
Agency, Ideology, and Critical Practice

[Home](#)[Textbooks](#)[Help](#)**CourseNo:** ARCHA6707_001_2014_1**Meeting Time:** R 06:00P-08:00P **Meeting Location:** BUELL HALL 300 S**Instructor Information:**[Jordan Carver](#)

Agency, Ideology, and Critical Practice

Thursdays 6–8 pm, Buell 300 South
Columbia University GSAPP
Spring, 2014

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Office hours: Thursday 4–6 pm, or by appointment.

Overview

The architectural profession never turns down the opportunity to talk about itself. At best new forms of self critique instigate new modes of operation, pushing the field in varied directions. At worst it leads to navel gazing and a long journey around the rhetorical loop where practice and theory are pitted against each other, neither quite declaring victory, but both left beat up and worn out. For our part, we will rigorously examine such debates. And then, we will move forward. Straight to action. Straight into new forms of production.

And so, the goal of this seminar is very simple: to develop critical frameworks for understanding architectural production, and for each student to claim a position within the broad field of “spatial practice.” In order to do this, the class will focus first on readings concerning the role of authorship, ideology, and criticism. We will then turn our attention to some of the more recent arguments within the architectural discourse concerning criticism and the use of theory. Finally, we will investigate how the concerns of the class are being raised (or not) and how new techniques of practice are being developed and deployed by several contemporary architectural thinkers often associated with “alternative” or “critical practice”—terms that are, of course, up for dispute.

Through a series of short assignments, students will develop (or further develop) their own critical approach—one that is both pointed and precise—by interrogating built works, texts, development schemes, exhibitions, or any other form of spatial production that is readily accessible. Key to this “critical approach” will be a clearly articulated stance in regards to the position of the author/critic and subject. The two common questions, “what is at stake here?” and “why is this important?” will be unapologetically embraced and asked not only of the subjects of critique, but also (more importantly) of the critique itself.

In order to more fully understand what a “critical approach” is, the semester will be roughly divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to historical readings on the role of the critic, the question of the author, and use of ideology, often through literary criticism, but adapted into architectural thinking. Key to this will be discussions on how and where to position the critic in relation to a work, and the status of interpretation in reading a work of architecture. At week five we will discuss Chantal Mouffe’s theories on agonism and their application to the field of architecture, which will set up several weeks of readings and discussions dedicated to

the role of criticism within contemporary architectural discourse. This will lead to a series of classes loosely structured around the theme of “critical practices.”

The final weeks are dedicated to readings from different practitioners working with different modes of production. We will closely interrogate the terms in which a critical practice is described and, to some extent, even possible. We will look at different methods and media and how certain practices deploy them into the discourse of architecture. Of course, the landscape of writing and critical projects is broad, so the classes will focus on several specific methods adopted by a few important practitioners: The use of narrative, law, drawing, the public sphere, and curation to form projects that have a distinctly, if sometimes nuanced, ideology and critical approach.

Assignments

Evaluation will be based on three criteria:

1. The completion and revision of three pieces of original, short criticism.
2. In-class reading presentations.
3. Discussion participation.

The format of the papers is open, but baseline requirements are 1,200 words—a common short article length for print and online publication—each, with necessary images as required. Papers should be written using Chicago Manual style and all images must be properly sourced. While the assignments favor written text, students may choose another format or media.

Assignments will be edited and returned no more than two weeks after submission. The three assignments are to be revised and re-submitted during examination week as a final, cohesive work with the goal of developing a coherent voice and critical approach during the semester.

All assignments are to be printed and submitted at the beginning of class, as well as submitted digitally via email.

Timely attendance to all classes is mandatory. University guidelines pertaining to attendance, plagiarism, and academic integrity will be enforced.

Readings

All readings can be found on Courseworks. Certain books have been reserved to shelf Avery shelf 354.

1. Introduction – 1/23/14

Required

Foster, Hal. “Post-Critical”

Recommended

Latour, Bruno. “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.” *Critical Inquiry* 30. 2004.

2. Authorship – 1/30/14

Required

Benjamin, Walter. “Author as Producer”

Foucault, Michel. “What is an Author”

Rock, Michael. “Designer as Author.” *Multiple Signatures*. New York: Rizolli, 2013.

Lupton, Ellen. “Designer as Producer”

https://www.typosheque.com/articles/the_designer_as_producer

Recommended

Barthes, Roland. “Death of the Author”

3. Intention – 2/6/14**Required**

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Introduction, Chapters 1–3.

4. Criticism and Ideology – 2/13/14**ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE****Required**

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. Chapters 1–2.

Recommended

Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology*. New York: Verso, 1978. Chapter 5.

5. Agonism – 2/20/14**Required**

Mouffe, Chantal. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. New York: Verso, 2013. Chapters 1, 5.

Miessen, Markus. *Nightmare of Participation*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010. p.105–159.

6. Pre Postcritical – 2/27/14

Hays, K. Michael. "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form" *Perspecta* 21

Eisenman, Peter. "Aspects of modernism : Maison Dom-ino and the self-referential sign."

Eisenman inside out : selected writings, 1963-1988. New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 2004.

Martin, Louis. "Against Architecture"

7. Postcritical – 3/6/14**Required**

Speaks, Michael. "Design Intelligence" *a+u*. 2002

Speaks, Michael. "After Theory." *Architectural Record*. June 2005.

Whiting, Sarah and Robert Somol. "Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism" *Perspecta* 33.

Baird, George. "Criticism and its Discontents." *Architectural Record*.

Martin, Reinhold. "Critical of What." *Architectural Record*.

8. Practice – 3/13/14**ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE****Required**

Anderson, Richard. "Tired of Meaning" *Log* No. 7

Selections TK from *What is Critical Spatial Practice*. Berlin : Sternberg Press, 2012.

Selections TK from *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Selections TK from *Log 28: Stocktaking*, Summer 2013

SPRING BREAK – 3/20/14

9. Narrative – 3/27/14

REQUIRED LECTURE: Chantal Mouffe, Wood Auditorium, 6:30pm

Required

Required

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