COURSE TITLE:
ARCHITECTURE AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMAGINATION AT THE END OF THE WORLD (PROPOSED FOR WINTER 2026 SEMESTER)

INSTRUCTOR
Benjamin J. Muller, PhD
Professor and Program Coordinator (Migration and Border Studies)

Cross-Appointed to the Department of Interdisciplinary Programs and the Department of Social Justice and Peace Studies at King's University College

bmuller@uwo.ca
www.biometricstate.com

Course Description

As we confront profound ecological, technological, geological, and even physiological uncertainty, it is high time we reflect on architecture and design. As Colomina and Wigley contend: "The history of design is [the] history of evolving conceptions of the human. To talk about design is to talk about the state of our species," (2016: 9). This seminar proposes a critical engagement with architecture and design both from and as a part of contemporary cultural, social, and political thought. This course will speak to a broader so-called "architectural turn" in contemporary theory and consider a range of critiques that take seriously architecture's role in fostering, disrupting, and critiquing cultural, social and political constructs. Through critical readings and discussions, the course encourages an understanding of architecture as a powerful medium for interdisciplinary inquiry to reflect critically on the limits and (im)possibilities of the socio-political imagination, as we confront climate chaos, Indigenous sovereignty, race, digital futures, cultural and national identity, humanitarian design, and post-humanity in the Anthropocene. Drawing on some recent work, we end the course with reflections on the power of imagination and/in architecture and design, as we confront planetary crises.

The course material will range from key architectural writing, such as Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* and Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles*, to contemporary, postcolonial thinkers, like Arturo Escobar's *Design's for the Pluriverse* and Achille Mbembe's *Brutalism*, and the intersection of design, ecological theory, and contemporary criticism, such as Caison's *Erosion*, and Davis's *Plastic Matter*. Throughout the course, we also entertain ideas about imagination, its limits/failures and its possibilities, from James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* to Ruha Benjamin's *Imagination: A Manifesto*.

SELECTED THEMES:

- Architecture, Archaeology and Erosion: Landscapes of Decay and Ruin
- Exclusionary Architecture: Brutalism, Borders, and Bare Life
- Post-human Design: Architectural Ethics in the Anthropocene
- Forensic Architecture: Conflict, Memory and Erasure
- Designing for the Pluriverse: Postcolonial Futures and Architecture *as* Resistance
- Future Ecologies: Rethinking the Built Environment at the End of the World

PROPOSED TEXTS:

Adey, Peter (2024) *Evacuation: The Politics and Aesthetics of Movement in Emergency* Duke University Press.

Benjamin, R. (2024). *Imagination : a manifesto* (First edition.). W.W. Norton & Company.

Caison, G. (2024) *Erosion: American Environments and the Anxiety of Disappearance*. Duke University Press.

Colomina, B., & Wigley, M. (2016). *Are we human? notes on an archaeology of design*. Lars Müller Publishers.

Davis, H. (2022) *Plastic Matter*. Duke University Press.

Easterling, K. (2014). *Extrastatecraft: the power of infrastructure space*. Verso.

Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press.

Le Corbusier. (1986). *Towards a new architecture*. Dover Publications.

Mbembe, A. (2024). *Brutalism*. (1st ed.). Duke University Press.

Muller, B. J. and Mutlu, C. E., eds. (2024) *Architectures of Security: Design, Control, Mobility*, Rowman & Littlefield.

Rael, R. (2017). *Borderwall as architecture: a manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico boundary*. University of California Press.

Scott, J. C. (2020). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Weizman, E. (2017). *Forensic architecture: violence at the threshold of detectability*. Zone Books.