically exercising their agency through the making of buildings. Yet, space and material— mediums of tremendous agency—remain extremely underrepresented in society’s decision-making. Architectural Arbitrage frames the discipline’s agency not through an understanding of how to make a better building, but rather through the architect’s capacity to communicate the instrumentality of space and material to a much larger constituency.

Imagine a welfare state that distributes resources under a predictable formula of “fairness” where each citizen receives the same dollar amount: such fairness accounting would drastically change if considerations of urban/rural cost differentials were introduced. Only architecture can provide a completely considered, material response to the complex set of criteria and consequences that determine the cumulative material and non-material cost differentials of a person living in a city versus one in the countryside.

:: REVISED ACCOUNTING ::

Revised accounting -- Redefinition of “Fairness”
Syllabus Gibraltar 2012
Taubman College

STUDIO FOUNDATIONS

The foundation for the pedagogical intent of the Taubman 2012 Gibraltar studio is grounded in my own background in architectural publishing and as an architect and editor.

Architects are increasingly generating their own areas of agency. Instead of relying on the dictates of the spatial-functional requirements of a building, our discipline is increasingly moving forward into other realms of architectural action that are not immediately recognized within the traditional spheres of our practice.

In order to prepare for a long and prosperous career within the field, this studio will help to prepare students to explore a variety of different techniques, and then be asked to focus on those methods which offer the most promise for long-term development.

The studio is designed so that students will develop skills that serve them far beyond the academic environment.

Thus, in addition to the more traditional methods of drawing, photography, and video, students will also be asked to participate directly in the office visits through student-lead conversations. Moreover, students will focus on developing their own architectural topics and to position themselves within not only the Taubman architectural community, but also the discipline at large.

* Please refer to original Gibraltar presentation that discusses architectural activity at different scales and formats
Syllabus Gibraltar 2012
Taubman College

PRE-COURSE

Apply :: 02/03
   F :: Initial Registration

Confirm :: 02/17
   W :: Final Decisions

Funding :: 02/21
   W :: ELF Grant Due

Deposit :: 03/05
   W :: Deposit Due

Prep :: March
   :: Accomodation
   :: Travel
   :: Visits
   :: Visas (paperwork)

SPRING 2012 - TAUBMAN

USA

Week 1 :: 05/04
AA :: Review Itinerary
:: Finalize Visas
:: Vaccines (if required)

Week 2 :: 05/07
AA :: Introduction to Arbitrage
:: Prepare Documentation
   Materials

SPAIN

Week 3 :: 05/14
Capital :: Madrid
:: Toledo
:: Escorial
:: Segovia

Week 4 :: 05/21
South :: Cordoba
:: Seville
:: Cadiz

SPAIN + UK

Week 5 :: 05/28
   Strait :: Tarifa
   :: Algeciras
   :: Ceuta
   :: Gibraltar

MOROCCO

Week 6 :: 06/04
   Africa :: Tangier
   :: Rabat
   :: Fez
   :: Marrakech

Week 7 :: 06/11
   Layers :: Malaga
   :: Granada
   :: Almeria

BUDGET OVERVIEW (WORKING)

Flight = 1000-1500 USD (DTW - MAD)
Housing = 40-45 USD/night (Spain)
   = 35-40 USD/night (Africa)
Eurail** = 301 USD (5 days)
   = 405 USD (8 days)
Food + = 30 USD / day
Admission

TOTAL = +/- 4150 USD
   = +/- 3150 USD (with Dept. stipend)

** Train costs can be combined with Eurail for longer more expensive legs, and local RENFE (Spain) and ONCF (Morocco) shorter train legs.
Working Bibliography:
Jan. 22, 2012


Miller, Susan Gilson. The Architecture And Memory of the Minority Quarter In the Muslim Mediterranean City. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2010.


Weston, Stephen. Remains of Arabic In the Spanish And Portuguese Languages. With a Sketch by Way of Introduction of the History of Spain; From the Invasion to the Expulsion of the Moors. London: printed by S. Rousseau, Wood Street, Spa Fields; and sold by Payne, Pall Mall; and Clark, New Bond Street, 1810.


### Working Building Bibliography:

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<tr>
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<td>Reina Sofia</td>
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### Urban Conditions and Typologies:

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