

Financial Forms

: designing architecture for alternative economies

MIT / Department of Architecture / ARCH 4.181
Fall, 2023 Time and Room TBD
Course Credit / 3-0-9 G

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Course Overview

Clients, funding, consultants, contracts—architects are enmeshed in financial mechanisms that forever remind us of our direct reliance on local and global economies. Money talks and architecture follows: our work articulating the interests of those served while fluctuating with the rapidity of the market. And while this relationship may be fixed, perhaps we can find ways to resist its normative logics, which exacerbate social inequalities and consolidate power in the hands of the few and the privileged. This workshop will explore alternative economies and financial arrangements to find ways to re-code capitalism's tendencies, desires, and outcomes. We'll draw from a range of writing—from queer theory to post-colonial studies to literary criticism—to undo dominant financial orientations.

We will ask whether in addition to designing architecture, we can also design the market that demands architecture—to produce economic scenarios under which we might build. Each week we will pair readings in economic anthropology (studying how economies are shaped by behavior, cultural values, and social relationships), texts from other disciplines, and case-studies to invent atypical demand-chains, work against models of optimal performance, and instrumentalize culture to undercut efficiency. We will look at how we might produce clients, programs, and actor networks rather than responding to the whims of the market. We will consider how we might think of economic arrangements as tools for designers.

Each week, students are asked to produce a written response to the reading and to help guide discussion, researching and exploring examples and references to ground our work. The task is to produce a collective and cumulative body of knowledge. Together, we will read, write, and compile a compendium of research for a publication on the topic. Students are encouraged to find broad reaching examples—from the domestication of post-war military technology to the proliferation of sharing economies to recent trends in reuse and the circulation of materials and everything in between. We will focus on buildings, materials, and products, largely drawn from North America in the 20th and 21st centuries but may also look further afield. The course will focus on real examples of immaterial and material phenomena, inventing new languages and representational strategies along the way.

Course Structure

Students are to submit reading responses each week before class *by 9:00am*. Reading responses should not exceed two pages and must include 250–500 words and illustration by way of images/references.

Some prompts for the responses:

1. Find and describe key points per text that relate to our workshop and group conversation.
2. Outline key questions per text to the class that spark discussion around the workshop.
3. Bring at least one reference/example that demonstrates some position regarding the texts. The references can be new, old, architectural, or otherwise. They should keep the conversation grounded in practical feasibility.

For the final project, each student will pick their own case study for which they will compile and present a research dossier. This dossier should contain a thorough written description and key research, and may also include interviews, diagrams, drawings, video/photography, data, and any other material that may be relevant to the case study. Case studies may be a building, a company, a product, a person, a business, a business model, a method, or something entirely different. We will dedicate a class mid-semester to collectively look over potential topics, determine a structure, and evaluate based on discussions in class.

Course Schedule

**Note: Each week key readings will be clarified by instructor and uploaded accordingly*

Week 1 **09/06** ***Introduction***
Outline key themes, concepts, and course direction/expectations.

Week 2 **09/11** ***Alternative Foundations***

Reading

1. Polanyi, Karl. *Instituted Process* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944).
2. Latour, Bruno and Vincent Antonin Lépinay. *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009): Part 1, 7–32.
3. Hillebrand, Sebastian and Hans–Martin Zademach. “Alternative Economies and Spaces: Introductory Remarks” in *Alternative Economies and Spaces* (transcript Verlag, 2014), 9–22.
4. Kolb, Jaffer. “Working Queer” in *Log 41*, Fall, 2017, 63–66.
5. Bismark, Pedro Levi. *The Architecture of Pessimism* (Stones Against Diamonds, 2020), online.

Week 3 **09/18** ***Gift/Exchange***

Reading

1. Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).
2. Graeber, David. *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Desires* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Ch. 2 “Current Directions in Exchange Theory”, 23–47.

3. Lee, Roger. "The Possibilities of Economic Difference?" in Hildebrand and Zademach, 69-84.
4. Blanchfield, Caitlin and Farzin Lotfi-Jam "The Bedroom of Things" in *Log 41*, Fall 2017, 129-134.
5. Cvetkovich, Anne. "AIDS Activism and the Oral History Archive" in *The Scholar and Feminist Online* published by The Barnard Center for Research on Women, Issue 2.1, Summer 2003, online.

Week 4 **09/25** ***Micro-Economies & Risk***

Reading

1. Muñoz, Jose Esteban. "Ephemera as Evidence" in *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 8:2, 5-16.
2. Bernstein, Peter L. *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (John Wiley and Sons, 1996), Ch. 11 "The Fabric of Felicity", 187-193 and Ch. 19 "Awaiting the Wildness", 329 - 337.
3. Orlean, Andre. *The Empire of Value* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), Ch. 5 "A New Approach to Value."
4. Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013).
5. Gordon Nembhard, Jessica. *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (Penn State University Press, 2014), Introduction, 1- 25 and Ch. 8 "Black Rural Cooperative Activity in the Early to Mid-Twentieth Century, 172 - 187.
6. Hennessy, Rosemary. "The Material of Sex" in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, eds. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose with Andrea Bebell and Suan Potter, Routledge, 2013, 134-149.

Week 5 **10/02** ***Informal Markets***

Reading

1. Puar, Jasbir. "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" in *Social Text* 84-85, Vol. 23 Nos. 3-4, Fall-Winter 2005, 121-139.
2. Hill, Dan. "The Commodification of Everything" in *sqm the quantified home*, ed. Space Caviar, Lars Müller, 2014, online.
3. Jaque, Andres. "Grindr Archiurbanism" in *Log 41*, Fall 2017, 75-84.
4. Sundararajan, Arun. *The Sharing Economy: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016. Chapter 1: "The Sharing Economy, Market Economies, and Gift Economies," 23-46.

10/09 Indigenous People's Day

Week 6 **10/16** ***Excess***

Reading

1. Veblen, Thorstein. *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Orig. New York: Macmillan, 1899): Ch. 6 "Pecuniary Canons of Taste", 54-76.
2. Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection" in *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1/2, 1982, 125-149.
3. Andreas Angelidakis, "Demos, Polemos" in *Log 41*, Fall 2017, 99-101.
4. Halberstam, Jack. *Wild Things: On the Disorder of Desire* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2022), 3-32.
5. Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1971): Chapter 2, 45-56.
6. Bataille, Georges. "The Notion of Expenditure" in *Visions of Excess: selected writings, 1927-1939* ed Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116-29.
7. Abrons, Ellie. "For Real" in *Log 41*, Fall 2017, 67-73.

Week 7 **10/23** ***Waste Value & Obsolescence***

Reading

1. Thompson, Michael. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), Ch. 3: "Rat-Infested Slum or Glorious Heritage?"
2. Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): Ch. 3, 87-121.
3. Abramson, Daniel. *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), Ch. 4: "Fixing Obsolescence", 79-106.
4. Muzaffar, Ijlal and Jorge Otero-Pailos. "Preservation and Globalization" in *Future Anterior*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Summer 2012, pp iii-vii.
5. Betsky, Aaron with Jaffer Kolb. "The End of Queer Space" in *Log 41*, Fall 2017, 85-88.
6. Shao, Qin. "Citizens versus Experts: Historic Preservation in Globalizing Shanghai" in *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Summer 2012, 17-31.

Week 8 **10/30** ***Alternative Financial Instruments***

Reading

1. Feher, Michel. *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age* (New York: Zone Books, 2018). Introduction / Chapter 2.
2. Boltanski, Luc and Ève Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso Books, 2005), Ch. 2 "The Projective City", 103-163.
3. Holert, Tom. "Hidden Labor and the Delight of Otherness: Design and Post-Capitalist Politics" in *e-flux journal* #17, June-August 2010, 1-9.
4. Dunne, Anthony and Fiona Raby. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), Ch 1 "Beyond Radical Design," 1-9.
5. Preciado, Paul. *Testo Junkie*, Chapter 2: The Pharmacopornographic Era (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013), 23-55.
6. Ngai, Sianne. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), Ch. 3 "The Zany Science", 174-232
7. Martin, Reinhold. "Financial Imaginaries: Toward a Philosophy of the City" in *Grey Room* 42, Winter 2011, 60-79.

Week 9 **11/06** ***Final Project Introductory Conversation***

Students should bring minimum two ideas for their final research project to discuss. Ideas should have ample evidence and enough material to sustain a rigorous investigation.

Week 10 **11/13** ***Market Experiments***

Reading

1. Esposito, Elena. *The Future of Futures: The Time of Money in Financing and Society* (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), Ch. 3 "Economy is time: needs and scarcity," 37 - 46.
2. Keeling, Kara. "Queer OS" in *Cinema Journal*, Winter 2014, Vol. 52, No. 2 152 - 157.
3. Wang, Michael. "Queering the System" in *Log* 41 (Fall, 2017), 135-140.
4. Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology" in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, V. 12 no. 4, 2006, 543-574.
5. Harcourt, Bernard E. *The Illusion of Free Markets: Punishment and the Myth of Natural Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), Chapter 8 "The Illusion of Freedom", 176 - 190.

6. Deamer, Peggy. "Cooperativizing Small Firms" in *Log 48* (Spring, 2020), 99-106.
7. Getsy, David J. "Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction" in Jared Ledesma, ed., *Queer Abstraction* (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center 2019), 65-75.
8. Dunne and Raby, Ch 4 "Consuming Monsters," 47 - 67.

Week 11 **11/20** ***Moonshot Economics***

Primary Reading

1. Mazzucato, Mariana. *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism* (Harper Business, 2023), Chapter 6: "Good Theory, Good Practice: Seven Principles for a New Political Economy", 163-203.
2. Dean, Jodi. "Communicative Capitalism" in *Cultural Politics*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2005, 51-74.
3. Bueller, Adrienne, the Value of a Whale, Chapter 6: "Ghosts: valuing a disappearing world", 227-267.
4. Barber, Daniel. "After Comfort" in *Log 47* (Fall, 2019), 45-50.
5. Halland, Ingrid. "Being Plastic" in *Log 47* (Fall, 2019), 35-44.
6. Schmelzer, Matthias with Andrea Vetter and Aaron Vansintjan. *The Future is Degrowth: A Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2022), Introduction, 1-34 and Chapter 5: Pathways to Degrowth, 212-250.

Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 12 **11/27** **Individual Meetings**

FINAL **12/18** **Date TBD, Final Presentations and Project Submission**

Course Expectations

This is a workshop, not a seminar, and students should be prepared to work collaboratively to undertake research and analysis. Students are asked to bring their own interests, their own attitudes, and their own interpretation of the material. They may incorporate other disciplines, conversations, and passions into the work for the workshop. Discussion and conversation will be paramount to the success of the workshop, and students are expected to be engaged, and importantly respectful of others. Grading will be determined through balancing participation, weekly assignments, and the final project.

Additional Bibliography:

Ascher, Ivan. *Portfolio Society* (New York: Zone Books, 2016).

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Collinge, Howard. *Beautiful Economics: A Guide to Gentle World Domination* (powerhouse Books, 2021).

Garutti, Francesco. *Our Happy Life: Architecture and Well-Being in the Age of Emotional Capitalism* (Sternberg Press, 2019).

Graeber, David. *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2012).

Henry, Michel. *Barbarism* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing's Continuum Impacts vol. 95, 2012).

Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

Muñoz, Jose Esteban. *The Sense of Brown* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2020).

Scott, Brett. *Cloudmoney: Cash, Cards, Crypto, and the War for Our Wallets* (Harper Business, 2022).

Rao, Vyjayanthi with Prem Krishnamurthy and Carin Kuoni. *Speculation, Now* (Duke University Press, 2015).

Willis, Carol. *Form Follows Finance* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1995).