

# ARCH 7201

## POST-CRITICAL DISCOURSES

Thomas Forget, Associate Professor  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, School of Architecture  
Fall 2019 Syllabus  
3 Credit Hours: Wednesday, 9:05-11:50



*Odd Lots* (Gordon Matta-Clark)

*"... there is no such thing as an entirely new system, and if a system claims to be such, it is either stupid or dangerous."*

Hanno-Walter Kruff

**PREMISE** This course is a laboratory that interrogates the built environment and the design processes that produce it, and more specifically a critical exploration of post-critical architectural culture. The course follows the history/theory sequence, coincides with the integrated design studio, and precedes the diploma project of the professional degree program. As such, it is an opportunity for students to take stock of emerging trends in the discipline and to respond to them through written, verbal, and graphic criticism. It is a no-risk environment in which students are challenged to explore their biases and to hone their voices on the central matters of design—its purpose, meaning, methods, and potential. Exercises and projects are low-stakes but rigorous, challenging students to think broadly but to work narrowly and deeply.

A primary theme is historical recurrence: despite rhetoric to the contrary, the “new” in contemporary architecture has been seen before. A primary question is the role of research in architectural practice: to what extent should research complement and/or supplant traditional notions of design, and to what extent may design in the traditional sense constitute a form of research? A primary method is typological thinking: the classification and organization of seemingly incompatible quantities and qualities leads to the production of knowledge.

**OBJECTIVES** The primary objective of this course is to develop a culture of critical inquiry and typological thinking toward contemporary architectural design and practice. To that end, it seeks:

- to develop an understanding of architectural criticism
- to develop critical recklessness through depth and agility
- to demystify the design process
- to consider how design is and is not an interdisciplinary act of research
- to promote reading, writing, and graphic analysis as complementary modes of design knowledge
- to promote history and precedent as contingencies of contemporary practice
- to develop and hone’ abilities to communicate through diagramming, writing, and speaking
- to reveal representational strategies as biased discourses that steer design

**STRUCTURE** The semester is divided into three sections. Part I (weeks 1-2) is an overview of the post-critical turn in the discipline, including close readings of the canonical texts by students and lectures by the instructor that situate the past two decades within the broader trajectory of the Modern era, beginning with the codification of the “architect” in the Renaissance. Part II (weeks 3-10) consists of a lecture series by the instructor and student-led discussions. Lectures focus on projects completed in New York City since 2001. The narrow focus, over time, builds a deep understanding of a context in which forces are shaping a set of major contemporary projects. Discussion focus on a parallel but distinct set of readings. Part III (weeks 11-16) is a graphic workshop that parallels the development of students’ final project in studio. Students are tasked with creating a non-normative visualization that falls outside the requirements of the deliverables for the integrated design project—an experimental graphic that somehow illuminates their project in a different light.

**DELIVERABLES** Deliverables are: 1) Weekly Responses: 8 reflections (written and graphic) on required readings (Part II); 2) SoA event journal: 10 reflections (written and graphic) on lectures and events noted on schedule; 3) Discussion Leadership: 1 in-class presentation, with a group of peers; 4) Midterm Project: typological analysis (verbal and graphic) and data visualization project; 5) Final Project: experimental graphics representing students’ studio projects.