New Paradigms for the Post Office

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The American postal service has a notable history, but an unclear future. Tracing its roots to 1775 with the appointment of the postmaster general, the American postal service predated both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. As a starting place of American democracy, it was a catalyst for the creation of a nationwide market for information and goods. Today, its once central role in fostering civic discourse and facilitating personal communications has been challenged by the internet, social media, and mobile phones. What is the future of the American postal service in the digital age, and in turn, how might we consider new paradigms for the venerable institution that reflect changing social needs and modes of communication?

Students will explore a small town site in Oregon for their proposal. In the second part of the term, students will study how their design could adapt to distinct environments. Students will be encouraged to think critically and question existing precedents in order to reimagine new paradigms for this familiar institution. Students will analyze various modes of communication – historic and new – in order to propose innovative ways to restructure and reform the spatial landscape within which the American postal service operates. As the structure that ties far away places to domestic spaces most concretely, students’ proposals will seek to materially embody human communication.

Jolie Kerns is the Principal at Jolie Kerns Architecture, an architecture and research practice engaging in social, cultural and environmental issues spanning multiple scales including residential, commercial and infrastructural and exhibition design.

Tiny Post Offices by Kyle Durrie of Power and Light Press