

Architecture, and...the Function of Fiction

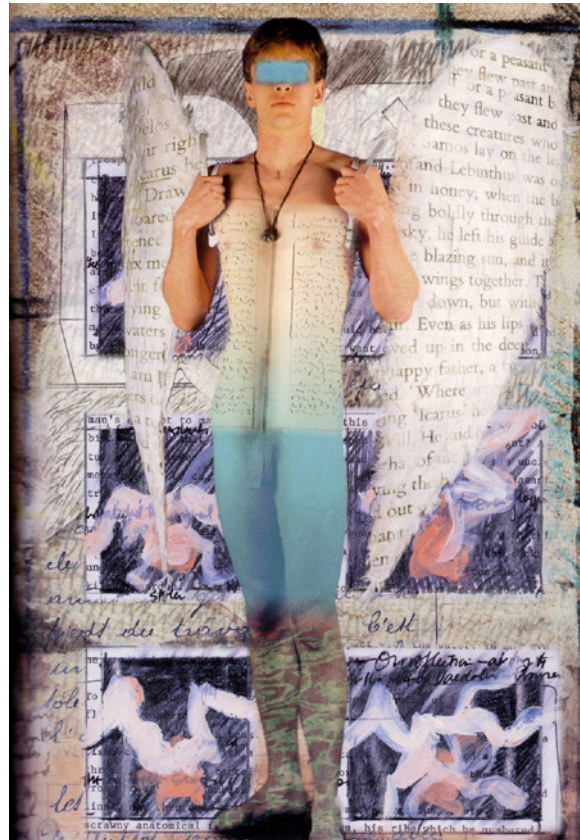
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Office Hours:
email for appointment

California Polytechnic State University
Department of Architecture

Arch 420 / Fall 2007
Seminar in Architectural History,
Theory and Criticism
12 noon—2:00
05-106



*This is a large, thick book with a blue-green cover that rainbow-hazes in the light. More a box than a book, it opens in unorthodox fashion, with a door in its front cover. Inside is a collection of eight smaller books arranged like bottles in a medicine case. Behind these eight books are another eight books, and so on. To open the smaller books is to let loose many languages. Words and sentences, paragraphs and chapters gather like tadpoles in a pond in April or starlings in a November evening sky.
from Prospero's Books*

Introduction

Our perception of the world is inherently metaphoric. From the time we are children, the world is expressed and understood through such relationships. Remember the ability to see a stick as a horse, not like a horse, but as a horse. It is within these loose but potentially deep relationships that language mediates. Language (dialogue, narrative, orality, text, script, etc) is always understood through some form of translation. This gap, not dissimilar to the blind spot that allows us to see, creates misunderstandings and also allows for the expression of our most profound desires.

Like a dream, architecture is always experienced but must be recounted to be understood. Though it is clear that the material of architecture may be other, we must rely upon language to communicate and express our intentions. Indeed, architecture has often been paired with, or understood through the lens of narrative theories and linguistics. The intention of this seminar is not to provide a survey of such analyses, but rather to look carefully at the development of a positive hermeneutics in relation to an understanding of narrative, fiction, and translation. It is my wager that each of these topics may then enrich our collective understanding and approach to making architecture.

It is obvious that a building is not text and a work of fiction is not the same as built form. Both, however, hold the capacity to make a world and to ground one's actions. Interestingly, much of the language used to describe each, float between the two worlds: One "reads" architectural plans. One discusses the "structure" of a novel. One "plots" drawings in an architectural office. Part of our human condition is the ability to understand our existing situation and to contemplate other worlds. This ability to synthesize our diverse everyday experiences into cogent praxis is common to both architects and writers. The task of the architect and writer then, may be to contemplate possible realities and real possibilities. This is what the seminar will explore.

The readings, discussions, and productions through this semester will flesh out the nature of architecture and narrative and specifically discuss issues regarding this analogous relationship. The intention is to critically develop an attitude towards architecture as well as the specific ramifications and potentials that exist within the relationship between architecture and narrative. For example: What are the relationships between the author and the architect? A text and a built work? What is the architectural analogue to plot development? Can a building be a mystery or a noir? What can be learned about how one experiences architecture from one's experience of reading? What are the similarities and differences?

Deliverables

Oral Presentations

2 @ 30%

General topics of the weekly seminars are given in the course schedule. Students will make two, 30-45 minute oral presentation and are expected to submit a 3-5 page outline of the topics covered for distribution to each of the other participants. Each student is expected to read the selected material each week and contribute to the seminar discussions. The texts listed serve as a point of departure only. Students who present may need to develop the reading of the primary sources with secondary source material.

Students are expected to present the material and give background information regarding the author, when the piece was written, and the audience to whom the author was writing. Try to present the main argument of the essay and then comment on the relevance to your own way of thinking about architecture. Please prepare a question to pose to your colleagues and provoke conversation.

Evaluation for the presentations will be dependant upon clarity, depth, and completeness.

A reader will be provided for mandatory weekly readings. Students are expected to locate further individual presentation readings. If, for some reason, you are not able to locate any material please contact me sooner rather than later and I either provide readings to you or help you to locate them.

Term Paper

30%

You are required to write one Term Paper. The paper shall be between 3000 and 4000 words, not including footnotes and works cited. This topic may be derived from the case studies listed below, or other. Topics should be grounded in the nature of the course—that is the relationship between architecture and narrative/fiction. You may decide to analyse a novel, a piece of writing, an architectural project or other. For each, you might discuss a theme, topic, or other issue relevant to the seminar. In any event, you are asked to meet with the Instructor prior to 12 October to discuss your topic selection.

Evaluation for the Term Paper will be dependant upon clarity, precision of argument, creativity and depth. Please correctly cite all of your sources. The *Chicago Manual of Style* will answer all of your questions regarding form and content of citation. Plagiarism is grounds for failure.

Participation

10%

You are required to attend and participate in each class. Each seminar will allow for questions at the end of each class. Please ask questions. The richness of the seminar is only possible when questions are raised and discussion follows.

Final

There is no final exam for this course. This will change, however, if you do not keep up with the weekly readings. If an exam is required, it will occur on 20 Nov 07 during class time. Percentages will be adjusted.

Schedule

Week One

Introduction

Sept. 18: Introduction to coursework / Readings Assigned

Sept. 20: Introduction to library research

Week Two

Uses of Literature

Sept. 25: 1. Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988

2. (two readers)

other: Leatherbarrow, David. "The Poetics of the Architectural Setting: A Study of the Writings of Edgar Allen Poe." *VIA 8: Architecture and Literature*, Journal of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, UPenn, 1986

Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994

Sept 27: 3. Case Study One: Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. London: Harcourt, 1972.

4. (two readers)

Week Three

On Language

Oct. 2: 5. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Prose of the World*. Tr. John O'Neil. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973. chs. 1, 2, 3,5.

6. (two readers)

other: Gandelsonas, Mario. "From structure to subject: The formation of an architectural language." *Oppositions Reader*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.

Foucault, Michel. "The Discourse of Language." *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Lucy Burke. London: Routledge, 2000.

Oct. 4: 7. Case Study Two: Peter Eisenman House Studies (esp. House X and VI)

8. (two readers)

Week Four

Fiction

Oct. 9: 9. Pavel, Thomas. *Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. Ch. 3

10. Ricoeur, Paul. *From Text to Action*. Tr. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991. Ch. 5, 6.

other: Ricoeur Paul. "Life: a Story in Search of a Narrator" *Facts and Values* Ed. and Trans. M. C. Doeser and J. N. Kraay Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library, Vol. 10 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 121-132.

- Oct. 11: 11. Case Study Three: *Lancaster Hanover Masques*, John Hejduk
See also: other "masque projects" by Hejduk
12. (two readers)
- Week Five** **Storytelling**
Oct. 16: 13. Kearney, Richard, *On Stories*. London: Routledge, 2002
14. (two readers)
other: Frascari, Marco. *Monsters in Architecture*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991. Ch. 2.
- Oct. 18: 15. Case Study Four: Lerup, Lars. *Planned Assaults*, Paris.
16. (two readers)
- Week Six** **On Imagination**
Oct. 23: 17. Ricoeur, Paul. *From Text to Action*. Tr. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991. Ch. 8.
18. Kearney, Richard. *Wake of Imagination*. London: Routledge, 1988. Intro and Conclusion.
- Oct. 25: 19. Case Study Five: Darden, Doug. *Condemned Buildings*
see also JJ Lequeu for comparison
20. (two readers)
- Week Seven** **Temporality (or, playtime)**
Oct. 30: 21. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. Vol.3 Tr. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1985. Ch. 7
22. Gadamer, Hans-George *Truth and Method*. pp 91-150
- Nov.1 23. Case Study Six: *La Petite Maison*
See also: Josephine Baker house by Loos
24. (two readers)
- Week Eight** **Translation**
Nov. 6: 25. Eco, Umberto. "Translation and Interpretation." *Experiences in Translation*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2001. (part 2)
26. Steiner, George. *After Babel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. Ch. 4
other Benjamin, Walter. "Task of the Translator."
- Nov. 8: 27. Case Study Seven: Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, *Danteum*, Rome
28. (two readers)

Week Nine***Hermeneutics as Architectural Discourse***

- Nov. 6: 29. Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. ed.'s Intro., part 3
30. Pèrez-Gòmez, Alberto. "Hermeneutics as Architectural Discourse"
- Nov. 8: 31. Case Study Eight: Pèrez-Gòmez, Alberto. *Poliphilo, or the Dark Forest Revisited*. Cambridge: MIT Press,
32. (two readers)

Week Ten***Final***

- Nov. 20: No class
- Nov. 22: No class: Thanksgiving Holiday
- Nov. 27: Final Papers due, 12:00 noon