SENIOR SEMINAR: ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM IN AMERICA 1850–2020

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar investigates the criteria for judging architecture and urban design in the last 170 years in America. In doing so, the class will explore the values (such as functionalism and organicism), principles (compositional and contextual, etc.) and intellectual thought (such as idealism, positivism, phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism) that shaped the criteria for evaluating the buildings. Seminar students will criticize the written results in order to arrive at an understanding about how architectural criticism could be improved.

The focus is on “applied” criticism in magazines and newspapers, where the buildings are evaluated according to criteria derived from theoretical principles peculiar to a certain time. During the seminar students analyze the critical essays to isolate those principles and criticize their effectiveness, while placing them within historical and philosophical frameworks. At the end of the semester, students themselves will criticize a contemporary work of architecture in New York for a seminar presentation.

Required readings include essays by seminal 19th and 20th century architects and architectural historians, theorists and journalistic critics, such as Viollet-le-Duc, Montgomery Schuyler, Lewis Mumford, Philip Johnson, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Colin Rowe, Ada Louise Huxtable, Alan Colquhoun, Mark Wigley, Martin Filler, Michael Speaks, Sarah Whiting, Robert Somol, and George Baird, Mabel Wilson, and Kimberly Dowdell. Interspersed among these essays are pertinent readings from the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Roland Barthes.
MAJOR REQUIREMENTS + PREREQUISITES: This section of Senior Seminar fulfills the requirement of one senior course for the Architecture major. Additionally, the course, *Perceptions of Architecture* is required to be taken prior to this course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students who participate in the course fully will:

- analyze readings, organize, and write brief critiques.
- verbally present independent or paired analyses and research using multiple media formats.
- formulate and conduct advanced research related to architectural criticism in the U.S.
- demonstrate an understanding of the history, role, and types of architectural criticism in the U.S.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, EVALUATION, AND GRADING:

The course is held online, through Zoom. There is no final paper and there is no exam. Instead, a one or one-and-a-half page paper is due each week, in which the student evaluates the readings according to an assigned topic. The last paper will be a short critique of a current work of architecture written by the student. Occasionally, students will be asked to deliver short presentations (with images on shared screen) in lieu of the weekly paper. Another form of presentation is the debate, which students, divided up into opposing teams, will participate on zoom in the last part of the semester.

Students will be graded on papers (50%) , class participation (30%) and presentations (20%). Readings may be changed during the semester, and substitutions can be made if a student has a particular interest in a topic not on the list.

Papers have to be submitted each Thursday during class, unless a student has asked for an extension (one or two days for special circumstances). If the paper is late without permission, the paper will automatically be lowered a grade.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class attendance is seriously mandatory. Class begins at 12:10 noon promptly every Thursday. Any student arriving after 12:20 PM will be considered ‘late’ and arrivals after 1 PM will be considered as absent. One unexcused absence results in a lowered grade for the papers (e.g., A to B) due that week, plus a failing grade for that week on class participation. Two unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade for the course (e.g. A to B). Three unexcused absences constitute a failing grade. The only excused absences are those for reasons of health or crisis. To arrange an excused absence, you must discuss the matter with the instructor before class. Notifying the instructor by e-mail the day of
the class is unacceptable. If a student can’t attend online class due to a sudden illness, he or she must call the instructor before class (212-684-4377 or 646-849-7132).

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment only.

FACULTY STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

We expect that students will work in accordance with their honor code. It is your responsibility to fully understand what constitutes a violation of the honor code. Below are links to the Barnard and Columbia Colleges honor codes along with pages that summarize what the colleges consider to be academic dishonesty.

Barnard:
http://barnard.edu/dos/honorcode
https://barnard.edu/honor-code/faq

Columbia:
https://www.college.columbia.edu/honorcode
http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicdishonesty

If an instructor believes you to have acted dishonestly, you will be referred to the formal process of Dean’s Discipline. Overseen by the Office of Judicial Affairs and Community Standards, the Dean’s Discipline process is an educational one that determines your responsibility using the principle of “preponderance of evidence.” If found responsible, and depending on the nature of the dishonesty and whether or not you have a disciplinary record, you could face one of several sanctions.

Parents and guardians may be informed, faculty committees awarding honors will be notified, and the case may remain on your permanent record meaning that employers and graduate schools may also be informed. These sanctions are in addition to whatever determination the instructor makes on how your final grade in the class will be affected.

STATEMENT REGARDING DISABILITY SERVICES:

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to register in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in 008 Milbank for Barnard students or Disability Services at Wien Hall, Main Floor — Suite 108A for Columbia students.
WELLNESS STATEMENT:

It is important for undergraduates to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stresses you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. We as a community urge you to make yourself—your own health, sanity, and wellness—your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites: http://barnard.edu/primarycare, http://barnard.edu/counseling, http://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about, http://health.columbia.edu/.

READING SCHEDULE (All readings are available on Courseworks)

Week I: 19th Century Theoretical Groundwork


Week II: A New Building Type: The Tall Office Building


Week III: Columbian Exposition


**Week IV: New York Skyscrapers of the Twenties and Thirties**


**Week V: International Style and Modern Architecture in America**


**Week VI: Debates at Mid-Century: Historicism/Vernacular**


**Week VII: Modernism’s Pitfalls**


Kennedy Center II” September 1971; both in *Kicked a Building Lately*, Quadrangle/NYT , 1976, pages 3-8.

**Week VIII: Architecture and Language**

Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. With a Introd. by*


Week IX: Post-Structuralist Influence on Criticism


Week X: Experiential Criticism: Bilbao and the Getty and Beyond


### Week XI: Social Justice, Social Concerns and Architecture’s Role


Mimi Zeiger, “Opinion: Koolhaas May Think We’re Past the Time of Manifestos, but That’s No Reason to Play Dumb,” Dezeen, December 12, 2014.


### Week XII: Criticism in a Computerized Global Age


**Week XIII: Student Critiques**

Each student will select a building or an interior in New York to criticize and present during the last class. The selection must be approved by the instructor.