

ARCH 684 Spring term 2018

Graduate Seminar in Architecture

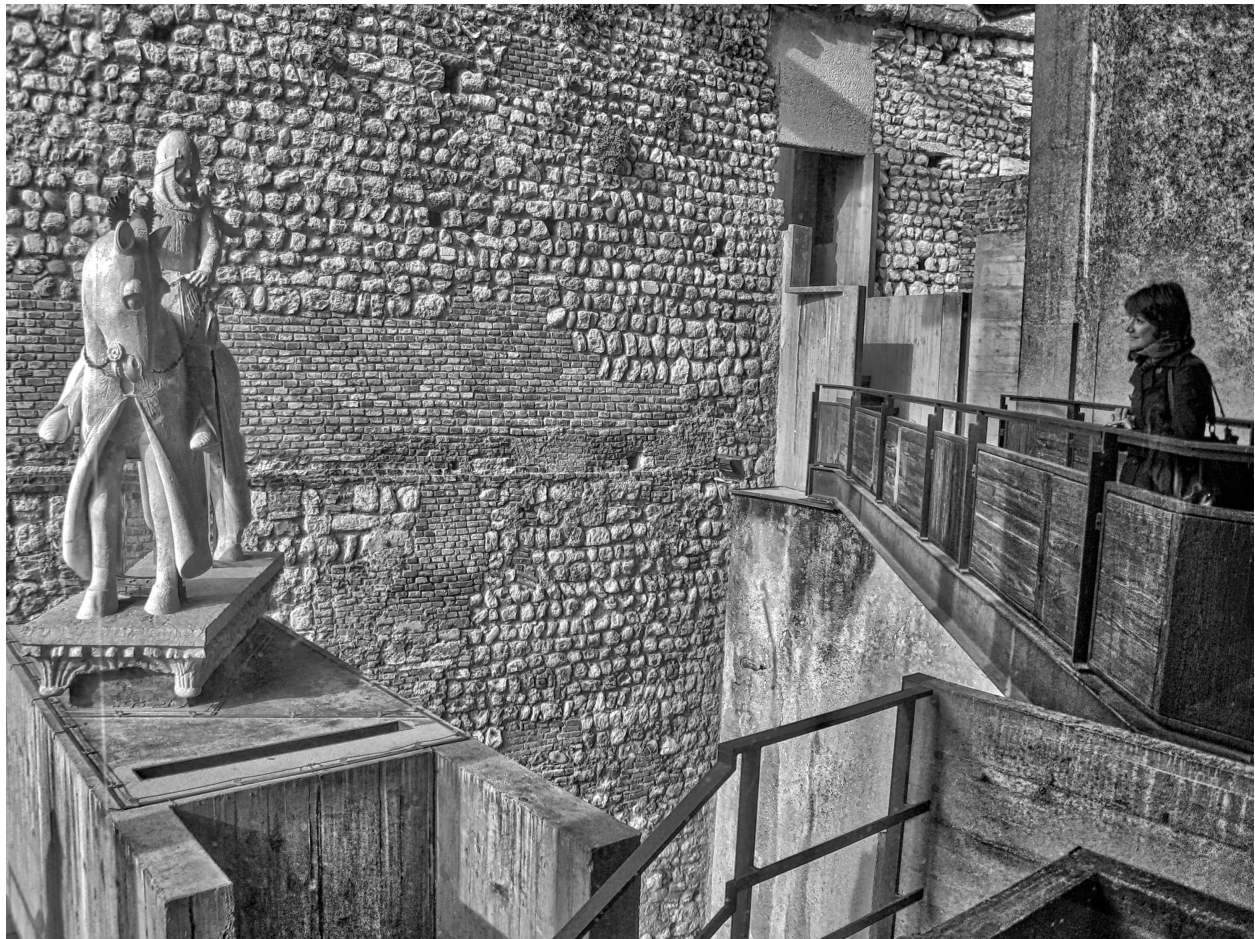
MODERN VERNACULAR: RESOURCES OF ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE

Instructor: Dr. Tracey Eve Winton (traceywinton@yahoo.ca)

Office hours — email for appointment

Lecture times: Tuesdays, 10 am -1 pm

School of Architecture, Room 2026



Modern Vernacular: Resources of Architectural Language

“In 1973, Zevi set out (his) ideas as a set of invariants - a sort of anti-classical codebook that attempted to define modernity as a language of asymmetry and dissonance, which he propagated via his magazine *L'architettura, cronache e storia*. This exciting theory of architecture as rupture and fragmentation marks him out as the seminal theoretician for all currents of modernism interested in iconoclasm and deconstruction, from Alvar Aalto in the 1930s to Daniel Libeskind in the 1990s.”

— Thomas Muirhead, March 1, 2000; *The Guardian*, Obituary of Bruno Zevi, 2000

In 1950 historian Bruno Zevi wrote a polemic, provocative, and personal book, later translated into English as *The Modern Language of Architecture* which, for reasons both political and personal, condemned architects imitating classical parameters and features for design, and outlined a strategic 'method' for designing in a modern language that displaced design emphasis from form toward content and new kinds of expression. Zevi didn't propose a style: he was very interested in the potentials of organic architecture, and in the primacy of space. He acclaimed Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* (1937) as a "new *Divine Comedy*" for architecture, implying that the house was a kind of epic poem in a modern language. Wright's inventive, unique way of building did not come out of nowhere, but like Carlo Scarpa's work two decades later, drew on its sources by way of intense study and research: from local traditions to the vernacular building practices of remote Japan.

Taking Carlo Scarpa's Castelvecchio Museum in Verona as a paradigmatic case study, we look into contemporary artists and movements to build up an exemplary picture of how architecture embodies meanings that can be discerned by the visitor.

The floor is, literally and figuratively the touchstone of a civilization. A good floor is much more than a delight to the eye; it appeals to that most sensuous of our senses, touch. Anyone who has walked barefoot on a polished marble floor, on tatami, or on those soft layers of carpet in the rooms of a Near Eastern house, has a better grasp of Oriental languor than can be gleaned from reading an unexpurgated edition of the Arabian Nights. — Bernard Rudofsky, "Before the Architects"

How can our built environment communicate as a poetic medium while also performing in its other (at times more prosaic) dimensions? Work will focus on study and analysis of the deep background of buildings and artworks dating mainly from the 1950s to the 1970s, looking at postwar American and European culture as a laboratory of discourse, concerning our world and our human relation to it. Dissatisfied with the International Style but not yet immersed in imitative Postmodernism, architects explored the poetics of space through language, materiality, action, and narrative. As a seminar group, we inquire into significant landmarks in the intellectual and cultural landscape of the period, strategies of research, communication and legibility that, while not unique to modern architecture, can be seen as the essential components that make certain contextual works endure and overflow with meaning.

This interactive graduate seminar digs into the cultural and historical foundations of projects to learn about how modern architectural language developed in the postwar era. It considers the influences of vernacular building (site-specificity, program, primitivism, local materials, craft traditions, sustainable design), popular culture, art (Spatialism, Process Art, Action Painting, Arte Povera), architectural representation, photography, and film in late modernism. Note that this course is not: a review of architectural theory; a history of modern architecture, a design methodology.

For possible USA Field Trip, students participating must have a valid passport.

Course description and content is subject to change.

INTRODUCTION to the coursework

The course is structured through weekly meetings co-ordinated and chaired either by myself or by one of the participants. It integrates lectures, seminar presentations and group discussions. There may be classes when we go outside and make things.

There are no tests and no final exam; instead the course is evaluated through presentations, participation and submissions. At the end of term you will submit your presentation in the form of a written critical paper, illustrated, with footnotes and bibliography.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this course is to introduce critical analysis and reading of architectural forms by comprehensive study of contextual discourse and debates, to open up potentials for meaningful poetics in design today, where new tools, scales, and modes of working are changing practice. Through consecutive readings and presentations, students will: analyse precedents (enhancing understanding of architectural language, integral structures and narratives, as well as spatial experience); translate concepts, research, and critical readings into their design work; and test out positions through class discussion. Course assignments require students to cross-reference and synthesize material from independent and assigned readings, their own presentations and those by the instructor and their peers, in order to construe meaningful parallels and associations between disparate texts and projects.

COURSE FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS

Assignment briefs in further detail will be handed out in class or sent by email.

Assignment 1. Prepare and present relevant topics in class for a presentation time of about 45 minutes and discussion time of about 45 minutes. Include images as interactive discussions that centre around specific aspects of a work are far more successful than abstract discourse.

Assignment 2. Rework and synthesize your research topic into the form of a maximum 5,000 word (10 pages) illustrated essay to submit with bibliography, footnotes, captions, and citations.

Participation: Seminar format courses are based on weekly round table participation. Being tuned in to the discussion and engaged in participation is essential to getting the most out of this course.

Assignments require cross-referencing of lecture material, readings, and peer presentations and so careful note taking throughout the semester is a fundamental reference. Ten weekly ungraded in-class participation activities (such as reflections on reading, lecture questions, or other course focused material) will be gathered, each making up 2% of the final course grade. These activities cannot be made up. Laptops are permitted for note taking. However, because we rely on a discussion format, non-class use of

laptops, smartphones or other devices while in class is not encouraged, because it is distracting for presenters and the class as a whole.

Student present case studies in class (and submit), comparing and finding parallels between a significant or groundbreaking “Zeitgeist” painter or artist and a contemporary approach to architecture in a specific building or buildings, in the period from 1945-1975. What made this period so rich for modern architectural language, and how can we learn from it communicative strategies for our contemporary work? At the end of term you will submit a written essay in which you expand the architecture and art history study to embrace the range of ideas that I have introduced and that we have discussed in class, to speculate broadly and specifically on the possibilities for architectural language to be part of a meaningful communicative movement in the public and cultural world today. What elements and events would be the touchstones of our times and the ideas and problems to which such a language may respond?

To discuss: potential for driving to visit FLW’s house Fallingwater, near Bear Run, Pennsylvania, an overnight study and field trip, perhaps on a weekend. Whether there are any dates that work for all of us, if there are enough cars in the group and willing drivers, or we can rent a van and split the costs, etc.

EVALUATION

Project assignment will be handed out as a separate document.

Participation is worth 20% of your final grade.

Presentation dates cannot be moved but you can trade days with someone and present a different topic.

Presentations should include abundant visual material on slides or panels that are suitably detailed that we can discuss in our group by speaking to photos, drawings or plans. They will be evaluated based on selection of projects and visuals, breadth and depth of research, points raised, quality of materials and analytical skills.

Submissions and Late Submissions.

Assignments will be submitted digitally, note that all assignments are due the night before class by 11:00 PM. Marks will diminish by 15% per day late.

Please title submissions as follows: ARCH684_S18_Last name_first name_Assignment number

Week Date Topic — Required Reading Due

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Prior to Class
Week 01	May 1	COURSE INTRO	Review thesis synopsis
Week 02	May 8	Castelvecchio Museum: a didactic walkthrough	Dante, Letter to Cangrande, Bruno Zevi, “Carlo Scarpa’s Re-design of Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy,” Samia Rab.

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Prior to Class
Week 03	May 15	Lucio Fontana, Gordon Matta Clark	Picture planes, frescoes, material planes, plans, glass, and other surfaces in relation to depth
Week 04	May 22	Library - not 2026. Bruno Zevi - read the book (pdf) and make notes during class time.	Bruno Zevi, <i>The Modern Language of Architecture</i> Bernard Rudofsky, 'Before the Architects,' <i>Design Quarterly</i> (118/119), pp. 60-63, 1982.
Week 05	May 29	Marcel Duchamp, Surrealism, Joseph Beuys	Readymades, polysemy and metabolism of material objects, objets trouvés
Week 06	Jun 5	Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian	Anti-perspectival space
Week 07	Jun 12	Renaissance Perspective, Medieval spatial sense	Unexplainable elements, opaque and mystical objects
Week 08	Jun 19	Robert Rauschenberg	Erased De Kooning, Combines, Collage, Montage
Week 09	Jun 26	Arte Povera	Action on materials and their qualities = art
Week 10	Jul 3	Jackson Pollock	Action painting and colour field distributions
Week 11	Jul 10	Narrative Architecture, Field of symbols	Rhetoric, History, Giambattista Vico,
Week 12	Jul 17	Fragment, Ruin, Demolition	Dalibor Vesely, <i>Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation</i>
Week 13	Jul 24	Prospectus for conceiving meaningful language in architecture	Is this transferable knowledge? Is it scale-dependent? What is architecture, and what is not architecture?

Readings will be distributed as a separate bibliography.

- **Course description**
- **Course objectives**
- **Required text and/or readings**
- **A general overview of the topics to be covered**
- **The evaluation structure for the course including course requirements, deadlines, weight of requirements toward the final course grade**
- **Acceptable rules for group work**

- **Indication of how late submission of assignments and missed assignments will be treated**
- **Indication of where students are to submit assignments and pick up marked assignments**
- **Any other element required by the program/department/faculty**
- **Any institutional–required statements – there are required statements that have to be published with regard to academic integrity. These are listed below:**

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity [check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/] to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate Associate Dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) (other than a petition) or Policy 71 (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a

ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals) www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm.

Note for Students with Disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

Note: students must be given a reasonable option if they do not want to have their assignment screened by Turnitin. See: <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/Turnitin/index.html> for more information.

June 15, 2009 (updated November 2009)

Academic Integrity, Grievance, Discipline, Appeals and Note for Students with Disabilities: see www.uwaterloo.ca/accountability/documents/courseoutlinestmts.pdf The text for this web site is listed below:

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