

Course Syllabus

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Mark Rakatansky

Reading Buildings, Writing Buildings

This seminar will explore a variety of visualization and written techniques in the close-reading of buildings, contemporary as well as those of prior centuries, that have been engaged to investigate the significance of the built environment. The building that you choose to develop your own forms of close-reading for the course can be from any time and any place, chosen by you because you find it particularly engaging — either because it really intrigues you or really disturbs you.

Readings will include short texts and excerpts from the writings of Daniel Abramson, Giovanni Careri, Beatriz Colomina, Peter Eisenman, Robin Evans, Michel Foucault, Kenneth Frampton, Jeffrey Kipnis, Rem Koolhaas, Irving Lavin, Sylvia Lavin, Greg Lynn, Jacques-Alain Miller, Colin Rowe, Bernhard Siegart, Manfredo Tafuri, Bernard Tschumi, Robert Venturi, Aaron White, and Rudolf Wittkower. As writing is itself an act of design, we will track how these writings are constructed so that an intended argument is proposed, developed, and articulated through the narrative and rhetorical attentions in its written and illustrated design, as it tracks the attentions of the building under investigation.

We will not only explore these written techniques of close-reading that have proved influential in the past, but will also investigate new forms developing in the digital humanities. Students versed in digital visualizations techniques may elect, as an alternative to a substantially written analysis of their selected building, to produce either a written paper augmented with their graphic analysis or to develop a substantially graphic form of analysis augmented with their narrative text.

Just as critical readings have illuminated new ways of understanding buildings, in a reciprocal manner digital techniques developed through the design fields can now be used to intensify the analysis of design, sharpening the visual acuity and agency in research and presentation. So parallel to an examination of the techniques of the writers listed above, we will explore how innovative 2-D and 3-D modeling and visualization techniques can move beyond merely documenting a building to provide new forms of critical and historical analysis. The course will investigate the diverse ways digital visualization can be a crucial new lens of perception and communication.

In every reading — whether by an architect, critic, historian, or theorist — the building is re-constructed in the act of writing, even and especially if the author is the very architect of the building in question. These exchanges will be especially evident when you compare the various written commentary on the building that you choose to analyze as your major project for the course, as every reading is an act of adaptive reuse of the building for the issues the writer seeks to convey.

So while it is not possible to discern or preserve some absolute intention of the building or its architect, what can be discerned and explored are various forms of attention in the building. These forms of attention can

lead to various hypotheses regarding the relations of its architectural form and the cultural/political intentions enacted through the building. Formal techniques can be utilized to draw forth questions of meaning, and questions of meaning can be utilized to draw forth questions of form — developing corroborating evidence to cross-reference the building's architectural and cultural positions through what are often seen as divergent forms of architectural analysis (biographical, economic, formal, iconographic, institutional, material, political, social, structural, typological).

January 16:

Introduction: A Few of Your Favorite (and Least Favorite) Buildings

January 23:

Architects and Critics Tracking Changes (in the Work and their Minds): Jeffrey Kipnis and Raphael Moneo on Herzog and de Meuron

Jeffrey Kipnis, "The Cunning of Cosmetics (A Personal Reflection on the Architecture of Herzog & De Meuron)" in *A Question of Qualities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 99-113.

Rafael Moneo, "Herzog & de Meuron" in *Theoretical Anxieties and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 364-405

January 30:

Architects Reading Against the Grain: Rem Koolhaas and Robert Venturi

Rem Koolhaas, "How Perfect Perfection Can Be: The Creation of Rockefeller Center" in *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monicelli Press, 1994), 160-207 [208-233 also recommended].

Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 13-105 [106-131 also recommended].

Recommended:

Alan Colquhoun, "Sign and Substance: Reflections on Complexity, Las Vegas, and Oberlin" in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 139-151.

February 6:

Reading Constructive Form: Kenneth Frampton on Carlo Scarpa and Aaron White on Bernard Tschumi

Kenneth Frampton, "Carlo Scarpa and The Adoration of the Joint" in *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 299-233.

Aaron White, "Ambivalence as Agency: Bernard Tschumi's Alfred Lerner Hall," José Aragüez, ed., *The Building* (Zürich: Lars Muller, 2016), 202-209.

February 13:

New Modes of Digital Analysis

Manfredo Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect": G.B. Piranesi, Heterotopia, and the Voyage" in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 25-54.

Recommended:

Tafuri, "The Historicity of the Avant-Garde: Piranesi and Eisenstein" and Sergei Eisenstein, "Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms" in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, 55-90.

February 20:

Reading Tectonic Actors: Beatriz Colomina and Sylvia Lavin on Windows (in Le Corbusier, Loos, and Neutra); Robin Evans and Bernhard Siegert on Doors

Beatriz Colomina, "Window" in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 283-335.

Sylvia Lavin, "Richard Neutra and the Psychology of the American Spectator," *Grey Room*, No. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 42-63.

Robin Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," in *Translations from Drawings to Buildings and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association: 1997), 55-92.

Bernhard Siegert, "Doors: On the Materiality of the Symbolic," *Grey Room*, No. 47 (Autumn, 2012): 6-23.

February 27:

Project mid-presentations (for Kinne-trip traveling students)

March 6:

Project mid-presentations

March 13:

No class: Spring Break

March 20:

Reading Experiential Form: Giovanni Careri and Irving Lavin on Bernini

Giovanni Careri, "The Altar of Sant' Andrea al Quirinale" in *Bernini: Flights of Love, the Art of Devotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 87-101.

Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Arts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), excerpts.

March 27:

Reading Institutional Form: Michel Foucault and Jacques-Alain Miler on Bentham's Panopticon and Daniel Abramson on John Soane's Bank of England

Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power," in Foucault, *Power / Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 146-165.

Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device," *October*, Vol. 41 (Summer, 1987): 3-29.

Daniel Abramson, *Building the Bank of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), excerpts.

April 3:

Architects Reading Historians (Reading Architects): Palladio re-imagined through Rudolf Wittkower, Colin Rowe, Peter Eisenman, and Greg Lynn.

Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 70-76.

Colin Rowe, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 1-29.

Peter Eisenman, *Palladio Virtuel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), excerpts.

Greg Lynn. "New Variations on the Rowe Complex," *ANY: No. 7/8, Form Work: Colin Rowe* (1994): 38-43.

April 10:

Project Presentations

April 17:

Project Presentations

April 24:

No class: Final studio reviews

May 1:

No class: Final studio reviews

May 4:

Final projects due

Course Summary:

Date

Details
