An Archi-Musical Reimagination of the Belltower Typology

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Lurie Tower, Designed by U of M Graduate Charles Moore, 1996

"Space is not just a container nor just a context for action. It is generative and always in flux, as are our perceptions of it." -- From Spaces, Sites, Scapes, Sound Studies Reader

"We might say, as a matter of fact, that interdisciplinary activity, today so highly valued in research, cannot be achieved by the simple confrontation of specialized branches of knowledge; the interdisciplinarity is not a comfortable affair: it begins effectively (and not by the simple utterance of a pious hope) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down -- perhaps even violently, through the shocks of fashion -- to the advantage of a new object, a new language, neither of which is precisely this discomfort of classification which permits diagnosing a certain mutation." -- Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text*

Workshop Description

This workshop brings carillon students (from SMTD, LSA, and CoE) and architecture students together to tour the university's two bell towers and learn about an array of controversial issues surrounding the carillon, from their internal mechanisms to the mechanisms of power which usher these monuments into being. We will discuss selected readings to sound out the relationship of the carillon to architecture, public soundscapes, and its place in civic society. Students will spend the remainder of the week alongside carillon students participating in group design exercises, culminating in a radical re-imagination of the bell tower typology. Work produced will be presented to an audience of Architecture, Music and Urban planning faculty. For those interested, we have secured funds for students to design and build a small exhibition at the Duderstadt gallery at the conclusion of the workshop.

Context

As collective timekeepers and urban-scaled musical instruments, bell towers hold a largely unquestioned place in our everyday collective consciousness. Historically associated with the Christian church and played exclusively by men from the sixteenth until the mid-twentieth century, carillons like the two on the University of Michigan campus point to increasing secularization of and access to the typology. While the bell tower is among the most participative of buildings embedded in our everyday experiences, there exist a slew of complex social, political, and spatial issues that allow these buildings to perform exclusionary architectural roles while deflecting public critique through their sonic ubiquity. For instance — while carillons are increasingly secularized, much of their musical canon remains unchanged, with the repertoire speaking to white listeners with the highest cultural and educational capital. And given the involuntary civic participation which any bell tower produces — that is, opting-out of listening is not possible with the bell tower — carillonists are just beginning to expand its repertoire to serve diverse, non-Christian audiences and finding that traditional tower design hinders inclusive public access. Another little-discussed issue is the intimate link between the carillon and the memorial monument, a topic in architectural discourse containing an exhaustive body of built and scholarly work.

These issues, and many more like them, present opportunities for bell tower designers to participate in an intersectional conversation spanning gender, race, religion, soundscapes, and architecture. This workshop asks how interdisciplinary student teams might architecturally and musically re-conceptualize the bell tower typology by decoupling it from its hegemonic roots. Our intended learning outcomes depend on cross-unit collaboration — the carillon as a musical instrument is an active participant in the construction of civic space, and more explicitly, it occupies the unique position of building-as-instrument. This music/architecture workshop presents a unique opportunity to rethink the tower — to reimagine it as

an approachable cultivator of civic space whose architecture can support the production of inclusive soundscapes.

Schedule

Auditorium – Friday, October 4 – 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Course Introduction, Group Distribution, Icebreaker

Room 1360 – Saturday, October 5 – 12:00pm - 2:00pm
Crash Course Overview of Carillon Culture, Brainstorm Session

Start @ Burton Tower – Sunday, October 6 – 3:30pm - 7:30pm
UM Carillon Visits, Student Dinner

Room 1360 – Monday, October 7 – 7:00pm - 9:00pm
Reading Discussion, Desk Crit 01

Room 1360 – Tuesday, October 8 – 7:00pm - 9:00pm
Desk Crit 02 – Guest Critics: Mireille Roddier & Daniel Jacobs (Taubman), John Granzow (SMTD)

Room 1360 – Thursday, October 10 — 7:00pm - 9:00pm
Desk Crit 03, for Those Interested

New Wing Commons Friday, October 11 — 6:45pm - 8:15pm
Science Fair Review & Discussion

Workshop Deliverables

Single Drawing
- [24" x 36" Printed Drawing, Mounted on Foam Core](#)
  - Musical Program / Notation
  - Site Information
  - Images of the building itself (isometric, plan, section, elevation, collage, render, other)
  - Demographics
  - Etc.

Sonic Specifications
- Artistic programming
    - Regular carillon recital schedule (automatic and live)
    - Year-long calendar of special event programming
- Audio
    - Playlist of sample carillon music (may be "aspirational" playlist) in a listenable format
    - Student-created audio: Soundscape with voice-over narrative (ex. sonic collage produced in Audacity using basic digital audio effects)

* Note that these deliverables are a baseline -- while we do expect a single drawing, we encourage experimentation in your representational techniques!

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