



WORKSHOP 5 / ARCHITECTURE THROUGH LANGUAGE – A PLAY FOR RADIO IN ONE ACT

CONTENT

The architect is a storyteller. The architect designs spaces that speak to the user and, in turn, the user hears that story through an interaction with a building. What would architecture be without a story? We suggest it would not be *architecture*. But to tell a story we need a language in which to communicate.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) the founder of modern linguistics saw language as ‘signs’ that express ideas. Each sign has a ‘signifier’ (a word) and a ‘signified’ (a meaning). We want to use this concept and apply it to architectural space. We want to tell stories that help the listener to imagine and indeed to experience space without seeing it.

We have designed a two week long workshop that will encourage you to use your imagination and apply it to a piece of significant architecture. By doing so you will elaborate a story through the body of someone else – not yourself – who experiences that architecture. You will need to consider questions about the building (the signifier) and the architectural intention (the signified) that the architect wishes to imply. So, for us and for our storytelling workshop the building becomes what Roland Barthes (1915-1980) would have called the ‘rose’ and the architectural connotation is what he would have labelled ‘passion.’

This is a creative exploration, interpreting architecture through storytelling and choosing words and sounds to communicate an idea. There is no right or wrong answer.

As students of architecture you need to become storytellers, and this workshop will help you to do so.

AIMS

Over the two weeks from 16th to 27th November you will work (via the internet) in groups with students from other universities. You will all speak different languages and come from different cultural traditions. First, you will need to decide on a common language(s) of communication for the group. Then, you will need to think about how we express feelings through words by using rhythm, tone, inflection etc...As well as doing this you will be guided in developing ideas about what is a ‘story’. Would the same story told in one language be the same when translated into another? And if architectural space is a ‘story’ we might then ask would the same architectural space be understood differently depending on the language, words, rhythm, tone and inflection used to describe it.

When we are familiar with a language the words we use carry meaning. Our cultural development gives words (signifiers) a particular cultural meaning (signified). So whilst we can translate a word into another language it is the meaning that’s all too often lost in translation. The listener does not give the word the same meaning as you. When applied to architecture we can think of this as the difference between the building (the signifier) and the architect’s intention. But we can take it a step further and explore the difference between the architect’s intention (signified) and a reading of the building as experienced by the user (which might be a different ‘signified’ to the architect’s).

We aim to explore the translation of architectural idea into architectural experience through storytelling.

By the end of our two weeks, you will have found a way within your groups of describing an architectural space that we (as architects) know well, and of situating a *narrative* within that space, that helps someone else experience it as architecture. In other words, we will tell a story about something that happened/happens/will happen somewhere, but in an immediately intelligible language.

METHOD

At the start of the workshop, under the guidance of Mike and Thom, we will work together to answer the questions posed above. We will you into groups that are deliberately multi lingual. We hope as many native languages as possible will be brought together, and none dominate. We will introduce you to the ideas of language and storytelling and how to apply them to three dimensional space. We will encourage you to be confident in expressing yourself using unfamiliar language and in recognising how 'sound' is just as important a concept as 'word.'

Each group will be allocated a building well known to students of architecture but which no-one in the group will have visited. Each group will have a different building. Information on the building will be easily available on line and it will be able to be visited 'virtually.' The building will have been the subject of architectural writing and the intentions of the architect will be readily found via the internet. Getting an architectural understanding of the building will be the starting point for each group. That will happen quickly.

The group will then be allocated a persona and will be asked to develop a one act radio play (story) exploring that persona's interaction with the building in a fictional way. Guidance will be given on the storyline but the important point is that the interaction must be such that it is with the architecture. In other words the action of the play could not take place meaningfully anywhere else but in the building given. The play will last 5 minutes and will be spoken, but accompanied by sound effects (but only such that can be made by students' voices) as appropriate. The play must not mention the name of the building or give express clues as to what or where it is. No expressly architectural terminology must be used and you must not simply describe the space – the important thing is the narrative. There must be a clearly understandable narrative (beginning, middle and end) to the story, all of which must be appropriate for the architectural space. The choice of words, rhythm, intonation and tone are vital as will be the sound effects. The play is to be pre-recorded by the group. The speakers must not use their native tongue nor English.

If done well the other groups should be able to describe the architectural space (perhaps by drawing it as they listen) and even guess the name of the building in which the play is set, just as a play about passion might lead us to draw a rose (without ever using the word rose in the play).

SCHEDULE

To be developed, when we establish other unis' schedules.

Monday 16: Participants identified.
Initial briefing
Understanding what a story is.

- Using language to convey meaning.
- Tuesday 17 Allocation of building
Identification of 'signified' and 'signifier'
Further briefing to all groups
- Wednesday 18 and Thursday 19
Allocation of persona – the storyline in the architectural space
Mike and Thom 'visit' each group for live tutorials
- Friday 20 The story – guidance and development
Plenary for all groups
- Monday 23, Tuesday 24:
The 'script' and 'roles' (voice, sound, effects)
Mike and Thom 'visit' each group for live tutorials
- Wednesday 25 A rehearsal
- Thursday 26 Recording and submission
Mike and Thom available as required
- Friday 27 On-line performance
On line interviews with the directors and actors
Simultaneous posting of individual live drawings as each performance ends

EVALUATION - ASSESSMENT

Each university has its own expectations and requirements and you will be informed of those separately. As a general guide to assessing your involvement in this workshop the following will be considered:

- A demonstration of understanding the application of 'signifier' and 'signified' to architectural space.
- A grasp of the architectural intention behind a given space
- The use of rhythm, tone and delivery as regards language to convey feeling
- The creation of a story that evokes architectural atmosphere through its telling
- The creative process and participation to a professional level

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