

## Contested Sights: Urban Design in the Wild

UD Seminar 1 / GSAPP A6830

Fall 2017 Wednesdays 11 am–1 pm

Avery Hall 409 and across NYC

Columbia University Graduate School  
of Architecture, Planning & Preservation

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“Where do you place the angry clients and their sometimes conflicting demands? Where do you insert the legal and city planning constraints? Where do you locate the budgeting and the different budget options? Where do you put the logistics of the many successive trades? Where do you situate the subtle evaluation of skilled versus unskilled practitioners? Where do you archive the many successive models that you had to modify so as to absorb the continuous demands of so many conflicting stakeholders—users, communities of neighbors, preservationists, clients, representatives of the government and city authorities? Where do you incorporate the changing program specifics? You need only to think for one minute, before confessing that Euclidian space is the space in which buildings are *drawn* on paper but not the environment in which buildings are *built*—and even less the world in which they are *lived*.”

—Bruno Latour & Alben Yaneva, “Give me a gun and I will make all buildings move’: an ANT’s view of architecture”

How does urban design become a subject of public controversy?

How do spaces, buildings, and urban visions transmit power and mediate struggles around class, race, and gender?

How can designers learn from conflicts surrounding architecture and urban planning?

This course examines sites in New York City where urban design has become a contested subject of public disagreement. By visiting sites, interviewing interested parties, writing, photographing, walking, and drawing, we will explore how the disciplinary activities of designers, architects, and planners intertwine with the political life of the city. Working in teams, students will study a single contested site for the duration of the semester, producing research and analysis, leading a performative walking tour with visual aids and guest speakers, and creating a portfolio of analytic drawings. Class activity emphasizes learning from shared research and analysis by class participants, collectively understood as an assessment of the socio-political position of urban design in New York City in 2017.



The Destruction of Jerusalem under Babylonian Rule, from Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493

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Grading

Expectations for the student:

- Attend and participate in class. Class participation is mandatory and will constitute part of your grade. Curiosity will be rewarded. Expected absences must be cleared with professor beforehand, and unexcused absences will affect your grade.
- Complete all class assignments, taking responsibility for identifying and executing work that goes beyond *information retrieval to convey meaning and understanding.*

Class Participation	25%
Contested Site Presentation	5%
Contested Site Tour	35%
Contested Site Portfolio	35%

Schedule

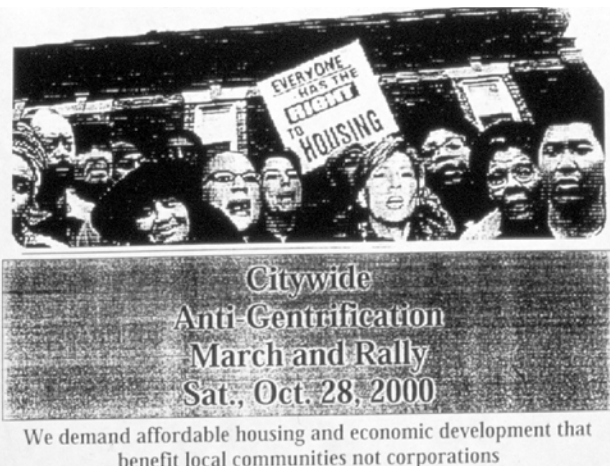
Sept 6	Introduction and overview
Sept 13	Sample walking tour: Meet at northwest corner of Essex & Canal
Sept 20	Seminar Reading: Latour/Yaneva & Forester Available on Courseworks
Sept 27	Workshop
Oct 4	Site Presentations
Oct 11	Draft Portfolio Pin-Up
Oct 18	Site Tour 1
Oct 25	Site Tour 2
Nov 1	Portfolio Revision Pin-Up
Nov 8	Site Tour 3
Nov 15	Site Tour 4 & 5 (Class runs 11 am–3:30 pm)
Nov 29	Portfolio Group Crits
Dec 6	Final Portfolio Pin-Up & Conclusion

All tours will meet at a location communicated by the tour leaders one week ahead of time, and are rain or shine. Please dress appropriately!

- Potential sites (no more than two per borough)
- Manhattan: East Harlem, Midtown East, Columbia Expansion, Hudson Yards, 125th Street Rezoning, South Street Seaport, Two Bridges, 57th Street Supertalls
- Brooklyn: Broadway Triangle, Atlantic Yards/Pacific Park, DUMBO, Greenpoint/Williamsburg Waterfront, Gowanus Redevelopment, Sunset Park/Industry City
- Queens: Willets Point, Far Rockaway
- The Bronx: Sheridan Expressway, Kingsbridge Armory, Hunt’s Point
- Staten Island: Staten Island North Shore, Fresh Kills

Student Learning Objectives

- Students should be able, at an advanced level, to:
- Formulate and conduct empirical and archival research related to social decision-making about the built environment.
  - Communicate urban design research, verbally and in multiple media formats, situating practices of architecture, urban design, and planning in political, social, regulatory, economic and other contexts.
  - Produce narrative and information-rich visual representations of complex urban design situations.



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### Assignments

All assignments grow from team research into and analysis of one contested site.

1. Contested Site Presentation: Seven-minute visual and verbal presentation including following preliminary site information (see "Site investigation tips" below for research approaches and resources)

- Historic archive (using historic *New York Times* database and other sources)
- Photo tour (must be your own photographs)
- Zoning, ownership, demographic patterns
- Draft themes, architectures and controversies (why is the controversy surrounding this site important?)
- Draft tour route

*Assigned Sept 6*

*Due Oct 4*

2. Contested Site Tour: 90-minute narrated tour centered on telling the story of one primary urban design controversy and touching upon layers of development and politics embedded in the surrounding environment. Must include: two or more guests for brief conversations, 10-15 visual aids, and be followed with 15 minutes of group conversation facilitated by tour leaders. Speaking roles should be equally shared by all team members. Can optionally include a relevant snack for the group.

*Assigned Sept 6*

*Due Oct 11–Nov 29*

3. Contested Site Portfolio: each student team will complete four 20x30 inch (landscape orientation) analytic site drawings documenting and analyzing the following qualities of the site:

- SPATIAL, analyzing overall spatial relationships using axonometric and other projective drawings
- VISUAL & MATERIAL, analyzing the detailed make-up of the environment, combining diagrammatic drawings with photographs and other documentation
- SOCIAL, analyzing the political, economic, and other relationships running through the site, following drawing precedents including the sociogram
- TEMPORAL, analyzing changes in the site over time, including unrealized proposals, using drawing techniques including timelines and small multiples

Alternative layouts and supplemental sheets acceptable upon instructor confirmation.

*Assigned Sept 20*

*First draft due/Pin-Up: Oct 11*

*Revision due/Pin-Up: Nov 1*

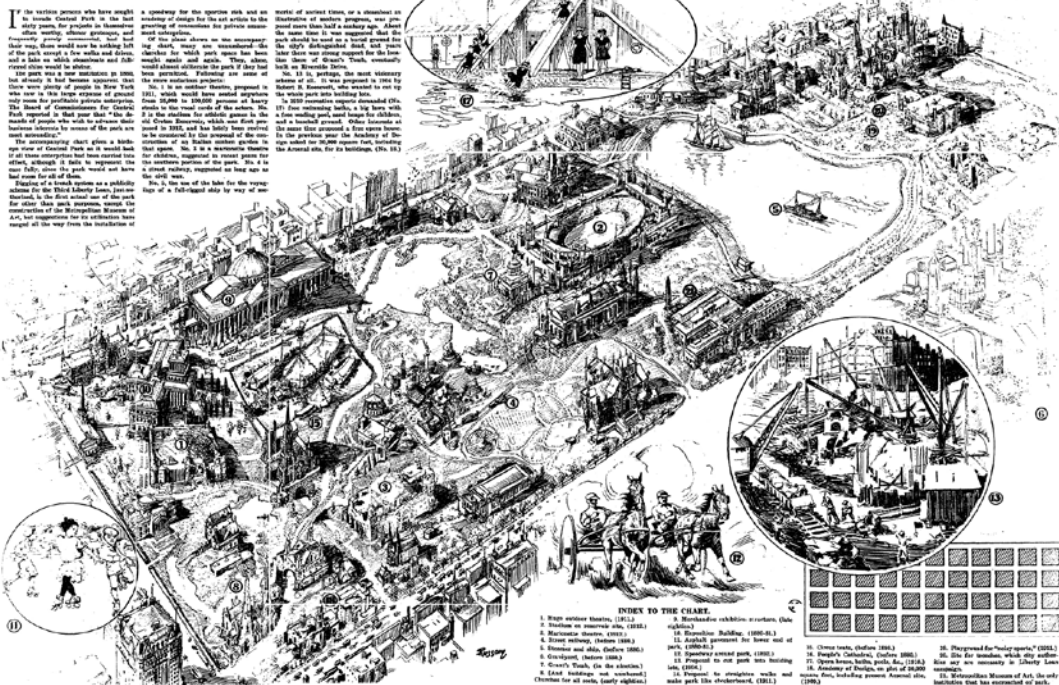
*Final due/Pin-Up: Dec 6*

### IF "IMPROVEMENT" PLANS HAD GOBBLED CENTRAL PARK

If the various projects which have sought to "improve" Central Park in the last thirty years, the projects in the following pages, which are in various stages of execution, had been carried out, the park would be a very different place. The park is a very different place than it was when it was first laid out by the Commissioners of the Park Department in 1858. The park is a very different place than it was when it was first laid out by the Commissioners of the Park Department in 1858. The park is a very different place than it was when it was first laid out by the Commissioners of the Park Department in 1858.

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Many Other Proposed Grabs Are Not Shown in the Picture, for Lack of Room



1. Water engine house, 1857.	10. Exhibition building, 1903-05.
2. Structure on structure, 1858.	11. Archway proposed for lower end of park, 1860-61.
3. Music stand, 1870.	12. Proposed to use park for building, 1860.
4. Stage building, 1860-61.	13. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
5. Summer and club house, 1860.	14. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
6. Grandstand, 1860.	15. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
7. Grier's Track, the structure.	16. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
8. East building, not completed.	17. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
9. West building, not completed.	18. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
	19. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.
	20. Proposed to change walk and make park the showplace, 1881.

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### Site investigation tips

1. Set a generous boundary for your investigation—contemporary controversies often build on historic layers of previous conflicts.
2. Gather official mapped information including Zoning, Historic District and Landmarks maps for site and surrounding area: <http://maps.nyc.gov/zola>  
Tax map: <http://gis.nyc.gov/taxmap/map.htm>  
Property ownership: <http://a836-acris.nyc.gov> (Requires Borough, Block and Lot of parcels)  
For those with GIS experience, other maps of interest could include demographic and housing information from the US Census.
3. Compile site dossier and timeline: Beyond general internet searching, download historical *New York Times* articles from ProQuest Historical *New York Times* database, sort chronologically, and read. Next, read relevant sections in *New York 1960, A Plan for New York City*, and at [ny.curbed.com](http://ny.curbed.com). Then, compile a list of books, articles, planning reports, and websites you will scan for information. Consider visits to the New York Library (42<sup>nd</sup> and Fifth Avenue) and internet chatrooms. As you read, compile timeline and analyze geography. Gather neighborhood background, specific stories, and funny details to share on the tour. Thought, note controversies about the architectural and urban development of the site.
4. List actors and organizations involved in site controversies (individuals and organizations) with brief descriptions of their position and interests. Note which might be good sources of guest speakers for tour.

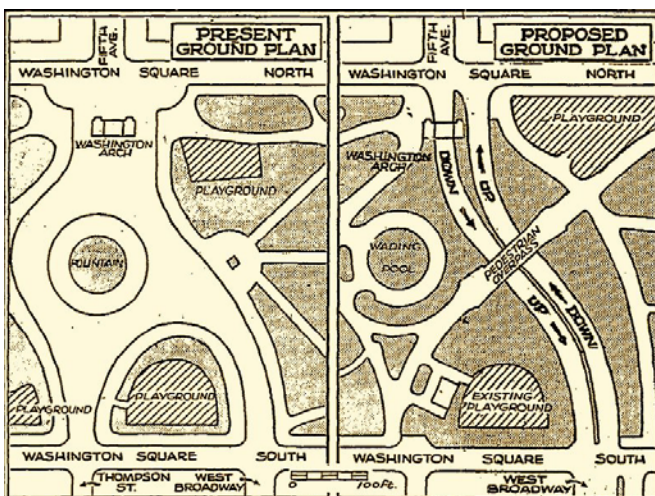
5. List arguments on different sides of site controversies. Collect documents like planning reports, renderings, and interviews that lay out each argument, especially any visual material.

6. Make several site visits and spend ample time exploring. Talk to people. Create a photographic survey using at least 20 photographs to generate a photographic and textual description of existing buildings, open spaces, and other elements on the site, showing wide perspectives and close details.

7. Craft a tour route: Based upon your research and exploration, compile list of significant sites of built or unbuilt architecture in the area. Make sure they are within walking distance of one another (people walk about 3 miles per hour). Determine route based upon physical adjacencies and narrative flow. Look for interesting spaces to take the group. Try to get permissions to access private spaces. Compile notes for each site. Use site list to write a script, listing each site with notes in the order you will visit, and indicating when each visual aid should be passed around. Practice at least once walking the exact route through the site (you may wish to record yourself).

8. Produce visual aids from *New York Times*, *New York 1960*, and other sources. Use historical photographs, explanatory diagrams, architectural renderings, newspaper clippings, etc. Use fliers and other materials you've collected in your investigation. Remember to always make best use of the built environment as the ultimate visual aid!

9. Recruit guests by calling and emailing businesses, organizations, and people mentioned in your research to request guest appearances. Call until you get a response. Tell them that you're leading a tour and you want to include voices of people who know the most. Maybe tell them that you already have lots of people with the opposite of their viewpoint, so they feel pressure to represent for their cause. Tell them you'll buy them coffee, that it will only take 10 minutes, etc., until they agree. Try to get at least two guests with notably different perspectives.



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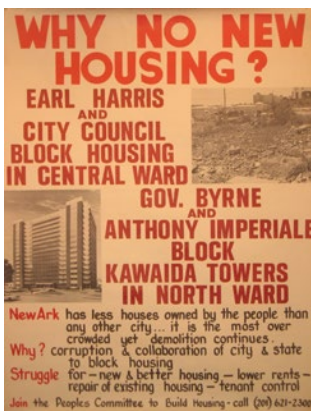
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## Contested Sights Presentation Checklist

In pairs, prepare a seven-minute visual and verbal presentation including the required items below.

Presentation to be submitted as PDF file

Assigned Sept 6, Due Oct 4

### THE CONTROVERSY

1. What is the controversy? (less than 100 words)
2. List of Actors: What individuals, organizations, businesses, agencies, etc are involved? Collect logos, photographs, mission statements, etc for each actor
3. Timeline of events
4. Collection of quotations: at least 20 quotations with sources from your research describing different sides of the controversy
5. Map of significant sites in the controversy.
6. Newspaper archive (minimum 30 articles found using historic *New York Times* database, general internet search, and other sources)
7. Visual archive (minimum 20 images with sources)
8. List of public processes: what public processes are involved in the controversy? For example, rezoning, ULURP, public RFP, etc. Diagram process & who is involved.
9. How is architecture and planning involved in the controversy?
10. What is at stake? What does this controversy allow us to research that applies to other sites and projects? (less than 100 words)
11. List of public meetings you plan to attend to research your controversy (at least 2)
12. List of people you plan to phone interview to research your controversy (at least 4)
13. List of potential guests for your tour.

### CONTEXT OF THE CONTROVERSY

14. Photo tour of neighborhood surrounding contested site with at least 20 photographs (must be your own photographs)
15. Sandborn maps or equivalent at neighborhood scale (1 mile by 1 mile) at four significant times during the site's history.
16. Current zoning map
17. Current income map
18. Current race/ethnicity map
19. One other thematic map based on Census data: could include language spoken at home, tenant/owner percentage, asking rent, etc
20. Visual material of architecture and past plans  
visual archive from *AIA Guide to New York, New York 1960, A Plan for New York City 1969*, etc
21. Draft tour route

### TOUR INGREDIENTS

1. Description of context (historical and architectural) for controversies
2. Description of controversies, stakeholders, and their relationships
3. Architectural commentary
4. Use of Archival Sources
5. Guest speakers
6. Visual aids
7. Group participation and questions
8. Snack (see professor for modest budget)