

ABE, Nicollo
ARC451H1F L0101: Mobility and Architecture
Professor Ipek Mehmetoglu
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Patricia and Peter Shannon Wilson Undergraduate Research Prize 2022 Reflective Statement

Self Introduction

My name is Nicollo Abe and I am currently a fourth-year undergraduate student at University of Toronto's John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture. I graduated from Sheridan College in 2017 where I earned an Architectural Technologist diploma. The office of the registrar acknowledged my past academic experience and have graciously granted me five courses as credits. This allowed me to pursue a minor in Art History and a minor in Visual Studies while undertaking the faculty's History and Theory of Architecture specialist stream (AHSPE1002). I am grateful for the practical and technical skillsets I have acquired from the past three years spent at college, but it has left me with a satiable hunger for a higher education that looked at architecture with a more critical lens.

Project and Course Summary

The Shannon Wilson Undergraduate Research Prize allowed me to reflect upon my researching capabilities that I have refined over time. As such, I have selected a research paper from a course I attended during the Fall of 2021 that represents my ability to effectively synthesize information. Professor Ipek Mehmetoglu instructed the ARC 400-level seminar course titled *Mobility and Architecture*, which interrogates how different forms of mobility affect architectural history, education, and culture throughout the twentieth century. This course—among many other courses offered at the faculty—enabled me to think about architecture beyond its structural components and to reconsider how its production and (mis)representation shapes different perspectives according to physical and symbolic circulations.

Research Methodologies

Elena Springall's workshop from 2020 has taught me how to perform more specific inquiries using *UT Libraries'* search menu. This includes the use of "quotation marks" to generate words or phrase-specific searches, while also inserting Boolean search commands such as AND, OR, and/or NOT to refine the search even further. It was around this time that I developed a familiarity with reputable online databases: such as *ProQuest*, *Oxford Handbooks Online*, and *Taylor & Francis Online* to name a few. *ARTSTOR* and *JSTOR* in particular has been extremely helpful in searching for appropriate images to include in my research.

The final research paper urges students to critically situate how mobility has shaped architecture and vice versa within a specific historical and geographical context with the help of visual materials (and image analysis) to support one's thesis. The prompt sparked a personal interest towards the practice of "mobile" OR "portable" architecture, as well as the "van life" movement. Using the aforementioned methodologies to search I uncovered five primary sources using the *UT Libraries* online database: such as

Echavarria's text titled *Portable Architecture and Unpredictable Surroundings*, and Dooley's periodical article titled *Wide Open Road*.

Realizing that my subject of focus may be too contemporary and unfitting to the assignment's objectives, I prepared an outline draft that included an abstract and annotated bibliography for Professor Ipek's review during her office hours. After which she encouraged me to further dive into this rich topic while also offering some helpful scholarly resources to further develop my research: such as Alison Smithson's article on caravans titled *Caravan-Embryo*; as well as two chapters from Guggenheim and Soderstrom's book titled *Re-Shaping Cities*.

While doing research on this topic, however, my focus has drastically shifted after pausing to consider how exactly architecture performs as a *vehicle* of symbolic power or how it is used as a cultural technique that shapes national identities while maintaining global imaginaries. I redefined my *UT Libraries* search by using keywords such as "circulation" AND "architecture" for further inquire into my deep curiosity for how architecture performs as a vehicle of symbolic power. Many newspaper articles and peer-reviewed journal articles appeared before me: among which is a journal article titled *The Design of the Euro Banknotes Does No Favours to Architecture* by Martin Pawley, which offers a critique—or rather, a variant perspective—regarding the abstraction of architectural imagery that are printed on contemporary European banknotes.

It was around this point that I developed a fascination with the topic: and have since began using keywords such as "European" AND "banknotes" (OR "paper bills" OR "currency"). Fortunately for me, many of these publications are readily made available online. However, one of the roadblocks I encountered while using *UT Libraries*, *ARTSTOR*, and *JSTOR* was finding the appropriate images to support my thesis—despite using many variations and combinations of keywords. Upon realizing this, I turned towards *Google* using the same search strategy. My online endeavours led me to discover Anna Pang (an exhibition architect) and Robert Stam (a Dutch artist) via online articles such as *ArchDaily* and *99% Invisible* respectively. Their wonderful sculptural works of varying scales and materiality allowed me to steer my research's conclusion towards a more symbolic gesture of humanity searching for stability through abstract circulation.

Conclusion

A bittersweet taste arises when I contemplate on the fact that I will be graduating this upcoming June. I hope to continue refining my research and writing skills as I expose myself into other fields. The road towards earning my architectural licensure in Canada is a long and tedious journey, but I believe my satiable hunger will continue to inspire me to pursue a master's in architecture. But for now, I am entering the professional world with a satiated mind that has been fed with the technical skillsets and the critical sensibilities acquired from college and university respectively.

Thank you very much for taking the time to review my work and for considering my application.

All the best,
Nicollo Abe