

Modernism in American Design and Architecture

Spring 2019

AMS 330 (31140), ARH 339Q (19830), URB 352 (37355)

Instructor: Jeffrey Meikle

Class: TTh, 2:00-3:30 pm, SAC 5.102

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This lecture course is intended to provide a broad knowledge of major issues in the history of American design and architecture from about 1880 to the present. The central assumption of the course is that our environments both shape us and reflect what manner of people we are. The word design is understood to include all elements of the built environment, ranging from the smallest artifacts and products through buildings (whether vernacular or elite) to the shape of suburban and urban landscapes. Students are encouraged to consider design in the context of social and cultural history, and as it relates to issues of functionality, civic responsibility, and community engagement on both regional and global levels. Among topics to be considered are methods of cultural analysis of material artifacts; the rise, triumph, and fall of functionalism and the International Style; the emergence of uniquely American varieties of commercial design in a consumer society; the interactions of technology, economics, and design; the impact of the automobile on all levels of design; the rise of postmodern design and deconstructive architecture as counters to the modernist tradition; and design for the information age. Among problems to be considered and discussed are tensions between tradition and novelty, between functional and expressive theories of design, between elite ideologies and popular desires, and between European and American design. Although lectures are well illustrated, this is not an image memorization course. Rather, students will need to develop critical thinking skills about what design means in society through the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of material presented and discussed in class, through reading assignments, through a paper that emphasizes individual inquiry and analysis, and in exams. AMS 330 satisfies the core curriculum requirement in Visual and Performing Arts; if you register under ARH 339Q or URB 352, consult with your major advisor to be certain you receive proper credit.

Required reading:

Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*

Carma Gorman, *The Industrial Design Reader*

Jeffrey Meikle, *Design in the USA*

John Kasson, *Amusing the Million*

The Project on Vegas, *Strip Cultures*

Required texts are available at the University Co-op. Sometime during the semester you should spend a couple of hours browsing through the Architecture Library in Battle Hall. Current periodicals are located in the most comfortable reading room at UT. Books on

architecture and design are on two compact levels. The Fine Arts Library, which is also a quiet, comfortable place, has many books and periodicals on design and the decorative arts. However, it was recently shrunk and is under threat of permanent closure. Get acquainted with it before the books are moved to PCL and offsite storage. Obtaining true value from this course requires looking outward from lectures and required reading to the objects, structures, and spaces of the real world around us—and exploring what has been written on those aspects that interest or fascinate you. The web has an inconceivable wealth of visual materials on every design-related topic. However, narrative depth and analytic insight are available mostly only in print sources held by UT's often ignored libraries, and there are millions of phenomenal images that have never been digitized but are easily accessible.

Required written work includes two in-class exams (the first counts 15% of the final grade; the second counts 25%), a paper of 5-7 pages based on original observation (counts 30%), and a final exam (30%). Final grades are reported with pluses and minuses.

The first exam counts only 15% because it is intended to familiarize you with the process. Exams are cumulative in the sense that they assume a working knowledge of prior course material. However, the emphasis in exams two and three is on material covered since the previous exam. Exams include short identifications and longer essays. You are expected to synthesize material from lectures and assigned readings, and when possible to refer to outside reading and personal observation.

Reading assignments should be completed before class on the date for which they are listed. Sometimes the readings are directly related to that day's lecture; sometimes they are scheduled simply to spread the assignments throughout the semester. Readings often include material that will not be referred to in lectures; you are responsible for it all the same. A premium is placed on efforts to understand the course material on your own terms, to use it as raw material for your own interpretations. Make-up exams will not be given except in documented cases of dire emergency.

Guidelines for the paper assignment will be provided later. You will be asked to write about the social and cultural meanings of a product, artifact, object, building, interior, or space with which you are personally familiar. Several short articles intended to suggest possible models for the paper will be made available later in the semester. Late papers will be marked down one full letter from the grade they would otherwise have received, except in cases of dire emergency. No credit is given for papers more than one week late. The paper is due in class on April 23.

Attendance will be taken daily through a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to make sure you sign in before you leave the classroom each day. A student who misses no more than two class periods will have the earned final course grade increased by one degree (for example, C+ to B-). A student who misses four or more class meetings will have the earned final course grade decreased by one degree (for example, B- to C+). Excused absences are awarded only in the case of documented personal emergency or by prior approval for educational conferences, organized athletic competition, or similar reasons. The instructor, not the TA, must approve excused absences.

Much of the lecture material is not information that can be memorized by rote but consists of the instructor's personal interpretations, which you are expected to assess for yourself and use as a springboard to your own interpretations. I place a premium on independent thinking—which is easier to arrive at if you've been attending class.

Use of cell phones, whether for calls, texting, or Internet access, is prohibited. Use of tablets and laptops for Internet access is also prohibited. Such use is distracting to those sitting nearby, and anyone observed doing so will be asked to leave class.

If you plan to miss a class or exam for religious observance, please notify the instructor at least a week in advance and you will be given an opportunity to complete missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

You are expected to abide by the University Code of Conduct and the Student Honor Code, which are both stated here:

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

"As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

If you have any uncertainty as to what constitutes cheating or intellectual dishonesty, please see the official eleven-point definition at <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-c/student-discipline-and-conduct/>. They will not be tolerated and are grounds for course failure.

Upon request the University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY. If you know you will be requesting an accommodation, please submit your letter during the first two weeks of the semester.

Please attend to the following statement from the Office of Campus Safety and Security regarding emergencies: "Occupants of buildings on the UT campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors."

Schedule

- Jan. 22 Organization
- Jan. 24 Design and Culture
- Jan. 29 Le Corbusier and Machine-Age Modernism
 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (look carefully through the book; you'll read it later)
- Jan. 31 Roots of American Functionalism
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 11-49
 Horatio Greenough, "The Law of Adaptation" (1852), Gorman, 11-14
- Feb. 5 Arts and Crafts Revivalism
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 51-87
 John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic" (1853), Gorman, 14-19
 William Morris, "The Lesser Arts" (1877), Gorman, 35-40
 Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine" (1901), Gorman, 55-61
- Feb. 7 Daniel Burnham: Classical Visions and Organic Dreams
 Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 3-112
- Feb. 12 Chicago Design and Architecture
- Feb. 14 Frank Lloyd Wright: Traditionalist or Innovator?
- Feb. 19 FIRST EXAM
 (bring a blue book)
- Feb. 21 European Roots of American Modernism
 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, v-289
 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), Gorman, 70-74
 Adolph Loos, "Ornament and Crime" (1910), Gorman, 74-81
 Hermann Muthesius, "Aims of the Werkbund" (1911), Gorman, 82-83
- Feb. 26 New American Tempo: Design in the 1920s
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 89-112
 Christine Frederick, "The Labor-Saving Kitchen" (1919), Gorman, 92-96
 Helen Appleton Read, "The Exposition in Paris" (1925), Gorman, 113-117
 Henry Ford, "Machinery, the New Messiah" (1928), Gorman, 121-123
 "Color in Industry," *Fortune* magazine (1930), Gorman, 123-125
- Feb. 28 Delirious New York: Art Deco Skyscrapers

- March 5 Domesticating Modernity Between the World Wars
- March 7 Streamlining in the Great Depression
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 113-129
 Earnest Elmo Calkins, "What Consumer Engineering Really Is" (1932), Gorman, 129-132
 Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson, "Machine Art" (1934), Gorman, 132-134
 Norman Bel Geddes, "Streamlining" (1934), Gorman, 135-137
 Harold Van Doren, "The Designer's Place in Industry" (1940), Gorman, 142-144
- March 12 The New Alchemy of Plastics
 Marcy Babbitt, "As a Woman Sees Design: An Interview with Belle Kogan" (1935), Gorman, 137-139
 "What Man Has Joined Together...", *Fortune* magazine (1936), Gorman, 140-142
- March 14 New York World's Fair of 1939
- SPRING BREAK
- March 26 Rise of the International Style
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 131-150
- March 28 Monuments of the International Style
- April 2 SECOND EXAM
 (bring a blue book)
- April 4 Housing for the Automobile Age
- April 9 Modernism in Crisis
 film: *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History* (2011)
- April 11 Populuxe vs. High Modernism in Postwar Design
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 151-173
 Edgar Kaufmann Jr., "What Is Modern Design?" (1950), Gorman, 146-151
 Raymond Loewy, "The MAYA Stage" (1951), Gorman, 155-159
 Henry Dreyfuss, "Joe and Josephine" (1955), Gorman, 162-168
 R. Buckminster Fuller, "Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth" (1969), Gorman, 186-187
 Victor Papanek, "Design for the Real World" (1971), Gorman, 188-191
- April 16 Lecture by TA

- April 18 Learning from Las Vegas: Commercial Vernaculars
 The Project on Vegas, *Strip Cultures*
- April 23 Eero Saarinen and the New Expressionism
 PAPER DUE AT START OF CLASS
- April 25 The Malling of America
- April 30 Postmodernism 1: Historicism and the Decorated Shed
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 175-203
- May 2 Postmodernism 2: Deconstruction and Beyond...
 Klaus Krippendorff and Reinhart Butter, "Product Semantics: Exploring
 the Symbolic Qualities of Form" (1984), Gorman, 201-204
 Barbara Radice, "Memphis and Fashion" (1984), Gorman, 204-208
 Dieter Rams, "Omit the Unimportant" (1984), Gorman, 208-211
- May 7 Contemporary Design
 film: *Objectified* (2009)
 Meikle, *Design in the USA*, 203-210
- May 9 Summary and Review
- May 17 FINAL EXAM, 2-5
 (bring blue books)