CL 9696B: Writing on the Wall: Literature and Architecture

Spring (2nd semester) 2016

Instructor: Professor James Miller (jmiller@uwo.ca)  Office hours: by appt (Pride Library)
Time / Location: Tuesdays 9:30am-12:20pm in The Pride Library (Weldon main floor, rm 107)
Course Description

Architectural theory has recently converged with literary and cultural theory in spaces well beyond the pages of obscure design-school journals. Where famous buildings of the ancient world (e.g. the Colosseum and the Pantheon in Rome) once generated the designs in influential theoretical texts such as Palladio’s *I quattro libri dell’architettura*, now we find that theoretical texts such as Bachelard’s *La Poétique de l’Espace* and Baudrillard’s *Simulacres et Simulation* are deeply influencing the design of contemporary buildings such as Libeskind’s Jewish Museum and Foster’s Reichstag in Berlin. Texts in cultural theory are now being produced by practising architects (e.g. Rem Koolhaas’s *S,M,L,XL*) while cultural theorists are practising what they preach by realizing their ideas of structure and signification in built space (e.g. Charles Jencks’s *Garden of Cosmic Speculation*).
What lies behind this striking trend in modern and postmodern culture? What impact is it having on the “construction” of literature in our era? How is the once stable concept of literary form affected by the ever-shifting and much contested notion of form in architecture? Has the deconstructive collapse of metaphysically stabilized meanings affected the cultural significance of planned demolitions and collapsing structures in the postmodern mega-city?

In this course we shall seek answers to these questions by first tracing the convergence of architecture and literature at a theoretical level to the emergence of semiotics within postwar structuralist thought. Reading semiotics as a modernist response to traditional allegorical hermeneutics, we shall then look back to the convergence of verbal and visual sign systems in a series of imaginary buildings and symbolic cityscapes from the Western literary tradition: the Cretan Labyrinth in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the Tower of Babel in Genesis, the City of Concord in Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*, the City of Dis in Dante’s *Inferno*, the Palace of Liberty in Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia*, the House of Alma in Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*, the Temple of Solomon in Du Bartas’s *La Sepmaine*, the Theatre of Knowledge in Campanella’s *La Città del Sole*, Pandemonium in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and the Wynand Building in Rand’s *The Fountainhead*. Particular attention will be paid to the complex interplay between articulated meanings in allegory and articulated spaces in architecture (including the transference of descriptive terminology between poetics and architectonics) in the wake of the Modernist “paragone” ushered in by Le Corbusier and Antonio Sant'Elia, who triumphantly asserted the primacy of modern architecture over all the other arts in the early twentieth century.

The course will conclude by considering the symbolic prominence and problematic interpretation of architectural signifiers in contemporary fiction influenced by poststructuralist thought: for instance, the monastic library in Eco’s *Il nome della rosa* (1980); the Scrovegni chapel and the Casa Anatta in Dessaix’s *Night Letters* (1996); the chawls and highrises of Bombay in Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999); the train stations and fortresses in Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001); and the Chicago World’s Fair Complex in Larson’s *The Devil in the White City* (2004). The course will include a special guest lecture by Toronto architect Paul Couillard.
Literature and Architecture: Schedule of Topics and Readings

JANUARY

10 — Prisoners of Architecture
- 4. Michel Foucault, Discipline & Punish (1975), “Panopticism” [online PDF]

17 — Guest Lecture #1: Paul Couillard, Architect

24 — Architexts: Metaphoric Buildings in Ancient Literature
- Readings: 1. The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablets I-II, pp. 1-22
- 2. Virgil, The Aeneid, Book 6, pp. 115-134

31 — Architexts B: Metaphoric Buildings in Biblical and Early Christian Literature
- Readings: 1. Old Testament: Genesis 11 (pp. 11-12); 1 Kings 6-10 (pp. 414-423); Daniel 5 (pp. 975-977)

FEBRUARY

7 — Architexts C: Metaphoric Buildings in Medieval Literature
- Readings: 1. Dante, Inferno canto 3 (pp. 46-47); canto 8-9 (pp. 151-175); canto 31 (pp. 566-575)
- 2. Gaston Bachelard, “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside” and “The Phenomenology of Roundness” from The Poetics of Space [online PDF]

14 — Architexts D: Metaphoric Buildings in Early Modern Literature
- Readings: 1. Francesco Colonna. Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Temple of Venus (pp. 189-224)
- 3. Tommaso Campanella. The City of the Sun (pp. 15-20, 28-32)
- 4. John Milton. Paradise Lost, Book I. Pandaemonium (pp. 24-29)

21 — Spring Break Study Period

28 — From Classicism to Modernism: Constructions and Explosions
MARCH

7 → Guest Lecture #2: Paul Couillard, Architect

14 → Textual Labyrinths / Labyrinthine Texts
            2. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* [novel]

21 → Classical Foundations / Postmodern Collapse
  Reading: 1. Salmon Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet* [novel]

28 → Breakdown: Architectural History as Traumatic Mirror
  Reading: 1. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* [novel]

Apr 4 → Writing on the Wall: Architectural History as Cultural Prophecy
  Reading: 1. Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City* [novel]
Reading List

a. Fiction ➔ Required Reading

- Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*
- Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*
- Salman Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*
- W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*
- Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City*

b. Theory ➔ Required Reading

4. Foucault, Michel, “Panopticism” in *Discipline and Punish* (trans. 1977) [online PDF]

b. Coursepack ➔ Required Readings

Table of Contents

PART ONE: Sacred Spaces and Symbolic Structures

   Excerpt: Tablets I-II, pp. 1-22

   Excerpts: Genesis 11 (pp.11-12); 1 Kings 6-10 (pp. 414-423); Daniel 5 (pp. 975-977); Revelation 21-22 (pp.317-319)

   Excerpt: Book 18, lines 490 ff. (pp. 409-413)

   Excerpt: Book 6 (pp.115-134)
   Excerpt: Lines 709 ff. (pp. 328-343)

   Excerpt: Buildings I. i. 27 ff (pp. 12-33)

   Excerpts: canto 3 (p.p. 46-47); canto 8-9 (pp. 151-175); canto 31 (pp.566-575)

   Excerpt: Temple of Venus (pp. 189-224)

   Excerpt: *Faerie Queene* II.ix (pp. 330-346)

    Excerpt: pp. 15-20, 28-32

    Excerpt: Book I (pp. 24-29)

PART TWO: Architects on Architecture

    Excerpt: pp.16-22

    Excerpt: “Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture” (pp. 2-21)

    Excerpt: pp. 167-182

    Excerpt: “Scale” (pp. 17-40)

**History and Theory →Recommended Reading**

Alberti, Leon Battista  

Anstey, T. With K. Grillner and R. Hughes (eds)  

Alexander, Christopher  
*Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (1964)  
*A Pattern Language: Towns, Building, Construction* (1977)  
*A Timeless Way of Building* (1979)

Bachelard, Gaston  
*The Poetics of Space* (1964)

Baudrillard, Jean  
*Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. 1994)  

Deleuze, Gilles  
*Difference and Repetition* (1994)

Hawkes, T.  
*Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977)

Hays, K. M.  


Jencks, Charles  
*Meaning in Architecture* (1969)

Johnson, Philip and Mark Wigley  
*Deconstructivist Architecture* (1988)

Koolhaas, Rem, et al.  
*Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large [S,M,L,XL]* (1995)
Kruft, H-W.
   *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present* (1994)

Laugier, Marc-Antoine
   *An Essay on Architecture* (trans. 1977)

Leach, Neil (ed.)
   *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*
   [essays on architecture by Adorno, Bataille, Baudrillard, Eco, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault]

Le Corbusier
   *Towards a New Architecture* (rpt. 1986)
   *Modulor I and II* (trans. 1980)
   *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* (rpt. 1971)

Ruskin, John
   *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (rpt 1989)

Semper, Gottfried

Summerson, John
   *Heavenly Mansions and other Essays* (1949, 1963)

Venturi, R.
   *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1977, rpt 1998)
   *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (1977)

Wigley, M.

Wright, Frank Lloyd
   *The Essential Frank Lloyd Wright: Critical Writings on Architecture* (2008)
Grade Breakdown

- Short Assignment: Semiotic analysis of a building……… …15%
- Class Presentation……………………………………………25%
- 20-page Essay…………………………………………………60%

Contact

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Statement on Academic Offices

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf