

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Zoöpolis (Introduction to Literary & Critical Studies for Architecture Students II)

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Modernity's anthropocentric spatial orderings seek to disentangle us from nonhuman animals. We ride the subway without seeing its rats; we live in exterminated apartments; we consume dead animals who are slaughtered away from our sight and processed into meat. Yet there is a serious need to address, engage and live with nonhumans, who "together with [humans] suffer from urban pollution and habitat degradation," and whose oppressions are intimately linked to our own, and to those we perpetuate within the world.

In her essay "Zoöpolis," cultural geographer Jennifer Wolch defines the eponymous term as a city that "[invites] the animals back in" to "[allow] for the emergence of an ethic, practice, and politics of caring." In this section of HMS 103B, we will consider the zoöpolis from an interdisciplinary perspective—from cultural geography to ecological urbanism, landscape architecture to literature, politics to visual art, literature to critical theory. Particular attention will be paid to 1) trans-species urban practices that aspire to "[alter] the nature of interactions between people and animals in the city"; 2) the culturally constructed dichotomy between nature and culture; 3) rhetorics of fear used to describe cross-species co-habitation and eradication of so-called pests; and 4) the proliferation of factory farms, and the politics of sight projected by these spaces. Ultimately, we will apply the concept of zoöpolis to literary works and speculative architectural designs. One goal of the course is to complicate the meanings of "human" and "animal" in order to de-center the humanist perspective and more responsibly take into account cross-species cohabitation and design. As such, you will be encouraged to draw connections between this seminar and your design studio, and to regard thinking as a form of activism.