THEOCRIT9212G
ARCHITECTURE AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMAGINATION AT THE END OF THE WORLD

INSTRUCTOR

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

As we confront profound ecological, technological, geological, and even physiological uncertainty, it is high time we reflect on architecture and design. As Colomina and Wigley contend: "The history of design is [the] history of evolving conceptions of the human. To talk about design is to talk about the state of our species," (2016: 9). This seminar proposes a critical engagement with architecture and design both from and as a part of contemporary cultural, social, and political thought. This course will speak to a broader so-called "architectural turn" in contemporary theory and consider a range of critiques that take seriously architecture's role in fostering, disrupting, and critiquing cultural, social and political constructs. Through critical readings and discussions, the course encourages an understanding of architecture as a powerful medium for interdisciplinary inquiry to reflect critically on the limits and (im)possibilities of the socio-political imagination, as we confront climate chaos, Indigenous sovereignty, race, digital futures, cultural and national identity, humanitarian design, and post-humanity in the Anthropocene. Drawing on some recent work, we end the course with reflections on the power of imagination and/in architecture and design, as we confront planetary crises.

CLASS NOTES

The specific week to week course materials and themes will be driven by the enrolled students. Many dates will list more materials (and ideas) than I would expect us to address. The facilitators who have signed up for that day will let us know what and how much the rest of us are expected to read. Have reasonable expectations of one another; this is a graduate seminar, but we also have other things in our lives in addition to this one seminar. Attempt to find the delicate balance.

This is a graduate class. It is an expectation that readings are completed and questions raised. Attentive listening is a thing. Being present is a precondition for engaging one another and the material we address. Much of this relies on mutual respect, and the successful creation of our classroom as a community of care. Everyone has off days. We're also incredibly eager to engage on other days. Find balance; extend courtesy; cede space; contribute quality. And raise questions. Meet answers with skepticism.

Finally, lines of communication are critical. If you foresee challenges, let me know so we can develop a plan to work through it.

COURSE EVALUATION:

Seminar Participation	25%
Class Facilitation	25%
Facilitation Respondent	10%
Final Paper	40%

CLASS FACILITATION AND RESPONDENTS

Each week, one or two students will serve as **class facilitators**. Facilitators are responsible for guiding the seminar discussion by identifying key themes or tensions and posing thoughtful, critically engaging questions. Facilitation should emphasize critical engagement and dialogue rather than a summary or presentation. (25%)

Each week, one or two students will be a **respondent**. Respondents prepare brief, critical response (5 minutes) that engages one or more readings, raises points of agreement or critique, and situates the texts in relation to broader course themes, sometimes even making connections to other material. The role of the respondent is to deepen and sharpen discussion, not to recap material, but to help get the discussion going. (10%)

For this to work well, coordination between facilitators and respondents is necessary.

FINAL PAPER

The final paper is a 5000-word research paper based on an area of interest related to the course. An abstract and annotated bibliography is due Friday 19 March. We will have a workshop session on April 2 to collective discuss and review paper progress, drafts, etc.

SELECTED THEMES:

- Architecture, Archaeology and Erosion: Landscapes of Decay and Ruin
- Exclusionary Architecture: Brutalism, Borders, and Bare Life
- Post-human Design: Architectural Ethics in the Anthropocene
- Forensic Architecture: Conflict, Memory and Erasure
- Designing for the Pluriverse: Postcolonial Futures and Architecture *as* Resistance
- Future Ecologies: Rethinking the Built Environment at the End of the World

PROPOSED TEXTS:

Adey, P. (2024) *Evacuation: The Politics and Aesthetics of Movement in Emergency* Duke University Press.

Allen-Kim, E. (2024) *Building Little Saigon: Refugee Urbanism in American Cities and Suburbs* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Benjamin, R. (2024). *Imagination: a manifesto* (First edition.). W.W. Norton & Company.
Caison, G. (2024) *Erosion: American Environments and the Anxiety of Disappearance*. Duke University Press.
Colomina, B., & Wigley, M. (2016). *Are we human? notes on an archaeology of design*. Lars Müller Publishers.
Davis, H. (2022) *Plastic Matter*. Duke University Press.
Denman, D. S. (2025) *Fortress Power: Hostile Designs and the Politics of Spatial Control* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Easterling, K. (2014). *Extrastatecraft: the power of infrastructure space*. Verso.
Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.
Le Corbusier. (1986). *Towards a new architecture*. Dover Publications.
Mbembe, A. (2024). *Brutalism*. (1st ed.). Duke University Press.
Muller, B. J. and Mutlu, C. E., eds. (2024) *Architectures of Security: Design, Control, Mobility*, Rowman & Littlefield.
Rael, R. (2017). *Borderwall as architecture: a manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico boundary*. University of California Press.
Scott, J. C. (2020). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.
Weizman, E. (2017). *Forensic architecture: violence at the threshold of detectability*. Zone Books.

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE

Week 1 — NO IN-PERSON CLASS (8 Jan)

Materials: *View the following 4 video clips*

https://youtu.be/OgribLSWhNE
https://thelocalproject.com.au/videos/fallingwater-by-frank-lloyd-wright-the-local-project/
Le Corbusier https://youtu.be/39zgXaAwH2Y
Rudolf Wittkower https://youtu.be/6F0nqIF1jEg?si=Y9CEklnHal0VOxPu
Reference materials we will periodically consult:
https://thelocalproject.com.au/
https://www.architecturaldigest.com/
https://forensic-architecture.org/

Week 2 – INTRODUCTIONS, DISCUSSION, EXPECTATIONS (15 Jan)

Readings: Sarkis, H., Barrio, R. S., Kozlowski, G., eds., (2020) *The World as an Architectural Project* MIT Press. *Selections to be provided.*

Week 3 — Foundations: Architecture, Design, and the Human (22 Jan)

Readings: Colomina & Wigley, *Are We Human?*; Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*
Theme: Post-human design and the human as a designed species

Week 4 — Failure/Limits of Imagination; Futures & Radical Possibility (29 Jan)

Readings: Ruha Benjamin, *Imagination: A Manifesto*
Theme: Imagination as infrastructure for liberation and world-building

Week 5 — Legibility, State Space & the Vision of Order (5 Feb)

Readings: Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Easterling, *Extrastatecraft* (middle chapters)
Theme: State simplification, legibility, and political ordering of space

Week 6 — Exclusionary Architecture: Brutalism, Borders, Bare Life – PART I (12 Feb)

Readings: Mbembe, *Brutalism*; Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture*; Denman, *Fortress Power*
Theme: Architecture as violence, enclosure, and necropolitics

Week 7 – READING BREAK

Week 8 — Exclusionary Architecture: Brutalism, Borders, Bare Life – PART II (26 Feb)

Readings: Mbembe, *Brutalism*; Rael, *Borderwall as Architecture*; Denman, *Fortress Power*
Theme: Architecture as violence, enclosure, and necropolitics

Week 9 — Forensic Architecture: Violence, Memory, Evidence (5 Mar)

Readings: Weizman, *Forensic Architecture* See also the excellent website: https://forensic-architecture.org/
Theme: Architecture as evidence and method for witnessing violence

Week 10 — Emergency Mobilities & Spaces of Crisis (12 Mar)

Readings: Adey, *Evacuation*; Easterling, *Extrastatecraft* (early chapters)
Theme: Movement, infrastructure, and governance in spaces of emergency

Week 11 — Plastic Ecologies & Anthropocene Materials (19 Mar)

Readings: Davis, *Plastic Matter*; Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse* (Intro + Ch. 1)
Theme: Toxic materiality, multispecies entanglements, and relational worlds

Week 12 — Architectures of Security & Future Ecologies (26 Mar)

Readings: Muller & Mutlu (eds), *Architectures of Security*
Theme: Security infrastructures, mobility, control, planetary futures

Week 13 – Paper Workshop/Discussions (Apr 2)

During class, in groups, students will share their paper topics, progress, challenges, exchange drafts ahead of time for discussion and editorial

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Statement on Academic Offences:
Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf
Please note that use of AI is not permitted in this class.

Graduate Course Health and Wellness:
As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students 2 may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/ . Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html .

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