

# ENCLOSURES: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE PERIMETER

## Course Information

4.154 Arch Design Option Studio

MIT Department of Architecture

Instructor: Matteo Ghidoni

Teaching Fellow: Adriana Giorgis

Teaching Assistant: Jeonghyun Yoon

Schedule: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-5:00 pm EST



## Studio Description

*Fencing is both the act of collective recognition and appropriation of a portion of land or physical space: it is the act of its delimitation and separation from the rest of the world-nature. It establishes the two topological, imaginary, geometric, technical regions of outside and inside. It formulates the problem of the mental or physical constitution of the limit, of the boundary and its violation. An act of architecture par excellence, the enclosure is what establishes a specific relationship with a specific place and at the same time the principle of settlement by which a human group proposes its relationship with nature-cosmos. But the enclosure is also the form of the thing, the way it presents itself to the outside world, through which it reveals itself.*

In the opening editorial of *Rassegna*, published in 1979, Vittorio Gregotti proposes a theme that can be considered the manifesto of both a way of understanding the discipline and of questioning its boundaries. Architecture is primarily understood as the effort of a multitude. While evoking a primordial act of territorial conquer, the emphasis is on the collective and ritual nature of the gesture. Both act and form, the enclosure doesn't produce a solitary figure nor an abstract, generic principle. Its presence is always in relation to a particular place. It establishes a new order and generates a new equilibrium within a given territory. Further on, the editorial argues for the need to redefine the notion of enclosure *at the highest possible level of abstraction*, recognizing how its definition in terms of *pure function* (that of preventing the crossing of a body, a gaze, a law...) is what allows apparently disparate objects to be brought together under a single notion. The catalogue of examples that follows is actually rather heterogeneous and incomplete. Its limitation is also its generosity: we feel entitled to expand it and pick up Gregotti's discourse where he left off.

*Enclosures* is a studio focused on the architecture of the perimeter. It intends to stimulate an in-depth research into the possibilities generated by the fundamental act of delimitation. The project will be explored as a selective device, producing certain conditions of inclusion and exclusion, creating and erasing connections, sustaining acts of separation and suspension, enabling detachment and otherness. Opposing the dominant conception of architecture as production of singular - self centered - objects, the studio will stress the dialectic nature of the enclosure in relation to an underlying notion of context. The activity of the studio - ideally conceived as an appendix to *Rassegna 1* - will be organized around three main tasks: a collective work of iconographic collection, the construction and manipulation of an organized taxonomy of case studies, and the development of site-specific proposals.

## Studio structure and assignments

The Studio program will unfold in two projects:

### 1. HORTUS

(a project based on *synchronic* collaborations)

The first four weeks will be dedicated to the development of a collective project. The project will explore the architecture of the *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) as the archetypical form of enclosed productive territory. It will speculate on the role of Boston Community gardens as collective infrastructures in the city, and places for the possible coexistence of cultivated land together with basic social functions. Our investigation will proceed from the elementary to the complex, questioning scale and taking the responsibility of form. The possibility of a collaboration among the authors of the project will be based on the construction and manipulation of a shared archive. The project will proceed through week-length phases. Every week will culminate with an assignment, conceived as a visual/sculptural essay focusing on specific formal, spatial and tectonic qualities of the project.

### 2. TEMENOS

(a project based on *diachronic* collaborations)

The last eight weeks will be dedicated to the development of complex site-specific proposals. The context chosen for the interventions is the Boston Harbor. Possible sites will be selected along its perimeter and on the Harbor Islands. The program is loosely defined as *A Public Room*, organizing a cluster of collective facilities, and it will be individually made more precise. The projects will not start from scratch. The students will inherit the documentation of projects produced by their colleagues, who worked on the same sites last year. They will be required to read and understand all the drawings, images, models contained in the documents, and to offer a reasoned critique of those materials. On the basis of this critical reading, the new projects can result in completions, superimpositions, displacements, changes... A certain degree of misunderstanding is also possible.

Between the two projects (October 9-12) we will travel domestically to visit architectural precedents (location to be confirmed). The trip will be designed in collaboration with the students and in connection with their interests of research.

## Studio Culture

I. We are interested in architecture as public thing. Not only in a strict sense (that of projects originating from public commissions), but for the inherently plural nature of every design act. Architecture is the effort of a multitude: it implies a collective goal, a shared knowledge and a collaborative work.

II. Given that by 2050 the world's population will be somewhere between nine and ten billion, the main problem for architecture can be reduced to: "How to live together?". We understand design as a technique of the real: a creative negotiation between desires and possibilities, between object and context, form and content.

III. Architecture relates to the city by essentially questioning "what is a city?" A question whose implications are both technical and cultural, both formal and political. A question all the more poignant since most of the territories we inhabit today lie outside the binary opposition between city and nature.

IV. In times of global challenges, we are keen to adopt a local perspective. An accurate knowledge of the local resources, material culture, traditional typologies, construction techniques, climate needs, can transform every particular place in a potential "laboratory of the future". Every project expresses a wider notion of ecology: a combination of social, geographical, technological and economic factors.

V. We must learn how to look at things, at every scale, from every angle, being aware that between observation and production - between research and proposal - there is an inescapable but not consequential relationship. The idea that a good survey automatically translates into a good project is an illusion. While the research process benefits from being open and inclusive, the architectural project is selective and affirmative, with no room for ambiguity.

VI. We see academic education as nothing more than a stage: a moment of learning to think and work as an architect within a much longer and broader process. A process aimed at consolidating both a technique and an attitude towards the work. We believe that this second aspect is by far the most important thing for a student today: the formation of a reasoned and coherent judgment about architecture as a whole, which serves as a premise and basis for one's own work and at the same time as a critical element in its making.

VII. The intellectual environment of our studio is strongly influenced by experiences connected to critical, curatorial and editorial practices. We are skeptical about the exaltation of individual creativity and the myth of novelty. We try to explore different modes of co-authoring. The common ground for a possible collaboration is the shared body of knowledge represented by all architecture that has been built or just designed through time. On this body we operate through selection, manipulation and appropriation.

VIII. We employ multiple forms of production as critical tools. We carefully consider each medium (text, drawing, model, image...) for its own specific potential. We place the highest importance in making as the basis of any possible discussion. Our activity requires precision, intellectual engagement, and a certain degree of organization.

IX. We encourage the "real living contact with the things themselves". Something crucial happens when we no longer visit architectures as tourists, but rather with a willingness to take hold of their technical reason, to learn how they are done, when we judge them as if we made them, when we look at them from the perspective of our own work.

X. Please don't be fooled by the assertive tone of the statements above. We have always dreamed of having a comprehensive, solid and convincing position on architecture. And consequently a method for teaching it: a reassuring one, valid once and for all. The truth is that we're full of doubts. Doubts that reoccur with particular violence whenever we are required to write down our pedagogical intentions. Sharing these concerns, making our students aware of them, is the most honest way we can contribute to their growth. If what you give is what you receive, we expect all our doubts to bounce back from our students with renewed power. We would consider this a success.

### Calendar:

#### Wk 01

Tue Sept 03: Studio Previews and lottery

Thu Sept 05: Studio Introduction

#### Wk 02

Tue Sept 10: HORTUS 1st assignment Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Sept 12: HORTUS 1st assignment Pinup (In-Person)

### Wk 03

Tue Sept 17: HORTUS 2nd assignment Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Sept 19: HORTUS 2nd assignment Pinup (In-Person)

### Wk 04

Tue Sept 24: HORTUS 3rd assignment Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Sept 26: HORTUS 3rd assignment Pinup (In-Person)

### Wk 05

Tue Oct 01: HORTUS 4th assignment Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Oct 03: HORTUS 4th assignment Pinup (In-Person)

### Wk 06

Tue Oct 08: Intermediate Review

Oct 09 - 12: Study trip window

### Wk 07

Tue Oct 15: Student holiday (no class)

Thu Oct 17: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

### Wk 08

Tue Oct 22: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

Thu Oct 24: TEMENOS Sites visit

### Wk 09

Tue Oct 29: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

Thu Oct 31: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

### Wk 10

Tue Nov 05: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

Thu Nov 07: TEMENOS Desk Crits (Hybrid)

### Wk 11

Tue Nov 12: TEMENOS Pinup group A (In-Person)

Thu Nov 14: TEMENOS Pinup group B (In-Person)

Wk 12

Tue Nov 19: TEMENOS Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Nov 21: TEMENOS Desk Crits (In-Person)

Wk 13

Tue Nov 26: TEMENOS Pre-final Review (In-Person)

Thu Nov 28: Thanksgiving holiday (no class)

Wk 14

Tue Dec 03: TEMENOS Desk Crits (In-Person)

Thu Dec 05: TEMENOS Desk Crits (In-Person)

Wk 15

Tue Dec 10: Final Review

Essential bibliography:

Gregotti, V. (1979). *Editorial*. In: Rassegna n.1, December 1979

Aureli, P.V. (2023). *Architecture and Abstraction*. The MIT Press

Ghidoni, M. (Ed.) (2013). San Rocco #6, *Collaborations*. Spring 2013