COPULA HALL

*"Pass through Copula Hall and she or he might leave Beszel, and at the end of the hall come back to exactly (corporeally) where they had just been, but in another country, a tourist, a marveling visitor, to a street that shared the latitude-longitude of their own address, a street they had never visited before, whose architecture they had always unseen." -- China Mieville, The City and The City*
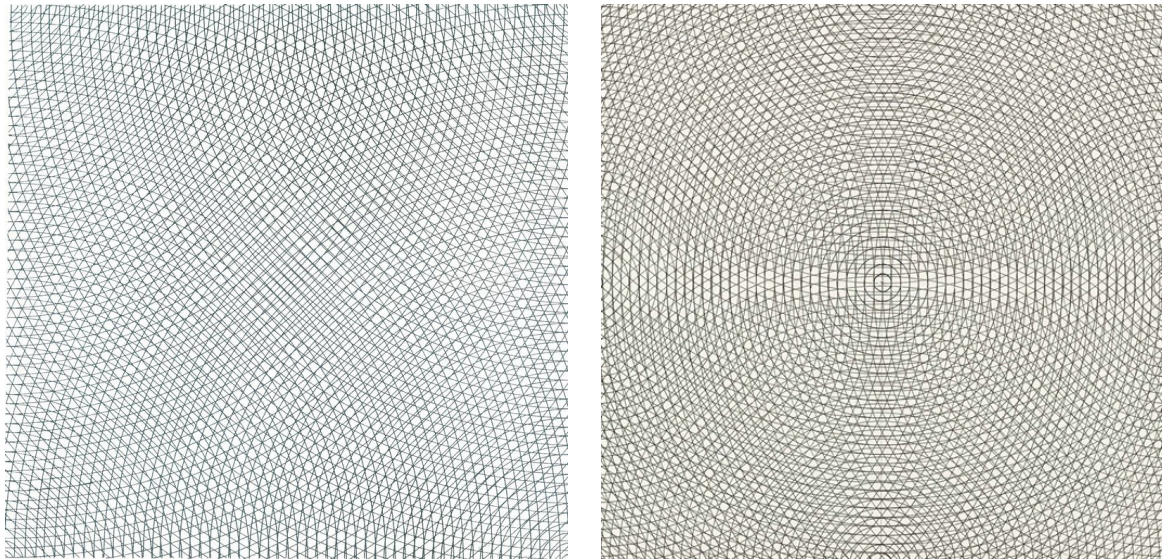
Sol LeWitt, Arcs, Circles & Grids 1972

context: Two oppositional city states partially occupy the same geographic territory. Citizens of both nations coexist side-by-side in an interwoven *crosshatch* of overlapping boarders, yet are forbidden to acknowledge one another's existence due to deep cultural strife. These irreconcilable conditions yield an encrypted urban fabric, a conflicted, yet coincident overlay of opposing architectural languages -- ancient and modernist, east and west -- that conveys the rigid set of behavioral codes and protocols required to maintain the tenuous political conditions of the city/cities.

These impossible architectural, cultural, and geographic circumstances are the setting for China Mieville's noire police procedural novel *The City and The City*, which will serve as the site, program, and universe of the studio. Intensively detailed within the action of the novel, the carefully-constructed fictional world is also a provocation. The *crosshatch* premise may be interpreted as a singular organism that is cleaved into two; as two individual but interlaced systems; or as an amalgamation of two that in fact produces a third. We will occupy each, both, and neither place(s), and assume that each tectonically-improbable urban figure from the text presents an

equally conceivable parable of abiding cultural, economic, habitual, social, racial and/or ethnic disagreement and/or discord in our everyday tangible realities.

program: *"Copula Hall, like the waist of an hourglass, the point of ingress and egress, the navel between the cities, the whole edifice a funnel, letting visitors from one city into the other, and the other into the one."*

Beginning with a close and rigorous reading, analysis, deconstruction, and re-composition of the text through analytic drawings/models, each student will enter and re-construct the implied geographies, styles, and site conditions on your own terms and in your own visual language. We will progress from this projective cartography into the iterative exploration and design of a three-dimensional formal language that enables the novels' inhabitants to negotiate these two opposing and intertwined cities.

Each student will intensively test and expand their *crosshatch* technique, effects, and systems in development of the final project: design for a Copula Hall, the key architectural protagonist of *The City and The City*. Copula Hall is a large, complex, 150,000SF building that houses two interwoven seats of governance and their respective bureaucracies, and serves as both boundary and portal between the two worlds.

conjecture: Architecture frames complex cultural and social relationships which are often impossible to solve – from the scale of a house and to the scale of a city. Taking on any architectural project means becoming expert in its program and the particularities, values, absurdities, tensions, and impossibilities of that particular family, organization, institution, or municipality. In order to do this well, an architect must become an anthropologist to worlds that, prior to the start of each project, you never knew existed even though they often coincide in space and time with your own. The best works of architecture are born out of this expertise, and leverage deep research to generate a project that not only strengthens but also transforms (and at time subverts) the inherent methodologies of the user.

As much as the studio premise is imaginary, it equally stands for any, and every, critical architectural project.

evaluation: This is an intensive studio with an emphasis on experimentation and production, in which students will work with rigor and intent to develop spectacular, unexpected architectural speculations. You are expected to overlay your individual motivations onto the work and define the formal and political terms of your project as your work explores the visual, social, political, tectonic, programmatic and/or ornamental notions of *crosshatch.* There is no pre-determined or expected solution to the problem; the best projects will be those that delve deep into the text, think through high levels of experimental production, and take calibrated risks to produce new and extraordinary outcomes.

travel: A traveling studio presents a privilege and a hazard for students of architecture; the opportunity to visit, experience and study unfamiliar and important landmarks, geographies and cultures can radically expand/shift/reposition design thinking and awareness. At the same time, the mistaken idea that a singular visit would enable even the most experienced architect to understand -- let alone to solve -- a local problem is antithetical to a sophisticated design process. To wrestle with this conundrum, which directly relates to the studio problem and the question of mastering an architectural problem, we will be taking two trips in the studio that raise a series of overlapping and at times oppositional questions: The first trip will be an intellectual journey into the world of the novel, which will be re-presented in your own visual language over the first part of the semester. The second trip will take us to Israel/Palestine; a place which has experienced centuries of overlapping and contested geographies, to see both every day and sacred sites which are shared by multiple cultures and religions.