

# A NEW AGENDA for GOTTFRIED SEMPER

COLLEGIUM HELVETICUM  
MARCH 17, 2023

SEMPER OBSERVATORY  
(ETH / STW)  
Schmelzbergstrasse 25  
8006 ZÜRICH

**Three roundtables** present new approaches to the architect and theorist Gottfried Semper in recent publications on architecture culture. **SEMPER'S LIFE AND TIME** addresses how new biographical insights and the time-spanning role of architecture reveal the historicist period to be not an isolated epoch. **SEMPER AND MATERIAL CULTURE** discusses the mid-nineteenth century's emphatic interest in material history against the backdrop of the precariousness of a life in exile confronted with a globalized world. **EDITING SEMPER** is devoted to new research questions in the context of the medium chosen for editing archival material: book and website.

organized by Sonja Hildebrand (USI Mendrisio), Mari Hvattum (AHO Oslo), and Philip Ursprung (ETH Zurich)

2 pm **WELCOME**

2:15 pm **SEMPER'S LIFE AND TIME**

Caroline van Eck, Sonja Hildebrand, Mari Hvattum, and Henrik Karge  
moderated by Philip Ursprung

■ Sonja Hildebrand, *Gottfried Semper: Architekt und Revolutionär*, Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2020.

This monograph presents a comprehensive picture of Semper's personality for the first time. In demonstrating the value of a biographical approach, it provides a far-reaching insight into the cultural history of the nineteenth century.

■ Mari Hvattum, *Style and Solitude. The History of an Architectural Problem*, Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2023 [to be published in June 2023].

The book studies the concept of style in nineteenth-century architecture. Moving from Winckelmann to Semper, it looks at conflicting ideas of style and their often paradoxical impact on architectural thinking and practice.

3:15 pm **SEMPER AND MATERIAL CULTURE**

Adam Caruso, Elena Chestnova, Murray Fraser, Michael Gnehm, and Sonja Hildebrand  
moderated by Mari Hvattum

■ Elena Chestnova, *Material Theories. Locating Artefacts and People in Gottfried Semper's Writings*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022.

This book takes a radically new approach to well-established thinking on nineteenth-century architecture and design by investigating Semper's classic ideas about dressing, metamorphosis of material, and cultural development.

■ Michael Gnehm and Sonja Hildebrand, eds., *Architectural History and Globalized Knowledge. Gottfried Semper in London*, Mendrisio: Mendrisio Academy Press; Zurich: gta Verlag, 2021.

The volume positions Semper as both an observer and actor in the revolutionary period of the mid-nineteenth century. Focusing beyond Semper as an individual person, it discusses his work as a designer, teacher, and writer of architecture against the backdrop of the historical, architectural, and disciplinary surroundings.

4:15 pm **Coffee Break**

4:45 pm **EDITING SEMPER**

Elena Chestnova, Maarten Delbeke, Raphael Germann, Michael Gnehm, Andrea Malits, and Dieter Weidmann  
moderated by Felix Christen

■ Gottfried Semper, *London Writings 1850–1855*, ed. Michael Gnehm, Sonja Hildebrand, and Dieter Weidmann, Zurich: gta Verlag, 2021.

This volume offers the first comprehensive selection of Semper's writings on architectural theory and the applied arts from his London exile in a critical and commented edition.

■ Gottfried Semper, *Style. Digital Edition*, ed. ETH Zurich and USI Mendrisio, 2017–2024 [semper-edition.ch]. The digital edition of Semper's *Style* presents the work for the first time in a critical edition. It makes accessible the material for *Style*'s published volumes and includes the preliminary stages and continuation plans such as the manuscripts of *Theory of Art Forms*, of *Comparative Architecture*, and of the *ETH Lectures* that survive in students' notes.

5:45 pm **CLOSING REMARKS**

6 pm **Drinks**