Histories of Modern Architecture

FAH 193 • Spring 2015 • Thursdays 9:00-11:30
Daniel Abramson
Office Hours: Thursdays, 12 – 1:30, or by appointment
11 Talbot Ave., rm. 207 • 617-627-2015 • daniel.abramson@tufts.edu

Overview
This is a reading seminar in the historiography of modern architecture. The course's main materials are texts, mainly books, that represent different constructions of the history of modern architecture written from the 1920s through the present by Paul Cret, Nikolaus Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, Reyner Banham, Vincent Scully, Manfredo Tafuri, Neil Levine, Diane Ghirardo, and Hans Ibelings. The course's main objective is to teach you to think critically about how these different histories of modern architecture have been constructed, almost as works of literature. Along the way, you will also learn a great deal about modern architecture itself -- the major architects, buildings, and ideas.

Accompanying these primary readings will be short recent texts on philosophies of history, architectural history, and the historiography of modern architecture, including works by Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Hans Kellner, Gwendolyn Wright, Louis Mink, and Claire Zimmerman. These additional readings assist in analyzing, understanding, and contextualizing the primary historical texts. In broadest terms, the course provides the theoretical and analytical tools necessary to think critically about all forms of historical knowledge.

Requirements
Reading and Class Participation (30%)
The course’s primary requirement is to read and be prepared to discuss actively each week’s texts. Everyone must participate every week.

Reading and preparing the texts will take energy and time, but if read the “right” way can be done efficiently. The book-length texts should be read almost as novels, looking at broad plot themes, character developments, thematic issues, underlying philosophical connections, rhetorical flourishes, symbols, metaphors, and awkward but revealing passages. Conversely, the shorter articles need to be read with close focus, making sure to understand not just the general arguments but all their twists and turns.

It is suggested that you read the supplementary readings before the primary text, so that you can make the maximum connections between the two. Your note-taking should be directed at writing the week’s review (see below) and towards making interesting and provocative contributions to the week’s discussion.
Weekly Reviews (50%)
To facilitate discussion of the week’s texts, a 2-4 page essay is due each week in class reviewing the week’s readings. This review should summarize your comprehension of all the week’s texts’ main points, and address these central questions: What in the primary text is meant by modern architecture? How does its story of modern architecture begin and end? What are the key episodes, protagonists, and turning points, and why? What is the narrative’s theory of history; how does change happen? Be sure to use direct quotations, and also include your own ideas about one or two particular issues. You should always connect the week’s primary and supplemental readings, and also refer back to previous weeks’ texts. These reviews constitute the course’s principle writing requirement and graded work. Note: Discussion leaders are exempt from writing a review of their week’s readings.

Discussion Leading, Presentation, and Bibliography (20%)
Most weeks, discussion leaders will guide the teaching of the texts. The discussion leaders are also responsible for compiling and distributing an annotated bibliography (to be graded) listing and briefly commenting on the texts written by and about that week’s historian, as well as websites of value, if applicable. You should at least briefly look at as much material as possible, so that your annotations can be broad. For your presentations (5-10 minutes), you should describe the historian’s life, education, publishing history, critical reception, and any other key points. For leading the discussion, which is the main part of this assignment, you should devise a series of questions and talking points to get the class to understand the meaning of any secondary readings and then, primarily, to discuss extensively about the principle text’s structure, key points, protagonists, passages, and arguments, interrelations, and relevance to other prior course readings.

It is mandatory that you meet with Professor Abramson prior to the class you lead, to go over what you’ve learned, to answer questions you may have, and to outline how you plan to lead the discussion of the week’s texts. Please also provide Professor Abramson with the bibliography by 8:30 a.m. the day of class, so copies can be made for your classmates.

Besides Tisch, for the research part of this assignment, you may need to use the architecture libraries at M.I.T. (libraries.mit.edu/roach). Plan well in advance and check library hours and location. For help preparing bibliographies and presentations, the resources you should consult are as follows:

Electronic Sources and Databases (in Tufts system unless otherwise noted)
Tisch Library book catalogue
Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals
WorldCAT
JSTOR
FirstSearch
Art Abstracts & Worldcat Indexes, under First Search
ArtBibliographies
BHA: Bibliography of the History of Art
Arts and Humanities Citation Index
Database Finders at Tufts: architecture, art, art history
New York Times and other newspapers
M.I.T. (Rotch) Library Catalogue (libraries.mit.edu/rotch)
Google (google.com)

If you need assistance at Tisch, talk to the reference librarians or specifically contact Chao Chen (x2057, chao.chen@tufts.edu). For the bibliography's citation style follow: http://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/CitingSourcesChicago

Notes: Failure in any requirements may result in a failing grade for the class. All class communication will be via Tufts email.

Texts
You must have your own copy of each of the following eight books to read for the designated classes. Most can be bought at the Tufts bookstore; all are available for purchase online; and all are on reserve at Tisch Library and can be obtained through Interlibrary Loan, the best option for books you don’t buy. **Do not wait until the last minute to get a copy of the book.**

At Tufts Bookstore (tufts.bncollege.com, under "Textbooks" for pricing and availability)
Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (5th or 6th eds.)

Obtain elsewhere (e.g., Interlibrary Loan, Tisch Library, online)
Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (Pelican 1970s eds. recommended)
Hans Ibelings, *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalization* (must be 2002 ed. or later)

*All other readings on course Trunk site*

**Schedule**

1) **Jan. 15**
   Introduction

2) **Jan. 22**
   Paul Cret

Hans Kellner, "Language and historical representation" (1989), from *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. K. Jenkin

Paul Cret. "Modern Architecture" in *The Significance of the Fine Arts* (1923)
3) *Jan. 29*  
**History for Architects**

Louis O. Mink, "Narrative For as a Cognitive Instrument" (1978), in *The Writing of History*, eds. R. Canary and H. Kozicki

Gwendolyn Wright, "History for Architects" (1990), in *The History of History in American Schools of Architecture*, ed. G. Wright

4) *Feb. 5*  
**Nikolaus Pevsner**

Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1987), in *The Content of the Form*

Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design, from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936)

5) *Feb. 12*  
**Sigfried Giedion**


6) *Feb. 26*  
**Reyner Banham**

Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1962): Introduction, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22; plus Introduction to first edition (PDF on Trunk)

*I recommend reading the last chapter 22 first.*
7) March 5     Vincent Scully
Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971)

8) March 12     Manfredo Tafuri
Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development (1973)

9) March 26     Neil Levine

10) April 2     Diane Ghirardo
Diane Ghirardo, Architecture After Modernism (1996)

11) April 9     Hans Ibelings

12) April 16    The Labor of Albert Kahn

13) April 23    Recent Histories and Conclusion