The course argues that the city and its processes are intellectually understood not only by reference to the urban cultural context but also by drawing categories from other disciplines. An open reading that traverses art theory and history, architectural manifestoes and theory, but also land surveying, cartography, film theory, philosophy and cultural studies, can identify a series of ‘figures’ that are ambiguously placed between the representation and the construction of space in the city.

The grid, the map, the labyrinth, the meander and tenderness, collage and morphing, montage and the interstitial, and the pulverizations of dust are explored beyond the appearance of their form as processes that differently make space between architecture and the city, and are proposed as unorthodox analytic techniques to read the contemporary urban complexity.

The course analyzes how these ‘figures’ have been employed at different times and in different visual disciplines beyond architecture and in relation to changing notions of space, and traces the role that they have played in the shift towards the dynamic that has taken place in contemporary theory and design research in architecture and the city.

1 GRID 1 (PAINTING): REPRESENTATION TO ABSTRACTION

Rosalind Krauss’ seminal essay ‘Grids’ explores the space produced by the use of the grid in the visual arts by the modern avant-gardes. Disconnected from perspective and from its construction of correspondences between the physical world (as object of the representation) and its image, this grid produces a space that is abstract in the sense of both removed and autonomous from material reality. Formal experimentation can occur in this space. But what occurs here is also an experimentation on the materiality of the drawing and the painting that produces (rather than represents) itself. The lecture explores different modern and contemporary uses of the grid in the visual (and spatial) arts.

Reading:

Bibliography:
Martin, Agnes, Writings (Hatje Cantz Publishers 2005).

2 GRID 2 (MAP): ABSTRACTION TO MOVEMENT

When the grid is applied to cartography it returns to be (or appears to be) an instrument of rationality and the repository of a set of conventions that allow for communication and transfer of information. At the same time, the cartographic grid produces an opacity that reveals intentions (a project) while it masks them (in its presentation). From the impossible viewing of early bird’s-eye-views as portraits of cities to the measured space of ichnography, the seminar explores the statute, the conventions and the ‘lies’ of the map. The map is presented here as a project and as a never neutral production of space.

Reading:
Bibliography:
Deleuze, Gilles, Focault (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

3 GRID 3 (LAND): MEASUREMENT TO EFFECT
When the abstract and geometrical space of the grid impacts on the physical world its effects have direct material implications. Territorial and urban grids, plotted on the accidents of the land, produce a variety of physical and spatial effects far greater than the grid of the canvas or of the map. Here the grid does not construct (produce) or represent (describe) space, but interacts in a supple and adaptable way with the physical conditions of its context. The lecture explores the impacts and implications of the physical grid – from the geopolitical malleability of the Roman grid, to the ‘blindness’ of other colonial grids, to the weakness of the Modernist grid, to the fractures (‘ladders’) and the warping of contemporary post-urban grids.

Reading:

Bibliography:
Davidson, Cynthia (ed.), Tracing Eisenman (New York: Rizzoli, 2006)

4 MEANDER AND TENDERNESS: FORM TO CITY
The grid of perspective re-constructs reality as its interpretation and visualization; the grid of abstraction liberates the space of painting from the relationship with a reality that is exterior to the construction of the image; the iconography of mapping ‘pretends’ to possess and objectivity that it does not have. It is when the grid encounters the territory that it must compromise with its unevenness, singularities and stratifications in order to succeed. Defined by movement, the meander is a figure that contains in itself the precarious balance of rectilinear space and the slow ness of adaptation and pliability. This does not go unnoticed in the experimentations and rationalizing attempts of Modernism (Le Corbusier). The lecture explores the meander as a figure that, beyond the absoluteness and the generalization of the Modernist tabula rasa, exposes its insufficiency and opens the possibility of a space that evolves in time – a space of becoming rather than the figure of a system of order.

Reading:
5 LABYRINTH: MAKING TO READING (VOYAGING)

Structure of double axiality (labrys), inescapable centre and unintelligible configuration, the labyrinth constitutes a mythical space for architecture (Derrida, Tschumi, Hejduk, Colomina). It is a space that contains the mystery of the origin and opens the question of intelligibility, knowledge, and description. The labyrinth is also the object of multiple representations and narratives suspended between architecture and the city (Borges, Eco, Pynchon).

The seminar explores the different meanings of the labyrinth in architecture, focusing on the space of narrative and the text that it opens up as a form of space making that is complementary and alternative to the drawing and the building.

**Reading**:  

**Bibliography**:  

6 COLLAGE TO MORPHING: FORM TO TRANSFORMATION

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter define collage in architecture to question the duality of the definition of space by figure/ground. Multichronic, collage assembles and juxtaposes different elements and different times in a coerced coexistence that exposes what is already contained in nuce in its fragments. Collage dislocates, juxtaposes and recomposes figures producing a new space that reads the lacuna as a discontinuity. This lecture explores those spatial operations that overcome the bidimensional limitations of the figure/figure operation of collage. Filmic montage (Eisenstein) and architectural morphing (Van Berkel and Bos) are analyzed as processes that question the frame of the composition, the edge of the fragment, as well as its temporal boundaries, to produce a complex performative process in which the intermediate stages of a trans-formation incorporate and erase the traces of the given layers and fragments.

**Reading**:  

**Bibliography**:  

7 MONTAGE TO THE INTERSTITIAL: FRAGMENT TO (BACK)GROUND
Sergei Eisenstein's redefinition of filmic montage in dynamic terms is based on the idea of the activation of the invisible space in-between pieces in the mind of the spectator. In this sense montage is not composed of defined framed parts, but by the tension that holds them together, by what is missing and by the performance of an active process of reconstruction. Montage includes discontinuity, shifts, variations of density (Gilles Deleuze) and its whole remains an open and variable process that overcomes the static bi-dimensionality of collage. In montage even the single element is challenged, and the internal tensions of the image are constantly modifying. This lecture explores the idea of a dynamic montage that challenges the integrity of form (Eisenstein) in relation to the definition of the architectural interstitial (Eisenman).

Reading:

Bibliography:

8 DUST. REVOLUTION TO ASSEMBLAGE
The idea of dust in architecture is introduced to indicate that which remains after the explosion of its established orders - the architectural object and its representations, space and its definitions - but no longer belongs to them. The concept of dust embraces at once the notion of the fragment and the fragmented, and that of a possible new assemblage. Dust is related to systems of order and disorder, in an attempt to overcome their oppositions, through a reconsideration of the material in architecture. In this context the fragment(ed) loses any reference to an a priori whole(ness) and form, and is redefined as a generative possibility for the production of space. The lecture reads dust as an index of different economies of the body, architecture and the city. It explores the workings of dust on architecture and their implications in the contemporary redefinition of space in dynamic terms (Bataille). It explores the workings of dust in architecture and their possible implications in the contemporary redefinition of form making in architecture and the city as a negotiated process (R&Sie(n)) that defies the distinction between the old and the new (De Geyter), the discarded and the reclaimed (Koolhaas).

Reading:

Bibliography:
Kastner, Jeffrey, Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s “Fake Estates” (Cabinet, 2005).
Xaveer De Geyter Architects, After-Sprawl: research for the contemporary city (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2002).