Architecture Climate Change & Society

**Buell Center
2020 Course Development Prize**

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**UNTHINKING OIL:
PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE AND
THE POST-CARBON IMAGINARY**

Unthinking Oil: Public Architecture and the Post-Carbon Imaginary is a cross-disciplinary course to be taught in collaboration between Kean University's School of Public Architecture, School of Environmental and Sustainability Studies, School of Social Sciences, and the Human Rights Institute (HRI). Its aim is to intersect architecture with the emerging field of energy humanities in order to speculate openly and collectively on the broad political and aesthetic dimensions of climate change. Its guiding premise is that climate change is symptomatic of a deeper crisis of thought that requires transdisciplinary modes of critical analysis to unmask. Our fossil-fueled, petrocultural reality, is not a mere techno-economic problem to be solved by mere techno-economic solutions; rather it is a deep cultural problem that entwines our social practices and energy uses with politically motivated representations and narratives about nature, modernity, and the environment. Petroculture operates in plain sight—post-industrial society is an oil society through and through. Climate change, then, is a symptom of a global carbon regime that permeates all aspects of our physical, material, intellectual, and affective lives. Change can only come by unthinking this regime and its infrastructures, by constructing new imaginaries of a post-carbon world. Paradoxically, unthinking requires deep thought.

"Big Oil" firms have been hit by a number of actions relating to their role in climate change. Photo: Bloomberg

UNTHINKING OIL:
Public Architecture and the Post-Carbon Imaginary

Course Description

This course—part seminar, part workshop—investigates overlaps and intersections between architecture and the energy humanities in order to imagine a world beyond carbon. While climate change is symptomatic of an oil-saturated capitalist crisis, it is also a direct product and producer of a much larger crisis, a crisis of thinking, or perhaps, of *unthinking*: As Fredric Jameson once said, "It is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism." But what if we *could* imagine an end to the world? What if *after* oil were too late? What if fossil fuels weren't an option...right now? The provocation in Jameson's statement lies in the possibility of *unthinking* the carbon regime—its systems and structures, its cultural and aesthetic apparatuses—in order to reimagine the world anew. This is our task.

Imagining a post-carbon society—that is, *unthinking* petromodernity and its global infrastructures— requires a radical realism that cuts through the hegemonic webs of power that shape collective life. How can architecture participate in unmasking the complex geopolitical forces, socio-political relations, and contradictory histories that shape, and are shaped by, climate change? How might we reimagine the field as we confront an energy and environmental crisis that is bigger than architecture itself? For that matter, at what scales does architecture intersect with climate change? While there are no simple answers, we will start with the premise that climate change is not a western techno-economic problem, but rather a global existential problem that pervades all aspects of life around the historical, aesthetic, and political dynamics between and among industrial capitalism, lifestyle, and fossil fuels. In order to untangle these dynamics, we need more robust transdisciplinary modes of analysis. We need new ways to connect the dots in order to *unthink* the carbon regime.

To do this, we will position architecture within the energy humanities and environmental studies in a collaborative setting in order to speculate alternative presents. In order for architecture to be a line of defense against climate change and its global crusade of social, economic, and environmental injustices, we must learn to *unthink* oil, to "see" the world otherwise, and to reimagine architecture's agency beyond the building scale to include politics more broadly. Taught collaboratively between the School of Public Architecture, the School of Environmental and Sustainability Studies, and the School of Social Sciences, the course will culminate with a public exhibition and symposium at Kean University's Human Rights Institute.

Course Sessions and Reading List (Sequence TBD, Required and Suggested Readings Combined, Abbriviated Citations)

History
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," in *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- Imre Szeman, *After Oil,* 2016
- Joshua Schuster, "Where is the Oil in Modernism?" in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture,* 2017
- David-Wallace Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019
- Daniel Barber, et.al., "Architecture, Environment, History: Questions and Consequences," 2018
- Elisa Iturbe, "Architecture and the Death of Carbon Modernity," 2019 (*Log* 47: Overcoming Carbon Form)

Oil
- Sheema Wilson, et.al., "On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else," in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture,* 2017
- Imre Szeman, "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster," in *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- "Post-Oil City" issue, ARCH+ 196/197 (Feb. 2010)
- Rania Ghosn, "Territories of Oil: The Trans-Arabian Pipeline," 2016
- Stephanie LeMenager "The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after Oil!," 2012
- Brent Ryan Bellamy + Jeff Diamanti. "Materialism and the Critique of Energy," 2018

Production
- Daniel Barber et.al., *Accumulation* Series, e-flux Architecture, 2018
- Mabel O. Wilson, et.al., *Who Builds Your Architecture? A Critical Field Guide*, 2017
- Elise Iturbe, "Talking Policy: The Green New Deal," 2019 (*Log* 47: Overcoming Carbon Form)
- Vaclav Smil, "Energy in the modern world: fossil-fueled civilization," 2017
- Andreas Bieler & Chun-Yi Lee, "Chinese Labour in the Global Economy: An Introduction," 2017
- Brian Halweil + Danielle Nierenberg "Meat and Seafood: The Global Diet's Most Costly Ingredients," 2008
- Nick Srnicek + Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work,* 2015

Capital
- Matthew T. Huder, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*, 2013
- Jason W. Moore + Raj Patel, "Cheap Money," in *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, 2017
- Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, 2016
- McKenzie Wark, *Capital is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, 2019

Property
- John Mouhot, "Past Connections and Present Similarities in Slave Ownership and Fossil Fuel Usage," 2017
- John Locke, "On Property," in *Two Treatises of Government*, trans. Peter Laslett, 1988
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A Cress, 2019 (1762)
- Ananya Roy, "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism," 2011

Liquid
- Reinhold Martin, et.al., *Liquid Utility* Series, e-flux Architecture, 2019
- Janine MacLeod, "Holding Water in Times of Hydrophobia," in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture,* 2017
- Maude Barlow, "Where Has All the Water Gone?," *Blue Covenant*, 2007.
- Matthew Gandy, "Rethinking Urban Metabolism: Water, Space, and the Modern City," 2004 (*City* 8:3)

Power
- Gabriel Hecht, "Nuclear Ontologies," *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- Bominic Boyer, "Energopower," *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- Michael Watts, "Imperial Oil: The Anatomy of a Nigerian Oil Insurgency," in *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, 2011

Nature
- Kate Soper, *What is Nature?: Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human*, 1995
- Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2010
- Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 2016
- Jason W. Moore + Raj Patel, "Cheap Nature," in *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, 2017

Body
- Sheena Wilson, "Gendering Oil: Tracing Western Petrosexual Relations," *The Energy Humanities,* 2017
- Daniel Barber, "After Comfort," (*Log* 47: Overcoming Carbon Form)
- Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture*, forthcoming 2020
- Roy Scranton, "Learning to Die in the Anthropocene," in *The Energy Humanities,* 2017

Other sessions include: Waste, War, Art, Ethics, and Rights

Faculty Bios

Gabriel Fuentes
Kean University
Michael Graves College
School of Public Architecture

Gabriel Fuentes is an Assistant Professor at the School of Public Architecture at Kean University's Michael Graves College where he is launching and coordinating the new Master of Architecture program. His research interests are at the intersection of architecture, aesthetics, and politics, especially as these participate in world-making projects (e.g. heritage, utopias, modenities, imaginaries, revolutions, etc.). Along these lines, his teaching and writing focuses on ways in which architecture reconfigures scales and territories of power, identity, and culture. His most recent scholarly article for *Future Anterior* 14:2 examines relationships between heritage, architecture, and urbanism in UNESCO-designated Havana, Cuba. He has also written about the environmental aesthetic dimensions of architecture in/of the Anthropocene, referencing sources in science and technology studies, philosophy (political, aesthetic, and eco-ethical), and cultural theory. His writing has appeared in *Log*, *The Journal of Space Syntax*, and most recently *e-flux Architecture* for which he proposed "Canonical vs. Non-Canonical"—a collaborative syllabus written for the *Theory's Curriculum* Syllabus Series.

Dr. Daniela Shebitz
Kean University
College of Natural, Applied,
and Health Sciences
School of Environmental and
Sustainability Studies

Dr. Daniela Shebitz is an Associate Professor and Executive Director of the School of Environmental and Sustainability Studies at Kean University's College of Natural, Applied, and Health Sciences. Her research interests are in Ethnobotany—integrating indigenous knowledge of medical, food, and basketry into ecological and land management studies—as well as urban, tropical, and restoration ecologies. Her written work has focused on Latin American and Caribbean biomes and ecosystems, biological and cultural diversity, tribal politics, carbon accounting, and sustainable agriculture and urbanism. She is an active board member of the Society of Ethnobiology and the New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability (NJHEPS), an Associate Editor for the *Native Plants Journal,* and volunteers weekly with a refugee program and regularly for Housing the Homeless. She has launched academic programs at Kean University's new Highland and Ocean campuses—chairing the creation and establishment of the Environmental Biology and Sustainability Science degree programs. Currently she is interested in exploring ways that indigenous knowledge and land practices can combat the destructive forces of climate change.

Dr. Julia Nevarez
Kean University
Collage of Liberal Arts
School of Social Sciences

Dr. Julia Nevarez is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Sciences at Kean University's College of Liberal Arts. Her research interests focus on urban issues, urban development, public space and technoculture. Her interdisciplinary approach to urban studies is evident in her written work, with book chapters on public space and globalization in Central Park; media, public space and governmentality in Times Square; and public space and gentrification in Harlem. The last is part of the book she edited entitled *On Global Grounds: Urban Change and Globalization. On Global Grounds* examined the globalization processes in cities during the early 2000s. Her second book is entitled *Governing Disaster in Urban Environments: Climate Change Preparation and Adaptation after Hurricane Sandy* and her third's working title is: *The Urban Library: Public Space and Urban Development.* Her interest in theory and contemporary urban space has contributed to public conversations about global urbanization, networked society, critique of the global city, and social justice in the city. Currently she is interested in climate change, sustainability, and digital sociology in urban areas.