

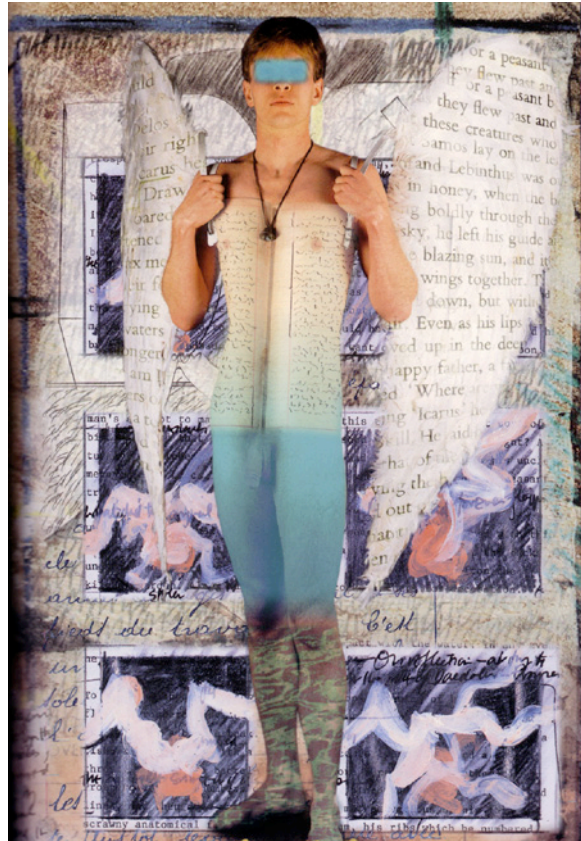
Marc J Neveu, PhD

California Polytechnic State University  
Department of Architecture

Arch 420  
Winter 2008  
Seminar in Architectural History,  
Theory and Criticism  
M / W: 10:10 – 12:00  
05-106

Office: 05-210  
(6-2507)

Hours: email for appointment  
mneveu@calpoly.edu



*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

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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 to making architecture.

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 (as dialogue, as narrative, as oral or textual communication, 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.

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. 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.

## Deliverables

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**Oral Presentations:** 50%

**Term Paper:** 30%

**Participation:** 20%

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**Oral Presentations** 2 @ 25%

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### Topic:

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 (as noted by a black dot) every 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. 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 will provide readings to you or help you to locate them.

### Format:

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. The best advice is to keep close to the text / building at hand. The philosophic readings (Monday) are intended to inform your analysis of the building projects (Thursday).

A good presentation will address the following topics:

- who?** ...is the author / architect, where are they from, who did they work with?
  - ...is the intended audience of the work?
  - ...else has reviewed the work? What was the reaction?
- when?** ...was the article written, what else was happening at that time?
- what?** ...is the article about?
  - ...is the most important point?
  - ...is the question that the author is trying to answer?
  - ...are the strategies of the author / architect?
  - ...are some other examples that may be used to explain the important issues?
- how?** ...is the argument constructed? What is the "geometry" of the argument?
- why?** ...is the author making this argument?

Please correctly cite all of your sources (text and image). The *Chicago Manual of Style* will answer all of your questions regarding form and content of citation.

I will be available on Thursday afternoon (1:00-3:00pm) to meet with students presenting the following week. If you have any questions about the readings, or, how you should be presenting the work, this is an ideal time to do so. Please email for an appointment.

### Evaluation:

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

## **Term Paper 30%**

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### **Topic:**

Your term paper topic should be framed as a question. The term paper should answer that question.

The 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. 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. You are asked to meet with the Instructor prior to 18 February to discuss your topic selection.

### **Format:**

The paper shall be between 3000 and 4000 words, not including footnotes and works cited. Please list a word count at the end of your paper.

You will be expected to utilise the library and specifically databases such as JSTOR and the Avery Index. The library may not have every book you are looking for. You may need to utilise Interlibrary Loan and/or Link+. Both are free to students; use them. All sources cited should be peer-reviewed. Wikipedia is NOT an acceptable source for citations. Please correctly cite all of your sources. The *Chicago Manual of Style* will answer all of your questions regarding form and content of citation.

Images should be included and referenced by figure numbers.

Papers should be double spaced and printed with a font that contains serifs (Times New Roman works well). Fonts without serifs are more difficult to read and it behoves you to make your term paper more readable.

### **Evaluation:**

Evaluation for the Term Paper will be dependant upon clarity, precision of argument, creativity and depth.

Plagiarism is grounds for failure.

## **Participation 20%**

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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.

### **Reaction Papers**

Each week you are asked to complete a two-page (500-750 words, maximum) reaction paper. The paper should raise one or two important points from the reading and your reaction to the reading. This should not be a summary of the entire text, nor a chance for you to wax poetic about your deep desires of architecture. Rather, a well-written paper will weave together points made in the reading to critique and illuminate the case study projects.

## **Final**

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There is no final exam for this course.

## Learning Objectives

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The objectives for the course are to develop critical thinking skills as follows:

- Analyze and understand projects (text, buildings, etc) within the world of the work.
- Analyze and understand projects (text, buildings, etc) within the longer tradition of architectural theory.
- To contextualise the projects (text, buildings, etc).
- To relate the projects (text, buildings, etc) to other fields of inquiry.
- Develop presentation skills verbally and graphically.
- Present a cogent argument regarding the results of research.
- Demonstrate the ability to utilise the research tools available at the library.
- Demonstrate the ability to research a topic.

### National Architectural Accrediting Board Criteria

As a required course for architecture majors, this class addresses several of the criteria mandated by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

- Western Traditions: Understanding of the Western architectural canons and traditions in architecture, landscape and urban design, as well as the climatic, technological, socioeconomic, and other cultural factors that have shaped and sustained them. (NAAB criterion 8)
- Non-Western Traditions: Understanding of parallel and divergent canons and traditions of architecture and urban design in the non-Western world. (NAAB criterion 9)
- National and Regional Traditions: Understanding of national traditions and the local regional heritage in architecture, landscape design and urban design, including the vernacular tradition. (NAAB criterion 10)
- Human Diversity: Understanding of the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical ability, and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures and individuals and the implication of this diversity for the societal roles and responsibilities of architects. (NAAB criterion 13)

## Schedule

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### **Week One**

#### **Introduction**

- Jan 7: Introduction to Coursework  
Readings Assigned
- Jan 9: Introduction to library research  
meet in Library rm. 111H (in reference room)

### **Week Two**

#### **Language**

- Jan 14: 1. • Gandelonas, Mario. "From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language" in *Oppositions Reader*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998): 201-23.
2. Rakatansky, Mark. "Spatial Narratives" in *Strategies in Architectural Thinking*. Ed. John Whiteman, Jeffery Kipnis, Richard Burdett. (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1988): 198-222.
- Jan 16: 3. • Verene, Donald Phillip. "Imaginative Universals." *Vico's Science of Imagination*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981): 65-95.
4. Ricoeur, Paul. "Editor's Introduction.", "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics." *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. " (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 1-27, 165-81.

### **Week Three**

#### **Architecture and Linguistics**

- Jan 21: **Academic Holiday – no class meeting**
- Jan 23: 5. *Case Study One*: Peter Eisenman, House Studies (esp. House X).
- Eisenman, Peter. "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign" in *Oppositions Reader*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998): 189-198.
6. *Case Study Two*: Lars Lerup, *Planned Assaults*.

### **Week Four**

#### **Fictional Variations**

- Jan 28: 7. • Calvino, Italo. "Lightness," "Exactitude" *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1988): 3-30, 55-80.
8. Umberto Eco, "Entering the Woods," "Possible Woods" *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1994): 1-27, 75-96.
- Jan 30: 9. *Case Study Three*: Jean-François de Bastide, *La Petite Maison*.  
Ref: Pelletier, Louise. *Architecture in Words*. (London: Routledge, 2006): 151-68
10. *Case Study Four*: Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.

**Week Five****Storytelling**

- Feb. 4: 11. • Kearney, Richard. "Narrative Matters" *On Stories*. (London: Routledge, 2002): 123-56.
12. Kearney, Richard. "Introduction," "Epilogue" *Poetics of Imagining*. (New York: Fordham University Press): 1-12, 241-257.
- Feb. 6: 13. *Case Study Five*: Doug Darden, *Condemned Buildings*.
14. *Case Study Six*: Jean-Jaques Lequeu, works.

**Week Six****(Em)ploting**

- Feb. 11: 15. • Ricoeur, Paul. "Emplotment: A Reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*" *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984): 31-51.
16. Ricoeur Paul. "Life: a Story in Search of a Narrator" *Facts and Values* Ed. and Trans. M. C. Doezer and J. N. Kraay Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library, Vol. 10 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 121-132.
- Feb. 13: 17. *Case Study Seven*: John Hejduk, *Lancaster/Hanover Masques*.
18. *Case Study Eight*: Brodsky + Utkin, complete works.

**Week Seven****Historical Variations**

- Feb 18: 19. • Frascari, Marco. "Monsters and Semiotics: a Teratology" *Monsters in Architecture*. (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991): 13-32.
- Frascari, Marco. "The Particolareggiamento in the Narration of Architecture." *Journal of Architectural Education*. Vol. 43, No. 1 (Autumn, 1989): 3-12.
20. Ricoeur, Paul. "Towards a Hermeneutics of Historical Consciousness" *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988): 207-40.
- Feb. 20: 21. *Case Study Nine*: Piranesi, *Carceri*.
22. *Case Study Ten*: Piranesi, *Nuova Pianta di Roma*. / Nolli Map.

**Week Eight****Discourse / Event**

- Feb. 25: 23. • Paul Ricoeur "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality." *Man and World*. Vol.2 No. 2, (1979): 123-141.
24. Ricoeur, Paul. "The hermeneutical Function of Distanciation." *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. " (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 131-145.
- Feb.27 25. *Case Study Eleven*: Michelangelo Antonioni, *l'Eclisse / La Notte / l'Avventura*.
26. (two readers)

**Week Nine Translation**

- March 3: 27. • Eco, Umberto. "Translation and Interpretation." *Experiences in Translation*. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2001): 65-132.
28. (two readers)
- March 5: 29. *Case Study Twelve*: Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri, *Danteum*.
30. *Case Study Thirteen*: Henri Labrouste, Bibliotheque Ste. Geneviève, Paris / Charles McKim / Phillip Johnson, Boston Public Library.

**Week Ten Hermeneutics as Architectural Discourse**

- March 10: 31. Ricoeur, Paul. "Time and Narrative: Threefold *Mimesis*" *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984): 52-90.
32. • Ricoeur, Paul. "Architecture and Narrative." *19<sup>th</sup> Triennale di Milano* (1996).
- March 12: 33. *Case Study Fourteen*: Alberto Pèrez-Gòmez, *Poliphilo, or the Dark Forest Revisited*.
34. (two readers)

**Final**

- March 19: Final Papers due, 12:00 noon, my office (05-210)
- There will be no final for this course