UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE-ENGINEERING

SPACE AND CULTURE

Spring Semester Course 2018-19

Instructors: Phoebe Giannisi, Rena Fatsea

**GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE [SYLLABUS]**

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CONTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

“I loved the city. We were anonymous, and even then I had the sense that cities were yielding; that they moved over and made room.”

- Sheridan Hay, The Secret of Lost Things (2008)

“Quelles bizarreries ne trouve-t-on pas dans une grande ville, quand on sait se promener et regarder? La vie fourmille de monstres innocents.”

- Charles Baudelaire

This is an advanced course in the area of History and Theory of Architecture. Conceptually, it uses the compound notions of ‘space’ and ‘culture’ as a way of both defining and comprehending architecture and its phenomena, rather than focusing more narrowly on building in its more conventional (i.e., technical) definition. The course combines two parallel approaches as represented by the two instructors, who will deliver their lectures alternately during the semester.

The first approach has a more historical orientation. Its subject-matter is the modern Western city, viewed as a result of fundamental economic and social transformations over the past three centuries, which have redefined her spatial and cultural identity now as modern (i.e., with a clear vision and direction towards the future), as opposed to its traditional predecessor. The centers of modernity – soon developed into the metropolises of the post-18th century industrial civilization – display a peculiar relationship with time and history. They retain certain elements from their Renaissance and/ or antique past while categorically reject others. Ideas, such as functionality, hygiene, control/ surveillance, and symbolism (now seen through the modern lens of scientific theory), shape the new spatial phenomenon, i.e., what is referred to as the 'modern big city'. The key feature of the latter is the centralized planning, identified with a programmatic mechanism of control over the heterogeneous population groups it encompasses in the name of their both lawful and peaceful coexistence. The ever-increasing specialization of functions (echoing the taxonomic model of modern sciences) – and the ensuing burgeoning of architectural typologies – does not necessarily bring about spatial heterogeneity as long it is subject to monumentalization strategies and, therefore, to the systematic obliteration of the human footprint from the public realm. Thus, the individual’s role is more and more limited to that of the mere observer.

However, this model of western metropolis, despite all its apparent homogeneity, remains culturally diverse due to its characteristic openness to the new and foreign. The latter, in fact, becomes conducive to its survival. Specifically, in the modern city the stranger finds a place, despite all the forces which work toward eliminating his/her material traces. The stranger – or, more generally, the modern subject – where he/she does not remain invisible and/or ineffective, initiate experiential instances of critical reflection upon both the city itself and its mechanisms of both spatial and cultural construction (*cf.* W. Benjamin, *The arcades project*).

The second strand of the course takes a more theoretical approach to its subject-matter and aims at critically negotiating concepts of space and culture by recourse to interpretative tools borrowed from a wide range of cognitive fields, such as anthropology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. After theoretically defining the very concept of culture, as well as the related cultural classifications and hierarchies, this part of the course proceeds to discuss concepts relating to space in reference to the microscale of the human body, bodily practices, daily practices regarded as rituals of everyday life, as well as the evolution of the relationship between public and private space as related to these practices.

Finally, modernity’s reading through the viewpoint of the city stroller will lead to the introduction of such themes as memory and narrative. While the historical strand of the course proposes to provide the descriptive aspect of the phenomenon of the urban space of modernity, the theoretical one, in its broader outlook, contributes the critical dimension of understanding, interpretation, and ultimately even the exploration of ways of either removing or overcoming some of the deadlocks that this space creates to its modern subject.

COURSE PROCEDURE

The course is based on the close cooperation of students and instructors. It has the form of 3-hour meetings (lecture and discussion), extending also to invited speakers and to student presentations.

The class meets every Tuesday in the amphitheater, 11:00-14:00. The instructors are available for private meetings with students during their regular office hours, as announced in class.

REQUIREMENTS – EVALUATION

The students will be evaluated through two written examinations: one (optional) in the middle of the semester for 40% of the total grade and one (required) at the end of the semester for 60% (or 100%).

The option of a modest research project for an extra bonus of 10% of the total grade is also open to students (either individually or in groups of two), to be delivered in the form of both a written paper and a public (class) presentation near the end of the semester. In this case, students will be required to collaborate more closely with the instructor of their choice in regular meetings (2 at least) during the semester.

SUPPORTING BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Pevsner, Nikolaus, Sir. *A history of building types*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976 (1997).