PHIL2214ID

Philosophy of the Built Environment

3 Contact Hours, 3 Credits

Proposed Pathways Designation: Individual and Society

Co-taught by Professors from Architectural Technology and Philosophy (in Social Science)

Prerequisites: None

**Course Description**:

The course is guided by the question, ‘what role does the built environment play in how the individual and collective relate to society?’ Theories and concepts regarding dwelling, designing and building architecture from philosophy, sociology, architectural theory, art history, and others are explored and analyzed. They are also the basis for reflecting upon and evaluating the development of the built environment through time as a response to existential, ethical, cultural, environmental, technological and aesthetic demands.

**Assessments**: Three low-stakes writing assignments answering questions about course readings, three low-stakes presentations reporting on course readings, a midterm group presentation and individual paper, and a final project consisting of a group presentation and individual paper.

**Course Objectives: General and Interdisciplinary Outcomes are outlined in detail below the schedule. Each class session in the schedule lists intended course objectives.**

SAMPLE SEQUENCE OF TOPICS AND TIME ALLOCATIONS\*

**Week 1 Foundations: History and Definitions in Architecture (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Kenneth Frampton - Chapters 1 through 3 (pages 12 through 40) from Modern Architecture: A Critical History. Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture (Pages 1 - 20)
* Learning Objective:  Learn about the cultural, urban and technological transformations that ushered in the modern era in architectural theory. Consider and evaluate the claim that architecture should welcome the complexity and contradictions of urban experience, and that making and experiencing architecture are always “critical-historical acts”. Evaluate the idea that the strength and value of our contact with buildings will depend on historical knowledge.

**Week 2 Foundations: History and Definitions of the Built Environment (Philosophy)** Ancient, Modern thinking about the built environment.

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Selections of Plato’s *Timaeus*, Aristotle’s *Physics*, and René Descartes’ *Meditations*.
* *Learning Objective*: Draw connections and contrasts between Ancient and Early Modern attitudes about the natural world and the built environment. Evaluate to what extent the built environment is an extension of or a break from the natural environment and what significance this may have for the goals of architecture.

**Week 3 Placelessness and Dwelling (Philosophy)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Heidegger - “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”; Relph – “Reflections on the Emergence, Aspects and Essence of Place”
* *Learning Objective:* Learn and apply phenomenological concepts in reflecting on lived and abstract space. Understand and analyze Heidegger’s concept of building as a fundamental feature of dwelling in the world. Identify and distinguish Relph’s various definitions of natural, built, and abstract spaces. Reflect on and evaluate the conceptual role of placelessness in situating place.

**Week 4 Place and Space (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Umberto Eco (excerpts from ReThinking Architecture). Collage City, by [Fred Koetter](https://mitpress.mit.edu/author/fred-koetter-3354) and [Colin Rowe](https://mitpress.mit.edu/author/colin-rowe-7711). Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino. Vidler…
* Architecture: Brutalism, International Style, Archigram
* *Learning Objective:* Study the relationship between space and place in the built environment. Compare and contrast theories on the origins of architecture (Laugier’s “primitive hut” and Sempers “Four points of Architecture”). Hyperreality (Las Vegas, Disney)

**Week 5 The Terror of Time and Verticality (Philosophy)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Harries, Karsten. “Building and the Terror of Time: in *Perspecta*, 19 No. 2 (1982): 58-69.
* *Learning Objective:*Understand and analyze what Harries means by the “terror” of time, and its connection to architecture. Reflect on and evaluate his contention that shelter and monuments are ways for us to cope with decay and mortality.

**Week 6 Space and Event (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:* Sanford Quinter, Architectures of Time.
* Architect: Bernard Tschumi and the engagement of space through the study of montage and film theory as a means of design.
* *Learning Objective:* understanding of how the concept of the event plays a role in architecture through programming.

**Week 7 Project/Assessment** - A presentation in regards to a topic in the Philosophy of the built environment.

**Week 8 Form and Function (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Eisenman, Post Functionalism. Symbolism, sign, signifier (Baudrillard)
* Architect: Peter Eisenman, Adolf Loos (Ornament and Crime)
* *Learning Objective:* Understand and evaluate the idea that symbolism in the built environment is a way to convey higher language through the use of visual elements, motifs, and creates buildings that are meaningful and reflective of their cultural context and inner connotations.

**Week 9 Form and Function (Philosophy)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Harries – “Space, Place, and Ethos”, Harries – “Philosophy and the Task of Architecture”
* *Learning Objective:* Understand and analyze Harries’ ideas about the impact of “art for art’s sake” movement on architectural theory. Reflect on and evaluate the roles of form and function in the design of a building, and what the status of “ornamentation” is as an element.

**Week 10 Typology (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:* Raphael Moneo’s “On Typology”
* Architect: Aldo Rossi
* *Learning Objective:*Understand how architectural type plays a role in how society collectively recognizes and affiliates with the built environment. Study the role of typology in the city. Reflect on and evaluate the idea that symbolism and tradition have created our shared definitions and have changed during the modern and postmodern eras.

**Week 11 Structuration (Philosophy)**

* *Readings to be completed for class:* ”Time, Space, and Regionalization” in Anthony Giddens’ *The Constitution of Society.*
* *Learning Objective:*Learn and analyze Giddens’ structuration theory and its duality of structure. Reflect on and evaluate the implications of this theory on the role of the built environment in supporting ontological security and trust in social institutions.

**Week 12 Topics: Architecture, Technology, and Environmentalism (Architecture)**

* *Readings to be completed for class: Parametric sustainability vs ecology. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), Walter Benjamin.*
* *Architect:*
* *Learning Objective:* Study the impact of incremental vs radical change in architectural thought and practice, and consider how the built environment plays a role in future ecologies.

**Week 13 Topics: Architecture, Technology, and Environmentalism (Philosophy and Psychology): Guest Lecturer: Eric Rodriguez – Environmental Psychology**

* *Readings to be completed for class:*  Andrew Benjamin - “Architecture and Technology: A Discontinuous Relation”, Bill Devall - “The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement”
* *Learning Objective:*Reflect on the relationship between nature and technology - is technology an extension of or agonistic against nature? Analyze and evaluate the impact architecture has upon nature and our attitudes in regards to the natural environment. Consider the debate about the two main approaches to environmentalism: Reformist Environmentalism versus the Deep Ecological Movement.

**Week 14 Group Project** - A paper and presentation in regards to a topic in the Philosophy of the Built Environment.

**Week 15 Final Project/Exam**

* Demonstrate learning objectives, including course content and reading, writing, critical thinking, evaluative, and reflective competencies through an in-class exam.

## GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. KNOWLEDGE:

Develop knowledge of architectural history and theories and philosophical approaches in reflecting on the role of the built environment for society in history. The course addresses the transitions from the pre-modern, modern and postmodern in both architectural history and the historical developments interpreted through the lens of philosophy and sociology. The course also explores Modernism and Post-Modernism as architectural styles, as well as the following schools of thought: Existentialism, Phenomenology, (Post-)Structuralism, Structuration, and Postmodernism.

1. SKILLS:

Learn and acquire skills for inquiry, ethical and aesthetic reflection, analysis, critical thinking, reading, writing, and effective communication. The intent and design of the course supports developing critical reading skills of sophisticated texts, developing general and disciplinary writing skills through regular short, informal assignments throughout the semester, as well as a culminating paper at the end of the semester. The course promotes dialogue and active inquiry through regular discussion in class as well as smaller group work, as well as a multimedia project and presentation. Assignments and projects are opportunities for applying ethical and aesthetic reflection, as well as analytical and critical thinking.

1. INTEGRATION:

This course is co-taught by professors from Architecture and Philosophy, and is governed by a unifying problematic that is ubiquitous in modern society – how the built environment relates to our everyday lives. How does it serve our needs, both functional and aesthetic, and how does it shape our thinking about the spaces that we inhabit and act in? Students read and write about texts that reflect on the built environment and society, and how it is that ideas, values, and concerns relate to the materiality of built places. Students reflect further on the integration between the two disciplines through verbal dialogue in class and groups, a paper, as well as a multimedia project and presentation.

1. VALUES, ETHICS, AND RELATIONSHIPS:

This course explores philosophical and sociological concepts about values, ethics, and relationships. Phenomenological approaches in particular attempt to uncover the many dynamic elements that become concretized into a building. Social values and preferences shape an architectural style, but never so purely as buildings also have functions that have specific requirements. The agents involved in actualizing a design of the building, who in turn are shaped by social forces (as well as psychological, ideological, historical, etc. forces), also determine the built environment in innumerable ways. Structuration postulates that the built environment supports the regularity and trust in institutions that anchors the stability of social praxis. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## INTERDISCIPLINARY INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

1. Purposefully connect and integrate across-discipline knowledge and skills to solve problems. This course is guided by a unifying problematic that is ubiquitous in modern society – how the built environment relates to our everyday lives, how it shapes our thinking about our world, and how it serves our needs, both functional and aesthetic. Readings which include architectural theory that adapts philosophy, and philosophy that applies its approaches to problems in architecture, support students in integrating how ideas shape the built environment and vice versa. Along with reading and writing, students reflect further on the integration between the two disciplines through verbal dialogue in class and groups, as well as a multimedia project and presentation.

2. Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. This course was developed by two professors who worked closely to identify topics and source material that would align problems within the two distinct disciplines in a strongly correlated way. The authors of the course texts tend to be interdisciplinary themselves who reach across the aisle without losing their disciplinary bounds. Edward Relph, for example, was trained as a geographer, but writes expertly about the philosophy of place and space. Karsten Harries was trained as a philosopher, but developed a course on the Philosophy of Architecture at Yale University, and became a renowned expert in the field. The urban landscape with which students are familiar also helps to mediate the synthesis and transference of knowledge.

3. Comprehend factors inherent in complex problems. The course analyzes the meaning of the built environment through a number of lenses that unpack the implicit and explicit factors that are inherent to its development and role in society. The course draws out the historical, cultural, existential, and aesthetic considerations that may not initially be associated with architecture.

4. Apply integrative thinking to problem solving in ethically and socially responsible ways. The integrative thinking resulting from Architecture and Philosophy enables students to recognize the close connection of the built environment to ethical and social considerations. As a tool in the hands of a humanity which seeks protection from the elements, architecture can be transgressive, along with other forms of technology. In the unit on environmentalism in particular, the course supports students in tackling the problem of environmental degradation by considering different solutions. The course also analyzes the underlying philosophical premises that shape the making and using of technology as it relates to architecture in society.

5. Recognize varied perspectives. Readings, writing assignments and projects, and class and group discussions allow students to understand and recognize various perspectives with which to view the built environment and its role in society. Architecture and Philosophy are particularly well situated to demonstrate that contrasting perspectives can still belong to a single problematic given that, ostensibly, little seems to be shared between them.

6. Gain comfort with complexity and uncertainty. In the course, students are expected to understand the built environment and the complex factors that shape and result from it without being reductive. There are architectural phenomena that lead to uncertainty, like the eclecticism of styles prior to Modernism, or the future of Postmodernism. In terms of Philosophy, in limited cases, students are expected to read texts that are perplexing and abstract, which are meant to question the categories of tradition and privilege.

7. Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively. Students are given frequent opportunities to work collaboratively in informal discussions, as well as in a group project that will lead to a presentation. Smaller groups can be settings in which students are able to engage in active learning by articulating and crystallize their ideas to peers who provide immediate feedback in the way of questions or comments.

8. Become flexible thinkers. The course supports flexible thinking by presenting various perspectives on the topic of the built environment in a way that shows the strength and validity of each approach. One approach need not cancel or diminish another. Also, the sheer diversity of perspectives presented militate against taking an inflexible or dogmatic stance on any one particular perspective.