Architecture as biography

This PhD seminar has two major intentions. (1) It explores the role of architecture as a primary source in biography, and (2) it contemplates the role of the archive in such work.

What do buildings tell us that diaries, letters, photographs, and other two-dimensional texts keep silent? Each meeting will showcase a place or building type; we will then discuss readings that help us to understand the role of architectural evidence in life story-telling.

We are privileged to hold the weekly course in the Sottsass Room, in the Shaughnesssey House, at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (*note exceptions, Oct. 2 and 30); most weeks we will engage directly with archival holdings relevant to the subject at hand.

The assignments are to write a 25-page biographical text engaging a source or sources at the CCA; to share your research in the form of a pecha kucha (20 slides x 20 seconds) during the last class; and to lead or co-lead the weekly discussion once during the semester, in consultation with Prof. Adams.

Please note that your individual research at the CCA must be scheduled by appointment, at least two weeks in advance.

Assessment: Paper 50%, pecha kucha 25%, leading discussion 10%, weekly participation 15%.

September 4: Introduction

CCA handling workshop

Dana Arnold, “(Auto)biographies and Space,” in Arnold and Sofaer, Biographies & Space, 6-34

Jane Rendell, "From Architectural History to Spatial Writing,” 135-50

September 11 + 18: Politicians

Case study (CCA collection 1): Cormier house by Ernest Cormier and Trudeau Chalet by Arthur Erickson, 1981
Adams and Macdonell, “Making Himself at Home”

Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States*, chapter on Monticello

Despina Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, chapter on the Berghof

Perri Meldon blog in *Perspectives on History*

September 25: Architects


John Summerson, “Sir John Soane and the furniture of death”

Nicole Reynolds, “The Literary Lives of Sir John Soane’s House-Museum”


Mark Lamster, *The Man in the Glass House*, chapter on house

Alice Friedman, “People who live in glass houses”

*Oct 2: Martin Bressani: School of Architecture or CAC*

*Case study: Catholic church of Saint-Joachim on the Côte-de-Beaupré in Québec*

Martin Bressani, Grignon M. “Une protection spéciale du ciel: le décor de l’église de Saint-Joachim et les tribulations de l’Église catholique québécoise au début du XIXe siècle”

Alan Gowans, "Thomas Baillairgé and the Québécois Tradition of Church Architecture”

Luc Noppen, "L'architecture intérieure de l'église de Saint-Joachim de Montmorency: l'avènement d'un style”

Ollivier Hubert, "Beaucoup de bruits pour quelques fêtes. Pourquoi, en 1791, une réforme du calendrier des fêtes suscita la passion”

Ollivier Hubert, "Espaces sacrés et groupes sociaux dans le Québec rural (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle)”

October 9: CCA guided tour [note AA will not attend]

October 16: Writers
Other writers’ houses: Margaret Laurence, Neepawa, Manitoba; Edith Wharton, “The Mount,” Lenox, Mass.; Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury and Monk’s House, East Sussex, UK; Iris Murdoch, Oxford, UK; Joan Didion, homes in California; Bronte sisters, Haworth; Charles Dickens, London; Vernon Lee, Tuscany; Edgar Allan Poe, The Bronx; Agatha Christie, Devon UK; Shirley Jackson, Bennington, Vermont; Victor Hugo houses in Paris and Guernsey;

No author, “The structure of Haworth Parsonage”

Suzanne Nash, “Writing a Building: Hugo’s Notre-Dame de Paris”

Timothy Hyde, “‘Well built, but poorly roofed’: Notes on the Remains of Architectural History”

Peter McNeil, “Crafting queer spaces: privacy and posturing”

Matthew Reeve, “Gothic architecture, sexuality, and license at Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill”

Diana Fuss, The Sense of an Interior, chapters on Dickinson and Proust

October 23: Institutions and Philanthropy

Rafico Ruiz, “Behind the Scenes at the Grenfell Mission”

[As we will engage with CCA architecture as a biographical source on this day, you may wish to peruse the website and statements of intention such as Canadian Centre for Architecture: The First Five Years and Helen Searing, “The CCA as Museum of Architecture,” RACAR, XVI, 2 (1989): 181-92]

*October 30: Women (class to be held at 3647 Peel)*

Case study: Square mile mansion 3647 Peel; Shirley MacLaine house by Arthur Erickson, De Baca County, New Mexico, 1989-94

Abigail Van Slyck, “Women in Architecture and the Problems of Biography”

Annmarie Adams, “Encountering Maude Abbott”

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Carolyn Heilbrun, Writing a Woman’s Life

Katarina Bonnevier, “A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray’s E.1027”
November 6: Doctors

Case study (CCA collection 4): Maison de Verre, Pierre Chareau et al

Annmarie Adams, “Designing Penfield”

Diana Fuss, The Sense of an Interior, chapter on Freud

November 13: Famous men, David Theodore

David Theodore, "'Gay is the right word': Montague Summers and the Replevin of Richard Barnfield”

David Theodore, “Simplex sigillum veri: The Exemplary Life of an Architect”

David Theodore, "'The Spiritual Aspect': Gordon A. Friesen and the Mechanization of the Modern Hospital”

David Theodore, “Treating Architectural Research: The Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust and the Postwar Hospital”

November 20: Industrialists (Guest Cameron Macdonell)


Readings TBA

November 27: Last class: student pecha kucha’s including CCA staff
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities.
Readings:


Lepore, Jill. “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography.” *The


Ulrich, L. “How Betsy Ross Became Famous.” *Common-place* 8, no.1
http://common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/ulrich


