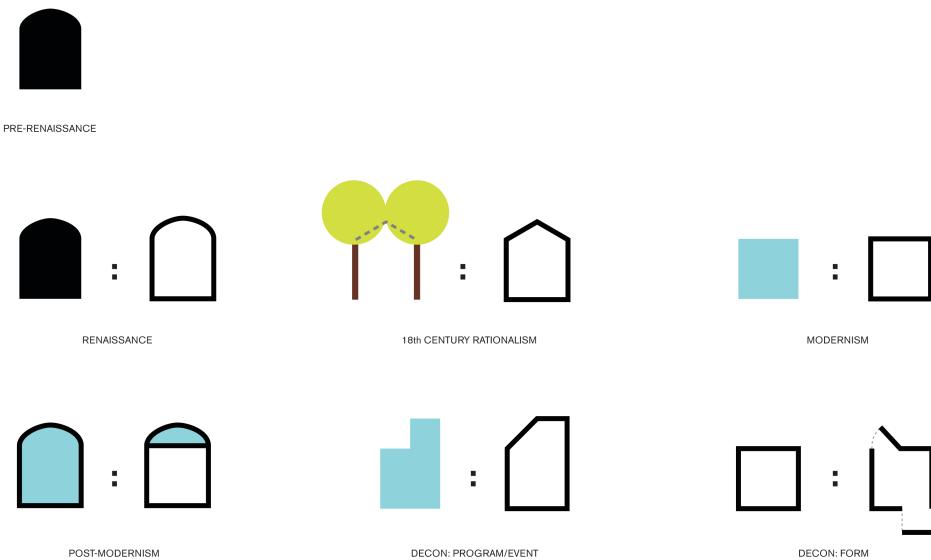


# ARCHITECTURE AND REPRESENTATION: THE LENS OF DIPLOMACY

Columbia University GSAPP  
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ADVANCED STUDIO V

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This studio critically re-examines the relationship between Architecture and Representation today. With the new sense of universality heralded by globalization and the resultant possibilities for architecture as a global practice, representation seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time, whole heartedly embraced by main stream practices and 'starchitecture' in particular while simultaneously being repressed as critical discourse. How can contemporary practices contribute to the long running discourse around questions of Representation in Architecture? This question will be explored through the typology of the Embassy, whose architecture has long embraced for its ability to convey iconic, indexical or symbolic meaning.

## **Representation and Architecture: A Primer**

In the West, Representation has been – at least retrospectively – embedded in the discourse of Architecture since the fifteenth century, when classical architecture was to be mined for language that could be upheld, subverted, or altogether excluded. Meaning was referential, derived from knowledge of the classical past.

In the eighteenth century, the pursuit of absolute truth trumped referential meaning and architecture's absolute origins were recast. Objects, like the column for instance, were no longer responsible for conveying referential meaning, but instead existed as a form of essential architectural beauty (for Laugier, this beauty would be found in nature.)

With modernism architects decried "form follows function" with the ambition to only represent function and technology. And yet, in all their abstraction, modernist buildings still performed as referential objects, engaging with an "industrial vernacular:" technological ducks equivalent to Post-Modernism's typological ones.<sup>i</sup>

With Post-Modernism, the question of Representation yields heated debates, with the questioning of objective function and absolute truth leading to two related yet opposing waves: on the one hand Post Modern Architecture's renewed commitment to symbolic meaning, understood as relative, referential and historical<sup>ii</sup> and on the other, Deconstructivist Architecture which untangles the relationship between form and function, rendering stable meaning and functional legibility impossible. Whereas architects such as Tshumi or Koolhaas unlock the Form-Function equation by focusing on Function as Program/Event (to be re-invented), others such as Eisenman focus on form, replacing legibility of symbolic reference by legibility of process (formal deconstruction).

This somewhat linear narrative of progression and transformation of the relationship between Architecture and Representation is not universal. A different, often intersecting narrative can be found elsewhere. In the Middle East and North African Regions for example (MENA), the embrace of Islam meant the rejection of figuration. Often interpreted solely from a religious/spiritual perspective,<sup>iii</sup> recent post-orientalist readings have re-affirmed the strong scientific base and primarily formal character of such ornamentation, developed in strong dialogue with the scientific constructions of Renaissance perspective.<sup>iv</sup>

The advent of colonialism contributes to further complicate the question of Representation in the MENA region.<sup>v</sup> The extensive analysis that is performed unto the colonized territories' architecture forcefully reduces local vernaculars to essential parts: signs and styles to be re-combined at will. Once the result of complex forces including local customs, cultural exchanges, economic forces and environmental concerns amongst others, much of the vernacular building tradition is now turned into an architectural grammar whose main purpose is to conjugate 'Arab' and camouflage the occupation.<sup>vi</sup>

It is within this context that nations emerging from colonialism whole heartedly embrace Modernism, never as an expression of pure function but rather, as a representation of their will for independence, their aspiration for progress and their optimism in the future. Untainted by the weight of History, Modernism is a vessel unto which to project and crystalize burgeoning national identities.

In practice, modernism's pure tenets are hybridized with building traditions and techniques resulting in regional modernisms.<sup>vii</sup>

Despite Modernism's strategic use to represent the newly independent nations, the colonial attitude prevails with most commissions handed to western architects<sup>viii</sup>. An early movement against the import of western models finds its voice in Hassan Fathy who creates a new architectural language that combines modernist principals with local and ancient vernacular.<sup>ix</sup> This new approach produces an indelible influence on architects in search of regional sensibilities, often a result of states' desires to find expression more in line with their social conservative stance.<sup>x</sup>

### **Representation and Architecture: A Global Crisis?**

With globalization, and despite the feeble call to resistance from a few architectural critics<sup>xi</sup>, Representation has been ushered '*en grande pompe*' again in the form of the Icon.<sup>xii</sup> And yet, in contrast to the previous architectural sophistication it produced or the highly inflamed discourses it invited, Representation has become lazy. While developed countries invite signifiers of financial power<sup>xiii</sup>, often embedded within wider claims of programmatic performance and/or sustainable practices, emerging markets seem to inspire one-liner meanings – the stadium as bird's nest, the tower as letter for the people – that sometimes yield unwelcome meanings such as the tower as kneeling man with his pants down.

This laziness reaches a peak in the Middle East where the recent proliferation of architectural and urban proposals that are outright Orientalist is alarming, as architects shamelessly enlist various original myths such as that of 'the traditional Islamic City,' 'Flower Deserts' or 'Oasis life' amongst others<sup>xiv</sup>. At a time when the MENA region and its diverse people are in a deadly combat to define a progressive future for themselves, it seems important that even in their all too limited power, architects not only serve the 'Visionary' rulers that enlist them, helping to construct myths of original identities and traditional values<sup>xv</sup>, but rather mine the more complex past of highly progressive eras, to produce a true 'visionary architecture' that can inspire new generations to come into their own, on their own term. Contrasting two recent images: that of 'the Protester' cover of the Times magazine in 2011 and the more recent photograph by artist Rabih Mroué's 'Blow-Up 4,' this studio asks: can Architecture's continued embrace of Representation be less like the former – stable, expected, reductive - and more like the latter – complex, multi-layered and abstracted - to allow for new unexpected events and identities to begin forming within it.



The Protestor, Time Cover (2011)



Rabih Mroue, Blow Up 4 (2012)

### THE LENS OF DIPLOMACY: THE AMERICAN EMBASSY DESIGN PROGRAMS

Of all the Architectural Types, the Embassy is the one that has most naturally relied on Representation. Charged with rendering visible one country to another, it is meant to function architecturally as a bridge between the two, a structure whose hybrid identity demonstrates the possibility for productive exchanges and diplomacy.

With the rise of its influence and power after World War II, the US experiences the gradual transformation of its Office of Foreign Building Operations (FBO), from a highly limited and frugal enterprise to an essential component of the American containment campaign against the Soviet expansion. This proliferation of American diplomatic representation in the form of Embassies and Chanceries follows the explosion of newly formed nations resulting from rapid decolonization. As young nations embrace Modernism to represent their emergence unto the world stage, the US enlists the young style to project the image of a vigorous nation, turned towards progress and the future. This early embrace of Modernism for foreign buildings becomes the whole-mark of American institutions abroad and stands in stark contrast to the continued use of neo-classical style for all official buildings at home, or the USSR's official socialist realist preference. Embassies are intended to welcome the local population and often include ancillary programs such as 'libraries, exhibition space, auditoriums and reception spaces to which foreign guests, such as writers, journalists, musicians and artists were invited to mingle with Americans as part of a new agenda to cultivate friends and promote democracy.'<sup>xvi</sup> Architecturally, they are conceived as opportunities for experimentation and often assigned to young up and coming architects.<sup>xvii</sup>

In the mid-fifties, an official design policy takes shape. Moving away from the highly experimental and 'fish bowl' aspect of the early years, new designs are invited to be more pragmatic and

functional as well as to integrate local customs and vernacular language, all the while continuing to project a 'dignified' image of what it means to be 'American.' This new hybrid modernism, often akin to a kind of 'Tropical Architecture' results in two seminal American embassies: Edward Durell Stone's embassy for New Delhi and Jose Lluis Sert's embassy for Baghdad. Most embassies from this era are located in downtown areas, close to other diplomatic buildings in the capitals of cities; sites are chosen for their prominence and ease of access by the general public as well as by American and other diplomatic officials. Interestingly, questions of appropriateness and style are debated at the highest level: responding to Paul Rudolph's design for a new embassy in Amman in 1954, a member of the then AAC (Architect Advisory Board) board reviewing the scheme writes 'I believe that an American Embassy should be clean looking in every aspect, not only philosophically but it should be easy to maintain [...] and should be housed in a building which is very monumental [...]' Commenting further on the extensive use of local motifs, he wonders 'whether you were not out-Arabing the Arabs'<sup>xviii</sup>

After a number of controversial projects such as Breuer's embassy for the Hague (1956-59) and Johansen's embassy in Oslo (1957-64), the FBO embassy design program loses steam. The 1960s witness a radical shift in America's perception abroad as a result of the Vietnam War, which lead protesters to demonstrate at the site of its embassies around the world. In 1965, a terrorist attack in Saigon claims three American lives, becoming the first of a long list of such assaults (Khartoum, 1973, Athens, 1974, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, Beirut, 1976.) The sense of insecurity and threat culminates in the 1979 Iran hostage crisis and finally in the suicide bombing that claims over 200 lives in Beirut, in 1983.

Between 1975 and 1985, there are 243 attacks and attempted attacks against US installations abroad, prompting the reorganization of FBO and the draft of the Inman Report in 1985 which sets new strict security guidelines for the design and construction of embassies moving forward. Abandoning its design policies of concealing security features and fitting in to the local context, the new embassies are to be massive and imposing, consisting of a walled compound of buildings often self-sustaining. Buildings are to be 100meter away from the site's boundaries, giving the new installations an odd suburban look. In addition, sites are to be located away from downtowns and in remote areas, hard to access. The careful articulation of facades to reflect being 'from America and from here' at once is abandoned in favor of blast-proof regulations and standards. An early example of such policy is the new Amman embassy: moved away from a tight downtown site, it is built at the edge of the city instead and attracts development later on.

The 1998 bombings in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam further radicalize the embassy design program leading to the Standard Embassy Design document which controls all embassy designs from there on. Abandoning architectural ambitions to focus exclusively on issues of security and construction efficiency, new designs are delivered through a design/build process. Between 2001 and 2010, seventy-one new major diplomatic facilities are completed by OBO. The program culminates in the building of the US embassy in Baghdad, a colossal compound of 104 acres, entirely self sufficient, designed to include more than 25 buildings including six apartment complexes and two office blocks. Costing over \$840Million dollars and the largest in the world, it is received as a sure sign of American imperialist plans for the country.

The Obama election of 2008 shines a spotlight again on the need for a more visibly and traditionally diplomatic approach to the US Image abroad and exceptions to the Standard Embassy Design

program emerge. The recent completion of the Beijing embassy, designed by Craig Hartman of SOM, San Francisco exemplifies best the integration of security concerns with a new attempt to produce a positive and optimistic image for US outposts, looking again at expressing the meeting of two cultures, not only through its architecture but also through its extensive art program. In 2010, Kieran Timberlake is selected to design the new American Embassy in London, ushering an era of landscape strategies of camouflage and the celebration of sustainable performance as the new image to be represented. Today, the form of Todd Williams and Billie Tsien has been selected to design the new embassy in Mexico and the competition to design a new American Embassy in Beirut is ongoing.

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<sup>i</sup> Eisenman, Peter. "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End." *Perspecta*, Vol. 21 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984)

<sup>ii</sup> Venturi, Robert and Denise Scott Brown. *Complexity and Contradiction* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968); Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972)

<sup>iii</sup> Abu-Lughod, Janet. "The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, May 1987)

<sup>iv</sup> Belting, Hans. *Florence et Bagdad: Une Histoire du Regard entre Orient et Occident* (Bona: Gallimard, 2012)

<sup>v</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-34

<sup>vi</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn. *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991)

<sup>vii</sup> Tabet, Jad. "From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism: Modern Architecture in Lebanon & the Problem of Cultural Identity." *Projecting Beirut*, Eds. Hasim Sarkis and Peter Rowe (Prestel, 1998)

<sup>viii</sup> See Ecochard's Beirut masterplan (1961-1964) ; Doxiadis' Beirut (1958), Riyadh (1968-1972), and Islamabad (1960) masterplans; Gropius' University of Baghdad campus plan (1957-1960); Gruen's Tehran masterplan (1963-1967)

<sup>ix</sup> Pyla, Panayiota. "Hassan Fathy Revisited: Postwar Discourses on Science, Development, and Vernacular Architecture." *Journal of Architectural Education*, 60:3 (Routledge,2007)

<sup>x</sup> Tabet, Jad. "From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism: Modern Architecture in Lebanon & the Problem of Cultural Identity." *Projecting Beirut*, Eds. Hasim Sarkis and Peter Rowe (Prestel, 1998)

<sup>xi</sup> Lavin, Sylvia. "Practice Makes Perfect." *Hunch*, No.11 (2007)

<sup>xii</sup> Somol, Bob. "12 Reasons to Get Back into Shape." *Content* (Taschen, 2004), 86-87

<sup>xiii</sup> Martin, Reinhold. *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

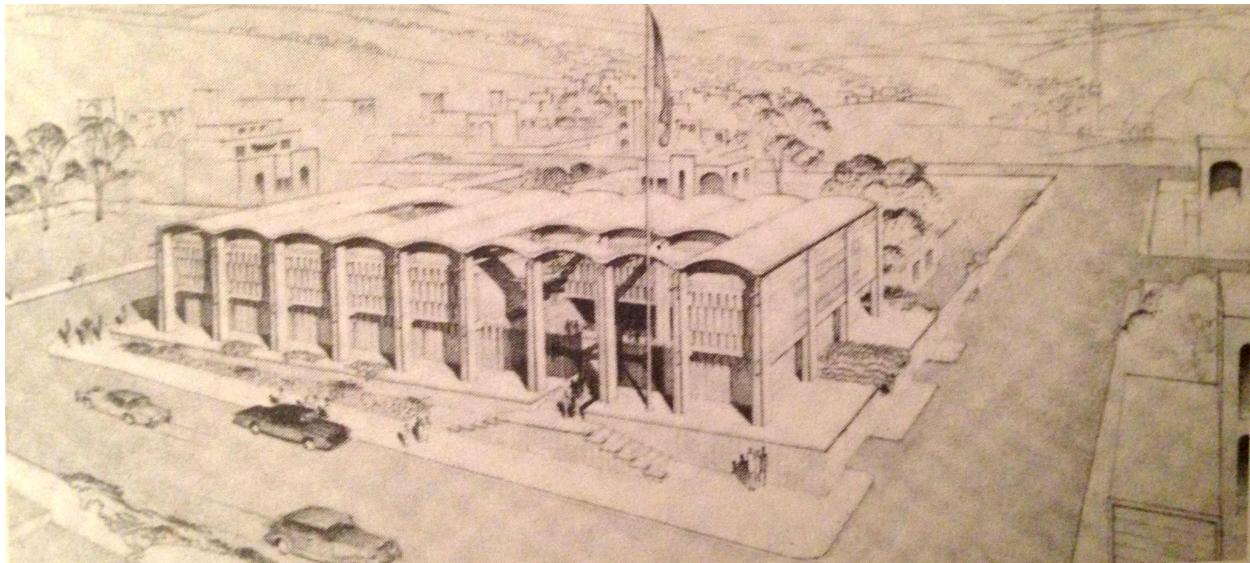
<sup>xiv</sup> See OMA's Waterfront City masterplan (2008), City in the Desert masterplan (2006); Foster and Partners Masdar City masterplan (2007-2008); Jean Nouvel's National Museum of Qatar (2011)

<sup>xv</sup> See Yamasaki's Dharan Airport (1961); SOM's Hajj Terminal, King Abdul Aziz International Airport (1981)

<sup>xvi</sup> Loeffler, Jane. *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998)

<sup>xvii</sup> Eames, Charles and Ray Eames. *Powers of Ten: A Film Dealing with the Relative Size of Things in the Universe and the Effect of Adding Another Zero* (1977)

<sup>xviii</sup> Loeffler, Jane. *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998)



Paul Rudolph, US Amman Embassy Proposal (1954)

### PROJECT: A NEW AMERICAN EMBASSY FOR AMMAN

The studio will take the current American Embassy in Amman as laboratory: an early result of the Inman Report, it was initially designed to be a fortress located remotely at the edge of the city in the middle of the desert. Today, it is surrounded by the new developments it has helped attract, and sits within an odd new unanticipated relationship to its immediate context. The Embassy compound was also originally designed with very little attention to the Architecture of its buildings. Following the recent re-engagement with design where security concerns, programmatic complexity and a sense of beauty are integrated with a new commitment to Architecture's ability to think through its local context and project once more a more nuanced and complex image, students are asked to re-image the American Embassy in Amman of the Future.

### READINGS

#### Embassies

Loeffler, Jane C. *Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*. Princeton Architectural Pres. 1998.

Inam Adm. Bobby R. and Others. *Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security*, Department of State, June 1985.

AIA 21<sup>st</sup> Century Embassy Task Force. *Design for Diplomacy: New Embassies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

#### Representation

Laugier, Marc-Antoine. *An Essay on Architecture*. Trans. Wolfgang Hermann and Annie Hermann. Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc. 2009.

Venturi, Robert, and Denise Scott Brown. Complexity and Contradiction. Museum of Modern Art. 1968.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books. 1972.

Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*. MIT Press. 1972.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. The New Press. 1998.

Tschumi, Bernard. "Architecture and Limits III." *Artforum 20, no. 1*. September, 1981.

Eisenman, Peter. "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End." *Perspecta 21*. MIT Press. 1984.

Lavin, Sylvia. "Practice Makes Perfect." *Hunch 11*. Winter 2006/7.

Zaera-Polo, Alejandro. "The Politics of the Envelope." *Log 13/14*. Fall 2008.

Martin, Reinholt. *Utopias Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again*. University of Minnesota Press. 2010.

## **Other References**

Kipnis, Jeffrey. "The Cunning of Cosmetics." *Herzog & de Meuron: El Croquis 84*. 1997.

Lynn, Greg. *Animate Form*. Princeton Architectural Press. 1999.

## **PROGRAM**

As realized by the Inman Report, Embassy programming has been required to change over time. Students are encouraged to take into account contemporary social, political, and Representational issues as a means of reevaluating and reinventing the embassy program.

Typical embassy programs is approximately 80,000 gross square meters in area and includes:

- Chancery
- General services office/support buildings
- Parking structure
- TDY lodging facility (temporary duty lodging)
- Marine security guard quarters (MSGQ)
- Chief of missions residence (CMR)
- Deputy chief of missions residence (DCMR)
- Staff housing
- Compound access control (CAC) facilities
- RSO annex
- Utility building
- Community center
- Vehicular/pedestrian screening facilities

## **PRECEDENTS**

From the US Foreign Buildings Operations ambitious embassy design program of the 1950s and 1960s to the implementation of the Inman Report in the late 1980s to present day, the US has witnessed an evolution of the embassy typology.

US Embassy in Karachi, Richard Neutra, 1955

US Embassy in Amman, Paul Rudolph, 1956 (unbuilt)

US Embassy in New Delhi, Edward Durell Stone, 1958

US Embassy in London, Eero Saarinen, 1960

US Embassy in Manilla, Alfred L. Aydelott, 1960

US Embassy in Athens, Walter Gropius, 1961

US Embassy in Baghdad, Josep Lluis Sert, 1961

Australian Embassy in Paris, Harry Seidler, Marcel Breuer, and Pier Luigi Nervi, 1978

US Embassy in Amman, Perry Dean Rogers Architects, 1992

British High Commission, Colombo, Richard Murphy Architects, 2001

Dutch Embassy in Maputo, Claus en Kaan Architects, 2004

Dutch Embassy in Addis Ababa, Bjarne Mastenbroek and Dick Van Gameren, 2005

US Embassy in Baghdad, Berger Devine Yaeger, 2007

US Embassy in Guangzhou, SOM, 2012

US Embassy in London, Kieran Timberlake, 2013

## **SITE**

Existing US Embassy in Amman Site, to be documented as part of research and site analysis phase as well as visit

## SCHEDULE

<p><b>Week 1</b> Sep 4, 6 <b>Sep 4: Lottery Presentation</b> Sep 6: Portfolio Review / Precedent selection Start Class Site Model</p> <p><b>Week 2</b> Sep 9, 11, 13 Precedents Analysis <b>Sep 11: Readings Discussion / Precedent Analysis</b> <b>Sep 13 PIN-UP 1 – Representation Timeline</b></p> <p><b>Week 3</b> Sep 16, 18, 20 <b>Sep 20: PIN-UP 2 – Precedent Analysis / Programming</b></p> <p><b>Week 4</b> Sep 23, 25, 27 Representation Concept <b>Sep 3: Guest Speakers</b> <b>Sep 27: PIN-UP 3 – Amman Study: Site, Typology, Representation</b></p> <p><b>Week 5</b> Sept 30, Oct 2, 4 TRAVEL WEEK</p> <p><b>Week 6</b> Oct 7, 9, 11 <b>Oct 11: PIN-UP 4: Representation, Site Strategy, Massing</b></p>	<p><b>Week 7</b> Oct 14, 16, 18 Massing, Sections &amp; Envelope</p> <p><b>Week 8</b> Oct 21, 23, 25 <b>Oct 21: MIDTERM</b></p> <p><b>Week 9</b> Oct 28, 30, Nov 1 Development</p> <p><b>Week 10</b> <i>Nov 4 No Class</i> Nov 6, 8 Development</p> <p><b>Week 11</b> Nov 11, 13, 15 Development <b>Nov 11: 3 / 4 Review</b></p> <p><b>Week 12</b> Nov 18, 20, 22 Synthesis &amp; Presentation Strategy</p> <p><b>Week 13</b> Nov 25, 27 <i>Nov 29 Thanksgiving</i> Synthesis &amp; Presentation Strategy</p> <p><b>Week 14</b> Dec 2, 4, 6 <b>Dec 6: FINAL REVIEW</b></p>
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