Course Syllabus

NB1: The research of this seminar will contribute to a major upcoming exhibition at the Guggenheim. All students will be credited for their contributions.

NB2: the most up-to-date syllabus can be found on Github here (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. I will try to keep the text below sync'd, but click on the Github link to ensure you have the latest.

Why do the contemporary deities of tech pray to the pagan gods of Burning Man? Why does Elon Musk believe we are living inside of a simulation? Why does Peter Thiel hold a New Zealand passport? Why did Alex Jones think the Sandy Hook mass murder was a hoax? Why did 1/5 of Americans think Obama was the anti-Christ? What does any of this have to do with architecture? To begin to formulate an answer to these questions we need to go back to the beginning.

Origin stories are the magical commodity of architecture theory: they grant legitimacy while skirting falsifiability. They command worldviews without offering proof. They are the perpetual motion machines of authority. Vitruvius understood this. So did Banham. Laugier is remembered for little more than his.

After two millennia of speculation, origin stories have fallen out of favor in architecture theory just as accelerationist conspiracy theorists, Evangelical pastors, alt-right meme magicians, and political technologists have employed them at scale to shift global order. But reactionaries do not have a monopoly on deep time; science has also begun to lay a new claim on pre-history. Recent discoveries in evolutionary psychology, archaeology, paleoanthropology, paleontology, paleoclimatology, anthropogeny, primatology, deep history, theology, indigenous studies, cave art, and the history and effects of psychedelics have shed light on what was long thought to be unknowable.

Some recent discoveries are too hot for history; their implications too radical for the disposition of academia. Challenging the very foundations of our social orders, they are above the pay grade of our professional storytellers. Addressing their implications requires braving the rabbit holes of the conspiracy theorists, seers, skeptics, self-styled Indiana Jonseses, and other "alt-archaeologists" and the out of place dots they attempt to connect.

In this seminar we will investigate the various discoveries and theories of the contemporary discourses of pre-history—credentialed and crackpot alike—to theorize their consequences for the figure of the architect. HINT: it may have very little to do with design; it will not be tethered to buildings.

The seminar will begin with a crash course in the esoteric knowledge required to jump into the more speculative reports, such as the occult, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, magic, ritual, ancient Egyptian spiritualism, shamanism, and other marginal histories, theologies, and practices. These will be complimented with selected readings from architecture theory, tech entrepreneurialism, military and business strategy, and other

supporting discourses. We will then move into weekly research assignments and presentations.

Deliverables

Note: there will be two options for deliverables that we will decide as a group in the first class.

Option 1: Cryptocurrency ICO
We will launch our own EC-20 compliant cryptocurrency on the Ethereum blockchain through an Initial Coin Offering (ICO). Each student will contribute to various aspects of the project, including: developing the concept, writing the whitepaper, writing the smart contract for the ICO, branding and graphics, building the website, and community management and hype.

Option 2: Recontextualizing 'Architect' and 'Architecture'
We will collectively define both 'architect' and 'architecture' by applying the insights from our weekly readings and discussions to a running group definition of each, and running personal definitions. This will include presentations that profile architects that belong to what Michael Witzel calls "grandmother stories"–Hiram Abiff, Imhotep, Vitruvius, Phidias, Daedalus–and recontextualizations of the discipline's "grandfather stories" by considering occult interpretations omitted from the canon–Thomas Jefferson, Christopher Wren. Each student will ultimately produce a presentation and research book\(let\) that corresponds to one of the topics of the Guggenheim exhibition.

Methodology

Paranoid Critical Method (h/t Rem Koolhaas)
One of the principal lessons of the seminar is that recent discoveries of our pre-history should serve as a reminder of how little we know of our ancient history. As such, we will not be attempting definitive accounts, nor will we be genuflecting to the canonical accounts of others. Rather, we will first scour discourse indiscriminately, sifting through heterogeneous sources as if panning for gold: solid evidence valuable beyond the context of its discovery. We will ultimately hold it up to the light of critique, but not until we have indulged our own paranoia. This is an attempt to operationalize the method Koolhaas scripted from Dalí.

Recontextualization (h/t Gordon White)

TK

Active Form (h/t Keller Easterling)

"Disposition is the character or propensity of an organization that results from all its activity. It is the medium, not the message. It is not hte pattern printed on the fabric but the way fabric floats. It is not the shape of the game piece but the way the game piece plays. It is not the text but the constantly updating software that manages the text. Not the object form, but the active form... Detecting and developing the active forms that

shape disposition is an essential skill of the urbanist in infrastructure space." (Keller Easterling, Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site., 2014)

Link to Weekly Schedule (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.