Decommodifying Ownership: From Extraction to Regeneration
California College of the Arts

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Brendon Levitt, associate professor, coordinator for building technology, senior associate at Loisos + Ubbelohde (L+U)
James Graham, assistant professor of architectural history, co-director of History Theory Experiments (HTX)

The Decommodifying Ownership cluster is comprised of three courses:

Property in Crisis
MARCH 6070 / ARCHT 5070, Fall 2022
Advanced Studio, 6 units
Janette Kim, Assistant Professor

The subdivision of land as property has structured racial and social justice—and injustice—by shaping the way wealth is distributed. The Jeffersonian grid, for example, accelerated the seizure of Indigenous land and lives by colonial settlement in the American West. The single-family home has banked on discriminatory loan policies and zoning laws written in the name of protecting property values. These and many other exclusive systems still endure, especially preventing Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color from generating wealth. There is a flip side to property, however. Many of its underlying logics—the commons, liability, maintenance, belonging, and yes, even profit—can be altered towards more inclusive ends. Community Land Trusts, for example, take land off the speculative market and enable their residents to manage land collectively. In another example, Usufruct Rights reserve Native American tribes’ ability to access resources on land that was ceded to the US government centuries ago. In other words, property can redistribute wealth, not just hoard it. It can proliferate resources, not just extract them. Property can play a crucial role in shaping jobs, justice and decarbonization—goals framed by climate justice and Green New Deal activists. Such approaches seek to replace an extractive economy based on the “depletion and degradation of natural resources, the exploitation of human labor,... and the accumulation of wealth by interests outside the community,” with a regenerative economy “based on reflective, responsive, reciprocal relationships of interdependence between human communities and the living world upon which we depend.” (Movement Generation, 2017)

Doing so requires an entirely different spatial concept of ownership. Traditionally, private property has defined a one-to-one correspondence between parcel boundaries and a landowner’s rights and responsibilities. In fact, however, these alignments are never so clean. Stormwater might flow from my garden into your basement. A church might sell its air rights to a condo developer next door. A “town fridge” on the sidewalk might distribute prepared meals to neighbors in need. In this studio, we will crack these fissures open, to embrace unexpected alignments and misalignments across architectural elements such as hard-scape, soft-scape, foliage, foundations, walls, roofs, furniture, and fixtures. Students in this studio will be asked to redesign a single property or cluster of properties in West Oakland. Designs will focus at an architectural scale, but with an urban impact, and could involve new or retrofit construction for programs such as affordable housing, food cooperatives, a marketplace, urban farm, or arts center.

Regenerative Building Performance
ARCH 540 / MARCH 640, Fall 2022
Building Technology Elective Seminar, 3 units
Brendon Levitt, Associate Professor

This seminar provides a generative framework for design invention rather than the problem/solution approaches common to engineering practice. This methodology recognizes energy (heat, air, light) and matter (nutrients, waste, water) as closed loop systems—continuous environmental flows in which the architecture is not the end result but part
Spaces of Extraction
ARCHT 5500 | MARCH 6500, Fall 2022
History/Theory Elective Seminar, 3 units
James Graham, Assistant Professor

The history/theory component of this collaboration is a seminar titled Spaces of Extraction. The first four weeks of the semester look at California (and the Bay Area specifically) through sessions on settler colonialism, electrification, resource extraction, and the financialization of property relations. Each of these topics will be explored historically with an eye toward reparative justice in the present, culminating in group presentations at the end of the first month that will feed into the ideas underpinning the design studio. The remaining weeks will build on these sessions with theoretical readings that situate architecture within economies of extraction—the buildings, infrastructures, logistical networks, and landscapes that have driven resource consumption and fossil capitalism. This also means thinking about architecture as extraction, and there will be joint sessions with the building technology seminar to think about the architectural envelope as a particularly intense node within the network of material, energy, labor, and site. Across the semester, we will be attending to the connections between the fields of architecture, geology, political economy, law, and ecological thought. How might things like atmospheric data, zoning laws and building codes, labor struggles, resource geology, racial capitalism, and financial globalization be read through architectural sites and landscapes? And how might an abolitionist approach to these various modes of extraction help us rethink architecture? This course will include reading-focused seminars, discussions with guest speakers, and research workshops.

Bibliography:

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<th>Property in Crisis:</th>
<th>Regenerative Bldg Performance:</th>
<th>Spaces of Extraction:</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Horn, Eva. Air Conditioning: Taming the Climate as a Dream of Civilization Leland, John. Why an East Harlem Street is 31 Degrees Hotter than Central Park West.</td>
<td>Gray Brechin, Imperial San Francisco (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2007).</td>
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**Coordination and Exchange:**

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<td>× Joint reading sessions</td>
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<td>× Joint reading sessions on the history of electrification, resource extraction, and property. Group presentations on histories of reparative justice in California. Handover to studio.</td>
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<td>Spatialization of decommodified land and resources. Define materials and/or tectonics, and develop narratives of inhabitation. Handoff to B/T Seminar</td>
<td>Analyze building details and envelope heat flows. Simulate thermal and/or visual performance over time. Handoff to Studio.</td>
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- Moe, Kiel. The Hierarchy of Energy in Architecture
- Plumer, Brad. How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering
- On Films and Energy
- Fargo, directed by Joel and Ethan Cohen, 1996.
- The Scent of Green Papaya, directed by Anh Hung Tran, 1994.
- Felipe Correa, Beyond the City: Resource Extraction Urbanism in South America (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).
- Elizabeth Kryder-Reid, California Mission Landscapes: Race, Memory, and the Politics of Heritage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
- Reinhold Martin, “Abolish Oil,” Places (June 2020),