

**VIOLENT ACTS OF ARCHITECTURE\***

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Architecture, as a perturbation of spatial conditions, is an intrinsically violent act. Its violence is the product of a design (a project). Yet the violence performed by architecture in its physical making remains often ignored, embedded as it is in issues of construction, sheltering, inhabitation. The recent refocusing on the environment and sustainability calls for a redefinition of the question of the violence of architecture, as it had been formulated in the 1970s by Bernard Tschumi, and before him by Georges Bataille.

Architecture, public and exposed, is also the easy target of physical aggression, a vulnerable body that can be attacked at different levels and scales. Violence on architecture is explicit, usually sudden, highly visible and often spectacular, as recent disastrous events have shown - from the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 in New York, to the effects of hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in 2005.

A fundamental distinction is necessary here between the violence intentionally perpetrated by man and the violence released by the paroxysm of natural phenomena (arguably triggered by human actions). Intentional violence on architecture is part of a design, but its project is not architectural. And yet, using architecture as a medium, 'designed' violence exposes the significations that are always already at work in the architectural body.

Starting from the most visible, sudden and spectacular recent episodes of intentional 'planned' violence on architecture, and the architectural reactions and designed responses to them, the lectures move on to explore how architecture incorporates violence. What emerges is architecture as a dynamic system that only momentarily freezes its tensions, both structural-material and linguistic-ideological, in the forms of the project, while the discipline continues to struggle with internal contradictions, impossibilities and external pressures.

These lectures articulate and questions the different relationships that link architecture to violence, through an exploration of projects, architectural types and elements and texts by architects, philosophers, critics.

Session one: **War, terrorism and the silence of architecture**

Beyond the destruction of physical structures, planned violence on buildings –war or terrorism- attacks also both the signification and the language of architecture, and thus brings architecture to its extremes. The lecture examines different possible responses –including silence- that architecture can offer to the formal rhetoric of destruction.

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Session two: **Public works, sex machines and mutant architecture**

A protégée of the French court and establishment before 1789, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Claude-Nicolas Ledoux performs a radical and violent revolution in architecture: beyond instances of social reform and work (and bodies) organization, his projects dissolve the unity of the architectural object and empty the rules of architectural composition.

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Session three: **Internments, surveillance and the discipline of the body**

Michel Foucault's seminal texts on the ordering and disciplining of modern space directly address architectural types and their forms and devices of spatial, social and bodily control. It is however Gilles Deleuze's reading of Foucault's use of the diagram that returns his work to the architectural discourse in a process that revolutionizes how architecture is produced.

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Session four: **Modern transparencies and unwanted exposures**

Concerns with light, hygiene, structural honesty (and lies) and the fascination with new technological possibilities allowed Modern architecture to experiment with different kinds of transparency. In fact the see-through-all modern glance performed a violation of intimacy and identity that continues today with the illusory privacy of contemporary opaqueness and CCTV surveillance.

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Session five: **Ambiguous building types and violent laughters**

Myth, archetype, building (or city?) that can never be fully known and represented, the space of the labyrinth is at the origin of an alternative history of architecture, tensioned between violence and discursive practices. In George Bataille's irreverent attacks to the established architectural types and the power systems they represent, the labyrinth is the condition that allows the subversion of social orders.

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Session six: **Falls, fireworks and other explosions**

In the 1970s Bernard Tschumi and other architects expose the violence embedded in architecture with a series of theoretical projects that exacerbate, subvert or literally explode the orders and subdivisions of Modern architecture. Apparently exercises in architectural formalism disconnected from reality, these provocations in fact produce a critique not only of the language of architecture but also of the politics, media and consumerism that affect it from outside.

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Session seven: **Disaster and the architecture of the dynamic**

Challenged in its form, wholeness and stability, architecture reinterpreted as a thermodynamic system reveals its fixed status as an only temporary balance produced by the competing forces of construction and destruction. The theory of the accident considers sudden destruction –naturally or artificially triggered- as in fact embedded in and enabled by the technologies that make architecture possible.

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