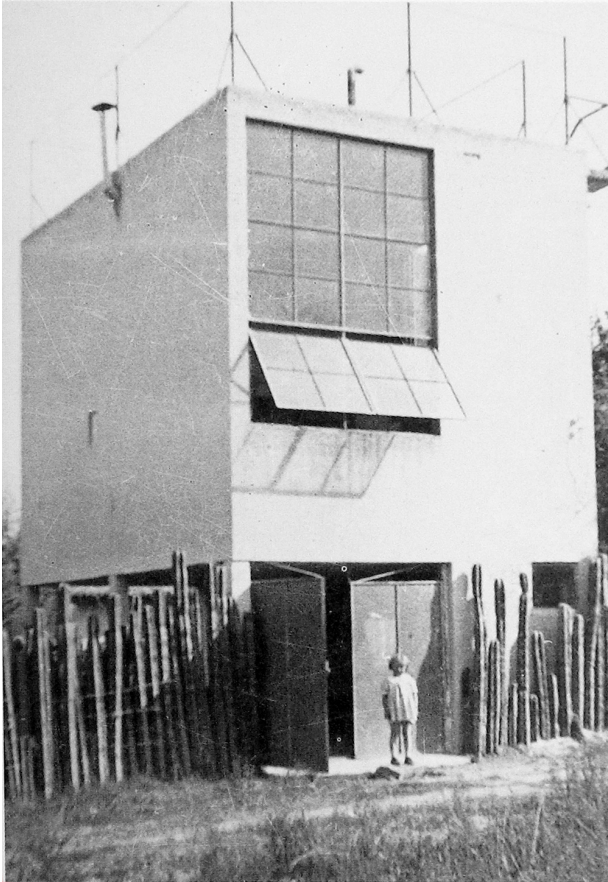


## A6813: (Radical) Functionalism in Latin America

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Fall 2017 | M 11a-1p | 3 Points | Avery 409



Life imposes its economic, social, and material conditions. The technical, within its means, is given the task of solving them in the best possible way; by way of the best avenue of maximum efficiency and minimum effort.  
–Juan O’Gorman, *Pláticas sobre Arquitectura*

This seminar will focus on the conceptualization and materialization of functionalist architecture throughout Latin America between the 1920s and 1940s. This architecture responded to the tremendous lack of public infrastructures (such as schools or housing facilities) as well as to what was then considered “bourgeois” aesthetic practices; practices that were in seeming opposition to social projects and ideals for the advancement of the population and culture in general. The research of this seminar will be centered on understanding and carefully investigating functionalism –an abstract utilitarian architecture primarily intended, in this context, for the masses– which manifested itself most powerfully in the urban centers of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay and in the artistic, social, political, and ideological messages from the architects and patrons who enabled and defined it. Specifically, the seminar will focus on four themes: the design, material, and structural bases for functionalist architecture; the new aesthetics that these propose; the translation of these to other non-public structures; and the tensions that developed through the introduction of local materials, formal references, furnishings, and art.

Through the seminar, we will look in-depth not only at the well-known work of Juan O’Gorman in Mexico City (whose polemics, buildings, and writings will serve as a case study and reactant for the earliest weeks of the semester), but also delve into the little-known work of Luiz Nunes in Recife, Juan Scasso in Montevideo, Alejandro Virasoro in Buenos Aires, Juan Legarreta in Mexico City, to name a few. The seminar will also look at the important work of émigrés who developed a socially minded critical work that linked itself to the place of its construction including Hans Schmidt and Paul Artaria’s Double House and Hannes Meyer’s proposals for

Housing in Mexico City, the Russian-born architects Wladimiro Acosta's work in Argentina and Gregori Warchavchik's work in Brazil.

The goal of the seminar is twofold: first, to have an in-depth understanding of functionalism, its theoretization, and its polemics (as it developed internationally), to analyze and evaluate the work in Latin America with the goal of writing historical accounts and critical essays about it, and to collect and gather information –from many available but scattered resources at the MoMA, Avery Library, New York Public Library, etc.– in an effort to develop an accessible “archive,” given that there are no books or other reference works that extensively address the topic of functionalism in Latin America. Second, to prepare and finalize the research and other materials (from this and last year's seminar) for publication.

**Requirements:**

Besides active participation in the seminar, discussion of the readings, and the presentation of examples to elucidate historical and theoretical terms and conditions, student teams will be asked to present their case studies and investigations, propose class readings, and organize a discussion format. It is expected that students will develop representational systems and organized graphic devices to present these case studies. As both a seminar and a research class, the goal is to find, organize and “process” historical and theoretical material, contextual information, and other important elements necessary for an understanding of the development and complexities of (radical) functionalist architecture in Latin America. Case studies, therefore, will ultimately be part of a larger seminar production: an archive of sorts, a mechanism –not unlike Koolhaas' Project on the City– to present, polemicize, and disseminate. As such, there will be discussions and proposals for its design and organization, the visual/graphic display of information, graphic conventions to (re)present architectural/urban information, the selection and organization of historical, theoretical, and critical information, etc. that will be produced for the seminar.

**Enrollment:**

Class size will be limited to 16 students in order to facilitate discussions and research agendas.

**September 11**      **Introduction: Functionalism, Polemics, and Latin America**

**September 18**      **Functionalism... The Basics**

Horatio Greenough, *Form and Function: Remarks on Art, Design, and Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 51-86 and 113-129.

Hannes Meyer, "The New World, 1926," "Building, 1928" and "Bauhaus and Society, 1929" in Claude Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer: Buildings, Projects and Writings* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1965), pp. 53-59.

"ABC Demands the Dictatorship of the Machine" in Ulrich Conrads, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), pp. 115-116.

Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), pp. 87-146.

Familiarize yourself with the organization (textual and graphic) and graphic material (photographs, diagrams, etc.) of Alberto Sartoris, *Gli Elementi Dell'Architettura Funzionale* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1935). Original available in the Rare Book room.

Further Reading:

Jean-Louis Cohen, "Functionalism and Machine Aesthetics" in *The Future of Architecture Since 1889* (New York: Phaidon, 2012), pp. 240-246.

Claude Schnaidt, "Introduction" in *Hannes Meyer: Buildings, Projects and Writings* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1965), pp. 17-59.

**September 25**      **Functionalism... Its Controversies**

Jonathan Bell and Ellie Stathaki, "Introduction: The House is not a Machine," in *The Modern House: Redefining Functionalism* (London: Laurence King, 2010), pp. 6-22.

Theodor Adorno, "Functionalism Today" and Robert Masiero, "Postscript," *Oppositions* 17 (Summer 1979), pp. 31-44.

Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," *Assemblage* 2 (February 1987), pp. 18-31.

Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy-Casares, "The Flowering of an Art" in *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1976), pp. 77-82.

Further Reading:

Andrew Benjamin, "Allowing Function Complexity: Notes on Adorno's 'Functionalism Today,'" *AA Files* 41 (Summer 2000), pp. 40-45.

**October 2**            **On the (Radical) Avant-Garde**

Peter Burger, "On the Problem of the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society" in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 35-54.

Gavin Grindon, "Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde," *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), pp. 79-96.

Philippe Sers, "The Radical Avant-Garde and the Contemporary Avant-Garde," *New Literary History* Vol. 41, No. 4 (Autumn 2010), pp. 847-854.

October 9

**Juan O’Gorman: (Radical) Functionalism and Social Progress**

(Re)familiarize yourself with the main points, argument, and organization of Le Corbusier, *Toward An Architecture* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 2007).

Beach Riley, “Social Progress and the New Architecture” in Esther Born, *The New Architecture of Mexico* (New York: The Architectural Record and William Morrow & Company, 1937), pp. 18-20.

Juan O’Gorman, “Presentation,” *Platicas sobre Arquitectura* (1933).

Further Reading:

Luis E. Carranza and Fernando Lara, *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art Technology and Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

Juan O’Gorman, “Escuelas Nuevas,” *Imagen* Vol. 1, No. 11 (September 1933), n.p.

October 16

**Juan O’Gorman: Between Art and Technology**

Juan O’Gorman, “Artistic” *Art and Useful Art* (1934)

Louis Althusser, “A Letter on Art Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 151-156.

Frances Toor, attrib., “New Schools and More Frescoes,” *Mexican Folkways* 4 (1932), pp. 212-213.

n.a., “Bridged Domesticity: The Diego Riveras have Two Roofs and One Menage,” *Arts & Decoration* 39 (1933), pp. 26-30.

Diego Rivera, “On Architecture and Mural Painting (The Architectural Forum, January 1932),” in Irene Herner de Larrea, *Diego Rivera’s Mural at the Rockefeller Center* (Mexico: Edicupes, 1990), pp. 154-158.

October 23

**Juan O’Gorman: Place, History, and (Local) Culture**

Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, “Functionalism” in *The International Style* (New York: Norton, 1966 [orig. 1932]), pp. 35-39.

Irving Gill, “The Home of the Future,” *The Craftsman* 30 (April-September, 1916), pp. 140-151, 220.

Diego Rivera, “The New Mexican Architecture: A House of Carlos Obregón,” *Mexican Folkways* Vol. 2, No. 4 (October - November 1926), pp. 19-23.

Manuel Gamio, “The Utilitarian Aspect of Folklore,” *Mexican Folkways* 1 (June-July 1925), pp. 9-10.

Diego Rivera, “Pulquería Paintings,” *Mexican Folkways* Vol. 2, No. 7 (June-July 1926), pp. 6-19.

## Case Study Presentations/Production:

The case study presentations will be based on the continued investigation into the architect(s), their work, the context within which they produced, their polemics, etc. For this, it is imperative that everyone read the section on the architect to be discussed that was produced last year. For important additions and/or changes to the work, please provide any reading and/or graphic material prior to the class in order for us to prepare for and better understand the material you will be addressing, allow us to formulate questions, find parallels between the works/cases/contexts, etc. In addition, consider the order, content, and graphic design of your presentation as a way to develop, modify, and/or improve the publication proposal [we will chose collectively how to do this and what to use, etc]. Finally, please provide the class with a handout with some of the basic information of your case study, as well as, brief textual and graphic information. The order of the presentations will be established in relationship to students' deadlines, material gathered/processed, and/or other circumstances; or, if all else fails, randomly.

The research and its presentation/dissemination of the case studies will be undertaken in teams of two students. The topics of investigation are: Luiz Nunes + Contemporaries (Recife/Brazil); Gregori Warchavchik (Sao Paulo/Brazil); Rino Levi (Sao Paulo/Brazil); Juan Scasso + Mauricio Cravotto (Montevideo/Uruguay); Alejandro Virasoro + Contemporaries (Buenos Aires/Argentina); Wladimiro Acosta (Buenos Aires/Argentina); Juan Legarreta (Mexico City/Mexico); European Emigres/Producers (ie. Hans Schmidt and Paul Artaria, Hannes Meyer, etc.)

General information on the topics can be found in:

Luis E. Carranza and Fernando Lara, *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art Technology and Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

Barry Bergdoll, et al., *Latin America in Construction: Architecture, 1955-1980* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015).

ICAA Documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art digital archive:  
<http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>

<b>October 30</b>	<b>Production/Organization/Design/Layout Discussion</b>
<b>November 6</b>	<b>No Class</b>
<b>November 13</b>	<b>Case Study Presentations</b>
<b>November 20</b>	<b>Case Study Presentations</b>
<b>November 27</b>	<b>Case Study Presentations + Final Discussion</b>
<b>December 15</b>	<b>Final Presentation</b>

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

### **Attendance and Class Participation (25% of grade):**

Each class will consist of a careful examination and in-depth discussion of the issues raised in the texts, presentations, etc. As such, attendance and active participation are expected as well as intensive reading and preparation of the material assigned. For many of the discussion sessions, you will be asked to bring in and present an example (visual or textual) that relates, expands, and enriches the discussion of the themes/issues discussed in class.

### **Reading Assignments:**

The reading assignments are required and must be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned. You are expected to read and prepare to discuss the required readings in order to facilitate a collective discussion of all of the material.

With some exceptions, all of the readings will be on-line. Many books have also been placed in Reserve at the Avery Library. For class, make sure to bring any notes and/or copies of materials to class for reference purposes during the presentations and discussions.

### **Case Study Presentations (15% of grade) + Final Case Study Production (60% of grade):**

This case study presentations and final productions are outlined above. It is expected that students fully take advantage of all of the rich and diverse resources that not only Avery Library has to offer but also the many libraries at Columbia University, the NYPL, etc. In many cases, when needed, make extensive use of the interlibrary loan and "Scan&Deliver" system of the university to secure material that may be located elsewhere. In addition, the Museum of Modern Art and other museums throughout the area hold extensive archives (visual, textual, etc.) that you should actively seek and consult. And, of course, the internet... but, be careful to verify and question the sources of scholarship posted there. It is, however, a great resource for images, films, and unpublished ruminations on some of the buildings and/or architects. You should also consider contacting scholars on the topic (even though, they may reside abroad). Finally, use your instructor as a source of information (he, no doubt, has material that might help your research) and guidance.

The final work is due on December 15, 2017. In fairness to all members of the seminar, please keep in mind that no late work will be accepted. No exceptions. In addition, any instance of plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty will be reported and dealt with according to the Policy on Academic Honesty set by Columbia University. All quotes and ideas from sources other than your own must be properly referenced. Constantly document and keep track of your sources.

The instructor reserves the right to modify this syllabus and requirements as needed.