

Architecture, the Free Market and the Degradation of Civic Space

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Course description:

The seminar will take a close look at how a variety of social and economic forces – from the shrinking of state power and the rise of the unregulated free market and globalization – have shaped contemporary architecture since the end of the Cold War.

We'll begin with a brief overview of the role that architecture played in the ideological conflicts of the postwar period, and then turn to how the failure of Modernism to deliver on its promise of a better society forged the values of a generation of architects who rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing them further and further away from seemingly intractable social issues and closer to the world of art and high culture.

From there, we'll zero in on a number of trends that have shaken architecture over the past few decades: the changing nature of cities and the urban audience in the wake of globalization, the impact of branding, and the increasingly cozy relationship between architecture, art, fashion and money – a relationship that has tended to trivialize even the most sincere architectural efforts. We'll look, too, at how contemporary architecture operates as a form of “camouflage” – obscuring rather than clarifying meaning, cloaking urban space in an aura of cultural enlightenment, for example, or creating the illusion of social diversity where there is none.

Finally, we will discuss different ways of talking and writing about architecture, with the aim of helping students develop a critical voice of their own.

Reading Materials:

A reader will be handed out in class; additional reading materials will be posted in Courseworks during the semester. (Not all of the included readings are required, but I encourage you to pay especially close attention to the works of those writers who can offer a broader social and political framework for our discussions about architecture – Loic Waquant, for example, and Naomi Klein.

Course requirements:

Students will be required to make a 30-40 minute presentation that will be followed by a class discussion. A list of suggested presentation topics has been posted in Courseworks; topics should be submitted no later than Thursday, February 9. Students will also be required to write a relatively short (2,000 word) essay on a related subject, due before the end of the semester. Although the paper should not be thought of as a manifesto, it should be a critical evaluation of the subject you chose for your presentation. The idea is to identify some of the maladies that afflict contemporary architecture, and to begin to articulate ways to move the profession forward. Ideally, students will choose subjects that provoke new ways of thinking about their own work as well.

Week 1 (January 19):

Outcasts and Misfits: A Generation Emerges from the Shadows

Readings: Joan Didion's essay "On the Morning After the Sixties," in *The White Album*. Excerpts from *Robert Venturi's Complexity and Contradiction* and Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*. Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley's *Deconstructivist Architecture*.

Week 2 (January 26):

Segregation and the City: Architecture's alliance with High Culture and the Erosion of Social Conscience

Readings: Excerpts from Tony Judt's *Ill Fares the Land*, Loic Wacquant's *Urban Outcasts* and Michele Alexander's *The New Jim Crowe*. Paul Krugman's essay 'Why We're in a new Gilded Age,' published in *The New York Review of Books*. Hal Foster's 'Master Builder' in *Design and Crime* and Rem Koolhaas' 'What Happened to Urbanism?' in *SMLX*.

Week 3 (February 2):

The Devil's Triangle: Art, Fashion and Architecture

Readings: Excerpts from Naomi Klein's *No Logo* and Sylvia Lavin's *Flash in the Pan*. Hal Foster's 'Neo-avant-garde Gestures' in *The Art-architecture Complex*.

Week 4 (February 9):

The New Sobriety: Architects Adjust to the Reality of Working in the Free Market

Readings: Rem Koolhaas' essay, 'Junkspace,' in *Content* and Pier Vittorio Aureli's 'Toward the Archipelago' in *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*.

Week 5 (February 16):
Finding Your Voice: Some thoughts on Writing
Readings: To be determined.

Week 6 (February 23):
Presentations

Week 7 (March 2):
Presentations

Week 8 (March 9):
Presentations

Week 9 (March 23):
Presentations

Week 10 (March 30):
Presentations

Week 11 (April 6):
Presentations

Week 12 (April 13):
Presentations

Week 13 (April 20):
A look back at the major themes of the course and some ideas about how the profession could move forward (Part 1)

Week 14 (April 27):
A look back at the major themes of the course and some ideas about how the profession could move forward (Part 2)