

"If the teaching doesn't feel like it's forcing something upon you, it's not good teaching."
Shunryu Suzuki

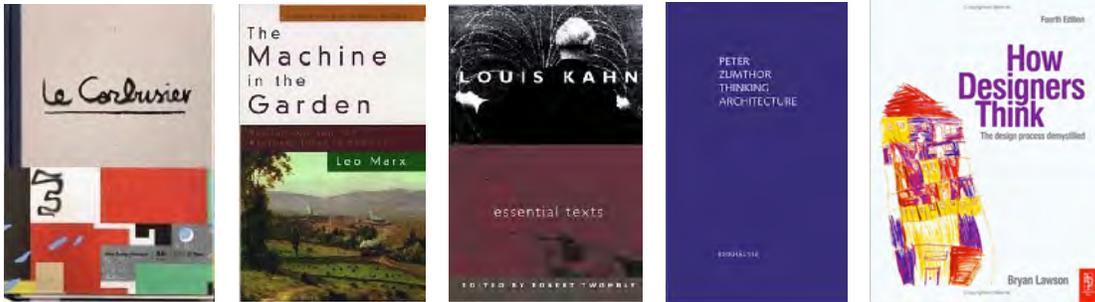
4051 Parti: On Thinking, Criticality and Architectural Theory

Thinking is what characterizes our species. Thinking is our ability to associate and articulate sensations, emotions and ideas into communicable discourse by means of a language. Although such intellectual activity may take place in different formats (e.g., visually, musically, mathematically, etc.), it is the verbal language what, arguably, constitutes its most common and powerful expression. **Criticality** is next to thinking in defining homo-sapiens. Criticality is our capacity to compare actual and ideal circumstances in order to deliver a judgment or appraisal of their relationship. Criticality is directly linked to self-consciousness in the sense that it demands us to consider the bias(es) we bring to any situation. It depends on taking a step aside and reflect upon what has or is happening vis-à-vis our position and values. Inquiry, rationality, logic, analysis, theory, ideology, and philosophy are all byproducts of these two fundamental functions defining who we are.

Architecture, of course, is dependent on verbal thinking and criticism although, when we begin to study it, it is not quite clear why or how. After all, buildings are material constructs responding to very obvious practical and functional demands. Yet, the more we engage architecture, the more we realize that a building is only the tip of a huge iceberg, most of which is immaterial! In other words, immateriality is at the core of the material ...

This class offers you the opportunity to dive into and investigate, learn, and apply the highest bio-tech emergent ever developed — **critical thinking**— in the context of a field that you love: **architecture**. Doing so will demand you to study and practice the art of understanding, building, and deconstructing arguments, ideas, beliefs ... theories! So, get ready to ask yourself: Where do I stand? What do I believe and why? Can I successfully debate its merit? How far I am willing to go for it? Am I biased or blind to something essential? What do I profess?

This class is not a survey course of past and present architectural theories. It is not about learning who said what when. Learning how to think is vastly more important than being smart at repeating what others have said. Thus, this class is about learning how to read, think, write, and talk about architecture and through it, about the subjective, the objective, the intersubjective and beyond. It is about the power of immateriality and rhetoric in creating and receiving architectural meaning and value.



“Our lives end the day we become silent about things that really matter.” Martin Luther King

Pedagogy

The class will be divided in 5 pedagogic units of three weeks each (see schedule), each addressing different topics. Each learning module will be organized in the same way:

Introductory Lecture: I will offer a wide, synthetic and provocative outlook of the issues to be covered.

Writing Review: you will be able to discuss your written work with me or the T'A'

Q+A (Question and Answer) sessions: oral discussion of the ongoing reading assignment. You should come ready to offer thoughtful questions and observations. This means, you'll have them written. Thoughtfulness or criticality means to have more than just one interpretation of the text as well as making meaningful associations, rational speculations, and the like. I will randomly call on students to offer, respond, or lead a discussion.

A+D (Argument and Defense) sessions: oral presentation and defense of your position in regards to the assigned reading/topic. This will provide you with the opportunity to test the ideas behind your in-progress writing assignment. Again, you are expected to show up fully prepared. I will randomly call on students to present, critic or defend an argument.

Written Essay: you will offer a written critical review of the reading.

Critical Reading *

The type of reading you will be required to do in this class moves beyond finding information or locating an author's purpose or identifying main ideas (as useful as these skills might be). It will ask you to dig deep in theoretical texts to ferret out meaning, systems of relationships between ideas, and examine your own response to these ideas and their impact on the world around them. In short, critical reading requires that you question intensely.

For critical reading, you cannot sit back and wait. These texts are not necessarily easy nor are you expected to swallow the words without consideration. True reading demands that you first *actively* listen to the author without projecting your own agenda. In this sense, you might imagine that you are engaged in a conversation with the author and once he has completed what he wants to say to you, you are in a position to speak back, to say something of your own, something meaningful and thought-out. If you have no response, you are reading lazily and need to instead, read critically: to formulate a response. Such response involves analysis, synthesis, and creativity.

* This section has been borrowed from Professor Martha Bradley's syllabus for this same class.



"Value judgments are destructive to our proper business, which is curiosity and awareness."
John Cage

Required Books

Instead of covering a wide varieties of articles, authors, and theories and therefore necessarily stay on the surface, this class will focus on two sources. This will allow us more time to study, reflect, and go deeper on what is being read. The result will be a more informed, focused, and sophisticated discussion. The two books we will use are:

Michael Benedikt, ***For an Architecture of Reality*** (New York: Lumen Books, 1987)
Juhani Pallasmaa, ***Encounters, Architectural Essays*** (Helsinki, Finland: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2008)

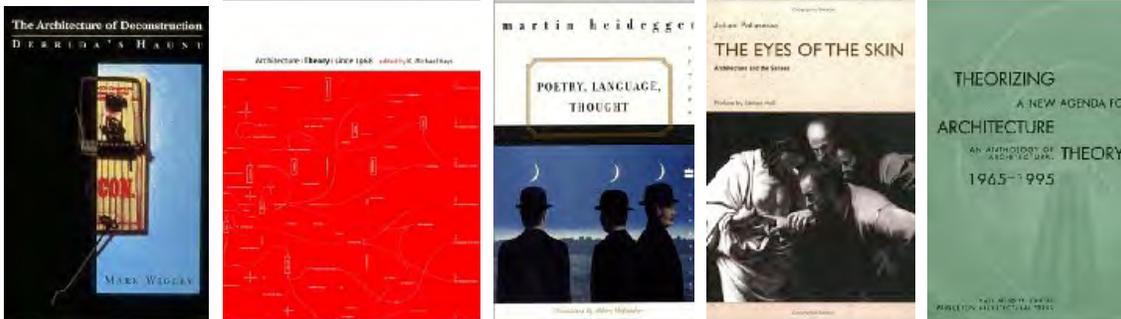
Note: the online cost for the texts is about \$12 for Benedikt's book and \$73 for Pallasmaa. That's about \$100 for books. In order to reduce your expenses, I encourage that students share the cost of purchasing Pallasmaa's work (and then share the text).

Bibliography of Reference

As we move into the semester and you begin to ask particular questions and work toward your final paper, you will want to check other sources. Here is a list of important texts you may want to consult. Ask me if you need any advice.

Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1955) Translated by Cosimo Bartoli
Le Corbusier, *Toward a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986) Translation by Frederick Etchells
Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997)
K.Michael Hays (Ed.), *Architecture / Theory / Since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1998)
Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971)
Louis Kahn, *Essential Texts* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2003) Robert C. Twombly (ed.)
Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford Univesity Press, 2000)
Kate Nesbitt (Ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture. An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996)
Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, the MIT Press, 1984)
Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: MOMA, 1977)
Vitruvius, *The 10 Books of Architecture*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1960) Translated by Morris H. Morgan

Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, the MIT Press, 1993)
Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Birkhauser Basel, 2006)



"In a complete and successful work there are hidden masses of implications, a veritable world which reveals itself to those whom it may concern — which means: to those who deserve it."
Le Corbusier

Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Fridays from 11-12 AM in my office or by special appointments (done via email or personally). The T.A. will announce his office hours.

Grading

Evaluation of the your performance will be done as follows:

(1) Class Participation	25%
(2) Written Essays (Essays 1 thru 4)	40%
(3) Final Paper (Essay #5)	25%
(4) Student Evolution	10%

Medical/Personal Problems

Students with medical problems or family emergencies which will keep them from class or cause an assignment to be submitted late are expected to notify me or the T.A. as soon as possible, and preferably before a project is due. Verification of illness or family emergencies may be required (i.e., physician's statement, obituary, etc.).

Instructor's Absence

Professors are involved in a variety of activities in addition to their teaching: research, scholarship, professional practice, university and professional service, and other university related activities that may cause them to be absent from class from time to time. I will inform you,

whenever possible, of any expected absence from class and do my best to make up any time missed.