

INTRODUCTION TO CRITICISM IN ARCHITECTURE

- Ahmet Alperen Ozdemir



Outline

- What is Criticism?
- Course Objective
- Course Outcomes
- Assessment
- Introduction to Criticism
- A Brief History of Architectural Criticism
- Types of Architectural Criticism
- Core Criteria in Architectural Criticism
- Theoretical Frameworks for Criticism

Course objective

This course aims to introduce architectural criticism as an analytical and theory-informed practice for evaluating the built environment. Students develop the ability to construct reasoned arguments about architectural works through critical reading, visual analysis, and contextual interpretation. The course emphasizes ethical and constructive critique as a tool for improving architectural design and professional practice.

Course outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze architectural works using established critical criteria and theoretical frameworks.
- Interpret architectural projects in relation to their spatial, cultural, social, and urban contexts.
- Critically read and evaluate architectural texts and visual representations.
- Articulate coherent and well-supported critiques through written, visual, and verbal communication.
- Apply critical thinking skills to assess both existing buildings and their own design projects in an ethical and constructive manner.

Assessment

Type	Number	Mark
Assignments	5	3
Quiz	2	5
Midterm	1	20
Final	1	40
Presentation	1	15

What does Criticism
mean?

Etymology of Criticism

- French, from Greek kritike, the art of criticism, from kritikos, critical
- Latin, criticus, from an adjective, “decisive”, able to discern
- Greekkriterion, a means for judging, standard from krites (Grolier, 1986:314)

Etymology of Criticism

Criticize, Criticize

1. To judge (something)
2. To evaluate or analyze (something)
3. To judge the merits and faults of; analyze and evaluate.

Etymology of Criticism

General Definitions of Criticism

Criticism

- The act of expressing disapproval and of noting the problems or faults of a person or thing : the act of criticizing someone or something.
- A remark or comment that expresses disapproval of someone or something.
- The activity of making careful judgments about the good and bad qualities of books, movies, etc.

Etymology of Criticism

Criticism

Crit 'Crit' is short for 'critique'

Critique

Critic

The difference between Criticism, Crit, Critique and Critic

Term	Definition	Context/Usage	Tone
Criticism	Evaluation or judgement, often negative	Informal or formal	Often Negative
Crit	Informal term for Critique	Creative/academic settings	Neutral
Critique	Detailed, balanced analysis	Formal, academic, or professional	Neutral
Critic	A person who evaluate or judge	Professional or general context	Neutral

A Brief History of Architectural Criticism

Classical Foundations

Architectural criticism originates in **classical theory**, where architecture was evaluated through rules and principles.

Vitruvius defined architecture through *firmitas* (strength), *utilitas* (function), and *venustas* (beauty).

Criticism at this stage was **normative**: judging architecture based on how well it followed established ideals.

Key idea: Architecture was evaluated against *universal rules*, not personal interpretation.

A Brief History of Architectural Criticism

Renaissance to Enlightenment

Architecture became connected to **humanism, proportion, and rationality.**

Critics and theorists focused on harmony, geometry, and classical precedent.

Architecture was seen as an **intellectual and cultural discipline**, not only construction.

Shift: From pure rules → to reasoned judgment and aesthetics.

Types of Architectural Criticism

- Academic criticism
- Journalistic and popular criticism
- Professional and jury-based criticism
- User-oriented and post-occupancy criticism

Core Criteria in Architectural Criticism

- Spatial organization
- Functionality and program
- Context (urban, cultural, historical)
- Structure and technology
- Materiality and detailing
- Architectural experience (light, scale, movement)

Theoretical Frameworks for Criticism

- Modernist criticism
- Postmodern criticism
- Phenomenological approaches
- Marxist and political readings
- Feminist and social critiques

Feminist and social critiques

- Feminist and social critiques examine architecture not only as a formal or technical product, but as a **social, cultural, and political practice**. These approaches focus on how the built environment reflects, reinforces, or challenges power relations, inequality, and everyday life.

Feminist and social critiques

Feminist Architectural Criticism

Feminist criticism questions the **gendered assumptions** embedded in architectural design, history, and professional practice.

It asks questions such as:

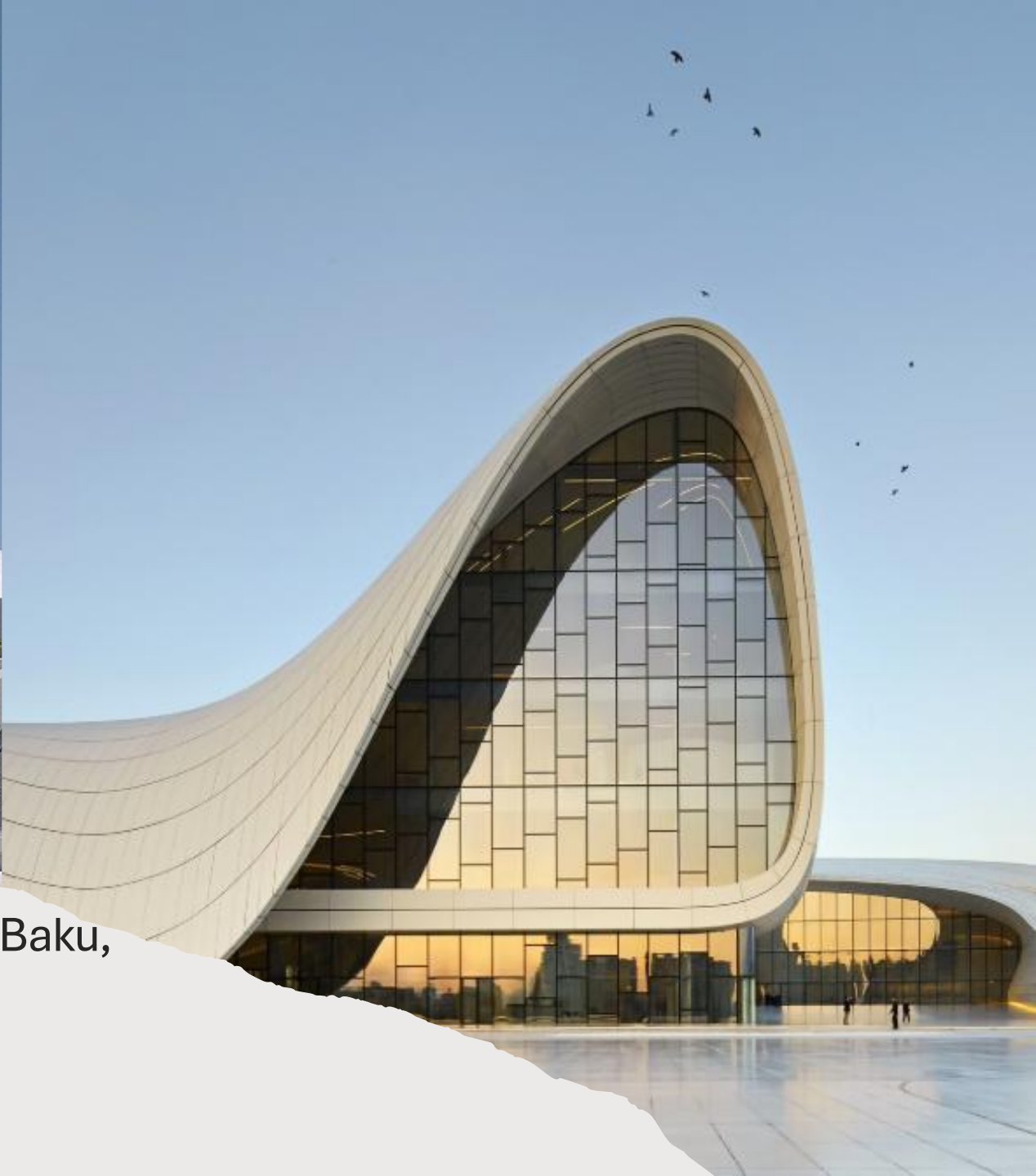
- Who is architecture designed for?
- Whose experiences and needs are prioritized?
- How do spaces affect care work, safety, and daily routines?

Key concerns include:

- Gender bias in housing layouts and domestic spaces
- Safety, visibility, and accessibility in public space
- The historical marginalization of women and other genders in architectural practice and discourse



Robin Hood Gardens – Alison & Peter Smithson (London, 1972)



Heydar Aliyev Center – Zaha Hadid Architects (Baku, 2012)

Thank you