The Aesthetics of Accelerationism

"Don't start with the good old things but with the bad new ones." Bertolt Brecht

As a contemporary movement in economics, politics, and philosophy, Accelerationism has developed ever increasing attention over the past decade with a growing quantity of both supporters and detractors. There are several different strains of this movement, but at its kernel they all hold that the way forward in a moment of crisis is not to resist, reject or return to previous epochs, but to move forward through the conditions at hand; to intensify aspects of the current reality, accelerating into what may come next. This studio will look at architecture as the discipline responsible for the aesthetics of the background of reality, and because of this, attempt to speculate on these aesthetics by accelerating several contemporary crises into the near future.

If Accelerationism is left to operate only through economics, technology, and ecology, it quickly moves into utopian, dystopian, or nihilistic tendencies. To counter these tendencies, it is necessary for a cultural practice such as architecture to deeply investigate questions of aesthetics. These are critical questions, for if ignored, architecture can become merely the outcome of capital, technology and ecology. Although architecture is intimately entwined in these concerns, it should not be seen as the result of these forces, but as a cultural project that contributes to a developing understanding of how they affect our built reality. Projections into the future can often become mere fantasy escape. But an aesthetics of a speculative realism can produce scenarios that directly comment on our own moment in time through advancing a particular crisis into the near future. These scenarios are often great lenses for a critical engagement with contemporary problems.

In many ways architecture is always a future speculation. This can be as simple as proposing a new lifestyle for a client's domestic environment, or as grand as imagining a new city with new social relations. This aspect of architecture places great pressure on the representations that create the plausibility of this new reality. If the aesthetics of a future reality can be articulated to a point where the familiar becomes strangely other, these speculations can gain political influence; they can build new audiences, new constituencies. How architects have made aesthetic arguments through different mediations is of crucial importance for the discipline of architecture, both past and future.
Course Description

The semester will begin with a series of representational experiments looking at the conventions of contemporary architectural mediation. The goal is to challenge these conventions to explore their aesthetic and communicative potentials. This first month will also consist of readings, lectures, and discussions regarding the studio topic. There will also be time devoted to research into the studio site.

The site for the studio will be Iceland. The entire island will be considered as a potential site for the development of future scenarios. Iceland presents a unique setting for the issues of accelerationism. As remote and isolated first impressions of the island may seem, Iceland is strangely at the center of many global issues ranging from data centers to climate studies, genetic research to financial investment. The primary questions that the studio will ask for this situation are: How will the aesthetics of the background reality in Iceland be altered in the next two decades? What will be the role of architecture in relation to the different crises that exist today accelerated into tomorrow?

Upon returning from the travel week, each student group will choose an issue related to the built environment that is currently in crisis today. The task then is to document the state and impact of these issues in Iceland, in the year 2036, as viewed from the year 2056. The future is now past. All forms of media are available for these speculations. The two key questions pertain to; plausibility as established through representation, and the aesthetics of estrangement in realism. Each group of students will develop and present a complete scenario of the future Iceland at the midterm review. These scenarios will set the stage for a re-imagined "site", that will consist of specific programmatic, cultural, technological, ecological and economic issues. Each building design will respond to these as the new reality of the future. The building designs will be fully represented through sets of architectural representations, based out of the initial representational exercises from the start of the semester. The final review will be the presentation of a documentation of a "new" building that was completed 20 years in the past. Thus, the architectural becomes available for aesthetic speculation.

Course Work

Studio will take place Monday and Thursday. The first month will be heavily dedicated to discussions through lectures and readings, combined with a series of representational exercises regarding conventions and estrangement in mediation. After returning from our travel week, the studio will be divided into 4 to 5 groups to propose scenarios regarding the documentation of the past future. The Midterm review will be a review of these scenarios. Following the midterm, each group will work on the design and documentation of a building intervention into these scenarios. These projects will last the second half of the semester up to the Final Review.

Each student is expected to be in studio during all required class hours and to complete all work in the time periods given. This course will primarily focus around an investigation and the development of architectural mediation as a theoretical argument. There is no single medium or software stressed, but instead the ways in which all mediations build their arguments through different aesthetic attitudes. This will require a constant effort through design work, visual output, and discourse.

References

Steven Shaviro, No Speed Limit (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015)
#ACCELERATION: The Accelerationist Reader (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media, 2014)
Benjamin Noys, Malign Velocities (Zero Books, 2015)
Boris Groys, In the Flow (London: Verso, 2016)
Quentin Meillassoux, Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction (Univoc, 2015)
Schedule

Sep  
1    Intro Presentation  
2    Lecture & Discussion  
8    Lecture & Discussion  
12   Pin-up Discussion  
15   Pin-up Discussion  
19   Pin-up Discussion  
22   Representation Review  
26   Site Research  
29   Site Research  

Oct  
3    Travel Week  
6    Travel Week  
10   Lecture & Discussion  
13   Desk Crits  
17   Desk Crits  
20   Pin-up Discussion  
24   Desk Crits  
27   Midterm Review - Scenario Review  
31   Desk Crits  

Nov  
3    Desk Crits  
7    Desk Crits  
10   Pin-up Discussion  
14   Desk Crits  
17   Pin-up Discussion  
21   No Class  
24   Thanksgiving  
28   Desk Crits  

Dec  
1    Pin-up Discussion  
5    Desk Crits  
8    Pin-up Discussion  
12   Desk Crits  
15   Final Review - Building Review  

Grading

The official meanings for letter grades are as follows:
  A - Outstanding performance
  B - Above average performance
  C - Requirements satisfactorily completed
  D - Minimum requirements met; passing but unsatisfactory
  F - Failure to meet the minimum requirements of a subject

Credits: Only those students who are officially registered in a course will have grades and credits entered on their records.
Course Requirements and Regulations:

Attendance: Class meets Monday and Thursday, 2 pm to 6 pm. Attendance is mandatory. All absences require prior permission of the faculty. Written documentation may be required (i.e. doctor’s note). Any absence from an in-class presentation or review requires a Dean’s excuse. Two unexcused absences are grounds for failure.

Punctuality: Students should be in class on time. All work should be pinned up and ready at the assigned times.

Participation: Participation is required for all presentations, tutorials, desk-crits, and reviews.

Reviews: Participation and attendance is mandatory for the entirety of all reviews.

Grading: As described above.

Portfolio: The completion of work and your final grade is contingent on the submission of a digital portfolio. The portfolio is due at the end of the workshop in pdf format and burned onto a CD/DVD. It should include scans of all drawings and images of all models. Please take the time to carefully document your work throughout the semester.

Readings: As described above.

No Cell Phones During Class
No Food or Drink in Classrooms

Authorship

Acts of academic dishonesty are extremely serious violations of both the spirit and the substance of this community. Acts of academic dishonesty including cheating, plagiarizing or the submission of work that has not been prepared by the person claiming authorship are forbidden. Such acts are viewed as extremely serious violations, and may affect the student’s grade and/or credit.

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students seeking reasonable accommodations, modifications of policies, practices or procedures, and/or auxiliary aid and services for a disability should contact the Dean of Students. Such requests may also be given to the Vice President for Finance, Administration & Treasurer/Equal Opportunity Officer.

Procedures for Students with Concerns or Complaints About Discrimination and Harassment and Non-Retaliation Policy

All members of the College community are expected to adhere to the Colleges’ policies and to cooperate with the procedures for responding to complaints of discrimination and harassment. All are encouraged to report any conduct believed to be in violation of these policies. It is in the best interest of the entire community for students to report incidents of discrimination and harassment. All students and applicants for admission are protected from coercion, intimidation, interference, or retaliation for filing a complaint or assisting in an investigation under any of the applicable policies and laws. Subjecting another to retaliatory, intimidating or coercive conduct for filing a complaint or participating in an investigation is prohibited and may be addressed as a separate violation.

Any person who believes that he or she has been the subject of discrimination or harassment may initially choose to deal with the alleged offender directly through a face-to-face discussion, a personal telephone conversation, e-mail correspondence, or letters. In many cases, this may effectively resolve the situation; however, individuals are not required to address the alleged offender directly. Such an approach maybe ineffective in correcting the problem, or an individual may be uncomfortable in handling the situation alone. All students are strongly urged to promptly report concerns of discrimination and harassment under the procedures outlined in the College Handbook.