

ARCH 685: Readings/Seminar in Architecture

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1119 685-003 # 461

Fall 2011

Instructor: Tracey Eve Winton

Course Title: Handcraft: Detail and Ornament

Course Description: The reading course is based on a modified version of ARCH 684: The Liminal Space: Detail and Ornament. (Please see course outline attached)

How will performance be assessed?

5 reports on readings: 50%

Research paper: 35%

Poster design: 15%

(please see attached outline for further details)

Graduate Seminar | The Liminal Space: Detail and Ornament

ARCH 684—400 SPRING 2010

Thursday 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. in Room 2026

Chair: Tracey Eve Winton

Office: 2013; Hours Friday 2-5 by email appointment; email tewinton@uwaterloo.ca



Course description

“A fundamental inquiry into any aspect of reality is the relationship between the part and the whole, the fragment and the complete, the detail and the indivisible unity of a deed, of an object, of a thought.” — Stefan Buzas, in *Carlo Scarpa: Architecture in Details*.

Ornamental surface, articulation, and joint, potentially much more than just applied decoration or stable construction, are worthy of re-evaluation as a vital key to architectural organization, legible meaning, and an entrance into the relevance of beauty in the constructed environment.

The term *decus* means ornament, grace, embellishment, splendour but also glory, honour, dignity and so on. The verb *decoro* means I adorn or decorate or beautify ... But the adjectival form (*decorus*) is more exclusively moral, paralleling our contemporary “decorous” and readily translating the Greek term for “the appropriate (*euprepēs*)”. (Nelson, 1993: 8)

“Ornament is the principal part of architecture.” — John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, 1853

“Ornament is dangerous precisely because it dazzles us and tempts the mind to submit without proper reflection.” — Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*

“God is in the detail.” — Aby Warburg, quoted by Mies van der Rohe

In *The Nature of Ornament* (2000), Kent Bloomer argues that ornament's purpose is to articulate a realm of the imagination. He observes that ornament has its own artistic features, which tie it to rhythm, line, purposes other than the pragmatic and utilitarian, is characterized mainly by combination and metamorphoses; finally that "The life, the playfulness, and the fantasticality of ornament exist in the liminal or transitional space of its objects."

"The joint is the beginning of ornament / And that must be distinguished from / decoration which is simply applied. / Ornament is the adoration of the joint." — Louis Kahn, *Light is the Theme*, 1975

Our intention in this course is to critically examine the place and the meaning of the architectural detail in Modern and contemporary architecture, whether read as a tectonic connection, a symbolic ornament, or an aesthetic and narrative mode of structuring inhabitation. It will be an informed enquiry into the poetics of form under specific circumstances, the part in relation to the whole, and the forms of representation by which architecture communicates. However, we will endeavour to shift the focus of understanding the detail from aesthetic form to the *process of creation and architectural invention*, with the intention of understanding how mood and atmosphere are established, communicated, and nuanced in the design of space. We will begin with the historical understanding of the communicative pattern in architecture, the divergence of detail and ornament, and what constitutes a detail in the discourse of Modernity.

"During the nineteenth century a seemingly irreparable rift opened between architectonic structure and ornament. Ornamental detail was contrasted with structural detail, and the overall dishonesty or honesty of a work was judged according to whether its decoration was or was not completely distinct from the purely functional, static organism." — Stefan Buzas, in *Carlo Scarpa: Architecture in Details*.

Ornament was originally associated with the idea of *order* in architecture, cosmic order as well as social order, and thus was a detail that communicated collective values. It had a moral as well as an aesthetic dimension. In the nineteenth century we may observe a shift in architectural literature, moving from treatises which contextualize form with meanings, towards pattern books and catalogues of forms, diverse and eclectic. Ornament was transformed into an index of taste, an interface related to the senses. There was a revival of the importance of materiality and the material, inorganic and organic, as metaphor. During high modernism, ornament became sublated into detail.

With the rise of postmodern stylistics in the later twentieth century, which attempted to enhance the legibility of architecture by recovering its figural dimension, ornament lost the last of its rich cultural connotations and became an applied aesthetic surface not related to the structure of the building, nor its historical context, but to the linguistic preferences of the architect. At the moment in which a community could no longer recognize themselves through the work of architecture as a social entity, architectural detail could no longer be counted on as a medium of social integration or maker of place.

Today, many architects are using figurative patterning again, yet in a new way. What does this return indicate? How is contemporary ornament related to sustainability, to technology? Is ornament an essential part of architecture, a basic human need? Is it an index of culture? And whether or not, what is its message and place in giving shape to human lives, to the art of living well? I propose that we augment this definition, by looking at how the detail functions physically, aesthetically, and symbolically in its *place*, not only within the building but also within the process of making architecture.

"...it is impossible to see architecture in its full complexity at once. Architecture is made up of details, fragments, fabrications. And the very idea behind it can be captured in a fragment, in a detail." — John Hejduk, "The Flatness of Depth", 1980

"To a large degree, the quality of the finished object is determined by the quality of the joins." — Peter Zumthor

We will begin by discussing how these concepts are relevant to the architectural thesis, as well as to all scales of design. The group will collaborate in building up a conceptual vocabulary, as a set of intellectual tools, relating architectural detail to the structure of traditional rhetoric and to embodied experience, through the Roman public orators and Carruthers, whose studies of medieval use of architectural imagery in meditation reveal clues to the metaphorical and narrative qualities of architectural space, and introduce key sense- and orientation-related concepts for ornament like *status*, *skopos*, *ductus*, and *modus*, as well as key concepts for detail, like division and composition. Roman ideas of the art of memory, composition, and figurative language (tropes) will bring new ways of looking at the relationship between detail and whole, as well as that between the idea and the material.

Format

This is a traditionally structured Masters Seminar, meeting every Thursday 2-5 in Room 2026. It is based on a collective discourse built around terminology, readings, writings, and presentations with discussions and conversations. On the first day, the group will select presentation texts from the list of works below (philosophical essays and books), while including the possibility of bringing one's own selections (including stories, movies, and poetry) to the table. Each person will choose which readings they will be presenting over the course of the term. Built projects to be discussed through the conceptual vocabulary established by the presentations may be chosen in advance or spontaneously week by week. Most of the articles are available as pdfs and can easily be shared to read. Auditing is welcomed and auditors may contribute to the seminars.

Marks will be based on the presentations by the students to the seminar group which will include the attentive reading of buildings, drawings, and texts, on the participation in discussions around the course material, and a research paper featuring architectural details (or their absence) which may form a chapter of, or an appendix to, your thesis. Evaluation of the written material will be based on your ability to read and interpret projects, drawings, and texts. Students will be expected to come to the weekly class, participate actively in discussion, contribute examples in the form of books, photos, movies and slideshows. No examination will be given in this course.

Evaluation

Participation in group discussions and presentations : 50%

Research paper due Tuesday August 9 : 35%

Poster design 11x17 : 15%

The **poster** will be a primarily visual argument of your personal position on the role of the detail in architecture; as a collage neither slogan nor imagery need be original: only how they are assembled, composed and joined. We will exhibit the posters. The research **paper** may be a development of one of your in-class presentations, or a chapter of, or an appendix to, your thesis.

Discussion Goals

To assess the historical meanings behind the place of ornament in architecture with a view to understanding its place; to trace the transformations of the ornamental detail and the tectonic detail in architecture, to collectively build up an enriched conceptual vocabulary with which to find a philosophical position, by means of reading literature alongside the careful analysis of built works and drawings; to thus broaden the scope and understanding of how ornamental and tectonic detail are used in Modern architecture and today architecture (i.e. not just the figurative or the traditional); to discuss the relevance of these terms to major historical categories like beauty, decorum, architectural language, quotation, temporality, articulation, adaptive reuse, tectonics, and the construction of place; to assess their meanings at scales of the body, the building, and the city; to look at the origins of the idea of detail and its place in the contemporary Zeitgeist, through themes like fragmentation, narrative, assemblage, and ecological organization; to pay special attention to those details with which the body comes into contact, and how they are used to reorganize the attention within a space, observe how details can be used to create coherence in a building, discuss the relevance of craft and technology, to examine how ornament and detail tie architecture in to the world in front of the work; and practically to investigate the devising of details in design, models, mock-ups or prototypes, specifications, and drawings.

Readings

Readings to be presented every week will be distributed at the start of the term. The class **presentations** involve presenting your readings in conjunction with images of one of more buildings and architectural details. These presentations are somewhat informal. Readers may choose how they prefer to present their notes, as well as summarize key concepts, suggest what is at stake (pros and cons). They and any other members of the seminar may

contribute visual material to the forum, in any form including library books, slides, movies, designed objects, maquettes, and photos.

1. Concepts and Contexts – May 05

- *Stephen Parcell, "The World in Front of the Work", 1993 (JSTOR)
- *Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*. Appendix: "The Detail and the Pan" (2005)
- *David Leatherbarrow, "World Building: Skirkanich Hall, by Williams and Tsien" (2009)
- Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology" (1939)

2. Cosmos, Creation, and Ornament – May 12

- *Vitruvius. *Ten Books on Architecture*. "The Corinthian Order" (ca. 25 BC)
- *George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (1988)
- *Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (1996)
- *Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love* (2004)
- Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*. (ca. 1450) pp.23-24, 61; VI:1-2, 4-5, 12; IX: 5, 7-8, 9-10.
- John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: Classical orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (1990)

3. Articulation: Decorum to Decor – May 19

- *Tim Anstey, "The Dangers of Decorum" (2007)
- *Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (2000)
- *Marco Frascari, "The Particolareggiamento in the Narration of Architecture" (1989) (JSTOR)
- Rhetorica ad Herennium* (90s BC) and selections from Cicero, Quintilian
- Peter Kohane and Michael Hill, "The Eclipse of a Commonplace Idea: Decorum in Architectural Theory" (2001)
- Caroline van Eck, *Book of Architecture ...*, *Germain Boffrand* (2002)

4. Play and Poetics – May 26

- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), § 14, 22, 41, 42, 51
- "The Idea of Abstraction in German Theories of the Ornament from Kant to Kandinsky", David Morgan, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Summer, 1992), pp. 231-242
- Johann Huizinga *Homo Ludens* (1938)
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1960), selections
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986)

5. Active Materials: Industrial Revolution to Arts and Crafts – June 02

- *Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Trans. Evelyn Kain. (1893)
- *Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine" (1901) (JSTOR)
- *Adolf Loos "Ornament and Crime" (1908)
- Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings* (1851)
- Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, (1856)
- John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1884)
- Louis H. Sullivan, "Ornament in Architecture" (1892) in *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings*
- Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934)
- *Henry Van de Velde, *Manuscript on Ornament* (unpublished; JSTOR)

Louis Sullivan, *A System of Architectural Ornament: According with a Philosophy of Man's Powers* (1924)

5. Modernism – June 09

- *Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981)
- *Kenneth Frampton, *Studies of Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (2001)
- *Roland Barthes, "Le vaisseau Argo - The ship Argo", in *Roland Barthes By Roland Barthes*, 1977
- Antoni Gaudí, *Ornamentation*. VIA (1973)
- Thomas H. Beeby, *The Grammar of Ornament / Ornament As Grammar*. Ornament. VIA 3. (1977) Graduate School of Fine Arts. University of Pennsylvania.
- David Van Zanten. (1977). *Architectural Ornament: On, In, And Through The Wall*. Ibid.

6. Postmodern Hybridization and Abstract Expressionism – June 16

- *Venturi, Robert. "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture: Selections from a Forthcoming Book" (1965)
- *Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, "A Third Principle: The Avoidance of Applied Decoration" (1966)
- *Alan Colquhoun "From Bricolage to Myth, or How to Put Humpty-Dumpty Together Again", (1978) *ibid.*
- Joseph Rykwert. "Ornament Is No Crime" (1975)
- Robert A. M. Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy", (1976) in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays
- Aaron Betsky, *Ornament is Fine*. Blueprint, No.145. p.24-25. (1997)
- Brent C. Brolin, *Architectural Ornament: Banishment and Return* (2000)

7. Abduction: Criminology, Art, Photography, Movies, Architecture – June 23

- *Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm" (JSTOR) (1979)
- *Carlo Ginzburg and Anna Davin, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method" (JSTOR) (1980)
- *Umberto Eco, Thomas Albert Sebeok, *The Sign of three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (1988)
- *Gianmarco Vergani et al, eds. *The Culture of Fragments: notes on the question of order in a pluralistic world*, *Precis* v. 6 (1987)
- *Gregotti, Vittorio. "Mimesis" (1983), "The exercise of detailing" (1983), "Narration in Architecture" (1987), Casabella.

June 30 – no class

8. Articulation, Invention, Imagination in Design – July 07

- *Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail" (1984)
- *Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *Differences*, MIT Press (1997)
- *Kent Bloomer, *The Nature of Ornament. Rhythm and Metamorphosis in Architecture*, 2000
- Mark Wigley "The Translation of Architecture, the Production of Babel", (1984) in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays

9. Technology vs. Phenomenology – July 14

- *Reiser + Umemoto, *Atlas of Novel Tectonics* (2006)
- *Andrea Gleiniger and Georg Vrachliotis, ed. *Pattern: Ornament, Structure, and Behavior* (2009)

- *Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (2005)
- *Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (2006) and *Atmospheres*
- Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (2004), Ch. 7, 8
- Farshid Moussavi, and Michael Kubo. *The Function of Ornament* (2006)

10. Presentation of paper outlines – July 21 (class may begin earlier)

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>

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. Once registered with OPD, please meet with the professor, in confidence, during my office hours to discuss your needs.