

AKC Essay Competition - Coversheet

- Complete all sections of this form and ensure it is the first page of the document you submit (either copy and paste this page into the front of your work, or begin your work on subsequent pages of this form).
- DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON YOUR WORK.
- Pages should be clearly numbered.

Student ID number (e.g. 1712345)	
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Degree Programme (where applicable)	MA STEM Education
Department (where applicable)	School of Education, Communication and Society
AKC Year (1, 2 or 3):	1

Essay question number:	1
Essay Title:	If there was a tenth lecture for this AKC series, which building would you choose and why?
Deadline:	23:59, Sunday 26 April 2020
Date Submitted:	26 April 2020
Word Count (max 1500 words):	1348

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

By submitting this essay, I declare the following:

This assignment is entirely my own work. Quotations from secondary literature are indicated by the use of inverted commas around ALL such quotations AND by reference in the text or notes to the author concerned.

ALL primary and secondary literature used in this piece of work is indicated in the bibliography placed at the end, and dependence upon ANY source used is indicated at the appropriate point in the text.

I confirm that no sources have been used other than those stated.

I understand what is meant by plagiarism, including self-plagiarism.

I understand that plagiarism is a serious academic offence that will result in disciplinary action being taken and may result in my withdrawal from the AKC programme.

I understand that essays which do not include references and a bibliography will not be read.

My word count is accurately stated above and I understand that essays which are more than 10% over the word limit may not be considered by the AKC Steering Committee.

Essay: 1.If there was a tenth lecture for this AKC series, which building would you choose and why?

66 Marchmont Street

There is a bookshop at 66 Marchmont Street that would be my choice for a 10th lecture on "London through its buildings".

"Gay's the Word" was not built in Roman times. One cannot, when one picks up a book from its shelves, glimpse at the foundational stones of the city, catch sight of early Medieval remains of a church, or otherwise hear the echoes of London's deep history.

In fact, as recently as the early nineteenth century the land where the bookshop can be found today did not exist as a street, but as part of an unbuilt field in what was still the outskirts of London (London County Council 1952). As the Foundling Estate, short of cash but with an excess of land, decided to develop the land, residential houses for the "respectable and reasonably well-off" (UCL Bloomsbury Project 2011) were erected under careful negotiations (though a number of slums sprang up close by too), and Marchmont Street, where the

bookshop can currently be found, made its first appearance on Horwood's map of 1807 (London County Council 1952; UCL Bloomsbury Project 2011). The street remained residential until its latest layer of meaning shifted in the 1850s, when it turned into a street of retail shops, which it has remained (through renumberings, redevelopments and changes to its neighbouring streets) till today (UCL Bloomsbury Project 2011).

As the retail in turn shifted from being largely geared towards food (UCL Bloomsbury Project 2011) to a more diversified number of shops, we make a jump to even more recent history, and turn to the founding of the shop (previously possibly a candy shop then an A.B.C. tearoom; Lim 2020, personal communication) by members of the Gay Icebreakers in 1979 (Spread the Word, undated). From then on, the building has added a new layer of meaning to the palimpsest (see Legg 2020) of this London street; one that serves as a place of gathering to individuals today, but also one that can be linked to histories still in need of excavation and which will extend into the future by virtue of its current existence.

As DeHanas (2020) demonstrates with his study of the East London Mosque, the very presence of a building can both transform the space around it – providing a fixed place to go to and a new space inside which people can do things they could not do otherwise (see Carlisle 2020) – and inscribe itself into a territorial continuity of spirit, which Peter Acroyd calls a “territorial imperative” (in DeHanas 2020).

So, for example, has the bookshop transformed the space around it, queering it by its very presence and by the iterations of its shop front. Continuity and queering of the street has been generated by the name of the bookshop itself and by the exhibition of book titles towards the street. In the recent past, when the shop front was blue, an occasional rainbow flag also served as an identifier; and today, the pink triangle on a white background reminds the visitor of the 1979 bookshop, of the troubled history of oppression and resistance that surrounds same-sex love, and of the continued presence of this history in our present.

As a place where queer individuals can gather and buy books related to their experience of love, Gay's the Word also serves as an important symbol and enabler of community. As Westminster Abbey provides a spatial “articulation of grief and hope” through its tombstones and memorials, its services and advocacy (Hawkey 2020), Gay's the Word, then, through its narrow space filled with shelves, its stacked chairs and counter crowded with books and badges, serves as a spatial articulation of resistance and of love; of intimacy and of publicness.

The bookshop serves these articulations together through its books, of course – fiction and non-fiction, second-hand and new, stories of pain and of deep happiness, light-hearted reads and academic insight, translations and echoes; ordered more traditionally than Warburg's “good neighbour policy” (Tresch 2020), on shelves that have not been transplanted from one European city to another in a bid to protect them from destruction, as Warburg's were (Tresch 2020), but that could still be seized by Customs and Excise in 1984, prompting

outcry and paradoxically putting perhaps Gay's the Word more firmly on the map (Historic England, undated).

The bookshop also serves the articulations of intimacy and publicness by acting as a space of gathering not only to book browsers and buyers, to writers who come in to discuss their works and to audiences who come in to hear them, but also, outside of its regular shopping hours, to a number of community groups. The Icebreakers, the Gay Black Group, the Gay Disabled Group, TransLondon, and the Lesbian Discussion Group, to which I belong through my frequent crossing of the threshold of the bookshop on Wednesday evenings, have all congregated there to find their place and act on the world. Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners have made history there – their presence still visible in the badges on the boards, and in the Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants group, who is not affiliated with the shop but has transported and transformed the acronym to new places of resistance.

Crossing the bookshop's threshold as a regular member of one of its community groups inspires in the threshold-crosser the bookshop's own spirit of place, its *genius loci* (see Tresch 2020), and the memories of each of the steps of one's journey, from places of fear and shame to places of love and affirmation, with all their ups and downs, their permanence and their flux. Gay's the Word thus generates continuity (see DeHanas 2020) and provides a potential space of communion (see Hawkey 2020) to queer individuals in the city.

Though the bookshop's claim to a territorial imperative stretching through the past may seem more fragile, situated as it is on 66 Marchmont Street, a retail street a mile off London's more widely recognised gay quarter, it interrogates our knowledge of the past and of how it relates or not to the present.

The greatest claim of territorial imperative may be linked to Gay's the Word being a bookshop in literary Bloomsbury, past home to the Shelleys on the same street, and to Orwell, Jerome K. Jerome, and members of the Bloomsbury group in the close cluster of streets of the neighbourhood (Marchmont Association, undated). But the layers of meaning of a city's palimpsest are not always evident to the current resident, and London makes no exception. As the Marchmont Association erects more blue plaques of commemoration around the streets of Bloomsbury, one becomes aware that Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes and Duncan Grant were not the only residents of this neighbourhood to partake in same-sex love or interrogations of gender identities; writer Dorothy Richardson, poet Charlotte Mew, and cross-dressers Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park make their appearance (Marchmont Association, undated), and a past that has existed but been forgotten starts to be re-excavated.

The "cast appears endless" at Gay's the Word and the space it occupies, then, as it does at Westminster Abbey (Hawkey 2020); it may simply be that not all the cast has been recorded, and the bookshop and the Abbey, as the other buildings presented in the lecture series, are simply part of the fixed buildings and symbols that may endure over time (see Carlisle 2020) for the resident to gather and to partake in some of the recorded history of the city, when they are able to

do so, as the temporary closures of bookshops, places of worship, theatres and buildings in these times of confinement reminds us. The fragility of Gay's the Word's claim to a territorial imperative also serves as a powerful reminder that new continuities can emerge at any time, and can participate in re-excavations of the past as well as represent powerful anchors in the present and hopes for the future.

Such an articulation of fragility and belonging can also be found on the other side of the city, at 19 Princelet Street; but this would be the subject of an 11th lecture...

References

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