

## BLUE ORANGES: A Seminar on Architecture's Relentless Affair with Ornament

WEDNESDAY 2-4:50 HHN 204

15 Classes

Method of Assessment: 40% class participation / 60% Research Project

### I. ABSTRACT

What is it about ornament that keeps arresting architecture? Did the modernists not eradicate such unnecessary and excessive tendencies? Why does so much contemporary architecture seem predisposed towards the production of a wider gap between the appearance of things and their reality?

This seminar will trace the long and often oblique relationship between ornament and architecture. We will explore the ways by which architecture has become implicated in the philosophical debate surrounding our ability to actualize a new world through design. We will read widely, crisscrossing the discursive landscape of metaphysics and aesthetic theory, to gain perspective on why ornament might be indispensable to a practice, such as architecture, which is based on the abstraction of reality. We will debate the intricacies of how changes in the meaning of ornament might embody historical shifts in what we think architecture can do or say.

We will start with the classics, move thematically through the philosophical debates surrounding architecture's engagement with ornament and then follow the polemics defining the why and how of ornament. Our path will jump across time periods yet can be described as generally chronological.

As such, the seminar will be both a **theoretical foray** into architecture's discursive past and a **critical history** of the use and abuse of ornament. Our theoretical journey will have us reading the likes of Benjamin, Loos, Kracauer, Gideon, Gadamer, Barthes, Jameson, Alberti, Vitruvius, Bataille, etc... In other words, it will be an eclectic serving of theorists, philosophers and critics. Alongside our readings, we will be taking a close look at buildings with the goal of learning how to read architecture through its many ornamental gaps. We will catalogue the different approaches to ornamentation and study the effects they create with the aim of apprehending what it is that this architectural operation does to our ability to see and practice architecture.

This is a theory seminar tailored for designers. In other words, after becoming better critics and more knowledgeable architects, our ambition is to develop a more nuanced understanding of what is at stake when we submit or reject our discipline's impulse towards ornamentation.

The readings are plentiful and not easy. Class participation in each meeting is key. **By 6pm, the evening before our class, everyone should email me TWO (2) questions or provocations regarding the readings.** Our first nine classes will begin with a lecture-- framing the readings and outlining the main themes-- followed by a group discussion of the readings. The next four will be focused on student presentations.

## II. SCHEDULE:

### Breakdown of 14 week Seminar:

9 weeks - readings, discussion, & lecture

5 weeks - student-led presentations

1 week - concluding lecture

### WEEK 1 - Classical Metaphysics & Its Relation To Ornament

Alberti, Leon Battista "On the Art of Building in Ten Books" Book Six: Ornament, 1472.

Vitruvius, "The Ten Books on Architecture" Book 1: Fundamental Principles of Architecture, Book 2: Origin of the Dwelling House, Book 4: Ornament of the Orders, Book 7: The Decadence of Fresco Painting, 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC.

Palladio, Andrea "The Four Books of Architecture" First book: Chapter XII: Of the five orders made use by the ancients, Chapter XIII: Of the dwelling and diminution of columns, and of the intercolumniation and pilasters. 1570.

Adorno, Theodor W. "functionalism today," 1953.

Plato, "Aesthetics"

Deleuze, Gilles "What is Philosophy?" 1991.

Architects: Parthenon, Rome, Palladian Villas, Corbusier, Loos, the Gothic,

Wagner, Mies, Miralles, Nouvel, Gehry, Moneo, Venturi,

### WEEK 2 – The Impulse Towards Excess: Industrialization, and the Ontological Debates

Bataille, Georges, "Architecture" 1962.

Bloch, Ernst "Formative Education, Engineering, Form, Ornament," 1957.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "The Ontological Foundation of the Occasional and the Decorative," 1981.

Vattimo, Gianni "Ornament/Monument," 1992.

Grosz, Elizabeth "Architectures of Excess," 2001.

Architects, Schinkel, Gideon, Horta, Louis Sullivan, August Perret, Otto Wagner,

Gaudi, Piranesi, Paul Rudolph, Edward Durrell Stone, Greg Lynn, RUR, Scarpa

### WEEK 3 – The criminalization of Ornament: Modernist Rage and Restraint

Loos, Adolf "Ornament and Crime," 1908.

Le Corbusier, "Towards a New Architecture" Three Reminders to Architects, 1923.

Evans, Robin "Mies Van de Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries," 1990.

Krauss, Rosalind "The Grid, the /cloud/, the detail," 1994.

Sola-Morales, Ignasi de "Mies van de Rowe and Minimalism," 1994

Foster, Hal "Design and Crime," 2002.

Architects: Mies, Corbusier, Gropius, Rudolf Schwartz, Schindler, Meier, Eisenman, Scott Cohen, Maltzan, Siza

#### WEEK 4 –Theorizing the City as Mass Ornament & the Emergence of Semiotics

Ludwig Hilberseimer, "Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays," 1922.  
Barthes, Roland "Semiology and Urbanism," 1967.  
Simmel, Georg, "The Metropolis and Mental life," 1903.  
Eco, Umberto, "function and Sign: the semiotics of Architecture," 1984.  
Benjamin, Walter "Paris, Capital of the Nineteen Century," 1930.  
Reeh, Henrik "Ornaments of the Metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and the Modern Urban Culture," 2004.  
Rappaport, Nina "Deep decoration" 2006

Architects: Wagner, Koolhaas, Corbusier, Hilberseimer, Meis, Gehry, Tschumi, Ito, Roche, Harrison & Abrammovitz

#### WEEK 5 – Postmodernism & The Big Tussle Surrounding Meaning

Johnson, Philip "Seven Crutches of modern Architecture," 1955.  
Stirling, James "Regionalism and Modern Architecture," 1957.  
Scott Brown, Denise and Venturi, Robert "On Ducks and Decoration," 1968.  
Martin, Reinhold "Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and postmodernism Again," 2010.  
Moneo, Rafael "Aldo Rossi: the Idea of Architecture and the Modena Cemetery", 1973.  
Colquhoun, Alan "Sign and Substance: Reflections on complexity, Las Vegas, and Oberlin" 1974.

Architects: Rossi, Venturi, Moore, Krier, Site, Graves, Stirling

#### WEEK 6 –Ornament As Revolutionary Politics & the Emergence of the Image

Hithcock, Henry-Russell, "The International Style Twenty Years After," 1951.  
Smithson, Alison and Peter "The New Brutalism," 1957.  
Cook, Peter "Zoom and 'Real Architecture,'" 1964. Superstudio  
"Invention Design & Evasion Design," 1967. Jameson, Frederic  
"The cultural logic of Late Capitalism," 1991. Debord, Guy "The Society of the Spectacle," 1967.

Architects: Archigram , Archizoom, Metabolist, Superstudio, Yona Friedman, Alison & Peter Smithson

#### WEEK 7 – Technology, Structure And A New Aesthetic Of Disclosure

Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Nature of Materials: A Philosophy," 1943.  
Fuller, Buckminster R. "Designing a New Industry," 1946.  
Schwarz, Rudolf "Concerning the Building Art," 1951.  
Rowe, Colin and Slutzky, Robert "Transparency; Literal & Phenomenal," 1956.  
Barthes, Roland, "The Eiffel Tower," 1979.  
Benjamin, Walter "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1929.  
Rajchman, John "Constructions: Abstraction," 1998.

Architects: Eiffel, Bruno Taut, Mies, Nervi, Wachsmann, Fuller, Bauhuas, Nuetra, Nouvel, Ito, Miralles

## Week 8 – The Digital Generation: Data, Patterns, & A New Love Affair With Ornament

Picon, Antoine "Ornament: The Politics of Architecture & Subjectivity," 2013.  
Actar "From Control to Design: Parametric / Algorithmic Architecture," 2009.  
Achim Menges, Sean Ahlquist "Computational Design Thinking: Computation Design Thinking (AD Reader)," 2011.  
Mario Carpo, "The Alphabet and the Algorithm," 2011.  
Sylvia Lavin, "Kissing Architecture (Point: Essays on Architecture)," 2012.  
Turing, Alan "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," 1950.  
Nelson, Theodore H. "A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing and the Indeterminate," 1965.

Architects: RUR, Ito, SANAA, contemporary parametric design, Eisenman, FOA

## WEEK 9 – A Reconsideration of the Skin: Theorizing Optics & the Dissolution of Reality

Taylor, Mark C. "Reflections on Skin," 1997.  
Herzog and De Meuron, "Approaches to Viewing a Building," 1991.  
Wigley, Mark "The Architecture of Atmosphere," 1998.  
Haraway, Donna, "The Persistence of Vision," 1991.  
Crary, Jonathan "Modernizing Vision," 1988.  
K. Michael Hays, "Architecture's Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde," 2009.  
Martin, Reinhold. "Atrocities or the curtain wall as Mass Medium," 2009.  
Kipnis, Jeffrey "The Cunning of Cosmetics"

Architects: Koolhaas, Siza, Diller Scofidio, Herzog and de Meuron, Scharoun, Gehry,

### III. STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECT

Each student will choose a research topic to develop as his or her final project. The topic can range from a historical episode in the story of ornament to a theoretical problem associated with the debates surrounding ornament. The research must be grounded by the criticism of built form. By this we mean, that the trajectory of the work must be framed by the close study of either a building; the work of an architect or a group of architects from a particular period; or a collection of architects/buildings across time. It is critical that students an area of interest a early on then work with their instructor to develop this into a thesis by the first submission on February 12.

The labor following this submission should be focused on refinement through a deeper reading of the structures and a closer reading of the selected texts. The goal of this research is to arrive at a tentative answer of what is at stake when we do architecture by zeroing in on a specific area of study pertaining to the problematic surrounding ornament.

The **deliverables** for this project consist of following THREE (3) items:

1. A one-Page abstract due on **February 12**
2. In-class presentation of on-going research during the last 5 weeks of class
3. 5-10 movie wherein each student describes their project using both a personal narrative and images of work and diagrams. **Due May 13 @ 8am.**