

JNST 000M
Architecture & Environment
Professor Tim Seiber
M/W 2:30-3:50

Course Description:

We have a sense that the built environment, including roads, buildings, structures, and landscaping, is somehow essentially different than the natural environment – with its trees, mountains, landscapes, rivers, and processes of creation and destruction. And today more than ever, as we live in the “anthropocene,” an era characterized by human involvement in rapidly changed climate conditions. So, we might ask: is there a fundamental opposition between human construction and the maintenance of a healthy, durable environment. Many fields, including environmental studies, public policy, literature, history, and art have attempted to situate the relationship between human activity and environmental awareness. Borrowing from these and other fields, architects and designers have asked themselves: in what way can an informed architectural practice engage with current and long-term environmental needs? Can we, in fact, design the interaction between the built environment and natural habitats such that the two become integrated? Is there a need for utopian design practices to help us imagine different possible worlds? What is the role of criticism and modeling in crafting exceptional built spaces? And why does anybody care if a building is LEED certified? In this course, we’ll read widely in the area of architecture history and theory, tracing out how the problem of “the environment” has been dealt with in the design, construction, criticism and history of architecture, looking at the work of figures as wide-ranging as Paolo Soleri, Robert Smithson, Ant Farm, Archigram, and Diller, Scofidio, and Renfro. This seminar will address concerns in environmental studies and public policy, as well as media studies and history, though its primary purpose will be to understand the history and philosophy of architecture as it relates to the natural environment.