

Reparation Architecture

The Preston Thomas Master Class

ARCH 6308/6408

Tuesdays at 1:30 - 3:30 EST

Instructor: Paulo Tavares

Cross listed as an Arch. Theory/Architecture, Culture and Society seminar

Architecture that seeks to redress spatial inequalities resulting from historic structural injustices is generally labeled “social architecture” (today it is often characterized in the liberal lexicon of “humanitarian architecture”). Arguably the invention of this concept of the social, within which architectural knowledge has been instrumental, is the product of modern-colonial frameworks defined along class-based and racialized categories that objectify subalternized communities as sites of study and intervention – before, the uncivilized and the primitive; later, the backward and the underdeveloped; today the refugee, the migrant, the class of the precariat.

This seminar aims at questioning these historic categories that define architecture in its ethical and political dimensions, probing the subjacent modern-colonial structures that sustain them, while at the same time drawing alternatives to rethink the relationships between architecture and its inherent “social mission” outside hegemonic parameters of spatial thinking and practicing in relation to memory, heritage, narratives, archives, pedagogies and the built environment.

It does so by proposing an approximation between architecture and reparation.

From Richmond to Cape Town to Santiago, as we witness cities erupt in social convulsions, challenging histories and memories displayed in public space, architecture should reckon with the ways in which – in its multiple dimensions across built and semiotic environments – it has been instrumental in perpetuating forms of inequality and promoting segregation.

In acknowledging the violent dimension of architecture and its divisive power, we can maybe move forward in thinking how architecture can be turned around and be deployed – in material and media forms – as spatial practices of reparation. Dwelling on the concept of reparation may open new visions for spatial practices outside the managerial, disciplinary, positivist frame that still haunts architecture, a field of knowledge historically grounded on the ideology that its practice is inherently “good,” working for beautification, betterment, improvement, civilization, progress, development. This seminar probes a politics of architecture that does not ground itself on an abstract idea of “the social,” but instead seeks a historically situated, contingent, bodily and material concept of architecture as reparation, asking how spatial practices can be conceived to redress and redraw social, historic and cultural bounds beyond charity, help, state patronage, philanthropy and humanitarianism.

Curating as spatial practice: combining theory and practice, the seminar proposes a speculative immersion into a concept yet to come – “reparation architecture” – through a research-based spatial-curatorial experiment developed with students. We will approach architecture as a network of interconnected practices that entangle design, curating, publishing, writing and other modalities of spatial-cultural intervention. In that respect one of our main sources of inspiration is the feminist spatial practice of Lina Bo



Bardi, who traverses the boundaries of architecture across multiple forms of expressions that includes building, curating, graphic design, publishing, writing and political militancy.

Modules: “Reparation Architecture is... ?”: the seminar is organized in modules that address the question “reparation architecture is...?”

- re-framing hegemonic/canonic narratives
- questioning the archive/museum as a colonial-modern apparatuses of knowledge-power
- re-defining notions of heritage, monuments and memorialization
- design as advocacy and pedagogy
- acknowledging forgotten histories and telling other stories
- infrastructure (addressing past spatial wrongs beyond the symbolic)

Case Studies: theory emerges from practice : adopting a mode of collective research, the seminar will engage in concrete situations where reparations cut across spatial issues in cultural and political dimensions, including topics concerning land, architecture, memorials, archives and museums. These include reflections on case studies such as:

- Reparation as right of return ? of Palestinians in relation to the apartheid spatial politics of the settler-colonial state of Israel
- Reparation as reconstruction ? in the case of the legacies of racial spatial segregation in the United States, past and present
- Reparation as reconciliation ? in the case of post-apartheid South Africa
- Reparation as amnesty ? in the context of the US and URSS-backed military dictatorships across the Third World during the global Cold War

Research Outputs: students will be required to produce visual interviews with architectural practices that are addressing questions of reparation through multiple forms across building, design, curating and research. This compendium of visual interviews will be published as a textual-visual curatorial book project.