



studies in eccentric geometries, tectonic improbity, and politics

This seminar takes as its premise that in architecture, as in other cultural fields, a set of disciplinary concerns develop that are unique to the field. This set of concerns is neither a fixed code nor a canon; the concerns are apt to be contested and subject to extrapolation, abandonment, or rebuttal. Rather, what they provide—at any given time—is a more-or-less common arena for creative discourse and disputation. Today, disciplinary interests in architecture are viewed by many as disengaged from the world and its pressing needs. This seminar posits instead that it is precisely from architecture's disciplinary obsessions that we create new ways to engage and reflect upon the world. The seminar and subsequent studio will look at a series of narrowly defined excursions into geometric eccentricities that arose in the later decades of the twentieth century. These will be contrasted to normative geometric and tectonic conditions that dominated architecture for centuries—including during modernism. In these eccentricities we will trace a tendency that sought to systematically dismantle architecture's propensity for order, control, and probity. A parallel line of research, initially led by two MAD-Crit students and later undertaken by all, will examine the cur-rent—contested—status of the monument and its implications for architecture and cities.

Tectonic Improbability: non-orthogonal grumblings

We will examine the progression of increasingly eccentric, atectonic works of architecture over the last fifty years including earlier antecedents through formal studies, geometric diagrams, and timelines. We

will examine ways this progression put into question—among other things—orthogonality and rectitude, the coincidence of building form with architecture’s drawing conventions and ground as architecture’s stable substrate. This will be contrasted to current reactionary formal impulses. We will examine these opposing tendencies of the present and near-past architecture and propose that the urge to return to stability, while perhaps inevitable in our uncertain and troubling times, is also made impossible by the disciplinary difficulties introduced in our recent past. The seminar will develop knowledge and tools for this undertaking to be employed in our subsequent spring design studio.

Politics: Monuments and Civic Life

Architecture is still largely executed through commissions involving a great deal of money, resources and labor, and arises to serve a client’s personal, corporate, institutional, or governmental needs. This has likely always been the case, but so has the architect’s delicate task of neither rejecting nor uncritically reflecting and projecting those circumstances and that power. In architecture, attempts to create explicit political expressions often result in built platitudes of indifferent form. However, characterizing any architecture as autonomous is also illusory. Executed in the midst of larger events architecture is inevitably colored by those events, shaping—even if unconsciously—their tenor and sensibility, and altering its reception by the world. This relationship will be examined in a parallel set of studies that considers the present, contested, status of the monument and through that examination explores the changing relationships between architecture and art, politics, and social life.