2013–2016 Lecture Series
Jean-Louis Cohen (New York University)

John Scheid
The launch in May 2014 of the lecture series delivered by Visiting Professor Jean-Louis Cohen from New York University, opened a new chapter in the history of teaching at the Collège de France, namely that of the Pluri-Annual Visiting Professorships.

The new system increases the Collège de France’s freedom of action: it can now invite professors and ask them to teach for relatively long periods of time, even if they choose not to give up the permanent position they hold in another institution, which would prevent them from occupying a permanent Chair. These professors can now sometimes teach at the Collège de France for several years.

A professor’s teaching can indeed be developed over two or three years. The Collège de France’s existing Annual Chairs do not always allow for this, since, like permanent Chairs, they are governed by civil service rules, which, for example, set an age limit on professors’ right to teach. Visiting professors are not subject to these rules that forbid us, for example, from inviting distinguished personalities over the age limit to provide continuous teaching at the Collège de France. Moreover, the teaching delivered by Annual Chairs may not exceed one year, which may be too short for developing a broader teaching project. Annual Chairs are tailored to focusing on a specific problem or a current research trend, not to elaborating a broader research theme. Hence, Pluri-Annual Visiting Professorship positions potentially offer French or foreign colleagues the opportunity to devote themselves to a detailed study of one aspect of their research, which their permanent activities would not allow them to do to the same extent.
Jean-Louis Cohen’s lecture programme, 2014

• 21 May: Architecture, Modernity, and Modernization
• 27 May: Social Reform and Modernity
• 04 June: War and Reconstruction
• 11 June: High-Growth Languages and Techniques
• 18 June: The Modernization Programmes
• 25 June: Catharsis and Renewal

Symposium, Monday 23 June 2014
Modern Architecture, Promise or a Menace?

Jean-Louis Cohen is an architect, a historian, and the author of many studies on architecture and cities from the nineteenth century to the present.

After obtaining a PhD in the History of Art, and accreditation to supervise research, from the EHESS, he headed the architectural research programme of the Ministère de l’Équipement (1979-1983) before holding a research Chair at the École d’Architecture Paris-Villemin (1983-1996). He was then Chair of History of Cities at the Institut français d’Urbanisme, Université Paris 8 (1996-2005), and in 1994 was appointed Sheldon H. Solow Professor in the History of Architecture at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts. In 1997 the Ministry of Culture entrusted him with the creation of

Jean-Louis Cohen's lecture series in 2014 considered the configurations of architecture in France from the early twentieth century, in the European context, and in relation to colonial policies. Central to the reflection were the tensions between institutions and professions, and between aesthetics and uses. The hypothesis proposed was that the structures constituting modernity in the French context, including in the colonies as laboratories, were all marked by the recurrent convergence of extremely powerful public policies, and by France's "constructive disposition", which Sigfried Giedion identified in 1928. Many episodes were marked by it, including for instance the programmes of the Loucheur law, those of the three reconstructions (1918, 1940 and 1945), and those of the high-density housing policy. The two wars were far from being periods of stasis, and the borders were porous: while models, forms and techniques from England, Germany and the United States were continuously received, France also exported its experiments way beyond its metropolitan territory.