Representationalism

Instructor: Kian Hosseinnia

Email: kianhosseinnia@gsd.harvard.edu

Class Sessions: Jan 3, Jan 5, Jan 10, Jan 12 – 11am-1pm

> *"People represent. That is part of what it is to be a person. . . Not homo faber, I say, but homo depictor."*
>
> *- Ian Hacking 1983, 144, 132*

Course Description:

Representationalism assumes the divisibility of the world into distinct objects with qualities to be represented by the subject through words, drawings, models, and images. The metaphysics of representationalism – which has its genesis in the western tradition of atomism – obscures the primacy of matters, processes, and apparatuses. In short, representationalism flattens the world's dynamism into static depictions.

The recent shifts in the discipline of architecture have either emphasized the object's primacy or embraced the production of better representations to address contemporary political issues. This course takes a different route. Instead of emphasizing objects or their representations, we will interrogate the metaphysics of representationalism as the mechanism for the co-production of both objects and representations.

In architecture, representationalism operates in three domains. *First*, the modern, professionalized figure of the architect is commonly used as a representation of the agents and processes involved in the production of the built environment. The division of labor between those who author buildings and those who construct them is a boundary-making practice that, through producing systemic disinterestedness, allows for the proliferation of the built environment at a scale damaging both the earth's climate and its populations. *Second*, the architect's labor bound to the production of representations as static depictions of buildings as distinct fetishized objects is incapable of capturing the dynamic global process of material circulation and labor that go into their production. *Lastly,* buildings are often conceptualized as representations themselves – we can think of Ledoux's speaking architecture and contemporary greenwashing practices.

In all these domains, representationalism misses an understanding of labor processes, networks of material extraction, production, and movement, and the techniques and technologies used by architectural workers to produce the built environment. To politicize the role of architecture in the contemporary moment and to address its role in the production of climate change, inequality, and exploitation is to critique the role of representationalism in shaping the modern discipline.

This course provides the foundations for a critical approach toward representationalism using theoretical tools borrowed from Science and Technology Studies. The goal is to foreground processes instead of objects in architecture.

Assignments:

There are two assignment options for this course:

The first option is to produce 4 discussion questions – one for each session. The second option is to produce a nonrepresentation of a process related to one of the students' own projects. The goal of the nonrepresentation would be to avoid representing objects and instead experimenting with the ways in which a building could be reimagined and communicated as a series of active and dynamic processes in time. These will be shared with the class on the last day.

Schedule and Readings:

Session 1, Jan, 3: Theoretical Foundations

Hacking, Ian. *Historical Ontology*. Harvard University Press, 2011. *Selections*.

Marx, Leo. "Technology: The emergence of a Hazardous Concept," *Technology and Culture*, Volume 51, Number 3, July 2010, PP. 561-577.

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31.

Session 2, Jan, 5: Historical Ontology of 'Architect'

Descartes, René. "Sixth Meditation: The existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body," in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Matthew Allen and Kian Hosseinnia, "Dichotomies and Impossible Demands" in *PLAT* issue 9.0: Commit (October 2020), Rice University.

Deamer, Peggy. "Contracts of Relation" *e-Flux*, November 2017: https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/representation/159198/contracts-of-relation/.

Optional Film: The Fountainhead

Session 3, Jan 10: Authority in Representations

Latour, Bruno. "Drawing Things Together," in M. Lynch and S. Woolgar, eds. *Representation in Scientific Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 19-68.

Haraway, Donna, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," in *Primate Visions* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 26-58.

Optional Film: The Belly of an Architect

Session 4, Jan 12: *x*-Washing: Architecture as Representation

Y. Ezrahi, Descent of Icarus, Ch. 3 ("Science and the Visual Culture of Liberal-Democratic Politics"), pp. 67-96.

Alexander, Zeynep Çelik. "Neo-Naturalism." *Log*, no. 31 (2014): 23–30.

May, John. "Logic of the Managerial Surface." *PRAXIS: Journal of Writing + Building*, no. 13 (2011): 116–24.