**4.189 Preparation for MArch Thesis**

MIT Architecture Spring 2025

Wednesdays 2-5, 10-481

Units: 3-1-5

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*…everything starts with a revolution. There is an existing thing against which discontent is felt. This discontent hardens, and at some point, intuitively a new image is conceived. This image is not an isolated thing, concerned purely with the plastic arts, but a sort of social-plastic entity; that is, it conceives a new way of life, a new sort of technology and a new image all in one, but in a rather vague sort of way…Architecture as something form-giving is involved in this business. It cannot be separated from ‘process’; form transforms this ‘process’ by taking part in it.*

Peter Smithson (1957)

**Description**

This course is a semester-long, structured process and conversation that will support each individual student’s definition of a thesis proposal.

A thesis implies an expansion of the present field and an examination of the boundaries of the discipline. A thesis is discursive—it implies a shared conversation or engagement with others about concerns, topics, and methods. Theses typically mark the end of an education, and beginnings of or openings onto ways of thinking, working, and questioning. As an *exercise*, the architecture thesis is a supported process where each student individually speculates upon the discipline through argument and project.

Students will meet twice weekly: once as a large group during class time and once in small groups (~6 students) with a TA at 2 set times during the week for approximately 1.5 hours. Class time will most often be structured into two 80 min halves separated by a 20 min break. Small group meetings should be signed up for weekly on the Friday before; in other words, the membership and topic of each group can change and adapt to rising needs from week-to-week.

**Course Elements**

Our main activities will be threefold: studying example projects (**case studies**); engaging and situating these projects through questioning and reflection (**critique**); and formulating a topic, scope, and method for individual projects (**proposa**l). Example projects are presented weekly in class by recent graduates from MIT, making for the group, a first-tier disciplinary conversation circle that is accessible and supportive, within which each student can develop their individual voice.

**Toolkit**

In place of exercises or assignments, this course provides a toolkit that each student is encouraged to use according to their needs.

**Worksheet** This worksheet is a matrix of descriptors/modes that can be used to think about a case study or be used to develop an individual thesis project. Worksheets will be provided at each guest presentation to be used for the discussion/critique session that follows. It is meant to be a scaffold for thinking and can be used and revised iteratively over the course of the semester.

**Archive** Exercises and Readings from past thesis prep courses are included in the class dropbox for your reference.

**Deliverables**

Two main deliverables are to be submitted at the end of the semester:

**Thesis Proposal** Your thesis proposal document is a file that can be digitally shared with your potential advisors that will require 5-10 minutes for them to review for basic understanding. It should be informed by the contents of the Thesis Worksheet. It may take these forms:

* A 10 page pdf, booklet or deck, with visual and textual information that presents your thesis idea to a reader
* A 5 min video that contains visual and spoken information that presents your thesis idea to a viewer.

**Archive Book/Dossier** Over the course of the semester, you will gather ideas, questions, images, thoughts related to your proposal. The Archive Book/Dossier is a single document of organized content that captures this collection into a referenceable resource. It might be a structured archive or a book with an argument, references, and citations. This fileis due at the end of the term and can serve as a starting point for conversations with your advisor.

**Evaluation Criteria & Grading**

50% Milestones (25% midterm presentation, 25% end of term presentation)

25% Attendance and Participation in class, small groups, one-on-one meetings

25% Proposal document and Archive Book