Lecture 2: Luigi Moretti, Casa “Il Girasole,” Rome, Italy

PROFILES OF TEXT
Luigi Moretti: Casa “Il Girasole”
on ECLECTICISM…

1953: ‘haphazard collection of classical tropes and architectural strategies lacking any single organizing principle’

1968: ‘a possible present reading is that prior to 1968, and the rethinking of a text proposed by Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, it was not possible to propose a textual reading of what appeared to Banham to be mere eclecticism’

*Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida

“One of the most prominent points made in the book is the criticism of the Western core tradition that considers language as being the same as spoken language, and as a consequence, to have a narrow view of writing, recognizing it only in the form of phonetic writing, namely just a transcript of the supposed ‘natural’ language.”

What does this mean for architecture?
How does *Of Grammatology* allow us to look at Moretti’s building differently?

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“…hybrid condition of both abstraction and literal figured representation”

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“It is here that an idea of what might be considered a text in architecture might be introduced.”

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“Casa ‘Il Girasole’ represents one of the first buildings after WWII to embody the undecideable nature of truths in attempting the parallel use of both abstract and figured tropes.”

Can you link what Eisenman calls ‘undecideable nature of truths’ to what had just occurred in WWII?

Why is this relevant?
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These are two images showing typical building built under Mussolini just outside of Rome leading up to and during WWII.

How do they differ from Moretti’s building? What is the significance?

“Casa ‘Il Girasole’ represents one of the first buildings after WWII to embody the undecideable nature of truths in attempting the parallel use of both abstract and figured tropes.”

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“The term formal describes conditions in architecture that can be read not necessarily in terms of meaning or aesthetics, but in terms of their own internal consistency.”

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“The term *textual* can be defined in relationship to one of post-structuralism’s key concepts in the Derridian idea of text…the text is not a single linear narrative, but a web or a tissue of traces.”

Alberti’s Sant’Andrea is a “superimposition of the Arch of Titus over the vernacular Greek temple-front”

*How is Alberti’s Sant’Andrea textual?*

*What is the difference of formal and textual?*
“(Neorealist films) represented attempts to move the language of abstraction toward a language more closely associated with what could be considered ‘the real.”

This is a great film. If you can see it, you should! Wikipedia it.

How does this film and other Neorealist films relate to what Moretti is doing with architecture?
“Spazio made an important distinction between the object-thing and the object of containment…An object can be seen and analyzed as a geometric abstraction, but space is difficult to analyze as a physical entity because it is defined by other things.”

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One of Moretti’s plaster casts of the space inside an Italian cathedral. These were presented in Spazio and Moretti made several.
“Profile is the edge of a figure – in other words, how a surface in architecture meets space: the edge of a volume seen against the sky is a literal profile.”

How does the profile make hierarchy and singularity of meaning problematic?
“Profile is the edge of a figure – in other words, how a surface in architecture meets space: the edge of a volume seen against the sky is a literal profile.”
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“Moretti’s use of the aedicule comes out of an historical tradition, from the Palladian window to Carlo Rainaldi’s Santa Maria in Campitelli.”
“Moretti’s use of the aedicule comes out of an historical tradition, from the Palladian window to Carlo Rainaldi’s Santa Maria in Campitelli.”

What is an aedicule and where do you find one at Il Girasole?
“Another theoretical proposition resides in the problematic of the corner... the play of solid, void, and edge are simultaneous conditions.”
“Another theoretical proposition resides in the problematic of the corner...the play of solid, void, and edge are simultaneous conditions.”
What is the difference in Greek and Roman space, and how is this problematic at Il Girasole?

“Another theoretical proposition resides in the problematic of the corner...the play of solid, void, and edge are simultaneous conditions.”
“Casa ‘Il Girasole’ is one of the first didactic examples of the idea of the profile as breaking up the regular outline of the modernist box: the modernist envelope is confronted by its opposite in the idea of contained volume.”
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"The paired volumes and paired sets of columns speak to a formal order that is different from an abstract or neutral column grid."

How is the Casa Il Girasole’s column grid different from one that is ‘neutral’?

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Can you make a connection between the part to whole relationships in these two villas and why looking at these would be important in an understanding of the Casa Il Girasole?

Villa Barbaro (Palladio) and Palazzo Farnese

“This is an evolution of the idea of the whole as a consistent relationship of parts, as would be the case with any idea of type to a condition no longer described by a dominant whole.”
“This is an evolution of the idea of the whole as a consistent relationships of parts, as would be the case with any idea of type to a condition no longer described by a dominant whole.”

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“The use of material is both notational and didactic, to call attention to the possibility of material as text.”

Adolf Loos, Villa Muller; Prague, Czech Republic

Loos is just an example of another architect who uses material in a textual manner.
“The use of material is both notational and didactic, to call attention to the possibility of material as text.”

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“In Casa ‘Il Girasole,’ the ‘rusticated’ base turns out to be a play on rustication.”

Why is it important to look at this villa in order to understand Eisenman’s meaning below?

Palazzo Barberini; Rome, Italy
In Casa ‘Il Girasole,’ the ‘rusticated’ base turns out to be a play on rustication.

What is Romano playing with here?
“The state of suspension between support and collapse, between heavy and paper-thin rustication, calls the materiality of stone into question.”
"The state of suspension between support and collapse, between heavy and paper-thin rustication, calls the materiality of stone into question."

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“Rather these sculptural elements are archaic and anarchic, as if the arbitrariness of everyday life, as portrayed in neorealist film, informs what Banham might consider arbitrary, whimsical, and unsystematic use of materials.”

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“Il Girasole” and the AT&T Headquarters in NYC by Philip Johnson

How is ‘Il Girasole’ both formal and textual, specifically, in your own words?

How would Eisenman say ‘Il Girasole’ is different and similar to the AT&T headquarters? What do you think?

“Such (historicizing references) make Casa ‘Il Girasole’ both formal and textual; certain formal coherences are emphasized and simultaneously displaced.”
Discussion Topics:

• Eclecticism or “Undecideability”?
• What does “Undecideability” have to do with canon?
• Moretti becomes neither eclectic nor a modernist. Eisenman says this is the moment of a canon. Defies easy categorization. What does this this mean of Eisenman’s definition of a canon?
• Eisenman says Casa Il Girasole is a critique of modernism. How?
  “Article “Valori della Modanatura,” (The Value of Meaning) challenged the Modernist conception of space…surface had the capacity to be modeled in such a way as to create a dialogue between volume and flatness, and therefore that the modeled surface could engage the affective potential of light and shadow.”
  “…the frontal picture plane was a dominant motif of the modern…”
  “…one of the first didactic examples of the idea of the profile as breaking up the regular outline of the modernist box: the modernist envelope is confronted by its opposite in the idea of contained volume.”
  “…columns were usually the same size and shape as functional grounding elements.”
  “…in (the material’s) refusal to refer to any external systems of material meaning, the materials function textually.”
• “By calling attention to profile in architecture, Moretti suggests its role as a marker of undecideable relationships and engages space as an object for close reading. As hierarchy and singularity of meaning are made problematic, the rhetoric becomes textual rather than formal.”

• How do Moretti’s spatial models lead to Casa “Il Girasole”?
• How does the profile not equate into the shape of “Il Girasole”?
• How is “Il Girasole” different from Postmodernism?
• Why does Eisenman think this work has gone almost unnoticed?
• Why do you think this work has gone unnoticed?

“Moretti’s Casa ‘Il Girasole’ rewrites the conditions that suggest architecture itself, and which this book argues, relate canonic buildings to close reading.”
Eisenman Ideas:

Undecideability
Fracture
Rupture
Inconsistencies
Marginal
Apparently Insignificant

These words will re-appear all semester. Think about what they mean for Eisenman. How does this differ from the way these terms are typically used?