Course Syllabus

Modern American Architecture

GSAPP

11-1

Pailos

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Course Description:

This course is a survey of American Modern Architecture since the country’s first centennial. As America ascended to its current position of hegemony during the late 19 and 20 centuries, its architects helped refashion the built environment to serve the needs of a growing and ever-diverse population. Hand in hand with the satisfaction of pragmatic requirements, American architects were called upon to fulfill deeper psychological wants, such as the country’s desire to have a national History. The American complex about the brevity, artificiality, and exterior dependency of its history, structured, with varying degrees of intensity, the evolution of the architectural discipline. Out of this deep-seated, and by no means exhausted, anxiety about producing, preserving, and identifying American history, came a sophisticated architectural culture; one capable of foiling, exploiting, subverting, and manipulating the various contradictions of modernity.

From the standpoint of this relationship between history and modernity, we will analyze the American architectural struggle to be progressive and accepted, exceptional and customary, and to simultaneously capture the future and the past. Each lecture will analyze the production and reception of built (and written) works by renowned figures and anonymous builders. The question of History will help us discern the terms of engagement between architecture and other disciplines over time, such as: preservation, planning, real estate development, politics, health, ecology, sociology, and philosophy. By considering American architecture’s successes and failures in relation to these multidisciplinary realities, we will gain a richer sense of the historical characteristics that have informed its evolving nature.
Objectives:

This course is a survey of architecture built in the United States and its territories from 1876, the country’s first centennial, to the present. It is designed to help develop your competence in identifying, understanding, and analyzing historic structures, their significance, types, and styles. The intention is to make you proficient in the use of the methodological, historiographical, visual, and intellectual tools necessary to grasp fully the meanings of historic buildings in their various contexts.

Method:

In each class, we will examine the conditions of possibility for the emergence of private houses, public and commercial buildings, landscapes, parks, settlements, towns, and cities. That is, we will ask how it was that this particular structure came into existence here (in the United States and not there), at that precise time. To answer these questions we will study the history of built form in the context of the intellectual, political, technological, cultural, social, and natural events that made it possible.

We will pay close attention to those projects which attempted to “overshoot” the accepted conventions of their times. For instance, we will look at the function of avant-gardism and traditionalism in resisting the status-quo. Insofar as they challenged established norms, we will study the function of these buildings in advancing new ways of making and of thinking –especially those that we might consider “American.”

Lastly, the course will interrogate the writing of American architectural history. You will be encouraged to consider why historians have written on this subject, and to take a critical position with regards to their work. Why are you interested in the past? How is your understanding of the past shaped by the subjective interpretations of other scholars?

Course Format:

Weekly lectures will provide the framework of the course.

Field Trips:

There will be walking tours in Manhattan done in collaboration with the course Modern Building Technology.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Abstract Images & Bibliography (Due: March 2)  20 %
Presentation (Due: April 20) 20 %
Final Paper (Due: May 6) 50 %
Attendance 10 %

ASSIGNMENT'S DESCRIPTION

1. Abstract, images, and Bibliography Assignment

DUE: MARCH 2

Grading criteria:

-ability to write a 500-word abstract that anticipates the argument and conclusions of the paper.

-ability to select 7-10 images that visually illustrate the paper's argument. Images are to be each in a single 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper, with captions and sources identified.

2. Presentation Assignment

DUE: APRIL 20

Grading Criteria:

-ability to present a summary of the paper in 5-7 minutes.

-ability to put together a PowerPoint illustrating the argument of the paper.

3. Final Paper Assignment:

DUE: MAY 4

The paper should interpret the historical significance of a brutalist building built in North America (or built by an American architect anywhere in the world). You should build a case for the building's period of significance, and discuss its associated values (historical, aesthetic, technological, etc). You should give preference to a building that played a role in a cultural transition in American life after it was built.

Grading criteria:

-ability to write a research paper: 4000 words in Times New Roman, 12 points, double spaced, not counting footnotes and bibliography
-ability to write a clearly articulated thesis that argues for the historical significance of the building.

-ability to structure the paper according to a sequential and consequential argument

-ability to describe the building using architectural vocabulary

-ability to clearly identify and describe how the building came to be associated with American culture.

-ability to interpret the building’s role in a cultural transition in American life.

-ability to document facts that and cite sources (use Chicago Manual of Style formatting)

-ability to identify the changes that were made to the building in order to adapt to the new cultural reality.

-ability to identify who was involved in creating or changing the building at that point in time, and what they intended to accomplish.

-ability to write a clearly articulated conclusion that succinctly reflects on the research findings of the paper

Office hours:

Sign up on google sheet:

https://calendar.google.com/calendar/selfsched?sstoken=UUVVVUZdFNUQ3A0fGRlZmF1bHR8OTBMWvkN2E1YzNiMjRjOTMwZGI4MjUzMDQ4YTU4MGI

or to schedule an appointment outside of office hours email Jorge at jo2050@columbia.edu.

Textbooks:


**Class Readings:**

Required class readings are available online through Canvas.

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

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**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**Session 1**

**Topic:** American Beaux-Arts and the City Beautiful

**Class Plan:**
Academic Eclecticism and homogeneity; the aesthetics of progressivism and cosmopolitanism; architecture and urbanism for bourgeois crowds; palaces for culture and commerce; the emergence of an American architectural profession.

**Required Readings:**

Herbert Croly, "New York as the American Metropolis," Architectural Record 13(1904), 193-206:


Sharon Irish, Cass Gilbert: Modern Traditionalist (New York, 1999), 74-113:


**Important Books:**


Ernest Flagg, The École des Beaux Arts, (New York, 1894)

Plan of Chicago prepared under the direction of the Commercial Club during the years MCMVI, MCMVII, and MCMVIII, by Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, architects; ed. by Charles Moore (Chicago, The Commercial Club, 1909)

**Recommended:**


John Belle and Maxinne Leighton Grand Central Terminal Gateway (New York, 2000)


Leland M. Roth, McKim, Mead & White, Architects (New York, 1983)

Abigail A. Van Slyck, Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture (Chicago, 1996)

William H. Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement (Baltimore, 1989)

Max Page, The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940 (Chicago, 1999)


Session 2

**Topic: The Chicago School and America's Heartland.**

Class Plan:

Inventing the skyscraper through the integration of new technologies and the reorganization of office-work; the consolidation of the skyline and the central business district; Mnemonic devices

Required Readings:


Daniel Bluestone, Constructing Chicago (New Haven, 1991), 104 151 :


Carol Willis, Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago (New York, 1995), 67 89 :


Important Books:

1. H. (Henry Hobson) Richardson, Designs for new county buildings, Allegheny County, Penn., (17 photoengravings in album 56 x 76 cm.), [1885?]

John Nolen, city planner, Hale J. Walker--Justin R. Hartzog, associates, A comprehensive city plan for San Diego, California, prepared for the City planning commission, the Harbor commission, the Park commission of San Diego, [San Diego] 1926.

Hon. William E. Cameron, History of the World's Columbian exposition, (Chicago, Columbian history company, 1893)

Recommended Readings:

Elizabeth Cromley, Alone Together: New York's Early Apartments (Ithaca, 1990)


Olivier Zunz, Making America Corporate, 1880-1920 (Chicago, 1990)

Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York, 1982).

Angel Kwolek-Folland, Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930 (Baltimore, 1994)


Sarah B. Landau with Carl Condit, Rise of the New York Skyscraper, 1865-1913 (New Haven, 1996)


1948 MGM Traveltalks: "Chicago the Beautiful"
http://www.chicagotribune.com/videobeta/ac08e4c0-c731-4461-a0e9-31a98782f329/Travel/1948-MGM-Traveltalks-Chicago-the-Beautiful-
Session 3

Topic: The Prairie Style and F.L.Wright

Class Plan:

1900-1920s: Arts and Crafts; Progressive vs. conservative politics of design; regionalism and global culture; “household science” and the women's movement; prefabrication, mail-order and the aesthetics of invention.

Required Readings:

Frank Lloyd Wright, "Building the New House," from An Autobiography (1932), 164 71

Bruce Kamberling, Irving J. Gill, Architect (San Diego, 1993), esp. 56 59, 74 77, 98 106, and Gill's "The Home of the Future" (1916), 124 128:

Douglas Haskell, "Houses Like Fords," Harper's Magazine 168 (February 1934): 286 97:


Roth 2nd Edition: 314-333, 396-409

Recommended Readings:


Kenneth Frampton, American Masterworks: The Twentieth-Century House (New York, 1995)

Reyner Banham The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment (Chicago, 1969)


Esther McCoy, Five California Architects (New York, 1960)

Robert Winter, Toward a Simpler Way of Life: Arts & Crafts Architects (Berkeley, 1997)


**Important Books:**


Greene and Greene Architects, architectural drawings collection at Avery Library.

**Session 4**

**Topic: Colonial Revivals and the Garden City Suburbs**

**Class Plan:**

1910s-1920s Colonialism, Capitalism and Regionalism, Spanish Revival in Puerto Rico, the Southwest, and Florida; Total-experience-design in hotels, theaters, movie houses, universities, Sugar and mining company towns, and department stores; debates about ornament, excess and kitsch. Early Suburbs and the Garden City Movement.

**Required Readings:**


John Margolies, Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theatres and How We Had Fun (Boston, 1991)

Lewis Mumford, "The theory and practice of regionalism ...," in Sociological Review, January, 1928, p. 18-33, and April, 1928, p. 131-141. :


Roth 2nd Edition: 360-374
Important Books:

Sylvester Baxter, Spanish-colonial architecture in Mexico, (with photographic plates by Henry Greenwood Peabody and plans by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue), (Boston, J. B. Millet, 1901).

Carleton Monroe Winslow, The architecture and the gardens of the San Diego exposition; a pictorial survey of the aesthetic features of the Panama California International Exposition, (San Francisco: P. Elder, c1916).


Addison Mizner, Florida Architecture of Addison Mizner; (New York: W. Helburn, Inc., 1928.)


Recommended Readings:

Chris Wilson, The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition (Albuquerque, 1997)


John Chase, Glitter Stucco and Dumpster Diving: Reflections on Building Production in the Vernacular City (New York, 2000)

Karel Ann Marling, ed., Designing the Disney Theme Parks (Montreal, 1997)


Session 5

Topic: Art Deco and the International Style

Class Plan:
1930s-1940s: European vs. American Modernism; Art Deco, Modern Classicism, International Style; The corporate office tower; Buildings for expanding government agencies (federal, state, and municipal); public space, public buildings and the “public sector.”

Required Readings:


Roth 1st Edition: 370-381.
Roth 2nd Edition: 384-396

Important Books:


Recommended Readings:

Robert A.M. Stern, George Howe: Toward a Modern Architecture, (New Haven, 1975)


Jose Luis Sert, “Can Our Cities Survive?” (1942)


Session 6

Topic: Postwar Modernism (Residential)

Class Plan:

1945-1960s: The “normal family” in the suburbs; model houses and museum exhibits; mass-production and custom-building; exporting American values; the dilemma of public housing,

Required Readings:

Mark Jarzombek, “‘Good-Life Modernism’ and Beyond: The American House in the 1950s-1960s,” Cornell Journal of Architecture 4 (Fall 1990), 76-93 :

Elizabeth Mock, Built in USA since 1932 (New York, 1945), pp. 9-47 :


Important Books:

Recommended:


Deborah Dietsch, Classic Modern: Midcentury Modern at Home (New York, 2000)
Renée Chow, Suburban Space: The Fabric of Dwelling (Berkeley, 2002)
Andrew Hurly, Diners, Bowling Alleys and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture (New York, 2001)

John F. Bauman, et.al., eds., From Tenements to the Taylor Homes (University Park, Pa., 2000)
Session 7  
**Topic: Postwar Modernism (Commercial)**

**Class Plan:**
The aestheticization of corporate culture; SOM and architectural bureaucracy; The university’s revolt against corporate architecture through Historic Preservation; The Texas Rangers; Saarinen’s expressive ambitions; Kahn’s mysticism; the Cold War and the “New Monumentality.”

**Required Readings:**


**Important Books:**
Walter Gropius, The Scope of Total Architecture (New York, 1955)


Recommnded Readings:


Phyllis Lambert, ed., Mies in America (Montreal and New York, 2001)

Session 8

Topic: Brutalism

Class Plan

Revolts against corporate architecture; The reinvention of Beaux-Arts pedagogy as modernism, the turn towards history, humanism, existentialism, search for abstract symbolism, camouflage and other military influences on architectural pedagogy, problems of modern church design, expressive potential of Brutalism, Saarinen’s neo-
expressionism; glass vs concrete, Kahn's search for monumentality; Labatut's Eucharistic Architecture.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


Jose Luis Sert, "Can Our Cities Survive?" (1942)


**Important Books:**


Session 9

Topic: Postmodernism

Class Plan:
Architectural phenomenology, The Whites, the Grays, and the Silvers; Postmodernism’s assertion of public opinion; from participation to spectatorship; historic preservation as avant-garde; responding to the site and the environment; marketing the space of identity.

Required Readings:
Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form (Camb, 1977), 1-20:


Charles W. Moore, “You Have to Pay for the Public Life,” in Perspecta, n. 9-10, (1965) p. 57-106:

Roth 1st Edition: 446-454, 475-513.


Important Books:


**Recommended Readings:**

Manfredo Tafuri, "'European Graffiti.' Five x Five = Twenty-five,'" in Oppositions, n. 5 (Summer 1976), trans. Victor Caliandro , 35-74.


Michael Sorkin, ed., Variations on a Theme Park: Scenes from the New American City and the End of Public Space (New York, 1992)

Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer, eds., Preserving the Recent Past (Washington, DC, 1995)


**Session 10**

**Topic: Deconstructivism**

**Class Plan:**

Neo-avantgardes; Politicizing practice; redefining eclecticism; formalism; critical historicism; feminism; post-structuralism; critical regionalism; neo-modernism; the computer and authorship; place and placelessness; the everyday and the exceptional; the search for architecture as autonomous art.

**Required Readings:**


Roth 1st Edition: 514-548.

Roth 2nd Edition: 541-570.

**Important Books:**

Kenneth Frampton, Peter Eisenman, and Mario Gandelsonas, Oppositions Journal.


Recommended Readings:


Todd Marder, ed., The Critical Edge: Controversy in Recent Am. Architecture (Cambridge, 1985)


John Chase, Experimental Architecture in Los Angeles (New York, 1991)

Michael Hays and Carol Burns, eds., Thinking the Present: Recent American Architecture (New York, 1990)
