The word **DYSTOPIA** derives from Ancient Greek δυσ- for “bad, hard” and Ancient Greek τόπος for “place, landscape”. It can alternatively be called ANTI-UTOPIA.

“A dystopia is the idea of a society, generally of a speculative future, characterized by negative, anti-utopian elements, varying from environmental to political and social issues. Dystopian societies, usually hypothesized by writers of fiction, have culminated in a broad series of sub-genres and are often used to raise issues regarding society, environment, politics, religion, psychology, spirituality, or technology that may become present in the future.”


“Reach for a new horizon
Setting sights on a circuit screen
Hail the new arrival on Static signs from a distant wanderer
Fill the air nights are never seen
Face the electric time shock now
No it’s not a dream anymore”

Neue Regel
http://www.flickr.com/photos/midnight-digital/4787603557

“In my vision the countryside is a thousand-year old remnant of the battle and co-operation between man and nature. Man shapes the land with mechanical devices to serve his own purposes and aims to create an order based on his utilitarian tendencies. Only gradually does nature, in all its diversity repossess the temporary order governed by man…”

Ilkka Halso: http://koti.phnet.fi/halsilk/pagenglish/gallery_e.html (Sourced 1 Aug 2012)

**The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution**

**Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown**

“...”
Cultural Practices: Narratives

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

This Postgraduate Master's Thesis research topic explores the Architecture of Dystopia. This research challenges our built environment to arrive at new solutions to 21st century problems we are facing: partially completed urban infrastructures or abandoned and dilapidated buildings resulting from economic recession; sites transformed by destructive strip mining, rising sea levels, global warming; sites damaged by war, abandonment, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, and floods; sites responding to disenfranchised youth, marginalized populations, or diaspora. This research implicates narrative, history, time, memory, cultural identity and meaning. It demands that students, as representatives of the new generation, take a strong personal position on what it means to represent this generation. How can the history and decayed state of permanently scarred sites be proactively used in their rejuvenation? How can the means of rejuvenating a permanently scarred site foster a new way of thinking about the significance of decay and future growth?

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

Significance: The objective of this Research Topic is to challenge our Built Environment to arrive at new solutions to 21st century problems we are facing. The topic demands lateral thinking. It seeks the most imaginative of design solutions, while demanding that these solutions be realizable (at least at some point in our future). It invites the invocation of history, time, memory, and cultural identity in our built environment. It demands that students, as representatives of the new generation, take a strong personal position on what it means to represent this generation.

Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown
Exemplars of Actual Sites that already suggest Dystopias or represent opportunities for engaging Dystopias

Note: For the Original Source of images and the quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.

Naoya Hatakeyama: Underground, 2000

“These enormous objects and constructions [in Japan] are almost sealed, locked up as a restricted area which ordinary people like us have no access to. Chances to ever get a glimpse of it are so rare, that I almost consider it as my duty to make full use of photography as a medium to visually introduce the country’s pride in technologies to people – not only internationally, but simply to Japanese citizens, who have no idea of what lies beneath their feet.”

Joe Nishizawa: Deep Inside, 2006
Exemplars of Actual Sites that already suggest Dystopias or represent opportunities for engaging Dystopias

http://webdesignledger.com/inspiration/30-incredible-examples-of-urban-decay-photography (Sourced 5 August 2012)

Urban Decay

“Urban decay... is the process whereby a previously functioning city, or part of a city, falls into disrepair and decrepitude. It may feature deindustrialization, depopulation, or changing population, economic restructuring, abandoned buildings, high local unemployment, fragmented families, political disenfranchisement, crime, and a desolate, inhospitable city landscape.”


Note: For the Original Source of the images and quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.
Exemplars of Actual Sites that already suggest Dystopias or represent opportunities for engaging Dystopias

**Runit Island** (left)
According to the Brookings Institution, “beneath this concrete dome on Runit Island, part of Enewetak Atoll, built between 1977 and 1980 at a cost of about $239 million, lie 111,000 cubic yards of radioactive soil and debris from Bikini and Rongelap atolls. The dome covers the 30-foot deep, 350-foot wide crater created by the May 5, 1958, Cactus test.”

**Ontario Place under Construction** (Domus 502, Sept. 1971) (right)
Exemplars of Actual Sites that already suggest Dystopias
or represent opportunities for engaging Dystopias

[Image: Water Treatment Plant (left)]
Note: For the Original Source of images, click on the hyperlink.

[Image: Fish Ladder (right)]

**Water Treatment Plant** (left)
Imagine if this treatment plant were no longer needed; what might it become? Or imagine if this were your design for a future habitat...

**Fish Ladder** (right)
Instead of building a fish ladder only long enough to let migrating fish go around just a single dam, this one at John Day Dam bypasses the entire river. Imagine if this design were no longer needed by fish and you commandeered it as the substructure of a future habitat...
Ilkka Halso: Museum of Nature

“In my vision the countryside is a thousand-year old remnant of the battle and co-operation between man and nature. Man shapes the land with mechanical devices to serve his own purposes and aims to create an order based on his utilitarian tendencies. Only gradually does nature, in all its diversity repossess the temporary order governed by man... The Museum of Nature is the next step in a continuum of imaginative nature restoring projects...” Ilkka Halso:  http://koti.phnet.fi/halsilk/pageenglish/gallery_e.html (Sourced 1 Aug 2012)
**Sahat el Shohada, the Underwater Venice of Beirut**, 2004 by Vincent Callebaut Architectures

“At the heart of Beirut’s city centre is a huge landscape which opens on the sea. It is a public space of a great national and historical value which celebrates the memory of the people after the destruction due to the war and represents a historical identity of the Martyrs’ Square itself. The Martyrs’ Square, originating from the execution there in 1918 of national heroes who strove for independence from the Ottoman yoke, is put underwater by the sea thus creating a vast and quiet artificial lagoon...”
Exemplars of Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias
Anthony Lau, London

Note: For the Original Source of the image and the quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.

Anthony Lau: Floating City 2030 (Flooded London)
“The proposal aims to express the beautiful forms and internal steel structures of ship hulls. The hulls serve as nautical reminders of the ship’s past and our previous closeness to water, which we will now embrace once again. The level of detail in Lau’s resulting models is astonishing; bridged superblocks of partially rebuilt oil platforms rise from the wetlands, amidst floating gardens and forest barges, like scenes from a maritime-industrial Avalon.”

http://bldgblog.blogspot.co.nz/2010/06/flooded-london-2030.html (Sourced 5 August 2012)
Anthony Lau: Floating City 2030

“With the pressure of increasing population and urbanisation, cities have no choice but to build on flood plains or in low lying areas. One side consequence of humanity’s rapid expansion in (arguably) global warming, resulting in rising sea levels and increasingly extreme weather. This conflict between expansion and climatic change threatens coastal cities around the world. One tenth of the world’s population live in coastal cities. Even a 1m sea level rise will result in a widespread economic and social disaster.”
**Exemplars of Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias**

Johannes Muenterga, London

**Johannes Muenterga: On Exactitude in Science**
Johannes Muenterga from the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London

A Journey to the Ruins of the Map Machine based on Jorge Borges’ short story “On Exactitude in Science” in which cartography attains such a high status that its cartographers draw ever larger maps leading to one at scale 1:1. The map is ultimately left to fall in ruins.

Note: For the Original Source of the images and the quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.

Exemplars of Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias
Giuliano Fiorenzoli, New York

Giuliano Fiorenzoli: Architecture of the Void and Landscape with Water Pools

Fiorenzoli’s exhibitions of drawings are “on the subject of the ‘visual’ in Architecture both as a craft and a method of investigation. The practicing of Architecture requires for those involved unique skills that are deeply visual. I believe in fact that to think of architecture is equal of ‘seeing it’ with the eyes of the intellect .... In a drawing , in architecture a double presence is to be observed and witnessed, that one of the ‘place’ we see and experience of and that one of the mind with emotions in the process of conceiving it.”

http://giulianofiorenzoli.com/_Pages/Drawings/Abstract%20Landscapes/Abstract%20Landscapes%20Places%20of%20the%20MinGallery.html (Sourced 5 August 2012)

http://giulianofiorenzoli.com/_Pages/Drawings/Drawings/ExhibitionOfDrawingMain.html (Sourced 5 August 2012)
Exemplars of Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias
Won Sok Choi, Brooklyn and South Korea

http://thefunambulist.net/2011/05/04/students-dmz-game-by-원석-최-won-sok-choi (Sourced 5 August 2012)

Note: For the Original Source of the images and the quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.

Won Sok Choi: Demilitarized Zone, Korean Peninsula 2009-2010 (The Funambulist: Architectural Narratives)
“There are hardly any stable moments of interaction in reality but people are conceptually more comfortable with the notion of stable culture, society, and physical environments. The modern nation states successfully convinced their people into the idea of scientifically proved pragmatic functional spaces with some collectively subjective aesthetic condiments. The notion of self-development of society with various tools has become nothing but a modern mirage: tragedy.”
The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

This Research Topic is structured to invite participation by students in all disciplines. Examples of potential site engagements:

**Architecture:** Architectural interventions to reinvigorate abandoned towns, deserted mines or mining towns, incinerators, deserted industrial areas, abandoned urban infrastructures, or earthquake or flood or volcano damaged sites.

**Interior Architecture:** Interior interventions in association with dilapidated or earthquake-prone historic buildings, or abandoned houses or abandoned medical facilities or abattoirs or airports or abandoned industrial buildings or abandoned schools or abandoned medical waste facilities.

**Landscape Architecture:** Landscape interventions to reinvigorate deserted mines, dams, dumps, deserted industrial areas, "brownfield" sites, abandoned urban infrastructures, dry docks, earthquake damaged areas, or areas already damaged due to global warming.

**Urban Design:** Proposals for Fukushima or Chernobyl or Christchurch or Kamaishi or Aleppo or Detroit or industrial cities or earthquake ravaged cities or devastated urban sites worldwide.

**Digital Media:** Gaming Design or Digitally Augmented Spaces or space theory, relating to the theme of Dystopia.

**Building Technologies:** Responsive Building Envelopes applied to the theme of Dystopia.

**Significance:** The objective of this Research Topic is to challenge our Built Environment to arrive at new solutions to 21st century problems we are facing. The topic demands lateral thinking. It seeks the most imaginative of design solutions, while demanding that these solutions be realizable (at least at some point in our future). It invites the invocation of history, time, memory, and cultural identity in our built environment. It demands that students, as representatives of the new generation, take a strong personal position on what it means to represent this generation.
Examples of Possible Research Questions relating to this Topic

Possible Research Questions
Students are encouraged to reword these to implicate your own specific discipline:

1. How can architecture (or landscape architecture) be used to repair permanently scarred landscapes (or urban-scapes), and reclaim them again as viable habitable locations?
2. How can the history and decayed state of permanently scarred sites be proactively used in their rejuvenation?
3. How can the means of rejuvenating a permanently scarred site foster a new way of thinking about the significance of decay and future growth?
4. How can abandoned sites be reinterpreted as a proactive means of urban rejuvenation?
5. How can the formation of a new infrastructure upon the scars of abandoned sites – building upon rather than removing those scars – facilitate the potential for future growth and activated renewal?
6. How can theories of “guerrilla architecture” or “guerrilla landscape architecture” enable inhabitants of damaged sites to learn about the enactment of place, the rituals of space and regimes of care?
7. How can the recognition of fallen sites be used to piece together our understanding of heritage?
8. How can the materials of historic ruins actively participate with contemporary materials in the process of renewal?
9. How can building code requirements be used to protect damaged or vulnerable historic sites without adversely transforming their historic narratives?
10. How can damaged sites be healed by strategically introducing landscape architecture (or architecture) that supports systems of resilience, while simultaneously acting as a distribution network for multifunctional civic activities?
11. How can a damaged site be reactivated by actively engaging, rather than concealing, aspects of the site that provide its fundamental identity – strategically engaging the history of the site and celebrating its place within the evolution of the urban context?
12. How can “lost sites” re-establish a meaningful sense of Place?

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

Example Research Question: How can a severely damaged site be reactivated by actively engaging, rather than concealing, aspects of the site that provide its fundamental identity? How can we strategically engage the history of the severely damaged site and actively celebrate its place within the evolution of the urban context?

Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown
Anticipated Research Outcomes

1. The intention is that each research student will enter their design in an international competition at the end of the design period. One objective is for New Zealand students (particularly our VUW New Zealand students) to win noteworthy international architecture competitions through innovative approaches to design. International student competitions are listed on the following web site, which is updated regularly: [http://www.deathbyarchitecture.com](http://www.deathbyarchitecture.com)

Of particular interest is the annual:

**Unbuilt Visions: International Design Competition**

“Unbuilt Visions promotes critical debate about architecture and design by acknowledging excellence in unbuilt projects. The competition provides an opportunity to engage with architecture, urbanism, interiors, and designed objects at the conceptual stage by recognizing work that offers a critical contribution to worldwide architectural discourse. Throughout time, unbuilt projects have exerted significant influence on the trajectory of global architecture and design.”

2. A second research outcome will be a virtual installation of the final “unbuilt” designs as they interact with one another to form a built-scape of the future.

3. A third research outcome will be the potential publication of these designs in peer reviewed research journals as exemplars of narrative design theory.

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The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

“In my vision the countryside is a thousand-year old remnant of the battle and co-operation between man and nature. Man shapes the land with mechanical devices to serve his own purposes and aims to create an order based on his utilitarian tendencies. Only gradually does nature, in all its diversity repossess the temporary order governed by man...”

Ilkka Halso: [http://koti.phnet.fi/halsilk/pagenglish/gallery_e.html](http://koti.phnet.fi/halsilk/pagenglish/gallery_e.html) (Sourced 1 Aug 2012)
Examples of Abstracts, Topics, Sites, and Research Questions

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

Examples from Current or Recent Master’s Students

Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown

Click this link and scroll down to Research-Led Teaching. Then click on the link at the end to view student abstracts.
Exemplars of VUW Master’s Student Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias
Renee Nankivell

Renee Nankivell: *Time Passes*

**Interior Architecture:** The objective of this investigation is to resolve problems incurred by historic buildings inhabiting the 21st century. Renovation of the 1905 Albemarle Hotel on Wellington’s Ghuznee Street is unaffordable due to requirements for earthquake reinforcing. This thesis tests how to structurally reinforce the hotel in a way that metaphorically acts as a witness to its history of decay.

**Cluster Supervisor:** Daniel K. Brown
Landscape Architecture: When large urban infrastructure projects such as elevated highway extensions are initiated during robust economic periods, a subsequent period of unanticipated economic decline can result in such projects being significantly modified or abandoned prior to completion. This thesis argues that such a site can be most poignantly reactivated by actively engaging, rather than concealing, aspects of the site that provide its fundamental identity – celebrating its place within the evolution of the urban context.
Exemplars of VUW Master's Student Imaginary Design Solutions for engaging Dystopias
Cameron Hurrell

Gunkanjima, Japan: Ruins of a Forbidden Island

Note: For the Original Source of the images and the quoted description at the bottom of each slide, click on the hyperlink.

Cameron Hurrell: Skalker Archive of Decay

Architecture: Off the west coast of Japan lie the ruins of Hashima (“Forbidden Island”). The island reef, once rich with coal, was heavily mined resulting in total devastation of the pristine atoll. During this period up to 5500 people inhabited the infrastructure. The mine was shut down during the 1960’s, but the ruins of the forgotten city remain, its history until recently forgotten.

Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown
Architectural Problem To Solve through Design: Abandoned coal mining sites leave huge scars on the landscapes they inhabit; once the mine is depleted the site is forgotten, left to its own destruction through a presumption of decay. This thesis argues that it is through their scars that such sites can be rejuvenated.
Cameron Hurrell: Skalker *Archive of Decay*

**Research Question:** How can architecture be used to repair permanently scarred landscapes such as abandoned mining sites, and reclaim them again as viable habitable locations? How can the history and decayed state of such sites be proactively used in their rejuvenation, thereby fostering a new way of thinking about the significance of decay and future growth?

Cluster Supervisor: Daniel K. Brown
Thesis Argument: This thesis argues that forming a new infrastructure on the scars of the forgotten mine – building upon rather than removing those scars – can facilitate the potential for future growth and activated renewal. With this approach, the island can become an archive *about* decay rather than being destroyed through a presumption of renewal *by replacement and repair*. 
The Role of Design: Through the recognition of fallen sites we can begin to piece a site’s heritage together; it is through architecture that an understanding of place can be enforced. It is architecture’s role to return these lost sites to the public view, strengthening their perception of place and the significance of lost sites, which can contribute to our understanding of the places in which we dwell.
Cultural Practices: Narratives

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These are fluid, recursive processes *(which are almost certain to be more complicated than this)*

Note: The table above by Dr. Robin Skinner relates to Peter Downton's book [Design Research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_Research) (Sourced 5 August 2012)

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

This Research Topic straddles all three frameworks of Peter Downton’s Model, beginning with Research about Design: investigating case studies relating to Architecture of Dystopia designs. The methodology continues with Research through Design, leading ultimately to Research for Design – arriving at new design solutions to new 21st century problems we are facing. The topic of Dystopia enables us to raise concerns “regarding society, environment, politics, religion, psychology, spirituality, or technology that may become present in the future.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dystopia (Sourced 5 August 2012)

Cluster Supervisor: **Daniel K. Brown**
Cultural Practices: Narratives

**The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution**

The SIGNIFICANCE of this Research Topic – The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution – is that it actively invites Design of the Built Environment to be used as a strategic tool to “raise issues regarding society, environment, politics, religion, psychology, spirituality, or technology *that may become present in the future.*”¹

Research Students are encouraged to select sites that already actively reflect issues of Dystopia; resolve the habitational problems of these sites in a narrative way, *building upon* the stories the sites already have to tell. These are the lessons for future generations. Rather than removing all traces of fledgling Dystopias, invite such traces to actively participate in the story of the future.

The ultimate objective of this Research Topic is to challenge our Built Environment to arrive at new solutions to new 21st century problems we are now facing.

Cultural Practices: Narratives

The Architecture of Dystopia: Project for a Revolution

Key references


