

The Critic as Producer: Essays on Architecture
Columbia University GSAPP / Fall 2014

James Graham, jdg2153@columbia.edu

This seminar will examine the role of critics, criticism, and the essay form in shaping how we understand architecture, in public life and within architectural discourse. We will consider reviews as testing grounds for the author's own intellectual commitments (theoretical, architectural, political) as those ideas are refracted through the work of others. Readings will include foundational texts in critical theory, histories of reviewing and essay writing, and predominantly the essays themselves. We will explore the complex responses to buildings across generational shifts through selected case studies, and we will speak with practitioners of the review in various forms. Finally, we will consider current trajectories within architectural writing and publishing, particularly a recent resurgence in the essay format (spawned in part by the rise of digital publication formats).

This seminar is being taught in conjunction with the launch of *The Avery Review*, a new digital journal for critical essays on architecture run by the GSAPP Office of Publications (www.averyreview.com). While the essays there will not be required reading, the seminar is intended in part to help shape the direction of the journal and to explore the theoretical and historical underpinnings of this mode of writing, and students are asked to follow the journal so that it might enter our conversations from time to time.

Students will be expected to participate vigorously in all class discussions, take an active role in leading the seminar once in the course of the semester, complete one group presentation on an architectural magazine or journal, and produce their own critical work in the form of two essays (strictly 2,000–3,000 words). These essays will then be workshopped in class and revised for final submission. Each essay will be worth 25% of the final grade, with participation and presentations making up the remaining 50%.

1. Introduction (4 September)

2. The Essay Form and Literary Criticism (11 September)

- Michel de Montaigne, “To the Reader,” “On Repentance,” and the translator’s introduction in *Essays*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 9-23 and 235-250.
- Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Criticism” (1711).
- Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (New York: Verso Books, 1984).

3. Origins of Art and Architectural Criticism (18 September)

- William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), ed. Ronald Paulson (London: Paul Mellon Centre, 1997), 17-42.
- Marc-Antoine Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture* (1753), trans. Wolfgang and Anni Herrmann (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1977), 1-38, intro. vii-xxii optional.
- Denis Diderot, Introductory pages to “The Salon of 1765” and “Notes on Painting: To Serve as an Appendix to the Salon of 1765,” in *Diderot on Art* vol. 1, trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3-7 and 191-240. The PDF also includes a somewhat random selection of descriptions from the remainder of “The Salon of 1765.”
- Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1846,” in *Art in Paris, 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1965), 41-120. Descriptions should be quickly browsed, focus on the argumentative kernels of this essay.

4. Theorizing the Critical (25 September)

- György Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper,” in *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1-18.
- Viktor Shklovsky, “First Preface,” “Ully, Ully, Martians,” “Regarding ‘The Great Metalworker,’” and “The Monument to the Third International,” in *Knight’s Move*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 3-4, 21-24, 54-57, and 69-70.
- Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1934), in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008), 79-95.
- T. W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form” (1958), trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer 1984), 151-171.

5. Reflections on Modernity: The Crystal Palace (2 October)

- Digby Wyatt, “The Construction of the Building,” in *The Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue* (London: Spicer Brothers, 1851), 49-81. (Skim this.)
- Gottfried Semper, “Science, Industry, Art” (1852), in *The Theory of Decorative Art*, ed. Isabelle Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 162-168.
- John Ruskin, *The Opening of the Crystal Palace Considered in some of its Relations to the Prospects of Art* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1854).
- Sigfried Giedion, “The Great Exhibition, London, 1851,” in *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 184-190.
- Mark Crinson, “Ruskin v. Jones” and “Copies and Commodities,” in *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 54-71.
- Peter Sloterdijk, “The Crystal Palace,” in *In the World Interior of Capital*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 169-176.

Essay #1 should be circulated to the class by 7pm on Monday, October 7

6. Meaning, Technology, Modernism (9 October)

- Louis Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* (March 1896): 403-409.
- Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Art and Craft of the Machine” (1901), in *The Theory of Decorative Art*, ed. Isabelle Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 202-212.
- Adolf Loos, “Plumbers” (1898), “Ornament and Crime” (1908), and “In Praise of the Present” (1908), in *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998), 82-88, 157-159, and 167-176.
- Reyner Banham, “A Home is not a House,” *Art in America* 2 (April 1965); “The Great Gizmo,” *Industrial Design* (September 1965); “The Triumph of Software,” *New Society* (October 1968).

7. Student Critiques of Essay #1 (16 October)

8. New Yorkers on New York (23 October)

- Louis Mumford, articles from *Architectural Record*: “The Case Against ‘Modern Architecture’” (April 1962), “The Disappearing City” (October 1962), and “Yesterday’s City of Tomorrow” (November 1962), in *The Lewis Mumford Reader*, ed. Donald L. Miller (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 73-83, 108-112, and 176-183.
- Ada Louise Huxtable, “The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered” (1985), “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Buildings” (29 May 1966), “A Vision of Rome Dies” (14 July 1966), and “How We Lost Lower Manhattan” (21 October 1966), in *On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change* (New York: Walker and Company, 2008), 132-139, 372-377, and 405-412.
- Herbert Muschamp, articles from the *New York Times*: “In this Dream Station Future and Past Collide” (20 June 1993), “Architecture as Social Action, and Vice Versa” (27 February 1994), “Preserving the Shrines of an Age, Not the Spirit” (30 April 1995), “Remodeling New York for the Bourgeoisie” (24 September 1994), “The Miracle in Bilbao” (7 September 1997), and “Zaha Hadid’s Urban Mothership” (8 June 2003), in *Hearts of Glass: The Selected Writings of Herbert Muschamp* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 185-189, 226-229, 295-297, 317-322, 424-435, and 735-740.
- Michael Sorkin, “Save the Whitney,” *Village Voice* (25 June 1985), see also Alexandra Lange’s commentary in *Writing about Architecture*.
- Michael Kimmelman, articles from the *New York Times*: “Restore a Gateway to Dignity” (12 February 2012), “An Arena as Tough as Brooklyn” (1 November 2012), “In Renderings for a Library Landmark, Stacks of Questions, Still” (30 January 2013), “Defending a Scrap of Soul Against MoMA” (13 May 2013), “Flexibility and Moxie Can Save West Side” (21 March 2014). The media coverage of Kimmelman’s activist criticism, particularly where Madison Square Garden is concerned, is also worth browsing through.

9. Journals and Sites of Criticism (30 October)

I’ll be out of town, we’ll schedule a makeup session the following week. In small teams, students will analyze and present on some of the major journals in critical architectural discourse across the last few decades (possibilities include *AA Files*, *AD*, *Any*, *Architectural Record*, *The Architectural Review*, *Assemblage*, *Grey Room*, *Hunch*, *Log*, *Oppositions*, *Perspecta*, &c). Journals to be selected by students.

10. Glass Logics of Capitalism (6 November)

- Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *New Left Review* I/146 (July-August 1984): 53-92, and “The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism, and Land Speculation,” in *New Left Review* I/228 (March-April 1998).
- Reinhold Martin, “Materiality: Mirrors,” in *Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2010), 93-122.
- Herbert Muschamp, “The Thrill of Outer Space for Earthbound Lives,” *New York Times* (20 September 1992).
- Simon Sadler, “Steve Jobs: Architect,” *Places* online (12 March 2013), <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/steve-jobs-versus-rem-koolhaas/37722>
- Paul Goldberger, “The Shape of Things to Come,” *Vanity Fair* online (January 2014), <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/01/apple-facebook-google-headquarters-architecture>
- Browse *CLOG: Apple* (2012).

11. The Critics: A Roundtable (13 November), participants TBD

12. Formats: Contemporary Publishing Practices (20 November)

- Pier Vittorio Aureli, *Less is Enough: On Architecture and Asceticism* (Moscow: Strelka Press, 2013), available as ebook or print on demand—you might also explore other titles in the Strelka series and read their editorial statement online.
- Keller Easterling, *Subtraction*, Critical Spatial Practice 4 (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).
- Detlef Mertins, *Modernity Unbound: Other Histories of Architectural Modernity*, Architecture Words series (London: Architectural Association Publications, 2011).

Essay #2 should be circulated to the class by 7pm on Monday, November 24

13. Thanksgiving, No Class (27 November)

14. Student critiques of Essay #2 (4 December)

Revised versions of Essay #1 and #2 are due by Wednesday, December 17