



## Architecture Theory for Idiots

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This is an idea for a series of short workshops that presents architecture theory as a *means of thinking about* architecture and the landscape (or any spatial-temporal situation for that matter). Mainstream theory courses must include a variety of historical perspectives, professional consideration, and contemporary theoretical ideas already in place. "Architecture Theory for Idiots" treats architecture as a public and practical art, but it recontextualizes the ways in which, in everyday life, architecture is perceived and received. The workshops short-circuit what it is in architecture that makes it distinct from the functions we assign to it and the *modes of enjoyment* by which we seem inherently to recognize this difference.

The model of this short-circuit is the idea of velocity, of a synchronized flow of reality in which small differences create turbulences, where speeding up or slowing down pulls elements out of synch and creates perceptions of ruin or destruction.

This is Lucretius's famous "take" on Democritus's theory of atoms, but it has been used famously in the past by artists, writers, and scientists to create analogies about the dynamic stability of natural and cultural systems. The flow model allows theory-for-idiots to revisit other theories about architecture to give them a new spin. But, because the velocity model does especially well in defining the marginal conditions of architecture — destruction, ruin, origins, etc. — it includes popular culture ideas about architecture that, under the heading of the uncanny, have always embedded architecture within ritual, folk belief, superstition, and narrative imagination.

The flow model has been commonly employed by writers (Poe will be used as the paradigm exemplar), artists (Duchamp), and scientists (Eddington). In philosophy the idea of a ubiquitous dynamic, transformative element has been around since Heraklitus but was extensively formalized by Vico and Hegel as well as Heidegger and, more lately, Agamben.

However, because the flow model is easy to explain, the workshop can condense its basic ideas into several short sessions and allow the participants to expand on ideas through experiments and independent projects. The pedagogical aim of the Architecture Theory for Idiots workshop is complex. It aims to supplement studio attempts to cultivate students' curiosity and autonomy without important snippet ideas that are too often literally (mis-)applied. Theory should be thought of "theory in action" rather than abstract ideas unable to connect to the construction and construing of architecture.

### Workshops

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**1/Fast-Forward:** This workshop looks at architectural origins, where building may consist of minimalist elements precisely placed to bring about "cosmic" effects; and building foundation rituals to bring the structure and occupants good luck and resistance to threat. NATURAL HISTORY, CHAOS THEORY, COSMIC MODELS, FOUNDATION RITUALS, MINIMAL BUILDINGS.

**2/Falling Behind:** When buildings become obsolete, we perceive that "they cannot keep up" with the fast pace of daily life. The metaphor is instructive, and in the Lucretian flow model obsolescence creates melancholy states that artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark have explored with virtuosity. RUIN, EXQUISITE CORPSES, MARGINS, POCHÉ, PREMATURE BURIAL, NARRATIVE MODELS

**3/Festival Architecture:** Bernard Tschumi once opined that the perfect architecture was fireworks, and indeed the festival "accelerates" buildings by decorating them as if they were about to explode, not in a random way, but in a manner that underscores architecture's identification with crystals and light. This session looks at how festivals operate (already) within a flow model to cover gaps in secular time, and how architecture is involved in such re-synchronization. CRYSTAL METAPHORS, CALENDAR GAPS, JANUS AND DIANA, THE FASCINATION OF DISASTERS

**TIME-FRAME OF THE WORKSHOPS:** Workshops use evening sessions, weekend sessions, and on-line components to avoid conflict with the ongoing program or work demands of other courses. Faculty must not be faced with any time conflicts or other interruptions of their course designs. Workshops are offered as the on-going semester schedule permits, with special multi-workshop sessions offered over holidays. Student participation is free, voluntary, with no course credits (certificates could be given). The benefits of participation should be evident in improvements in work done in studio and other courses. Landscape Architecture students and others would be invited to participate.