
Session funded by the European Architectural History Network (EAHN)
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The ongoing phenomenological turn in architectural theory adopts a critical approach to methods of conceptualising architecture which focuses primarily on vision. Spurred by texts such as ‘The Eyes of the Skin’ by Juhani Pallasmaa, such an approach can be described as pansensory, advocating ‘design for all the senses.’

However, earlier seminal texts in this tradition present diverse potentialities which the current phenomenological turn in architecture has largely left unexplored. For example, the 1988 article entitled ‘The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism,’ by Martin Jay, presents the opportunity to reframe anti-ocularcentrism as an ethical and historical occurrence. He identifies “…a now widespread excoriation of what can be called the sins of ocularcentrism,” intimately linked to early Christian iconoclasm, and lingering as a counterpoint to ‘Baroque Vision.’

In this panel, we aim to explore these anti-ocularcentric ideas as a historical and ethical phenomenon, and whether this activates pansensory alternatives to a vision-based recollection of architectural history. Our chosen topos is the English Stuart period, a period which seems ripe for a crisis of ocularcentrism. Spanning more than a century, this period encompasses both Puritan iconoclasm and the formation of an ‘English Baroque,’ coinciding with growing interest in interconfessional hermeneutics. Moreover, this period is largely recounted as one of transformation in architectural style - from chivalric eclecticism to English neoclassicism. This ocularcentric recollection begs the question as to whether a pansensory methodology would allow for richer perspectives on what is an architectural period of immense moral and ethical interest.

This panel comprises of two sessions; the first focuses on the history of anti-ocularity during the Stuart period; the second involves moral readings of Stuart architectural history that exceed vision, such as ethical theories of architecture which address sound, smell, touch or even taste.
Session One: Anti-ocular Architectural Theory
Chair: Dr. Nicholas Smolenski

2. Dr. Emily Rowe. Gilding the senses: Ocular anxiety and golden foils in Lingua (1607)
3. Luka Pajovic. The columnar orders beyond “ocular trial” in the City churches of Sir Christopher Wren.

Session Two: Pan-sensory Architectural Perception
Chair: Prof. Anne-Françoise Morel
Respondent: Dr. Gregorio Astengo

1. Matthew Lloyd Roberts. Sensing the built environment in William Davenant’s ‘Burlesque on the Cities of London and Paris’
3. Dr Elaine Tierney “All the way is so thronged with people”: Multisensorial experience of festival architectures.

Anti-ocular architectural commentary in the 1612 phrasebook ‘Il Passeggere’
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Relatively little is known about ‘Il Passeggere,’ a 1612 Italian phrasebook published in London. The author writes under the suspiciously pseudonymous moniker ‘Benvenuto Italiano,’ aiming the text towards a courtly readership. This is evident in both its dedication to Prince Henry, and the polite topics addressed in the dialogues contained; such as fashion, medicine, ethics, and most pertinently, architecture. It seems to have reached this target audience, an edition being documented in the famous Arundel library, and donated to the Royal Society in 1667.

Within, the imagined dialogues between Mr Eutrapelus, and Mr Alatheus constitute a vivid architectural commentary. As the gentlemen walk through London and make decisions about where
to go, the language employed is decidedly pan-sensory. The gentlemen delve into the negative ethical connotations of magnificent perspectives ‘pleasing the eye;’ they negotiate the intersections between ‘hearing news’ and seeing fashionable architecture; as well as commenting on the ‘putrid smell’ of outdated and unfashionable timber building. Such discourse is certainly modish, the King having prohibited timber building the previous year. Indeed, the phrasebook synthesises a variety of popular opinions on architectural perception for this period, capturing a pansensory snapshot of pedestrian architectural thinking in a perhaps unlikely textual genre.

Gilding the senses: Ocular anxiety and golden foils in Lingua (1607)

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In Thomas Tomkis’ 1607 academic drama, Lingua, the titular character and feminine embodiment of language and the tongue swears to “closely cover, The rustie canker of [her] Yron spight, With golden foile of goodly semblances”. As Lingua battles against the five senses, the potential for language to deceive the senses, vision in particular, is central to this text. Tomkis’s play engages with seventeenth-century scientific discourses that feared both language and vision’s ability to deceive and to encourage natural philosophers to, as one essayist put it, “content themselves with gilded Plate, when they cannot attain to true Gold”. Gilding and gold offer useful metaphors for ocular and linguistic anxieties in early modern literary and scientific discourses. These anxieties are mirrored in moral condemnations of gilding, such as Stuart proclamations urging against the gilding of buildings, coaches, and furniture. Yet historical records show an early modern London covered in gilt — from the outward faces of buildings to the furniture in people’s homes. This paper examines the seventeenth-century material culture of gilding and its paradoxical moralisations alongside its figurative uses in scientific discourse before turning to Lingua as an exploration of how ocularcentrism can undermine scientific inquiry by preferring gilt over “true Gold”.

The columnar orders beyond “ocular trial” in the City churches of Sir Christopher Wren

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Looking back on the fifty-two parish churches constructed in the aftermath of the Great Fire of London in 1666, architectural historians have long struggled ‘to reconcile their crude vernacularism with the cool and lucid classicism’ of Wren’s other works.[1] Prominent among the features in which their supposed vernacularism has been seen to reside is their apparently lax deployment of the
columnar orders, characterised by unusually wide intercolumniations and idiosyncratic entablature details. This paper seeks to situate such features in the context of Wren’s writings on the subject, re-casting them as the embodiment of the surveyor’s skepticism about those proportional ‘Rules, too strict and pedantick,’[2] by which his predecessors sought to ‘make a systematical Science of their Art,’[3] amounting, upon a closer reading, to a wholesale rejection of ocularcentric theories of classical ordonnance.


Sensing the built environment in William Davenant’s ‘Burlesque on the Cities of London and Paris’

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In 1656 in the private premises of Rutland House, shortly after his release from prison, the former Poet Laureate William Davenant staged The first days entertainment at Rutland-House. It included an imagined dialogue between a Londoner and a Parisian, holding forth on the character and flaws of each other’s home city. It takes its rhetoric from the urban planning agenda of the Stuart court, whereby the irregularity of the city represents the ethical and political disorder of the state.

This text, much under-considered by historians of 17th century England, is a striking evocation of the landscape of the city which hinges on much more than just visual experience. Throughout the text, the moral character of the disorderly city rests on olfactory, haptic and auditory evidence. The smell of sea coal and the quiet of the Hôtel courtyard were as vital as visual phenomena to comprehend the character of both cities.

The coda of the story of this text is that in 1735, amidst a bitter row over his architectural criticism, James Ralph, the editor of the Weekly Register, republished Davenant’s text. This paper will trace how the urban planning agenda of Stuart courtiers lingered in the regularising architectural debates of Georgian London.
Resounding Consecration Practices in Restoration England

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Consecration practices were considered, at best, inconsistent from the start of the Reformation in England and into the Restoration (1660–1714). The Liber Regalis (1382), a source essential to the liturgical tradition of consecrations, served as the backbone for Protestant services; in several cases, such as the consecration of St Paul’s Cathedral (1697), practices bore such little resemblance to the Liber that a fragmented tradition was developed in its place.

It is through the intersection of architecture and sounding liturgy that Restoration-era worship spaces were defined as inherently Protestant. Despite Christopher Wren’s image of St Paul’s influenced by Byzantine and Constantinopolitan antecedents, consecration of the cathedral’s chancel in 1697 converted the space into an English one, in both image and sound. Activation of religious spaces, through the subversion centuries-old liturgies, cultivated new interpretations of resonance unique to Protestant England. The intertwining of both voice and space was an essential component to the translation of custom, and this study explores the ramifications of such translations on culture and Church in Restoration England.

“All the way is so thronged with people”: Multisensorial experience of festival architectures in London

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This paper considers two types of temporary structures – triumphal architecture and functional viewing platforms – to rethink festival architectures in seventeenth-century London. Using the concepts of ‘focus’ and ‘drift’, it intervenes in debates about the changing purpose of early modern festivals. Historians of theatre, performance and politics argue that events were transformed from participatory rituals that forged and represented bonds of reciprocity within socially unequal communities, to top-down, emphatically visual projections of power by elites. The paper uses ‘drift’ – wandering bodies, distracted attentions and deviations – as a tool for challenging the primacy of the visual asserted in ‘engraver ready’ narratives of festivals. It explores the differences between carefully curated versions of occasions, above all the presentation of triumphal architecture in lavishly illustrated festival books, and the much more fragmentary evidence of what people did on these days. Choosing a drifting point of view, over a fixed one, means being attentive to those aspects of early modern festivals that were as socially and politically meaningful to people, but less precisely
captured in records. In doing so, the paper re-inscribes embodied and multisensorial experiences into how we understand the social and political ‘work’ of early modern festival architectures.