

PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARTS

ARCHITECTURE

Course Description

Architects and architectural historians are used to relying on a number of philosophical distinctions pertinent to architecture: space and spatiality, ground and context, form and style, body and world. In turn, throughout the modern and postmodern tradition philosophers have made systematic use of architectural metaphors such as edifice, foundations, construction, and deconstruction. And yet, the connection between philosophy and architecture has remained mostly unexamined.

In this course, we will explore the nature of the relationship between architecture and philosophy through the analysis of how the dialectical tradition of thought, inaugurated by Hegel and Marx, shaped the revolutionary work of great modernist architects, including Adolf Loos, Mies Van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Le Corbusier. The hypothesis we will test is that, with the onset of modernity, philosophy and architecture are consumed by the same very ambitious pursuit: attending to the “construction” of the human subject, its space, its needs, and first and foremost, its dreams.

The notion of modernity will thus be our point of departure. We shall read excerpt from Hegel and Marx, and subsequently analyze their reverberations in some of the key-buildings in the modern tradition. We will also read texts by Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin, two of the sharpest theorists of modernity, and evaluate their philosophies of history, a theme crucial to the architecture of all times, as well as their views on the nature of experience in the metropolis.

We shall discuss the question of urbanism in the post-industrial and increasingly globalized society through the radical theorists of the Situationist International, including Guy Debord and more recently Paul Virilio.

The definition of architecture’s relation to history and more in general with its physical and cultural context has been the “battling ground” of the modernism/postmodernism debate. In order to assess the terms of this debate, we will examine essays by Stern, Habermas, and Michael Graves.

A central portion of this course is devoted to Martin Heidegger’s critique of modernity and the role that technology plays in it. Two of his later essays on building and dwelling as well as excerpts from his classic “Origin of the Work of Art” will elucidate for us his position and give us an opportunity to discuss the work of two major figures of 20th century architecture from an unusual perspective: Mies Van der Rohe and Louis Kahn.

The issue of how architecture should commemorate acts of unspeakable violence, including the Holocaust, will be raised mainly in light of “the face,” Levinas’ crucial figure of thought alluding to the priority of ethical responsibility over any other form of cognition. Both Levinas and Agamben will be discussed relation to two recent Berlin projects: Liebeskind’s *Jewish Museum* and Eisenman’s *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*.

We will conclude by discussing two of the most influential late twentieth century “responses” to both the modernist and postmodernist challenges: Derrida’s deconstruction and Foucault’s critical work on power, which will be considered in relation to buildings by Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi, and Zaha Hadid, the first woman to earn the Pritzker Price for Architecture.

Texts

Conrads, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, Trilateral
Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, Taylor
Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson

Requirements¹

Class participation is expected and will count for roughly 25% of your final grade. You will be asked to sign up for 1 class presentation, 15 minutes long, based on class material as well as independent research. Although you may not read a paper, you will have to write a 3 pages “report” on your presentation, in which you concisely describe your topic. I will grade the presentation and the paper as two complementary parts of one assignment. Therefore, you will receive only one grade for both. There will be a mid-term take-home exam, and an 8 pages final research paper on a subject of your own choice. I will approve the topic on the basis of a paper proposal (one or two paragraphs long), which is due one week before the end of the course.

All your written work has to be double-spaced, and submitted by Blackboard, in a “.doc” format, as well as either in hard copy at the Philosophy Department’s office (Rocky 209) or to me. On every one of your essays, I expect to find a header with your name, the class in which you are enrolled, the type of assignment (separately from the specific title you will choose for it), and page numbers. Late papers will result in a grade penalty. Extensions may be asked and obtained only long in advance for medical or family reasons.

There will be a class trip to the Bard College Performing Arts Center, designed by Frank Gehry, in the morning of Saturday, April 29.

Please, notice that Thursday, March 6, the last class before break, is canceled. On the Friday, March 7, I will be lecturing in Bologna, Italy, at the opening of a conference marking the 10th anniversary of ECCO (Eastern College Consortium, the Vassar-Wesleyan-Wellesley JYA program) at the University of Bologna, Italy.

¹ Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please, schedule an appointment with the Instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations that may be needed for the course. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Disability and Support Services (ext. 7584) as indicated in the accommodation letter.

Lectures and Readings

January	24 Introduction
	29 The Foundations of Human Progress: Hegel Introduction to the <i>Philosophy of History</i> , excerpts, Blackboard
	31 Hegel, <i>Lectures on Aesthetics</i> , excerpts, Blackboard
February	5 Two Kinds of Historicism: Schinkel and Pugin Schinkel <i>Altes Museum</i> , Berlin, <i>Bauacademie</i> , Berlin Carter, “Karl Friedrich Schinkel: The Last Great Architect,” Blackboard Pugin <i>House of Parliament</i> , London <i>Modern Architecture</i> , 42-43
	7 All That Is Solid Melts into the Air: Marx Marx and Engels, <i>Manifesto of the Communist Party</i> , Blackboard
	12 The Iron and Glass Revolution Paxton <i>Crystal Palace</i> , London Eiffel <i>Eiffel Tower</i> , Paris <i>Modern Architecture</i> , 29-36 Sullivan The Guaranty Building, Buffalo, NY <i>Modern Architecture</i> , 51-56
	14 Man Shall Be Overcome: Nietzsche and the Vienna Secession Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> : Prologue, Zarathustra’s Speeches through The Tree on the Mountainside, On the Vision and the Riddle, Blackboard

Olbrich
Secession Building, Vienna
Hoffman
Palais Stoclet, Brussels
Modern Architecture, 78-82

19 Against Historicism: Nietzsche and Benjamin
Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,"
excerpts, Blackboard
Benjamin, IX Thesis on the Philosophy of History
Cacciari, "Loos and His Angel," Blackboard

21 Architecture and the Crisis of Culture: Adolf Loos
Steiner House, Vienna
Goldman&Salatsch Building, Michaelerplatz, Vienna
Loos, "Ornament and Crime," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 19-24
Modern Architecture, 90-95
Cacciari, "Tabula Rasa," "The New Space," "The House," "On Loos's
Tomb" Blackboard

26 Loos
Tristan Tsara's House, Paris
Moller House, Vienna
Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," Blackboard

28 For or Against Distraction? Simmel and the Deutsche
Werkbund
Simmel, "Bridge and Door," "Metropolis and Mental Life," in
Rethinking Architecture, 65-79
Behrens, *A&G Turbine Factory, Berlin*
Muthesius, "Aims of the Werkbund," Muthesius and Van de Velde,
"Werkbund Theses and Antitheses," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 26-
31
Modern Architecture, 109-122

March

4 Bauhaus: Gropius and Breuer
Gropius, *Bauhaus Dessau, Dessau*
Breuer, *Wassily Chair*
Breuer, *Ferry House, Vassar College Poughkeepsie, NY*
Gropius/Taut/Behne, "New Ideas on Architecture,"
Gropius "Programme of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimer," in

Programs and Manifestoes, 46-53; Schlemmer, "Manifesto for the First Bauhaus Exhibition," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 68-70
Modern Architecture, 123-129

6 Canceled
Take-Home Due at 5 PM on Blackboard ONLY.

8-23 **Spring Break**

25 A Poetics of Universals: De Stijl
Rietveld
Red-Blue Chair
Schroeder House, Utrecht
Van Doesburg, "De Stijl Manifesto I," "De Stijl: Creative Demands,"
"De Stijl Manifesto V," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 39-40, 64-66
Modern Architecture, 142-148
Friedman, "Not a Muse: the Client's Role at the Rietveld Schroeder House," Blackboard

27 The House as a Machine for Living: Le Corbusier
Maison Dom-ino
Villa Savoy, Poissy
Ronchamp Chapel, Ronchamp
Le Corbusier, "Toward a New Architecture," "Guiding Principles of Town Planning," Le Corbusier/Pierre Jeanneret, "Five Points Toward a New Architecture," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 59-62, 89-94, 99-101
Modern Architecture, 149-160

April

1 The City in Fragments: Benjamin and Bataille
Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *Rethinking Architecture*, 24-40
Bataille, "Architecture," "Slaughterhouse," "Museum," *Rethinking Architecture*, 24-40

3 Urban Counterculture: the Situationist International
Debord, "Critique of Separation," Blackboard
Lefebvre, "The Production of Space," 138-146
Virilio, "The Overexposed City," *Rethinking Architecture*, 380-390
Constant/Debord, "Situationist Definitions," "'Situationists:'
International Manifesto," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 162-162, 172-
174

8 Heidegger and Mies
Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," "The Origin of the Work
of Art," *Rethinking Architecture*, 98-109, 119-121
Mies
Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper Competition
German Pavilion, Barcelona
Farnsworth House, Plano, IL
Seagram Building, New York, NY
Mies, "Working Theses," *Programs and Manifestoes*, 74-75
Modern Architecture, 161-166

10 Heidegger and Kahn
"Poetically Man Dwells," "Art and Space," *Rethinking Architecture*,
121-124
Kahn
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Jonas Salk Institute, La Jolla, CA
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad
Kimbell Art Museum, Forth Worth, TX
Modern Architecture, 238-246
Kahn, "Order is," *Programs and Manifestoes* 169-170

15 Catch up class

17 The Complexity and Contradictions of Postmodernism
Stern, "Complexity and Contradictions in Architecture," Blackboard
Graves
Dolphin Hotel, Orlando, FL
Graves, "A case for Figurative Architecture," Blackboard
Habermas, "Modern and Postmodern Architecture," *Rethinking
Architecture*, 227-235

22 Architectures of the Inexpressible
Liebeskind
Jewish Museum Berlin, Berlin
Eisenman
Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin
Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," Blackboard
Agamben, "Collective Memory and the Holocaust," Blackboard

24 Deconstructivist Architecture
Gehry
Gehry House, Santa Monica, CA
Ginger and Fred, or the *Dancing House*, Prague
Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao
Derrida, "Architecture Where the Desire May Live," *Rethinking Architecture*, 319-324

26 Visit to Bard College Center for the Performing Arts

29 The Raw and the Cooked of Architecture: Eisenman
Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
Derrida, "Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books," *Rethinking Architecture*, 336-347

May

1 Deconstructing Paris: Tschumi
Parc de la Villette, Paris
Derrida "This Point of Folie. Maintenant l'Architecture," *Rethinking Architecture*, 324-336

6 Other Spaces and Others: Zaha Hadid
Vitra Fire Station, Weil Am Rhein
Northpark Cable Railway, Innsbruck
Phaeno Science Center, Wolfsburg
MAXXI National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Rome
Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," "Space, Knowledge and Power," *Rethinking Architecture*, 348-356, 367-379
McLeod, "'Other' Spaces and 'Others'," Blackboard

9 Final Paper Due at 5 PM BOTH on Blackboard
and in the Philosophy Dept. Office (Rockefeller 209)