SENIOR SEMINAR: ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM IN AMERICA 1850-2014

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar investigates the criteria for judging architecture and urban design in the last 150 years in America. In doing so, the class will explore the values (such as functionalism and organicism), principles (compositional and contextual, etc.) and intellectual thought (such as idealism, positivism, phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism) that shaped the criteria for evaluating the buildings. Seminar students will critique the written results in order to arrive at an understanding about how architectural criticism could be improved.

The focus is on “applied” criticism in magazines and newspapers, where the buildings are evaluated according to criteria derived from theoretical principles peculiar to a certain time. During the seminar students analyze the critical essays to isolate those principles and criticize their effectiveness, while placing them within historical and philosophical frameworks. At the end of the semester, students themselves will critique a contemporary work of architecture in New York for a seminar presentation.

Required readings include essays by seminal 19th and 20th century architects and architectural historians, theorists and journalistic critics, such as Viollet-le-Duc, Montgomery Schuyler, Lewis Mumford, Philip Johnson, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Colin Rowe, Ada Louise Huxtable, Alan Colquhoun, Mark Wigley, Catherine Ingraham, Martin Filler, Michael Speaks, Sarah Whiting, Robert Somol, and George Baird. Interspersed among these essays are pertinent readings from the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Roland Barthes.

PREREQUISITES: There are no prerequisites for this course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students who participate in the course fully will:

• analyze readings, organize, and write brief critiques.
• verbally present independent or group analyses and research using multiple media formats.
• formulate and conduct advanced research related to architectural criticism in the U.S.
• demonstrate an understanding of the history, role, and types of architectural criticism in the U.S.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There is no final paper and there is no exam. Instead, a one or one-and-a-half page paper is due each week, in which the student evaluates the readings according to an assigned topic. The last paper will be a short critique of a current work of architecture written by the student. Occasionally, students will be asked to deliver short presentations (with slides) in lieu of the weekly paper. Another form of presentation is the debate, which students, divided up into opposing teams, will participate in during the last part of the semester.

Students will be graded on papers, class participation and the presentations. Readings may be changed during the semester, and substitutions can be made if a student has a particular interest in a topic not on the list.

Papers have to be submitted each Thursday during class, unless a student has asked for an extension (one or two days for special circumstances). If the paper is late without permission, the paper will automatically be lowered a grade.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class attendance is seriously mandatory. Class begins at 11 AM promptly every Thursday. Any student arriving after 11:20 AM will be considered ‘late’ and arrivals after 12 PM will be considered as absent. One unexcused absence results in a lowered grade for the papers (e.g., A to B) due that week, plus a failing grade for that week on class participation. Two unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade for the course (e.g. A to B). Three unexcused absences constitute a failing grade. The only excused absences are those for reasons of health or crisis. To arrange an excused absence, you must discuss the matter with the instructor before class. Notifying the instructor by e-mail the day of the class is unacceptable. If a student can’t attend class due to a sudden illness, they must call the instructor before class (212-684-4377 or 212-904-3698).

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment only.

FACULTY STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic
community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

We expect that students will work in accordance with their honor code:

Barnard College: http://barnard.edu/dos/honorcode
Columbia College: https://www.college.columbia.edu/honorcode

If an instructor believes you to have acted dishonestly, you will be referred to the formal process of Dean’s Discipline. Overseen by the Office of Judicial Affairs and Community Standards, the Dean’s Discipline process is an educational one that determines your responsibility using the principle of “preponderance of evidence.” If found responsible, and depending on the nature of the dishonesty and whether or not you have a disciplinary record, you could face one of several sanctions.

Parents and guardians may be informed, faculty committees awarding honors will be notified, and the case may remain on your permanent record meaning that employers and graduate schools may also be informed. These sanctions are in addition to whatever determination the instructor makes on how your final grade in the class will be affected.

For more information on academic integrity at Columbia, students may refer to the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity: http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity

**BARNARD COLLEGE HONOR CODE:**

“We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by refraining from every form of dishonesty in our academic life. We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor. We consider it dishonest to remove without authorization, alter, or deface library and other academic materials. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.” http://barnard.edu/dos/honorcode

**COLUMBIA COLLEGE HONOR CODE:**

“We, the undergraduate students of Columbia University, hereby pledge to value the integrity of our ideas and the ideas of others by honestly presenting our work, respecting authorship, and striving not simply for answers but for understanding in the pursuit of our common scholastic goals. In this way, we seek to build an academic community governed by our collective efforts, diligence, and Code of Honor. I affirm that I will not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, or examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the
evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.” https://www.college.columbia.edu/honorcode

STATEMENT REGARDING DISABILITY SERVICES:

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to register in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in 008 Milbank for Barnard students or Disability Services at Wien Hall, Main Floor — Suite 108A for Columbia students.

READING SCHEDULE (Subject to change)

[READER: refers to the reader of xeroxed articles, which can be purchased, and is on reserve at Barnard Library. BOOK: refers to a book of essays on reserve, Barnard Library, or in some cases Avery.]

Week I: 19th Century Theoretical Groundwork


Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Thoughts on Art,” 1841 in America Builds, ed. Leland Roth, 1983, pp.90-99 [BOOK] [http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/emerson/essays/art.html]


Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc “Lecture X” in Lectures on Architecture, (Entretiens sur l’Architecture), v. 1, 1877, pp. 446-50; 454-55; 466; 482-84. [BOOK, AVERY RESERVE]

Week II: A New Building Type: The Tall Office Building

https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/185963


**Week III: Columbian Exposition**


William Dean Howells, “Letters of an Altrurian Traveler,” 1893. [READER]

Paul Bourget “Farewell to the White City,” (1893) in *Architecture in America*, eds. Coles and Reed, 1961, pp. 185-86 [BOOK]


Louis Sullivan, “Chapter 15, Retrospect,” in *America Builds*, ed. L. Roth, pp.361-64. [BOOK]
**Week IV: New York Skyscrapers of the Twenties and Thirties**


Douglas Haskell, “The Filing-Cabinet Building,” *Creative Art*, (June 1932), pp. 446-49. [READER]


**Week V: International Style and Modern Architecture in America**


Catherine Bauer, “Exhibition of Modern Architecture, Museum of Modern Art,” *Creative Art*, v. 10 (March 1932), pp. 201-06. [READER]


**Week VI: Debates at Mid-Century: Historicism/Vernacular**

Colin Rowe, La Tourette,” in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Others Essays*, 1976, pp.GET PAGES. [BOOK]


Philip Johnson: “100 Years, Frank Lloyd Wright and Us,” 1957, in *Philip Johnson Writings*, 1979, (pp.192-98). [BOOK]

**Week VII: Architecture and Language**

Robert Venturi, *Complexities and Contradictions in Architecture* (pp.22-103) (1966) [BOOK]


**Week VIII: Post-Structuralist Influence on Criticism**


Rowan Moore, “All That’s Solid Melts into Air,” Blueprint, (April 1990), pp. 26-31 [READER]

Week IX: Experiential Criticism: Bilbao and the Getty and Beyond


Week X: Typology Today


Hawthorne, Christopher, Barnes Foundation Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, ArchitecturalRecord.com (from print June 2012 page 46)

Week XI: Litigation against the Critic

   Review of
   *Why We Build: Power and Desire in Architecture*
   by Rowan Moore
   Harper Design, 392 pp., $30.00

   Xerox of New York Review of Books handed out in class


   by Paul Goldberger

   *October 12th, 2014*


Note Bene: Read the articles chronologically. They are NOT listed chronologically.

Week XII: Criticism in a Computerized Global Age


Week XIII: Student Critiques

Each student will select a building or an interior in New York to criticize and present during the last class. The selection must be approved by the instructor.