

# The Self and the Society

ARCH 7101 / ARCH 4101- Topical Studio  
5 Credit Hours - MWF 2:00-5:30 pm

Fall 2023

Instructor: Manoj P Kesavan



John Pawson: *Cistercian monastery in Novy Dvur*,



Assemble: *Folly for a Flyover*

“For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.”

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

## Premise:

Withdrawing into Oneself vs. Going out into the World: The twin dilemmas of life, the complementary modes of existence. This is a study of architecture as a tool for understanding oneself and one's place in the world. It would involve field trips; explorations & excursions, both literal and intellectual - into unfamiliar lands, cultures, ways of thinking and seeing the world.

A *Great Introversion* happened roughly a 100 years ago. As siblings of modern psychology and existential philosophies, modern(ist) art and architecture mostly turned away from the society/city, and became the manifestation of the newly discovered internal universe of each individual. This urge/tendency still remains deep in our DNA.

If the early 20th century saw a withdrawal into oneself, what we see now is artists and architects re-immersing themselves in society. Whether it is the “Social Practice” artists like Theater Gates or Natalie Jeremijenko, or architects/collectives like Alejandro Aravena and Assemble, the role seems to be shifting from that of the introverted lone genius into a humble and open collaborator and community orchestrator. This studio will be an exploration through design into the constantly changing and evolving role of the modern architect in the society.

## Part I: A Place Of One's Own

(first 4 weeks...)

“I am learning to see. I don't know why it is, but everything enters me more deeply and doesn't stop where it once used to. I have an interior that I never knew of...”

- Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

## Objectives:

- Understanding architecture as an exploration/expression of the self, through space and materials;
- Exploring the complex relationships between private and public realms
- Learning the history/context of that approach and philosophy and how it has shaped the contemporary built environment as well as the way we think about buildings and cities.

Product: Architectural design expressed through drawings & models.

**Part II: the Architect in the Community** – A Study/Immersion/Intervention into a Community & Culture  
(...rest of the semester)

“Poverty, population growth, natural disasters & war are combining to create unprecedented demands (for buildings), but architects are unable to overcome the challenges posed by politics, economics and building codes to deliver viable solutions... The building logic, the political framework, and the policies, are part of the equation and we're not well trained for that... We're never taught the right thing at university.”

- [Alejandro](#)

[Aravena](#)

"I look for inspiration (or opportunities) from people and places rather than looking for people and places to host my ideas."

- [Julia King](#)

**Objectives:**

- Learn from a community, culture and the people
- Learning to observe, to ask the fundamental questions, the right questions
- Understanding the expanded role artists/architects are taking in 21st century society that goes well beyond traditional design.
- Understanding the potential as well as the limitations of arch/design to be a tool for dealing with the complex social, political, economic and cultural forces that shape our society and life.

**Process:**

- Case studies of contemporary social practices in art and architecture
- Research into the history as well as the current circumstances of the chosen neighborhood/region
- Devising systems and strategies for successful interventions in the community
- The process will include interacting with the people from the community as well as activists/leaders working on addressing the various issues and needs of the time and place.

**Product:**

Designing systems/strategies that address urban/social issues; Architectural interventions at the specific spots to be expressed through drawings/models and/or installations at those locations.

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**Preliminary References:**

[Spatial Agency](#): Other Ways of Doing Architecture, [Nishat Awan](#), [Tatjana Schneider](#), [Jeremy Till](#)

[Rebel Architecture](#) video series, Al Jazeera TV

[The Dawn of Everything](#): A New History of Humanity: David Graeber & David Wengrow (Chapters 1 & 2)

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**Manoj P. Kesavan** is the Founder and Exec. Director of [BOOM Charlotte](#), a multidisciplinary artist collective and non-profit that addresses issues of equity, access and opportunity in the community through innovative and collaborative cultural programming. Their other initiatives range from the design of an off-the-grid free rural [clinic in Haiti](#) to running the [Pecha Kucha Night](#) series in Charlotte. Kesavan has been a visiting lecturer/panelist/juror at several universities and writes/speaks internationally. He also consults on urban design/planning, public art and community engagement projects. [More info & [Interview](#) w/ Kesavan]