

EXTREME SCALES

Speculating New Futures for a POST - POST OFFICE



Post Office Workroom, Washington, D.C., USA, Harris & Ewing, February 1907

INTRODUCTION

“The History of its post office is nothing less than the story of America. Of the nation’s founding institutions, it is the least appreciated or studied, and yet for a very long time it was the U.S. government’s major endeavor. Indeed, it was that government in the experience of most citizens. As radical an experiment as America itself, the post was the incubator of our uniquely lively, disputatious culture of innovative ideas and uncensored opinions. With astonishing speed, it established the United States as the world’s information and communications superpower.”

Winifred Gallagher. How the Post Office Created America, 2017

USPS Recent News:

“...the Postal Service’s role throughout the coronavirus pandemic forced lawmakers to reach a consensus on restructuring its balance sheet, with worries that the agency could not withstand another financial shock. Nearly half of all voters cast their ballots by mail during the 2020 election, and postal workers hauled packages from doorstep to doorstep amid surging e-commerce demand, allowing individuals to purchase essentials remotely and stay home during public health shutdowns....Senate passes \$107 billion overhaul of USPS, lauding mail agency’s role in pandemic response.”

-The Washington Post, March 8, 2022

Biden plan to ship 500 million coronavirus test kits transforms Postal Service into relief agency

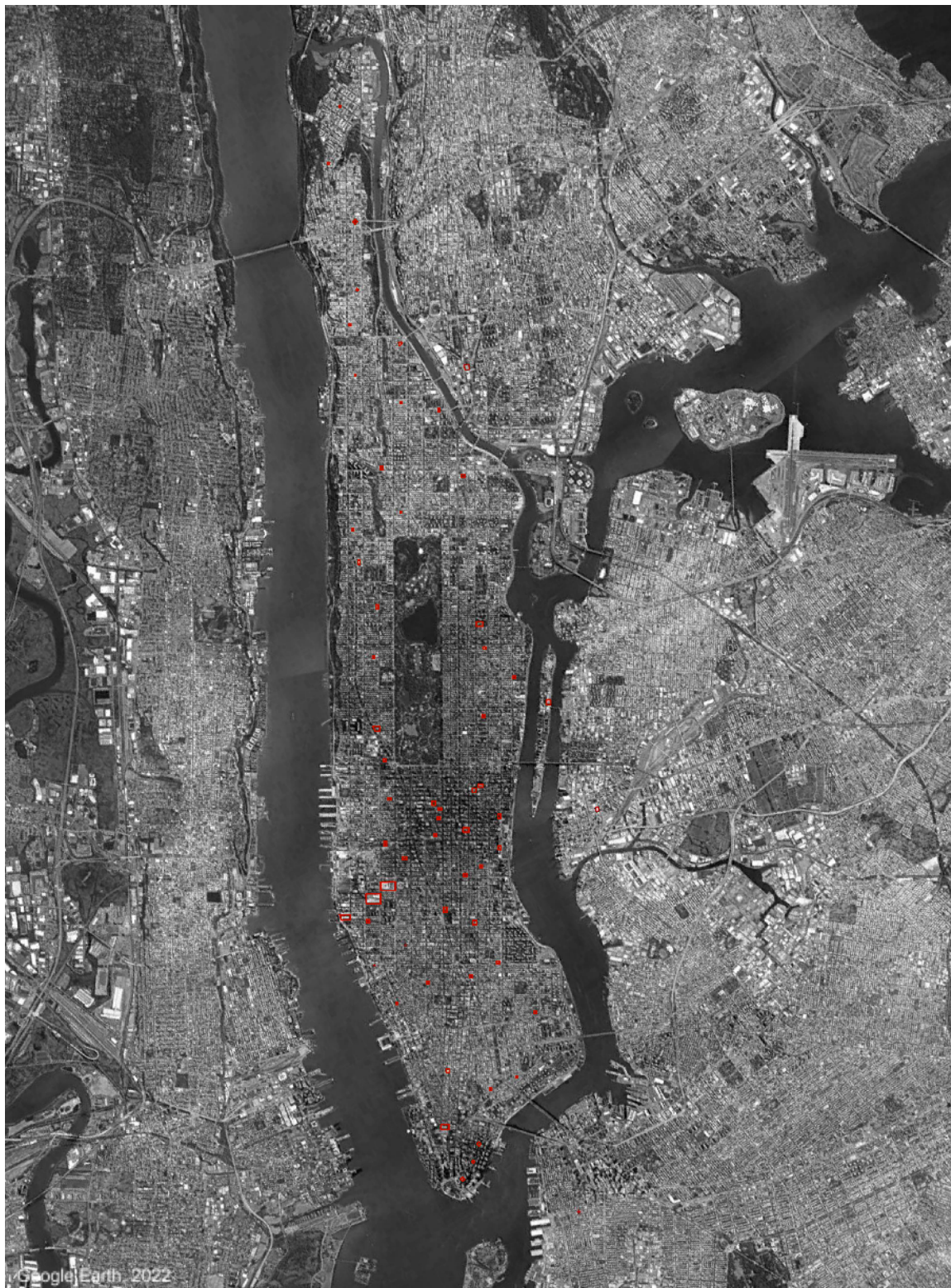
USPS has added thousands of seasonal employees and converted more than 40 facilities to house, process and ship the rapid tests.

By Jacob Bogage

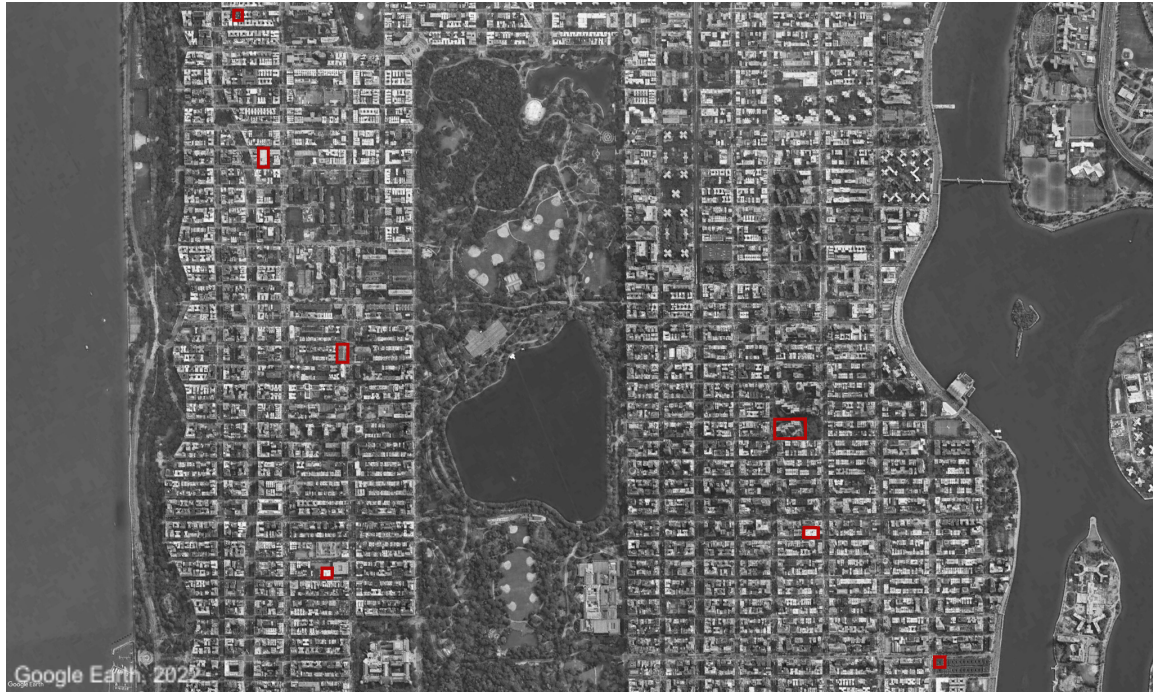
“The U.S. Postal Service’s mission to deliver 500 million coronavirus test kits has cast it in an unprecedented role in the nation’s pandemic response just as covid-19 infections have peaked within its own ranks and its network is under immense strain...”

-The Washington Post, January 21, 2022 at 4:42 p.m. EST

Can large infrastructure projects do more than one thing?



USPS Locations in Manhattan



USPS Locations in Manhattan

PROGRAM

In this studio we will design the new Post Office.

We will speculate on ways in which new programs could expand the United States Postal Service and transform its mission, services and role for the zip code, as well as for City, State and Federal programs; possessing a new architecture in every sense of the term. The intention is to explore and reimagine that architecture, and its role in shaping this essential public infrastructure now and in the future.

Some key questions for the studio:

- What would be the form of these interventions?
- What would be housed in the buildings / building?
- How would these buildings and their program engage at their local site?
- Would new alliances and relationships form new configurations that form this complete new modality?
- What is the effect in considering new technologies, energy generation, resilience, water management and importantly health and equity at the body, building and site scale?

The starting point for this studio is the recently passed Infrastructure Framework Plan ratified by the US Senate and **The Inflation Reduction Act** which includes legislation that will reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40 percent by 2030. This legislation will serve as our catalyst for the infrastructural and potential transformational changes using Manhattan as a test case.

SITE

New York City and its Postal System network is our site.

We will survey existing Post Offices in Manhattan as test cases for re-thinking the USPS's physical future. **The current and existing USPS building stock has not modernized, let alone been advanced, to reflect our contemporary condition; however, USPS buildings are often located at key urban sites.**

Students will propose new programs and spatial strategies for existing sites of their choice, and will make informed assumptions about the **Now, Soon and Eventually** for the Post Office in order to project its possible new future with design work. Some possible scenarios for proposed projects/buildings might be:

- the existing USPS building remains and is revised and reinvisioned, or
- the existing Post Office increases, decreases, or is atomized at a number of sites, or
- you demolish the existing Post Office and propose something completely new as a test case;

according to your new proposed programs.

STUDIO FORMAT

This studio will use physical models as much as possible.

Design will progress from initial mapping and research studies at sites, mapping drawings of the postal network, to the scale of an architectural program in a specific location, culminating in a design proposal for the POST-Post Office.

As the semester progresses, together, we will make assumptions as to the **now, soon and eventual** conditions of the reimagined USPS to anticipate **a new future** for your strategic proposals.

First Exercise - The studio will launch with an exercise using a medium of students' choices - including but not limited to GIS, drawing, animation, photo montage - representing the mailing of a letter or package to a destination of their choice. Kicking off the studio with this exercise will allow students to visualize the movement of physical mail/packages; an inherent part of our daily lives yet often overlooked.

Week 1 – 4 Working in teams* collaboratively, to research, precedents, site mapping, case studies and construct working physical site models

Week 5 – 8 Project strategy + program development

Week 8 – 11 Developing design + program strategies at the building scale

Week 12 – 14 Narrative, presentation + site model/drawing development for final

Research - Design work will progress in parallel with the research.

Teams* will investigate and hypothesize with models, drawings and diagrams on critical aspects of research at extreme scales; from body to building to urban network. We will challenge the definition of systems. Students will critically investigate and assess the complex visible and latent infrastructural layers **relevant** to the USPS system. System research topics for constructing transformative and resilient urban space are as follows:

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- Transportation + Mobility
- Ecology and Natural Environment
- Waste
- Water
- Housing
- Education
- Industry + Manufacturing
- Public Space, Open Space, Recreation
- Food
- Energy
- Politics, Governance + Policy
- Emergency Response
- Communications

(Studio Format - continued)

GIS - will be a useful tool for our research. Either of the following excellent courses for architecture students are recommended for this studio:

[PLA4577](#) - Geographic Information Systems, Leah Meisterlin, 3 pts, Tuesday 11AM-1PM, 113 Avery

or

[PLA4578_003](#) - GIS Lab for Arch + UD, Mario Glampieri, 0 pts, Thursday 7PM-9PM, 114 Avery

Final Review - Students will present their concept strategy along with detailed development at their chosen site/s; using drawings, models, mock-ups, and large-scale sections, both physical and digital models, time-based film / animation; as all are preferred forms of representation throughout the semester.

***Teamwork** - Teams may comprise 2 or 3 students and the work realized in a variety of ways from a collaboratively designed project where the result is a seamless integration of work; to other ways of working where individuals in a team work separately and share certain questions and concerns – producing individual project parts and components. The key is feedback and discussion between team members:

- between the team and faculty,
- between the team and students in the studio during workshops and presentations,
- culminating in the discussion and presentations between teams and guest critics at midterm and final reviews.

First Class Meets in Ware Lounge, September 12, 1:30 PM

Required Reading - for First Class:

Introduction - “Why the Post Office Matters”, Chapter 1 + Chapter 16

“Inventing the Government: B. Free Franklin”,

[How the Post Office Created America](#), Winifred Gallagher.



USPS Locations in New York City

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Background Statements and Reports

Fact Sheet - President Biden Announces Support for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework

By *The White House*, Statement and Release, June 24, 2021

- [At this link](#)

Post Office Resources

United States Post Offices in New York State 1858 - 1943 Thematic Resources

By *The Department of the Interior*, 1908

- [At this link](#)
- Thorough analysis of post office design done by the DOI.

The United States Postal Service: An American History

By *The United States Postal Service*

- [Link to Publication](#)
- A publication on the USPS website
- Benjamin Franklin was made Postmaster General. Speaks to the inevitability of organized communication networks with or without government assistance.

How the Post Office Created America, By Winfred Gallagher

- [Link to Book](#)

The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Building, By Lois Craig, *The Staff of the Federal Architecture Project*

- [Link to Book Review](#)
- Lots of pictures and plans, frequently referenced in the Department of the Interior text.

Building Gotham: Civic Culture and Public Policy in New York City, 1898-1938

By *Kieth Revell*

- [Link to Book Review](#)
- About the establishment and refinement of New York municipalities after the merging of the five boroughs.

Enriching Communities Through the Reuse of Dismantled United States Post Office Sites, By Widney Pierson

- [At this Link](#)
- 2014 Dissertation.

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ADV STUDIO Fall 2022

Critic: Laurie Hawkinson

The People's Post Office: The History and Politics of the Japanese Postal System, 1871-2010, By Patricia L. Maclachlan

- [Link to Book Review](#)

The Social Meaning of Civic Space: Studying Political Authority through Architecture By Charles T. Goodsell

- [Link to Book Review](#)
- Mainly about city-council chambers with a relevant discussion of how civic infrastructure is organized.

"Banks of the People": The Life and Death of the U.S. Postal Savings System

By Christopher W. Shaw

- [At this link](#)

Pennsylvania Station & James A. Farley Building, [New York City] : McKim, Mead & White, By Garam Han, Brad Vogel

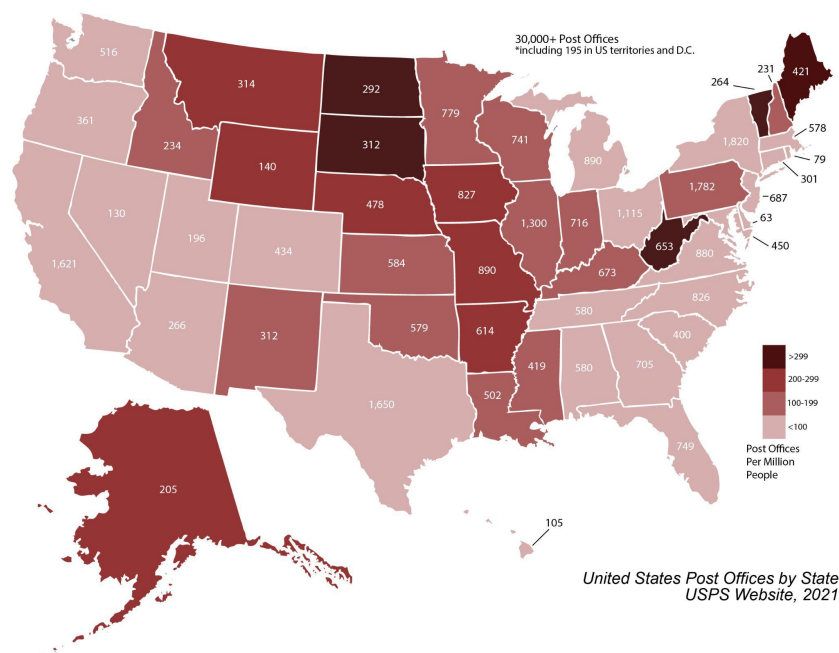
The Colonial Post-Office, By William Smith

- [At this link](#) Interesting origin story of the US Postal System. Richard Fairbanks' tavern in Boston took on the role of a central post office more than a century before

Articles on Mapping

The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, James Corner.

http://peterahall.com/mapping/Corner-agency_of_mapping.pdf



SEMESTER SCHEDULE - DRAFT

SEPTEMBER			
WEEK 1		STUDIO PRESENTATION + FIRST STUDIO MEETINGS	
THURS	7	Studio Presentations & Lottery 3:00 PM	
WEEK 2		RESEARCH SITE + PRECEDENTS	
MON	12	First Studio Meeting - Ware Lounge 1:30-4:30 Studio Teams – Assignment 1A_Research Workshop + Assignment 1B_First Exercise Mailing a Letter	LH
THURS	15	Site Visits	LH
WEEK 3		SITE MAPPING RESEARCH + CASE STUDIES	
MON	19	Ware Lounge 1:30-6:30 Desk Crits Assignment 1B _ Mailing a Letter Assignment 2 _	LH
THURS	22	Review Assignment 1B Avery Studio 1:30 PM Studio Discussion with David Polk, architect / GSA, 115 Avery, 3PM Meet w/ Research Groups	LH
WEEK 4		STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT + CASE STUDIES	
MON	26	1:30-4:30 Research Groups Roundtable Assignment 3_Programming	LH
THURS	29	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
OCTOBER			
WEEK 5		PROGRAMMING	
MON	3	Avery Studio 1:30 PM Programming Discussion	LH
THURS	6	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
WEEK 6		PROGRAM STRATEGY PRESENTATION	
MON	10	Avery Studio 1:30 PM Program Workshop	LH
THURS	13	Avery Studio 1:30 PM Program Strategy Presentations	LH
WEEK 7		MIDTERM PREP	
MON	17	Avery Studio 1:30 PM Dry Runs - Midterm	LH

THURS	20	MIDTERM REVIEW 1:30 – 6:30 PM, 114 Avery	LH
WEEK 8		INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE BUILDING SCALE	
MON	24	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
THURS	27	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
MON	31	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
NOVEMBER			
THURS	3	Avery Studio 1:30 PM Building Scale Workshop	LH
WEEK 9		TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT	
MON	7	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
THURS	10	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
WEEK 10		SECTION DEVELOPMENT	
MON	14	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
THURS	17	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
WEEK 11		NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT	
MON	21	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
THURS	24	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	LH
WEEK 12		FINAL PRESENTATION DEVELOPMENT	
MON	28	Avery Studio 1:30 PM	LH
THURS	1	VERY STUDIO 1:30 PM – Last Day of Studio	LH
WEEK 13		FINAL REVIEW PREP	
MON	5	Dry Runs	LH
DECEMBER			
THURS	8	Dry Runs	LH
MON-FRI	5-14	Final Review Dry Runs - see Google Doc Sign-up	LH
WEEK 14			
MON	12	FINAL REVIEW, 1:30 PM – 6:30 PM, 504 + 505 Avery	LH