

Spring 2022

School of Architecture and Planning  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**11.302J/4.253J: Urban Design Politics**

Units: 3-0-9 (H)

Prof. Lawrence Vale, Office: 10-497M, x3-0561, [ljvale@mit.edu](mailto:ljvale@mit.edu)

Time: Mondays 3-6 p.m. in 10-401

Enrollment limited to 15 students, by permission of instructor

Office Hours: by appointment (via email), available either in-person or via Zoom

This is a seminar about the ways that urban design contributes to the distribution of political power and resources in cities.

“Design,” in this view, is not some value-neutral aesthetic applied to efforts at urban development but is, instead, an integral part of the motives driving that development. Though many urban designers and architects often seem to regard “good design” as somehow independent from social and political factors affecting its production and use, design efforts are influenced by politics in at least two important ways. First, urban design proposals may be subject to challenge by a variety of groups during the planning and implementation process. Second, political values, whether tacit or explicit, are encoded in the resultant designs. Taken together, this two-way embeddedness may justify the use of a hyphen in urban design-politics.

The class investigates the nature of the relations between built form and political purposes through close examination of a wide variety of situations where public and private sector design commissions and planning processes have been clearly motivated by political pressures, as well as situations where the political assumptions have remained more tacit. We will explore cases from both developed and developing countries.

Applying insights from architects, planners, political scientists, historians, anthropologists, philosophers, and others, we will analyze urban design from a variety of perspectives, including lenses of race, gender, and class. Cases discussed will include extreme examples of politically charged environments: Hitler’s megalomaniacal plan for Berlin and designs for new capital cities around the world (Washington, D.C., New Delhi, Canberra, Brasília, etc.). We will then explore seemingly less extreme settings for urban design-politics, by focusing on public squares and on the origins and redevelopment of American public housing. Finally, the class will conclude with sessions exploring the design-politics of urban security and “urban resilience” — the attempt to rebuild (socially, politically, urbanistically) following sudden disasters.

The format of the class will be part slide lecture, part discussion. Participants will be responsible for four things: 1) Completion of readings in advance of each class (all readings are available on Canvas); 2) Involvement in seminar discussions, including at least one short presentation; 3) A short paper that uses selected readings to extract the “design-politics” of a place or project; 4) A term paper on a topic analyzing both the design and political history of an urban design intervention, to be presented during the final sessions of the class. All final papers will be due on the date of the last class, though earlier submissions are welcome.

## **Inclusive Classroom**

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.

## **Land Acknowledgement Statement**

We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The lands which MIT occupies are the traditional unceded territories of the Wampanoag Nation and the Massachusetts Peoples. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, as well as the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated. Beyond the stolen territory which we physically occupy, MIT has long profited from the sale of federal lands granted by the Morrill Act, territories stolen from 82 Tribes including the Greater and Little Osage, Chippewa, and Omaha Peoples.

As we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous people connected to this land from time immemorial, we seek to Indigenize our institution and the field of planning, offer Space, and leave Indigenous peoples in more empowered position

In particular, we should all acknowledge that Urban Design and Development never takes place on a *tabula rasa*. In analyzing how change happens over time, the work for this subject strives to understand the processes of marginalization and to seek ways to implement racial justice practices that can work to improve this.

## **Writing Assistance**

The Writing and Communication Center offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts with advanced degrees and publishing experience. The WCC can help you further develop your oral communication skills and learn about all types of academic and professional writing. You can learn more about the WCC consultations at <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center> and register with the online scheduler to make appointments through <https://mit.mywconline.com>. Please note that the WCC hours are offered Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., and fill up fast.

Some faculty already require their students to consult with the WCC's communication experts on their papers, technical reports, and presentations — doing so is a good way not only to improve the quality of their students' work but also to help students grow as academic writers and communicators.

The WCC has decades of experience preparing thousands of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as postdoctoral scholars and faculty, for positions in research, academia, and industry. They provide expertise in scientific and engineering writing as well as humanities and social science writing across various genres, including journal articles, scientific posters, dissertations, oral presentations, and slide design.

### **Special Accommodations**

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. If you have a disability and are not planning to use accommodations, it is still recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with their services and resources. Please visit the [DAS website](#) for contact information.

If you have already been approved for accommodations, please let me know.

### **Academic Integrity**

In this subject, I will hold you to the high standard of academic integrity expected of all students at the Institute. Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never (1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, or (2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class. Please see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

Please review MIT's [Academic Integrity](#) policy and related resources (e.g., working under pressure; how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote; etc.) and contact me if you have any questions about appropriate citation methods, the degree of collaboration that is permitted, or anything else related to the Academic Integrity of this subject.

### **Attendance and Contingency Plans for Illness/Absence**

Urban Design Politics meets in person on Mondays from 3p.m. to 6 p.m. EST (except on February 22, when Monday classes are held on the Tuesday, and on Institute holidays). This is a synchronous course where I expect students to participate in discussions and share reflections. Students are required to attend all sessions. If you are not able to regularly attend the full sessions of this subject, you should not enroll; please let me know at your earliest convenience if you wish to investigate a possible exception to this expectation. In case of illness or other necessary reason for absence, I have Panopto video recordings of some sessions of the Spring 2020 version of this subject that can be provided to you to enable you to catch up asynchronously if needed.

In the event that we need to pivot to remote delivery of this subject—due to illness or isolation protocols, I have established a Zoom link and linked it to our Canvas site.

Note that we will not otherwise regularly be recording our classes during the Spring 2022 semester, unless circumstances change.

## **Student Support**

### **Graduate Students: GradSupport**

As a graduate student, a variety of issues may impact your academic career including faculty/student relationships, funding, and interpersonal concerns. In the Office of Graduate Education (OGE), [GradSupport](#) provides consultation, coaching, and advocacy to graduate students on matters related to academic and life challenges. If you are dealing with an issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you may contact GradSupport by email at [gradsupport@mit.edu](mailto:gradsupport@mit.edu) or via phone at (617) 253-4860.

Website: <https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/>

### **Undergraduate Students: Student Support Services (S3)**

If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S3). S3 is here to help you. The deans will verify your situation, provide you with support, and help you work with your professor or instructor to determine next steps. In most circumstances, you will not be excused from coursework without verification from a dean. Please visit the [S3 website](#) for contact information and more ways that they can provide support.

Website: <https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3>

## **Calendar**

January 31

**Introduction: Urban “Design-Politics”: From MIT to “The Capital of the World”**

February 7

**Four Perspectives on the Politics of Design**

1. Political Science: How is political power constructed through space?

Murray Edelman, “Architecture, Spaces, and Social Order,” in Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 73-90.

2. History: How is the past manipulated to serve the present?

Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” from Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

3. Philosophy: How is meaning conveyed?

Nelson Goodman, “How Buildings Mean,” in Goodman and Catherine Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 31-48.

Optional: William Whyte, “How Do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture,” *History and Theory* 45, 2 (2006), 153-177.

4. Science and Technology Studies: Do Artifacts have politics?

Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” *Daedalus* 109,1 (Winter 1980), 121-136.

Bernward Joerges, “Do Politics Have Artefacts,” *Social Studies of Science* 29, 3 (1999), 411-431.

February 14

**Five More Perspectives on the Politics of Design**

1. Critical Race Studies: How does race affect design?

George Lipsitz, "Introduction: Race, Place, and Power," in *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 1-21.

Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a Politics of Empowerment," in *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 291-309.

Optional:

Brandi Thompson Summers, "Introduction: Black Space Matters," in *Black in Place: The Spatial Aesthetics of Race in a Post-Chocolate City* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 1-27.

2. Gender Studies: How does gender affect design?

Daphne Spain, "Space and Status," in *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina Press, 1992), 1-29.

Susan Fainstein and Lisa J. Servon, "Introduction: The Intersection Between Planning and Gender," in Fainstein and Servon, eds., *Gender and Planning: A Reader* (Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1-12.

Optional:

Helen Jarvis (with Paula Kantor and Jonathan Cloke), "Homes, Jobs, Communities and Networks" in *Cities and Gender* (Routledge, 2009), 186-215.

3. Political Economy: Who benefits from urban development?

John R. Logan, and Harvey L. Molotch, "The Social Construction of Cities," in *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1987), 1-12.

Optional:

Sharon Zukin, "Market, Place and Landscape," in *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3-23.

4. Anthropology: Whose perspective matters?

Lisa Peattie, "Representation" in *Planning: Rethinking Ciudad Guayana* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 111-152.

5. Geography: How does urban space affect justice?

Edward W. Soja, "On the Production of Unjust Geographies," and "Building a Spatial Theory of Justice," in *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 31-66 and pp. 67-110.

First Paper Assigned: Due in Class March 7, but presented to the class on March 14.

February 22 (Monday Classes Meet on Tuesday)

**The Political Extremes of Urban Design 1--  
Berlin, From Pre-War to Post-Wall**

Stephen Helmer, *Hitler's Berlin: The Speer Plans for Reshaping the Central City* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 27-48.

Albert Speer, "Responsibility and Response," *Journal of Architectural Education*, 32, 2 (1978), 18.

Martin Kitchen, "Germania," in *Speer: Hitler's Architect* (Yale University Press, 2015), 57-100.

Brian Ladd, "Nazi Berlin," "Divided Berlin," and "Capital of the New Germany," in *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 127-235.

Michael Z. Wise, "Master Plan for a Government District," "Choosing a Chancellery," and "Norman Foster's Reichstag: Illuminating Shadows of the Past," in Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 57-80, 121-134.

Karen Till, "Memory in the New Berlin," in *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 193-228.

Jennifer Jordan, "Blank Slates and Authentic Traces: Memorial Culture in Berlin after 1945," in *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 23-58.

Optional:

Leon Krier, "Forward Comrades, We Must Go Back," *Oppositions* 24 (September 1981), 26-37.

Joan Ockman, "The Most Interesting Form of Lie," *Oppositions* 24 (September 1981), 38-47 (Response to Krier).

February 28

## **The Political Extremes of Urban Design 2--Capital Cities**

Required reading:

Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008, 2nd edition), Chapters 3-5.

Göran Therborn, "Cities, Power and Modernity," in *Cities of Power: The Urban, The National, The Popular, the Global* (Verso, 2017), 7-32.

Carl Nightingale, "The Outer Limits of Colonial Urbanism," in *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 193-226.

Lawrence J. Vale, "Mediated Monuments and National Identity," *Journal of Architecture* (Winter 1999), 391-408.

Optional:

Sekou Cooke, "Afrofuturism," in *Hip-Hop Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 197-200.

Walter Hood, "Commemoration," in Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada, eds., *Black Landscapes Matter* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 46-49.

For further Reading:

Göran Therborn, *Cities of Power* (read all of it)

Michael Minkenberg, ed., *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space* (Berghahn: 2014).

Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Charles T. Goodsell, *The Social Meaning of Civic Space: Studying Political Authority Through Architecture* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

## **March 7: The Design-Politics of Public Squares**

Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments," *Representations* 35, Summer 1991, pp. 84-117.

Tali Hatuka, "Challenging Distance," "Choosing a Place," and "Reiconization: Beijing, Tiananmen Square," from *The Design of Protest: Choreographing*



*Political Demonstrations in Public Space* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 5-44 and 219-230.

Luis M. Castañeda, “Plaza of Fusions” and “Feeble Harmony” from *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 90-100.

Exercise 1 due, for discussion on March 14.

March 14: **Discussion of Exercise 1**

March 21: **No Class: Spring Break**

March 28: **The Design-Politics of Developing Public Housing**

Lawrence J. Vale, “Standardizing Public Housing,” in Eran Ben-Joseph and Terry Szold, eds. *Regulating Place: Standards and the Shaping of Urban America* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 67-101.

Walter Gropius, “Sociological Premises for the Minimum Dwelling of Urban Industrial Populations,” and “Houses, Walk-ups or Highrise Apartment Blocks?” from *The Scope of Total Architecture* (1955), 104-35.

Lawrence J. Vale, “Building Selective Collectives,” in *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 162-266.

Johana Londoño, “Design for the ‘Puerto Rican Problem,’” in *Abstract Barrios: The Crises of Latinx Visibility in Cities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 23-69.

Optional:

Andrew Herscher, “Black and Blight,” in Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 291-307.

April 4: **The Design-Politics of Redeveloping Public Housing**

Karen A. Franck and Michael Mostoller, “From Courts to Open Space to Streets: Changes in the Site Design of U.S. Public Housing,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 12,3 (Autumn, 1995), 186-220.

Peter Calthorpe, “HOPE VI and New Urbanism,” in Henry Cisneros and Lora Engdahl, eds., *From Despair to Hope: HOPE VI and the New Promise of Public Housing in America’s Cities* (Urban Institute Press, 2009), 49-64.

Oscar Newman, “Housing Design and the Control of Behavior” and “Site-Planning Guidelines for Housing,” from *Community of Interest* (1980), 48-77 and 193-213.

Lawrence J. Vale, “The Persistent Design-Politics of Race: Power and Ideology in American Public Housing Redevelopment,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics, Vol. 1: Violence, Spectacle and Data* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming, 2022).

#### April 11: **The Design-Politics of Urban Security**

Setha Low, “Unlocking the Gated Community,” in *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (Routledge, 2004), 7-26.

Zaire Zenit Dinzey-Flores, “Fortress Gates of the Rich and Poor: Past and Present” and “Precaution: Security Knives in the Gates,” in *Locked In, Locked Out: Gated Communities in a Puerto Rican City* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 9-27 and 53-72.

Robert H. Nelson, “Introduction: A Constitutional Revolution,” in *Private Neighborhoods and the Transformation of Local Government* (Urban Institute Press, 2005), 1-18.

Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Site and Urban Design for Security: Guidance Against Potential Terrorist Attacks, FEMA 430* (Washington, D.C.: FEMA, December 2007). Skim chapters 1 and 4, downloadable from

Theo Deutinger, “Walls & Fences” and “Defensive City” from *Handbook of Tyranny* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2018), 84-95.

Interboro (Tobias Armbrorst, Daniel D’Oca, and Georgeen Theodore), “Exclusionary Amenity” (by Lior Jacob Strahilevitz), “Fence” (by James Rojas), “Fence 2,” “Gate” (by Gabrielle Esperdy), ““No Loitering’ Sign,” “Wall,” and

“Wall 2” (by Jeffrey Johnson), in *Arsenal of Exclusion and Inclusion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Actar, 2021), 134-136, 154-158, 176-178, 232-235, and 373-376.

Jon Coaffee, David Murakami Wood, and Peter Rogers, “Controlling the Risky City” and “The Intensification of Control: Towards Urban Resilience,” in *The Everyday Resilience of the City: How Cities Respond to Terrorism and Disaster* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 67-109.

April 18: No Class—Patriots’ Day

April 25:

**The Design-Politics of Urban Resilience**

Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella, “Introduction: The Cities Rise Again,” and “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience,” from *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-23 and 335-355.

Jon Coaffee, David Murakami Wood, and Peter Rogers, “States of Protection and Emergency: The Rise of Resilience,” in *The Everyday Resilience of the City: How Cities Respond to Terrorism and Disaster* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 110-132.

Ashley Dawson, “The Jargon of Resilience,” in *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (Verso, 2017), 152-187.

Jeff Goodell, “Climate Apartheid,” in *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World* (Little Brown, 2017), 213-232.

Naomi Klein, “Blanking the Beach: The Second Tsunami” and “Disaster Apartheid: A World of Green Zones and Red Zones,” in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Metropolitan Books, 2007), 385-422.

Lawrence J. Vale, “The Politics of Resilient Cities: Whose Resilience and Whose City?” *Building Research and Information* (February 2014), 1-11.

May 2

**Student Presentations 1**

May 9

**Student Presentations 2**

Final Papers due no later than May 9