"It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely
sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."
- Leonardo Da Vinci

It is urgent that architecture address the compounding social and political problems of today— income inequality, racial division, religious persecution, gender identity and rights, and ecological crisis—to name a few. The question is how. For nearly seventy-five years architecture has assumed a critical-theory basis for socially engaged design; that upon diagnosing and revealing the truth of a given social inequality or problem, an action to rectify that problem will be taken by those who can now see it—whether architect or observer. A strategy of producing “awareness” to prompt action, accordingly, continues to permeate the socio-political ambitions of the architectural profession. While contemporary attitudes in philosophy and the arts have largely abandoned these awareness-based techniques as utterly ineffective (as merely seeing a problem rarely actually prompts action to solve it), they persist in architecture and, worse; convince architects that they are socially engaged when, in fact, they are using broken strategies in their attempts to be so. Architectures reliance on these assumptions has proven not only painfully ineffective, but, as philosopher Jacques Ranciere theorizes, actually reinforces the very hierarchies and inequalities that such strategies seeks to abolish.

This seminar asks if there are other ways in which the design of buildings and “objects” can be socially and politically impactful—and if there are other ways to discuss these issues rather than relying on standard critical-theory/critical-discussion seminar formats. Instead of relying on dry PowerPoint presentations or abstract, intangible discussions— all presentations, brainstorming, ideation and think-tank style discussions in this seminar will be done solely through engaging with physical objects—sometimes found and sometimes designed and made by students. In fact, PowerPoint presentations, images, diagrams, hand-outs (with the singular exception of this syllabus…) or other 2d or image based materials are expressly forbidden. Students will engage in preliminary historic research regarding past examples of the politicization of objects—largely using the Victoria and Albert Museum’s recent “Disobedient Objects” exhibition as a collective starting point, but also architectures flirtations with disobedience in the form of Utopée, Archigram, Archizoom, Superstudio and other disruptive practices that challenged political structures by challenging architectural convention. This history of object-based activism will help position subsequent discussions, through objects related to the contemporary writings by Jacques Ranciere, Graham Harman, Elaine Scarry, Steven Shaviro, the Laboria Cuboniks Xenofeminist Collective, Nick Sniteck, Alex Williams and others. Concepts and movements addressed will include, but are not limited to, The Poltics of Aesthetics, Dissensus/Asthetic, Xenofeminism, Immaterialism, Object Oriented Ontology, Alien Phenomenology, Extr-O-Science Fiction, Accelerationism, Para-Fictional Practice, Afrofuturism, Estrangement and Discognition. The seminar is about reading and discussing ideas that may help us enable acts of design to reveal, normally withdrawn, politically and socially impactful qualities. This seminar
can also fulfill the YSoA History and Theory elective requirement through the writing of a fifteen-page paper done in association with, or possibly instead of, the final project pending approval of the instructor.

- THE DEFINITION OF AN OBJECT -
BY GRAHAM HARMAN

1. An object is any unified entity, whether it has reality in the world or only in the mind. Philosophy must be broad enough to deal with both types of objects.
2. Let the first kind be called a “real object” or a “thing.” Real objects are autonomous forces in the world, existing even if all observers sleep or die.
3. Let the second kind be called a “sensual object” or an “image.” sensual objects exist only insofar as some perceiver is occupied with them. These perceivers need not be human.

- ASSIGNMENT 1 -
THE STRANGE OBJECT or THE ENTHYMEMETIC
ROUND TABLE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

As an introduction to Harmanian concept that objects “withdraw” and that they are simultaneously more than a bundle of their qualities (Hume) or abstractions without sensorial qualities (Plato) we are going to start with a far reaching discussion of objects, qualities and what might constitute their actual and sensual realities. In order to avoid abstraction in favor of having concrete things to use as props, we are going to have this discussion at a table full of student-selected actual objects. You are tasked with bringing to the table (within reason) the weirdest/strangest object you can get your hands on. You will need to first define strangeness and err on the side of actually strange instead of strange only after you’ve had an opportunity to describe why. This object should be seriously, visually, strange, and recognizably so without a speech. If selected properly the object will simultaneously invite curiosity and exhibit Aristotle’s concept of an enthymeme (having knowledge of a thing without it being stated—in this case that it is unusual), which will also be discussed during the meeting. This object is probably not a deformed live pony or a beating heart, but could be any non-living object that passes the common sense test of being a reasonably carried size, legal, and not-dangerous. You are only allowed to select one object to bring to class—and be prepared to come with a list of its “qualities” as you perceive them via your senses (red, porous, heavy, squishy, reflective, rough, voluptuous, prickly etc.). We will discuss which objects are the strangest, why, according to what criteria, and will rank them accordingly. The students who are considered to have brought the strangest objects and are best able to articulate why will have first choice of topics for their Project #2 presentations.

- ASSIGNMENT 2 -
THE DISOBEDIENT OBJECT or THE ACTIVIST
ROUND TABLE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

In 2015 the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (itself a museum of objects) held the exhibition “Disobedient Objects,” which was the first to examine the powerful role of objects in movements for social change. It contained a Suffragette tea service, protest robots, designs for barricades and blockages, political videos games, experimental activist-bicycles, and more in order to illustrate how political activism can be manifest through design. Students will select an object from this exhibition, research it and its original historic and political contexts, and prepare a brief 3-4 minute presentation for the roundtable class discussion. Students will be required to make, find or bring a contemporary equivalent of the historic object and imagine a contemporary narrative in which it would be equally as political. This entails the historic knowledge of the original, and speculative extrapolation into today or the near future. While the original example may have been an “experimental activist-bicycle” the contemporary corollary may be a hoverboard. How could a hoverboard be politically charged in the same way as an experimental bicycle was in 1970? How would it need to be changed? How could it be deployed? In short, how does one make a seemingly conventional object politically charged and what of its normally hidden and withdrawn qualities need to be brought to the foreground of our attention for this to happen? The object to be selected are a

- ASSIGNMENT 3 -
THEORY THROUGH OBJECTS PRESENTATIONS
RANCIERE, MEILLESOUX, HARMAN, SHAVIRO, LABORIA CUBONIKS, ET. AL.

Given that the intellectual positions being studied are still in-progress there are a limited number of texts which codify the positions of the various players. Groups of paired students will focus on individual figures in order to translate the social, political and design ramifications of their writings to the class. Each group will present for a maximum of @20 minutes through objects that are used to illustrate key points. Each group will also design and fabricate an original object, with architectural sensibilities, that they believe conveys or emerges from a concept, or concepts, as presented by the figures being studied. These are not comprehensive presentations on the work of these figures as much as a mining of key concepts that can be translated or even distorted into potential political design interest to the profession. Each object must be larger than an 8” cube. As usual, PowerPoint presentations, images, diagrams, hand-outs or other 2d or image based materials are expressly forbidden.
-FINAL PROJECT-
WHAT WOULD NORMALLY BE CALLED A FINAL PAPER BUT IS INSTEAD NOW A THING

The final project for the course is done individually unless pre-approved as a group by the instructor. Students will adopt a key idea from within the course, as it emerges from the readings, presentations, discussions, or reviews. While the object may be used to illustrate a key concept or be activist, it is not required to. Instead it may only use the concept as a springboard to illustrate or emerge from the beliefs and ambitions of the students as they have emerged from the course. This object may be large or small, have a dear or no function, but must be physical and durable for later exhibition. As this project accounts for 75% of the course, it is expected that the object produced be exceptional and museum-quality in terms of its design production, detailing and materiality. (*This seminar can also fulfill the YSoA History and Theory elective requirement through the writing of a fifteen-page paper done in association with, or possibly instead of, the final project pending approval of the instructor.)

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<th>Date</th>
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| September 08| thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Kickoff introduction to seminar, room 322  
Brief readings assigned when students officially assigned to class |
| September 15| thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Assignment 1: Roundtable Discussion  
The Strange Object (Enthymematic)  
Project 2 topic assigned |
| September 22| thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Assignment 2: Roundtable Discussion  
The Disobedient Object (Activist)  
Assignment 3 topics assigned |
| September 29| thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Assignment 3: Presentations and Discussion  
Theory through Objects, (20 minute presentations max)  
Jacques Ranciere: Dissensus and the Politics of Aesthetics (2 students)  
Graham Harman: OOO + Weird Realism (2 students)  
Presenter led discussion |
| October 6   | fri  | no class | Advanced studio travel week, no class |
| October 13-15| thurs| all days | Aesthetic Activism Symposium, no regular class on Thursday Oct 13.  
Students are required to attend full symposium event.  
(Time will be made up by not having class on Thursday November 3rd during the open house, or on Thursday November 10th during Mid-Review week.) |
| October 20  | thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Aesthetic Activism class discussion, based on student notes and questions |
| October 27  | thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Assignment 3: Presentations and Discussion  
Theory through Objects, (20 minute presentations max)  
Steven Shaviro: No Speed Limit, (2 students)  
Lucia Cubonik: Xenofeminism (2 students)  
Presenter led discussion |
| November 3  | thurs| no class | Open House, no class |
| November 10 | thurs| no class | Mid Reviews, no class |
| November 17 | thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Assignment 3: Presentations and Discussion  
Theory through Objects, (20 minute presentations max)  
Timothy Morton: Hyperobjects (2 students)  
Mellesoux, Shaviro: Extr Science Fiction and Discognition (2 students)  
Final Project approved by today |
| November 24 | thurs| no class | Fall Recess, no class |
| December 1  | thurs| 11:30-1:20 | Final Project Review and Discussion (5 students) |
December 8    thurs    11:30-1:20    Final Project Review and Discussion (5 students)

December 14   thurs    no class    Final Studio Reviews, no class

December 21   wed     no class    No class, however any final papers due for theory credit are due
(Possible joint discussion with Michael Young’s seminar this week)

- SEMINAR REFERENCES -