

Ginger Nolan

# Representation, Rhetoric, and Research

01/07

This syllabus responds to two current tendencies within the architectural profession: first, the increasing globalization of architectural practice and architectural education; second, the profession's loss of ground to various specialized forms of expertise (largely within the domain of the technical).<sup>1</sup> The proposed syllabus is therefore designed around two practical considerations:

1) When an architecture student travels as part of studio coursework – whether to another country or simply another neighborhood – what theoretical training will help her discriminate between, on the one hand, the modes of site interpretation required of her and, on the other hand, the prerogative to represent others with the effect of denying those others' their capacity to represent themselves?

2) What research tools and methodological approaches might help architecture graduates assert a form of expertise that is distinct from aesthetic tinkering or, similarly, distinct from the expertise possessed by engineers and urban planners/developers?

These two questions lead us astray from a familiar itinerary of themes, debates, and texts whose canonization as “architectural theory” was largely the result of architects' turn to European philosophy and cultural criticism in the postwar years as a way to legitimize their work as a form of scholarship. Social-scientific interrogations of the urban have typically received scant treatment in architectural theory syllabi relative to the preponderance of texts coming from art and cultural criticism, post-structuralist philosophy (or the latter's translation into architectural discourse), and comparative literature, to say nothing of the self-promotional texts written by practicing architects and the smattering of humanities scholars whom architects have adopted in their own projects of self-promotion. The resulting curricular blind spots have impaired architects' abilities to contribute intelligently to contemporary urban issues.

Rather than squarely confront this problem, many architecture schools have begun to reverberate with calls for the discipline's re-enchantment, as if the discipline was not always-already a perpetual motion machine for re-enchantment (its bouts of malaise belonging as well to that cyclical mechanism). “Theory” has long played a crucial role in such re-enchantment (even the kind of theory that

e-flux Architecture Ginger Nolan  
Representation, Rhetoric, and Research

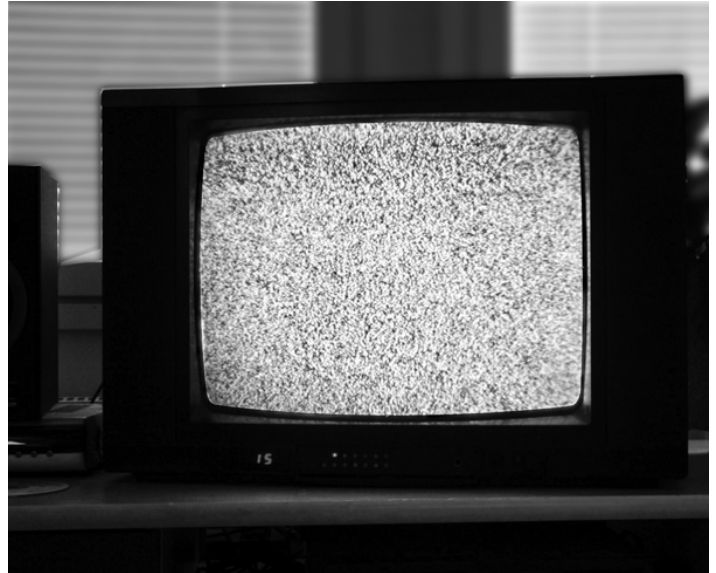
purports the end of theory). Under the profession's current paradigms of enchantment, architecture students are often asked to digest solipsistic paeans to technological sensuosity (for example) rather than being given a training that might help them responsibly consider the diverse spatial conditions implicated in their design studios. Such a training requires theory courses not only to cover a much broader geographical focus, but also to expose students to how other disciplines have grappled with power imbalances as agents versus objects of research, and how they have approached issues of cross-cultural understanding.

This syllabus takes a step toward redressing the stark absence of attention in architecture curricula not only to social theory but also to methodologies of social and spatial research. Although students are implicitly asked in their design studios to conduct research – e.g., to produce site studies as a matter of course – they generally set about this task without serious methodological or theoretical guidance. They are rarely given any textual introduction to the uses, methods, and pitfalls inhering to different forms of social-scientific, visual, historical, and spatial research. This syllabus therefore presents some basic concepts, methods, uses, and problematics of oral history, human interviews, cartography, and ethnographic observation. These issues are not of course strictly a matter of social-scientific literature; on the contrary, texts from the humanities help students understand crucial issues related to representation and historical knowledge, which are relevant not only to design *per se* but to the crucial process of understanding the nuanced complexities of a given site.

Undoubtedly, this turn to research methods and the social sciences lacks a certain aesthetic allure relative to the seductions of many theoretical texts one finds at the intersection of cultural studies and architecture. Given the ways that aestheticized verbal discourse supports architecture's complicity with capitalist development, the syllabus steers students away from regarding "theory" as a verbal aesthetic supplement to design practice. To encourage students not to "use" texts so much as to parse their intentions and devices, students are asked to read and discuss together and formulate answers to questions about the texts. Students with different comfort levels in reading should be paired together to assist each other. Taking advantage of the range of disciplinary, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds represented in the classroom, this exercise also resists how "theory" has often functioned within the aggressively competitive culture of the

architectural profession – essentially, as a tool of intellectual one-upmanship. To challenge students without making them feel befuddled or intimidated by the authority of texts or teachers, the syllabus pedagogy stresses the value of struggling and helping each other with difficult readings more than the value of gleaning from texts and lectures what is now commonly referred to as "take-aways." The surprising fact that so many students seem to not only expect but even demand such "take-aways" is in itself strong evidence for our need to attend to the uses and abuses of theory for (architectural) life.

02/07



Anon. photograph, n.d.

e-flux Architecture Ginger Nolan  
Representation, Rhetoric, and Research

### Representation and Rhetoric, Session 1: Discourse

*This interrogates the politics of knowledge and representation, asking how particular rhetorical devices help inscribe human geopolitical relationships. Sandoval, drawing on Roland Barthes on Mythology, points to several rhetorical devices through which white maleness is constituted and conversely asks how language can be refashioned toward other ends. We can extrapolate from Said's text several particular rhetorical devices that appear in Orientalist discourse including tautology, generalization, hyperbole, ventriloquism, and ask whether the visual and spatial can be similarly thought of in terms of possessing rhetorical devices. Relatedly, we will examine the use of the technological and territorial sublime in contexts of territorial conquest. We will ask where visual rhetoric appears in architectural discourse.*

#### Readings

- Edward Said, "The Scope of Orientalism," in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
- Chela Sandoval, "The Rhetoric of Supremacism

as Revealed by the Ethical Technology: Democratic,” in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

· Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” *Social Text* 17 (Autumn, 1987): 3–25.

· Jacques Derrida, “Scribble (Writing-Power),” *Yale French Studies* 58 (1979): 117–147.

### Representation and Rhetoric, Session 2: Ideology

*Students are asked to consider Althusser’s definition of ideology when reading several texts authored by members of early twentieth-century European avant-garde groups. The session provides students with a schematic historic background to Marxian concepts of ideology, including Gramsci’s contributions, and also to the historic contexts surrounding the architectural manifestoes we are reading, including manifestoes for Italian Futurism and the Arbeitsrat für Kunst. We then perform close-readings of a number of manifestos and declamatory statements by the architectural avant-gardes of today, asking how ideology functions in these texts. We conclude by noting the wide scope of practices and institutions Althusser associates with ideology and asking what the limits of ideology might be.*

#### Readings

· Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 121–176.

· Selected manifestoes from Ulrich Conrad, ed. *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975): “Futurist Architecture,” “Programme of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar,” “Work Council for the Art,” and “The New Era.”

· Antoni Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

### Representation and Rhetoric, Session 3: Medium

*Building on our discussion of rhetoric and ideology from the preceding sessions, we will consider how twentieth and twenty-first century electronic media help produce forms of subjectivity, governmentality, and habit. We will discuss how Marshall McLuhan’s dictum “the medium is the message” corresponds (or not) to the affective and libidinal powers of audio-visual media. Whereas Morris detects a disquieting power of “spirit” in televisual spectatorship, Stiegler calls for a renewed fostering of the spirit through technics. Connecting these issues to the*

*media and aesthetics architectural production, we will look at images from architectural competition entries from the mid-twentieth century up through contemporary digital renderings, and we will ask what architects and architectural critics are referring to when they echo the call for re-enchantment.*

#### Readings

· Rosalind C. Morris, “A Room with a Voice: Mediation and Mediumship in Thailand’s Information Age,” in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

· Bernard Stiegler, “Against the Reign of Innocence: Investing in an Increase in the Value of ‘Spirit,’” In *The Re-Enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit against Industrial Populism*, trans. Trevor Arthur (London: Bloomsbury, 2014 [2006]).

· Mhoze Chikowero, “Is Propaganda Modernity? Press and Radio for ‘Africans’ in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi during World War II and its Aftermath,” in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, eds. Peter Jason Bloom, Stephen Miescher, Takiwaa Manuh (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014).



Studio MAS, Walter Sisulu Square, Soweto, South Africa, 2002–2011.  
Source: Gauteng Tourism Authority.

### Tropes of Architectural Discourse, Session 4: Modernity

*This session interrogates the essential ambiguity between modernity as an imperative and modernity as an aspiration in the mid-twentieth century. This begs the question of how the “Third World” was produced/represented vis-à-vis “modernity,” by what actors, and with what agendas. Then, looking at architectural proposals including the design of new postcolonial capitals, educational institutions, infrastructural projects, and political monuments in India, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania, we will interrogate the role of international architectural expertise in postcolonial nation-building endeavors. Recalling*

Said's emphasis on representation, we will ask what it means for a nation-state to self-represent within the framework of a presumed developmental lag. We will conclude with a look at the consequences of the Third-World debt crises in the 1980s and the effects of Structural Adjustment Programs on modes of urban development.

### Readings

- Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Figuring Democracy: An Anthropological Take on African Political Modernities," in *Theory from the South* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).
- Gabrielle Hecht, "Radioactive Excess: Modernization as Spectacle and Betrayal in Postcolonial Gabon," *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, eds. Peter Jason Bloom, Stephen Miescher and Takyiwa Manuh (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014).
- Adil Hasan Khan, "Ghostly Visitations: 'Questioning Heirs' and the Tragic Tasks of Narrating Bandung Futures in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Past and Pending Futures*, eds. Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah (Cambridge, Melbourne, and Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- Ayala Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity: Expatriate Architects and the Shaping of Addis Ababa," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75, no. 4 (December 2016): 447–468.

### Tropes of Architectural Discourse, Session 5: Nature

This session asks students to consider the link between "nature" and the naturalization of various political, technical, and ecological conditions. For example, how do racial logics and related modes of dispossession become naturalized? In reference to Smith's text, we will discuss Kant's conception of the sublime and ask how the aesthetics of the sublime functioned vis-à-vis histories of geopolitical conquest. Turning to architecture, we will discuss what falls under the domain of the "natural" within various architectural discourses, ranging from the biopolitics of urban planning to the "nature" of technological progress and the digital-organic. How has "nature" served as a stand-in for "the inevitable" related, inter alia, to the presumed imperative of globalization and its effects on urbanization and consumer culture?

### Readings

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 197–222.
- Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt:

The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3: Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime (September 2012): 361–385.

- Yates McKee, "Climate Refugees: Biopolitics, Aesthetics, and Critical Climate Change" *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 309–325.
- Neil Smith, "The Production of Nature," In *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

### Tropes of Architectural Discourse, Session 6: The Human

The "human" has long been invoked in architectural discourses as a rationale for a host of different positions and undertakings: from the minimal standards of low-cost human shelter to phenomenological assumptions of innate aesthetic proclivities. While the former presumes the universality of a biological human entity, the latter presupposes a transcendental form of subjectivity, allied to notions of human exceptionality vis-à-vis non-humans. This session traces a trajectory from the still-humanist strains of twentieth-century phenomenology to posthumanist perspectives on cyborgs, technofuturity, and "re-enchantment," with special attention to the mystical and ahistorical (or "transhistorical") leanings of both humanist and posthumanist discourse. Interrogating the utopian and dystopian potentials of enchantment, we will reflect on Charles Johnson's notion of an inter-subjectivity based on non-language-based forms of empathy, and we will weigh this conception of an anti-hegemonic form of intersubjectivity against the forms of intersubjectivity orchestrated by nationalism and fascism.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, we will ask how architecture lends itself to the production (or illusion?) of different forms of inter-subjectivity, looking at various monumental architectures, including architectures imagined by Albert Speer and Giuseppe Terragni as well as memorials to slavery and genocide, including Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial, and different iterations of the International African American Museum.

### Readings

- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2010): 475–496.
- Jean-François Lyotard, "Discourse, figure" in *Lyotard: Writing the Event*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Bennington (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56–102.
- Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, "The Phenomenology of the Allmuseri: Charles Johnson and the Subject of the Narrative of Slavery," *African American*

Review 26, no. 3 (1992): 373–394.

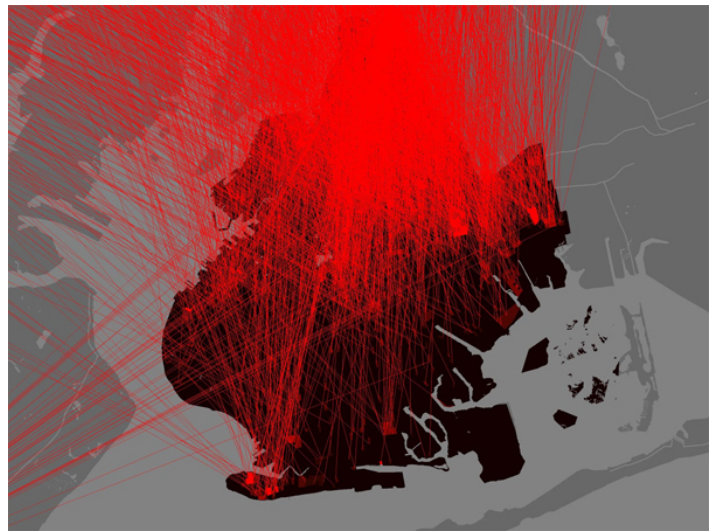
· Antoine Picon, “Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust,” trans. Karen Bates, *Grey Room* 1 (Fall 2000): 79–81.

### Tropes of Architectural Discourse, Session 7: Politics

*This session turns its attention to how informal architectures and economies might give rise to political processes that are distinct from an inherited liberal European conception of democratic politics. We will discuss how such political practices suggest a critique of received conceptions of biopolitics. As a point of comparison to Chatterjee’s and Diouf’s observations on politics and “informal” urban practices, we will examine institutions and ideologies of self-help in their multiple iterations including the recent expansion of slum upgrading, self-enumeration, micro-credit, and community land titling. We will ask how “the politics of the governed” that Chatterjee detects in auto-constructed settlements differ from the forms of governmentality instated through self-help housing initiatives related to either the demolition or financialization of informal settlements and their economies. We will pay special attention to the gendering effects and presuppositions of self-help. The session should also provide some background on the history of South African township planning and the Group Areas Act as a way to understand Bremner’s perspective on the design proposals for Freedom Square.*

#### Readings

- Lindsay Bremner, “Reframing Township Space: The Kliptown Project,” *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 521–531.
- Teresa Caldeira, *Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 1 (2017): 3–20.
- Partha Chatterjee, “The Politics of the Governed,” in *Politics of the Governed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- Mamadou Diouf, “Urban Youth and Senegalese Politics: Dakar 1988–1994,” in *Cities and Citizenship*, ed. James Holston (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).



Spatial Information Design Lab (Laura Kurgan, Eric Cadore, Davide Rienfurt, Sarah Williams), *Million-Dollar Block*, 2006, visualization.

### Producing Discourse, Session 8: Research

*Students are asked to select two chapters from the following, bring in a short paragraph summarizing each text they read. Then, in smaller groups, they should share their understandings of different methods, quandaries, and uses of research, and discuss how these methods relate to the contexts they encounter in design projects. The instructor should provide a broad schematic history to the development of various strains of social-scientific method including early twentieth-century anthropology, the work of Max Weber, the Chicago School, and quantitative methods of data analysis and data mining. We will look at examples of how these methods have been used by architects and planners.*

#### Readings

- Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).
- Robyn Creagh and Sarah McGann, eds., *Visual Spatial Enquiry: Diagrams and Metaphors for Architects and Spatial Thinkers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).
- Fadwa El Guindi, *Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Theory* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2004).
- Mitchell Duneier and Philip Kasinitz, eds., *The Urban Ethnography Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders eds., *Anthropology in Theory: issues in Epistemology* (Hoboken: Wiley; 2014).
- Elizabeth Campbell and Luke E. Lassiter, *Doing Ethnography* (Chichester and Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

### Producing Discourse, Session 9: Science

*This session focuses firstly on how science has figured as a legitimizing discourse and practice*



within architecture and developmental politics and, secondly, on what practices and relationships undergird scientific knowledge as such. Students will be introduced to the model of Actor-Network Theory and its development as a device of ethnographic and historical analysis, along with Latour's emphasis on technologies of transcription. We then examine various examples of architecture's turn to the natural and social sciences in the mid- and late-twentieth-century, such as the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, MIT's and Harvard's Joint Center for Urban Studies, and the disciplinary emergence of environmental design and environmental psychology in the United States. We conclude by asking what forms of scientificity are operative in the recent rise of "design thinking" (perhaps related to the logic of "open-ended planning"), and what it means for this new paradigm of "design" to cut across the domains of marketing, economics, high-tech industries, and engineering.

#### Readings

- M. Ijlal Muzaffar, "Fuzzy Images: The Problem of Third World Development and the New Ethics of Open-Ended Planning at the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies," in *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the 'Techno-Social' Moment*, ed. Arindam Dutta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).
- Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986 [1979]).
- Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "Representation to Presentation," in *Objectivity* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2007).
- Fabiola Lopez-Duran, "Picturing Evolution: Le Corbusier and the Remaking of Man," in *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

#### Producing Discourse, Session 10: Travel

We will view portions from the film *Lagos: Wide and Close* (Koolhaas, et al. 2005). The session should use supplementary historical material beginning with early- and mid-twentieth-century architectural excursions from Europe to Asia and Africa. We will ask how travel functions differently in the accounts given by Bartsch, Clifford, and Koolhaas. We then turn to the development of international expertise and current relationships between "local" and "international" architects. We will discuss the role of travel in students' own design studios – its purposes (explicit or otherwise), immediate effects, and long-term effects.

#### Readings

- Katherine Bartsch, "Roots or Routes: Exploring a New Paradigm for Architectural Historiography through the Work of Geoffrey Bawa," in *Travel,*

*Space, Architecture*, ed. Miodrag Mitrasinovic (London: Routledge, 2016).

- James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 539–564.
- Rem Koolhaas, *Lagos: How it Works* (Zürich: Lars Müller, 2007).
- Miwon Kwon, "The Wrong Place," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (2000): 32–43.

#### Producing Discourse, Session 11: History (as Text and non-Text)

Beginning with Mbemebe's observations about architecture's complicity with the power of historical archives, this session asks what purpose knowledge of the past serves, through what devices and institutions such knowledge is secured, and what the potentials and limitations of historical research and writing are? The session begins with socialist labor movements in post-War Italy, showing how the conditions of the production of historiographic knowledge prompted scholars such as Portelli to turn to oral-history interviews. We will discuss Portelli's views on the political significance of what is remembered even when memory does not accurately represent past events. Turning then to the limits of archival knowledge, we will discuss, in reference to *Forensic Architecture*, the importance of empirical evidence of the past. Finally, we will look at how interviewing urban residents was used as a tool by feminist architects attempting to resist relationships of patronage/patriarchy in architectural production.

#### Readings

- Alessandro Portelli, "Memory and the Event," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).
- Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton, et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2002).
- Eyal Weizman, "What is Forensic Architecture?," in *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

#### Producing Discourse, Session 12: Mapping

This session explores how the editing of the represented object – a process inherent to cartography – serves to bring things into legibility while, at the same time, obscuring the obscurity that remains in the relationship between the object and the representation. We will discuss issues of scale – at what point the map becomes a plan, and what is the difference – and the political and economic uses of maps as a source of evidence of the past and projections for the future. We will look at the use of cartography as a device of colonial conquest and urban planning

and the comparative development (and transformation) of architectural drawing conventions.

### Readings

- Karen Culcasi, "Multiscalar Nations: Cartography and Countercartography of the Egyptian Nation-State" in *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
- Laura Kurgan, "Mapping Considered as a Matter of Theory and Practice," in *Close Up from a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2014).
- Sarah Soliman and Erin Newell, "Exploring Mapping: Discussions with Swati Chattopadhyay and Derek Gregory," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 23 (2014): 120–130.

x

1

This syllabus is based on required theory courses I teach to B.Arch. and M.Arch. students.

2

See for example Charles Johnson, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Tales and Conjurations* (New York: Atheneum, 1986).

07/07

e-flux Architecture Ginger Nolan  
Representation, Rhetoric, and Research