



## ARC 489/589 TAB: RE-THINKING BIG

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### CONTEXT

The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness...Hence the delight is in the former case coupled with the representation of quality, but in this case with that of quantity.

Immanuel Kant  
*Critique of Judgement*

But in spite of its dumb name, Bigness is a theoretical domain at this *fin de siècle*: in a landscape of disarray, disassembly, dissociation, disclamation, the attraction of Bigness is its potential to reconstruct the Whole, resurrect the Real, reinvent the collective, reclaim maximum possibility

Rem Koolhaas  
*Bigness*

The making of artificial lakes, with the help of dams, brings into view a fast 'garden'. For instance, the Peligre Dam in the Republic of Haiti consists of 250-foot high concrete buttresses. This massive structure, with its artificial cascades and symmetrical layout, stands like an immobile facade. It conveys an immense scale and power. By investigating the physical forms of such projects one may gain unexpected esthetic information. I am not concerned here with the original 'functions' of such massive projects, but rather with what they suggest or evoke.

Robert Smithson  
*Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site*

### CONTENT

Our current cultural context often reveals a vacuum of the visionary, and in its absence, the once-distant horizon of our collective imagination seems to be rushing towards us. Perhaps this can be explained by the increasingly common sediment that the urgency of our contemporary problems require immediate solutions before the possibility of an extended future can be imagined. On the other hand, this alarmist tendency is accompanied by an even more daunting problem: increasingly, technology, hurtling us forward with the irresistible force of development, threatens to make anything possible.

To confront these possibilities requires an architecture that *thinks big*. While thinking big is often associated with a will towards comprehensiveness, Kant reminds us that big is not far from boundless, and that the a radical increase in quantity can disrupt our definitions of quality. In re-thinking big, (which is also to say, to think big, again) this course will explore this unfamiliar side of architectural ambition, its often unintended potential for the production of the strange, and its necessary confrontations with the political, the social, the temporal, and the extremities of architecture's disciplinary specificity.

Students in this course will participate in the production of this alternative history of thinking big through the development of a dictionary of operative terms that "...no longer give the meaning of words, but their tasks." Through the examination of theorists, practitioners, and critics of thinking big in the past and present, we will recuperate its use-value, and its optimism, relative to our future.

A proliferating list of sources includes, but is not limited to: Constant, Megastructure projects of the 1970s, Robert Smithson, Louis Kahn, Tony Smith, Andy Warhol, Robert Moses, Le Corbusier, F.L. Olmstead, Buckminster Fuller...