

Architecture and Ethics in the Post-Truth, Neoliberal Era

Course description:

The seminar will take a close look at how a variety of technological, social and economic forces have shaped contemporary architecture since the end of the Cold War and the ethical challenges it has raised.

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 – coupled with the economic and social breakdowns of the 1970s – forged the values of a generation of architects who rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s.

From there, we'll explore a number of trends that have transformed the architectural landscape over the past few decades: the changing nature of 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 by 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 zero in on various ethical conflicts that have surfaced as a young generation of activists has begun to question the role that architecture – and culture in general – plays in promoting the worst aspects of globalization. To that end, we'll take a critical look at projects that have drawn fire from activists both inside and outside the architecture world. These will include Sidewalk Labs' “Smart City” waterfront development in Toronto, Norman Foster's high-speed rail in Saudi Arabia, Diller Scofidio + Renfro's Shed in Manhattan, Frank Gehry's Foundation Louis Vuitton in Paris, OMA's CCTV headquarters in Beijing.

The idea is to begin to develop an ethical framework for future practice.

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 will be posted in Courseworks; topics should be submitted no later than Thursday, February 6. 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 23):

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 30):

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*. 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 *SMLXL*.

Week 3 (February 6):

The Devil's Triangle: Art, Fashion and Architecture

Readings: Excerpts from Naomi Klein's *No Logo* and Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy*. Hal Foster's 'Neo-avant-garde Gestures' in *The Art-architecture Complex*.

Week 4 (February 13):

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

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

Week 5 (February 20):

Presentations

Week 6 (February 27):

Presentations

Week 7 (March 5):

Presentations

Week 8 (March 12):

Presentations

Week 9 (March 26):

Presentations

Week 10 (April 2):

Presentations

Week 11 (April 9):

Presentations

Week 12 (April 16):

Presentations

Week 13 (April 23):

Presentations

Week 14 (April 30):

A look back at the major themes of the course and some ideas about how the profession could move forward

