



John Akomfrah, *Listening All Night To the Rain*, 2024 (film still) © Smoking Dogs Films, courtesy British Council

Lecture 1- The Contemporary Condition – Cracks and Crises- SEMINAR SESSION
Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)

Question 1. The Contemporary Condition

MAIN ESSAY QUESTION

How do contemporary creative practices articulate or intervene in the complex conditions of late modernity, including ecological precarity, social fragmentation, and global uncertainty? What imaginative or critical strategies do they offer for navigating these crises?

Three possible ways to scope the question:

1 ECOLOGICAL PRECARITY

Planetary scale, more-than-human relations, ecological perception.

2 SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION

Division, exclusion, belonging, rupture and repair.

3 GLOBAL / COMPUTATIONAL UNCERTAINTY

Visibility, data, surveillance, prediction and agency.

Aim: narrow the broad question to one problem, 2–3 concepts, and two case studies.

MODEL 1 – Ecological Precarity

ESSAY QUESTION

How do contemporary artists make ecological crisis perceptible across scales that exceed ordinary human experience?

THESIS STATEMENT

Contemporary ecological art does more than illustrate environmental crisis. Through strategies of scale, material encounter and more-than-human perspective, it challenges anthropocentric perception and makes ecological interdependence experientially available.

THEORY FRAME

Timothy Morton – hyperobjects and planetary scale
Donna Haraway – more-than-human entanglement
Peter Osborne – multiple temporalities of contemporaneity

CASE STUDIES

Olafur Eliasson – Ice Watch (2014–18)
Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg – Pollinator Pathmaker (2021–ongoing)

Ecological Precarity – Essay Outline

Essay Stage	Focus	Key Works / Concepts
1. Introduction	Define ecological precarity and the problem of representing planetary crisis. Establish the thesis.	Contemporary condition; ecological scale
2. Theory Frame	Explain scale, entanglement, anthropocentrism and uneven temporalities.	Morton; Haraway; Osborne
3. Case Study 1	Analyse how melting glacial ice turns climate time into bodily, sensory experience.	Eliasson, Ice Watch
4. Case Study 2	Examine design from the perspective of pollinators rather than human spectators.	Ginsberg, Pollinator Pathmaker
5. Conclusion	Argue that ecological practice can reconfigure how relations between human and nonhuman worlds are perceived.	Perception; interdependence

MODEL 2 – Social Fragmentation

ESSAY QUESTION

How can contemporary creative practice expose social fragmentation while also creating possibilities for collective repair?

THESIS STATEMENT

Salcedo and Gates offer contrasting models of intervention. Salcedo makes structural division materially and bodily perceptible through rupture, while Gates treats creative practice as social infrastructure capable of producing provisional spaces of repair and collective belonging.

THEORY FRAME

Peter Osborne – uneven contemporaneity
Dolphijn / Serres – crisis as crack or opening
Achille Mbembe – power, exclusion and precarity

CASE STUDIES

Doris Salcedo – Shibboleth (2007)
Theaster Gates – Dorchester Projects (2009–ongoing)

Social Fragmentation – Essay Outline

Essay Stage	Focus	Key Works / Concepts
1. Introduction	Define social fragmentation through inequality, exclusion and belonging. Introduce rupture and repair.	Contemporary condition; social fracture
2. Theory Frame	Frame crisis as revealing structural inequalities and uneven experiences of the present.	Osborne; Dolphijn / Serres; Mbembe
3. Case Study 1	Analyse the physical fissure as a material and bodily encounter with division.	Salcedo, Shibboleth
4. Case Study 2	Examine creative practice as social infrastructure, reuse and community formation.	Gates, Dorchester Projects
5. Conclusion	Compare exposure and reconstruction as different strategies for intervening in social fragmentation.	Rupture; repair; collective relation

MODEL 3 – Global Uncertainty/ Computational

ESSAY QUESTION

How do contemporary creative practices expose and intervene in systems of data, surveillance and prediction that increasingly organise everyday life?

THESIS STATEMENT

Contemporary computational culture reorganises visibility, agency and temporality. Through strategies of exposure, opacity and counter-investigation, artists reveal how data systems act upon subjects and events while also repurposing those systems as critical tools.

THEORY FRAME

Hito Steyerl – visibility and circulation
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun – networks and habit
Cox & Lund – computational contemporaneity
Avanessian / Malik – post-contemporary temporality

CASE STUDIES

Hito Steyerl – How Not to Be Seen (2013)
Forensic Architecture – investigative / counter-forensic practice

Global/ Computational Uncertainty – Essay Outline

Essay Stage	Focus	Key Works / Concepts
1. Introduction	Define computational uncertainty through data, visibility, surveillance and prediction. State the thesis.	Contemporary / post-contemporary
2. Theory Frame	Establish how computational infrastructures shape visibility, habit and temporality.	Steyerl; Chun; Cox & Lund; Avanessian / Malik
3. Case Study 1	Analyse satire and digital form as a critique of ubiquitous capture and the fantasy of invisibility.	Steyerl, How Not to Be Seen
4. Case Study 2	Examine the repurposing of modelling, imagery and testimony as counter-evidence.	Forensic Architecture
5. Conclusion	Argue that creative practice can expose computational power while strategically redirecting its technologies.	Visibility; evidence; intervention

Your Turn – Build a Q1 Route

SCOPE YOUR QUESTION

1. Which condition interests you?
2. What specific problem will you examine?
3. Which 2–3 concepts help explain it?
4. Which two case studies let you test the argument?
5. What is your provisional thesis?

FIVE-PART PLAN

1. Introduction – problem + thesis
2. Theoretical Context – concepts
3. Case Study 1 – establish argument
4. Case Study 2 – extend / complicate
5. Conclusion – critical synthesis

The second case study should develop the argument, not simply repeat the first.