Course Syllabus

Theories of Feminist Architecture
Columbia University GSAPP
History/Theory Seminar
Tuesdays, 11am-1pm, 200 Buell
Bryony Roberts

Although feminist causes have gained greater visibility and popular appeal in recent years, the meaning of feminism is increasingly contested. Expanding awareness of the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality, as well as intersectional understandings of race, class, and gender have challenged previous definitions of feminism and methods of action. In this moment of cultural instability, this seminar takes stock of past and present feminisms and discusses different models of agency for architecture in pursuit of inclusion and equality.

Foregrounding change over time, the course introduces students to foundational texts from Second Wave and Third Wave Feminism and fosters discussions on how and why these discourses have transformed. Readings by Jane Rendell, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, and Susan Stryker emphasizes awareness of the interdependent conditions of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Exploring the implications for architectural discourse and practice, students examine architectural theorists, historians, and practitioners who have found agency through writing architectural history, planning cities and buildings, introducing alternative material practices, and restructuring the architectural design process. Every discussion of these undertakings in historiography, planning, materiality, and process addresses the specific historical contexts in which these projects emerged. The goal of the course is for students to develop critical, historical views of existing discourses and to gain exposure to the wide range of available discursive, projective, and material tools of engagement.

While primarily focused on texts, the course addresses modes of agency in architecture and therefore involves discussion of theoretical positions relative to design practices and methods.

SCHEDULE

January 22 – Introduction
General introduction to course topic, assignments, and expectations
Discussion of different historical and contemporary definitions of feminism
January 29 – Feminisms: Overview and Terminology

- select weeks for presentations by end of class

Required Reading:


February 5 – Second Wave: Women’s Movement

With guest presentation by Andrea Jeanne Merrett

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html

“National Organization of Women (NOW) Statement of Purpose” (1966)

http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/gna/Quellensammlung/10/10_nowstatementofpurpose_1966.htm

February 12 – Intersectionality: Race, Class, Sexuality, Ableness

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


http://www.dsq-sds.org/article/view/3871/3411


http://the-toast.net/2014/04/21/suffragettes-sucked-white-supremacy-womens-rights/


February 19 – Gender Trouble: Naturalism, Performativity, and Gender Abolitionism

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


Bey, Marquis. “Enough of this TERF war, it’s time to debunk some transphobic arguments,” Fembot Magazine 8. October 2015


February 26 – Rethinking Architecture: Program

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


March 5 – Rethinking Architecture: Historiography

With guest presentation by Mary McLeod

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


March 12 – Rethinking Architecture: Materiality
Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


March 19  >>Spring Break<<

March 26 – Rethinking Architecture: Care and Maintenance - will need to reschedule day & time

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


April 2 – Rethinking Architecture: Process

With guest presentation by Lori Brown

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


http://modesofcriticism.org/precarity-pilot/ [accessed march 26th 2017]

April 9 – No class

April 16 – New Waves: Posthumanism, Xenofeminism

Required Reading:


Optional Reading:


April 23 – Conclusions

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Reference Texts:

Reference texts are available on reserve at Avery Library.


Contemporary collectives, practices, and online platforms:

Architexx
Atelier d’architecture autogérée
Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation
Bulletin Broads
Crunk Feminist Collective
Equity by Design
FATALE
Feminist architecture collective
Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative
Girl Uninterrupted
Madame Architect
Muf Architecture / Art
Mycket
Parlour
Precarity Pilot
Rebel Architette
Jane Rendell’s Situated Design at the Bartlett School of Architecture
Women’s Center for Creative Work
Women In Architecture
XYX Lab at Monash University

COURSE INFORMATION

Contact
Bryony Roberts - bryony@bryonyroberts.com
Course Meetings
Tuesdays, 11am-1pm

Course Structure
Weekly seminars will include close textual analysis of the reading assignments and discussions. Students are expected to complete weekly reading assignments, to participate actively in weekly discussions, and to complete all assignments.

Learning Outcomes
Upon successful completion of the course, students should gain a critical understanding of historical and contemporary feminisms. Through discussions and assignments, students are expected to improve their abilities to analyze texts, articulate their ideas and construct compelling arguments.

Grading
Students are graded using the standard GSAPP metric:

- HP (high pass) = a superior level of work
- P (pass) = an acceptable level of work
- LP (low pass) = work that meets minimal standards
- F (fail) = work that is unsatisfactory

Grading rubric:
- Attendance and active participation in reading discussions - 30%
- Position paper - 1000-word paper presented verbally in class - 30%
- Final project - 2000-word paper - 40%

Deadlines
Students must attend all class sessions and deliver all assignments on time. Deadlines are not negotiable. If a student is ill and unable to attend class or deliver an assignment, they must email the instructor ahead of time and include a doctor’s note.

Reading Assignments and Discussions

Weekly reading assignments are listed in the syllabus as “required reading.” Other optional reading material is included for those seeking further information on each topic. Students are expected to complete the reading assignments and to participate actively in class discussions. Students should not only absorb information from the readings, but also develop the ability to critical reflect on and develop arguments about the texts.

Articles are available as scanned pdfs on Dropbox and books listed in the optional readings are available in Avery Library.

Assignments

Position paper

Each student writes one position paper in response to one of the required readings during a week of their choice. Selections of weeks and topics are made at the beginning of the semester. Position papers are presented verbally in class during class discussion when the reading is addressed.

The position paper is 1000 words long (approx 6 minute verbal presentation). The paper takes a position in relation to the reading, and constructs an argument in favor or against the central thesis of the given text. The paper is not a summary of the article, or a biographical description of the author. Instead it presents a critical, thoughtful response to the text, informed by research and specific examples to make an argument. Presented verbally, the paper is intended as a prompt for further discussion and debate among the classmates.
Final paper

Students select two texts discussed in class that outline opposing positions on a theme. For example, whether gender is natural or performative, whether decorative arts are empowering or confining to women, whether the ethics of care is liberating or essentializing, etc.

Students respond to the debates outlined in the texts, and develop their own position on the topic. The paper is not a summary of the two texts. Instead the paper begins with a strong thesis position, which states the student’s position, and supports that thesis through specific examples from the text and from research.

The final paper is 2000 words and must include specific references and quotations from at least two texts on the syllabus.

Final paper is due by end of day on May 9, emailed to bryony@bryonyroberts.com