

UTOPIA -OR-

OBLIVION



Haludovo Hotel (1972), designed by Boris Magaš; Krk Island, Croatia.

ARCH 421Q
Graduate School of Architecture, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture
Washington University in St. Louis

Time: Tuesdays, 1:00 – 3:50 PM
Location: Givens Hall 115

Instructor: Michael Allen, Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design
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Course Description

Is utopia relevant to architectural practice today? Can architecture be a revolutionary practice, serving to transform social and spatial relations simultaneously? Can designers bring about a future that meaningfully restructures society? Should they? If so, should they see futurism as a speculative practice or a serious commitment? If not, is it because they have demonstrated as much capacity for inflicting negative social change as positive?

Taking its title from Buckminster Fuller, this seminar investigates whether architectural design could be a revolutionary practice, serving to transform social and spatial relations simultaneously. In this era of pandemics, climate change and social disparity, can architecture's history of utopian projects help us form practices to change the world around us? Can an imaginary of perfecting the world through built forms serve useful purposes today? The course will examine built and unbuilt designs that sought to transform social and political structures, including speculative urban-scale designs by Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Tony Garnier, Mirra Alfassa, Paolo Soleri and others, as well as architectural projects envisioned by Fuller, Oscar Niemeyer, Minoru Yamasaki, Archigram, Kisho Kurakawa, Russian and Yugoslavian communist designers and others. Lectures will be coupled with field work at local sites enmeshed in concepts of utopia and dystopia, and students will develop their own speculative work addressing utopianism in architecture.

Aim

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the ways in which architectural practice has responded to history, especially through projects or movements that are utopian or futurist in nature.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Articulate how architecture has pursued future-focused practices, including the incorporation of utopian and revolutionary ideas;
2. Articulate general themes in futurist movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries;
3. Research and write about specific case studies of futurist-oriented designers, movements and architectural projects;
4. Relate futurist theory to the capacity of architecture to address contemporary societal challenges and needs.

Course Materials

All required readings will be accessible on Box.

Schedule

Tuesday, March 21: Introduction to the Future

Instructor Lecture: Futurability and Architecture

Tuesday, March 28: New Plans, New Powers

Instructor Lecture: On Obsolescence

Student Presentations:

Plan Obus – Joseph Henke

Old Man River City – Toritcha Coulibaly

Tuesday, April 4: New Nations, New Forms

Instructor Lecture: Housing Blocs: Ordinary Modernism Across the Atlantic

Student Presentations:

Novi Beograd (New Belgrade) – Charlie Chen

Brasilia – Celine Haddad

Tuesday, April 11: New Forms, New Relationships

Student Presentations:

Nagakin Capsule Tower – Jacob Davies

La MéMÉ – Ange Long

Barbican Estate – Ellis Wu

Tuesday, April 18: New Forms, New Societies

Student Presentations:

Auroville – Dora Chen

Arcosanti – Angela Lai

A Skyrise for Harlem – Teddy Levy

Tuesday, April 25: Conclusions

Final Discussion

Assignments

1. Case Study Presentation

On the first day of the seminar, students will select one of the case studies which will become the basis of their case study presentation. Students will be responsible for:

- a.) Undertaking research on the case study including journal articles, books and online sources;
- b.) Addressing the history of the project, the career of its designers, its larger social context and its successes and failures;
- c.) Creating a 30-minute talk or interactive discussion to present in the seminar.

Students are welcome to create handouts, assign readings by email or enhance the presentation beyond a slideshow. Students should upload their slides to Box after they present.

2. Final Project

The final project will extend research into the case study by relating it to a current global political problem. Students will craft a journalistic-style article written as if a writer is looking back at valuable lessons from the case study, a video as if appearing on a television news program or a podcast episode. The exact parameters of this assignment will be distributed in seminar in week two. Final projects will be uploaded to Box and discussed in a final group discussion on the last day of the seminar.

Evaluation and Grading

The required work in the seminar will include the case study presentation, the final project and participation in discussions. The final grade will be based on this formula:

Final Project	50%
Case Study Presentation	30%
Attendance and Participation in Discussion	20%

Papers and work will be graded numerically out of 100 points. Final grades will be letter grades based on the following grading scale:

Conceptual Considerations	Methodology	Craftsmanship	Integrative skills
A New concepts are explored in original ways. Conceptual basis of project demonstrates clear grasp of complex issues (histories, social contexts, ecological issues). Project is fully developed and expresses a high level of investigative rigor.	Analysis demonstrates rigor and highly developed understanding of scope. Sophisticated and attentive design decision-making apparent throughout process. Logical, confident and iterative procedure generates design outputs that can be described and evaluated in terms of the process.	Clear connection between ideas and their investigation through careful manipulation of design representation and materials. Excellent craftsmanship displays thought and care. Clear demonstration of the importance of the artifact in design production. Attentiveness to the aesthetic of making.	New and complex issues are successfully integrated. Seamless integration of depiction and depicted. Comprehensive marshaling and conjoining of the physical, the conceptual and the representational.

B	Complex issues are adequately integrated. Project is well-developed and design outcomes show understanding of issues.	Process demonstrates adequate grasp of problems and issues. Clear use of iterative method. Source data employed throughout. Project process remains within the confines of the known.	Good quality work, with moderate appeal. Engagement with materiality of representation needs further work. Outputs would improve with greater attentiveness to quality of craft.	Design production shows real understanding of issues, problems, resources and process, but does not quite bring them all together in a unified articulation of design intent.
C	Project exhibits an inherent lack of conceptual engagement. The necessary components are gathered but are related and explored only superficially.	Clear and effective process never fully developed. Tentative and ill-defined methodology. Tendency to change from approach to approach without fully investigating any one method, suggesting uncertainty with respect to iterative procedures.	Crafted dimension of production distracts from design intent. Sloppy, ill-managed articulation of the artifact as an object. Ideas remain untransformed by the act of making.	Project remains on the level of a collection of disparate ideas and forms, weakly integrated or developed, and only marginally related to the singularity of the site, situation or program.
D	Project is inadequately developed in all areas. Heavy reliance on found materials. Project shows little or no regulation by means of conceptual thinking.	Inadequate development of project. Muddled thinking about process. Little or no clear methodological procedure utilized. No connection between design output and design process.	Poor quality or negligible craftsmanship. No sense of the development of an aesthetic. Outputs are uninspiring, timid and uncared for.	Little or no sense of the project as an interactive condition. Outcome does not relate to program, site or contexts. Failure of understanding with respect to the nature of design.

Course Policies and Information for Students

The best learning environment—whether in the classroom, studio, laboratory, or fieldwork site—is one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. At Washington University in St. Louis, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, although instructors bear primary responsibility for its maintenance.

A range of resources is available to those who perceive a learning environment as lacking inclusivity, as defined in the preceding paragraph. If possible, we encourage students to speak directly with their instructor about any suggestions or concerns they have regarding a particular instructional space or situation. Alternatively, students may bring concerns to another trusted advisor or administrator (such as an academic advisor, mentor, department chair, or dean). All classroom participants—including faculty, staff, and students—who observe a bias incident affecting a student may also file a report (whether personally or anonymously) utilizing the online Bias Report and Support System.

This seminar operates on a pedagogical model of participatory inquiry, where all participants shape the research questions and experiential priorities of the course. The seminar requires a high degree of participation through verbal discussion while also demanding a robust schedule of readings to support exploration of themes. While the instructor will lecture and guide, the seminar is a venue for each student to present questions, findings and connections located in readings and field trips.

Policies

1. **ATTENDANCE POLICY:** All students should attend each class session, take notes and participate in discussions. *Only two unexcused absences are allowed.* If a student cannot attend a session due to a conflicting academic requirement, that student should notify the instructor in writing one week prior to the session that will be missed. If a student has a medical or personal reason for absence, likewise the instructor shall be notified in writing at least prior to the start of class. When in doubt, please contact the instructor. Your grade will thank you. All field trips will occur during class time and are mandatory.

2. **PENALTIES FOR LATE WORK and REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS:** Late work will lose three points for each day that it is late. Requests for extensions must be made before the start of the class session before the assignment is due. Always consult the instructor if in doubt.
3. **REGRADING POLICY:** Regrading is not automatic. The instructor retains discretion to grant requests for regrading.
4. **REQUESTS FOR INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS AND REQUESTS TO REVISE:** Please consult the instructor if you want to receive feedback on writing before it is due.
5. **TECHNOLOGY POLICIES:** Computers and smart phones may aid course sessions by allowing students to pull up readings, websites, images or other materials to share. These devices should not be used for other purposes during class time. Absolutely no use of these devices for personal communications, web browsing or games is allowed.
6. **FIELD WORK.** Field work is mandatory. Students and the instructor will have to provide transportation with private automobiles. On field work days, the course will assemble at the Steinberg Hall driveway for carpooling.

Academic Integrity

Effective learning, teaching and research all depend upon the ability of members of the academic community to trust one another and to trust the integrity of work that is submitted for academic credit or conducted in the wider arena of scholarly research. Such an atmosphere of mutual trust fosters the free exchange of ideas and enables all members of the community to achieve their highest potential.

In all academic work, the ideas, drawings, photographs, written texts and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged through citation, with the name of the author and full reference of the source. See <http://artsci.wustl.edu/~writing/plagiarism.htm> for more information on properly documenting any work or ideas that are not your own. Work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original. Faculty, students, and administrative staff all share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment at Washington University. Students must be the sole authors of their work from concept through production.

Students should become familiar with the guidelines and policies of the university and school regarding academic integrity and misconduct. Any questions or concerns should be immediately addressed. Your instructors, advisors and department faculty are available to help students understand the Academic Integrity Policy, how to avoid plagiarism and its serious consequences by learning to cite sources correctly and leaving plenty of time to complete assignments. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance with any concerns in these regards.

Intentional plagiarism may result in a failing grade for this class. If you are not certain what constitutes plagiarism, please ask your instructor.

Resources for Students

1. **DISABILITY RESOURCES:** If you have a disability that requires an accommodation, please speak with instructor and consult the **Disability Resource Center** at Cornerstone (cornerstone.wustl.edu/). Cornerstone staff will determine appropriate accommodations and will work with your instructor to make sure these are available to you.
2. **WRITING ASSISTANCE:** For additional help on your writing, consult the expert staff of The Writing Center (writingcenter.wustl.edu) in Olin Library (first floor). It can be enormously helpful to ask someone outside a course to read your essays and to provide feedback on strength of argument, clarity, organization, etc.

3. THE UNIVERSITY'S PREFERRED NAME POLICY FOR STUDENTS, with additional resources and information, may be found here: registrar.wustl.edu/student-records/ssn-name-changes/preferred-name-policy/preferred-name-policy-student/.

4. ACCOMMODATIONS BASED UPON SEXUAL ASSAULT: The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations to students who are victims of sexual assault. Students are eligible for accommodation regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. Depending on the specific nature of the allegation, such measures may include but are not limited to: implementation of a no-contact order, course/classroom assignment changes, and other academic support services and accommodations. If you need to request such accommodations, please direct your request to Kim Webb (kim_webb@wustl.edu), Director of the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center. Ms. Webb is a confidential resource; however, requests for accommodations will be shared with the appropriate University administration and faculty. The University will maintain as confidential any accommodations or protective measures provided to an individual student so long as it does not impair the ability to provide such measures.

If a student comes to me to discuss or disclose an instance of sexual assault, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if I otherwise observe or become aware of such an allegation, I will keep the information as private as I can, but as a faculty member of Washington University, I am required to immediately report it to my Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to speak with the Title IX Coordinator directly, Ms. Kennedy can be reached at [\(314\) 935-3118](tel:3149353118), jwkennedy@wustl.edu, or by visiting her office in the Women's Building. Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to Tamara King, Associate Dean for Students and Director of Student Conduct, or by contacting WUPD at [\(314\) 935-5555](tel:3149355555) or your local law enforcement agency.

You can also speak confidentially and learn more about available resources at the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center by calling [\(314\) 935-8761](tel:3149358761) or visiting the 4th floor of Siegle Hall.

5. BIAS REPORTING: The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University's Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. See: brss.wustl.edu

6. MENTAL HEALTH: Mental Health Services' professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. See: shs.wustl.edu/MentalHealth

Disclaimer: *The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to this information throughout the semester.*