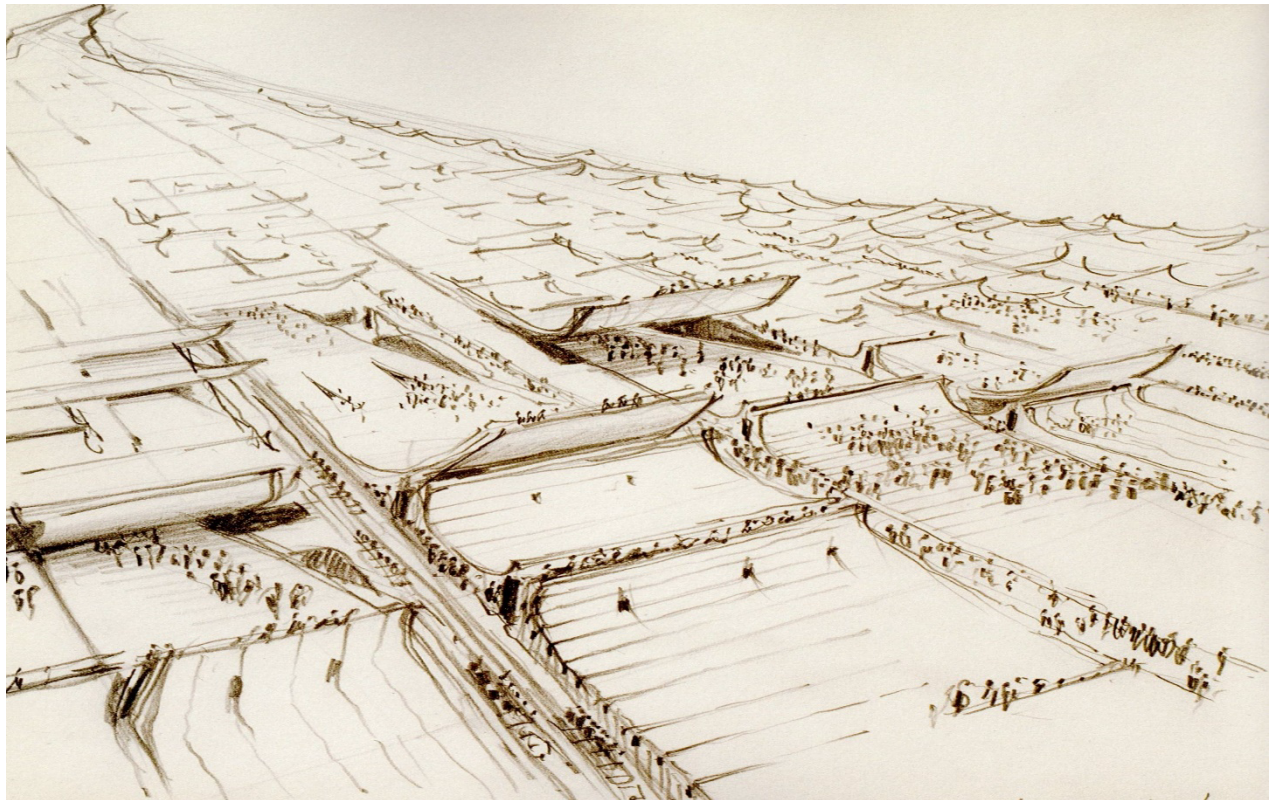


Architecture of Utopia

Spring 2025 | history & theory seminar

Thursday 6:00 – 8:50 PM

Prof. Matei Denes



Oblique City - Architecture Principe 1966

Utopias allow us to explore beyond the everyday and ask big questions about who we are and what we want. They are designed as spatial representations of society. Architecture plays a key role in both the development and understanding of utopias. In this class we will be looking at how architecture can produce cultural, political, and economic meaning.

The class will explore how utopian projects in architecture manifest four main ideas:

1. Architecture as Problem Solving
2. Architecture as Political Machine
3. Architecture as Social Experiment
4. Architecture as Formal Metaphor

Classes will be structured as discussions with presentations by both the instructor and students. Readings and films will supplement the discussions. Students will be expected to show their understanding of the material through participation in class discussions, presentations, writing, and design.

The class will have several assignments. Groups of 2 or 3 students will be expected to present a reading and lead a class discussion on the topic. An introductory reading with everyone presenting a short segment will introduce the format. There will be three small projects to design specific types of utopias. And an assignment to select and report on a commune. Finally a 3-5 page essay will be required.

Readings:

1. Twelve Cautionary Tales For Christmas – Superstudio
 - Everyone
 - Jan. 30
2. Utopia – Thomas More
 - 3 people
 - Feb. 6
3. The World in a Shopping Mall – Margaret Crawford
 - 3 people
 - Feb. 13
4. The Metropolis of Tomorrow – Hugh Ferriss
 - 2 people
 - March 6
5. Utopia Achieved *from America* – Jean Baudrillard
 - 3 people
 - April 10
6. Dome Improvement – Sam Kriss
 - 2 people
 - April 17
7. Back From the Future – Thomas de Monchaux
 - 2 people
 - April 24

Assignments:

1. Architecture as Problem Solving
 - Design a structure that solves a specific problem
 - AI image prompts
 - Submission/Presentation: Feb 20
2. Pick A Commune, Any Commune
 - Select a commune from this database:
 - Explain why you chose this commune and how it works.
 - Presentation: Feb 27
3. Architecture as Social Experiment
 - Design a space for a new type of social organization
 - Collage drawing
 - Submission/Presentation: March 27

4. Architecture as Formal Metaphor
 - Create a form that has meaning
 - Poster
 - Submission/Presentation: May 1
5. Architecture as Political Machine
 - Explain the political/social/economic views of an architectural utopia.
 - 3-5 page essay (+ images & bibliography)
 - Submission: May 12

In addition to the formal assignments, students will be expected to participate in class discussions and readings. Participation is based on engagement during class discussions on the readings. 3 points can be earned during each reading. 1 point for saying anything, 2 points for saying a few things, and 3 points for making a significant contribution to the discussion.

04 _ evaluation

1. Architecture as Problem Solving	10%
2. Architecture as Social Experiment	10%
3. Architecture as Formal Metaphor	10%
4. Pick a Commune, Any Commune	5%
5. Initial Reading Exercise (Superstudio)	5%
6. Reading Presentation	15%
7. Architecture as Political Machine (Essay)	20%
8. Class Discussions	15%
9. Movie (x2)	5% each

05 _ schedule

week 01 01.23	<i>lecture: from u to ue / understanding utopia</i> <i>in class readings: "Six Buildings on an Island," "Utopia of Two Cities," & "Pure Hardcore Icons"</i> - WAI Think Tank
week 02 01.30	<i>lecture: it's worse than you think / dystopia</i> <i>reading: Twelve Cautionary Tales For Christmas – Superstudio</i>
week 03 02.06	<i>lecture: fixing the world / eco- & techno-utopias</i> <i>reading: Utopia – Thomas More</i>
week 04 02.13	<i>lecture: working it & showing it off / company towns & world's fairs</i> <i>reading: The World in a Shopping Mall – Margaret Crawford</i>
week 05 02.20	<i>lecture: living in utopia / social housing & future houses</i> <i>presentations: Architecture as Problem Solver</i>
week 06 02.27	<i>lecture: utopia together / communes</i> <i>presentations: Pick A Commune, Any Commune</i>

week 07 03.06	<i>lecture: metrotopia / utopia and the city</i> <i>reading: The Metropolis of Tomorrow – Hugh Ferriss</i>
week 08 03.13	MOVIE The Truman Show
SPRING BREAK 03.20	
week 09 03.27	<i>lecture: collective utopia / socialism & utopia</i> <i>presentations: Architecture as Social Experiment</i>
WELLNESS DAY 04.03	
week 10 04.10	<i>lecture: the united states of utopia / american utopias</i> <i>reading: Utopia Achieved from America – Jean Baudrillard</i>
week 11 04.17	<i>lecture: big is best / megastructures</i> <i>reading: Dome Improvement – Sam Kriss</i>
week 12 04.24	<i>lecture: newtopia / utopia in contemporary architecture</i> <i>reading: Back From the Future – Thomas de Monchaux</i>
week 13 05.01	<i>lecture: beyond utopia / speculative architecture</i> <i>presentations: Architecture as Formal Metaphor</i>
week 14 05.06	MOVIE Megalopolis
office hours	available remote by appointment on Tuesdays and Wednesdays

06 _ school standards

LEARNING AND TEACHING CULTURE POLICY

In addition to the overarching values and ethics of the university, the New Jersey School of Architecture is dedicated to optimism, diversity and solidarity, professional conduct, constructive evaluation and instruction, collaborative community, health and wellbeing, time management and school-life-work balance, respectful stewardship and space management, and well-rounded enrichment. The pedagogy of architecture and design is as complex as it is rewarding, and as dynamically evolving as the people who learn and teach it. This understanding resides at the core of the NJSOA Learning and Teaching Culture Policy.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is limit to one project (“Architecture as Problem Solving”)

AI is prohibited for use in any other assignment or project for this course. Work will be checked for use of AI tools and any suspected use will be referred to the administration. Students will receive no credit for work produced with AI other than in the project listed above.

CANVAS

This course will use the learning management system CANVAS as the repository for all readings assignments and project assignments. All student work must be uploaded in the appropriate assignment folders. To access CANVAS, you must have a UCID account with NJIT.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: NJIT Academic Integrity Code.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.”

Grading Scale for Undergraduate Courses:

Grade	Description
A	Superior
B+	Excellent
B	Very Good
C+	Good
C	Acceptable
D	Minimum
F	Inadequate
AUD	Audit
I	Incomplete--given in rare instances to students who would normally have completed the coursework but who could not do so because of special circumstances. It is expected that coursework will be completed during the next regular semester. If this grade is not removed before final grades are due at the end of the next regular semester, a grade of F will be issued.
W	Withdrawal
S	Satisfactory
U	Unsatisfactory

ABSENCES

HCAD does not maintain an active official policy on absences, although the NJSOA requests coordinators and instructors to customize a policy for the cohort they teach. Coordinators should maintain a consistent absentee policy across a studio year that is clearly explained in the studio syllabus. Instructors of individual courses are asked to maintain an absentee policy for an individual course.

The NJIT office of the Dean of Students (DOS) maintains a way for students to explain absences that instructors can use to regulate absenteeism. By providing verifiable documentation through filing an online [Student Absence Excuse Request](#) form related to the absences within 14 days, a student can ask for accommodation and that their absences not affect their grade. Once the absence has been verified, the DOS will communicate with the instructor. Nonetheless, the DOS only verifies documentation, and it remains the instructor’s discretion to provide any accommodation and the student’s responsibility to follow up with the instructor. Accepted reasons for absence include bereavement, medical concerns, military activity, legal obligations, or university-sponsored events. Some NJSOA instructors have found that requiring DOS documentation is a strong incentive to attend class. Additional DOS information outlined [here](#).

Here are some other attendance enforcement methods that NJSOA instructors currently practice: ask students to notify the instructor by email, text, or phone before missing class and provide sufficient cause for nonattendance to maintain grades, use Canvas for attendance and calibrate scoring; or simply dock a student one-half grade (from an A to a B+) for every class missed (up to 3 classes for a studio course). This last measure is a legacy NJSOA policy no longer in force.

All instructors are asked to keep an accurate attendance log. If absenteeism is affecting a student's performance, the NJSOA strongly recommends issuing a warning notice mid-semester to remind the student of the grading consequences. If a student challenges a grade, and absenteeism is an issue, the appeals committee will request this log.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please be reminded that your syllabus represents a foundational document between instructor and student. It is a kind of contract. While information initially included may be supplemented later, such as by providing clarifying information on an assignment, the general scope, schedule, and grading value should be clearly outlined in the syllabus you post on the first day. Please bear that in mind.

NJSOA typically organizes outcomes to add to 100%. NJIT recommends that a final project or exam count for no more than 35% of a semester grade.

PLAGIARISM

Students and faculty must familiarize themselves with a proper way to cite visual and intellectual sources. Plagiarism, whether deliberate or inadvertent, simply cannot be tolerated. Simply put, plagiarism is the use of visual or intellectual material created by others without proper attribution. Even the use of one's own material for more than one assignment can also be considered plagiarism. Students should not do so without the expressed consent of all instructors involved. Our librarian, Maya Gervits, has assembled excellent resources on copyright, plagiarism citing, and avoiding plagiarism: [http:// researchguides.njit.edu/ c.php?g=671665&p=4727920](http://researchguides.njit.edu/c.php?g=671665&p=4727920)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The school's moral, ethical, and legal obligation is to provide appropriate accommodations for all students with physical and/ or learning disabilities. If students need accommodation related to disabilities, all official documentation must be filed with the Dean of Students and the Disability Support Service Office. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor at the beginning of the semester if accommodations are warranted.

Dean of Students: [https:// www.njit.edu/doss/](https://www.njit.edu/doss/)

Disability Support Service: [http:// www.njit.edu/studentssuccess/disability-support-services-0/](http://www.njit.edu/studentssuccess/disability-support-services-0/)

07 _ bibliography

READINGS

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Crawford, M. "The World in a Shopping Mall." In *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (M. Sorkin, Ed.). Hill and Wang. 1992.

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REFERENCE MATERIAL/FURTHER READING

Alison, Jane, editor. *Future City: Experiment and Utopia in Architecture*. Thames & Hudson, 2006.

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