

CITY as FILM

Architectural thought and imagination for futures in a non-modern* world.

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'Historical ontology, after all, is not only an account of how things came into existence but also of how possibilities of being arise in history.' Zeynep Celik Alexander, *Neo-Naturalism, Log31 2014*



***In the midst of our serene new world of images, a descriptive revaluation of the conditions of imaging...is a prerequisite for architecture to pose the question...how can we learn to live differently? So differently that we might soon become non-modern?**

John May, Signal Image Architecture p28

Background

This studio will move from a critical reconsideration of Pittsburgh's versions of modernism to formulate novel responses by experimenting with non-linear narratives in moving image. The idealized image of the city's rebirth hides a complex history that includes land seizure, mineral extraction, labor exploitation and brute force. All are poised to continue but could be diverted with a new set of operative interventions to the current systems. This studio will propose organizational principles for a city set in a global context. Our design methodology will consider Pittsburgh's specific histories and ecologies in order to invent devious playbooks in response to the contemporary condition. The studio's speculations will collect and construct alternative sequences of interaction and insidious influence. The film narratives produced by the studio will evolve from a close reading of three phases of Pittsburgh's expansion; 1910's, 1960's and 2020's. Architecture has been a discipline attached to machines, modernism and orthography. This studio will experiment with potentialities of data, digital media and moving imagery to develop a design process to challenge authoritarian problem solving mindsets.

Care

Ethical, political and ecological concerns will be central in the studio critique as we analyze the implications of various propositions. Care in response to precarity across cultures, codes and regions will form the prompt for the studio interventions. Consideration of scales of care will become evident in the developing scenarios. The final presentations will contain resulting insights.

Context

Reference will be built around the location of Pittsburgh Point, with use of historic photographs, films and maps. Particular reference will be made to the research by Grimley, Kubo and el Samahy in the book *'Imagining the Modern'*. Monticello Press 2019.

Three polemical texts will act as a theoretical scaffold for our analysis; *Medium Design* by Keller Easterling, *Image Signal Architecture* by John J May, and *Class Matter* by bell hooks. We will study narrative film form in the innovative early C20th silent films by Vertov, Ruttmann, and Kinugasa, the 1970's experimental films by Maya Deren, Agnes Varda and Chris Marker, and the contemporary radical filmmakers John Akomfrah, Mati Diop, Im Heung Soon. The studio will acquire a broad vocabulary of strategies developed by artists working in the arena of expanded cinema.

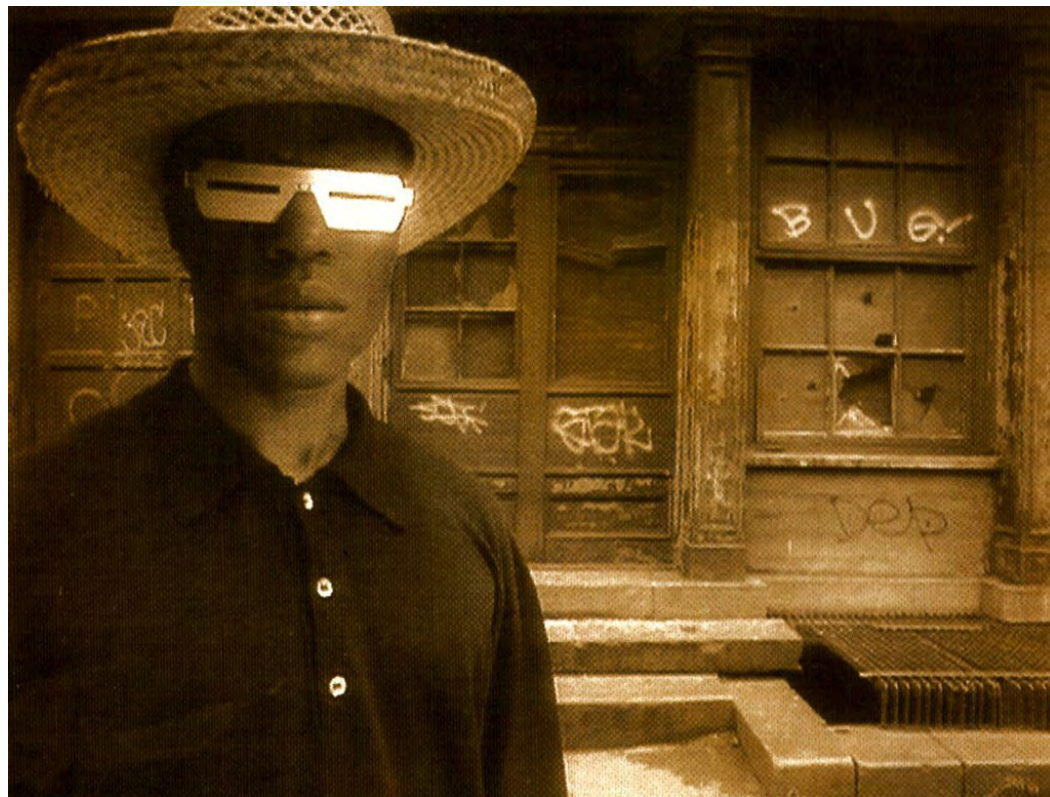
Memoir holds revelatory insights from all three eras and we will make reference to *Out of this Furnace* Thomas Bell 1941, *The Portraits of Duane Michaels* 1958-88, *Punch Me Up to the Gods* by Brian Broome 2021.



Above Dymaxion World Map Projection
1959 Buckminster Fuller
Left Ernie Gehr dir.
Serene Velocity 1970

Program

An historical and theoretical positioning will be presented by Arscott + Torello in weekly discussion format through the first half of semester. Site visits to the Point and to the relevant archives will be organized. Each person will take part in the preparation for presentation of different aspects of the material and the research will become a common resource. Separate lenses of analysis will be taken by each person and then together the themes will be developed as a set of cross currents. The element of time is embedded in the medium of film, you will become story tellers and use both still and moving images with words and sound to build an argument. The material is endlessly editable and you will become adept at the mnemonic, eidetic and prophetic mode of the medium. The sequence of assignments will lead you through skill acquisition, no previous familiarity with editing software will be necessary.



Learning Outcomes

- On successful completion of this studio you should be able;
1. to demonstrate a critical understanding of the relationships between ideology and forms of representation.
 2. to construct visual-verbal moving image narratives to describe ethical argument and ideas for societal speculation.
 3. to use ideas of system interventions to pose multiple outcomes for radical change.
 4. to understand and apply theoretical positions from studio readings as keys to generate discussion and new insight.
 5. to describe the counter positions embedded in your own design propositions.
 6. to demonstrate a critical understanding of the history of Pittsburgh's versions of modernisms and its continued impact on our understanding of the city.

Above Left: John Akomfrah dir. The Last Angel of History 1995
Above Right: Teinosuke Kinugasa dir. A Page of Madness 1926
Below Right: Agnes Varda dir. La Pointe Court 1955
Opposite: Clyde Hare photographer, Alcoa Building 1952



INCLUSIVITY
 The studio is committed to drawing references from at least 50% BIPOC and female writers, artists, architects and thinkers.

Studio environment.
 The material that we're covering in this class can be difficult. While we expect there to be rigorous class discussion and even disagreement, you should engage with care and empathy for the other members in the studio. Critically examining and assessing our most basic assumptions and values is one of the tasks of the architect. Have the courage to face the uncomfortable and we will work together to establish a classroom environment that is supportive of taking these intellectual and emotional risks.