Contributors

difference

thresholds

35
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Differentiating “Difference”

James D. Graham

Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which precedes it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual controls—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the group of a single glance, and the unexpectedness ofsmartening impressions.

Giacomo Sommella, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

Figure from ground, specific from general. Individually from collective. Local from global. It is through the act of distinction that we ascribe and understand the relative identities of things, spaces, ideas, people. The critical ambivalence of “difference” is that it requires first a sameness to be measured against; it vacillates constantly between afﬁnity and dissimilarity—the ones and zeros of abstraction. As Gilles Deleuze puts it in the preface to his canonical text on the subject, difference “allows itself to lead to contradiction, only to the extent that its subordination to the identical is maintained.”

But what constitutes a meaningful or productive difference? How can simple relativism and reductive categorization be usefully re-conﬁgured? The contributors to thresholds: 35 present sixteen distinct but interrelated studies that probe these and other questions while situating difference within particular cultural, historical, spatial, and theoretical contexts.

One of difference’s more problematic corollaries, “originality,” is at the heart of Non Archi prac wed and Reality Brand/ Habitat’s study of Origami Satta Anubhanda’s Building Nine at Panabhandhu School, which adopted (or, depending on one’s perspective, plagiarized) the forms and features of Modernist masterworks to suit the climate and political milieu of Bangladesh. A similar brand of referential difference is explored in Pei Wang’s essay on the Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park in Shanghai. A heterogenous blend of Chinese tradition with Western proper names and imagery, Zhangjiang (like the Panabhandhu School) com-

The rhetorical act of “signiﬁcation” is explored by Scott Bull, who traces the ways in which the rhythmic improvisations and extensions of signiﬁcation have inﬂuenced other more spatial models of African-American cultural production. In particular, he focuses on工作室 designs. Montana Cannon and Simon Kim of UK studio, who among the architects selected to design a house for the ongoing Ordos 100 project—discuss how their design strategically engages both the speciﬁcities of the site’s masterplan and the generalities of the broader ﬁeld of contemporary architecture.

The discourse of difference is frequently concerned with edges, these delineations where “this” is known not to be “that.” But boundaries are rarely absolute. Anne-Marie Armstrong presents the particularly problematic case of the Haskett Free Library, which sits directly astride the Canada / United States border. In that same architecturally scaled-over, two design projects explore the liminal contact of adjacent but disparate interior programs: Sarah Dunbar’s hybrid monastery and gamma ray research institute gathers the metaphys-

ical and the cosmic into a monumental form in a Tibetan valley, while Alexander Maynwind and Cody Davis propose a mixed-use complex whose functions are not compartmentalized but rather juxtaposed in a void and unpredictable environment. The collision of commerce, desire, and architectural form that Maynwind and Davis inves-

Age in Brooklyn is in many ways predated by the warehouse urbanism of London’s West India Docks, studied by Elizabeth Bishop. As a point of transfer between the extra-state apparatus of maritime trade and the land-based merchants who satiated the developing tastes of the British public, these docks are a subtle system of textual control, built to absorb and to regulate London’s engagement with the wider world.

Taking the body itself as a boundary, two essays invite the reader to reexamine the intimacy of the self, finding difference within the confines our own subjectivity. Lauren Davis outlines a set of “twin logics” based not on an indistinguishable symmetry but rather on what she terms “non-autonomous individuality” and the mutual embedding of the other within the subject. The equally layered overlaps and disjunctions between the personal and the affectual (“I” come to light in Nikhil Mareve’s poignant and provocative readings of Ariana Reines’ prose poems “Cocoon of Liar” and Slava Zisk’s Parable Feast. From the “minimal difference” of the divided self to the lines between countries and cultures, the contributors to thresholds: 35 situate difference at the nexus of our perceptual and conceptual worlds, as a variable and always contingent way of making distinctions.
Differences, Originality and Assimilation: Building Nine at Panabhandhu School

Non Arkaprasertkul & Reilly Paul Rabitaille

An Architect should neither compete in the war of images, nor be concerned with absolute originality.

Ongard Satrabhandhu

In 1969, the architect Ongard Satrabhandhu was commissioned by his family to design Building Nine of the prestigious Panabhandhu Elementary School in Bangkok. Thai by birth but educated at both Cornell and Yale, where architectural study emphasized the latest and greatest design du jour. Ongard chose instead to directly reference Modernist architects such as Le Corbusier. This emulation, though often criticized by Western academics as a form of plagiarism, not only allowed Modernism’s entrance into the Thai tradition but also highlights the differences in the definitions of originality and assimilation when viewed through a specific cultural lens. In the case of Thailand, a country with a long history of cultural intermingling as a result of its frequently shifting borders, Building Nine was enthusiastically received as an emblem of Western high culture in Thailand and its architect as a fearless appropriator of elements and motifs from various sources as a means of paying homage to the purity of Modernist form.

Architecture of Building Nine: Transplantation and Adaptation

At its core, Ongard’s Building Nine is essentially a modified version of Le Corbusier’s unbuilt French embassy in Brasilia (1956). Treating the original design as a design template or found object that could be adjusted or exaggerated to satisfy the needs of the school and dormitory program [figs.1,2]. Given the limited and awkwardly triangular nature of the site, the circular plan of the transplanted Embassy allowed for an aesthetically pleasing site strategy as well as a method for vertical expansion. Ongard re-imagined the L-shaped office spaces of the Embassy plan as a series of classrooms connected together by double-loaded corridors, which, when echoed without partitions, served as dormitory space at the upper levels of the building. The top floors, which Le Corbusier intended for the office of the French Ambassador, were also parallelized or Ongard’s transplantation, which designated those spaces instead for building and academic administration.

In addition to these programmatic adjustments, Ongard also expanded the Embassy shading system to protect the entire circumference of the façade from the Bangkok sun and added an exterior fire escape to the east side to satisfy the local building code—an element that would later prove to be the distinguishing feature from the Le Corbusier’s original scheme [figs.1,4].

The found object strategy extended further to the aesthetic modifications of Building Nine, with many of the few modifications having themselves been taken from other well-known modern buildings, including other works by Le Corbusier himself. The curvilinear ramp fields of Le Corbusier’s Carpenter Center of the Visual Arts at Harvard University [1962; figs.10,11], the mushroom capitals of his Chandigarh Assembly Hall [1953-63; figs.6,7], and the sculptural water tank on the roof of the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille [1952; figs.14,15] all appear in Building Nine, as do the principles of flat-slab concrete construction (from Le Corbusier’s “five points”) and the average European ceiling height as defined by Le Corbusier’s Le Modulor. And although Ongard is later quoted as saying that Building Nine “meant a lot to Le Corbusier,” the brick circular cutaway to the ground floor directly quotes Louis I. Kahn’s arch at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad [1962-64; figs.12,13]), and the oddly juxtaposed and incongruous auditorium on the top floor is also borrowed from James Stirling’s expressively sloped auditorium at the Engineering Building at the University of Leicester [1963; figs.16,17]. Ongard even takes cues from the postmodernist Robert Venturi by prominently displaying the letters “PB” atop the exterior wall of the auditorium, a billboard-like advertisement in the manner of Venturi Scott Brown’s Seattle Art Museum [1968-81].

Salient features of Ongard’s design not found in prior Modernist examples were the open ground floor and the particular classroom type. The ground floor of Building Nine was set on columns, seemingly in accordance with Le Corbusier’s use of pilasters. In fact, however, this
decision relates more to the traditions of the vernacular Thai house, rather than using the ground floor’s openness solely for the sanitary reasons that Corbusier prescribed. Ongard opened the entire space for natural indirect lighting, ventilation, and social activities—traditions inherent in Thai culture. Its multi-purpose program was enriched by the integration of stairs, benches and tilted walls to encourage active use, appealing to the Thai preference for outdoor public spaces. When configuring the classroom arrangement, Ongard offered an alternative to the conventional Thai school design of single-loaded corridors of classrooms terminating in administration. By separating the classroom from the faculty area, Building Nine modified the traditional Thai student-teacher relationship to encourage more self-discipline among the student body. Finally, Ongard’s regionalized alterations extended to the landscape, as he eschewed Le Corbusier’s use of massive concrete plazas (found at Chandigarh and elsewhere) in favor of tree-lined public spaces that created a pleasant student atmosphere while lowering the ambient temperature.

### Polarized Reception: West vs. East

As a radical break from the emphasis on “originality” taught by Western schools, Ongard’s Building Nine was panned by Western architectural critics of the day, who referred to the excessive transplantation as demonstrative of an “immature appreciation of Modernism.” Nevertheless, the new building was extremely well-received in its native Thailand, where critics perceived it as a socio-cultural phenomenon: a conjunction of Modern architecture and the local context. Architecture in Thailand already had a strong history of cultural adoption and assimilation, due in no small part to the shifting borders and multiple cultures that have historically endemic to the Siamese area; thus, the nature of the Thai reaction was hardly unusual. The Grand Palace at Bangkok features several examples of architectural importation, including the model of Angkor Wat commissioned shortly after the Siamese occupation of Cambodia [fig. 9], and the hybridized Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall designed in 1876 [fig. 8]. The Throne Hall, with its juxtaposition of a Thai roof on Baroque imperial architecture, is of particular importance in relation to Building Nine, since it was the first indication of Western influence on Thai culture.

Like the Angkor Wat model and the Throne Hall, the popular interpretation of Building Nine’s transplantation and imitation was shaped largely by the power of social image. King Rama IV commissioned the model in order to illustrate to the Siamese people the vast cultural wealth of their empire. His successor, Rama V, commissioned the Throne Hall to symbolically reinforce the country’s modernization by requiring a Western-style classical revival. As a result, the Khmer and Baroque styles of the model and hall both made their way into the Thai architectural tradition. Building Nine, although not a governmental building per se, held similar prestige due to its association with the elite and royally-sponsored Pananhandhu School. Thus, the building’s widespread acceptance similarly allowed Modernism to arrive in Thailand.
Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall at Bangkok's Grand Palace, 2008

Model of Angkor Wat at Bangkok's Grand Palace, 2008
What is Original, Anyway?

The construction of Building Nine emphasizes the subjective nature of originality in the context of the adaptation or imitation. Western academia’s receptive attitude towards Orientalism reflects a culture that frames “originality” as an act of conceptual generation. In Thailand—a developing country with a history of cultural conquest and assimilation—the appreciation of form and its social and political implications is considerably more important. Generally unconcerned with the difference between “authentic West” and “imitated West,” the success of Building Nine comes from the limited means Original took in making Le Corbusier’s Embassy design appropriate for use as an academic building in the middle of Bangkok.

Building Nine’s sensitive modifications—the exaggerated shading system, the double-loaded corridors, and the modified open ground floor—all of which satisfy the physical needs of the Thai lifestyle in the introduction of Thai Colonialism as the royal architectural style one hundred years before. His sensitive modifications—their modification reflects a culture that frames “originality” as an act of conceptual generation. In Thailand—a developing country with a history of cultural conquest and assimilation—the appreciation of form and its social and political implications is considerably more important.

What comes out of the Building Nine narrative is the question of how far must one move from the original template in order to be considered “original.” Between Western and Thai academia, the perceptual difference—at least in terms of form—is considerable. However, at its heart, the construction of Building Nine reveals the nature of originality as culturally subjective. Is Building Nine plagiarism? Largely, yes. But is Building Nine original?...
Invoking the "apocalypse" brings forth connotations of the end of the world—historically imagined as everything from the judgment of God to nuclear Armageddon. In its contemporary manifestation it has taken the form of various global crises: whether environmental, economic, or the unexpected. Of course, the "end of the world" is not a novelty; it has its own history and is itself a genre of expression as a category of pessimism. A recurrent theme, it is the shadow of the progressive ideal of the avant-garde. It seems that at this juncture, utopia, that place of high aspirations and lofty ambition, has been the motivating conceit for a society (and an architecture) of aspirational perfection for quite some time, but across the spectrum of culture there has been a recent turn from the utopian to the apocalyptic, in forms both fictional and factual. With the intermingling of the improbable and the possible (such as The Day After Tomorrow or 9/11 and Children of Men), the consideration of the apocalyptic is no longer a matter of fantasy, but of policy (one recently referred to as "disaster capitalism"). What we see in this latest manifestation is not merely the conservative position describing a fall from grace, or the entropic decline of systems and the diminishment of quality over time, but a description of a new prevalent condition. If Utopia is an unattainable goal, a literal no place, then the apocalypse is everywhere.1

The question is, of course, why apocalypse now?

The genre of the apocalyptic always contains within it a means of working through the problematic of its era. The term itself indicates as much: "Apocalypse" from the Greek "ποκάλυψις" literally translates as a "lifting of the veil," and represents, as a concept, the disclosure to certain privileged persons of something hidden from the masses of humankind. Its occurrence in narrative is a symptomatic response to the larger issues, though it reveals the limits and flaws of the society that wrote it. For us, it is a combination of factors, it is both global warming and sub-prime loans, it is nuclear terrorism, and social ills. All are real and all are, to some extent, constructs.

The real issue with the various evocations of the "end of the world" has never been about "the end," but a beginning. Anthony Burgess, author of the dystopian classic A Clockwork Orange, once commented that the "warnings" of apocalyptic tales about the end of the world were really a kind of wish-fulfillment.2 In a world of overwhelming complexity, of zero-sum economics and peak oil, the apocalypse comes in, not as problem, but as answer. The "end of" also implies a "beginning of"—a chance to re-start and re-think. At the level of fantasy the apocalypse represents the chance to begin anew; the end of the world always represents a new start, a chance to have another, unencumbered, go at making the world. In this sense the specter of the apocalypse is another version of the modernist tabula rasa, a leveling of the past to make way for the future.3

So the end of the world is but a re-orientation of sensibility. We can already see evidence of this in the new emphasis on the basic conditions of our existence. What unites these manifestations is their survivalist undertone.4 The operation of the subject in an environment is not only a thing, but also an action, a mechanism that
If this sounds like an environmental call to arms, with the earnestness of LEED and green design, of responsibility, of course, but that is not the only manifestation, or even the most useful. The new mode would (as opposed to affectivity), with an emphasis on the agency of design as a responsive, problem-solving effort.

...and stewardship, preservation and prevention, it is not (at least not completely). There are issues of responsibility, of course, but that is not the only manifestation, or even the most useful. The new mode would want to address matters of concern, where environmental matters are no more or less important than others (such as aesthetic or social) in terms of course or need. The coming apocalypse may or may not be a solvable problem, or it may not be a problem at all, but its existence as an idea demonstrates a shift that is not only practical, but conceptual.

So, one could imagine the re-description of architecture’s disciplinary legacy in terms of effectiveness (as opposed to affectivity), with an emphasis on the agency of design as a responsive, problem-solving effort. This sounds like an environmental call to arms, with the earnestness of LEED and green design, of responsibility, of course, but that is not the only manifestation, or even the most useful. The new mode would want to address matters of concern, where environmental matters are no more or less important than others (such as aesthetic or social) in terms of course or need. The coming apocalypse may or may not be a solvable problem, or it may not be a problem at all, but its existence as an idea demonstrates a shift that is not only practical, but conceptual.

Shifting from the utopian to the apocalyptic is not merely to set the terms in an opposing relation, but to understand their similarity. Both describe a condition of radical change, turning from one to the other as a privileged mode doesn’t speak to a preponderance of nihilism per se, but to a fundamental recalibration of the imagination (specifically, architectural imagination) from issues of plenty (of capital, of resources, of attention) to those of scarcity. How would architecture act in a post-apocalyptic mode? One can imagine that the answers will not come on rhymes, but rather would be seen in architecture’s response to the imperatives of survival, in how it responds to coming disasters major and mine. The results will not be definitive, but indicative, of directions to follow and refuges to find, bomb shelters of utopia in which to weather the approaching maelstrom.

So: design for the apocalypse, the time is nigh, and the end (of something) is near... and the beginning (of something else) is imminent.
Concrete Variations

Entry from an Encyclopedia of Calamity Mollifying Devices for the Modern Metropolis

Elijah Huges

The architecture of these castles has brought with it a specially devised language and imagery of division...Iraqis know them simply as ‘concretes’, borrowing the English word. But for those who construct the barriers, both military and civilian contractors, there are subtle differences. There are ‘Hescos’, the vast, circular wire-covered bins of river gravel, originally designed for flood defences and now used to withstand the biggest bombs. Then there are the waist-high Jersey barriers, and the T Banner also known as the Texas barrier and as the Bremer barrier after the US proconsul of Iraq, Paul Bremer, in whose time the first 20ft high blast walls appeared. It is the blank, grey, soaring face of these T barriers that has come to be the symbol of the new Iraq.


The mutation of any given architectural emergency device frequently occurs in response to threat evolution and market competition, leading to variation within a family of closely related devices sharing a common relevance point or mythical source. Like the exterior fire escape, automatic sprinkler, or theft alarm, the Jersey Barrier is an invention which may be understood as part of a crumple zone intended not to prevent urban disaster, but to absorb, limit, and contain its effects. Developed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) in the 1950’s, the concrete roadway barrier commonly known as the Jersey Barrier became the formative variation in a hardy, expanding family of “portable” or “temporary” Precast Concrete Barriers (PCBs or TPCBs). Proving exceptionally adaptable to new geographies and new applications, the Jersey Barrier was ready for production and deployment on a large scale, without definitive spatial identity, and suitable for use in new or existing construction. Over time, new performance parameters, field discoveries, and barrier situations prompted further experimentation with empirically established profiles. In a self-perpetuating cycle, increased variation offered increased range and increased range prompted further variation.

Likewise most architectural emergency devices, the Jersey Barrier was designed to compensate for a particular architectural or urban shortcoming and to operate responsively and specifically within definable spatial parameters. While the origin-myth of the Jersey Barrier is linked to that state’s highways, the history of concrete barriers deployed for traffic related applications in the United States can be traced at least as far back as the mid-1920’s when the state of California began experimenting with the use of concrete barriers on highway US-50, both as a traffic management measure and to reduce maintenance costs associated with post-collision repairs to the wood and metal systems then in widespread use. In New Jersey, concrete barrier experimentation began in 1943 in an effort to address a significant increase in the number of cross-over head-on collisions occurring on the state’s undivided highways. Of particular concern were situations where other existing barrier methods – such as wide center medians or deformable metal barriers - were impractical due largely to the relative density of development along roadways in New Jersey, a state already on a trajectory to becoming the most urbanized in the country.

Systematic crash testing was not initially undertaken. Instead, barrier design was modulated and improved as performance data was accumulated, and shortcomings observed, in the field. Growing from 19 inches to 32 inches in height over the next decade, by 1959 the distinctive sectional profile of the NJDOT Barrier had evolved [fig. 2]. The Jersey Barrier sectional profile emerged as a means of transitioning the horizontal velocity of a vehicle vertically and reducing its overall momentum without causing grievous harm to the vehicle’s occupants. As such, the profile was a literal rotational folding and compression of the horizontal buffer space of the roadway shoulders or the median into a vertical thickness. Evaluation and analysis of the barrier’s effectiveness undertaken by researchers at the Stevens Institute of Technology in the 1960’s was conclusive: The ‘Summary of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents’ for the year 1964, compiled by the traffic Safety Service of the New Jersey State Division of Motor Vehicles, shows that of a total of 138 two-vehicle accidents, occurring between intersections, 137 involved...
Satellities (59 percent). None of these occurred on any road segment on which NJ had installed concrete center barriers (32 inches high). ”What is more, “historically, the accident record of a road section improves in direct relation to the amount of barriers installed.”

By the end of the 1950’s, California had adopted the Jersey Barrier for roadway applications, followed by nearly every other state (figs. 4, 5). Globalization would follow. After introduction to the European market in the early 1950’s, the Jersey Barrier became the standard concrete roadway barrier for a number of countries whose steel barrier systems had been predominant previously, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. “Through this process of expansion, “Jersey Barrier” lost the specificity of its geographical and historical context and became instead a term used to describe shaped concrete barriers in general, effectively expanding its brand recognition from a specific device to a family of related products.

Although the historical Jersey Barrier profile remains the most common concrete barrier profile produced, testing and development of alternative profiles have also been ongoing. In 1959, The National Highway Protection Agency (NHPA) undertook a parametric study of six concrete barrier profile variations, labeled A-through-F. Using both computer simulations and full-scale crash tests, the F-shape was found to be the most effective profile. However, in part because its shape was almost identical to that of the Jersey Barrier, the F-shape has not superseded its predecessor, which also performed well in the study’s computer crash testing. Instead, most states simply added it to the list of acceptable concrete barrier profiles for roadway applications. With public and private investment in the history already established, the form of model specifications and precast concrete framework, future variations would consistently come to coexist or compete with, rather than supplant, the historic profile. The most notable variations include the Gian barrier, designed and marketed unsuccesfully by the company in the late 1970’s, and the “constant-slope” barrier, added to the profile set in 1989. In the case of the latter, the primary advantage is that its performance, like its slope, remains constant, independent of adjacent conditions.

The relative success of properly installed Jersey Barriers in limiting the penetration of even large-scale vehicles at both acute and frontal angles, evidenced by a growing volume of roadway accident data and crash tests, facilitated not only a migration to highways around the world, but also from the high-speed roadway to densely populated downtowns, national monuments, and a growing list of public and private sites with security interests. Its effectiveness in managing the potentially deleterious effects of speed and explosives on the city – from runways to cars to cars-bomb – both provided an expanded range of applications, and further stimulus for the development of situation-based variations. For years, the security barrier has been seen as incor- nament, unsightly, andbirthdate, and in its crude form, it is still. As a result, its use has often been limited due to aesthetics. Now, the orderly barrier has been rediscovered as the primary multipurpose tool in security and force protection tool. It is now being used for a variety of purposes, most notably for access control, traffic management, blast mitigation, ballistic protection. When we speak of barriers most people think of the concrete jersey barrier. Though it is the most visible and often-used, it is only one member of the barrier family.

Just as “Jersey Barrier” has come to be used as a general term assigned to waist-height pre-cast concrete barriers, whether in con- formity with the historic profile or not, some variations have acquired their own categorical assignments as well. For example, “F-wall” and “Alaska Barrier” are terms used to describe large barrier types with only generally defined profile parameters, the former marked by a readily identifiable T profile, the latter by its 20’ height. As variations have increased to address even more specific situations, the range of space defined or demarcated by PCBs has expanded. Frequently, the overall size and profile shape of the PCB is selected, or even custom- ized, in response to site-specific conditions for spatial delineation, con- tamination, or perceived threat.

In addition to their engineered profiles, many PCBs are equipped for permanent installation or anchoring, are designed to ac- commodate cross-flow drainage, have attachment points along their tops, and connection hardware at their ends to allow multi-barrier linear systems to be formed. These augmentations to fundamentally solid product lines have also enhanced the potential range of the PCB. Indications that PCBs are in the terminal condition new architectural emergency devices move through before becoming provisionally insis- sible – absorbed into the everyday fabric of the city while remaining visu- ally present – include their recent adoption and embellishment by ar- chitects and designers, as evidenced in designs for PCB planters. PCBs with stamped concrete finishes imitating field stone, and PCB focused Harvard GSD thesis projects (figs. 3, 5). As an engineered device, the Jersey barrier can be quickly deployed and reconfigured without com-promising its performance, which relies primarily on its empirically shaped, and highly reliable, distribution of mass. Among its strategic advantages: durability, extensive field history, mass-preservability – has been its portability. However, with the PCB beginning to meld with its environment, blending into its architectural or urban surroundings, permanently claiming territory by permanen- tally securing it through uncompromising means. As with emergency devices in general, for the most popular designs are those which aestheti- cize the device while still revealing or referencing its visual presence. Designation and ornament remain the preferred methods for assimila- tion [figs. 1, 2].

Total visibility is undesirable. The PCB’s effectiveness has come to be attributed to both its physical performance and its visual identifiability. As with most architectural emergency devices, PCBs have come to represent safety, independent of their physical presence for it or the specific application for which they are deployed. This sup- plementary accumulation of symbolic value is often cited as a contribut- ing factor to overall performance and is also frequently referenced in industry literature. According to the National Precast Concrete As- sociation, “Precast concrete barriers, which are normally used in high-way applications, are being used more frequently as a protection against unwanted vehicular traffic and terrorist activities around government buildings, utility facilities, historical landmarks and airports. Their im- proving appearance and mass provide excellent exterior elements in reference. In many areas, the barriers adorn their surroundings with a decorative coat of paint.”

With or without this adornment, PCBs also take on the role of a supplementary architectural enclosure, offering blast – rather than thermal or smoke – protection. Their deployment produces an interior- ity or spatial difference at once definitive and highly flexible. Originally designed to solidify the lines of the road – to mark difference in more certain terms than plant, the portability and reconfigurability of the PCB also renders architectural solidity flexible, the scale and configura- tion of the city and its infrastructure potentially redesigned by the in- stallation speed of a particular PCB product. “Having proven adept at negotiating the relationships between horizontally articulated buffer spaces – as defined by blast streets, speed reduction distances, or areas of visibility – and vertical containment, variations from the global family of PCBs currently define the borders of the Green Zone in Iraq and form the recently constructed barrier separating traffic between Israel and Palestine, while others continue to protect cars from potentially wayward traffic on the New Jersey Turnpike.”
Endnotes
2. M. Peter Jurkat, “Highway Center-Barrier Investigation, Part 3: Accident Analysis” (Stevens Institute of Technology, Dawson Laboratory Report No. 1231, June 1984), 1.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Ibid., 3.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 4.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Ibid., 4.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid., 4.
12. Ibid., 4.
In August 2008, Vikram Prakash and I took a road trip through southern India as part of our research. On the way, we encountered numerous wonders of architectural design that have not yet been admitted into the architectural canon. Here are some samples from our photo journal.

More photographs from the Roadside series can be found on pages 42 & 43 and 90 & 91.
Algorithms as Difference Engines

Caroline A. Jones with Benjamin Aranda of Aranda/Lasch

In the span of time between (1667) and (1847), there were two Britons—John Milton and Charles Babbage—who negotiated difference, albeit in radically different ways. Industrial modernization (Babbage) produced difference as a calculable sum, where the epic religious poet (Milton) had seen it as a navigable sign.

The Angels met
Jacob in Mahanaim, where he saw
The field poised with its Guardian bright—Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 16, 1667

Here, the word “pavilion” as a verb—the rolling courtyard of Milton’s imagination poised with the sublime songs of guardian angels, fluttering emblems signifying a torsion in which Biblical time and the future of England commanded, and the difference between secular and divine was a matter of will and interpretation. For Victorian engineer Charles Babbage, on the other hand, difference was to be automated for minimum error and maximum utility in the struggle to produce invariant numerical tables for the use of scientists, navigators, and surveyors, but most bearing necessity for assurances in the burgeoning new commercial insurance trade.

The two seemingly unbridgeable epistemes emblemized by Milton’s evanescent signs of divinity and the laboring gears of Babbage’s architectural collaborations—notably, the 2008 pavilion commissioned with the Serpentine Gallery pavilion series (which has included works by Rem Koolhaas, Toyo Ito, and Frank Gehry). The latest complex collaboration is spearheaded by artist Matthew Ritchie, who titled the pavilion The Morning Line.

It was a break between the simple algorithm, which has a determinate end, and the stochastic algorithm which is designed to generate changing outcomes. How—do you—introduce randomness, the stochastic, the aleatory? Perhaps the tandem lie you is the intuitive.

Caroline Jones: What algorithms did you use for The Morning Line? From your previous book, Teeling, we know where you ended up with: sliding and modular boundaries.

Benjamin Aranda: It’s about coming up with ways of packing space so there are no gaps, to fill out the networks. It should be said that while you can use algorithmic levels, as with Babbage’s difference engines, the algorithms are merely utilization—the uses to which they are put remain exquisitely embodied and full of craft, aiming at signification and interpretation, much like an actuarial table or a religious tract.

Positions, of course, have always been more important in architecture than their supposed ephemeralinity would imply. In modern times, the evanescence experienced implied by “pavilion” became gnostic; as in Marx von der Rohé’s monumental 1919 Barocke pavilions, or the Gropian pila built to signify the U.S. nation at the Venice Biennale. The Morning Line comes closest to what Milton had in mind, engaging an algorithmic practice that generates “building” as a progressive term. Perforated, open, and clusted with what seem like bubbles framed in steel. The Morning Line’s “drawing in space” resists modernist statism to mount a transitive action on the ground.

In preparation for a catalogue essay on the pavilion, I interviewed Benjamín Aranda about the processes that yielded this modular, crystalline, and chaotic “anti-pavilion” (per Ritchie). What emerges from the interview edited below is that the algorithms at the core of this project are not blueprints but propositions that generate footing paths: do this, infer this, or else something else results. Then do that. Cursally, Aranda/Lasch introduce the stochastic not by feeding in random numbers, but by intermittently interrupting the algorithm to allow collaboration, craft and intuition in their design process. They tinkered with Babbage’s engine because form, not capital risk, is their stock in trade. Intuitively aiming for buildable, scaleable, and fractal forms, the architects altered the algorithm so that craft could function. Fusing the difference engine to poetic form. Architecture might take this lesson more broadly, learning to renovate the aging computational notions of the algorithm by using more open-ended practices that transform the static permanence of “building” (noun) into “building” (verb).
Benjamin Aranda: We are often asked about the sense of randomness in our designs – sometimes it is literally coded in there, as a random variable that generates seemingly random effects. But we know there is no randomness. Even randomly generated, computationally produced [random numbers] are kind of fake in a way. Even if something seems base, we’re trying to introduce other orders. Even if we don’t know what those other orders are yet, we have a feeling – and this is where intuition comes in - that you might be able to sense order. So there’s not really a randomness but a looseness that lets us control the narrative. If anything this project is about moving from an open geometric framework to a specific visual language.

Caroline Jones: When you release control, it’s not to a number from out-there, but rather to the process of collaboration itself. It’s something where you loosen the structure to accommodate this narrative possibility.

Benjamin Aranda: Yes, absolutely. The whole point of this exercise is that it’s not necessarily about producing complex shapes, but about producing opportunities. They can take many shapes, they can be within the project and they can also inform the project, in the way that Ritchie’s narratives do – I mean [laughs] take your pick, Milton to Q.E.D. What was important to us as architects was to come up with a framework that could sometimes loosely reference these narratives but other times specifically capture them.

Caroline Jones: Can you give me an example of an instance in which a specific reference would be coded into the structure?

Benjamin Aranda: One is that the universe expands. The model of the universe is a legitimate model – whether the model is as big as a pos- ter, whether the model fits into the palm of your hand, or whether it’s at the scale of the universe, it’s always systematically reproducing the kind of inherent order of matter wanting to expand. I mean, we don’t have the expansion coefficient set exactly to what the universe has as its expan- sion coefficient, but we wanted something that could be about expansion. The second issue that is really important at the geometric level is that it’s producing networks and can loop back into itself. This is not a small detail; it took us months to figure that out. We had to truncate the tetrahedron on such a way that as it connected to itself it would basically produce a ring after a certain number of units, it would come back to its origin point. If you truncated it too little it would intersect and become irrational. There’s one way of truncating the shape that it both produces these fractals and produces these rings. The rings are really important because they produce predictable structure, and not only that, they produce lattices. Lattices you can understand as many rings tied together into structure.

Caroline Jones: They become buildable. It’s sort of like Kepler, there’s some order there, and you tweak it until you get the perfect solids that nest. So there’s a play between the intuitive twiddling that gets this gorgeous buildable structure to emerge, and the core geometries that you’re tweaking to get there.

Benjamin Aranda: Yeah. We understand the universe as something that needed to expand but also something that needed to build space. And what builds space is matter. And the kind of matter that we want to explore is built out of crystals – crystallographic structures which are repetitive, stable, and buildable entities.

Caroline Jones: That’s interesting because from Ruskin to Smithson people have thought of the crystalline as built of angles, as angular. Yet we sense in the designs that you’ve generated a more organic sense – of bubbles, say such that when they meet they create flat surfaces where they touch.

Benjamin Aranda: The project is not only about geometry, it’s about expression – what Matthew Ritchie would call a semasiographic struc- ture, a [holographic] visual language. There is nothing other in the proj- ect than its language. The lines themselves and the drawings are the structure, and produce the space. We believe you can only get 3-D tiling and procedural space through the drawings. Sometimes you can just see the visual language, scribbles, hieroglyphics, and other times you experience the horizon line - the underlying geometric structure. You can have this kind of toggling between the framework and expres- sion, between geometric ideal and a narrative specificity. That toggling is itself a kind of experience of reality. And that’s what we wanted to
in produce in this project, where you can basically sense the geometry at work, something that was systemic and reflected an actual theory of the universe.

**Caroline Jones:** That does correspond to one of the deep structures of aesthetic theories, the pleasure that we have in experiencing fractals. In terms of the algorithm, much of its uptake in architecture is about a progressivist aim at the future, yet what is striking about Ritzehoej is his attempt to hold onto everything from the past. Lucullus, Voudou, etc. How does that feel for you as architects? Perhaps you’ve been there done that with postmodernism’s relation to a historical past, but what is your architectural relationship to this narrative past?

**Benjamin Aranda:** There is one line that we as architects really hold on to in Persepolis Last where Adam is shown as a vision of the future of a flooded world and it’s implied as his fault. What we needed to proceed from that point was a vision of the anti pavilion. It’s not a normal position in that it sort of antithesis about an optimist future. More like an apologist for the future, it’s imagining what exists after the second fall. It’s this sort of blackened steel frame, a haunted ruin of a future monument. We were really excited because Matthew asked us to fail in a spectacular way. What we will make as a kind of wager at best. The Morning Line might be a picture of the universe, it’s the best chance we have. We’re using the leading theories of the universe’s laws from some of the leading physicists, we’re applying the most advanced geometric principles that we can get our hands on. It might be sight or it might not be, but in any case, in 50 years it will be a ruin.

**Caroline Jones:** This reminds me of Smithson’s paraphrase of Vladimir Nabokov who had said that the future is but the obsolete in reverse, where for Smithson, the failed urbanism of Pascassio becomes “ruins in reverse.”

**Benjamin Aranda:** It’s an anti-pavilion, but without hubris. We’re re-placed that optimism with a learning sense of humankind’s ability to fall – the literary narratives from Nabokov interweave with the cosmological narratives coming from Princeton physicists and Columbus trained architects. I’ve always seen myself and our role as architects as one of the players in this poker game that Ritzehoej has set up.

**Caroline Jones:** On the literal future of this pavilion Matthew said it was being built in a modular way, with a demand for disposability. I’ve discussed it as a kind of “contaminated infinity.” Each time it’s built it will be in a different site and perhaps a different modular combination, creating infinite possibilities.

**Benjamin Aranda:** It’s conceived as a cycle in a way, steadily as an infinity sign in three dimensions. [Physicists] Neal Turok and Paul Steinhardt’s new theory of the universe (which is not proven at all) is that the universe is going in cycles and is being rebuilt every 22 billion years or so. So for us it was important that the structure be cyclical – using the fractal logic, it could be a cycle with multiple points of entry. The narratives might have beginnings and ends but you understand all the narratives as a movement around a center, this cosmological model of The Morning Line itself a kind of universe... like a bunch of brackets, the biggest bracket being at the scale of the universe itself. I hear myself saying this and I know it sounds grandiose and kind of crazy, but these are the terms of the project, and for an architect that was pretty fun.

**Caroline Jones:** It’s a model, and we don’t get confused that we are actually in the universe... although we are at every point actually in the universe. But – I say this hypothetically – we imagine that we are in a model of the universe in the best way of good art and architecture: that we seamlessly inhabit it even as we are allowed to develop a conceptual space for reflection on its implications at another scale. In the 18thcentury game, you have to know the rules, and then you have to be able to forget them in order to play Internazional, but he capable of reflection.

**Benjamin Aranda:** Exactly.

**Caroline Jones:** What part was played by Arup and Bosia?

**Benjamin Aranda:** They are hybrid engineers and architects. They’re very much interested in complexity and minularity. We complement them well, because we’re able to connect a project’s deeper intensionality into a design concept. So that’s more than a system, it becomes a project. I think ultimately a real problem is brought in by using the word “algorithm” – in a way I wouldn’t care if you never used the word algorithman when describing this project, it’s sort of been polluted. It’s mis-understood as more technocratic rather than project oriented; we approach it as more of a novel concept-generating tool. And because Arup’s Advanced Geometry Unit. They’ve been doing this a lot longer than we have. And like they write their own code, they are trained computa-

tionally but also really interested in design that produces opportunities and conflict, this stochastic or random thing that you were pointing out earlier. They’re very systematic in a way but also leave things open.

**Caroline Jones:** Yes, but am I correct that some people might introduce the stochastic by borrowing a bunch of Monte Carlo numbers and punching them in, where what you are doing is actually releasing yourself from the algorithms momentarily to have an intuitive engagement with the process, as design? These two kinds of stochasticism are pretty dif-

erent: intuition and craft as randomness versus ‘pure’ mathematical randomness.

**Benjamin Aranda:** Yes, that’s cool. But that’s not to say that we don’t appreciate the more mathematical randomness. One certainly lives more. But you’re right, there are many ways to inside the random: they might be programmatic, or not they might be computational, or not; so that’s a really great way of putting it.

**Caroline Jones:** Tooling is about how we build our own tools. And most people came back to us and they think Tooling is about writing computational code. But for us, the most powerful tools that we have built are the ones that make looking back at history a very productive kind of act. Usually, by writing code, you are rewriting history, a little bit, between the lines. We try to position different narratives about history as tools, which, in a way, become algorithms that you can use to redress your present. We don’t talk about it too much because it would almost ruin it – but we con-
sider Tooling a way to re-consider chapters of history that were otherwise closed. We find ourselves really fascinated by. That’s why working with Ritzehoej was great – his artwork is about that. We are finding ourselves influenced by him in a very deep way. We don’t want to say his style, it is his artistic language, but we feel a deep affinity with him.

**Caroline Jones:** And I think conversely Ritzehoej in some ways finds in Tooling a way to redress the fact that he is doing in a deeply contempo-
ary way. In other words, the ambition is mutual.

**Benjamin Aranda:** It somebody went that then we’d be very happy.

**Caroline Jones:** (laughing) Yes. Well, maybe somebody will.
Within the terms we have at our disposal to think through the mergers (uncomfortable or solving subjectivities and relationships are pervasively inadequate. This inadequacy is born Reines’ work (quoted in part above) reminds us that the available dialogues addressing dis-rewinders, are inevitably short handed. As Roland Barthes writes: the writer and the written erode in the writing.

But does this mean we are left with nothing, Coeur de Lion1 Ariana Reines, I had to be close.

I had to be close.

It made me nervous Weak; barely To them. They looked Me when I was little Looked stupid to

"...Neural self-relating designates the magic moment when neural activity no longer circulates around the input that triggered it, but generates its own subject. The focal point around which its activity circu-

lates...I...If, then, self-relating means here that there is no ‘subject’ previous to activity (that which acts is ‘self-produced’, the result of its own activity), in what, precisely, does the difference between the subject and the inessential subject that is the attractor consist?"

In short, what Zizek points to in the lines above is that the subject becomes the call that it answers. Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation and Judith Butler’s work on performativity point to this same phenomenon, as does Michel Foucault’s work on subjectivization. “Yet, does The Perfume View give us any better terms for handling this difference between bodies of flesh and bodies of work (as if they were so easily separable)? Zizek writes:

In the documentary Deride, in answer to the question of what he would ask some great classic philosopher if he were to meet him, Derida immediately snaps back: ‘About his sex life.’ Here, perhaps, we should supplement Derida: if we asked this question directly, we would probably get a common answer: the thing to look for, rather would be the theory about sexuality at the level of each respective limi-

tation...What accounts for the weird (if not - for some, at least - tasteless) character of this exercise is not the reference to sexual practices at all, but the short circuit between the two spheres which are usu-

ally perceived as incompatible, as moving at ontologically different levels: that of sublime philosophical speculation and that of the details of sexual practices.”

In Coeur de Lion, Reines’ narrating “I” thrives images of herself, her former relationship and her phe-

tological heading toward something of the "sublime philosophical speculation...of sexual practices" which Zizek al-

ludes to above while confusing and confounding those practices with and on a style of dull low “...Triangulat-

ing piercing inaccessence in the face of love and tenderness, acute philosophical and theoretical understandings in constant dissolution, and heavy sexual terminology, Reines (and her narrator?) insists the lyric poem, as a means by which personal emotions are laid out by an all knowing “I” as early tolerated. It is a bold move in a time when writers have instead turned to anti-humanisms like those espoused by Heidegger in order to avoid the problem of volitional absolutes. Yet, it is more than just boldness that necessitates Reines’ fallback to the lyric form: handling the difference between bodies of flesh and bodies of work (as if they were so easily separable)? Zizek

addresses this head on. Reines writes:

Between “democratic estimations” of purportedly objective standards and “events”, as things that hap-

pen to... Reines works the boundaries of the contemporary subject. On one side (again as if this were as simple as something like a box, with sides...), working against the impossibility of metaphysical objectivity, the Heidegger-

ian subject is one that is given by language. To properly, unlike the Cartesian subject who is a self-productive center, the Heideggerian subject does not produce, but is produced by language and its events, resulting in a strained and extraneous posture which cannot tolerate the “I” of the lyric poem: “...Further extraving this “I”, the Heideggerian subject goes subject to later “evental” subjects, such as those of Alain Badiou which are the results not rest of language exclusively, but of political actions, global shifts, and militant events.” Zizek’s work in The Parallax View is an attempt to restate the “I” of (factual?) agency while acknowledging its inherent limitations and fundamental passivity. post-Heidegger: In this work he comes very close to difference as it was iterated by Jacques Derrida. In his impressive book Transcritek, Kojin Karatani endeavors to assert the critical potential of such a ‘paradise in its system’; forcing a common stance in the present Kantian sense of the term, we should renounce all attempts to reduce one aspect to the other (or, even more so, to enact a kind of ‘dialec-

tical synthesis’ of opposites); on the contrary, we should assert animosity as irreducible, and conceive the point of radical collapse not as a certain determinate position as opposed to another position, but as
the irreducible gap between the positions in itself, the purely structural interaction between them. Kant’s stance is thus “to see things neither from his own viewpoint, nor from the viewpoint of others, but to face the reality that is exposed through difference (parallax).”

While difference is, for Derrida, _neither a word, nor a concept_ it alludes to the inherent decenter and differencing of language. For example, the word concept of _woman_ is already possible in that it both refers to “lady,” “girl,” “women,” etc. It also differs from each of these terms. _Woman_ is possible in language because it is a both singular (i.e. able to describe a particular _woman_) and repeating (i.e. able to reference but not alter other ideas of _woman_). One could almost say that difference parallels “the purely structural interstices” between signifiers... 

Another possibility is that these signifiers are not at all possible in a language, or at least not possible in the way that we think they are. In that case, the gap between signifiers is not a question of their difference, but a matter of the very possibility of their existence.

This difference in the minimal difference, perhaps the difference between Zizek’s parallax and Derrida’s deconstruction, could be characterised as a difference deconstruction without deconstruction, a parallax without parallax. Derrida here introduces the idea of a “purely minimal difference,” which is the only difference that exists between signifiers. What is interesting is that this idea of minimal difference coincides with an un-attainable object: in contrast to a mere difference between signifiers, the pure difference is itself an object.

In this discourse on the minimal difference, perhaps the difference between Zizek’s parallax and Derrida’s deconstruction can be characterised as: whereas Derrida would see the meaning of deconstruction as an unending deferral, Zizek’s parallax results in the production of “difference” as an object. At the same time, as Zizek recounts, “at its most radical the object is that which objects.” This object then is both a passivity and a production.

Thus the paradox is that the roles are reversed (in the standard term of the active subject working on the passive object) the subject is defined by a fundamental passivity, and it is the object from which movement comes.

Amidst the Delexification of the objectified self, it is impossible to determine whether the objectified self is an object, or an objectification. But this is not the case with Zizek’s parallax. Here, the object is an object that objects.

In that the terminology of the “object which objects,” the “minimal difference” between the literary and the non-literate “Y” emerges. Going back to Reines and her “Jake.”

In the above, “Ariana’s” slip between the “is” of the writing from Jake and “Jake” himself repeats the minimal difference Zizek writes through in the Parallax View. It is this literature’s poem above all. For “Jake” is produced for “Ariana” in “what he wrote,” “Jake” is the minimal difference—yet how can we say this? Reines writes to this confusions with the lines, “I mistrusted it if I thought I’d also loved it. Maybe I did not love it, but I loved you” (“which” you? the literary or the real?) it is precisely what is mocked and at stake. And while this slip between signifiers (is, you, Jake, etc.) is again very close to Derrida’s pronouncement that there is nothing “outside the text,” Zizek’s claim is that something does come to exist and Jake and Ariana, again, at the point where neural activity becomes self-production: “Jake” and “Ariana” in this case, becomes objects of making: just as fries is being made into the minimal difference/parallax object created between herself and her writing.

This minimal difference is why love, biography and philosophy are only what they make of themselves. Between themselves. There is no origin outside of activity and even that activity stands in a double bind between product and produced.

If neither Derrida nor Hegel left behind a systematisation of their sexual lives, this gap is being filled by writers and poets who are students, subjects, and objects of contemporary biography. Reines’ work: _Coeur de Lion_. But “I” (at least) is certainly more than that; _whether_ Reines hoped Derrida meant when he expressed interest in some philosopher’s sex life: it is a theorisation on site—in production, in print. It produces the object of investigation which is not the theorisation alone but its outcome. In other words, while Zizek uses the introduction to _The Parallax View_ to propose an understanding so closely tied to its own nemesis, Reines’ work: _Coeur de Lion_.

In this discourse on the minimal difference, perhaps the difference between Zizek’s parallax and Derrida’s deconstruction can be characterised as: whereas Derrida would see the meaning of deconstruction as an unending deferral, Zizek’s parallax results in the production of “difference” as an object. At the same time, as Zizek recounts, “at its most radical the object is that which objects.” This object then is both a passivity and a production.

Thus the paradox is that the roles are reversed (in the standard term of the active subject working on the passive object) the subject is defined by a fundamental passivity, and it is the object from which movement comes.

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This minimal difference is why love, biography and philosophy are only what they make of themselves. Between themselves. There is no origin outside of activity and even that activity stands in a double bind between product and produced.
Q: What is your attitude, as a western architect, towards the Ordos Project?
A: (pause)… units and identities. 1

There is an interesting relevance in examining a one hundred-fold outcome that is controlled by self-similar criteria. One form of this is seen in a short-list competition from which a judging panel awards a hierarchy of prizes. Each scheme contains a protest of given conditions from which individuality is established and reinforced in order to gain the prize. The logical conclusion of this activity for the architect, given its extremity, is to find or manufacture a sui generis from the field of contestants. This is a dual strategy, as the field is not known during the competition phase and thus every participant works in secrecy. Therefore, any speculative attempts to expose and exploit a winning difference are through a clairvoyance, or the re-creation of all possible permutations in the work of the others. This imagined set of all possible combinations is then the field in which the competing architect may construct either the Counterpoint or the Unknown, and most likely some degree of both. The enquiry into the Unknown requires a process of discovery emerging from an active system. The Counterpoint involves the positioning or compounding of countervailing fictions and interpretations of past instances: a rhetorical device.

There is another method of producing the same stimulation of design anisotropy. This other format is the masterplan, as seen in the case of the Ordos 100 project, led by the artist Ai Wei Wei and his FAKE Design team, which commissioned one hundred emerging architecture firms to design one hundred discrete houses for a new town in Mongolia. The difference between the Ordos 100 project and a competition, of course, is that the entire field is to be constructed. This distinction requires the Unknown and the Counterpoint to be at work constantly, and not only at the single event of the competition. The field is exacerbated further by the lack of site conditions in which to respond. Because of the knowledge that every one of the seventy-two second-phase participants knows the name but not necessarily the work of the adjacent architect (as many of the one hundred were chosen for their potential, not their name), the strategy of Counterpoint becomes increasingly tenacious. This requires a counterpoint not to the immediate group but to the field of architecture in general — but to what continent, or which polemics, or even which school? Concurrently, the designs of the twenty-eight first-phase architects were available as references on a large masterplan model, with empty sites ready for the designs of the next phase. As any reference, these became primary notations in the Unknown and Counterpoint strategies. 2
Parcel 55: Site Topography

We were given this particular site from a lottery. With a grade change of four meters, parcel 55 is also in a dense location, with adjacent houses packed closely on all sides. The site and its steep terrain are managed through tracking walkways that then subdivide the site into best-fit terraced plates. The terraces are of sufficient dimension to allow for domestic functions. This operation allows for the subdivision of the overall site into an array of planes, each of which has specificity of occupancy.

House 4-2-1

FAKE Design provided a generic square outline as a recommended profile stacked with three floors; we maintained this area but introduced a slight rotation of the eastern edge to elongate the southern exposure. The primary house elements are composed in a movement of four terraces that follow a simple reversal of bifurcation. At the ground, there are four separate entrances to the distant towers. As the towers climb, they join into two spaces: the major and minor living and dining rooms. At the top level, the towers unify into a single space of dwelling; all of the bedrooms and private spaces are located there.

The house that is produced by this system is interesting as its volumes are not easily perceived as domestic. However, the generated forms that emerge are regulated by profiles of intercase spaces that are specifically dimensioned for their program and relations. As a sui generis condition, the bifurcations are a set of operations where the resultant is indeterminate, yet still predetermined in its overall range of limits.

The references and allusions from the site and context, as a counterpoint, have a didactic or narrative component. However, because the narrative or idea requires a form or container as an architectural expression, the house is a resultant of a portmanteau operation of domestic functionality overlaid with a model of bifurcation. As in the case of portmanteau by Lewis Carroll, ideas or words are not transformed but are superimposed to invent another, larger idea that contains the originals as well as the invention.

Endnotes

1. Excerpt from a videotaped interview by the Ordos Project team, June 2008. The following question replaced “Ordos” with “Inner Mongolia”.
2. This difficulty grows by an order of magnitude when the other competitors are unknown, as short-list competitions frequently have historic frissons among well-established practices making predictions on the entries of others.
3. There are certainly other strategies we choose to differentiate these two as an operation or composition.
4. Faced with the simultaneity of individual work among a collection, the architects were apt to repeat the same behavior as in a design competition. While collaboration or at least communication among neighbors was tactfully discussed, most of the design work was shared instead among friends and colleagues.
6. Lewis Carroll. Through the Looking-Glass (1872). “Well, ‘Lithy’ means ‘lithe and slimy’…idea a portmanteau—there are too many words packed into one word.”
This essay is an investigation of the critical legacies of Patio and Pavilion.1 Designed by Peter and Alison Smithson, along with their long-time collaborators Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi (who were collectively known for the event as Group Six), this installation was presented at the This is Tomorrow exhibition, held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1956. It featured a light architectural structure: the walls were made of second-hand wood slats and the roof of corrugated plastic (the pavilion). It was often described as a “shed” one of the lateral sides was unenclosed, but was later barred off by the artists, free to fill it with “signs of inhabitation.” The pavilion feature a photo-montage titled Head of Man (fig. 12), as well as several objects either found or created by the two visual artists (toy railway cars, decorated ceramics and boulders, a bangle, a revolver, a lobster picture, etc.). They also activated the floor, sand-covered the entire surface, except for a patch that revealed another large collage by Henderson and different ornamented ceramics.

Patio and Pavilion was therefore designed in two phases. First the Smithsons erected the architecture, then Henderson and Paolozzi deployed the “signs of inhabitation.” The two approaches were fundamentally different from each other: such a way of working was a statement on the part of the group, who enjoyed the idea of the “integration of the arts” with its sympathizers of the neo-Constructivist (CIAM) in Dubrovnik, showing no inclination to what the architects, became the “hard core” of practically all the research programs that came after it. Take, for example, the widely read chapter “New Brutalism and the Architecture of the Welfare State: England, 1949–59” in the second edition of Kenneth Frampton’s Modern Architecture: A Critical History. He states that the project is an “ironic reinterpretation of Laugier’s primitive hut of 1753 in terms of the back-yard reality of Bethnal Green” but also suggests “that this gesture was by no means entirely retrospective, for within this cryptic and almost chemical metaphor of the shed the distant past and the immediate future fused into one. Thus the pavilion patio was furnished not only with an old wheel and a toy airplane but also a television set. Britain, within a decade and a half (i.e. bomb-out) urban fabric, the ‘shame’ of consumerism was already being ensnared and moreover welcomed, as the life substance of a new industrial vernacular.”

Frampton’s short interpretation, with its numerous projections, is a classic example – to use an expression by Umberto Eco – of an interpretation “(built)”2 and Pavilion never featured a television set or a toy airplane,3 which therefore renders his interpretation of the project as a traumatic afterthought on war and a casual celebration of consumerism rather unconvincing. As The shed, often compared to Henderson’s “putting shed behind his residence in Bethnal Green (the neighborhood where the Whitechapel Gallery was actually located).” It does feature decorated ceramics, but hardly any objects or tools that are distinctly “working class.” More recently, the media critic Ken Higdon, following up on these precedents, describes Patio and Pavilion as “clumsy, bombshell architecture,” as “a reminder of death and destruction” or “a period all too ready to embrace the annihilation of the spectacle.” Of course, all of these points suggest something extremely interesting about the external cultural contexts out of which these 1950s and 1960s architectural and cultural events evoked (the Cold War for Banham and Frampton, and the so-called “era in terms for Higdon), as well as the various competing theoretical trends of different decades. But to paraphrase Egon Eiermann, the work’s internal coherence, about which one can determine the legitimacy of a particular response, an interpretation that does not respect this irreducible aspect of the work is one of the most important is a tendency to restrict ourselves to one right meaning, but at this point, we should check the main hypotethis at hand against the cost of the work itself. First of all, is Patio and Pavilion “bombshell architecture”? This persistently held assumption seems difficult to accept, as the structure features no real signs of destruction. In fact, it stands out for the newness of its architectural materiality (especially the use of reflective aluminum panels and of corrugated plastic, two popular industrial materials in the 1950s). The wood panels, that are apparently second-hand, are not burned out, shattered or even dirty. As for the “homely junk” in which it is clusted together with care around the path laid out for the visitors, which suggests the display was very consciously arranged and not meant to resemble the result of an explosion, let alone a nuclear blast. As for Henderson’s Head of Man, a photomontage/collage made of outmoded images from catalogues, encyclopedias and natural histories books such as Diderot and D’Alembert’s Encyclopédie, and not from contemporary commercial advertising, as in the case of the other Pop Art installations, which sported a dizzying array of images from science-fiction, if it indeed could read as a fragmented and burnt out corpse…

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Nicola Pezolet

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"Signs of inhabitation":
The Critical Legacies of Patio and Pavilion

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with creased surfaces (an interpretation even more pregnant when we consider that Henderson worked on bomber planes during World War II), it could just as well be interpreted as a Vitalist figure representing “organogenesis through the cycle of decay and rebirth” (especially in light of the other collage in the small gallery space, which represents plant growths and a set of pend in which various life forms are japsed to an excised figure from Pompeii). As claimed by the art historian Victoria Walsh, Henderson—who was very familiar with the collages of Max Ernst—for example—was “true to the surrealist aesthetic, which embraced ideas of ambiguity and metamorphosis.” Indeed, Henderson, in a letter to Chris Mullins, confirms that he had been inspired by the heads of Archimboldo’s “and those composites light of the other collage in the small gallery space, which represents the Pavilion and the Colline [fig. 5], which, as noted by the architectural historian Laurent J. Stabler, strongly emphasize the “honesty” of materials and the rawness of the individual building components as ways to breach the liasonal formalism and also in order to promote an “aesthetic of change.”

Beating these various points in mind, it is pertinent to open up new possibilities to interpret Pavillon and Pavilion with fresh appreciation. It seems particularly interesting to further explore the nature of the collaboration between the Smithsons, on the one hand, and Paolozzi and Henderson, on the other. Indeed, if both parties rejected the Constructivist idea of an “integration of the arts,” their way of working was particularly at odds with each other. In this particular project, the Smithsons seem willing to further promote their “aesthetic of change”—as they developed with other projects like Hunstanton. With this concept, “the Smithsons had defined an architectural, and in the best sense of the word, aesthetic principle that not only had to be able to incorporate structural changes, but was supposed to imply them as well.” Instead of opting for formal unity, the Smithsons instead focus on the use of materials in order to support their ideas of expandability, transience and mobility. Not only could a structure like the one seen in Pavillon and Pavilion serve different functions— it could also be assembled quickly, just as it could be deconstructed and moved around to meet the basic needs of its users.

The choice to call it a “pavilion” also shows a willingness on the part of the architects to site this project, albeit critically, within a whole trajectory of modernist pavilions, such as the 1932 Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe and the 1933 Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux by Le Corbusier. But whereas Mies chose to add a classic nude sculpture by Georg Kolbe and to use permanent materials (steel, glass, marble, and travertine) for his impermanent exhibition in order to elevate his pavilion from mere construction to “building art” (Baukunst), the Smithsons chose to work with highly portable and expendable materials in a way not so dissimilar to what Le Corbusier did with his transient Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux (fig. 4). It could be interesting to consider the connections between Pavillon and Pavilion and this mostly overlooked project of Corbu: the title echoes that of the exhibition they were a part of (it translates in English to “the pavilion of the new era,” which is very close to This is Tomorrow), and its innovative text-like structure (based on his drawing of a “primitive temple”) could very well have been appealing to the architects. Such an approach would also allow its clarity and to substantiate the issue of Pavilion and Pavilion’s relationship to the “primitive” and also the Smithsons’ ambitious staging of a future that more or less looks like the past (or that, at least, does not look like “futurism,” like the House of the Future, presented a few months earlier at the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition). If it does deal with the theme of architectural “primitivism”, it seems to be mediated through this particular drawing and position (and not Le Corbusier, etc. Sempé). First published in L’Esprit Nouveau and then reprinted in Vers une Architecture, Le Corbusier’s rendering of a “primitive temple” indeed shares some similarities to the Smithson’s own drawing of Pavilion and Pavilion: the open façade in front of which ritual objects are to be displayed and also the rectangular shape of the enclosure (fig. 6). However, despite some of these similarities, the Smithson’s project rejects the claims made by Le Corbusier, who uses this drawing to re-instate his connection that “geometry is the language of man.” Instead of geometry, change and mobility seem to be the key ideas defended by the Smithsons.

Henderson and Paolozzi, on the other hand, were little concerned with these architectural issues and seemed more willing to use art and “found objects” to describe what lies outside of the construction/logic of modernist architecture. Indeed, their “signs of inhabitation” or “a process of representing spatial experience as radically subjective. Informed, at least to some extent, by the Surrealist collage of Max Ernst, in which strange creatures invade living rooms and streets, they subvert the exemplary tectonic structure unto an unclassifiable and uncanny space. Objects take an unpredictable life of their own: as the hand-written catalogue for the ‘Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux’ and the “artifacts” and “pin-ups” are there for man’s “irrational urges.” By quoting the Surrealist leader André Breton’s text on Max Ernst, we could very well describe Henderson and Paolozzi’s use of objects as cues to disrupt the normativity of everyday perception through an aesthetic of “informality.”...
so different, so appealing.\\n\textbf{disciplinary boundaries}, is just what make architecture which is made possible not by direct collaboration between the artists and feminine.”21

\textit{counterpart} to such functionalism. As Hal Foster has polemically argued, “Surreal- and the ornamental, the very forms tabooed in such functionalism, associated as they

\textit{amidst Head and the other collages representing animals and natural forms} could just as well be meant to represent a stolen apocalypse [as many of these things were being created as violent accidents as the war]. I wish to thank my colleagues \textit{Enrique Ramirez (School of Architecture), Pontificia Universidad Javeriana} for their generous insights on this matter.

A photograph by Henderson seems to foreshadow Henderson’s The artists’ intervention, then, is not only about “giving signs and images to the stage” of the individual’s ‘realization’, but also about giving rise to what has been repressed by the discipline of architecture. This should not be understood as a reactionary and nostalgic dismissal of modern architecture altogether—much like the Surrealists before them, the artists indeed try to position themselves as the necessary counterpoint to such functionalism. As Hal Foster has polemically argued, “Surreal-ism is about desire in order to allow it back into architecture it lives on the outmoded and the ornamental, the very forms tabooed in such functionalism, associated as they became not only with the historical and the fantastic, but with the atlantic and the feminine.”22

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Endnotes
1. I wish to thank my advisors, professors Caroline A. Jones and Mark L缬strem (History, Theory and Criticism of Art and Architecture, MIT), as well as professor Laurent J. Stalder (Geography and Theorie der Architektur, ETH Zurich), who greatly contributed to the completion of this essay. I also wish to thank the students of the course \textit{Reflection in Progress} (2006) (“What Object?”) for allowing me to present this paper as a part of their seminar. I particularly thank you for listening and for the assistance of the Special Collections of the Francis Loom Library at Harvard University.


4. \textit{There are no famous examples by Madrid Taubin.} In \textit{Theories 1952–60 and Their Application in a Building Project 1963–70} (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 132.


5. \textit{There are no famous examples by Madrid Taubin.} In \textit{Theories 1952–60 and Their Application in a Building Project 1963–70} (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 132.


7. The hack version of Pete’s and Paolozzi indeed does not contain any scribbles, although a drawn outline of a plane appears in the entry for the This Is Tomorrow exhibi- tion catalogue, with the caption “He’s where a late contraction of the machine [fig.3]. Although the drawing exists of a plane used during World War II (fig.3), it would just as well be meant to represent a stolen apocalypse. (as many of these things were being created as violent accidents as the war). I wish to thank my colleagues”.\n


11. \textit{This Was Tomorrow.} Architectural Review, vol. 151, no. 815 (1974), 55-56. The Smithsons also despised graffiti: according to Mark Jarzombek, during one of their conferences at MIT, the Smithsons described it as a manifestation “to palliate the problem of the fact that the scenery is not real enough to be real.”

12. Ben Highmore, \textit{“Rough Poetry: Patio and Pavilion Revisited,”} in: \textit{Head} and the other collages representing animals and natural forms could just as well be meant to represent a stolen apocalypse [as many of these things were being created as violent accidents as the war]. I wish to thank my colleagues

13. Sarah Williams Goldhagen, \textit{“Freedom’s Domicile,”} in: \textit{This Was Tomorrow} (Cambridge, Ma.:


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Nearly fifty years after its remarkable incarnation in downtown Boston, the raised highway nicknamed the Green Monster met its end, to the delight of its many detractors. With north- and south-bound traffic now pumping through a network of underground roadways and the vestigial structure removed part by part—like a green-painted puzzle—the interstate has essentially been erased from view; in its place, a series of parcels designated for park-space emerged to constitute the Rose Kennedy “Greenway”.

Adding 27 acres of open space to the city, the Greenway arrived on the heels of a decade-long construction process popularly known as the Big Dig. This famously troubled works project inflicted a seemingly endless headache of excavation and construction—and left behind a tidy image of greened park-space at the site of impact. Applied like a green salve to the six-lane gash that divided the city, the linear park promised an improved public realm as payback for the poorly realized ambitions of early-1960’s highwayification. The resulting swath of open space, however, retains the memory of the old Artery through its singular figure; while no longer a physical barrier, the resulting “urban void” rearticulates the zone of separation between adjacent neighborhoods.

The raised Central Artery was such a conspicuous presence in the city that one can argue that its removal generated an afterimage: an optical misrepresentation, an afterimage occurs when the brain sees the negative of an image recorded by the eyes after the actual image shifts out of view. The path that replaced the dismantled highway is a linear figure of comparable substance against the background of the city, occupying the same highly contested and historically fraught real estate in downtown Boston. A repressed element from the city’s recent past, the Green Monster remains like an imprint on the surface of the urban ground; an after-image involuntarily reproduced until it eventually fades as perception catches up with reality.

The Big Dig can thus be understood as a transfigurative process, whereby one object of public value, the raised highway, is substituted with another currency. But now that the construction fences have come down, the results of the decade-long transformation resist the tidy evaluations of before-and-afters: after all of the expenditure, after all of the enormous effort, the result is emptiness.

While open space is a critical ingredient in the production of a public realm, there is a vivid contrast between the complexity of the Big Dig as an infrastructural project and the seeming simplicity of neutral open space as the unassailable answer to the Artery’s afterlife. Even the phrasing “open space” suggests itself not as a fully-formed idea but as an indeterminacy or absence, a negative space framed within a more resolved context. The complicity of this project came at no small cost, both in a monetary sense but also in less quantifiable ways, such as the inconvenience and anxiety of a city undergoing massive reconstruction. If this public works...
View of Spectacle Island from Downtown Boston

View of Greenway and northern entrance to the Central Artery Tunnel
Several contemporary landscape projects have forged creative ways to celebrate the seemingly incongruous relationship between a public open space and the infrastructural basis of its creation: the Olympic sculpture park in Seattle by Weiss/Manfredi and the High Line Park in New York by Diller, Scofidio + Renfro are notable in this regard. The simultaneous identities of these sites—incorporating residual aspects of their original function while reconceiving their vital role as urban parks—accepts the challenging condition created by the open-ended temporality of public works. Public space must likewise be agile, actively engaging the ongoing production of the public sphere, whether in terms of infrastructural works or public parks.

Sharing the explicit purpose of providing green space for recreation, the Greenway and Spectacle Island offer different vocations of the urban park: one sites a pastoral ideal as a surface condition and the other recreates a marine wild on a dramatic topography. Beneath the idyllic veneer of either representation of nature, these sites both participate in an ongoing project of public works as both product and producer of infrastructure. Dispensing of the false opposition of an authentic nature and pure artifice—the lesson of Spectacle Island and the Greenway is the double negative: matter subtracted from one site of public works is displaced to cap the accumulated products of another. A landfill becomes park and a raised highway is erased from view. The full-twin poles motivation provides an infrastructural logic for the strange hybridity of these parks, but stops short in incorporating more active design strategies.

Following the allusive routes of matter and the transferred satiandae of infrastructural espedency, it becomes clear that no public proposal is a self-contained arc from start to finish with a definitive footprint or cosmetic improvement. Rather, public works are an ongoing procedure enacted on the expanded technological landscape of the city, a transitive process, where parks figure in both as public space and public image.

Endnotes

Several other contemporary landscape projects have been mentioned here or elsewhere in this essay (Hong Kong: MAP Book Publishers, 2003).

Path to Spectacle Island

Excavation: Disposal

Image Credits: All photographs courtesy of Buck Sleeper. Drawings courtesy of MY Studio.
By the beginning of the 17th century the British Empire had been emerging, contact with difference from overseas for some time. The Empire had grown to include an array of colonies and dependencies and cultural exchanges, especially in London, had enjoyed imports from these territories for years. No longer did England rely on entrepôt cities such as Amsterdam and Venice. By 1660 the British Empire had strengthened its naval forces and developed its own import and export strategies, and London was becoming an entropic city itself. Imports that were not previously consumed by the average Londoner found their way into daily routines: tea, chocolate, coffee, tobacco, and rum entered the daily diets of many Londoners. Consumption of sugar rose drastically. Overall patterns of consumption beyond communities also changed, collecting many areas of daily life. Horn buttons, ostrich feathers, indigo dyes, and a host of fabrics such as chintzes, calicoes, and silk had become more commonly available and affected clothing choices. As patterns of consumption changed, the urban fabric of the city likewise changed to accommodate them. The docklands, where imports entered the city, were altered noticeably as London reorganized its fabric to absorb cultural differences in the form of imports. This is particularly apparent at the West India Docks, where a new species of warehouse urbanism began to take root:

Import companies like the British West India Company and the British East India Company (chartered as early as 1600) were at the forefront of the increase in imports to England. Based in London, they nevertheless controlled large portions of the Empire overseas. Both companies were separate from and not controlled by the state, enabling them to engage in a variety of activities, not always within the law:

- The East India Company, for example, acted as a government in India, building cities, ports, and establishing other infrastructure, along with maintaining a standing army. Similarly, the West India Company controlled areas in the Caribbean, altering the land and its people. The companies were separate from the state, creating large masterplans for warehouse buildings, and taking on governmental roles. Even if the company was acting in a legal manner, through its servants (as employees of the East India Company were known) could act in duplicitous manners.

- Elihu Yale, hailed as the founder of Yale University after his donation of valuable East India goods to Cotton Mather, was one such servant of the East India Company. Yale then governor of Madras, employed a variety of questionable administrative techniques that eventually caused him to step down from his post and retire to London.

As similar as the two major companies were, there were some very clear differences between them. An obvious distinction is that they imported different things, from different parts of the world. The sugars and curds of the West India Company were heavy, packed in massive hogheads (for sugar) or puncheons (for rum). As seasonal goods, harvested from the monoculture created by the British in the Antilles, massive amounts had to be stored in London to satisfy year-round demand. The East India Company, by contrast, imported China, tea, silk, calicoes, cotton, and other fabrics, as well as manufactured goods, diamonds, and other precious stones, jerry, and sherry from ports in India, China, and Indonesia. Trade was seasonal in the sense that trade winds blew in more beneficial directions at certain times of year, but the growing season was largely irrelevant. These high-quality luxury goods were sold not in markets but in showrooms which were appended to the warehouses in the 18th century. Wealthy clients or other merchants could bid on goods in semi-public sales that were held in the Sale Room in the East India House, the building that also served as the headquarters of the East India Company.

In this sense, one particular species of urbanism grew out of the East India Company’s imports. But the warehouse urbanism that this study considers is that of the West India Company at the West India Docks, from the time an architectural competition was held in 1799 to the completion of the project in 1812. Before the boom in imports in the 19th century, London’s waterfront did not contain a variety of large-scale warehouse buildings. As architectural historian John Summerson notes, Georgian London did not have many building types specifically designed to accommodate commerce. Large masterplans for accommodating imports, like the complexes of warehousing built at the West India Docks, were not employed until the mid-18th century. When the tide of commerce—the life stream of the capital—began to ebb, so did the architectural deposit it once issued. Along with the external forces of trade, the increasing chaos of the port itself enacted change on the city. Shopping traffic crowded into the port, including the merchant ships (known as East and West Indiamen), the sail collars that traveled between London and other British ports, and lighters, the smaller, flat-bottomed boats used to unload the larger ships. In addition to this increased traffic, the Thames was difficult to navigate because of its tidal nature. An elongated threshold between open sea and the city, the Thames’ daily ebb and flood tides (with as much as a twenty-foot discrepancy, often leaving muddy brown water exposed at low tide) complicated that relationship. Twice a day the river was a place of flux, of changing currents and reversing tides, neither sea nor river. Situated with shipping routes that connected the port to a vast network overseas, the sea was considered a possession of the British Empire. The wealth of nations (and the cultural difference that accompanied it) flowed into London via the conduit of the Thames.

Yet before any “architectural deposit” was made, a crisis point had to be reached in the port. In the years leading up to the announcement of the architectural competition for a warehousing masterplan for the West India Company, the port grew so much that it nearly ceased functioning. Within this confluence, there were few mechanisms of control. Identities were fluid; pirates impersonating customs officers raided ships, gangs of thieves in league with the crews of merchant ships plotted thefts at sea, and the day laborers that were hired to unload the ships pillaged unimpeded. The scale of theft ranged from what fit in a pocket to the stealing of entire ships and their cargoes. There was no established and reliable means of receiving imports. The British East and West India Companies and these pirates lost money due to these deceptions, and ships’ captains began turning away from the port. Something had to be done to remedy the chaos on the river. The import companies themselves often operated on the fringe of legitimacy, verging into acts of piracy when beneficial. In the early 1730s, when the East India Company was becoming increasingly powerful in India and the West India Company was mechanizing sugar production in the Caribbean, piracy was not a new concept. For years England had issued letters of marque to pirates, effectively changing their title to “privateers,” and enabling them to engage in low-grade aggressions against other nations with the blessing of the state—a practice tolerated and encouraged as a ceasefire. As Elihu Yale, a servant of the East India Company, noted, a “Neither pirates nor privateers were technically origins of the state or part of its apparatus of war, but a knowingly duplicitous national sovereignty (through the guise of private gain) allowed them to attack the navies and merchant fleets of rival nations when necessary.”

Technically they were free agents, interested only in profit. This fluctuating identity enabled the pirates to engage in a mutable sovereignty, backing whichever state proved the most profitable, when feasible. Reciprocally, the state could choose to support or invoke support of the pirate’s actions as needed. In the late 16th and early 17th century, as the British Empire became more powerful with better
defined spatial boundaries, the state found it increasingly difficult to find a use for the alternative sovereignty of pirates.

In fact, pirates became a hindrance to the activities of the state, and merchants (especially the British East India Company) began to have difficulties keeping trade routes open to India because of the British peacemaking. When the British pirate William Kidd attacked and plundered the Dutch ship Goede Hoop in the Indian Ocean in 1698, it was the last straw. Kidd claimed that the ship was flying a French flag at the time of attack, but there was no supporting evidence of this, and he was hanged even though significant members of the state and the East India Company had invested in its actions. In To Rule the Waves Arthur Herman explains Kidd’s situation:

Kidd had fallen victim to a new, less tolerant attitude towards the time-honored tradition of theft at sea. A few years earlier Kidd’s exploits would have been business as usual. His investors included not just Governor Belhaven but Edward Russel, now Lord Orford, along with the three other Whig peers—and even, for a 10 percent cut, King William III.

Even though Kidd’s practical activities happened overseas and miles away from the capital, he was brought back to London for punishment and hung at Execution Dock on the banks of the Thames in 1701. Afterward his body was displayed in a gibbet (a metal cage for the body of the executed) in Tilbury Reach for an extended amount of time; the exhibit expressed the new alliance between state and the structures of the port.17 The gibbet and Execution Dock established the state’s new tolerance for piracy. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Michel Foucault writes of a similar strategy in 19th century France: “the body of the condemned man was...an essential element in the ceremonials of public punishment.”18 In Kidd’s case, the exhibition of his body expressed the new alliance between state and Company control; these practical acts became catalysts and irritants that precipitated political and spatial developments in London. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, Execution Dock and the gibbet were used less as a new species of urbanism became the chief instrument of controlling and mitigating difference in the liminal space of import. Enclaves of dock compounds were built at the edges of the Thanes, a new spatial language emerged in the post—“the interface between the East and West India Companies, other pirates, and the city of London.”

Before entering the river, ships were under the influence of naval laws that existed outside the state. This international sovereignty of the high seas often involved actions permissible at sea yet illegal on land. Once on land, this extra-state sovereignty was replaced by the sovereignty of the state, the border between the open seas and the port of London was the site of negotiation between these two realms of power. Wet docks on the Thames enforced this border: in these enclaves, policing systems emerged and were rehearsed as mechanisms of asserting state control.

After an abortive attempt at holding an architectural competition for a master plan in 1799, a proposal for a compound of enclosed wet docks, quays, and warehouses was enclosed by a thirty foot high wall was presented to the Corporation of the City of London.19 The site ultimately chosen for the construction was on the site of the Dock, a peninsula of land to the east of the City formed by a meander in the river. The proposal for the West India Dock effectively quarantined all trade coming from the West Indies in a securable system of wet docks. The plan dictated a sequence of ships entering the wet dock, berthing at the quayside, and systematically unloading cargo (figs. 3.1-3.7).

In this enclave that birth enabled a particular species of piracy (the duplicity of the West India Company) and protected against other illicit activities, the metrics of trade influenced the form of the structures. The depth of the wet docks was determined by the draught of a fully loaded merchant ship; the metrics of the berths that West India merchants used to ship sugar (now introduced to the city’s diet on a large scale) dictated the flow to floor heights and the loading capacities of warehouses that were built within the enclaves. The architecture and infrastructure of the port responded to forces from beyond the city as they met the London market.

A tract printed in 1799 explains the merchant’s point of view regarding the plans for the port: “no Plan can effectually remove the evil and Loss sustained under the present system, which does not provide for a Part of the Trade of the Port in Wet Docks.”20 “The merchant was naturally motivated by profit; if the goods entering the city could be stabilized in warehouses and released when demand in the market rose, risk could be minimized. The impact of acts of piracy outside the structure of the West India Company could be lessened while the acts of piracy by the West India Company could be further enabled inside the enclave. The wet dock space that the City of London proposed was removed from the shipping lanes of the river, and received the ships directly as they came in from the sea.

Once reaching the Isle of Dogs, the ships were immediately brought into a system of locks and docks; the crew remained on the ship until she was docked and a revenue officer could board. Both the crew and the cargo were unloaded while the ship is docked and “under the entire control of the Revenue and Dock Officers.”21 The warehouses were located “immediately contiguous” to the docked ship, and these spatially contiguous warehouses with adjacent quay space allowed the unloaded cargo to be systematically and precisely handled. Goods flowed from the ship to the quay to the warehouse in one simple sequence, enclosed with a series of unassailable walls that surrounded and controlled the whole enclave. The only means of entrance and exit was through a heavily monitored gate—“The enormous scope of these walls and gates can still be discerned from the remnants at the West India Docks (figs. 6-8).”22

The choreographed sequence of movement within the dock walls was scripted in the proposal for the buildings at West India Docks. This script included the roles of Revenue officers and Landing Visitors, two ante- cedents of the dock-side police. The role of the Revenue officers was eventually developed as a result of Patrick Colquhoun’s exposition of waterside crime. A magistrate of the East End and an avid statistician, Colquhoun realized that the rampant piracy within the port was taking a toll on the profits of the import companies. Convinced by his argument, the West India Company, with assistance from the government, funded what would
become the Marine Police force, which patrolled the river and monitored the West India Docks along with the Military Guard and the Peace Officers. The Peace Officers, formed in 1802, specifically patrolled the warehousing compound and were essentially constables with surveillance duties. Like the Military Guard, the Peace Officers were a land-based police force. Accommodations such as guard stations and check points were provided for both these forces within the walls of the warehousing enclaves at the West India Docks.

Two “round houses” or detention areas were commissioned by the West India Company shortly after the warehouses were completed. The architects of the warehouses, George Gwilt and his son, also George, designed the two small structures which were round in plan and roofed with a small dome at the North and South sides of the docks. One of the round houses was used primarily to store weapons and the other was a guard station, but both functioned as interrogation and holding cells for suspects caught within the West India Dock’s walls. Surrounded by moats and connected to the rest of the compound via drawbridge, the round houses were designed by the Gwilts in the same austere neo-classical style as the warehouses at the West India Docks, but they take on an architecture of surveillance reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, designed in 1785. The high enclave walls surrounded a zone of surveillance. “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere.”

The links between surveillance, commerce, piracy, and changes in the urban fabric explored by this study are frequently subtle. It is often difficult to establish causal links between imports and changes in infrastructure. However, it seems more than coincidence that in 1799, when only 32,000 hogsheads of sugar could be accommodated at the existing riverside warehouses and quays and when the West India Company was importing an average of 100,000 to 120,000 hogsheads a year, an architectural competition was announced for a design to accommodate the extra hogsheads. Many authors agree that London’s port in 1800 was ready for change, largely because of the cultural changes and differences that flowed into the city through the area. The port was a membrane through which different worlds came in contact. The increase in contact at the beginning of the 19th century engendered changes in the physical fabric of the city.

Today, extra-state actors with dispositions akin to the East and West India Companies still influence the creation of space. Warehouse urbanism is still used in an effort to mediate, control, and obscure difference. Territories with spatial implications similar to those of the compounds created in the port of London are still constructed. Networks enable the execution and realization of grand global strategies, and even if their dispositions have changed, architectures of surveillance and control remain as places to critique power and understand difference.

3. Other British cities such as Bristol and Liverpool recognized their ports as a response to the increase in imports as well. Arthur Herman, Jr. Rule the Waves (New York: NY Harper Collins, 2004), explains that “Bristol was the first port outside London’s incorporation itself on the basis of the sugar trade.” 203.

4. The Weaver’s Rents highlight an example of this; in the late 1600s the East India Company imported silk already woven into cloth from Asian markets for sale on the English market. This import directly undermined local weaving businesses, and weavers coined in protest. In one case the East India House itself was attacked by the weavers. In 1730 an Act of Parliament was passed prohibiting the Company from importing silks that had been already woven into cloth, but this did not seem to have hampered the East India Company sales of silk. See William Louis, Nicholas Canny, F. Marshall, Allen Buchanan, et al., The Oxford History of the British Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 217-8.

5. See Joan Bingham’s account of Eliza Thrales activities in India in Eliza Nolle: the American ribbon of Queen Square (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1933).


7. Arthur Henry Baxendale’s London Imperial ports (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1903) describes the city’s imports during the height of empire. Another good discussion is found in Jonathan Schneer’s London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Even though Schneer is writing about London 100 years later than this study, he paints a picture of the port as a “vast empire”, where difference in the form of goods and people flowed into the imperial capital. N. E. Chung and Laura H. Wu, “William Pitt and the Development of the European Campaign, 1744-1767,” The English Historical Review, vol. 61, no. 240 (1946), 425-50. A tea sale at the East India House at Leadenhall Street is discussed as a background to the history of Pitt’s enforcement of the European Campaign.


12. Sir John Sewar was employed by the West India Company as the judge of this competition, but he feared the entries to be difficult to evaluate. In correspondence to the directors, Sewar wrote, “It appears to me that the foregoing designs contain the same accommodation for storage of goods, although they differ widely in the extent of the building, as well as in many other leading points.” Trave Vol. 85. Volume of designs relating to the competition designs for West India Dock Company, 1793 dock, marked sheets 230-235 currently in the collection at the State Museum Archiv, Lutsko’s dive Feilden.


14. Ibid. 2

15. The Survey of London describes the construction of the walls at the West India Docks.


21. Today, Five Trade Zones (FTZ) Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Export Processing Zones (EPZ) are three examples of areas that are similar in disposition to the warehouse urbanism built by the West India Company. These types of zones are typically geographic areas within a nation that are allowed more relaxed laws than the surrounding area in regard to investment and financial gain. Additionally these areas give rise to a special architecture that is not in form is similar to that of the compound built by the West India Company.

22. These types of zones are also associated with the “mudlarks” and “scuffle hunters”.


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Occupying a Third Space: The Haskell Free Library on the U.S.–Canada border

Anne-Marie Armstrong

The Haskell Free Library is unique among libraries in that it was purposely designed to straddle the 49th parallel [fig.3]. Built in 1904 to serve the residents of Derby Line, Vermont and Stanstead, Quebec, equally, this project and its historically contentious context can be seen as an intervention of political, geographi-
cal, and cultural boundaries that powerfully challenge the notion of a territorial edge [fig.2]. The library is rec-
nected by both nations as a “no-man’s land,” where inside the space, however, one is constantly alerted to its
unconventional orientation. The border is represented by a thick, black line painted onto the hardwood floor of the library, curving uninterrupted through the space, passing under the circulation desk and through book
stacks [fig.1]. The lobby in the United States whereas the stacks are primarily in Canada; the upper floor of the library serves as an opera house, which was originally conceived of as a way to generate income for the library. Here, one can watch a performance enacted on the stage in Canada while being seated in the U.S. Count-
ing a gap on otherwise unremarkable territorial line, the Haskell Free Library is a space of inclusion that offers
a marked contrast to the increasing opacity and impermeability of the United States’ borders.

The idea for an international public library was conceived by prominent townsperson Martha Haskell in the late 19th century, who sided the project on the borders as a way to cement the close ties that existed be-
tween community members on both sides of the line. Martha (Stewart) Haskell was born on April 28, 1831 in
Quebec (her father was considered to be “one of the wealthiest men in the county”) and later married Vermont
merchant Carlos Haskell in 1821 but was widowed fourteen years after the union. Through her binational famil-
ary history and her own dual citizenship, she became a powerful force in the making and maintaining of an
identity for the border community of Stanstead and Derby Line, in which she resided until her death in 1906.

The site Haskell chose for the library was a place of wartime mediation between binational residents nearly a century earlier. The 1901 laying of the cornerstone for the library was by definition an international event. The ceremony was heavily attended by Freemasons from both nations because the Golden Rule Lodge of Vermont and Lion Lily Stone Lodge of Quebec had met there to keep the peace between the US and Canada during the War of 1812. An 1895 Freemason account describes the tense atmosphere in the borderlands during this period of war:

The frontiers inhabitants regarded each other with jealousy and distrust, and nothing but some event at petty malice was wanting to kindle a sanguinary border warfare. The two lodges, by appointing peace committees, who held weekly and almost daily sittings, working in union... restored confidence among the settlers and upon two different occasions, mobs of armed men were dispersed through the intervention of the committees.

The ground of the library was thus inscribed with a compelling history of bilateralism. It was already
a space set aside from the tyranny of territorial control – a place where warring factions could meet and reach compromise. Haskell’s deci-
sion to locate the library on this site acknowledged this memory and extended the notion of a ‘third’ space of arbitration from that of an in-
ternational lodge exclusive to make Freemasons towards that of a public space which invites all members of the community to take part in the act of daily mediation and the building of a community across interna-
tional lines.

This shift from exclusivity to public accessibility embodied in the Haskell Free Library was contemporaneous with the development of the modern public library, an institution which derives from a Vic-
torian prototype and which aimed to mediate the public and private realms. Women, who until then had been generally excluded from ac-
tive participation in the making of public space, played a pivotal role in the development of the public library. The Carnegie library program, which built over 1700 new libraries in North America between 1883 and 1919, was a springboard from which newly appointed female li-
brarians deploying the concept of ‘municipal housekeeping’ were able to take a leading role in library design and practice and to promote the equality of its diverse patrons. Thus measured on several scales, the
Haskell Free Library is a powerful ‘third’ space bridging both gendered and international boundaries.

Today, the increased hardening of the U.S. border has effec-
tively stilled public gathering and exchange on a town where informal crossings were once everyday activities. Below a townsperson may ven-
ture over the line, he or she must report to a part of entry inspection station for the country he or she is entering. The installment of video surveillance and the strong presence of border patrol officers further reinforced this diode. Because of its status as an unclaimed territory, the Haskell Free Library remains the only mutually accessible meeting space for this border community. The press recently reported that no guards are stationed on the “quiet, shady streets” around the library, and Canadians who cross into Vermont to enter the library on the U.S. side do not need to show their passports at a border station, as they do when crossing for any other purpose. The library continues to function despite the militarized control of the space surrounding it by its very ability to house and express the collective memory of this transnational community. In a milieu of extreme territorial enforcement, the Haskell Free Library presents itself as a gap in the enforced realities of territo-
rial life, a functional emblem of the binational community.
Signifyin’: African-American language to landscape

Scott Ruff

The language of blackness encodes and names its sense of independence through a rhetorical process that we might think of as the Signifyin’/black difference. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Within African-American culture, signifyn’ refers to a particular rhetorical act that informs many of the culture’s most well-known productions, from music and literature to religion and politics. Its potential, however, extends beyond the verbal; it is the intention of this text to present signifyn’ as a critical mode that informs visual and spatial work, particularly that of African-diagnostic aesthetic traditions. An analysis of the work of two African-American figures—Jean-Michel Basquiat and Walter Hood—illustrates this clearly, each uses different mediums, but both operate within a similar cultural tradition of conceptualization and space making.

If “signifyin’,” in Standard English, refers to the meaning that a term conveys, then “signifyin’” refers to the critical play of terms, the transposition of meaning.3 This technique known as “break composition,” for example, has signifyn’ characteristics: it is the disruption of pattern and repetition.5 To create a break in composition it breaks from explicit ordering systems like lines, boundaries, and grids using operations such as slitting, skipping, jumping, fragmenting, and reversing elements.6 This way of approaching composition is present in the work of noted African-American painter Jean Michel Basquiat (1960–88), the son of Puerto Rican and Haitian parents who became well known in the New York art scene beginning in the 1980s as part of the so-called Neo-expressionist movement. Basquiat took a strong interest in exploring his black identity, fusing his works with references to African spiritualism and the complicated richness of diaspora culture.7 These allusions came about by way of collage techniques, photocopying, and writing with point. Most of his work seems to draw heavily upon both rhetorical and visual signifyn’ techniques as well.

In “Depuces de pon’yr” (1980), Fig. 1, a skeletal mausoleum with a top hat and wand is rendered, flatly in black paint; he is Blon Somercy, a Haitian Voodoo loa.8 Within the field of cool greens and yellow, Basquiat interweaves his “Rural Landscape,” three times. The ends of the canvas are orange and assault the canvas by becoming cross-outs and structural partitions, collectively forming a field composed of figural fragments.9 Colored newspaper: point adds depth to the painting; it is used to articulate a line broken god system. White paint, enveloping and weaving through the composition; operates in two capacities; visually, it falls to the background of the painting but the ghost images of color and newspaper push it to the foreground. Variations of the color blue dance around, radiating out of the color black. Lines of printed dot paint drops strategically support an underlying compositional structural system. The painting communicates its African-diapositive roots through allegory and structure and its contemporary art roots through collage and expressive painting techniques. Allegorically the color black creates a large chasm in the picture, a void to be entered; white becomes atrophying and light like, the greens represent the explicit rural landscape, and the newspaper stands for in the foil play of life. Color is administered in the manner of a patchwork quilt; although not strictly defining the edges of cells, each color is ordered by a fractal-like system of inserted vector/ angular cells. The painting is a study in storytelling, structure, mark-making, and figure/field interplay. It is quite clear that for Basquiat, signifyn’ – as we define it today – figures as an important element in his artistic production.

In architecture, the principles of disruption, play, and ambiguity are harder to discover. Two reasons: there are not too large for such actions to be read within their expanded spatial context, and architecture is an art form that is linear, making it more difficult culturally about “meaning.” Furthermore, in a white-dominated profession, it is not easy to find ready acceptable of black-oriented positions. This makes the work of Walter Hood (the principal of Hood Design in Oakland, California and a Professor and former Chair of Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley) all the more remarkable. His work is a response to a community call: his approach to design and the field. He engages the real people of a community, past, present, and future, not just the benefactors of a given project.10 The work of his ways of design may be in step with some mainstream landscape design, his methods and strategies can be seen as specifically connected to African-American land use practices.

There are at least two possible origins of African-American land use that inform Hood’s work: the enslaved African’s counter-cultural use of the southern plantations and African-American yards. Slave quarters were frequently located a considerable distance from the “big house” on the southern plantation. From the margins of the property, enslaved Africans were able to create their own landscapes. According to Rhys Isaac, paths and trails leading into the countryside were common elements of the slave landscape in Virginia.11 Many of these secret pathways led to clandestine clearings in the woods, occasionally used by rituals, festivities, and meetings. Informal paths also marked particular elements in the landscape, leading to marshes and rivers and providing for expedient travel and communication between plantations. Footpaths in this sense were also common. The ensemble of sites, pathways, and social mark enslave a territory with cultural and social meaning; essentially, the enslaved African-American’s landscape is an art form that is less personal; making it more difficult culturally in the world. It can be said that the elements signifyn’ in space. They operated as counter agents to the rigidly defined plantation plan, making an edge in the perimeter of defined landscapes, across fields of crops, and meandering in woods thick with vegetation. Essentially, the enslaved African-American critically read the use of the landscape, literally and figuratively carving out cultural space to dwell within freely. From the perspective of European Americans and Europeans, slaves (when left to build their own quarters) often built in “random” or “chaotic” patterns. In one account, the cabins built by slaves were “so small, in some secluded place, down in the hollow, or amid the woods, with only a foot path to their abode.” Another account in North Carolina describes a village consisting of wavy frame buildings in a row, but each was set at an odd, angular angle to the next.” These acts of appropriation, creating patterns, and the social acts here mentioned operate counter to the oppositional culture of the South, but adapt culturally to the hostile environment and the rules of the land, using it to contain the process of culture building.

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In architecture, the principles of disruption, play, and ambiguity are harder to discover. Two reasons: there are not too large for such actions to be read within their expanded spatial context, and architecture is an art form that is linear, making it more difficult culturally about “meaning.” Furthermore, in a white-dominated profession, it is not easy to find ready acceptable of black-oriented positions. This makes the work of Walter Hood (the principal of Hood Design in Oakland, California and a Professor and former Chair of Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley) all the more remarkable. His work is a response to a community call: his approach to design and the field. He engages the real people of a community, past, present, and future, not just the benefactors of a given project. The work of his ways of design may be in step with some mainstream landscape design, his methods and strategies can be seen as specifically connected to African-American land use practices.

There are at least two possible origins of African-American land use that inform Hood’s work: the enslaved African’s counter-cultural use of the southern plantations and African-American yards. Slave quarters were frequently located a considerable distance from the “big house” on the southern plantation. From the margins of the property, enslaved Africans were able to create their own landscapes. According to Rhys Isaac, paths and trails leading into the countryside were common elements of the slave landscape in Virginia. Many of these secret pathways led to clandestine clearings in the woods, occasionally used by rituals, festivities, and meetings. Informal paths also marked particular elements in the landscape, leading to marshes and rivers and providing for expedient travel and communication between plantations. Footpaths in this sense were also common. The ensemble of sites, pathways, and social markers constitute an alternative territorial system based in a desire to avoid visual light lines and the surveillance of masters. These loose and meandering elements are signifyn’ in space. They operated as counter agents to the rigidly defined plantation plan, making an edge in the perimeter of defined landscapes, across fields of crops, and meandering in woods thick with vegetation. Essentially, the enslaved African-American critically read the use of the landscape, literally and figuratively carving out cultural space to dwell within freely. From the perspective of European Americans and Europeans, slaves (when left to build their own quarters) often built in “random” or “chaotic” patterns. In one account, the cabins built by slaves were “so small, in some secluded place, down in the hollow, or amid the woods, with only a foot path to their abode.” Another account in North Carolina describes a village consisting of wavy frame buildings in a row, but each was set at an odd, angular angle to the next. These acts of appropriation, creating patterns, and the social acts here mentioned operate counter to the oppositional culture of the South, but adapt culturally to the hostile environment and the rules of the land, using it to contain the process of culture building.
The work of Walter Hood clearly shows signs of operating within the signifyin’ tradition. African-American plantation survivals and “yard work” are major ingredients in his formal landscape canon. Hood uses terms such as “improvisation” and “hybridism” to describe his work. His hybrids are combinations of landscape types, themes, and tropes: orchards, plazas, parks, etc. His improvisations consist of four parts: 1) spontaneous change and the allowance of flexible adaptability, 2) the self-expression of the designer, 3) reinvention of the familiar sense of historical place, and 4) a transmutation of the canon of landscape. The improvisational method is a critical reading of “place” and time mixed with the historical landscape canon to insinuate specific social and spatial contexts. As Hood writes, “Extending and enriching the tradition of environmental design...improvisation...interlaced with African sonorous sensibilities” has been a spatial medium – landscape – in a similar mode as hip-hop, blues, and jazz musicians, teach of whose use of mixing, sampling, and improvisation (interlaced with African sonorous sensibilities) has been well documented. In one of his current works, the Foster Homestead and Cemetery, Hood weaves a “louder geometry” of curved, looped pathways into the University of Virginia’s existing orthogonal system.

The new paths meander through forest-like groupings of trees around clearings – the house, yard, garden, and burial site – in the woods. By following the new paths, the “object spaces” in the design are approached obliquely. Through the sidestep and the ground, the proj- ect creates the effect of a palimpsest, allowing the excavated markings of the past to show through the contemporary surface. In this design Hood has created a double-voiced landscape that operates within the American tradition and yet is firmly grounded in the knowledge of African-American spatial practices.

The Virginia Key Beach Museum in Miami. Flordia is another landscape design by Hood that exhibits the characteristics of signifyin’.[6] The primary formal move of this project is to define the boundary of the site with a sweeping wall of palm trees, moving north to west. To the south, a large dune garden is interfaced with Hood’s “hybridized program elements. To the east is the ocean. The design is highly conscious of the articulation of thresholds into the site. The museum, along with other objects, is treated as a ruin – a sculptural, monumental, and spatial artifact – in the landscape. In the words of Hood, “Built objects are communalized with the natural landscape providing a specific identity to the rich cultural heritage.”[7] The overall strategy of the design – from the bounded compound to the use of multiple sculptural objects within the site to the use of parking lot as a front yard and plaza for the main sculptural ruin on the site – allude to traditional African-American yard designs.[8]

From chroto to quilting to collage and ultimately to land- scape, signifyin’ is a principle and a practice that traverses multiple mediums. It is a mode of conceptualization born out of African cultural thought, which is not to state unequivocally that signifyin’ is only done by people of African descent. Rather, signifyin’ should be seen as a char- acterization of a special cultural and spiritual force that can inform the work of artists and critics who insightfully engage African diaspora creative productions – from language to literature to the spatial arts.
Wal-(medley mixed-up mélange montage mash-up shopping)mart

Alexander Maymind and Cody Davis

The contemporary architect is caught between the platitudes of utopian ideality and the realities of developer logic. This speculative, hyper-mixed-use project hedges those competing discourses by combining the spectacle of commerce, the banal tabulations of parking, and a sentimental nostalgia for urban street life. This programmatic and infrastructural patchwork—a vertically-oriented Wal-mart superstore, a series of big-box platforms, cantilevered parking event-surfaces, and a layer of now ubiquitous “luxury lofts”—is a monstrous hybrid enveloped by the licorice between disparate audiences and markets. Parking garages, shopping malls, and landscape urbanism become ingredients in a spontaneous assemblage that forms something appropriate to its site and program but that feels altogether foreign.

The project is sited along the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn at the intersection of vast big-box shopping, empty horizontal parking lots, and a 95-foot high elevated train platform. To choreograph the movement between these existing conditions and the newly inserted programs, this project uses stacking as its operative technique. The precarious balance between its wide-ranging uses is based on the logic of samples, mash-ups, re-mixes, and collages without falling into referential aesthetics, remaining equal parts composition and strategy.

The divergent programs of the complex are positioned relative to each other to create highly complex environments laterally, not to a coordinated effect but seeking instead a synergy that results from an unpredictable mix of the banal, the strange, and the affective. The architecture echoes the differentiation fetish of consumer commerce with an array of polychromatic patterns and abrupt juxtapositions, creating a space of maximum heterogeneity. These textures of program, parking, and event create a differentiated realm that redoubles and exorcises the public space of shopping. In creating an architectural ambition for Wal-mart that extends beyond efficiency, this project re-conceptualizes the big-box as a parasite—one that snakes around its neighbors, interrupting and interfering with its context but engaging new urban audiences in doing so.

The vertical heterogeneity of the complex is made cohesive through a continuous parking infrastructure which parasitically strings together various parts as an unrelated datum of constant movement. Likewise, a series of elevator shafts act as “skewers” that bind the juxtaposed programs into a legible order. Thus the unified yet jarring set of programmatic “immersions” are tied together as separate constellations; each horizontal separate offers an array of competing mirages in the distance. At every level, an archipelago of commercial shopping experiences exists in the ether of infrastructure.

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1. assortment, blend, brouhaha, charivari, collection, combo, conglomerate, diversity, fantasy, faceto-face, hodgepodge, heterogeneity, hodgepodge, jumble, mélange, micoarray, mix, montage, olla, olla podrida, pascolo, paschino, patchwork, potpourri, salmagundi, variety.
Fashion Week at 85 feet in the air

Wal-Mart Parking lot experience

Vertical Difference

- Housing
- Prada
- Recreation
- Grocery
- Walmart
- Bazaar
- Parking
Section through complex
A Multi-dimensional Valley: A Study of Heterology in Contemporary China
Fei Wang

From the perspective of contemporary China, it appears that almost everything one can imagine outside the culture is translatable, transmalleable, and copyable. But it is not so simple: the case of Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park [hereinafter known as ‘China’s Silicon Valley’] in Shanghai. Pudong reveals a complex and multi-dimensional layering of international influence and innately Chinese traditions and politics. Begun several years ago on a site formerly occupied by farms, the naming of the streets was immediately problematic. It was clearly unlikely that the developers would use a traditional system of names; in Pudong, one finds street names like Lannidu Lu (Road Muddy Ferry), Shenggan Long (Killfly Slaughter Pk.), and Luoyi Tang (Garbage Pond), all reflecting the rough state of the area’s agricultural past.1 The new street names had instead to represent the new China and to signal the ambition behind the creation of China’s biggest free trade district, the Waigaoqiao Free Trade Zone. Should the streets be named after world famous harbors and tax-free districts like Lannidu Lu (Road Muddy Ferry), reflecting the rough state of the area’s agricultural past?2 The new street names had instead to represent the new China and to signal the ambition behind the creation of China’s biggest free trade district, the Waigaoqiao Free Trade Zone. Should the streets be named after world famous harbors and tax-free districts like Rotterdam, Yokohama, or Alexandria? Or should they rather be named after scientists, Chinese and foreign alike, such as Newton, Einstein, Zhang Heng3 and Zu Chongzhi?4 Such appropriation of both Western and Chinese history is one way in which China’s dream of globalization and modernization has approached fruition.

The deployment of scientific names on the streets of Zhangjiang was far from arbitrary. Chinese name are on east-west streets, whereas foreign (western) names are on north-south streets. There are ten Chinese scientists represented, ranging from the 2nd Century BC to 20th Century AD: along with ten western counterparts ranging from the 15th to 20th Century AD (including Lake Nobel). The Chinese chronological range is almost four times longer than that of the foreign ones, and there are only two Chinese scientists named from the time period covered by the foreign ones. Clearly the intention is to show the longevity of Chinese science, but in so doing, it also reveals the inadequacies of Chinese science in recent centuries. The Chinese scientists also dominate the naming system in terms of street width and total length: China compensates three times the length of the west.

There is still another layer to this naming system. Each sign for a street name in Chinese has an ‘English’ counterpart on the same board—if we can call it English, since the alphabetization of the names is far from standardized. Sometimes the alphabet letters in the green signs on the street are identical to those in the blue signs for drivers hanging above the street crossings, sometimes they differ. These three standards emerge.[fig.1]

1. Haruyo Pinpin (Chinese pronunciation) coherence, e.g. Nuduan Rd (for Newton Rd) and Haili Rd (for Valley Rd) in both green and blue. 2. Haruyo Pinpin above the crossing and English on the street, e.g. Jiaolian (for Galileo) Rd in blue and Galileo in green. 3. Haruyo Pinpin on the street and English above the crossing. e.g. Daerwen (for Darwin) Rd in green and Darwin in blue.

The lack of a fourth standard, in which the pair of signs are coherently English demonstrates that legibility for foreigners is relatively unimportant. It is obvious and understandable that Chinese is dominant in such circumspection, and that English is a type of accessory, yet, the naming system of signs on the street doesn’t match that of above the crossing, not that of the consistent Chinese pronunciation showed on Zhangjiang’s official English website: ‘So which one is real, or which one is more standard?’

This heterogeneity of nomenclature has nothings to do with English or Chinese pronunciation (or even the evolution of real people and events) but rather with the fact that Chinese-English relations, in matters of both language and culture, are quite complicated in a sense, this language confusion brings out—and perhaps even provokes—deep-seated cultural conflicts. If I am a foreigner driving a car in this science park and don’t know any Chinese characters, how can I read the street? By which standard? What if I am walking on the street, trying to find an address? Commonly, identifiable globalization is important, why don’t Zhangjiang simply use Chinese characters along with Pinpin (Chinese pronunciation) rather than mixing up Pinpin and Eng- lish? The words of Baudrillard come to mind: “The whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum— not univocal, but simulative, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, on an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.”

The Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park is of course, of only one extreme version of a larger trend in Chinese design. Take, for example, the façade of the Fanchengda Food Store [fig.4], located on Nanjing Road, a famous commercial street in Shanghai. During the store’s renovation in 2004, the scaffolding was covered by a huge printed image showing a rendered perspective of the Galileo Galilei (while the existing store remained open). The entrance in the printed rendering and the physical entrance overlapped, although because the building was situated in a curved corner, the two-point perspective (rather than 2 D façade im- age) appeared distorted. The signage was oddly double: one marquee was printed on the rendering while the other punctured the rendering, jutting halfway into view. The use of a perspective image on a flat street front indicates an only partial understanding and awareness of western trompe l’œil painting in urban contexts [fig.5]. The distance between physical reality and imagination approaches zero—a distinctly Chinese dilemma and invention. There is no homology between image-maker and image-user at all: the user has the right to adjust its value. In Chi- nese paintings from the 19th and 18th centuries, linear perspective was used for the building and furniture, which were treated as formal ob- jects and could be constructed with geometrical precision, while the hu- man figures and landscape were treated as informal objects that could only be painted with traditional Chinese techniques—shadows, trompe l’œil, shade consisting on the same object. Today, precision and rationality still cannot eliminate this characteristic overlapping of realities.

The same is true at Zhangjiang, at several crossings, large mar- keting posters obscure the construction behind [fig.2]: in one, a young lady in a white dress leans against a golden picture frame that shows high rise housing and endless grassland in the distance. But behind the posters are standard, mid-rise residential buildings built in 1980’s and ’90s. What is the difference if within the dream world of Zhangjiang there is yet another dream to dwell in it?

Maps of Zhangjiang’s “Silicon and Pharmaceutical Valley” [fig.6] make this dream still further: showing the numerous logos of high- tech institutions, this map attempts to imitate the maps of the original Silicon Valley that show the logos and messages of leading companies. The website of the company that designs this map states, revealingly, that “Silicon Valley can’t be so much a place as it is an idea. More than any specific landmark or point of geography, Silicon Valley is identified primarily by a spirit—the spirit of limitless possibilities thatock the box.” Although it is called “not just a place”, the companies in California’s Silicon Valley can nevertheless be roughly located on the conceptually distorted mental map that includes cars, but not buildings, and
seagulls, as though drawn for a vacation resort; in recent years, the cartographic technique of such maps technique increasingly echoes this style in favor of the more technological aesthetics of Google Earth. At Zhangjiang, however, the latent geography that one would have found in the Silicon Valley maps is removed and icons are placed at random, floating above the proportional map. One is left with only “an idea.” Capitalism is here removed from context. It is thus not too difficult to understand why there are so many overlapping systems for naming streets; it is all idea, if you will, a heterology rather than a homology.

Let us return to the question of naming. Throughout the technologized world, the phrase “Silicon Valley” conjures up a pop-culture understand of microchips and mouse, which lends equally on the word “Silicon” (no “Silicon Wannabe” [Seattle], Silicon Alley [New York], Silicon Hills [Austin, Texas], Silicon Island [Taiwan], Silicon Plateau [Bangalore]), Silicon Czarode [Malaysia], Silicon Weib [Seoul]). Silicon Fen (Cambridge, England), and so on! On the other hand, when this high tech wonderland lands in China, it shifts literally back to “Valley” (Chinese: Gu), e.g. Guoyou Gu (Light Valley, Wuhai, Hubei Province) and Rie Ma Gu (Namenter Valley, Shanghai, Fujian, Shenyang, etc). Of course, none of these places are “valleys” at all; Zhangjiang was, after all, flat farmland, but for the sake of Hi-tech (IC, software, and biomedicine industry), it was semantically transformed.

Zhangjiang is thus a multi-dimensional space that could not happen in any other culture, an abstract symbol and a territorial container full of heterologous dreams and crossovers of technology, imagination, cultural tradition, sexuality, and perhaps above all, language; a hypervalual simulacrum that attempts to create a new assumed “reality.” In a propaganda DVD that exists the potential of this new Hi-Tech park, a young engineer stands in a metro train, eyes shining, and says: “Our dreams are in Zhangjiang!” And indeed, Zhangjiang is itself a dream (or many dreams), a dream-valley, one of many in contemporary China.

Endnotes
1. This research is part of an urban study undertaken along with the exhibition City in Progress / Live From Zhangjiang at Shanghai Art Gallery (Bund 3), Zhangjiang Art Museum, and Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park. The exhibition—from September to December 2006—includes indoor and outdoor exhibitions as well as three books and was done in collaboration with artists and architects from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau. This essay is previously published in Domus (Chinese Version) 01/2007, titled “Zhangjiang, Shanghai,” in Chinese.
2. Zhao Qizheng, Pu Dong Xin Qu Di Ming Zhi [Record of Place Names in Pudong New District] (Shanghai, 1999).
3. Zhang Heng, (78-139) was an astronomer, mathematician, inventor, artist, poet, and literary scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty in ancient China.
4. Zu, Chongzhi, (429-500) was a Chinese mathematician and astronomer of the Southern Dynasties.
6. Joel Backford. Simulations (Semiotext(e), 1990), 11.
8. 0http://www.siliconchina.com/?realestate/47
9. The same goes for many governmental and courthouse buildings in China which are called “White House-like” —despite the fact that they are usually “Capital-like” in that neo-classical style. In the media, the phrase “White House” has much more exposure than “the Capital”; thus, the White House is often inaccurately invoked by a public unaware of the exact meaning it carries. Image credits: Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5 courtesy of the author. Fig. 3 courtesy of Fosotalve Inc.
One image of ‘divine’ or first order. undifferentiated – ‘twin’ – the so-called ‘primal androgynous’ – has been depicted as a conjoined or bisexual entity. The Greek Hermaphroditus (Hermes + Aphrodite) and Hindu deity, Andharanaraya (Shiva + Kali Ma), were said to have had bodies ‘female on the left side, male on the right side’, or confron- tier or appositeness (coincidence/opposition)7. In Plato’s Symposium, Aristophanes gives a detailed etymology on the mythology of the original autonomous unity of the three sexes of humanity: the man, the woman and the hermaphroditus, each having ‘four hands, four legs, and two faces, identical in every way’ before Zeus cut them in two. ‘Each of us is a mere fragment of a man (like half a telly stick)’. Plato wrote: ‘we’ve been split in two, like filleted place. We’re all looking for our other half’.7 This ‘telly stick’ – a Greek mnemonic device or a receipt of transaction, illegible when split – serves an interesting analogy for Plato’s description of human experience as an existential search for one’s twin autonomy. Re-constituting the memory of this two-whose was one, the question of non-autonomous identity leaves something lacking, to be completed by an unknown and absent other.

While mythology has represented human twins as differenti- ated or inverse analogues of one another, often embodying and anthropomorphizing polarities that in the greatest mythos is that such twin polarities are equal in their opposition? Biology, however, is rarely the engineer of equality. Beyond the typical classification of identical and fraternal twinning4, there are several obscure, sometimes indistin- guishable variations of the two that blur the tacit, biological construc- tion of the ‘shared’ and ‘separate’.7 Though perhaps 25% of monzy-gotic twins are so called ‘mirror twins’, exhibiting reversed features including cowlicks, birthmarks, and order in the appearance of baby teeth, the vast majority of twins experience asymmetry even in utero. Twin to twin transposition syndrome is a very common occurrence, lead- ing to the unbalanced distribution of nutrients from a singular, shared placenta and quite often one underdeveloped or malnourished twin at birth. Gross asymmetry can lead to the loss of one twin, as is the case in the phenomenon of ‘vanishing twins’, an occurrence of astonishing statistics in which the demise of one twin in early term is followed by the death and absorption of the other.7 The rarest conditions of all involve anomalies in zygotic division or fusion; in the case of chimerae, one discreet body contains two sets of distinct genetic material, while conjoined or para- sitic twins are a literal, mutual incorporation from an incomplete split or a partial re-fusion of zygotes. Each of these types of twin present, in a manner of speaking, a chroma asymmetry: ‘left hand’ and ‘right hand’ with variable degrees of categorical difference and deficiency.

From biological to psychological asymmetry, the most pro- found risk is the trauma of loss in the case of death, suicide, or sepa- ration. Vanishing twin syndrome has been said to leave its biological mark, a physical deformation, or, more controversially, a sense of grief and mourning at the sacrificial, an empty tomb for an absent other. An aversion to gross imbalance may even trigger a transfer of burden from one twin to the other, as a physical, psychological, or psycho somatic ‘offering’. Freud’s postulation that ‘the reminiscence [is a] somatic symptom rather than merely a psychological memory’ is provocative here: is there a human capacity for a psycho somatic or mnemonic recognition – a re-membering – of this other half of the proverbial telly stick?7 May the memory of one twin be embedded or inscribed within the other?

Doubling/ Shared Logics

Twin logic is characterized primarily by this potential of a radical positioning of self as other. That which is doubled exhibits an implicit condition of sharing; thus, the doubled singularity (autonomy) and the implicit, reciprocal vacating (non-autonomy) of the twin pair al- lows us to go beyond the dialectic of difference and sameness to address what Liptard has called the ‘dilemma’, the concurrence and mutual embedding of the ‘other’. From the obscure origin of a single identity, the twin must seek to define [one] self: what are the repercussions of always answering to two names, as though one is both subject and other, or conversely, to be as though one is ‘one half’ of a singular identity? Twin logic is always twinned, never linked to the singular strategisms of one that developed from the irruptions of multiplicity, colliding and intertwining rule-sets. Twins are always already in the condition of departure. Knowing completing each others’ (thus their own) sentences, embalming each others’ (thus their own) ideas, and interrogating them- selves with metacriticism in a clause of mutual identity. Their ego (or centricism) is marked by a conditional cycle of receptivity and deferral, and a continual paradigm of coming from oneself to oneself. Twin (doubling thus shared) logic constitute the dissolution of a singularly constructed identity. It establishes an alterity of identity through dynamic asymmetry and reciprocity, and poses questions of a radical ethics in the limits of self identity. The following Twin logics are suggestive spatial and perceptual models through which a twin praxis – a capacity for ‘being other’ – may be embodied.

The twins stand together before the mirror. They experience their difference and sameness as a per- ception of multiple—an experience of increasing multiplicity. The specular complexity of such mutual voyeur- isms is multiplied by such confusions of fantasy and reality, a performative space of comparison where sameness or difference can be exaggerated dramatically. Twins of the same sex can become the opposite sexes or vice versa, through mirroring, inversion and a relative positioning of their bodies and identi- ties with respect to the other. The act of differentiation is thus performed as a function of time, as twins emulate each other in the present, the past, and the future. The self and the other are extended and deterritorialized between the material plane, the specular plane, and the projective plane.

This specular reflexivity deconstructs the concept of ego. It creates a multiply-layered palimpsest of projection and self-allocation, as the perception of one is supersimosed upon the other. The distinctions between subject/object and singular/multiple are softened in the space of the imaginary. What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? What if we were to suddenly come to experience our mature lives as a foregone, as if for the first time? 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The mirror space may thus constitute a mise en ohmy, placing identity into identity, into a virtual...
which the mirror is always already shattered. And yet, twins remember— and still remain— the twin. The twin then initiates a lucid, collective (reflexive) tele-zone in the spatially exploded mirror. It is an aporetic space—a temporal and spatial impasse—constituting both a gulf and a hole in the subject’s surface. That a memory of a psychosomatic connection is projected, pre-inscribed into all existing subject/object relationships.

Offering an opportunity to establish an experimental and control group within a single set, the twin pair has historically provoked a problem of differentiation between subject and subject with respect to developmental biologists, geneticists, and sociologists. Further, the typological distinctions and fraternal can be themselves be assigned 'control' and 'experimental' status space—a temporal and spatial impasse—constituting both a gorge and pre-determination of those things which may (or may not) be made to "time out of joint"15—is marked by the dissolution of discrete spatial-temporal alterity—a displaced perception locus with respect to time ("time out of joint")15—is marked by the dissolution of discrete space and time ("out of phase").13

Twin logic invokes a coincidence and opposition of identity, a non-diagonal entwinedness of the ‘other’. Like the mnemonic ‘stally stuck’—the corporeal and inescapable I is constituted within a temporal-spatial relationship, with self and other inseparable. This conclusion of Twin logic— the mutual dependency of presence for closure—indicates that the other must bear witness for a thing to have occurred.14 Yet the non-automated identities—both one-half of two and two with-in—isa parenthesis of presence and absence, spatial and temporal immediate: An impetus to turn to the other events to an internal turn: a "turn in—turn homeward" (einkehrt). Whether biological or perceptual, dual or plural, the impersonalized (other’s) self (eliminated in an other’s time), produces a profound paradox of difference and sameness, presence and absence: within which can be found a vague recognition of self/other in the future.

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Doubt

The author is grateful for the patience and assistance of editors James Graham and (uncredited) co-author Sara Dunn.


If the aforementioned logics regard training with respect to biological nature, the notion of the doppler propoges a still more radical training with respect to the perceptual axis of space and time. This experience of a ‘phantom twin’, ‘ghostly double’ or ‘absent other’, may demonstrate twin logics through a spatial-temporal confusion, illusion, or deception of physical presence and identity. The dopplerlogicy (literally ‘moving doubled identity’) is thus an uncanny sensation of self-image or a perceived displacement of one’s body with respect to space or time. The perceptual manifestations vary from an imputed ‘out of body experience’ (e.g. glimpsing oneself in peripheral vision with no mirror, no shadow, or no reflection) to the conviction that one’s ‘eats double’ having lived out a parallel life to one’s own. Such a radical spatial-temporal alterity— a displaced perception (focus with respect to time) ("time out of joint")15—is marked by the dissolution of discrete space and time ("out of phase").13

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This recently completed thesis project is a design for a monastery and research institute sited in the Yangbajing Valley of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, 80 km northwest of Lhasa. The altitude - 4,000 meters above sea level - and the wide open space of the site are ideal for the research of gamma and cosmic rays, which require the deployment of large arrays of devices that detect the passage of these tiny particles through the earth’s atmosphere. The coupling of metaphysical and cosmic studies in the same institute is intended to enable dialogue across disciplines. Likewise, the construction of such an institute would require an international initiative, bringing a global and public architecture to the region and providing China with an opportunity to use this unique landscape for ends other than tourism or the extraction of resources.

While the landscape is marked and delineated from its surroundings by the placement of the research arrays, the architecture takes the form of monumental buildings that mediate the open space through brute form and scale. The architecture draws on vernacular precedents, namely, Tibet’s forts and monasteries, for organizational and material inspiration. Tibet’s Potala Palace (ca. 1645), its largest fort building and former home to its religious and political leader - the Dalai Lama - is now a tourist attraction, monitored and maintained by the Chinese government. Programmatically it is as varied as any medieval castle, with rooms of state, temples, living quarters, and a prison on the lower levels. Disparate volumes are accessed by labyrinthine paths that work their way through the structure, directing one’s movement and ordering the experience of the building. This immense structure, seated on a hill in the Lhasa valley, rises a total of 1,000 feet above the valley floor and is over 1,000 feet wide; the perception of its mass is perhaps as visceral as the passage through it.

Though drawing on vernacular precedent, this thesis hopes to move away from the easy commodification of folk culture, a trend which is prevalent in Tibet today and an easy bedfellow with political repression. The proposed building and research infrastructure instead use built precedents and a reaction to Tibetan landscape to develop a mechanics of form suited to the particular site. The proposed building, though massive, unfolds and reveals vast emptiness within, organized by medieval path and modern cores with varying scales of publicness in its folded interiors. A network of roads links the research infrastructure with the architecture and with two major lines of transport which pass through the valley on the way to Lhasa: the Qinghai-Tibet Highway and the Qingzang Railway. Unlike much of the peripheral program (military bases, nuclear testing grounds, secret prisons, mining, etc) which dots the Tibetan plateau, beyond the route of the tourist or even the public, the proposal makes this highly specialized program both accessible and visible. The architecture and landscape contrast the seeming invisibility of much of Tibet, serving as an act of delineation, or of difference that gives definitism to its surroundings.

Programmed Emptiness: Research Infrastructure on the Tibetan Plateau
Sarah Dunbar
Campus Housing

Platform Spa

Cast Concrete

Deployable Field

Structural Glass

Steel Beams

Operable Windows

Concrete Block Repeatable Rows

Concrete Block Components

"Hollow Wall" Assembly

Stones and Bones

Concrete Panels

Steel System

Concrete Black Repetutable Rows

Concrete Black Components

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"Hollow Wall" Assembly

Stones and Bones
Recasting the Castor: From The Book of Beasts to Albertus Magnus’s On Animals

Melissa Lo

In The Discataloged Images, C. S. Lewis tells his readers that me- dieval zoology was split into two opposing camps: one was what he calls the allegorical, “childish” description of animals in bestiaries based on the text, and the other was the “practical,” everyday observation of animals in the wild by hunters, trappers, and fishermen whose meals and medicines depended on first-hand animal knowledge. Textual descrip- tions of animals professed moral lessons; the animals of day-to-day experi- ence and observation were food, sustenance, and sometimes medicine. Very rarely, Lewis emphasizes, did authors attempt to make the everyday animal the subject of a text.

The case of the medieval beaver, however, offers an alternate version of this. The illustrated castor of the multi-authored, twelfth- century Book of Beasts fits into the list of Lewis’s categories well enough: it was certain to be allegorical and its propheticic-sounding title was based solely on ancient authority. But about two hundred years later, in his On Ani- mals (De Animalibus), Albertus Magnus would weave careful observation of this text to the universal—i.e., the philosophical. So why this change in authority? Added to Albertus’ work was a new conception of what worth recording. The author of The Book of Beasts (De Animalibus) followed a conven- tion of example bestiaries that privileged authoritative and, more importantly, the world of God. Thus, each animal description— including the description of the beaver—operates in two registers, as a text that relies on classical authority, and as one that uses this authority in order to abstract and illuminate a larger Christian principle. In the short entry on the beaver, the first paragraph serves as a textual description, relying on the Physiologus in order to explain the use of the beaver as well as the beaver’s behavior during the hunt:

This is an animal called CASTOR: The beaver, none more gentle, and his testicles make a capital medicine. For this reason, so Physiologus says, when he notices that he is being pursued by the hunter, he removers his own testicle with a bite, and carries them before the sportman, and thus escapes by flight. What is more, if he should again happen to be chased by a second hunter, he lifts himself up and shows his members to him. And the latter, when he percusses the testicles to be missing, leaves the beaver alive.

The Physiologus’ authority is not questioned: indeed, the text, by virtue of citing the Physiologus, further reinforces ancient expertise. Far from being biased for novelty, these texts were tools for promoting and re-promulgating the known wisdom of a reliable authority. But this authority and the information it provided also served a higher authority: God. For example, the Physiologus’ description of the beaver quickly feeds into a larger, allegorical portrait of the animal: “Hence every man who inclines toward the commandment of God and who wants to live justly, must cut off from himself all vices, all mo- tions of lewdness, and must cast them from him in the Devil’s law.”

The use of the beaver is not just that it is “testicles make a capital medicine,” but that the beaver’s behavior—and its presence on the earth—hews to a larger, more important lesson of chastity and virtuelessness. This higher understanding, almost a decoding of nature’s creatures in order to better identify the attributes of the righteous man, serves as a kind of spiritual knowledge that facilitates the ability to see the world—and God’s crea- tures—with a religiously conscientious lens.

The final sentence, explaining the name of the beaver, is yet an- other short reminder of this lesson, synthesizing both the authoritative description and moral lesson: “The castor is called a beaver (Castor) because of the castration.” In this etymological anecdote, the ambiguity of the phrase “the castration” amalgamates the object the beaver is meant to serve. Is the reader meant to only think of the beaver’s castra- tion when the animal is being hunted? Or, perhaps, to think of the genuinely religious significance for man of his similar cutting off of sin? The ques- tions loom off of one another, creating a loaded feedback loop: this cir- cular double entendre suggests that the reader is meant to think of both.

Indeed, the feedback loop of these two kinds of knowledge also activates the entry’s accompanying illustration (fig. 1). The illustra- tion is more than a simple depiction of the beaver’s physical traits; it is a redeemed Explanation of the interaction and relationship of man to nature in the realm of the natural, as a kind of allegorical text. From the front of the page, the picture features a group of beaver hunters and a trap, and, at the center, a young gentleman who has pierced the representation cas- tor. In the deep shade of the pole, showcasing the beavers from one side to the other, has been so effective that the animal’s testicles easily spring forth from its body, towards the bolt of the old hunter. The moment could be triumphant. For the hand of man has acquired the means with which to make the vagus Physiologus-appropriated prophylactic. But the mutual gaze between the hunter and the beaver suggests little sluttish. The hunter’s expression, more severe especially in the foreground. The brows, eyes and lips of both soldier and castor droop downwards; and as their eyes lock, the hunter and beaver commiserate with one another: the beaver’s castration and the valiant effort are intermingled. The scene is made all the more poignant because the Devil—to whom a face a man throw his arms. In contrast, the image shows the animal itself; the way the image is made. The text, however, is careful to recognize that God is not the only explanation for the immediate processes of nature: “I take nothing away from God, for whatever exists is from Him and because of Him. But the natural order does not exist contrary and without rational arrange- ment, and human reason should be content with the orders it treats of. But when it completely fails, then the matter should be referred to God.” Adelard proceeds reason alone ever for explaining the natural order, and deems it the most philosophical of explanatory mechanisms.

He does recognize, however, that even reason has its maximum limits. Only at these limits, and as a last resort, can God be invoked again. Sub- sequently, in his hierarchy of explanation (and knowledge-making), al- legories that abstract religious conscientiousness from the natural world explain very little. Indeed, Adelard is quite clear, for another mechanism is in play: “For if reason were not the universal judge, it would have been given to each in its own vein.” Reason has now become the universal instrument of choice for knowing the world.

And it is the existence of this universal capability to reason that is worth perching animals. Adelard is quite frustrated with those who have indociduously relied on ancient authors, waiting paper along the way: “Whence some men seem not to understand the name of the Physiologus, and that they have employed great license in writing to such an extent that they do not hesitate to present the false as true to such animal-like men. For why not fill up sheets of paper, and why not write on the back too, when you usu- ally have such readers today who require no rational explanation and put their trust only in the ancient name of a title?” Adelard’s exasperation shines from his pages. Beyond the gipes and complaints, the structure of his own book sets an example for writing reason and out-writing au- thority. Though it is somewhat modeled on the dialogues of ancient Greek philosophers (Plato’s use of the Socratic dialogue, in particular), Adelard uses this form to showcase reasoning. “With very different aims than the encyclopedic nature of the Physiologus, this question-and-answer session features Adelard’s ‘step’ who poses questions, Adelard’s ‘response’ who question, and the world on authority, subsequently leaving the field wide open. Adelard weep with reason as a vehicle of authority, and his voice becomes better, more reasonable tactics for investigating nature. Above his nephew asks why humans lack horns. Adelard responds: “In order to establish that your question is worth answering, you need to first show if it is true or likely reason why it seems ought to have. Otherwise such a question does not merit discussion among philosophers.” In effect, the text becomes an instruction manual for how a newly enlightened reader might go about writing his own philosophical text, and, more importantly, a directive for how to go about asking questions and providing answers for the natural world. The act of theorizing is a product of reason in the ser- vice of philosophy, and the particular specimen and specific species has been suppressed in order to best answer the question. The catalogizing impulse of the beaver has fallen away to make more room for the reason- able practice of philosophy.

Beavers, in Particular

One hundred years after Adelard’s Natural Questions, when university-ensconced Albertus Magnus wrote his De Animalibus (c. 1256- 1260), he, like Adelard, continued to uphold the tenets of reason for ex- plaining nature, critiquing any exclusive reliance on textual authority along
features of each animal. Thus, in Albertus’ catalogue of quadrupeds, the beaver emergence as a living, highly social creature, with an aptitude for building itself rather elaborate houses. The animal has been recast such that its moral implications are nowhere to be found and universal truths have been scrapped from the description. Instead, because the universal—i.e. reason-based and philosophical—categories and conditions for such species as the beaver have already been discussed in previous books of De animalibus, the castor’s physical and societal traits can be emphasized along with its use as a human prophylactic.

Unlike the bestiary, Albertus’ description does not include an illustration, but rather, relies on colorful language derived from experience. He outlines the description with such specifics as “green like the feet for swimming and forehead like a dog,” “ash-colored” hide, inclining toward black and “thick, short hair,” creating a tactile, experienced-based version of the beaver. And in describing how the animal goes about its livelihood, Albertus evidences something close to admiration, describing the beaver with such love as the work of a human.

In other words, the knowledge that Albertus’ beaver produces is a knowledge only of particulars. Unlike the twelfth-century bestiary beaver whose behaviors could be transmitted into an abstract mental and spiritual message, Albertus’ beaver has a very particular way of living in the world and serves very particular human uses. Although Albertus implies that in order to know an animal, one must observe it and observe it again, beyond such observation (and the creature’s prophylactic value) Albertus’ beaver has no universal lesson to offer. Observations only stand to supplement the philosophical investigations that Albertus has laid out elsewhere. In the end, reasonable philosophers cannot simply hinge their truths about the world on specific creatures. But these observations of particulars—of beavers and other beasts—we can still find our way into such truths.
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