Society, Nature, and Technology

The University of Texas at Austin
School of Architecture
Dr. Steven A. Moore

ARC 386M-01055
Fall 2006
Th 3:30-6:30, Battle 101
I. GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Architects have tended to tell the history of our discipline as either the succession of styles or as the succession of theories. In both these views of architectural history, technological choices are understood to be the instrumental means by which aesthetic projects are realized. This course will examine architecture differently. Rather than examine architecture in visual or textual terms, we will examine the evolving relation between society and nature that is realized in the technological choices of architects. To better understand what technology is, the seminar will read from the Philosophy of Technology. To better understand how technologies and natures are socially constructed, the seminar will read from Science and Technology Studies. This background will enable seminar participants to finally consider the various proposals for sustainable, regenerative, or green technology as a historical critique of modern architectural production.

II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course will require rigorous reading and writing. The writing component will include three brief (less than 5-page) “position papers” and one 10-15-page final paper. Reading requirements are indicated in the course schedule below. Reading selections that are not included in the required texts will be available electronically via “blackboard.” In addition to completing the reading, pairs of students will take turns in leading a critical discussion of the required and recommended reading for each class. This requirement may be repeated for extra credit depending upon the number of students enrolled. The student responsible for the week’s reading will prepare:

- a brief synopsis (5 minutes) of three points derived from the authors’ principal argument(s). These need not be comprehensive, but should be selected to reflect the student’s own interests.
- the three points must then be related to contemporary issues of architectural production. I encourage the use of images to develop your logic.

Class presentations on the reading must not be read as a text.

The three brief position papers are conceived as an opportunity for students to “stake-out” a theoretical position in response to the texts read for parts I, II, and III of the syllabus. These exercises will prepare you for the more ambitious final paper. In this sense the course writing-component builds upon itself. The purpose of the final paper is to provide seminar participants with an opportunity to critically interpret a contemporary case of so-called sustainable architecture or to investigate an aspect of your thesis or dissertation research. This alternative is encouraged.
A weekly voluntary discussion group will be scheduled in addition to our weekly class. Our TA, Barbara Brown (MA architectural history, CRP PhD student) will lead discussions for those who want an additional opportunity to interpret the texts and develop paper ideas.

There will be no final examination.

**Enrollment:** The seminar will be limited to twenty graduate students. Undergraduate Urban Studies Program students will be admitted by petition only. Up to three LBJ students enrolled in the Environmental Policy program will be admitted. Should enrollment be oversubscribed, priority will be given first to SOA Sustainable Design students. Graduate students from any discipline will then be given priority based upon rank. IE., Ph.D. students are given priority over Master students, third year over second year, etc. Interdisciplinary students are welcomed.

**III BOOKS**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**
Selections from these texts are available via Blackboard:


Web site:

It is recommended that you subscribe to *Green Clips*, a web-based environmental newsletter that announces technological events in architectural technology that the editors deem worthy of publication. The purpose of subscribing (which is free) is to test your critical skills in interpreting technology, not to blindly accept the editors' definition of the good. Various “clips” might make good subjects for your final paper. See <www.greenclips.com>
IV COURSE SCHEDULE

31 Aug. Course Introduction:
Should architecture be understood as the history of styles, the history of space, the history of ideas, or as the ethnographic study of making places?

Recommended reading:

PART 1: TECHNOLOGY AND MODERN ONTOLOGY

07 Sept. What is so modern about modern technology?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

14 Sept. On reading Heidegger through rose- or puce-colored lenses.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

### PART II: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF TECHNOLOGY

#### 21 Sept.

**Science, technology, technoscience and “great men.”**

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

#### 28 Sept.

**Technology and gender.**

**Position paper no. 1 due**

Required reading:
Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “The Industrial Revolution in the Home,” in


Recommended reading:

05 Oct.  Technological voluntarism Vs determinism.

Required reading:


Recommended reading:

15 Oct.  Technology and democracy.

Required reading:

Andrew Feenberg, “Subversive Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Democracy,” in Technology and the Politics of

Recommended reading:

PART III: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATURE

19 Oct. Competing ideas about Nature and the ecology crisis

Required reading:

26 Oct. Is “Nature” dead, becoming “second” nature, or did we concoct the whole idea in the first place?

Position Paper No. 2 due.

Required reading:


PART IV: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE (and PLANNING)

02 Nov. Competing paradigms of architectural production.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
William McDonough and Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the way we make things. (New York: North Point Press, 2002).

09 Nov. Pluralism Vs singular models

Position paper no. 3 due


16 Nov. Competing and alternative design

Required reading:

23 Nov. Thanksgiving, no class

30 Nov. Architects, nature and society

Required reading:

07 Dec. Summary and conclusions

Final paper due

Each seminar participant will present a 5-minute synopsis of their paper followed by a general discussion of our collective findings for the semester.

V PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Work for the semester will be based upon the scale outlined below. If any student wishes to protest a grade, a request for review must be made within one week of its issuance, after which no grade revision will be considered. It is up to
the student to request interim evaluations from the instructor if you are concerned about your progress.

Individual writing assignments will be evaluated as follows:

**A:** Students work is original and of exceptional intellectual quality, is very well written, is supported by wide textual documentation, is structurally inventive, and is complete.

**B:** Students work is of high intellectual quality, is well written, is supported by textual documentation, progresses logically, and is complete.

**C:** Students work is of average intellectual quality, is written intelligibly, is supported by some textual documentation, progresses logically, and is complete.

**D:** Students work is of below average intellectual quality, is written poorly, is not adequately supported by textual documentation, progresses illogically, and/or is incomplete.

**F:** Students work is of unacceptable intellectual quality, badly written, unsupported, illogical, and/or incomplete.

Assignment weight:

- Reading review(s)  10%
- Position Paper No. 1: 15%
- Position Paper No. 2: 15%
- Position Paper No. 3 15%
- Final paper:   35%
- Discussion participation  10%

VI  OFFICE HOURS

Goldsmith 4.134, Thursday 1:00-3:00 PM, or by appointment. Office telephone: 471-0184. E-mail samoore@mail.utexas.edu

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641.