

Barnard and Columbia Architecture
Fall 2021, ARCH V3901, 4 pts
In person.
Thursdays: 12:10–2:00 PM

INSTRUCTOR: Suzanne Stephens
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OFFICE: To Be Determined
Office hours by appointment only.

SENIOR SEMINAR: ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM IN AMERICA 1850–2021

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 Mario Gooden. Interspersed among these essays are pertinent readings from the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Roland Barthes.

The course is planned to be held in person. 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 each student. During the semester, 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.