

Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

Essays on Architecture

Columbia University GSAPP / Fall 2018

Mondays, 9am–11am, Avery 408

James Graham, jdg2153@columbia.edu

** Note: Enrollment will be capped at 16 students, since some of our sessions will be writing workshops. If there is a higher level of interest, I will request statements of interest by email ... we can discuss at the first session. The course will only be open to students who attend the first session. **

This seminar will examine the role of critics, criticism, and the essay form in shaping how we understand architecture, in public life and within architectural discourse. We will consider reviews as testing grounds for the author's own intellectual commitments (theoretical, architectural, political) as those ideas are refracted through the work of others. Readings will include foundational texts in critical theory, histories of reviewing and essay writing, and predominantly the essays themselves. We will explore the complex responses to buildings across generational shifts through selected case studies, and contemplate the possibility that the history of architecture is in fact a history of essays on architecture. We will consider current trajectories within architectural writing and publishing, particularly a recent resurgence in the essay format (spawned in part by the rise of digital publication formats). Finally, we will examine the essay as a means through which to connect the discourse of architecture with political life. In essence, the intention of this course is to ask the question "what is an essay?" and, over the course of the semester, develop an idea about that question through essayistic writing—in true essay form, we will (hopefully) discover something about the essay by practicing it.

Students will be expected to participate vigorously and generously in all class discussions, and take an active role in leading the seminar once in the course of the semester. Each student will produce her own critical work in the form of two essays (strictly 2,500–3,000 words), one of which will be a review of a building (we will discuss further just what this might mean), one of which will mark out a terrain for architectural thought which is not canonically understood as "capital-A architecture," and neither of which will be on a subject that you have previously written on. These essays will then be workshoped in class and revised for final submission.

Grading breakdown:

Contributions to seminar discussions: 25%

Participation in peer critique: 25%

Each essay: 25% (based on draft and revisions)

Terry Eagleton's *The Function of Criticism* (1984) will not be provided in PDF form, as we're reading the whole book. I recommend purchasing them or borrowing it from the library.