

TU/e Architecture

Philosophy in Architecture

Course Code: 7X700

Lecturer: Dr. Jacob Voorthuis

Email: J.C.T.Voorthuis@bwk.tue.nl

Website: www.voorthuis.net & OASE

Credits: 3 ECTS which translates into 84 dedicated study hours

When: 1st quarter 2011-2012 on Mondays 3rd and 4th period (10:45-12:30)

Where: Auditorium 8

Assignment deadlines: 19.09.2011 for the essay proposal and 28-11-2011 for the completed assignment

Course Description

Freedom is doing what you want to do. However, you have to be careful about what you want. Before you know it you are throwing away your freedom by doing things which end up enslaving you or show you to be the slave of your worst animal drives. That is surely no freedom! For Immanuel Kant to be free is to determine your own end and to live subject to a law you give yourself. That begs the question: Which are good ends to pursue and what kind of law would you freely impose upon yourself as a human being and a designer? Probably, I would guess, ones you- or someone you trust has thought very carefully about. We feel happy enough subjecting ourselves to the laws of a community as long as we feel they are reasonable, fair and benefit us. Our whole upbringing is geared to finding and getting used to useful rules to live, love and work by. And at university, just before we are launched into the rest of our lives, we consequently assume that everything we do needs to be appropriately justified. This course is an exercise in justification. Design is free. You can design anything in any way you want to. That is where the problems start. Freedom in design is important, but also very difficult to deal with. Freedom in design consists in designing according to criteria of judgement that we have thought carefully about and we willingly impose upon ourselves.

Architecture is the product of a continuous creative process resulting in what we might call an architectural *event*. An architectural event is the moment some person undergoes a building or a space through use of it in whatever way. To arrive at this event we need a building to undergo. Buildings are the product of refined a technology evolved over time and realised with the help of a prescriptive process of design and facture using various materials and techniques of making. These coupled and integrated processes attempt to realise hoped for qualities in the final work which can be broadly summarised by stability, comfort, convenience and enjoyment. Then, as a counterpoint for this

productive process there is the body which needs to undergo the building: the bodily experience that constitutes the architectural event. This could be seen as a descriptive creativity. One improves one's undergoing of a building, through spatial exercise and the practise of one's judgment. To extend one's experience in undergoing spaces well is in fact a form of virtual designing and making. It is a redesigning and remaking of the building *in one's bodily experience*. These strands of the creative process braid into a continuous experience and they learn from the other. Comparing notes makes our approach to the design task more sophisticated and more fluently aligned to the way people have found ways to use and experience spaces. The architect acquires knowledge skills and an appropriate attitude by practicing his design as well as by becoming what we might call spatially refined or athletic. In this way, it is hoped, she will design buildings that help society do what it needs to do, give us all a good place to reside and do what we want to do.

Immanuel Kant asked himself three basic questions: What do we know? How should we act? And, what do we dare hope for? Taken together these questions explore the architect's engagement with society and his or her power to design well. After all, the architect makes things that order our world. Making and ordering is done on the basis of our experience, on the basis of what we think we know. We undertake these activities with the idea that it is right that we do things in this way and finally, we do it in the hope that something good will come of it. The project of philosophy is essentially architectural, a fact that was not lost on Kant. The philosopher describes, through simulation, the landscape of reality as best as he can. On this he builds his house of thought, which has to be firm, comfortable, convenient and enjoyable. In that house he designs the machinery of his actions. At the same time the architect is someone who makes our image of the world and makes the world habitable. That constitutes something of a responsibility.

This course seeks to explore the intimate relationship between architecture and philosophy by examining the grounds of our ability to judge designs and justify design decisions from the perspectives of four of the main philosophical movements of the twentieth century: phenomenology, pragmatism, existentialism and transcendental empiricism. Each lecture will be concerned with the presentation of a thought-string. Sometimes a specific problem will take centre stage at other times a thinker or a movement. During each lecture we shall be looking at three things: the landscape or context in which the thinking takes place, the architecture of the thought and the mechanics of action that the thought appears to suggest. All this with reference to concrete examples from the world of design in architecture.

Purpose and learning objectives

Through the concrete examination and critique of specific buildings, designs and urban agglomerations from the perspective of a number of philosophical themes, the student will, at the end of the course, be in a position to place their own efforts in design and design thinking within an increasingly refined and well-practised frame of reference, helping him to make considered design decisions within social space and thereby undertake and undergo the odyssey of the design process with greater awareness.

At the end of the course students will be able to:

- Describe the most significant philosophical movements of the twentieth century as they relate to design in architecture and use the resultant insights to help them in the criticism of designs and the critique of design decisions.
- Describe the relevant concepts used by these philosophical movements and apply them in the formulation of a personal position relative to design in architecture and its role in society.
- Place the examples used during the course in their chronological, geographical and cultural context.
- Use the history of architecture and philosophy as design tools through comparative analysis of designs situated within their social, cultural, economic and technical context.
- Analyze epistemological, perceptual, aesthetic and ethical problems and relate them to specific themes in architecture such as, for example, the relation between the body, space and time.
- Formulate specific research questions which can be investigated using literature as well as concrete examples from the built environment in order to form a thoroughly argued personal attitude to the design process.
- Perform research according to the accepted criteria of scholarship.

Program

The program consists of 8 lectures whereby architecture is looked at with a philosophical focus. Taken together, these lectures constitute something of an odyssey along a set of concepts derived from some very intimate questions:

#	Date	Title/Theme	Questions asked
1	05.09	Decision and justification in design, freedom, good use and abuse	<i>What is freedom? If freedom means I am able to do what I want, what should I want?</i>
2	12.09	Finding Beauty	<i>How does one find beauty?</i>
	19.09	Lecture cancelled	
3	26.09	Virtues: Politeness, Generosity and Love	<i>Virtues concern a moral aesthetics</i>
	26.09	Hand in essay proposal: subject and 1st version of the research question	
4	03.10	Design and evolution: use and development	<i>How do things appear? And how do they change?</i>
5	10.10	Fairness: Making things and thinking about making	<i>Do we have to become better people to make a better world?</i>
6	17.10	Form and behaviour	<i>How does form behave and behaviour form us?</i>
7	24.10	Utopia, Autopia and Heterotopia	<i>Places and placing people</i>
8	n.n.t.b.	Story and Identity	<i>The problem of identity and its design</i>
	28.11	Hand in essay	

Assignment

The purpose of this course and the assignment is to form a carefully deliberated and well-argued position within a chosen subject. Students are invited to formulate a specific research question on the basis of a thorough study of two substantial pieces of literature which can be brought in relation to each other at the hand of a concrete example.

You are not encouraged to choose a formal philosophical theme or topic. You need to choose a topic that interests you. The assignment is intended to allow you to explore your own fascinations in architecture and to begin preparing for your final year. The most important part of this module is to learn to formulate a well-crafted research question. A research question begins by being general but, by the time the essay is finished, should end up being quite specific. It acquires this specificity as you become familiar with your chosen subject and begin to realize which direction you are taking. When you hand in your essay proposal you will not be expected to have formulated the final version of your research question. In its final form a good research question gives the subject you have chosen to research as well as the means and the angle you have adopted.

The purpose of the exercise is to learn to use research and argument in the formulation of a well considered design strategy.

Game rules

You begin by choosing a subject (a word, a concept, a privileged theme in either philosophy or architecture, see the list *possible subjects*). The recommended literature can help here, but you are encouraged to explore new paths. The choice of possible subjects is enormous. You can choose for an extremely abstract subject or you can choose to investigate a well known and important relationship (such as the relationship between Music and Architecture). You can also choose words that are used regularly within the architectural debate: the notion of place, the idea of symmetry, chaos, harmony, climate, light etc. You do not have to choose a philosophical theme, in fact I would rather you look at an architectural theme critically.

Once you have made your choice of subject you may begin to sharpen the angle you might want to take, try to find literature that is relevant to your chosen subject. This is the divergent part of your research as there is a lot of interesting stuff out there. In the end you must choose no more than two books or substantial articles as well as a concrete example with which you will be able to illustrate your arguments.

The essay is the convergent part. That has to focus on your research question and develop a well considered view on the subject: your view. I want an essay of no more than 3000 words. The research question has to be carefully formulated and given right at the beginning of the essay. The essay should document all used sources properly according to current bibliographic norms. It may be written in Dutch or in English and if necessary in French or German. I expect languages to be used properly. Badly written essays will be handed back without a mark.

If you require help in setting up an essay go to my website www.voorthuis.net a consult the *guide to reading and writing*. A student assistant will be on hand to help in setting up the essay.

Hand-in requirements

On 19.09.2011 the student is required to hand in an *essay proposal* digitally (no more than half an A4) stating your chosen subject, the reason you are interested in the subject, and a first tentative version of

your research question. This will be printed out by me and discussed with you during one of the discussion sessions after each week's lecture.

For the final assignment I would like an essay of 3000 words to be submitted in hardcopy. It is to be deposited in my pigeonhole on floor 7. The deadline for submissions is given at the top of this document. After the essays have been marked they can be collected from the secretary's office on floor 7. All essays handed in on time will receive feedback by email before. Sloppily presented or incomplete work will not be marked. Any evidence of plagiarism will be passed on to the Office of Education on floor 2 and will be acted upon.

If you fail the assignment you are free to resubmit an improved version of the same essay, taking account of the feedback given, within three weeks of receiving the mail with your mark and feedback.

All assignments handed in after 09-05-2012 will not be marked. Your right to a mark is thereby forfeited and you will have to redo the course next year.

Your mark

I shall assess and grade your essays according to four main criteria:

- **completeness** (has the assignment been completed according to the above specifications?)
- **commitment and professionalism** (has the student worked diligently and with enthusiasm?)
- **perceptiveness and understanding** (Is the student able to form and argue his own position relative to the material? Is the student able to describe and compare concepts from a specific standpoint? Is the student able to place that standpoint in a broader context?)
- **verifiability and documentation** (have enough sources been consulted and have these been properly documented according to internationally accepted standards?)

I can of course always be reached by email: j.c.t.voorthuis@bwk.tue.nl. If you need to speak to me privately I can occasionally be found in my office 7.32 but it is safer to make an appointment.

Recommended Literature:

Mallgrave, H.F., (ed.), (2006 & 2008) Architectural Theory Vol. 1 & 2, Blackwell

Leach, N., (ed.), (1997) Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory, Routledge.

Nesbitt, K., (ed.), (1996) Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture, An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995, Princeton Architectural Press

Heynen, H., (ed.), (2001) Dat is Architectuur, Sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw , 010 Rotterdam.

Hays, M., (ed.), (2000), Architecture Theory since 1968, MIT.

Thoennes, C., (et. al.), (eds.), (2003) Architectural Theory from the Renaissance to the Present, Taschen

Engel, H., & Claessens, F., (eds.) (2008) *Wat is architectuur? Architectuurtheoretische verkenningen*, Sun.

Mallgrave, H.F., (2005) *Modern Architectural Theory, A Historical Survey 1673-1968*, Cambridge Univ. Press.

Kruft, H.W., (1994) *A History of Architectural Theory, From Vitruvius to the Present*, Princeton Architectural Press

Specific Subjects

Ballantyne, A., (2007) *Deleuze & Guattari for Architects*, Routledge.

Sharr, A., (2007) *Heidegger for Architects*, Routledge.

Blattner, W., (2006), *Heidegger's Being and Time*, Continuum.

Damasio, A., (2003), *Looking for Spinoza, Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, Harcourt.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi, Univ. Of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Johnson, M., (2007), *The Meaning of the Body*, Chicago Univ. Press, Chicago.

Lefebvre, H., (1991), *The production of space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (transl.) Blackwell, Malden.

Wenzel, C.H., (2005) *An introduction to Kant's Aesthetics, Core Concepts and Problems*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken.