

## Overview

To collectively reimagine Philadelphia as a multispecies metropolis: That is our ambition in this course, an ambition we will dog-gedly pursue through anthropological fieldwork and speculative design. Reaching that shared goal demands a culture of collaboration between us, within and across our diverse projects, perspectives, and practical know-how. Critiques—or “crits”—offer one formal communicational strategy for making collaboration a routine occurrence in our classroom. From the Proto-Indo-European root *krei*, the word “critique” denotes an act of sieving, or discriminating, and, indeed, we will use critique to sort and sift through our observations, interpretations, and projections together, as a group responsibility. By opening up our data and analyses to one another through four critiques (two empirical, two creative), we will arrive at a more robust understanding of our fieldsites and their relationships to one another.

Over the semester, we will welcome various guest critics from anthropology, history, and architecture, both building and landscape. During each critique, you will all have the opportunity to present the current status of your work. The critic and I will provide remarks, and then anyone else who wants to contribute may also comment. You will then respond, briefly. In the remainder of this guide, I will outline the history and function of critiques, describe how our approach to critiques will compare to their conventional use in the teaching studio, and characterize what good critique means, in my opinion.

## History and Function

Design critique, as a genre of writing and a mode of thought, has its origins in 18<sup>th</sup> German philosophy, most notably Immanuel Kant.<sup>1</sup> Its use as an educational tool, however, begins with the French architecture school Ecole des Beaux-Art, which implemented the formative and summative critiques (i.e., mid-term and end-of-term feedback) into its *ateliers*. It was later adopted by the Bartlett School of Architecture, the Architectural Association School of Architecture, the Liverpool School of Architecture, and the Bauhaus. Today, pedagogy in the arts relies heavily on critique, from design, architecture, and the fine arts to music, dance, and other forms of performance.

Traditionally, critique functioned as a public system of evaluation: Students presented the products of their labor, to an instructor or jury, who assessed them on the grounds of their ability to reproduce what they learned. It was a mark of a student’s learning but also the instructor’s teaching. As such, critique is an important site of professionalization: By participating in critique, you perform, or demonstrate, your mastery of canonical knowledge and technique.

For some educators, myself included, this “banking model of education,” Paolo Freire’s terminology for the flawed idea that teachers “deposit” facts into a students’ minds, fails to grasp the open-ended nature of critique. By offering feedback based on our own expertise, the critics and I are not correcting you. We are even less so commanding you to conform to our vision for your projects. Instead, we are inviting you to join us in a conversation, in an exchange of our points of view, and in a process of mutual discovery. This occasion will encourage you to pause the progress of the project, reflect on its direction, and articulate your goals and the steps you have taken to achieve them. You’ll have an occasion to practice key vocabulary and skills. You’ll also have an occasion to hear about the

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on critique is vast, exceeding the scope of this guide. If you want to read more, please contact me. Readings below center on critique within the institutional context of higher education in architecture and other design disciplines.

projects of your classmates, and, in so doing, we will cultivate a community through design critiques. Above all, you'll have an occasion to push your project into new, unprecedented directions, by drawing on the wisdom of your peers through collegial dialogue.

“Space/Power/Species” combines the standard “design critique” with “ethnographic critique.” Historically, anthropology has been a solitary pursuit driven by a solo fieldworker. In the past decade, anthropologists have turned to architecture and related design fields, especially studios, as a paradigm for collaboration (see the literature cited below). Twice over the semester, you will tell us about your fieldwork through the critique format. During the first one, we will suggest some ideas for how to re-conceive of your problem, questions, and tactics, knowing that the project is still in its early stages. During the second one, at which point your fieldwork will be complete, we will generate recommendations for how to best analyze and theorize your sites. Likewise, during our two critiques of your designs, we will vary our commentary based on the stage of your work. Through this process of iteration, I hope that you not only recognize this work is always ongoing, never complete, but also become “entangled,” as animal scholars like to say, within the projects of your classmates.

A note to designers: We will not have desk or pin-up crits; my written feedback on your reflections and papers serves a similar role. Nor will we have a jury assessment of the exhibition as our final submissions will be more speculative. Our critiques will be more akin to a public crit, albeit shorter, on the order of 5 to 10 minutes per individual or group.

### Good Critique

Through these exercises, I intend to instill in you an appreciation for “good critique”—not merely critique that is insightful, although that is part of it, but, more importantly, critique that is good in an ethical sense of doing right by your peers. In that regard, what I value, and what I will evaluate, is the respect and generosity that you showcase. Sharing work-in-progress is always an act of vulnerability, and I expect that you speak politely and kindly to one another. This is not to say that disagreement is not allowed. The opposite is true: We *can* and *should* disagree if it is warranted. That is intellectually productive. Our goals are not to confirm what we already know but to co-create a new viewpoint on our scholarship through discussions. This, however, ought to never be an uncomfortable experience.

There are three components to a critique:

#### (1) The presentation

You will have two minutes to speak. I am not assessing your project per se but rather how you communicate your project. On Canvas, I will identify the specific details that I want to see in each critique, which will vary from week to week. Across all the critiques, you should tell a clear and coherent story—visually and verbally—about your inspiration, your rationale, your process, and your results. Note that this is a chance to steer the ensuing comments you will receive: How do *you* want your project to be perceived? What do *you* want the critics and your peers to address? What would be the most helpful for *you*? If you are explicit about this, we will all be more inclined to focus our attention there. What questions do you have for us? How can we support you? Establish the boundaries and parameters of the critique. It would, of course, to specify what constraints and issues you have faced.

#### (2) The critique

After the presenter(s), critic, and I speak, I will open up the floor for additional comments. Everyone should comment at least once throughout the semester although you are invited to do so often. Your commentary should be constructive. You should think about how to assist your peers in attaining their goals if they are not doing so. This might be conceptual and/or practical in nature. Aim to clarify some aspect of their project with your comment. What can you reveal about their problem space, theoretical context, or design solution that might open up the discussion? Are there instructive analogies, either in your case or something you read? Remember that your comments should *empower* your peers. It is beneficial to summarize how you heard their presentation, praise its strengths, identify shortcomings, and end with a more positive word of encouragement. Note well: You should *never* criticize the person (that is, the “ad hominem” argument), only the idea. I will be moderating. If I catch this, I will pause and ask you to rephrase.

During the critique, I recommend that the presenter(s) listen attentively and take notes (or assign a note-taker). It is doubtful that you will later recall everything that was said in detail.

### (3) The response

When everyone is done commenting, the original presenter(s) may choose to respond. Critique should let you grow your project. If it does not (i.e., if you have lingering doubts or uncertainties), do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Keep in mind that we are rooting for you and your project. Critique is not personal. Nor is critique infallible. It is based on (I hope well-reasoned) opinion. As such, you should take all critique under consideration, but you do not have to respond to everything, or incorporate every suggestion into your project. Reflect on it for a day or two, and then act accordingly. It is completely acceptable to disagree, given you have a sound reason for that choice.

## Further Reading

### *On anthropology and design*

Alison Clarke, *Design Anthropology: Object Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2010)

Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (1991)

Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018)

Wendy Gunn et al., *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice* (2013)

George Marcus, “Prototyping and Contemporary Anthropological Experiments with Ethnographic Method,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* (2014)

Keith Murphy, “Design and Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2016)

Keith Murphy and Eitan Wilf, *Designs and Anthropologies* (2022)

Paul Rabinow and George Marcus, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (2008)

Donald Schön, *The Design Studio: An Exploration of Its Traditions and Potentials* (1985)

Rachel Charlotte Smith, *Design Anthropological Futures* (2019)

Lucy Suchman, “Anthropological Relocations and the Limits of Design,” *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* (2011)

*On critiques*

Wayne Attoe, “Methods of Criticism and Response to Criticism,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1976)

David Bell, “Reflection,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1986)

Adam Connor and Aaron Irizarry, *Discussing Design: Improving Communication and Collaboration through Critique* (2015)

Gabriela Goldschmidt et al., “The Design Studio Crit: Teacher-Student Communication,” *AIEDAM* (2010)

Su Hall Jones, “Crits—An Examination,” *Journal of Art and Design Education* (1996)

Jon Kolko, *How I Teach: Reflecting on Fifteen Years in Design Education* (2017)

Raymond Lifchez, “Notes on the Role of Criticism in Educating Future Architects,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1976)

Sally Mitchell, “Institutions, Individuals, and Talk: The Construction of Identity in Fine Art,” *Journal of Art & Design Education* (1996)

Keith Murphy et al., “Embodied Reasoning in Architectural Critique,” *Design Studies* (2012)

Yeonjoo Oh et al., “A Theoretical Framework of Design Critiquing in Architecture Studios,” *Design Studies* (2013)

Rosie Parnell and Rachel Sara, *The Crit: An Architecture Student's Handbook* (2007)

Belkis Uluoglu, “Design Knowledge Communicated in Studio Critiques,” *Design Studies* (2000)