

Blueprints of Justice Vol. 3

Environmental Justice: Learning to Live.

Spring 2023, MIT and Stanford's Legal Design Lab

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In memory of co-creator Virgil Abloh

TA: Esther Mojolaol Idowu

Studio Schedule:

Tuesday & Thursday 1- 5pm

Hybrid structure - most classes in person, with speakers joining in person or on zoom, on a case by case basis.

Studio Trip: during Spring Break.

“To be truly visionary, we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.”

bell hooks

“A revolution on a world scale will take a very long time. But it is also possible to recognize that it is already starting to happen. The easiest way to get our minds around it is to stop thinking about revolution as a thing — “the” revolution, the great cataclysmic break—and instead ask “what is revolutionary action?” We could then suggest: revolutionary action is any collective action which rejects, and therefore confronts, some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations—even within the collectivity—in that light. Attempts to create autonomous communities in the face of power, would, for instance, be almost by definition revolutionary acts. And history shows us that the continual accumulation of such acts can change (almost) everything.”

David Graeber

This studio explores the structural frameworks and spatial implications of the climate crisis in its various manifestations, as well as, crucially, the role of the architect within the climate movement. The ambition is to ask , as Denise Ferreira da Silva writes in *Difference Without Separability*, “..what sort of ethical opening can be envisioned with the dissolution of the grip of the Understanding and the releasing of *The World to the imagination*”.

The environmental crisis is not a question of scientific advancement, or innovation and just as little a design problem. It is a political crisis: we know what we should do, we know what we could do, we even know how to. Yet we don't.

Predicated on the idea that "justice" does not have a clear definition or measure, the studio will be working closely with the Stanford Legal Design Lab to map and challenge political structures - historic and current ones, raising questions of policy, code and laws in direct relation to the environmental crisis.

With a sober yet imaginative sense of what is possible, the studio will identify and propose a range of projects at various scales, ranging from tactical strategies (Extinction Rebellion's use of tensegrity structures being a prime example), to questions of managed retreat (specifically looking at the program recently launched by the Biden administration, the first of its kind, to fund the relocation of communities) and as far as A Global Moratorium on New Construction, questioning the architect's very own role.

One case study will be Port Arthur, 90 miles east of Houston, a flood prone city located only 19 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. It is a city facing some of the highest air pollution rates in the country. The studio will be working closely with community members, activists, scientists and journalists to define the final scope and projects of the studio.

The studio trip to Port Arthur will include a break in Houston, specifically the Menil collection, the Rothko Chapel and the James Turrell Twilight Epiphany Skyspace.

"We are all projects of collective self-creation. What if, instead of telling the story about how our society fell from some idyllic state of equality, we ask how we came to be trapped in such tight conceptual shackles that we can no longer even imagine the possibility of reinventing ourselves?"

David Graeber & David Wengrow

Student Learning Outcome Objectives:

- Strengthen the students' ability to research, conceptualize, and develop an understanding of politicized environments
- Strengthen the students' ability work in technically constrained environments
- To engage and rationalize complex socio-political contexts through the architect's tools
- Learn and practice presentations skills in front of clients and user groups
- Ability to represent a design concept through accurate graphic representation

Evaluation Criteria:

Students will be graded according to the following criteria:

Studio Criteria: Depth of analysis and design research.

- Quality, clarity, and depth representation to convey information

- Engagement in communal discussions and contribution to the studio's shared learning.
- Ability to process criticism in a productive manner and to self-evaluate.
- Clarity and organization of oral presentations.
- Completion of assignments by their deadlines.
- Individual growth over the semester

Attendance:

Attendance for the full duration of each class is mandatory. Greater than three absences for the semester without a medical excuse supported by a doctor's note or a family emergency confirmed by a school official may result in a failing grade. If you miss six or more classes, you will be asked to drop the subject or receive a failing grade.

Background literature/links:

1. *Caliban and the Witch* - Silvia Federici
2. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* - David Graeber, David Wengrow
3. *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* - Andreas Malm
4. *Ecofeminism* - Marian Mies, Vandana Shiva
5. *Disasterology: Dispatches from the Frontlines of the Climate Crisis* - Samantha Montano
6. *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2022* - Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Jaime Green
7. *An Alaskan Town Is Losing Ground and a Way of Life* Emily Witt New Yorker,
8. *In a First, U.S. Pays Tribes to Move Away From Climate Threats* Christopher Flavelle, NYT
9. *Ethics of Ambiguity* - Simone de Beauvoir
10. *"Managed Retreat": A Solution to Communities Impacted by Climate Change*
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/managed-retreat-solution-communities-impacted-climate-change>
11. *The Illinois town that got up and left* - Marcello Rossi
12. *Environmental Challenges and Prospects for Community Relocation in Houston and Port Arthur, Texas*
13. *Assisted Resettlement and Community Viability on Louisiana's Gulf Coast*
14. *They Were Proud Houston Homeowners. Then It All Fell Apart.* - Jake Bittle
NYTimes