



the space of
appearance
and lessons in
mass appeal

ARCH 540 Advanced Topics Studio

Hemsworth – Sept 2024

UBC's Vancouver's campus occupies land on the unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people, who have lived in balance with that land and water for millennia, as have Indigenous Peoples around the world. In the context of this studio project, we will be exploring the opportunities of our shared natural and social environments, and exploring means to give voice to local community groups. While the project is situated outside of the traditional lands of the Musqueam, this avenue of thinking may provide insight to future discussions and negotiations within our shared habitations of these territories.

Premise

I remember finishing my graduate degree at SALA, feeling quite disillusioned with the architectural discourse at the time. I had arrived at school with a simplistic understanding of public space and architectural form-making, and I was leaving without any idea of how to proceed.

It seemed clear that the abstracted and universal underpinnings of the 'modern movement' were not a productive place to harvest ideas for the complexities of contemporary public life.

Simultaneously, the symbolic musings of post-modernism seemed oblique and impossibly unrelated to everyday life.

When you then fold in the poststructuralist loss of meaning as pronounced by Derrida and Baudrillard, along with the resultant 'critique' architecture of deconstruction, such as Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, one was left gasping for air.

Desperate for a path forward, one even contemplated the 'digitizing' of an architectural process through software, as reflected in Greg Lynn's early work. His abdication of authorship in favour of a parametric methodology appeared, at the time, perfectly aligned with what seemed to be the only possible outcome of contemporary, consumptive life: novelty.

The one reprieve from all of this was found in the writings of George Baird. His book, *The Space of Appearance*¹, proposed that the rejection of modern and postmodern reductive concepts of publicness could be replaced with a large and diverse enough imagining of publicities to hold the heterogeneity of contemporary life. Heavily influenced by Hannah Arendt's concepts of the space of plurality, being seen, and collective action, it offered, at least, a possible way forward.

In 2021, Stanford University streamed a lecture series on the public realm featuring Allied Works founder Brad Cloepfil ², I was struck by the similarities between his practice's search for a building's 'initiation'—or offering beyond simply function to the potential of varied, unanticipated occupancies—and Baird's proposition of a plurality of the public. Their strongest example being the 'public room' of the Wieden+Kennedy building in Portland, which was both a communal meeting space for the company and an important public performance space in downtown Portland.

More than the simple juxtaposition of program, as suggested by Koolhaas's Delirious New York Athletic Club, Cloepfil suggested that a single space could be open to reinterpretation and various co-options, both intended and unintended; collective and intimate.

I was heartened by the similarities to one of our own projects, the Leon Lebeniste Factory in Squamish, where we upended the client's request for a simple ground-level café by placing a shared community space on the roof overlooking the Squamish Valley.

Since then, my thinking has returned to the ideas considered by Baird in *The Space of Appearance*. It seems possible that the subtle manipulation of programmatic considerations to offer unanticipated occupations for a variety of different publicities can be accelerated by imbuing these 'community spaces or rooms' with a heightened architectural 'quality of space'.

For the purposes of our continued exploration as a practice, and this studio offering, we are proposing that these spaces can be both harvested for a multiplicity of public occupations while simultaneously representing the overall shared iconography of sustainability and stewardship through the utilization of mass timber as a generative architectural proposition.

Simply put, the explicit use of mass timber in the public realm offers a clear narrative of a more environmentally sensitive approach to construction and architecture, while providing spaces that are more compelling to the people who will inhabit them.

Methodology

For this studio, we will explore the role of mass timber in the development of a sustainable public architecture. Considerations of mass timber production, supply, detailing, construction, and structural limitations will be balanced by phenomenological considerations of materials, light, rhythm, and site.

We will study Canada's position in the development of mass timber construction in public buildings including Patkau Architects' Sq'ewqel Community School, the public atrium expansion of the Art Gallery of Ontario by Frank Gehry, and our own Upper Sheena Recreation Centre. For a detailed list, see *20 Years of Mass Timber in Canada* (A+U, June 2024).³

A detailed precedent study will focus on built models at various scales to explore both the civic offering of buildings and the structural inevitabilities of mass timber construction.

We will then work on two unique projects with an attention to sketch modelling, drawing, evaluation, and iteration. The small project will be a public amenity in Squamish BC, and the larger project a Wei Wai Kum First Nations community facility in Campbell River, BC.

The studio will include a day trip to Pemberton, Whistler, and Squamish in early September and an overnight trip to Campbell River mid term (dates to be confirmed).

1. George Baird, *The Space of Appearance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
2. Stanford University School of Engineering, "Stanford University Spring Lecture Series Architecture & Landscape 2021: Brad Cloepfil," YouTube, April 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK5uGMRebcc>
3. "20 Years of Mass Timber in Canada," a+u, June 2024.