

# BArch THESIS

Critical Inquiries,  
Observations, and  
Provocations through  
Architecture

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“Choose carefully the site of rebellion.”

—Terence van Elslander

**“Writing a thesis requires a student to organize ideas and data, to work methodically, and to build an ‘object’ that in principle will serve others. ... With time, a writer becomes more astute and knowledgeable, but how he uses his knowledge will always depend on how he originally researched the many things he did not know.”**

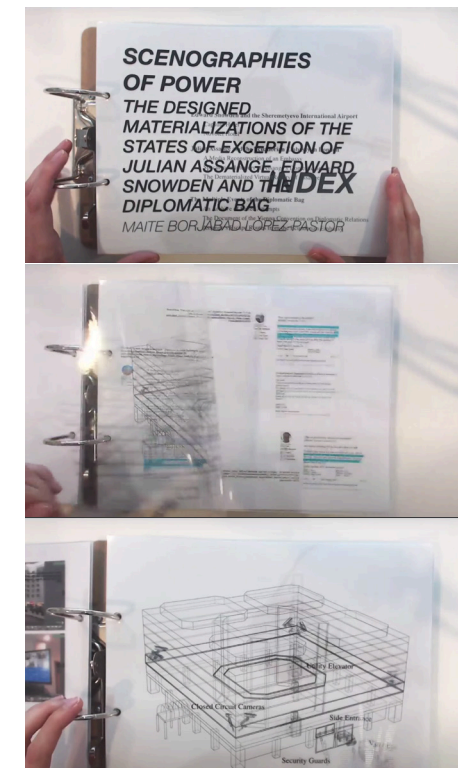
—How to Write a Thesis, Umberto Eco, 1977

## Background

What is a thesis? There are many different answers to the question depending on who you ask.

This course is an opportunity to create a project entirely your own; original research through design. With guidance from a carefully selected group of advisors and mentors, you have the chance to deepen your engagement with architecture on your own terms, exploring a topic you are passionate about. Informed by your unique background and perspective, your thesis will contribute something new to the architectural discipline through a thesis book and exhibition.

Thesis projects may be particularly beneficial for students who wish to specialize or pursue further research after graduation, but for any student the studio will offer the chance to develop a project that you will carry with you throughout your career.



2016 thesis book by Maite Borjabad Lopez Pastor, for her project entitled “Scenographies of Power: The Designed Materializations of the States of Exception of Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, and the Diplomatic Bag.” Borjabad’s thesis, completed as part of the Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture at Columbia University GSAPP, examined how architecture materializes political apparatuses and legal frameworks. It later became an exhibition at the Casa Encendida in 2017.

## Privacy\_

All architecture is political. An important aspect of this thesis studio is understanding how your project engages with networks of power, and the many ways you as a designer might intervene. In regards to privacy, for example, how might an architect provide cover for the vulnerable or increase transparency of authority? In framing an impactful thesis, you will carefully examine a particular social, economic, political, or cultural context and articulate your stance on privacy as part of your intervention.

## Context

In defining your thesis project, you are also defining a place for yourself in the architectural landscape. You are testing ways of working, and modes of engagement. To that end, part of the semester is devoted to reviewing existing design and research related to your chosen topic, including published writings and built work. You will critically reflect on the work of others, and also practice self-reflection in order to build a sense of creative autonomy. You will be working under the guidance of dedicated, trusted advisors, but the project is ultimately your own. Throughout the process of completing a thesis, you will strengthen your skills in writing, research, time management, organization, and communication, which will be invaluable throughout your career. At the end of the year, you will be rewarded by having completed a personally, intellectually, and aesthetically satisfying project that will also reap dividends after graduation.

**Program**

Class time will be devoted to:

- Developing a thesis exhibition and publication
- Desk critiques to ensure the timely development of your work
- Group discussions to review project milestones, requirements, and ideas
- Reviews with advisors and outside critics to refine design projects and exhibition design strategies
- Independent design, research, and writing



**Learning Outcomes**

- Refining research skills in architecture and design
- Developing and expressing a critical outlook and perspective on architecture practice
- Designing and installing an exhibition of work
- Writing, editing, and designing a thesis book that compiles the outcomes of the research and design process
- Sustaining and managing a long-term independent project
- Polishing verbal and visual presentation skills

*The Installation view of Fulfilled, an exhibition and symposium at Ohio State University curated by Ashley Bigham and designed by Outpost Office in February 2020. The exhibition explores the role of architecture in a culture shaped by excessive manufacture and assuagement of desire—from warehouses, suburban homes, cardboard boxes, shopping malls, to shipping containers and material life cycles.*



*A selection of spring 2020 SoA BArch thesis projects. From top—Designing Pro-Compassion: Conceptualizing Destigmatized Spaces for Independent Abortion Providers (Alina Kramkova), Superimposed Landscapes: Adapting the Community Garden Model to Vertical Urban Landscapes (Cotey Anderegg), RE\_VISION: A Resource for Community Organizers + Housing Advocates (Alison Katz & Alex Lin), too little TOO MUCH: Looking at Existing Sensory Therapy Practices to Inform Spatial Experience through an Expanded Definition of Access (Michael Powell). See more on the online thesis exhibition, "System Reboot?," at [thesis.soa.cmu.edu](https://thesis.soa.cmu.edu).*