

Architecture 142

Fall 2019

School of Architecture

S Y L L A B U S

Professor: Robert Jan van Pelt Office hours, room 2022, Tue 2 pm – 4pm
 Teaching assistant: James Callan Wilson-Delafield

Place and Time: Cummings Lecture Hall, Tue 9:30 am to 12:30 am

- 1 Sept 10 Film: “Denial.” Lecture: How I came to be played by Mark Gatiss.
- 2 Sept 17 Readings: Rose, *Love’s Work*. Lecture: Life’s Work.
- 3 Sept 24 Film: Resnais and Carol, “Night and Fog”. Readings: Levi, *The Periodic Table*. This class will be held in the Arch 120 evening slot.
- 4 Oct 1 Film: “Toute la mémoire du monde.” Readings: Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. **Deadline essay topic.**
- 5 Oct 8 Film: “Fateless.” Readings: Kertesz, *Fatelesness*.
6. Oct 22 **First test: materials read and discussed in weeks 1-5 (30% term mark).**
7. Oct 29 Film: “Land and Freedom.” Readings: Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*.
8. Nov 5 Readings: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.
- 9 Nov 12 Readings: Grossman, *See Under Love*. **Deadline essay (30% term mark).**
- 10 Nov 19 Readings: Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*.
- 11 Nov 26 Readings: Sebald, *Austerlitz*.
- 12 Dec 3 Readings: Swift, *Waterland*.
- Dec 10 **Second Test: materials read and discussed in weeks 7 – 12. (40% term mark).**

THE IDEA OF THE COURSE.

In this first course of the cultural history curriculum in the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, we will explore the idea of Man as the Story-telling Animal.

We spend our lives as a tale that is told.

Psalm 90

God made man because he loves stories.

Elie Wiesel, *The Gates of the Forest*.

There is a story of a cub reporter who was sent to cover a wedding. When he came back he said dejectedly that he had no story because the bridegroom did not show up. . . .

Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*.

Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories, he has to keep on making them up. As long as there's a story, it's all right.

I don't care what you call it—explaining, evading the facts, making up meanings, taking the larger view, putting things in perspective, dodging the here and now, education, history, fairy-tales—it all helps to eliminate fear.

Graham Swift, *Waterland*.

And in one of those apparently random and abstract thoughts that so often assumed importance in his life, it struck him that when one is overburdened and dreams of simplifying one's life, the basic law of this life, the law one longs for, is nothing other than that of narrative order, the simple order that enables one to say: "First this happened and then that happened. . . ." It is the simple sequence of events in which the overwhelmingly manifold nature of things is represented, in a unidimensional order, as a mathematician would say, stringing all that has occurred in space and time on a single thread, which calms us; that celebrated "thread of the story," which is, it seems, the thread of life itself. Lucky the man who can say "when," "before," and "after"! Terrible things may have happened to him, he may have writhed in pain, but as soon as he can tell what happened in chronological order, he feels as contented as if the sun were warming his belly.

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*.

Both the world and men stand in need of praise lest their beauty go unrecognized. Since men appear in the world of appearances, they need spectators, and those who come as spectators to the festival of life are filled with admiring thoughts which are then uttered into words. Without spectators the world would be imperfect; the participant, absorbed as he is in particular things and pressed by urgent business, cannot see how all the particular things in the world and every particular deed in the realm of human affairs fit together and produce a harmony,

which itself is not given to sense perception, and this invisible in the visible world would remain forever unknown if there were no spectator to look out for it, admire it, straighten out the stories and put them into words.

To state this in conceptual language: The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it had disappeared; remembrance, by which you make present to your mind what actually is absent and past, reveals the meaning in the form of a story. The man who does the revealing is not involved in the appearances; he is blind, shielded against the visible, in order to be able to “see” the invisible. And what he sees with blind eyes and puts into words is the story, not the deed itself and not the doer, although the doer’s fame will reach to high heavens. Out of this then arises the typically Greek question: Who becomes immortal, the doer or the teller? Or: Who depends on whom?

Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*.

Reality is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and events, which, anyhow, is unascertainable. Who says what is—*legei ta eonta*—always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning. It is perfectly true that “all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them,” in the words of Isak Dinesen, who not only was one of the great storytellers of our time but also—and she was almost unique in this respect—knew what she was doing. . . . The political function of the storyteller—historian or novelist—is to teach acceptance of things as they are. Out of this acceptance, which can also be called truthfulness, arises the faculty of judgment—that, again in Isak Dinesen’s words, “at the end we shall be privileged to view, and review, it—and that is what is named the day of judgment.”

Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics.”

Reading has always been life unwrapped to me, a way of understanding the world and understanding myself through both the unknown and the everyday. If being a parent consists often of passing along chunks of ourselves to unwitting—often unwilling—recipients, then books are, for me, one of the simplest and most sure-fire ways of doing that. I would be most content if my children grew up to be the kind of people who think decorating consists mostly of building enough bookshelves. That would give them an infinite number of worlds in which to wander, and an entry to the real world, too; in the same way two strangers can settle down for a companionable gab over baseball seasons past and present, so it is often possible to connect with someone over a passion for books.

Anna Quindlen, “Enough Bookshelves.”

Writing about reality is the simplest way to not be a victim.

David Grossman, *Writing in the Dark*.

The thesis underlying this course, and the whole cultural history curriculum, is that storytelling is a passion universally shared by human beings of all times and all places. As a result, both true stories and even more untrue stories, are the basis and the substance of life as we understand it, and of civilization as we have made it. And where stories break down, or cannot be told, we find civilization in a crisis. But in the same way as we can learn about the substance and character of a person when s/he hits the bottom, so we can learn most about a civilization when it is shipwrecked. This is not a new idea. One of the greatest historians ever, Machiavelli, formulated the historiographical principle that a history that focuses on the glories of the past cannot but become obsequious, a servile *laudatio* of the powers that are. A description that seeks to establish the truth about anything, past or present, must begin by focusing on the seamy side of that phenomenon—without however ever losing sight on the other side. This is difficult. As F. Scott Fitzgerald observed in his essay “The Crack-Up,” “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” As all of us are assumed to have first-rate minds, it is worth a try. Therefore the topic that connects all stories in this course is the event that (almost) brought western civilization down: the Holocaust.

In this course students will not only be asked to consider the story-telling of others, but also engage in story-telling themselves. In two essays they will exercise their ability in writing a first-person essay, pulling from the raw material of experience a tale that may shape a vision and, perhaps, an insight.

Books to be purchased for this course

Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Penguin) 978-0143039884
 Grossman, David, *See Under Love* (Picador) 978-0312420697
 Kertesz, Imre, *Fatelessness* (Vintage) 978-1400078636
 Levi, Primo, *The Periodic Table* (Schocken) 978-0805210415
 Orwell, George, *Homage to Catalonia* (Penguin) 978-0141183053
 Oz, Amos, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (Mariner Books) 978-0156032520
 Rose, Gillian, *Love's Work* (NYRB Classics) 978-1590173657
 Sebald, W.G., *Austerlitz* (Random House) 978-0676974348
 Swift, Graham, *Waterland* (Vintage) 978-0679739791
 Schulz, Bruno, ****

I ask you to purchase these books because it is difficult to engage this course with copies that come with a schedule with return dates. But I ask you also to buy books because I believe that one cannot develop one's imagination without having one's personal library. We will probably discuss this in the course, but here a few teasers.

For some of us, books and libraries symbolize some of the very qualities and modes of being that are threatened in our fast-paced, instrumental lives. Books speak of time and depth and attention. They speak of the slower rhythm of life. And in their weighty physicality, they draw us back to our own materiality, and to the materiality of the world. Libraries are places not just where books can be found, but where people can temporarily remove themselves from the speed and

busyness of life, where they can read and write and reflect. They are (or can be) shared, sacred spaces in a secular, common world—one of the only spaces outside places of worship where quiet and contemplation are not only sanctioned but enforced.

A year or two ago, I was sitting in cafe working on this book. A woman at the next table struck up a conversation with me, and asked me what I was writing. I gave her an overview, and this led to a discussion about the place of books in an increasingly digital world. She had recently visited a home that was empty of books, as far as she could tell: no bookcases, no books on coffee tables, none. What she said next has remained fixed in my memory. “I don’t care if you don’t read,” she said, “but how can you live without books?”

David Levy, *Scrolling Forward*

Alifano: In certain ways you profess that cult of books, isn’t that so, Borges?

Borges: Yes, I do. I will tell you a secret. I still continue pretending that I am not blind. I still buy books--you know that very well, I still go on filling my house with books. I feel the friendly gravitational force of the book. I don’t exactly know why I believe that the book brings to us a possibility of happiness. . . .

Alifano: Borges, there are people who speak of the disappearance of books, and they assert that modern developments in communications will replace them with something more dynamic that will require less time than reading. What do you think about that?

Borges: I believe that books will never disappear. It is impossible that that will happen. Among the many inventions of man, the book, without a doubt, is the most astounding: all the others are extensions of our bodies. The telephone, for example, is the extension of our voice; the telescope and the microscope are extensions of our sight; the sword and the plow are extensions of our arms. Only the book is an extension of our imagination and our memory. . . . If books disappear, surely history would disappear, and man would also disappear.

Jorge Luis Borges and Robert Alifano, *Twenty-Four Conversations with Borges*

When the great thirteenth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides searched for the title of his magnum opus, he found perhaps the archetypal name for all of literature: *More Nebuchin* (A Guide for the Perplexed). Like a child that needs to hear the same story over and over again to grasp the shape of things, the structure with which to see the world, all reading and every story reassures that there is form, that events have a beginning and an end, that catharsis follows catastrophe, that goods wins over evil, that the bedlam of our daily lives can be cast in a mould of meaning, of recognizable convention: I met so-and-so yesterday, and I said, and he said, and I said . . .

We need to rehearse this in the face of a chaotic world, again and again, for reading and storytelling are consolations for the perplexed. Collecting is an aspect of this process. The collector, like the reader, seeks to convince himself that there is structure, that things can be ordered and understood, even if they seem to obey alien rules, or no rules at all. The library, a space where books are

ordered and classified and not just humbled in heaps of unconnected titles, becomes a story in its own right; within it, at least, things have their place in the scheme of things, on their shelf.

Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold*

I know how each of these volumes came to me—some of them legacies, others gifts, most of them dug up with my own hands from the rummage of second-hand dealers. Many of them have accompanied my whole life, from year to year, from apartment to apartment, their broad or narrow backs patiently waiting during sleepless nights until my hand brushed over them or took them out to link their destiny with mine. Nowhere else are the concepts of kinship and friendship as visible as in the books one owns.

Whoever owns books knows how hard it is to part with them. It is much more difficult than parting from humans. More people cling to their books until death, and then there are often children or grandchildren or friends who identify us with our orphaned books, permitting them to eke out their lives.

Martin Gumpert, *First Papers*.

The most seductive thing about literature is the books. They are a token of how self-contained it all is, or at any rate appears to be. A printed book is actually a miracle of technology that took more than five hundred years to develop, but it does not look or feel impossibly far from the notebook and the pen that are all it takes for us to get a printed book started. . . . Not only can the writer read in the café, he can write. And the day might always come when the book he reads in the café that he wrote. When he looks at his own sentences in print, he will find them transformed. The better they are—let us suppose that he can tell bad from good even when reading his own stuff—the more they will sound as if he didn't write them. They will sound as if they were written by the single voice that all good writers seem to share when at their closest to the truth.

Clive James, *Cultural Amnesia*.

The requirement to buy books for a university course may seem old-fashioned: for decades now, course packets of photocopied readings and, more recently, a list with websites seem to have become the usual way of providing texts. Yet these course packets and downloadable texts carry an insidious message: it proclaims that reading material is ultimately disposable. The cultural history stream at the School of Architecture has, from its beginning, tried to link the act of reading to its origin as a sacred act. If books contain in their writings the imprint of the souls of people—mostly dead but sometimes still alive—it is appropriate to treasure and keep these embodiments of the spirit. In traditional societies, written materials could not be discarded in a careless manner: texts were not thrown away, but buried with ceremony, or stored in special rooms. The contemporary book still carries a dignity that demands respect. The photocopy does not. Created most often in violation of copyright, and with a violation of the original form—whatever the size of the original, it will end up on an 8 1/2 by 11 sheet—the photocopy proclaims that it does not matter if, once its content has been read and examined, it is tossed out. This is

certainly acceptable in business but, despite the fact that it has become a sad practice in universities, is unacceptable in what is essentially a Great Books curriculum.

ON THE TESTS.

To assist your preparation for the two tests, here some points to consider, in relation to your analysis of the readings, lecture material, and construction of a thesis argument.

Content Analysis

1. In one or two sentences, describe the main idea(s) or action in each chapter of the book.
2. In four sentences or less, present the major argument of the book.
3. Select quotations from the text that reinforce your position.

Structural analysis

1. How does each chapter begin/end?
2. How are the chapters organized?
3. How is the book narrated? One voice? Many voices? Why would this be important?
4. What is the nature of the conflict presented?
5. Is this a tragedy/satire/romance/comedy?
6. What position does the author take to the nature of the conflict? Do I agree/disagree with this position? What evidence from the text can I use to support my position?

Preparation for the tests:

1. To strengthen your argument, consider its relation to the ideas discussed in class.
2. Make a summary of your lecture notes, including a list of the major ideas, and consider the point of the lecture. What was I trying to say?
3. Do the same for your reading notes, considering the author's position. Look for parallels or discrepancies between the two summaries, from which to build your own argument about the course.
4. Form a small study group to discuss ideas/uncertainties.
5. Heed the advice given in Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*: strive to improve the clarity of your writing by reducing the number of words used to make your point. "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts."

Writing the tests:

1. Take 5 minutes and read the question carefully! Make sure you understand what the question is asking. Break down the question, even re-write a part in your own words to make sure you understand it.
2. Plan your argument – take a few minutes and write a point form outline. Think about how you are going to answer the question. What is my thesis? And how will I support it? How will I begin and end my argument?
3. Timing is critical. Plan how long to spend on each question (if more than one). Be strict with yourself. Be clear with your thoughts – when writing under pressure it is easy to get lost in your own writing and go off in different directions. Stick to the outline – use it as a reference to build a logical, persuasive argument. Stay on track by checking what you are writing against your original thesis. Ask yourself, do the ideas presented, and does each sentence I am writing, help or hinder the argument, or am I going in a different direction? If you find yourself running out of time – at least give us point form, so we can see how you intended to construct your argument or where it was planning on going. Get to know your writing style – how long will it take me to write a paragraph?
4. Also, please double space your work, it is easier to read and mark that way. Please try to write legibly: markers get irritable when they have to decipher handwriting.
5. We are not looking for the right answer (if it even exists), but rather the logic, accuracy, reasoning (support), clarity and conciseness of your argument.

Grading of the tests:

1. Grading will be based on the following principle: clarity and elegance of your argument which, in order to be effective, should
 - a. include a simple thesis backed up by clear evidence and followed by a conclusion (1/3 of mark);
 - b. be historically and/or logically valid (1/3 of mark),
 - c. and use appropriate and effective quotations from the texts discussed (1/3 of mark).
2. Bad grammar and bad spelling will affect your grade negatively, as they are great offenses. Illiteracy will lead to disaster. Delay in the hand-in will result in a penalty. You are allowed to use your notes and the texts.

ON THE ESSAY TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS COURSE.

Architects do not only communicate their ideas in drawings, but also in words. For the architect, writing is a necessary and important skill. And it is an essential part of any academic program that aspires to do more than simply train people in the use of discrete set of skills.

In this course you will have to write a personal narrative, which may take the form of a memoir or a first-person essay. Linked closely to an art form with which most of us are very familiar—the story telling that occurs in every conversation—the personal

narrative seeks to create prose which, in the words of the writer Vivian Gornick, is “controlled by an idea of the self under obligation to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver wisdom.”

Truth in a memoir is achieved not through a recital of actual events; it is achieved when the reader comes to believe that the writer is working hard to engage with the experience at hand. What happened to the writer is not what matters; what matters is the large sense that the writer is able to make of what happened. For that the power of a writing imagination is required. As V.S. Pritchett once said of the genre, “It’s all in the art. You get no credit for living.”

The personal narrative has that in common with architectural design in that it attempts to distill from the manifold of experience an insight and a position. It is different from architectural design that at least in the memoir the self plays a central but not necessarily exclusive role. Almost two centuries ago the German writer Friedrich Hebbel wrote in his diary that “I consider it to be the great duty of every person who writes to contribute materials to his biography.”

And when he has made no spiritual discoveries and has not conquered foreign countries, then he must at least have made many different errors, and those errors are as important to mankind as the truths discovered by the greatest of men.

In this course you will write a personal narrative in which you must seek to merge the “first-person essay” and the “memoir.” In this essay, due on November 6, you must present an environmental autobiography. In this memoir/essay, you are asked to reflect upon a single place that is especially important to you, to consider way it made you the person you are today, and the way it shapes your ambition as an architect-to-be. While this essay has much in common with a “normal” autobiography, its central focus should be not on people or events, but on a place, its location, form, texture, sound, light and so on. You must include two sketches. This essay should be around 3,000 words long. This essay requires some sustained thought and work. In order to stimulate you to begin work early, you must submit a title with a one paragraph outline for the essay on October 2. If you fail to submit this outline by that date, your essay mark will be reduced with 10 points (out of 100)—that is an essay that would have earned an A becomes a B, and so on.

ETCETERA

Moving from the sublime to the mundane, here the basic rule that governs class time: pagers, i- or other phones, blackberries, other electronic voice or e-mail communication devices, ipads, tablets, androids and computers, must be turned off for the duration of the class and cannot be on your desk. This means that you will have to make your notes by hand with pencil, marker or pen on paper, either single sheets to be assembled in binders, or in notebooks of your choice. There is little need to address the lack of civility shown when one answers a phone class in class. For those of you who wonder why I exclude the use of other electronic means as tools of note-taking, I refer to David Cole's "Laptop vs. Learning," an article that appeared on 7 April 2007 in *The Washington Post*. Cole, a Professor at Georgetown University, reported that a survey showed that 80 percent of his students admitted to be "more engaged in class discussion when they are laptop-free," and 95 percent used their laptops in class for "surfing the Web, checking e-mail, instant messaging and the like." Cole concluded his article with the observation that reflects my own experiences with the use of laptops in class: "For most classes, it is little more than an attractive nuisance. Technology has outstripped us on this one, and we need to reassess its appropriate and inappropriate role in teaching." My own experience reflects Cole's. So, no laptops.

Also, for the record, the so-called "small print." But, despite the fact it is in small print, don't ignore it.

AVOIDANCE OF ACADEMIC OFFENSES

Academic Integrity: To create and promote a culture of academic integrity, the behaviour of all members of the University of Waterloo is based on honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

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,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>

Experience teaches that there is rarely any need to refer to the small print during the course.