INTO THE MYSTIC: PERSPECTIVES ON SACRED ARCHITECTURE

Lecturer: Marie Clausén
Session: Winter 2019
Dates: January 10 – February 14
Time: 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.
Location: Room 124 Leeds House Building

LECTURE SERIES OUTLINE

WEEK 1

Consecration: The Making of Sacred Space
How do we make sacred space? What different forms does it take? We shall touch on the difference between revelation and provocation of sacred space, as well as principles of sacred space, such as graduated sacredness, orientation, setting, geometry, and the concept of thresholds. We shall also discuss the so-called ritual-architectural occasion and whether space can ever objectively or universally be considered sacred.

Suggested readings:
Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space, Beacon Press, 1994
Jones, Lindsay. The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison, Harvard University Press, 2000
Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space, Blackwell Publishing, 1991

WEEK 2

Dedication: The Meaning of Sacred Space
Why do we make sacred space? What is its purpose? In exploring what sacred architecture is made to be and supposed to do we will address place-making, liminality, totems, icons, symbols, divinities, the notions of transcendence and transformation, as well as the relationship between the tangible and intangible, between aesthetics and ethics. We may also touch on Heidegger’s concept of dwelling.

Suggested readings:


WEEK 3

**Secularisms and Other Challenges**

This week we will explore the underlying social and cultural challenges to sacred space in our own time. Various types of secularism will be explained and defined, and concepts such as materialism, commodification, objectivism, positivism and utilitarianism will be introduced. Implicit and explicit values expressed in contemporary politics, economics, society and culture, including city planning and architecture, will be exemplified and discussed.

**Suggested readings:**

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Verso, 2009

Clausén, Marie. “Secularism in Contemporary Western Architecture and Society” in *Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age: Anamnesis of Durham Cathedral*, Routledge, 2017 (pp. 49–94)


WEEK 4

**Profanation: The Undoing of Sacred Space**

We will continue the discussion about the challenges to sacred space this week, moving now to discuss the actual mechanics of desecration and deconsecration as well as profanation. We will highlight specific instances, such as the Bamiyan Buddhas and the Reformation of the Christian Church. We will explore both the necessities of profanation and the paradoxes that lie at the heart of both the act and the consequences of it. We will also begin to look at whether transvaluation of sacred architecture into cultural heritage can ultimately be seen as an act of (re)consecration or profanation.
Suggested readings:


WEEK 5
Sacred Space: The Cultural Heritage Perspective
The most common form of transvaluation of the formerly sacred in the West today takes the shape of heritagization, i.e. of turning sacred buildings into cultural heritage sites. This week we continue to look at the various ways in which transvaluation of the sacred into heritage saves it – or speeds its demise. We will address both material and intangible heritage, the agency of display, the theory of falling, and the difference between conservation and preservation.

Suggested readings:


Goffi, Federica. Time Matter(s): Invention and Re-Imagination in Built Conservation: The Unfinished Drawing and Building of St Peter’s, the Vatican, Ashgate, 2013


WEEK 6
Resurrection: The Role of Poets
Heidegger famously claimed that it was the duty of poets to remind people how to dwell, i.e. how to live like “mortals” – self-conscious and mortality-conscious humans – on the earth. We will take that statement as a starting point for exploring the relationship between language and place, words and architecture, and the
importance of narrative, both its content and style, on our perceptions and actions. We will see whether we can indeed poem our way into the mystic.

Suggested readings:

Cheeke, Stephen. “Ekphrasis” (11 – 41) and “Prose ekphrasis” (163 – 189) in Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis, Manchester University Press, 2010


Pater, Walter. ‘Preface’ (3 – 6) and ‘Conclusion’ (118 – 121) in Studies in the History of the Renaissance, Oxford University Press, 2010 (8 pp.)


Other interesting resources:

NOVELS

Ackroyd, Peter. Hawksmoor, Penguin, 1985
Carr, J. L. A Month in the Country, Penguin Essentials, 2014
Golding, William. The Spire, Faber and Faber, 1964
James, P. D. Death in Holy Orders, Fawcett Books, 2012
Townsend Warner, Sylvia. The Corner that Held Them, Virago Modern Classics, 2000

POEMS

---. “Church Going,” The Less Deceived, The Marvell Press, 1955

FILMS

BBC Four. “John Betjeman – A Passion for Churches” (1974): www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Izx7pbYaW0
James, M. R. “The Stalls of Barchester” (1971): www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLxHJxhDlr0

PHOTOGRAPHS

Frederick H. Evans (of Westminster Abbey and Wells Cathedral in particular)