“What-Ifs”: Histories of Environments in Architecture” explores the intersections between environmental imaginaries and architectural designs (built or not) throughout history to investigate how storytelling has informed architectural notions of the environment, climate, and nature. By way of addressing the writer Amitav Ghosh's generative provocation that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (2016), this seminar asks: What if we could read and write environmental histories based on buildings? How could we situate architectural histories within the contested grounds of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene/Chthulucene/Plantionocene?

The course encourages students to reckon with normative conceptions of the built environment -- such as continuations of empire and colonialism, fossil capital, geoengineering, and other mitigation strategies regarding climate change -- and read “climate” and environments through agencies of infrastructure, technology, and grassroots movements. Through methods of architectural history in research and visual analysis, along with writing genres and exercises, the class will weekly assess a combination of primary and secondary sources to contend with themes from political and architectural movements, postcolonial and decolonial critiques, and other theoretical frameworks from marginalized geographies and methods. Primary sources will include land treaties, architectural manifestoes, professional statements, speculative designs, scientific reports, artistic genres, and speculative fiction, among others.