Phantom Architecture: Jeremy Bentham's Haunted and Haunting Panopticon

-

In Event: *Visual and cultural analyses of crime and punishment: prisons, policing and plantations*

Wed, Nov 16, 8:00 to 9:20am, International 10, International Level

Abstract

This paper unpacks the notion of 'phantom architecture' in relation to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Drawing on Derrida's notion of hauntology, it examines the continued influence of a building that has never been constructed. Using visual analysis of the architectural drawings associated with the Panopticon, as well as a close textual analysis of Bentham's letters, the paper sets out a framework for understanding the 'haunted' and 'haunting' nature of this 'phantom' building. Placing the Panopticon within the context of both the ecclesiastical and industrial architecture that Bentham's brother was exposed to during his time Krichev in Belarus, we see the Panopticon as being inspirited by these influences. Further, we examine how the building itself was designed to house an imagined presence. Using Derrida's notion of the 'visor effect', we find ourselves forced to replicate the asymmetry of vision between an imagined presence that observes and those that are being observed. Drawing these threads together, we see this paper informing the nascent field of 'ghost criminology'. We conclude by framing the Panopticon as an extension of Zizek's 'architectural parallax' in its entanglement across various temporalities.

Author