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Introduction

In culling responses for and assembling thresholds 37, it became clear that an open, candid, and critical discussion of sex in architecture was not only absent in the current literature, but also long overdue. For example, while an architect may be quick to call a rendering "sexy," or to describe a perspectival view as the "money shot," there is an accompanying reluctance to elaborate on these slips of language, or to discuss how sex may actually operate in architectural language and work. While this reluctance may be due to a kind of historicized mood surrounding critical discussions of sex, more powerfully, it also suggests a specific lacuna in current discourse. As theories of twenty years ago are showing their age, and older structures are no longer sufficient, thresholds 37 argues for a new critical look at how we integrate sex into our lives and work. We must take a step back to look at "sex," proper, in order to move forward.

Indeed, the resulting variety of approaches and material included in this issue stand as strong evidence that we've reached a critical juncture for sex in architecture and in art. In addressing a range of topics from reproductive science, to the cultural taboos of coupling, to linguistic analysis, each contributor examines sex through an individual and different lens. In offering up this range of articles, we hope that their kaleidoscopic richness will serve as platforms to open up a more robust and varied discourse around sex. Through this issue, we hope to make clear that sex is not something for only women to write about, it is not something to be relegated to the history/theory classroom, and it is indeed much, much more than a token discussion.

A number of contributors explored reproduction as a driver of design, both conceptually and literally. Caroline O'Donnell's comparison of biological taxonomies and their application in architecture lays the groundwork for her trajectory from Wölfflin to Lynn. She proposes a return to the critical judgment of Darwinian analysis as a way to evaluate the viability of contemporary computational works. Mark Jarzombek introduces us to the historic metaphor of design as gestation; his foreword to an excerpt from Filarete's Treatise on Architecture considers the way that reproductive metaphors run rampant in the conceptualization of architecture. In Jason Sowell's investigation of landscape design, human sexuality is categorically opposed to plant sexuality. In shifting our perspective of the garden as erotic delight to the garden as complicated breeding-ground, Sowell volleys for projects that harness the power of plant propagation and pollination in their designs.

Other contributors discuss sex as affect, as an evocative player in architecture. Melissa Tapper Goldman attempts to articulate a theory of lust; as she struggles to find words to describe the ways that space speaks, she cleverly points out that this operation is hardly ever acknowl-
edged. Sex and desire are major drivers behind Thaddeus P. Jusczyk's Hotel Archiphilia project. Not only is the narrative focused on the desire of his protagonist, but the building around which all his action takes place is itself programmed for sex. Sensuality is a major presence in Gabriel Esquivel and Ryan R. Collier's A SWELL Project, an installation that questions tactility, proximity, and the seductive using novel generative and fabrication techniques.

Also in this issue, moments of shift in architectural or artistic thinking provide a ground for speculation on sex. The stair takes on new importance in Alice T. Friedman's reading of sensuality injected into the staid language of Modernism. She describes the influence of dramatic staircases (and with them sex appeal) in Eero Saarinen's design for the GM Technical Center as a turning point in appreciation of, and engagement with, the sensual. Three artists are highlighted for their engagement of male sexuality in Charissa Terranova's bid to galvanize a progressive politics of masculinity. Whether or not Matthew Barney, Robert Gober, and Paul McCarthy acknowledge the affinities in their work, Terranova offers evidence that their practices together offer a vision of male sexuality that is entirely new.

Shifts in theoretical allegiance and conceptual practice also illuminate historical trajectories. Beatriz Colomina explores the disjunction of inside and outside, of private life and public appearance, in her analysis of Adolf Loos' relationship with the Secessionists. Loos' values are brought to light in contrast to those of his contemporaries and through historical context. The priorities of a practice can also be evaluated as shifts in thinking, as Ana Miljački does in her piece on MOS's P.S.1 installation, "Afterparty." She investigates the architects' claim to promiscuity as a new critical position, situating them in a new generational paradigm. Alexander Maymind works in the opposite direction, taking Jeffrey Kipnis's idea of the cosmetic and using it as an alibi for a computational distortion to be applied to a façade.

The role of language and text as sites for activism also ran through a number of pieces in thresholds 37. In Jane Rendell's An Embellishment: Purdah, the author describes her process of opposing window-sized text installations and the effects one has on the other as light changes throughout the day. And, text is a critical tool in Nana Last's fantasy of an installation. She imagines a recoding of bathroom door signage to destabilize the word “men” as a privileged root.

The essays and projects collected here in thresholds 37 are but a trailer for what we hope is to come. In this issue we aim to make clear that the presence of sex in architecture and art is undeniable, and that a further engagement with sex and its influence is necessary. Enjoy.
You perhaps could say, “You have told me that the building is similar to a man. Therefore, if this is so, it needs to be conceived and then born.” As [it is] with man himself so [it is] with the building. First it is conceived, using a simile such as you can understand and then it is born. The mother delivers her child at the term of nine months or sometimes seven. By care and in good order she makes him grow. “Tell me, how is this conception achieved?”

The building is conceived in this manner. Since no one can conceive by himself without a woman, by another simile, a building cannot be conceived by one man alone. As it cannot be done without a woman, so he who wishes to build needs an architect. He conceives it with him and then the architect carries it. When the architect has given birth, he becomes the mother of the building. Before the architect gives birth, he should dream about his conception, think about it, and turn it over in his mind in many ways for seven to nine months, just...
as a woman carries her child in her body for seven to nine months. He should also make various drawings of his conception that he has made with the patron, according to his own desires. As the woman can do nothing without the man, so the architect is the mother who carried this conception. When he has pondered and considered and thought [about it] in many ways, he then ought to choose, [according to his own desires], what seems most suitable and most beautiful to him according to the terms of the patron. When this birth is accomplished, that is when he has made, in wood, a small relief design of its final form, measured and proportioned to the finished building, then he shows it to the father.

As I have compared the architect to the mother, he also needs to be the nurse. He is thus both nurse and mother. As the mother is full of love for her son, so he will rear it with love and diligence, cause it to grow and bring it to completion if it is possible; if it is not, he will leave it ordered in such a way that it will not perish because of its incompleteness. A good mother loves her son and with the aid and knowledge of the father tries to make him good and beautiful, and with a good master to make him valiant and praiseworthy. So the good architect should strive to make his building good and beautiful. As the mother makes every effort to find good masters for her son, so the architect ought to find good masters, masons and the others who are needed for the work, if the patron does not prevent him. Without the good will of the patron he would be like a woman who can do nothing against the will of her husband; the architect is exactly the same. We shall state here some things that the architect ought to do and also what ought to be done to him.

The architect ought to be experienced in many things, but at present I do not wish to state what he ought to know because I intend to treat of this elsewhere. At present I wish to discuss only his duty in the preparation of the building after it has been conceived and determined in the manner stated above. We shall also state what ought to be done for him by the man who has chosen him as the organizer and executor of the thing he loves.

Building is nothing more than a voluptuous pleasure, like that of a man in love. Anyone who has experienced it knows that there is so much pleasure and desire in building that however much a man does, he wants to do more. Sometimes he is never concerned with the expense; examples of this are seen every day. When a man is in love, he gladly goes to see his beloved. When she is in a place where he can see her, he is not sorry for the time spent, nor is he bored. So he who builds goes gladly to see his building and as often as he sees it, the more he wants to see it and the more his heart swells. Time passes and he is never reluctant to look at it or to talk about it exactly as a man in love talking about his beloved. He is pleased when it is praised, and his heart swells even more. When he is absent and someone comes to talk about it to him, he is greatly pleased and desires to see it. His soul it drawn to it and he always desires the things that he thinks are best for it, exactly as a man in love [would] do. There is no half way for him; he loves it. He makes it useful and honorable for only two ends. The first [is] for utility and the second for fame, so that they will say it was he who made such a beautiful building to rise.

Endnotes
Jean-Francois de Bastide’s mid-eighteenth century novel, *The Little House*, describes an erotic encounter between a persistent man and a reluctant woman. More remarkably, the novel introduces a third character, the estate where the seduction takes place. The house not only serves as setting, but as an active aphrodisiac, the male’s invaluable teammate in the game that unfolds. The building facilitates the seduction, while both outlining and hosting the fantasies of its inhabitants. It serves as an escape that helps the characters evade the constraints of nearby Paris, and inserts itself into the narrative as an active participant.

But, in this day and age, can anyone really take such a claim seriously? Can architecture really perform as a character, rather than as mere backdrop in the narratives that unfold around it? Using de Bastide’s novel as a springboard, Hotel Archiphilia was conceived as both an architectural and a literary project. The product emerged in two forms: a design for a building in which Bostonians confront their latent escape fantasies, and a novel of seduction in which the building interacts with other characters as part of an ensemble cast.

The seductive narrative is a fitting story in which to insert architecture as a character. It is a story of chase, retreat, resistance, and yielding in which the building can become not just a setting, but the frame, facilitator and implement of the action. Largely neglected in the modern movement, in most of the world, architecture’s role in the seductive game has been reduced to a relatively minor position in seedy motels and honeymoon suites. While Loos may have focused the gaze towards the female interior, and Le Corbusier may have used openings to frame dominion over the exterior, as Anthony Vidler has put it, modern architectural eroticism has been “banished to the furtive encounter in the marginal spaces of latrine and underpass.” However, in love hotels, prevalent in Japan and Korea, the building’s role in providing an escape towards fantasy is exploited as a seductive agent. Encouraging limited or no personal contact between patrons and staff, with a focus on anonymity, these hourly hotels provide fantasy backdrops, shielded from the outside world. Providing a variety of themes, the hotels allow the patrons to choose from a list of fantasies as represented in the rooms. But, confined to normative hotel structure and form, on the exterior, the buildings merely distinguish themselves through painted and decorated facades. The rooms inside, organized as in any other hotel, are differentiated by varying drywall and plaster-produced themes, limiting the architecture’s role as participant to surface treatment.

What more can we ask of architecture? The building’s role as a scopophilic device has been long since replaced by the media of photography and cinema. Through their intrinsic relationship between the gaze supplied by audience, camera, and characters, these media provide an unmistakable connection between the realms of fantasy, experience, and projection. According to Laura Mulvey, “this complex interaction of looks
is specific to film. However, Mulvey’s statement overlooks architecture’s potential as a device that supplies and facilitates views, interactions, juxtapositions, and unexpected encounters. In contrast to cinema’s three layers of look, architecture is afforded the unique opportunity to serve as the frame, object, and enclosure of the gaze—as an escape within itself.

Taking advantage of this phenomenon, Hotel Archiphilia takes on the role of an escape haven in downtown Boston, capitalizing on the tenuous relationship between urban anonymity and intimate fantasy, and recognizing the essentially linked relationship between the characters of the intruders in space, and the spaces they inhabit. Sited in the city’s infamous “Combat Zone,” former home to the city’s purveyors of fantasy, Hotel Archiphilia, serves as a full service love hotel, spa, and urban hermitage, and emphasizes an active relationship between characters, juxtaposing the conditions of privacy, pleasure, and desire.

What follows is an introduction to the characters of the novel, and their roles in the events that unfold:

**Hotel Archiphilia:** An escape in three parts (fig. 1, 2). A refuge within Boston’s notorious, but now defunct, “Combat Zone,” it provides a full service love hotel that attracts a Craig’s List-addicted clientele interested in quick anonymous sex, mature couples looking for escape from the ordinary, discreet couples looking for no-questions-asked privacy, and anyone else with a stubborn curiosity (fig. 3, 4). In addition to the love hotel, the building is organized around a more public spa program, allowing weary Bostonians to come in for a quick escape from the bustling city (fig. 5). Finally, buried within the multiple mechanical floors (fig. 6) that are required to supply the water, ventilation, lube, etc. to the spa and love hotel, are urban escape pods—small, discreet, and intensely private rooms, where guests can completely shut themselves off from the outside world for as long as they like. Discreet access is provided between the three programs.
Maurice: The narrator, and witness to the action (fig. 7). A voyeur/stalker obsessed with a B-list actress, Sophie, he has been served with a restraining order which states that he must keep back at least one hundred feet from the object of his desire. Nevertheless, he follows her, and her disappearance into Hotel Archiphilia sets his curiosity in motion, and thus the novel. We follow Maurice as he discovers his way around the building (fig. 8).

Sophie: A somewhat insignificant actress who recently rocketed to fame after her ex-lover released a compromising sex tape (fig. 9). Now confronted with a paparazzi frenzy, at least one stalker, and an overwhelming desire to disappear, she wonders if she can’t just make it all go away. Chastising herself, the self-proclaimed sex addict wonders if she has the strength to give up human contact cold turkey. Inspired by Baudelaire’s statement that “almost all our woes come from not being capable of remaining in our rooms,” she is determined to find a place where she can cut herself off from the world. Desperate, she stumbles across an ad for Hotel Archiphilia, and books a private room in the hermitage. Once she is ensconced in her room, she can actually have a moment alone, released from the demands of dealing with the public outside. She soon takes pleasure in the simple act of being alone in her secluded room, where she can behave however she wants, and order whatever she desires from room service, without having to answer for any of it. She enjoys the luxury of being bored with herself. But, inevitably, the boredom and loneliness become overpowering. She needs a fix of social contact, and what could be better than quick access to a full service love hotel?

Jeanne: Sophie’s go-getting lawyer (fig. 10). She and her husband are engaged in another of their endless arguments. It always starts the same way, but this time things feel different. She simply cannot bear it anymore. All of the tedium is catching up to her, resulting in an all-en-
Maurice.
Maurice's approach to Hotel Archiphilia.
Sophie.
Jeanne.
Setting the dial to 'lube.'
12 Guy.
13 Lounging at the pool.
14 Guy enjoys the surroundings.
15 Guy moves to the love hotel.
compassing numbness. Determined to get away, to recharge her batteries, she surreptitiously makes her way to the Combat Zone. She enters Hotel Archiphilia with trepidation, not sure exactly what she wants or expects to find, just as long as it is something different. Drunk with the freedom of not caring at all, she quickly immerses herself in the atmosphere of abandon. She practically falls into the arms of an attractive stranger, and her numbness is soon forgotten as they make their way to an empty room (fig 11).

**Guy:** A businessman, and former acquaintance of Maurice (fig. 12). It has been another one of those days at the office for him. Unable to focus on any single task, he sits and stares out across his desk or absent-mindedly flips through trade magazines. The work keeps piling up, and he keeps putting it off. If only he could relax for a few hours, and stop thinking about everything that he still has to do. Coming across an advertisement in the latest issue of Office Work Quarterly, Guy is intrigued by the idea of packing it in for the day and heading to the spa to re-focus his energies. Once he arrives at the spa at Hotel Archiphilia, he finds more than a few distractions on which to focus his attentions (fig. 13, 14). He is taken in by the scenery, and soon strikes up some casual conversations. Soon, he finds a need to venture over to the love hotel portion of the building (fig. 15).

**Endnotes**


Sex in architecture is saturated with traditional rhetoric: to be current, the discourse must take a different position. Sexuality in architecture is no longer the struggle for power, truth, and confession; nor is it gender found through speculations of formal or programmatic manipulations.

Within current architecture positions, projects like “SWELL” do not presume to answer big questions, solve problems, and broach oppositions. Rather, they incite fascination with architectural forms that induce sensation: fantasy, ornament, intimacy, sexuality, and above all, the pleasurable experience.

SEXUAL
As an architectural object; it has the effect of producing emotion, and finds itself rich with libidinal potential: from its conception, the tearing and stretching of the skin was used to produce an erotic and sensual state, while the object-subject of the “swelling” skin/surface is in perpetual conflict as the two become sexually involved. The stretching ornamental skin as the surface of sex lies in contention with the interior sensual bodies—these reference conditions like the ripping condom, the defloration of the hymen, and the stretching of the foreskin during the erection, as well as more culturally driven acts like medical procedures (i.e. plastic surgery).

“Life is nothing but instability and disequilibrium... a swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion.”
Georges Bataille'

a SWELL project
ARCHITECTURAL

This project addresses a classic architectural problem of the column/beam or more literally the corner/beam condition, turning into a swelling condition. The space includes a system of ornamentation through apertures and voids about the surface. To the benefit of the whole, two subservient (submissive) systems work concurrently, interdependently to erect an affect of Swell. As the systems complement one another and create such interactions, the composite system begins to swell under arousing pressures, literally ripping the surface: apertures graze the surface where there were none. The micro condition of the porous appears taut via stretching of certain geometries, ultimately achieving a high porosity about the swelling of the softbodies, a system beginning to distend: an infinite cleavage never fully undressed, a condition of invaded interstitial spaces, the vaginal.

Not unlike the Baroque, Swell positions itself in a sense of levitating ecstasy and anticipation—a feeling that the swell condition will either a) cause the entire beam to ultimately invade the floor and spread as a viscous fluid, or b) explode under the pressure of the aforementioned systems.

Swell’s close affiliations to architecture are realized through references to ornamentation, sexuality and perhaps the abject. When discussing ornamentation, it seemed pertinent to look at Louis Sullivan’s work. Through the use of the figural, excessive, and aggregated form, certain conditions of ornamentation can be read as conditions about skin: unraveling surfaces of invaginations allowing sensuality to occur. It is at the detail, the synthesis of form with ornament, that the potential condition of the “sexual” emerges through the work. Although there are several pertinent examples of a figural/sexual relationship found in Sullivan’s work, perhaps the best is in the vestibule façade of the Merchant’s National Bank in Grinnell, Iowa. There are two conditions that stand out: that of the figural corner ornamentation and that of the “spires” that sit erect above each engaged column.
In Sullivan’s work, figuration seems to engage itself, creating a condition of aperture (not porosity), a discussion of invaginations about the corner surfaces. It is the relationship between ornamentation and form that reveals a sexual attitude about Sullivan’s work; such logic of ornamentation parallels that of Swell.

SENSATIONAL

However, a Swell project desires to argue a broader cultural attitude about sexuality: to a culture that longs for different attitudes and sensations, classic nudity in and of itself no longer triggers new emotions. The cultural body has been rethought; its anatomy has been reconfigured through prosthetic alterations, exercise, and metabolic potions, like a building or a column claiming a new geometry. We have generally matured in our salacity, that while throughout time we have thought of the normative (body/modern building/column) void of imperfection, we are in fact misguided: in contemporary discourse, the nude, with all its flaws, leaves nothing to be desired, lacks sensuality. It is through acts of ornamentation (lingerie, jewelry, plastic surgery, the tattoo, even “wings”) that we retool these (body/building) indices into something seductive, sexual, the “sensational”.

Endnotes

Seduction between the two systems as the swelling moment.
As pillar of foundations and cultural grammar, “masculinity” has been with us immemorially. Though descriptive of only half of the human species, manliness has been the unquestioned paradigm by which we construct language and social hierarchy, at least until the rise of the feminist movement in the twentieth century. By the 1970s, feminism, along with the gay liberation movement, evolved into a full-fledged progressive politics affecting change, from the opening up of the marketplace to women to the loosening of gender stereotypes for all. Feminism and the gay rights movement were united early on as a force of change, enlightenment, and, more precisely, tolerance and gender equity. The cohesiveness of each group made political self-expression in the fine arts not only easier but also more powerful. Their status as organized movements, as what we once called “groupuscules” and even earlier “collectives,” made their bodies politic more resolute and prises de parole more resonant in the arts than if each position had been but a set of random acts. Cases in point are Womanhouse (1972), the CalArts Feminist Art Program founded by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (1970), and the NAMES Project Foundation behind the AIDS Memorial Quilt (founded in 1987).

By contrast, masculinity has advanced only recently, over the last twenty years, to the realm of a consciousness-raising discourse. In historicizing masculine stereotypes, this discourse has also relativized the category of the masculine as one choice among several. The work of three contemporary artists—Robert Gober, Paul McCarthy, and Matthew Barney—quietly foments a silent, if not passive, revolution in the realm of the arts by deflating certain norms associated with masculinity, such as sexual prowess, stamina, erection-on-demand, he-man virility, extraordinary member size and clear and legible heterosexuality as the universal norm for men. It is a passive and weak revolution in thinking and artistic practice based on the body made sexual not so much by “nature” but, and in keeping with Michel Foucault, administration. On first blush, we might interpret an essay on progressive masculinity, moreover an entire issue of an academic journal for architecture and visual studies devoted to the subject of “sex,” as a dalliance with the avant-garde or an experimental provocation of sorts. As Foucault states, just speaking
about sex “has the appearance of a deliberate transgression.”

I propose here a dialectical stance—taking further in keeping with Foucault that delivers transgression only insomuch as we understand that the overstepping of boundaries places us only deeper within certain power struggles. Boundary-breaking is but a stirring of trends readymade for the market. One step forward across a boundary is one step further into the realm of someone else’s control. Nevertheless we march.

Transgressing sexual boundaries gives rise to what Foucault called the “great sexual sermon” which “chastised the older order, denounced hypocrisy, and praised the rights of the immediate and the real.” The oppression of sexuality and emancipatory jeremiads are two parts of an interactive whole, the sides of which co-actively reinstate the necessity of the other. That said, I argue here for a weak sense of agency with no promise of emancipation, but only a creative, productive, and playful meandering through the labyrinths of discourse. We play through the dialectical movements of a paradigm that prima facie delivers transgression only to reinstate our position in the biopolitical campaign of bureaucratic administra-

tion. Though not part of any such cohesive avant-garde movement, the work of these three artists constitutes a rising—an inching-along—of a progressive politics of masculinity. And it does so by confronting head on machismo, castration anxiety, and homophobia.

We must take a moment, however, to ask ourselves just what type of progressive body politic this group might be, when none of the artists overtly acknowledge participation in a group politics of resistance characteristically attributed to past avant-gardes. How is this a movement if Gober, Barney, and McCarthy do not claim to be part of a cohesive force for the progressive politics of masculinity? Far different from the heroic avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, both historic and neo-, these three artists constitute a “movement” only insomuch as the word ceases to designate tight-knit association and grand heroic declarations or promises. In keeping with each artist’s deployment of “ugly feelings,” their work constitutes an avant-garde of the passive, or what the scholar Sianne Ngai has described in terms of the Bartlebyan project of “negative affects.” In her book Ugly Feelings,
Ngai circumscribes an alternative political agency the model of which is the terse and phlegmatic Bartelby of Herman Melville’s short story “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Bartelby’s pithy five-word rejection of requests, “I would prefer not to,” becomes the metaphorical *chuchotement de coeur* (soft outcry or literally “whisper from the heart”) of this new politics of apathetic resistance. Here we find an aesthetics set in motion by the “ignoble feelings” of animatedness, envy, irritation, anxiety, paranoia, disgust, and “stuplimity,” Ngai’s neologism referring to the “aesthetic experience in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom.”5 In short, the politics of masculinity at work in the art of Gober, McCarthy, and Barney is exhausted of heroics but emboldened by the odd-body combination of figural deformation and ignoble feelings.

They are three artists whom I have loosely though potently affiliated because of their collective critique of masculinity as we know it. Their work recognizes the constructed nature of gendered identity in that it “performs” masculinity. It is work, however, that does not act out maleness, or masculinity, ex nihilo, as though a Promethean act of pure will. Rather, here we find instances of performance in keeping with Judith Butler’s gender theory.6 Gober, Barney, and McCarthy rehearse, ricochet against, and finally reject the limiting rules of male gender as prescribed and repeated by the language and ideologies into which we are born. The objects and moving-images of these artists “cannot be theorized apart from the forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes,” as Butler states.7 Because much of the work symbolically oscillates between and beyond gender dimorphism, that is, the male-vs.-female paradigm, we find here a body politic that is gender deviant.8 This is work that transgresses the age-old ideological as well as biological binary of “man” and “woman.” It is work that is in the same vein “degenderist,” to use a word from an exhibition at the Setagaya Museum in Tokyo in 1997. That is to say, the work “implies a double leap, recognizing the existence of unknown, diverse values, and placing the self which lives in the midst of this in the position of the other, outside.”9 When coalesced, their work seems highly heterogeneous with each artist’s oeuvre succinct and separate. At the same time, though, the three bodies of art are united through the symbolic form of undifferentiation—icons that are total yet porous, neither fully male nor female but a mixture of the two. For Gober it is the recurrent symbol of the half-male, half-female chest (fig. 1) that brings home the degenderist strategy in his work. In Barney’s work
we find the corporate-inflected Field Emblem—a bisected capsule that signifies being in-between, an orifice that is both open and closed (fig. 2). We look to the blonde, Marilyn Monroe-inspired wig (fig. 3) McCarthy wears in the recording of two polymorphically perverse performances from 1975, Tubbing and Sailor’s Meat. The work of Gober, Barney, and McCarthy claims space for other sexualities in and through the body. Their work defuses the primary role of the robust and taut musculature of the macho male body. In what follows, I return to Professor Ngai’s ideas on sublimated and passive affects in the creation of a short taxonomy of works of art that purvey an ethos of progressive masculinity.

Stuplimity and Machismo

In the word “stuplimity,” Ngai calls upon the Kantian sublime only to thwart its potential heroics into a realm where boredom concatenates with astonishment. Stuplimity “belongs... to the dirtier environments of what [Gertrude] Stein calls ‘bottom humor.’” In the art works here, stuplimity serves to likewise thwart the heroics of machismo. If McCarthy’s Stick Dick (1971) (fig. 4) offers a static form of stuplimous abjection, his Glass Case (1973) (fig. 5), offers the same sentiment as a naked performing body—McCarthy squeezing his naked body into a glass box.

Similar stuplimous acts unfold in the performance and video work of Barney. Barney has used moving images to investigate the normative structures of male sexuality since the late 1980s. Years playing football in high school and modeling while an undergraduate student at Yale reinforced the role the male body takes as a readymade commodity and cultural playground. This led in turn to his Drawing Restraint series, a continuous project that has materialized in performance, video and film focusing on the narcissism of the male body, in particular as evidenced in the maintenance of taut muscles and extreme athleticism. The phrase “drawing restraint” refers to the disciplinary measures taken at the gym to increase muscular girth, or as one curator put it “the idea that resistance makes muscles larger and stronger due to hypertrophy.” A series of performances in the late 80s and early 90s finds Barney deploying his own athleticism in makeshift gym-space using weight machines made from viscous materials, barbells made out of petroleum jelly. The series of interventions and acts brings together the artistic act of drawing and the everyday regimen of working out under the rubric of disciplinary action. In Drawing Restraint 1 and 2 (1987-88) Barney drew
Anxiety and Homophobia

Ngai rethinks the connection between anxiety and projection in the work of Sigmund Freud in order to show the “spatialized representations of anxiety in the work of Herman Melville, Alfred Hitchcock, and Martin Heidegger.” What this yields is a sense of anxiety, a humor of “thrown-ness” to signal Heidegger, which is structural to existence. More precisely, and with great significance to the study at hand, the anxious subject finds momentary footing in a world where the distinction between “here” and “yonder,” to use Ngai’s words, are difficult to gauge. Let “here” and “yonder” function as dyads that parallel the gender binary of “man” and “woman.” Barney and Gober work through this topsy-turvy space, the anxious, yawning, and ever-shifting gap of gender, by going in drag—donning a wedding dress—in two separate projects from 1989. In *Field Dressing* (*orifill*), Barney wore a white wedding gown while carrying and posing with plastic weights in front of a case of phallic sports trophies. The same year, Gober made an installation at Paula Cooper Gallery in which stood a white satin wedding dress hand-sewn by the artist. An untitled stack of photo-doctored newspapers from an installation at the Dia Center for the Arts in 1993 shows Gober in an advertisement once again dressed in drag, wearing a wig and a wedding dress (fig. 6). The ad is placed in jarring juxtaposition to an article on the Vatican’s support of discrimination against gays. Gober’s self-portrait as a bride triggers the self-loathing and doubt of homophobia while also aping the concept of “human nature.” As with Barney’s gym-room, wedding-dress romp in the 1989 video *Field Dressing* (*orifill*), Gober’s self-portrait in drag muddies the water of straightforward sexual identity. To forcefully degenderize discourse is not only to confront the ambiguity of sexual identity but also to reveal the admixtures of everyday gender practices—to highlight everything in between “male” and “female”, “straight” and “gay.” At the same time, in wearing a white wedding dress, each artist acts out the mythology of marriage and its attendant semiotics of virginity, sublimation, legal contractual loyalty, and long-held bigotries against those who are refused the right of legal marriage or those who choose to opt out of the convention for other reasons.

Gober began his career with another gender-bending piece at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York in 1984. Titled “Slides of a Changing Painting” (1982-83) (fig. 7), the piece consisted of a set of images documenting a single painting that Gober regularly painted, changed by over-painting, and registered in photographic form. In the end, “nothing remained but the photographic record of a painting metamorphosing,” Gober explains. The slides depict the changing landscape of a human chest, from a hairless male, to slightly hirsute male, to its transformation into a woman’s breasts atop which sits a coffee cup, to its hybridity as both male and female, to the surrealist piercing of the male chest by a blue stream of water, to its forestation, to erasure, abstraction and site of gesture, to a chest bearing a utility pole, to its transformation into an armature of an interior of a house, and to finally its deliquescence into geometric abstraction. Gober made a lengthy and complex permutation of form through the minimal materials of paint, board, and slide film. The chest becomes the site of unstable references: it is a shape-shifter that is becoming-man, becoming-woman, becoming-house, becoming-nature.

Disgust, Castration and Bodily Fluids

Disgust, as Jacques Derrida once noted, is the absolute other of the system of taste. Barney and McCarthy deploy ersatz bodily fluids—petroleum jelly in the work of Barney and mustard, chocolate in the work of McCarthy—in rejection of that very system, inciting disgust in order to confront fears of putative sexual deviancy. Themes of deviant...
7 (right) Robert Gober, [chest with culvert], Slides of a Changing Painting, 1982-83.
sexuality are borne upon body cavities symbolically turned inside out as both artists show how “desire and disgust are dialectically conjoined,” to return to Ngai’s ideas.19

For Barney, petroleum jelly lubricates the movement of this dialectic. A general mollifier, it is also an icon of sexual acts, surrealist perversity, and gender ambiguity. It literally loosens up the static and stilted nature of the normative gender binaries of male/female and straight/gay. With Transexualis (decline) (1991) (fig. 8) Barney cast workout equipment in petroleum jelly and installed it in precision coolers. Barney deconstructs masculinity and its attendant signifier machismo in order to lay bare the homoerotic nature of working out and going to the gym. While used in this instance for the making of still, succinct sculptural objects, petroleum jelly functions performatively as an active negotiator of spaces in the Cremaster films, Barney’s five-part film series that elides the polished grammar of blockbuster Hollywood into Buñuel-esque symbolism of art-house films. While Barney has described the Cremaster series simply in terms of non-linear “sculptural narratives,”20 they are moving-image landscapes for gender play, in particular the constructivist game ality. This movement of linguistic the very name of the series, cremuscle within the scrotal sack that or elevate based on temperature. lent metaphor representing the human species, as well as acts of Cremaster 2, we find Barney in the making his way through the petro sutured-together Ford Mustangs (fig. 9). Here, two cars become one and together an orifice and passage, a would-be site of lovemaking as well as a birth and death canal. Cremaster 3 finds Barney establishing a homology between teeth and the mouth on the one hand and the penis and scrotum on the other. Barney undergoes a procedure in a dentist’s chair in an office on the 71st floor of a skyscraper. With legs spread as though in a gynecological chair rather than dental, his apron is lifted and instead of genitals, we find “a frozen splash pattern formed by a drop of water falling into a pool of liquid.”21 Rather than the removal of teeth, the doctor has removed his member. The allusions are manifold here, but it is shocking that he lacks a conventional male phallus, a sight that in turn invokes castration anxiety.

McCarthy similarly plays on castration anxiety through performing disgusting bodily acts. Working in a variety of media, including painting, performance and video, and a survey of banal materials, including hot dogs, mayonnaise, ketchup and chocolate, McCarthy intentionally af fronts the putative American dream by undermining male virtue. McCarthy’s body is an abject
Matthew Barney, Scene from Cremaster 2, 1999.
field of perverse activities including sodomy and castration. The videos *Meat Cake #1*, *Meat Cake #3* and *Hot Dog* (1974) find McCarthy performing alternately in ladies lingerie, men’s BVDs, and the nude while slathering condiments on his body (fig. 10). In the *Meat Cake* videos he slides atop raw meat. Jennie Klein explains that these performances “can be read as an outgrowth of his earlier concerns with exposing the seams in the otherwise seamless relationship between artistic greatness, artistic creation, and phallic potency.” 22 Though these early performances captured on video bring to mind the more macabre work of the Viennese Actionists, McCarthy distances himself from the bodily fluids of blood and excrement. Using hot dog condiments instead of actual blood and guts, McCarthy’s work is Pop and softly pornographic, offering an ironic statement on the relationship between everyday practices of eating, sex acts and voyeurism.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this essay has been an attempt to forge a progressive politics of masculinity where there is no linguistic component present. Though altogether evident in form, such a politics is lacking in the will of verbal or written artistic declaration. There is no manifesto. I insist, nevertheless, that much of the work of these artists—Robert Gober, Matthew Barney and Paul McCarthy—succeeds in pushing the limits, dare I say even transgressing if not destroying the traditional boundaries of normative as well as hegemonic masculinity. I underscore the confrontational nature of this work as a means to confirm that *confrontation precedes knowledge, which precedes understanding, followed by acceptance*. Admittedly, this has been a heuristic exercise. That is to say, this has been a taxonomic act that enables a better understanding of work that is, needless to say, many-headed and difficult to grasp. I have offered a cursory survey of each artist in order to bring home the way in which the male body, its contortion and re-presentation, serves as a basis to question and undermine dimorphic sexuality. These artists confront and begin to overcome the unmentionable if not burdensome realities borne by the modern male, from the erect phallus to masculinity made legible in taut muscles and a large penis.
Endnotes


2 My will to write this essay comes, in fact, by way of a union of art and everyday life, in the scrutiny of lecture material for a survey of contemporary art and my friendship with two men who embody the ambiguities and divergences of progressive masculinity. The first is a 6’5” 40-year-old former marine now doing contract work for the private military in Iraq. His body stands before him in many ways, dictating the onuses that come with personal strength, agility, and persuasive ease of highly remunerative employment in an economy of war. Copious amounts of money can easily trump the anti-war leftist temperament of a writer who has a lot of experience in waging and managing a Middle Eastern warfront. The other man is my neighbor, a gay man who is religiously dedicated to the culture of NASCAR. In him we find once again a collision of the demographic unforeseen: an out gay man living in Dallas, from a small town in Kansas, with leftist-liberal political views who is, at the same time, an avid NASCAR fan. This essay is dedicated to these two men, Bradley and Mike.


4 Foucault, 294.


7 Butler, 15.


11 Ngai, 271.

12 Ngai, 271.


14 Ngai, 212.


19 Ngai, 333.

20 In a public discussion of January 2004 at the Dallas Museum of Art, Barney described his work as “narrative sculpture.”

21 Spector, 49.

As architecture takes more and more clues from discourses and media concerned immediately with the power of the bodily and the haptic, we find ourselves in a renewed position of potency to recapture and contribute to a contemporary sense of the real, the frivolous, and most importantly, the sexy. These three contemporary phenomena rarely can escape the irony or cynicism of the last twenty years without coming off as sentimental, corporate, or overtly empty—and thus are currently ripe territory.

Cosmetics, as theorized by Jeffrey Kipnis in regard to Herzog and de Meuron, are unlike ornament in that they are indiscreet, with no relation to the body on which they lie. Cosmetics typically are understood as a kind of erotic transmogrification, subverting the skin away from its typical obligations and recasting it with a set of new desires. Cosmetics differ from ornament in that they aim only to work on their own fixations, perhaps even selfishly. The last twenty years of research have shown that they work primarily through field conditions, tending to be more visceral than intellectual, more atmospheric than aesthetic, trading in both figuration and formal legibility for more deviant and subversive qualities. They require a kind of paranoid control that is hard to detect, but entirely menacing, subverting the other perceptions of the body that they require as prosthesis.

This project uses the marble rain screen skin of Knowlton School of Architecture at The Ohio State University, by Scogin and Elam Architects, as an armature for an exploration into the realm of painterly pattern. The marble’s current arrangement in a
Knowlton Hall; Ohio State University (existing building as blank canvas).

Screenshot of shareware Mazaika Mosaic Maker.
(available at http://www.mazaika.com/download.html)

Marble rainscreen tiles; to-be sorted, etched, and re-arranged.

Texture of tiles as lo-fidelity pixelated mosaic.
A non-ordered random system led to the idea of a quick yet circuitous cosmetic make-over. Using the marble’s own texture at multiple scales as the Duchampian pattern to be manipulated, the tattoo is the result of the potentially laborious task of taking the individual panels off of the building, using the shareware Mazaika’s lo-fidelity capabilities to create a new mosaic arrangement for the library of tiles, etching into the pieces to accept colored dyes, and then (re)-placing them in a new location on the existing building skin to act as a pixel in a larger non-figural pattern.

Equal parts intricate tracery, complex linework, and animated texture, these tattoos are not quite marble or natural, but instead behave similarly to the distinct haze of a Richter or a photograph of Thomas Ruff. If contemporary painting can suspend the viewer between contemplation and attraction, then perhaps architecture can find a similar relationship that is yet to be explored as part of our medium and its engagement with the world at large.

Live trace dialogue box in Adobe Illustrator: the limited number of options of the tracing algorithm creates the possibility of endless copycat images and liberated replications. The genealogy of copying is not the history of technique of reproduction or imitation—it is the swerve away from literal likeness that always results in a difference, new feelings and new effects. This project seeks to distinguish the copy from the imitation, (which seeks to act as the original) and plagiarism (which wants to erase the presence of the original). These are forms of copying that still depend on the original as primary, albeit in a distorted and perverse way. The copycat believes that the very notion of the original has shifted out of sync with today’s multivalent culture and that instead a work is never closed or complete, but can continue to move, update and evolve.
marble as cosmetic skin

building scale  local scale  unit & texture scale

Large scale original source image manipulation.
Individual unit scale traces (tests based on blur, color, threshold).
Collage perspectives—building facade scale view of cosmetic marble tattoo.
Alice T. Friedman

Do Tread on Me: Disciplined Design and the Sensuous Staircase

1 The GM Styling Building.
Image courtesy of the Eero Saarinen Papers.
A close examination of Eero Saarinen’s General Motors Technical Center in Warren Michigan (1949-1956) offers an opportunity to go beyond analysis of the visual character of architectural composition to consider varieties of embodied experience as multi-dimensional, sensory, psychological, and artistic phenomena. In recent years, scholars in the fields of anthropology, history, and contemporary art theory have produced new, critical analyses that raise a host of questions related to this approach. Now architectural historians have begun to follow suit. The GM complex was conceived by Saarinen (initially in partnership with his father Eliel) as a modern campus composed of flat-roofed, low-profile structures with curtain walls of glass and steel surrounding a large, rectangular reflecting pool: the prairie site provides a strong, horizontal datum on which the project is neatly laid out, and the highly industrialized look of the architecture—cited by many contemporary commentators both for its Miesian elegance and for its use of new technologies and materials—carried forward the themes of control, efficiency, and mass-production that were critical for the symbolic identity of a complex that was to serve as a laboratory and think tank for the company.

Industry, rationality, and discipline were not the only elements of the company profile that Saarinen sought to engage in his design, however. No doubt the production of automobiles depended on those qualities, but at GM, marketing and sales relied on a different kind of appeal: on the promise of freedom, the excitement of the open road, and on the “sex appeal” of the product. Indeed, as GM chairman Alfred P. Sloan famously remarked, he “wanted to design a car so that every time you get in it, it’s a relief—you have a little vacation for awhile.” With auto designer Harley Earl at the helm of the “Styling Section” at the Technical Center, enormous amounts of energy were devoted to creating an environment conducive to that process; for Saarinen, the challenge was to shape the language of modern architecture into an expressive vehicle that would not only satisfy the architectural critics to whom he answered, but, more importantly, effectively communicate both with his clients and the general public. Beyond commissioning sculptor Alexander Calder to design a water feature that occasionally turned GM’s highly disciplined reflecting pool into an exuberant, gushing display of spurting water, what could the architect do to make modern architecture seem not just smart and scientific but also glamorous and sexy?

Thoroughly versed in the lessons of architectural history (he seems, for example, to have fully embraced the notion of GM as an “Industrial Versailles”), Saarinen found his answer in the architecture of the grand staircase and open lobby, designing a suspended, double flight set piece for the Styling Building (fig. 1), and a glamorous circular staircase for the Research Building (fig. 2). Each composition makes use of long, theatrical sightlines and a diverse palette of industrial and craft-produced materials—lustrous, glazed blue-black tiles, shining brass rods, and the blue water of a reflecting pool at the Styling Building, and an inverted cone of stainless-steel cables over a floating spiral of flecked black marble treads at Research—to create a sensuous composition that can be seen, experienced, and remembered for its distinctive look and its vivid physicality. Borrowing from the conventions of fashion photography and from film, Saarinen and his lighting designer Richard Kelly (who would prove so invaluable to the making of distinctive imagery in collaboration with many Mid-Century modern architects) orchestrated the play of light and shadow over each scene, highlighting foreground figures and backlighting the pool and the stairs to create distinctive silhouettes as people ascended or met in conversation. Further, GM made frequent use of these spaces for photo shoots featuring cars and elegantly dressed models. The message was clear: the architecture, like the cars, created a thrilling and memorable artistic, physical, and psychological experience that lived on long after the worker, the visitor, or the client had left the premises.

At GM, as in popular Hollywood movies like “An American in Paris,” (MGM, 1951) and in the luxurious resort hotels of Miami Beach by Morris Lapidus where monumental curving staircases played a special role in creating an image of—and a lasting desire for—glamorous experience, Saarinen created a new kind of American modernism that his client, and its customers, embraced. Subsequently, as the Technical Center project was nearing completion, he started work on another building for a major American corporation, TWA, whose new terminal at Idlewild, now Kennedy, Airport (1956-62) was a particu-
larly high-profile commission. There, the building, like one of Harley Earl’s mid-1950s Cadillacs, with their huge, chrome-laden fenders and elaborate tail fins, carried the message forward by itself, using its picture-ready image and the intensely muscular concrete forms of its distinctly un-Miesian (and critically disastrous) curves: in the view of many observers, it appeared to crouch, like an enormous, pre-historic bird about to take flight. The interior at TWA (fig. 3) is all curves and level changes, with animate walls (fig. 4) and futuristic open spaces illuminated by other-worldly light and fugitive shadows. Clearly Saarinen’s modernism had taken a very different path from that lain out by his teachers.

As Saarinen explained in a lecture in January 1959, the “challenge was to create a building that was distinctive and memorable . . . in which architecture itself would express the drama and excitement of travel. . . . All the curvatures, all the spaces and elements, down to the shapes of the signs, information boards, railings and counters, would have to have one consistent character. As the passenger walked through the sequence of the building, we wanted him to be in a total environment where each part was the consequence of another and all belonged to the same form-world. It is our strong belief that only through such consistence and such consequential development can a building make its fullest impact and impression.”

In sum, as Architectural Forum
reported in 1962, he wanted “to catch the excitement of the trip.” His architecture thus had to be not only visually memorable but also physically palpable as sensory stimulation and in memory’s recall, and he used the all-encompassing experience of the sensuous staircase that the building’s interior had become, to make that happen.

Two further examples of mid-twentieth century staircases demonstrate the ultimate fate of “International Style” modernism in the period, particularly at sites where entertainment, consumer image-making, and memorable physical experience were paramount concerns. For Philip Johnson, whose ambivalent relationship with Mies’s architecture has now begun to be explored, the commission for the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building in New York, 1958-59 (fig. 5) proved a particular challenge and opportunity in this regard. Mies’s elegant architectural context, with its careful proportions and classical resonances, as well as the high modernist standards of the client, clearly dictated the rules: in this instance, Johnson treated the discipline of the Master as a foil against which his sensuous scenarios and luxurious materials make a particularly strong impression. Creamy travertine, highly-patterned wood paneling, shimmering metal balusters, and here again, the magical effects of Richard Kelly’s lighting design, combine to create a strong impression of an elegant and cool, yet unmistakably sexualized environment of power and restraint: the softly undulating beaded curtains by artist Marie Nichols, together with the rippling water in the pool at the center of the dining room and the pinpoints of light in the trees, soften the hard edges of the architectural context while also highlighting their presence. For Johnson—modernism’s most dedicated theorist, curator, and commentator—an architect who was always fully conscious of the complex social and sexual messages his work carried (whether at his own New Canaan estate or his numerous commissions for public and private clients), and himself a familiar denizen of these palatial spaces, this project seems to have been particularly significant.

Finally, in the work of Wallace K. Harrison at the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center in New York (1956-66), it would appear that the disciplines of modern architecture have given way under the strain of American consumerism and the need for popular narrative appeal. To the horror of critics, the building, like Johnson’s adjacent New York State Theater and Max Abramovitz’s Philharmonic (now Avery Fish-
er) Hall, draws heavily on an abstracted classicism of repeated geometries to create a monumental image of civic grandeur and public pride; the bright, white marble cladding of the buildings and the plaza itself underline these themes. For each of these architects—men who considered themselves modernists—history offered a series of models on which to draw: for Harrison, no doubt, it was the conventions of the grand European opera houses that loomed large. Thus we find an interior lobby and staircase that glitters and swoops, and walls that bend and soar, like a space-age version of the Paris Opéra.

The senses are completely engaged in a modern environment such as this: here the architecture embodies the excitement of the crowd, the beauty of the music, the soft murmur of conversation, the sound of clinking glasses, the rustle of fabrics, the warm air rising from below, and the highly-charged feeling of possibility that the experience of opera-going here both symbolically encodes and experientially communicates. Why else would it succeed so brilliantly as a backdrop for the fantasy New York honeymoon of Carrie Bradshaw and Mr. Big of “Sex and the City” fame (as photographed by Annie Leibovitz for Vogue in June 2008) whose spent, prone figures lie splayed on its crimson carpet? Here modern architecture, borrowing freely from the storehouse of history, creates a world in which not simply narrative, fantasy, and popular culture, but sexuality itself, finally seem fully at home. This moment in the mid-1960s thus represents a watershed and a turning point: while Robert Venturi might have made the case for postmodern complexity and contradiction in theory, it is to American architects like Saarinen, Johnson, and Harrison that we must turn to witness the ultimate break with modern architecture’s disciplined design and the flagrant reentry of much that it had worked so hard to exclude. Like it or not, in their work, the gloves—and a great deal more of modernism’s elegant clothing—finally come off.

Endnotes

1 For Saarinen, see Jayne Merkel, Eero Saarinen, London. For General Motors and other works, see Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Donald Albrecht, eds., Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future (New Haven: Yale University Press), passim, and 162–64; for the symbolism of mass production technology in design, see Terry Smith, Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 90.


8 “I Want to Catch the Excitement of the Trip,” Architectural Forum, July 1962, 72–79.

Promiscuity as a Project?
-“MOS definitely”¹

If we needed a concept of a fur covered roof for partying under (and we did, even if we did not know it) then the 2009 P.S.1 installation finally delivered one. The Reyner Banham aficionados will recognize in this statement the opening of his endorsement of the fur covered spaceship interiors supplied in 1968 by the movie Barbarella. Unlike Barbarella’s interiors, featuring the innocent face (and body) of the “surfer girl” Jane Fonda, Afterparty was not presented in Playboy. If it had been presented in those pages, Afterparty would have of course immediately confirmed its capacity to support the promiscuity promised us by its architects, MOS, in their (third stab at a) P.S.1 blurb.² But without an endorsement by Playboy, Afterparty’s “promiscuity” requires disciplinary deciphering. And yes, furriness may have to be part of that interpretive work, but it is hardly the most important issue at stake.
What was really interesting about Barbarella was not the fact that its furry, goopy, low-tech, soft-porn world made it onto the pages of Playboy, but that Reyner Banham’s “Triumph of Software” made a nearly canonical place for it in architectural discourse. Banham argued in this piece that Barbarella instantly acquired cult status among architects and architecture students because it was (unlike standard period Sci-Fi) giving precedence to a malleable and responsive environment over the usual hyper-articulated joinery of hardware. Barbarella’s fur and transparent plastic bubbles (predictably) hit the nerve of the architecture culture of the late sixties, confirming that the period interest in these was pervasive, and by extension, that architecture was part of a cultural continuum now finally tending towards matters of performance, feedback, and pliability: Banham’s world of optimizable functions and ambient effects. And it was through a patently promiscuous act of criticism that Banham lodged the images of Barbarella even deeper into architecture culture’s historical consciousness, from where they still conjure up one of his most consistent lines of argument, that the architectural field and practice ought to absorb into their body the intelligence of the world beyond them.

As we know only too well, in the post-post world, an argument for inter-disciplinarity might not be noticed at all, and if it were it might be judged in bad taste, if for nothing else than for its mimetic resemblance to an old, overly academic paradigm. And yet, since their Afterparty project, Hilary Sample and Michael Meredith of MOS have been arguing for “radical inclusion” on the lecture circuit. The notion of radical inclusion may signal to some a greedy unwillingness to edit, clarify, or focus, but it could be seen instead as a particularly contemporary commitment to remembering as many lessons in architecture culture, technology and politics, as possible. So what might be important about Afterparty is that for once the usual Gen X ambition to value all positions equally, to not be “too judgmental,” to find a way to do whatever the project called for, to dutifully work with constraints, actually began to resemble a viable position.

The statement for MOS’s 2009 P.S.1 project, a truncated manifesto for architectural promiscuity, starts mid-paragraph, as if it were continuing an already lively conversation paused only to wet one’s lips. It would not be too far-fetched to say that the Afterparty text updates the old both-ands position, but it is so much more than that, as it holds particular generational contradictions in tension: avant-garde and rear-garde, the representational and the real, being serious about light-heartedness, and certain about the need to travel deep down the rabbit hole of self-doubt.

MOS is one of many young American practices that in age and intellectual constitution correspond more or less to Douglas Coupland’s Gen X. This is the generation that has both endured the overly simplistic critique leveled at it by the previous one and has inherited a thoroughly academic version of that previous generation’s legacy of criticality and skepticism together with a world in which symbolic resistance is not an option. The unwillingness to state allegiances clearly (often seen as weakness of mind, or heart, by critics and more arrogant colleagues) is not due only to their meticulously educated awareness of the criticism that could be leveled at them on the basic grounds of over-simplification or dogmatism (no matter what the particular content of those allegiances might be), but is also a symptom of an actual generational belief that collecting and repurposing pieces of old legitimating narratives might be more viable today than any of those old narratives in their totality. It is this generation’s particular historical task to construct positions after several decades of their collective dismantlement and to do this at a time when just about every reputable thinker—except for Žižek (and power to him for it)—agrees that the era of stable positions and large narratives is definitively over. The task of staking out a collective trajectory and cultivating a vital discussion within the discipline about the practice of architecture is objectively harder at this point than at any time before, notwithstanding the flood of apocalyptic and dogooder narratives in circulation. It is in this context that MOS’s radical inclusion, and call to architectural promiscuity both begin to provide a framework for a new type of generational position. The vital notion at the basis of both radical inclusion and architectural promiscuity—consciously caring for a multitude of discourses, disciplines and realities—allows MOS to begin to narrate and perhaps qualify the all-encompassing versatility, blunt realism, and truly expanded expertise that together characterize the Gen X architects. Somewhere between those two notions, a third bigger one emerges: radical disciplinary promiscuity. If disciplinary promiscuity were to be embraced as an appropriate self-description by a group of architects who already speak of inclusion and expansion of expertise, it would also require further narration, nurturing and definition of goals beyond (or through) this methodologi-
cal lens, in order to indeed warrant the qualifier radical. But imagine that: not default, not matter of fact, but willed, and radical?

The Afterparty text is not just one of three P.S.1 texts MOS architects have written, it is also one of many recent texts by this team of architects that laments the current state of architectural discourse. Michael Meredith’s “Fighting against institutionalized formalism through ephemerality,” an introduction to a small (wall-sized) exhibition mounted at the GSD, calls out with irritation and derision the collectively accepted individual imperatives in architecture: “The imperatives are individual—get work, build it faster, get it published, repeat.” For most Gen X architects this statement is a truism not even worth mentioning in public, but unless it is called out as a generational frustration it merely describes the status quo and surely stays outside of discourse. It is because they yearn for a collective discussion, a cultural context to work within that is as smart and as rich in nuance as each individual architect constituting this generation, that MOS’s literary contributions often simulate a conversation.

In the reverse order of appearance, their P.S.1 blurbs begin thus:

2009 Afterparty: “One thing about the “Afterparty,” as we’re calling it, is the need to look for new promiscuities, new methods of design, after the party of a sort of high-formalism which has dominated academic discourse . . .”

2007 Prehistoric Future: “Also, you’re right that we didn’t want to do that, we wanted to make something more building-like . . . a huge singular object . . .”

2004 Plug-in Drop-out: “The manifestation of a temporary urban beach within a doubly sanctified institution (MoMA/PS1) is inherently problematic . . .”

It is hard to miss even in these few opening lines how much more earnest and proper (in literary terms) was their first P.S.1 description than the subsequent ones, and their first project for P.S.1 was in equal measure less present, more ephemeral than the subsequent two, although not any less interesting as a strategy. But the first proposal, as Michael Meredith admits (in Praxis, Untitled Number Seven), was indeed more naive (than the subsequent two) and more accepting of the contemporary themes and trends in the American scene, even if not exactly managing to hit the right note when it comes to the image of complexity (that was de rigueur for P.S.1). More importantly, Plug-in Drop-out was developed before the MOS team began to articulate their interest in the historical avant-garde and in the idea of simulating a new beginning. In the context of relative flatness of architectural discourse (regardless of and in equal measure due to its ever-expanding breadth and plurality) and in opposition to that individualistic imperative to get the commission, build, publish, and repeat the same steps again, simulating a break and simulating a conversation may be the only way to effectively estrange the familiar conditions of practice and discourse. Thus a new beginning (a “desert island”—in Meredith’s retooling of Deleuze), and not under the pressure of an economic or ecological catastrophe, but as an artificially induced imperative to refocus the cultural project in architecture, goes hand in hand with delirious soliloquy (earnest or exaggerated). Both the simulation of a new beginning and talking to oneself have a certain self-help value, but are also invitations to a generational conversation, if nothing else.

The affectation of texts that start mid paragraph, or the atmosphere of painful confusion that permeates Michael Meredith’s 2002 movie (Alternate Ending 1: The Glimmering Noise), are over-exaggerated and openly artificial (even as the affectation is one of absolute earnestness). And depending on one’s taste for artificiality (or its opposite: authenticity) this affectation either invokes hilarity or aversion. But simulation might be the only way to change the course of things today, and here
following Slavoj Žižek’s recent proposals for the course of radical politics today, by simulation I especially mean a kind of historical imagination that actually manages to change the structure of historical time itself. Only if we can simulate a belief (or actually believe) that a certain outcome of events is inevitable can we act in the present as if it were our believed, or simulated, future’s history. If we believed that a generational discourse and focus were not just possible, but inevitable, we could begin to actually produce them into existence.\textsuperscript{11}

Promiscuity. Critics use this term in architecture reviews and they mean different things by it. Sometimes the most grotesque barf rendered in gold gets a wink, a nudge and a snicker, but architectural promiscuity in MOS’s work and writing is of a different kind, not some feeling we are all simply supposed to agree upon, it is not a case of personal taste turned into a pedagogical (read: religious) imperative. In MOS’s latest P.S.1 statement, quoted above, new promiscuities seem to be identified with new methods of design, and more importantly, placed historically in opposition to high formalism (the same recent bling that someone else might identify as promiscuous). But this simple qualification does not do justice to the coruscating kaleidoscope of projects presented on MOS’ website—for your pleasure and use—in the properly contemporary open source format. We need the idea of radical inclusion in order to ensure that new methods alone not be mistaken for promiscuity. It is not Processing, or MOS’s applet MOScat, that are intrinsically promiscuous. Promiscuity needs normalcy (or something like moral purity) in order to be meaningful. Only with the historical and cultural knowledge of the architectural discipline (and Gen X is well versed in it) can one really decipher MOS’s promiscuity, since it is a behavior born of exactly that impulse to truncate and splice different (and different degrees of historically incompatible) disciplinary narratives and tools. Environmental optimization, constructivist social project, and its non-objective art together with parametrically generated upside down catenary curves, real material properties, and fictional movie scripts . . . it is not any single method here that is promiscuous, but rather, it is disciplinary promiscuity itself that constitutes a new method, or at least a more forcefully stated description of a historical predicament. This narrative of inclusion and expansion of expertise is a frequent chant among Gen X architects, but MOS elevates it from a default position to an ambition.

Once they have convinced us to consider disciplinary promiscuity as radical and not just as a titillating apology for confusion and lack of judgment: how do we evaluate that furry collection of chimneys? How is the architectural artifact implicated in this narrative? Processing and thatch, the most advanced and the most primitive of architectural techniques, don’t simply produce a promiscuous object together. And even if some aspects of the Afterparty beast were grotesque or abject (as Meredith suggests in his Artforum confession) every photograph and certainly every digital representation that accompanies the project is mesmerizing.\textsuperscript{12} They are like the images of the sixties modular furniture rendered in more saturated Dan Flavin neons, but with more taste and a tinge of ecstasy.

The shape of Afterparty chimneys is one of the instantiations of MOS’s research into the assemblies of shapes that are, well, chimneys on one end—both in terms of their thermal performance and their figural reference—and hipped roofs on the other end. From certain angles, the hipped roofs provide the cartoon gabled roof house image, and when spliced with chimneys, they turn into elongated houses or squashed, primitive hut versions of chimneys. The hybrid shapes are not standard, but they are also not without reference. Some are more and some are less housy, some are more and some are less chimney stacks, but their aggregation into assemblies ensures that the effect of recognition is elastic and hovers over the entire grouping, even if unevenly. Equally importantly, recognition here is not only recognition of the archetypal reference at play, but also of the deformational logic that is
clearly effecting results without being didactically available to the viewers.

The qualifier that describes the ‘09 P.S.1 installation the best comes from Mark Goulthorpe’s quotation of William Forsyth’s aesthetic ambitions—precise indeterminacy. In Afterparty, precise indeterminacy applies to some extent to the composition of shapes, and in this sense the term corresponds to Goulthorpe’s use of it, but the multitude of references invoked by the project and ultimately impossible to synthesize into a singular reading could also be described as ensuring a whole new level of interpretive instability. I saw Barbarella in it, and Chewbacca, natural history and the Muppets, primitive huts, African spas, Rossi’s chimneys, minimalist furniture (underneath), Surrealist objects, MOS’s own formal motives. Some of those references were funny, others operational. But this is not to say that the architectural artifact was disheveled or incoherent, even on a bad hair day. It was precise (and tasteful) even as it summoned up referential and compositional instability.

Postmodernism 101 (Jameson and maybe Lyotard—not Jencks)? Maybe if it were 1999, but since we are talking about the generation that “grew up” with sampling, with networks as fully internalized and lived protocols, contributing to and learning from Wikipedia, actually taking their environmental responsibility seriously, a generation that remembers with nostalgia (of someone who has never been there) the world in which external, authoritative truths were preconditions for action—I beg to differ. MOS is struggling to reconnect to broken narratives, to simulate referentiality and with it to simulate both the effects of recognition and strangeness that are only possible against a background of references and their baggage.

Recognizing MOS’s own formal research among the rush of personal and cultural references triggered by Afterparty is of great consequence for any possible interpretation of the narrative of architectural promiscuity. The imperative to radically include even incompatible issues and methods does not also mean that MOS’s form making is circumstantial or determined by that inclusion alone. Radical inclusion is not everything goes. Radical inclusion may describe MOS’s generational baggage, with an invitation to interpret its possibilities as radical, but it is not an exhaustive, critical description of their project. The structurally unstable pile and the composi-
tionally unstable stack exceed the narratives of inclusion and architectural promiscuity, they are born of MOS’s particular formal interpretation of a confluence of issues and methods, they are not inevitable outcomes of picking up Processing and caring about the science behind airflow patterns.

MOS is in the “business of producing images”—to invoke Banham again (and merely to confirm what the architects confessed already). Some of those images are good enough to be centerfold pin-up sized posters, good enough to decorate architecture students’ desks just as Barbarella lounging in acrylic tubes did at the end of the sixties. They are filled with the thrill of hip color and the perfect measure of optimism and doubt, and if the formal obsessions that permeate these projects were not “doing it” for you on their own they are now held together with a narrative of disciplinary promiscuity. MOS’s version of inducing the fleeting utopian sentiment through objects, images and their own positioning narrative works insofar as they manage to reframe and teach us about the historical architectural projects they are interested in, and of course get us to pay attention to the artifacts they are churning out. Most importantly then, MOS is in the business of simulating discourse around their work and around their generation’s predicament. This is perhaps what it means to both begin anew and use everything at one’s disposal to do it.

The world we live in is everything Reyner Banham had dreamt of and more. Barbarella and her furry spaceship have been canonized, and made mundane again, functionalism with a small “f” is everywhere refracting through one or another kind of parametric command and control, and dealers in architecture culture are fast to get on the iPod app bandwagon (or any other equally trendy and virally spreading medium for dissemination). Architecture is everywhere, everything is architecture, and transgressions of disciplinary boundaries, or of the once useful boundary between art and life don’t phase us. In a world in which “damn near everything presents itself as familiar” as Jonathan Lethem described it recently, making familiar strange again through simulating new memories and conversations might reframe our role in that world. The contemporary imperative is to construct narratives of relevance again, and to do that without forgetting who we are in the process of rewiring the links to the history and to the future of our discipline. In offering Afterparty as our own version of Barbarella, I too hope we can begin again, restart a conversation (that has not happened yet) about radical disciplinary promiscuity as a position that enabled an entire generation to leverage its expanded expertise as it embraced and rewrote the old political and cultural projects in architecture to fit its time.
Endnotes

1. “MOS definitely” was, according to Hilary Sample and Michael Meredith of MOS, their own self-cheering slogan when they launched their practice. See, “Notes on MOS,” on the firm’s website, http://www.mos-office.net/.

2. I won’t go into the politics of the P.S.1 Young Architects program, but the fact that MOS had a chance at three tryouts, whether they liked it or not, and it would be hard to ‘hate’ that opportunity, highlights the fact that a number of the ‘elders’ in the field who get to be asked by MoMA to make recommendations support or are intrigued by MOS’s work.


4. Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample started calling out this notion of radical inclusion before the 2009 P.S.1 competition took place. They at least discussed radical inclusion at their Emerging Voices talk at the Architectural League in New York in 2008, and Michael Meredith has published an article in Perspecta 41 on the theme of inclusion as well. See Michael Meredith, “Radical Inclusion! (A Survival Guide for Post-Architecture),” Perspecta 41: The Grand Tour, December 2008.


6. A number of Žižek’s books can serve as examples of his holding out against the common description of the inevitability of the intellectual disintegration of the contemporary moment. His In Defense of Lost Causes even starts with a literary maneuver that teases the reader into nodding in agreement with the description of a flattened world, before it forcefully states a contrary position (Verso, 2008). And his First as Tragedy, Then as Farce is dedicated to charting a possible trajectory for a real contemporary legacy of Marxism, which admittedly even here requires a type of reconstitution of the Marxist narrative to properly address the contemporary fabric of political issues (Verso, 2009).

7. The text for Michael Meredith’s GSD exhibition on Avalanche Journal is posted on MOS’s website, http://www.mos-office.net/.

8. All of the P.S.1 texts are published on MOS’s own website, http://www.mos-office.net/.


10. Michael Meredith’s studio brief for a fall 2008 option studio at the GSD was entitled Desert Island and it invited students and critics to consider what a new beginning in architecture might entail. The title and much of the sentiment of the brief were indebted to Gilles Deleuze’s essay “Desert Island,” in Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953–1974) (Semiotext(e), 2002).

11. Of course this is only a small and some may think trivial instantiation of Žižek’s “project time,” since his point with this way of rethinking the structure of historical thinking is aimed at making serious, or lost causes possible to think radically again, or anew. I agree with him on those larger issues, but I also think that what he describes is transferable to thinking about the contemporary predicament of the architectural profession and discourse as well. See for example the ending of First as Tragedy, Then as Farce (Verso, 2009).


14. It is relatively easy to draw parallels between Michael Meredith’s recent description of the Bouroullec brothers and the ambition and effects of MOS’s own work. “Utopian jouissance” could be said to be an effect of MOS’s work, equally localized in scale and in time and conceived of as “aggregated assemblies” as the work of the Bouroullecs. And so far, MOS architects seem in equal measure satisfied and frustrated with this. See Michael Meredith, “Whatever Happened to ‘Whatever Happened to Total Design’? The Momentary Utopian Jouissance of the Bouroullec Brothers.” Harvard Design Magazine, What About the Inside? Number 29, Fall/Winter 2008-09.

Somewhere between a fantasy and a plan, I remember walking down the long corridors of MIT, seeing the periodic Men’s and Women’s rooms and imagining perpetrating a sort of hack. In it, I would return during the early morning hours, bearing black paint and the proper stencils, and I would etch in a set of parentheses ( ) before all the indicators: MEN.

( ) MEN

Into the parentheses I would add a (yet undetermined) two-letter prefix.

( _ _ ) MEN

While I was never quite certain what two-letter prefix to insert, I was always certain as to the meaning and intent of the action/inscription. The act was designed as a spatial, political and linguistic repositioning gesture undertaken to shift males away from having claim to the neutral/root term of “humanity” and simultaneously place their designation, now, “ _ _ men,” in a position equally offset from the center as that of “women.” What had previously been “men” and designating males, would now be “ _ _ men.” This shift would align “ _ _ ” and “wo” as commensurable modifiers of the root term, “men,” forming the latter half of the word. “Men” or “man” would then be freed to become the gender-neutral root term designating humanity that it professes to be.1

What interested me in this act of redesignation was not that it would be a revelation, but rather the fact that the very obviousness of the inequality of the terms and of the privileged association of males to the neutral, is readily apparent yet continually disregarded. That is, it is not the revelation of this situation that my act was aimed at unveiling—but the fact that it remains unchanged. The obviousness of this situation in which a gendered, ideologically privileged term is offered as neutral, is a perfect example of what Roland Barthes characterized as myth, which he defined as speech that presents its ideology as natural or depoliticized.2

Changing “men” to “(_ _)men” entails a distinct spatial component that insists we respond to such naturalizing of a privileged ideology. In pointing to the relation between the root word and its prefix, the parentheses became a necessary player in this repositioning by literally displacing “men” to off-center, thereby marking both the historical situation and its redress. Shifting the neutral term for humanity so that it is no longer owned by one gender opens up numerous situations for acknowledging and revising, both spatially and socially, the relations involved. Against this, while it was the unequal gender positioning which remained foremost in my mind, the architectural designating of gender opens up broader sets of relations including those between language, space, form, society and architecture. Prying open this linguistic formation thereby divulges a set of problematics composed of privileged relations between language, on the one hand, and materiality, history, and actions on the other. Such thinking suggests that language is somehow separated from the actual or real, which by contrast holds some unique claim to being neutral matters of fact. It is this view of language that allows for the impact and import of the ideological to be continually reinscribed in linguistic formations.

I think one reason that I never fulfilled this fantasy was partly

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1. Nana Last, Repositioning Center: Architecture, Gender and Fluidity.
due to my uncertainty over what that two-letter prefix should be. At its best, the act was imagined as more than instituting a new term but rather as reinaugurating a dialogue premised in redacting collectivity. Collectivity is of particular issue as, while, in some cases the term “man” might nominally refer to all of humanity, in many cases—as in “all men are created equal”—that is patently inaccurate. Rather, the term appears in discourses that have excluded populations such as women from various rights, most notably the right to vote: exactly the right necessary to enter into the collectivity designated by “men.”

The addition of the two-letter prefix to “men” was aimed at forcing the split between the enacted meanings and the seeming ones. Towards this end, the repositioning of “men” away from the center was not aimed at suppressing conflict and ideology, but at fully acknowledging the linguistic, spatial and ideological components implicated in such designations. This formal/spatial gesture, along with its obvious commentary on the role of gender in society, simultaneously points to the uneasy associations that architecture (typically associated with matters of fact, the real, the material, and the functional) has historically held to linguistic designations on the one hand and to concomitant associations to ideology on the other. Such rifts are evident, for example, in functionalism’s offering an ideological distinction between showing—which it embraced—and saying (linguistic designation), which it rejected as a sign of the failure of architecture to show. The suppression of saying, however, is not neutral, but serves to validate unacknowledged ideological choices. In that view, function needs to be evident—and lie at the root of—form, in order to legitimate the architect’s decision-making process. In other words, function, presented as neutral, is proffered to eradicate both the appearance and existence of the architect taking an (ideological) position in the design decision-making process. This suppresses both subjectivity and positionality, and gender is all about positioning.

While architecture and architecture theory in the 1980’s and into the 1990’s embraced the linguistic, issues of gender, subjectivity and historical positioning, over the last decade, these issues have largely been pushed out of much of architecture (theory), denounced as dated, their demise going the way of Derrida, despite the continued importance and lack of resolution. As the editor of this issue of thresholds so aptly stated regarding these concerns: “I am eager to bring these questions back into a productive discussion of architecture, if only because they seem to have become so dated and because they clearly are not.”
Recently, however, there has emerged the promise that relations between such dichotomies as subject/object, interior/exterio as well as others, are being brought back into the discussion from a new standpoint. That new position is a product of developing models of spatiality emerging around the construct of flow, a concept that—in suggesting a new set of spatial relations that specifically go towards undermining dichotomies—has implications for a wide range of constructs, including that of gender. More fully developing that promise, however, requires not isolating the spatial and formal aspects of flow, but understanding how flow interweaves the linguistic, social, and ideological with the spatial. It is out of that interaction that the situating of social constructs such as gender arises.

Looking back at the initial fantasy, I see that it partly emerged from noting the sameness of the doors bearing the inscriptions: MEN and WOMEN. This line of thinking was noted by Jacques Lacan in his 1953 essay, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud” which offered the story and accompanying diagram of a girl and boy sitting facing one another on a train as it pulls into a train station. The train comes to a stop so that the division between the train window aligns with that between the doors to the men’s and women’s rooms in the station. This allowed each child to announce it’s “_ _” in agreement with her or his own gender, thereby highlighting the fact that the doors were otherwise the same. Similarly, along MIT’s corridors, the sameness and seeming neutrality across rooms that more or less differed, was in contrast to the divergent linguistic designations. My concern here, though, is not with the suggestion or break with sameness across the threshold of those doors, something more akin to the traditional architecture concern with how a facade or surface expresses or hides what lies on its other side. Rather, my concern is with how the architecture’s sameness (of the doors, in this case) lends a sense of neutrality to the words stenciled on its surfaces—words intended to designate matters of fact.

There are a range of articles that could follow at this point: the 1970’s anti-functionalist one might focus on architecture’s relation between exterior form and interior function, or the early 1990’s one might pick up from Lacan issues of desire and nature/culture divisions. In 2009 my concern is with how those nature/culture dichotomy discussions have been broached (ane?) by architecture’s past decade focus on biology (DNA, monsters, morphogenetics, etc.) and other processes of natural growth (icebergs, clouds, crystals, natural properties of materials, etc.). The particular aspect that interests me here is that many of these discussions emerge in and around the concept of flow or fluidity. Flow is frequently associated with the breaking down of traditional architectural dichotomies (or perhaps dichotomies themselves?) such as nature/culture, inside/outside, container contained or object/field. Examples that come readily to mind are Reiser + Umemoto’s discussion in Atlas of Novel Tectonics or many entries in the Gen(home) exhibition catalog from the LA MAK Center.

A number of important issues and related confusions are raised in importing the construct of flow into architecture. For example, what is it that flows in the case of architecture? The form of the architecture, or its materiality? Is it the spaces, or the humanity that inhabits them, or our experience of those
spaces? Or does flow disrupt any or all of these distinctions? These issues emerge in accordance with flow’s potential for producing new spatial models that bear on issues of gender. For example, changing the linguistic designation from “men” to “_ _ men” points to the spatial and ideological aspects of center, eccentricity, neutrality, etc. embedded within linguistic designations of gender. Accordingly, the introduction of new spatial models as developed under the auspices of flow, can be mined for correlated aspects, including potential linguistic, social and ideological implications or structures. What remains important is not to have these socio-political implications and possibilities associated with emerging spatial models remain unacknowledged, unseen, or buried under the more readily apparent formal and spatial aspects. This is all the more crucial with the model of fluidity, as it aspires to embody interchangeability and connectivity.

Despite its own construct, there remain a number of difficulties in eliciting the social, linguistic and ideological aspects of flow in relation to its formal ones. This is the case not simply because they are overwhelmed by the visual and spatial facets. Much of the difficulty, instead, stems from how models used to generate flow are themselves situated or presented. For example, many models used to generate flow arise from scientific and biological examples or are derived from the natural properties of materials. The employing of these models, however, frequently proclaims to be a focus on the “real”—a term selected to decisively distinguish this set of concerns from the focus and inundation in the linguistic with its associated criticality that marked so much of architecture practice and theory in the last decades of the twentieth century.

This stance, though, is at odds with the proclamation of many of these same practices in suggesting that flow undermines or redefines a set of dichotomies. The breakdown of dichotomies is a spatio-social-linguistic act that, in the case of architecture and flow, produces new forms of boundary, connection or dividing lines. By developing new spatial models that redefine the formal, spatial and material relations active in these dichotomies, architecture produces models that can be shared by other fields, including linguistic ones and discourses on gender. These formations clearly present us with the bases for potential new social relations. In the dissolution of the dichotomy between container and contained, or between field and object, for example, the neutral root position—comparable to “man”—is rethought. Such a spatial rethinking dislodges a point of central stasis (think “man” losing its centrality to become eccentric as in “_ _ man”), substituting in its place a fluid repositioning with the potential to disallow the seeming neutrality of stasis and fixed centrality themselves. In the case of gender terms, this loss of a fixed center is yet to be produced, no less occupied. Against this, the spatial models developed around flow can be mined for spatio-linguistic formations that respond to issues of repositioning gender. Such repositioning works both from the spatial to the linguistic/gender/social and back, as it implies a concomitant rejection of the reinstating of the linguistic versus material/real dichotomy as equally anachronistic. This is to say that architectural models of flow, while spatial and formal, have linguistic components and social counterparts and relations that can be recognized and seized as productive.

While many discussions of fluidity proclaim little socio-political efficacy, their anti-dichotomy stance suggests other pos-
sibilities. This yields a curious situation in which such spatio-social dichotomies are rejected while architecture’s social efficacy is denied. While I am not suggesting that architecture can singularly achieve sweeping social change, my point is exactly that architecture does not act in isolation. Rather, architecture is embedded in a related and interwoven set of constructs that have various linguistic, social, material, etc., counterparts, extensions, practices and meanings. Such interrelations are paramount with the construct of flow. It is within that framework that architecture produces, inscribes and acts as an arbiter of social structures. Architecture thereby contributes to what sets of issues we acknowledge and which ones we present as neutral or simple matters of fact. Accordingly, it proclaims those inscriptions in a range of ways at times not so differently than the halls of MIT with its frosted glass planes declaring MEN, WOMEN, room numbers, department names and a host of other things. These designations point to the structuring of our society and to the way we varyingly suppress or respond to those differences.

What then, does it mean for a movement that works to eradicate (certain) dichotomies to do so by reinstating another set of them as when the critical is declared in contradistinction to the projective—or the linguistic in opposition to the real/material? Why are these various components of dichotomy not acknowledged as active on the same plane; a plane now envisaged varyingly as Mobius strips, double helixes, etc.? The introduction of such spatial models, brought to bear on a set of linguistic dichotomies, opens the possibilities for other forms of dialogue rather than needing to be legitimized by reinstating older dichotomies. Nor do they need to repress the linguistic/subjective/critical in the turn to the natural, scientific, etc. This is all the more important when brought to bear on a socially situated discipline such as architecture.

The promise of fluidity thus enters architecture to reimagine relations along and across boundaries by generating new spatial models, many based on importing constructs and models from other disciplines. These have then been used to generate forms of spatiality in architecture with the potential—formally, spatially, materially, and in terms of content—to revise our idea of the formation and functioning of boundaries as well as spatially constructed dichotomies. This results in developing a different set of relations both laterally and across, both linguistically and materially, which bear upon directly and indirectly the locating of issues of gender, something forestalled when the linguistic is cut off from the materiality of these and other models, or when the social is severed from or made subservient to a fore-fronting of the biological, the natural or the material.
Endnotes

1 While the use of man remains in force, other changes to various ideological designations have been introduced of late, including the switch to the use of she in general references and the comparable development of the term, B.C.E. in lieu of B.C. that at once acknowledges and transforms the encoding of a social structure.


3 This situating is not as changed as it might seem. References, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the first moon landing uphold this. The discussion regularly arrives at Neil Armstrong’s ‘misspoken’ small step for man and big leap for mankind as a grammatical problem corrected by replacing “man” with “a man” to show the difference between an individual human and the collectivity of humankind. The claiming of neutrality and the broader conflation of it with white, male, heterosexuality is also recently confirmed most publicly in the senate judiciary debates over the supreme court nominee, Sonya Sotomayor. In those debates, the nominee’s acknowledgement of a position as a non-white female is placed at odds with the—unacknowledged—assumed (neutral) position of a white male. Again such related positioning re-emerges in the debates surrounding the recent arrest of and dropping of charges against Henry Louis Gates.

4 Acting on the plural form more readily invokes the collectivity, rather than the singular form that attempts to further remove itself from the people it refers to.

5 Subjectivity, it should be noted, is denigrated as an internal reality divorced from an external reality deemed the real. It is that division—or implied separation—that is part of what is at stake, which, although challenged under structuralist and post-structuralist models of subjectivity, retained much of its force when the knowledge gained from those methodologies is rejected or abandoned rather than incorporated in future thought.

6 One suggestion that emerges is a focus on architecture’s various systems, including plumbing, mechanical and so on, as well as certain formal structures.

7 And yet—do we want to—is it possible—or desirable, I wonder, to get rid of dichotomies?
To overcome difficulties is the last stage in the progress of art. After civilized man has had every thing which he can desire in season, his next wish is to heighten the enjoyment by consummation at extraordinary seasons. The merit here consists in conquering nature.¹

— J. C. Loudon

Prior to Rudolph Jacob Camerarius’s definitive study of plant sexuality in 1694, *De Sexu Plantarum Epistola*, the literal and metaphorical means by which fertility and sex have guided a landscape’s design, use, and interpretation were most often framed according to their significance in human sexuality.² The cultivation of landscape as a stage for physical delight and sensual pleasure established the garden as both a setting for, and symbol of, sexual expression.³ Garden iconography, which referred to romantic or erotic themes contained within classical narratives; and dense vegetation, which afforded seclusion and privacy, together helped facilitate this dual role. The spatial relationships these elements lent gardens from antiquity to the eighteenth century provided romanticized settings for courtship rituals and sexual trysts.⁴
Plants, particularly flower species, were also considered relative to anthropomorphic references, or for their symbolization of human sexuality and fertility.\(^5\) Classified as members of a lower order within the Aristotelian worldview, their own sexual traits remained both unacknowledged and therefore largely unobserved. In the exceptional case in which male and female plants of a specific species were recognized and actively cultivated, as in the Mesopotamian date palm plantations circa 885 B.C.E, intuitive knowledge regarding plant sex was verified empirically through methods of artificial fertilization that had been perfected over several centuries. Since fruit production required gametes from both sexes, male flowers, and thus male pollen, were entwined with female flowers to ensure pollination.\(^6\) The fertilization process, made evident by Camerarius’s findings, led him to sense the science’s potential use: “The difficult question, which is also a new one, is whether a female plant can be fertilized by a male of another kind... and whether, and in what degree altered, a seedling will arise therefrom.”\(^7\)

The developments within botanical science and related cultivation technologies have introduced a scale shift from the human body to the flower, such that the garden’s evocation of human interaction is juxtaposed with the cellular level of plant reproduction. This essay provides a broad overview of human intervention in plant reproduction; gauges the ability to precipitate propagation, pollination, and gene transfer; and assesses the influence such acceleration techniques exert on planting practices and vegetation characteristics within human designed landscapes.\(^8\)

**accelerated propagation**

In J.C. Loudon’s *An Encyclopedia of Gardening*, an extensively detailed historical and technical overview of landscape gardening first published in 1822, he stated that “scientific processes and operations include the master-operations of gardening as an art of culture. These operations are all mechanical; but some depend, for their beneficial result, on chemical changes... but the greater number are dependent on the laws of vegetable life.”\(^9\) Loudon systematically cataloged and described those techniques by which orchard and ornamental vegetation can be propagated by both seed and vegetative means (fig. 1), and emphasized early plant preparation as one method by which to accelerate vegetative growth.\(^10\) His considerations underscored the importance a scientific understanding of plant sexuality imparted to maximizing landscape and agricultural cultivation.

In utilization in Babylonian date and fig production as early as 4,000 years ago, the vegetative propagation techniques Loudon detailed take advantage of a plant cell’s regenerative potential...
2 Micropropagation of rice plant. Image courtesy of the International Rice Research Institute.

3 Mobile hives unloaded into cultivated field.
to produce any needed vegetative organ.\textsuperscript{11} These techniques—which include cuttings, division, and grafting—provide a range of measures by which singular plants provide the base material for implementing whole landscapes. As opposed to seed propagation, vegetative propagation retains all the genetic material of the parent plant; all of the resulting offspring are clones, and thereby maintain all of the unique characteristics that would be lost through sexual reproduction. The lack of genetic diversity in a landscape of clones increases the landscape's susceptibility to devastation from insect infestation and blights. Yet, despite the disadvantages, vegetative propagation, in particular from cuttings, permits the generation of new stock in a limited space, at a faster rate, with a higher percentage of propagation success, and for a theoretically indefinite time.\textsuperscript{13}

Developed at the turn of the twentieth century, and first put into practical use with orchid production in 1922, contemporary vegetative micropropagation techniques stimulate new plant development through the placement of tissue culture into an artificial growth medium under sterile conditions (fig. 2). Operating at the cellular level, the process demonstrates the cell's capability to form a full plant. Not unlike scions grafted onto disease resistant rootstock, micropropagation protects the new plants from pathogens; isolates desirable traits for new varieties at the cell level; utilizes little parent material; and, perhaps most critically, permits rapid multiplication.\textsuperscript{13}

**artificial insemination**

Although beekeeping for honey production had existed as a practice for over 4,000 years, the insect's role in flower pollination remained unproven until Arthur Dobbs' discovery in 1750.\textsuperscript{14} His observations led him to conclude the insect's role in cross-fertilization, and confirmed Aristotle's observation that bees confined themselves to singular plant species during individual runs for pollen and nectar.\textsuperscript{15} However, despite Dobbs' findings, the potential influence of honey bees in pollination of specific plant species was not studied until M.B. Waite's publication *Pollination of Pear Flowers* in 1895. In the United States, migratory hives for honey production began in 1895, while renting of colonies for crop pollination began in 1910.\textsuperscript{16} Aided by moveable frame hives, this migratory practice replaced the use of woven baskets, or skeps, such that mobile hives distributed among crop fields (fig. 3) replaced the construction of bee boles or freestanding bee houses.\textsuperscript{17}

Honey bees have an effective pollination range of 180 meters, which suggests that the hives be placed at intervals of 150 to 180 meters. According to a Cornell University study published in 2000, the bee pollination industry contributes $14.6 billion to crop cultivation within the United States. Of the 2.9 million hives, nearly one million were trucked to California almond orchards alone, thereby demonstrating the national level at which hives operate, on the one hand; as well as a pattern of travel based on the reproductive cycles of the various crops being grown, on the other.\textsuperscript{18} In this regard, human management serves as an agent in large-scale pollination processes, including the selective breeding of plants more attractive to bees, as well as the breeding of bees for a particular preference for specific crops.\textsuperscript{19}

**gene manipulation**

The 300 species of the more than 3,000 edible plants currently cultivated for food production have undergone, to differing degrees, selective breeding at some stage in order to improve any number of traits, including yield rates, fruit size, taste, disease resistance, or even salt tolerance.\textsuperscript{20} The process has been fundamental to agricultural production since human populations transitioned from a nomadic to an agrarian existence, and serves as a foundation by which subsequent genetic manipulation can be understood.

Agricultural development is predicated on a process of domestication, whereby specific desirable traits exhibited by a few plants—such as ease of harvest—provided the seed base for subsequent crop generations. This domestication produced plants whose propagation led to ever greater harvests, even as the propagation cycles resulted in the plant species' gradual loss of natural defense mechanisms. In essence, humanity and cultivated crop species became co-dependent: humanity provided an environment in which the plants could thrive, while the plant provided the needed sustenance for growing populations.\textsuperscript{21}
new cultivars whose sexual traits maximized productivity and disease resistance, while simultaneously decreasing labor, fertilizer, and water inputs. However, each change in a plant’s genetic characteristics has ushered in adaptations in diseases and pests. The practice of cross breeding has further decreased plant diversity, given the tendency to cross breed between a limited genetic base. As a result, increased yields became more and more dependent on chemical inputs.

Biotechnology has arisen to address the above limitations, and has further decreased the scale by which the propagation of plants is defined. Biotechnology, in general terms, relies on basic molecular proteins as building blocks for producing new, desired traits (fig. 4). The technology permits the transfer of genetic material between organisms, including the transfer of genes from one species to another. Even in the instance when the gene transfer is between members of the same species, viruses are utilized as the vector by which the gene is spliced into its new host. It is the cross between species barriers that has raised the greatest concerns and the most vocal criticisms, yet there is additional unrest involving how the changed organism could introduce unpredictable genetic material into the ecosystem.

68 percent of transgenic crops are planted in the United States, with many of the crops altered either to increase their resistance to herbicides, or to produce their own natural insecticide. The intent is to reduce chemical use, which has obvious benefits to the surrounding ecosystem. Gene transfer develops these traits at a rate significantly faster than traditional cross breeding. Yet agricultural crops are not the only plants that could be altered through these techniques. Programming for salt or drought resistance would be beneficial for plant propagation in a range of environments, agricultural or forested alike. Similarly, reproductive methods that eliminate the need for sexual propagation by seed are being investigated. Seeds collected from plants originally grown from genetically modified or even hybrid seed stock cannot be planted, since the sexual traits will not match those of the parents. Due to this, most major seed companies, such as Monsanto, have to produce new seed to be sold each growing season. To counter this, and to “simplify breeding schemes and genetically perpetuate” a particular plant hybrid, the hope is to exploit crosses between plants that reproduce asexually.

Conclusion
Contemporary large scale landscapes, faced with protracted implementation schedules, and often times ecologically de-
granted sites, provide examples in which plant propagation and pollination techniques are critical to the project’s design strategy, and suggest biotechnology’s potential landscape applications. OMA’s competition entry for Downsview Park in Toronto, and Field Operations’ Fresh Kills Park on Staten Island, are two such projects whose vegetation establishment is contingent on the rapid propagation and maturation of plant stock. In each project, cuttings from vegetation planted in nurseries located on site could serve as one method by which each respective Park’s vegetation is propagated and grown. In West 8’s 1992 master-plan for Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport, honey bee hives were programmed as one component of the design strategy in order to help pollinate the site’s extensive clover fields and 25,000 birch tree stands, thereby increasing the rate at which the landscape matured. These examples point to the consideration of landscape as a place born of specific processes.

J.B. Jackson, in his essay “The Word Itself,” defined landscape as “a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the process of nature. As Eliade expresses it, it represents man taking upon himself the role of time.” Jackson’s statement has been referenced in contemporary landscape architectural theory to emphasize the means by which landscape architecture can engage dynamic processes in the implementation and management of built landscapes. In context of the above propagation practices and plant related biotechnology, Jackson’s statement parallels Loudon’s own observations, in which he states that “vegetation is accelerated, retarded and modified, almost at the will of the operator; and this is done by processes, which suppose him to possess a considerable degree of physiological and chemical science, as well as practical skill and mechanical dexterity.” In this regard, the application of techniques that take advantage of plants’ cellular regeneration capabilities, pollination strategies, and gene transfer provide opportunities to cultivate vegetation capable of accelerated establishment, long term resilience, and performing an ecological service. These techniques, however, must respect the need to maintain species diversity; ensure that genetic manipulation remains environmentally benign once the plant becomes a component of a much larger ecosystem; and, utilize the processes that surround a flower’s development as a setting by which the body experiences place.
Endnotes


2 Julius von Sachs, *History of Botany* 1530–1860, revised by Isaac Bayley Balfour, translated by Henry E.F. Garnsey (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967, first published 1890), 385–90. Camerarius’s *De Sexu Plantarium Epistola* (Letter Concerning the Sex of Plants), published 1694, Tubingham, Germany, was the first series of experiments to identify the male and female reproductive organs in plants. Sachs’ incredibly comprehensive study frames the development of this botanical knowledge in context of allied fields in the physical and philosophical sciences. For an additional discussion of plant sex knowledge, see also Sheldon P. Hayes, “A History of Our Concept of Sex,” *Bios* 5, no. 3(1934): 98–111.

3 John Prest, *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and Re-Creation of Paradise* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981). Prest equates gardens designed for physical delight as an anti-Paradise, a reference to the two Creation stories depicted in Genesis. Toward this, Prest notes that a consequence of the consumption of knowledge, and thereby expulsion from Eden, could be understood as the awakening of sexual differences and erotic desire.


5 Elizabeth Hyde, *Cultivated Power: Flowers, Culture, and Politics in the Reign of Louis XIV* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 3–19. Hyde’s book describes the manner in which plants were compared to human male and female body parts, in addition to noting their symbolic importance for various life events: loss of virginity, marriage and sexual union, death; fertility rituals during planting and harvesting; and the exertion of cultural power, if not male dominance.

6 George Sarton, “The Artificial Fertilization of Date-Palms in the Time of Ashur-Nasir-Pal B.C. 885–860,” *Isis* 21, no. 1(1934): 8-13, http://www.jstor.org/stable/224804. Most plant species do not have separate male and female plants, containing, instead, male and female reproductive organs within a single flower. Given the Greeks’ contention that plants were of a lesser order than animals, and therefore sexless, the process of reproduction remained less evident. The date palm is the exception. As a critical fruit bearing tree for the Assyrians, both economically and food-wise, the need to have both sexes for successful cultivation came to be known. See also A.H. Pruessner, “Date Culture in Ancient Babylonia,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 36, no. 3(1920): 213–32, http://www.jstor.org/stable/528126. For a general discussion of date trees and early plant hybridization, see H.F. Roberts’ *Plant Hybridization Before Mendel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), 1–15. As Roberts notes, the fact that other plants could be improved utilizing artificial fertilization, as in the date palm, never materialized for reasons that remain unexplained.

7 Roberts, *Plant Hybridization Before Mendel*, 15. The original quotation is from Camerarius’s *De Sexu Plantarium Epistola* (Letter Concerning the Sex of Plants).


14 Eva Crane, The Archaeology of Beekeeping (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Human populations had harvested honey from wild nests at least as early as 8,000-2,000 B.C.E., as evidenced by Mesolithic paintings found in Spain. The earliest evidence for beekeeping as a practice, in which humans constructed colonies for honey production, were found in bas-relief scenes in Egypt that date back to 2,400 B.C.E. Verne Grant, “Arthur Dobbs (1750) and the Discovery of the Pollination of Flowers by Insects,” Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club 76, no.3(1949): 217–19. Despite Julius von Sachs’ declaration that Joseph G. Koelreuter was the first to recognize the insect’s role in flower pollination in 1761 (see History of Botany 1530-1860, page 409), Dodd’s connection between the bee and flower pollination was submitted to the Royal Society of London eleven years earlier.
23 Cary Fowler & Pat Mooney, Shattering, 53.
27 A.A. Estrada-Luna, et al., “Beyond Promiscuity: From Sexuality to Apomixis in Flowering Plants,” In Vitro Cellular & Developmental Biology. Plant 38, no.2 (2002): 146–51. Apomixis is the process by which plants reproduce asexually, whereby the embryo develops without the paternal genome. As a clone of the mother, desirable gene combinations can be maintained. With the additional engineering of male sterility, gene flow through pollen transfer would aid in the containment of transgenes.
28 Current nursery practices for Fresh Kills’ North Park indicate the development of stock through the use of potted containers. No indication was given as to the plant source, be it seed or vegetative. The suggestion for accelerating propagation vegetatively is purely speculative. See Field Operations’ presentation for the North Park: http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/fresh_kills_park/pdf/North_Park_PublicPresentation041708.pdf. Although OMA was selected as the winner of the Downsview Park competition, their project will not go forward.
31 Loudon, An Encyclopedia of Gardening, 622.
In 1753, Carolus Linneaus first used the term *species* to apply to groups of plants and animals that were similar to each other, ruling out intermixing with other distinct groups. Implicit in the taxonomic usage of the term is the Platonic notion that there is a prototype for every species, and that variations are due to imperfections and deviations from an ideal. This concept laid the groundwork for a way of categorizing architecture, exemplified in 1825 by Quatremère de Quincy’s entry under *Type* in his *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, that refers architectural form back to the ideal model of the primitive hut.

Wittkower’s analysis of Palladio’s Villas in his *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* might be read as a series of transformations and deviations of a single species from one ideal form. In his drawing entitled “Schematized Drawing of 11 of Palladio’s Villas,” Rudolph Wittkower redraws eleven Palladian Villas and in the twelfth slot, he proposes his own diagram, which he refers to as a geometric formula or pattern which he imagines to have been in Palladio’s mind. Described as a “rectangle divided by two longitudinal and four transverse lines”, this diagram serves as a template, a static representational device that explains the consistencies and similarities of the villa and ultimately refers to a platonic ideal.

Further, in Rowe’s 1973 Addendum to the same essay, he proposes an expansion of his study of Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein at Garches and Palladio’s Villa Malcontenta to include another familial pair: Schinkel’s Altes Museum in Berlin and Le Corbusier’s Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh. Rowe will go on to compare buildings using what he calls “the admittedly ancient technique of deliberately distorting what is presented as the ideal type;” for example, the Renaissance-Baroque pair of churches: Santa Maria della Consolazione at Todi representing the ‘perfect’ building and Sant’Agnese in Piazza Navona representing the compromised building in its less than perfect site.

This platonic approach is inconsistent with the evolutionary thinking proposed in 1858 by Charles Darwin, in which there is no prototype for an evolutionary species. On the contrary, it is the variation that is important, not an average or ideal. Darwin proposed that modern life had descended from pre-existing forms of life, which had themselves descended from pre-existing forms. Crucially, he said, the modifications were undirected. That is to say, not only did they not come from a prototypical form, but they were not on any trajectory towards an ideal form.

Further, evolution was not intelligent, merely a consequence of the best fitting plants or animals producing more offspring. The process of natural selection led to the origin of more and more complex forms capable of exploiting diverse ecological niches. On the Galapagos Islands, for example, Darwin found 13 species of finch, all with a common origin, but each having developed notable differences in size and beak structure depending on their diet and habitat. Each finch had adapted to its own environmental niche.
Wittkower's Schematized drawing of 11 of Palladio's Villas.

Transformation between Wittkower's twelfth villa and each specific villa.

Santa Maria della Consolazione at Todi.

Sant'Agnese in Piazza Navona.
A niche is more than an environment; it is an abstraction of the environment that is relevant to each particular species. In *Battle at Kruger*, we see the carnivorous lion, the herbivorous buffalo, and the reptilian crocodile all share an environment in which each is adapted to its own particular abstractions of that environment.\(^6\) If this were not the case, all animals in a particular environment would tend towards the same form.

On the other hand, environments that are distant but comparable can potentially produce a pair of similar species. Biologist Mark Kirschner cites an example of two moles from different continents that evolved to be almost identical creatures: the marsupial Australian mole and the placental eutherian South African mole. Taxonomically distinct, the moles illustrate the way in which “random changes that occur in the context of the mechanisms can produce useful outcomes partly because these processes themselves are deeply embedded within the regulatory fabric of the organism.”\(^7\)

The term niche not only implies a place but also a time. Fitness to a niche in the past is different to a niche now. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, white moths were the most common variant of many species of moth, with only an occasional dark (melanic) moth being found. Since then, however, populations of white moth began to decline in industrialized areas. Despite the same physical location, in the same period, dark moth populations grew in direct proportion to the increase or decrease in the same populations in non-industrialized areas. British biologist H.B. Kettlewell concluded that the change was due to the increased visibility of the white moth to birds in industrial polluted sites where tree trunks were covered with soot. The dark moth, now camouflaged, survived and produced offspring (fig. 6).

The niche and the species are in constant interaction, constantly shifting and adjusting to one another. There are many possibilities for change in an environment: changes in climate, vegetation, coloration, shelter, prey, predators, water, and so forth. And these changes in the environment translate to changes in the niche, some of which may be significant, others irrelevant to the species fitting that niche. It is this change in the niche that accounts for much of the transformation occurring in an evolutionary species.\(^8\)

Colin Rowe’s lineage of Villa Rotonda, Altes Museum and Palace of Assembly has been continued and developed by Peter Eisenman, resulting in a much-referenced architectural lineage that now includes James Stirling’s Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart and Frank Gehry’s Peter B. Lewis Building in Cleveland, Ohio (and could go on to include OMA’s competition entry for the Très Grande Bibliothèque and others) (fig. 7). Eisenman notes that “The resonance of Schinkel’s Altes Museum in Gehry’s Scheme for the Lewis Building is first and foremost visible in the plan…This is not to say that the influence of Schinkel’s plan reflects a wholly conscious design; such influences can penetrate one’s unconscious, particularly when a diagrammatic operation allows such unconscious projections to the surface.”\(^9\)
However, despite his propagation of the lineage, Eisenman is critical of its platonic motivation. In his dissertation, Eisenman implies that Rowe's diagrams are not sufficiently diagrammatic since they represent a static truth condition. Eisenman's subsequent work seeks out an active transformative diagram that is descriptive rather than representative. He articulates two ways in which the term ‘diagram’ is understood: as an analytic device or as a generative one. Wittkower's drawings, he notes, are “diagrams in that they help to explain Palladio's work, but they do not show how he worked.”

Following this lead, Greg Lynn, in his essay *Multiplicitous and Inorganic Bodies* uses familial language (brood, kin, progeny, species...) to return the work of his predecessors to its previously unmentioned relation to evolution and indeed to use evolution theory as a tool to critique the reductiveness of Rowe and Wittkower's conclusions. For organic evolution to occur, three attributes of matter are necessary: the capacity for reproduction, capacity for change (variation), and the capacity for continuity between generations (heredity). Genetics, by definition, is the study of these two forces’ change and continuity, and this is where Lynn inserts his project.

Lynn looks in particular to morphologist D'Arcy Thompson's geometric system of description in which animals from different species are demonstrated to be mathematical transformations of each other (fig. 8). The organism then, is seen as a moment along a spectrum of difference, a gradient that transforms laterally over time and transversely across species. Lynn writes: “Geometry is no longer a static measure of invariant and unitary characteristics but what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have referred to as a "plane of consistency" upon which differential transformations and deformations occur. Type itself is never present in a fixed state in an entire species.”

In this essay, the typological logic that has been passed down from Wittkower (and presumably even earlier from Wölfflin) shifts from an acceptance of ideal forms to a scale of transformation, seeing architecture as evolution without a platonic ideal. In a subsequent essay, Lynn proposes a new way of thinking about architecture: "Where Rowe's logic is extensive, exact, and reducible, an alternate mathematics of form would be emergent, indeterminate, differential, intensive, inexact, and creative."

But if the focus is, as Lynn suggests, on the tactical cunning of vicissitude, what can be the causes of that transformation? Are the transformations, also present but mute in Wittkower’s analysis of the Palladian Villas as well as in Rowe’s comparison of Palladian and Corbusian villas, driven by some logic other than the purely formal?

Lynn makes his case for a pliant system by citing its capabilities of transforming and reacting with local contingencies: the traditional architectural constraints of program, culture, structure, economics, and context. These constraints, considered again in evolutionary terms, are absolutely necessary to create difference, to allow difference to be produced. He proposes as an example his *Stranded Sears Tower* project, which attempts to reformulate the iconic corporate tower into strands that are reactive to heterogeneous contextual forces. Here, Lynn acknowledges the necessary bond between the constraints of the niche and the species, describing the project as an act of “laying the structure into its context and entangling its
monolithic mass with local contextual forces.” However, the understanding of variations with constraints has itself transformed since then, with the development of variation assisting software, and, like the single-name pop-star, has dropped the cumbersome latter names to become, simply: Variation.

In his recent essay Variability, Variety, and Evolution in Early 20th Century Bioconstructivisms, in Research and Design: The Architecture of Variation, Detlef Mertins notes this shift in thinking in the interwar period from one focused on form to one “focused on the process of formation, to dynamic constitutive systems and ecologies, to techniques, building blocks, modules, evolution and diversity.” With a nod to Le Corbusier’s standard, Mies van der Rohe’s seashells, H.P.Berlage’s single-celled sea creatures, and Buckminster Fuller’s radiolarian, Mertins deftly delineates a thread of evolutionary thinking in architecture at the beginning of the last century. The architects, however, seem more concerned with the sea of possibilities than with the constraints inherent in the environments of these creatures versus the constraints of their own sites (with the exception of gravity). The issue of environmental forces finally enters with El Lissitsky and Kiesler, the latter claiming that forms are “only the visible trading posts of integrating and disintegrating forces mutating at low rates of speed.” It is clear that Mertins does support a notion of design in which the environment is a fundamental player in the transformation of the organism and that the two mutually evolve through interaction. The book, however, goes on to present a series of projects without any real mutually affective interactions between context and object.

In his foreword to the same publication, Lars Spuybroek acknowledges the role of computing in the move towards evolutionary systems: “Computing has proved it can liberate architecture from fixed types and catalogs, it has also moved design away from the production of single objects to the wider scope of a possible range of objects. With computing, one must design the organization of something as much as the thing itself. In a way, it is very close to breeding. Computing has made every object into a system, and it understands each system as a set of variables, not unlike species or families and research equates to finding or testing the limits of such sets.” Indeed, computing has made breeding possible for architects, but, to paraphrase Jurassic Park’s in-house mathematician Dr. Ian Malcolm on the same subject: we were so preoccupied with whether or not we could, we didn’t stop to think if we should.

Gone wild in the throes of a variation-fueled ecstasy (often in reference to evolution), today’s experimental architectural production is missing the concept of the niche. Seductive and intricate systems are displayed either in a vacuumous white space or a boundless full-bleed (fig. 9). Systems are all variation and no constraint.

Organic evolution, in its non-intelligent selection, can produce transformations that are lethal in a particular niche, as in the case of the white moth. How can we know if the variations that we are now producing are non-lethal? Recent avant-garde work claims to be a peek at what the architecture of the future may look like. But how can we think of these Semper-inspired rippling and bubbling objects as surviving without understanding the constraints and attributes of the niche and allowing the transformations to be guided by that both specific and abstract data? How are we to evaluate these fantastic creations without a context?
Endnotes

1 Carolus Linneaus, *Species Plantarum*, 1753.


6 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68KM


8 Of course, evolution is much more complex than this. Historically, geography has been the focus of the speciation discussion, but contemporary evolution acknowledges three models: *allopatric speciation* (the model that has been presented here, in which populations diverge in different locations), *parapatric speciation* (in which populations diverge across a continuous distribution), and *sympatric speciation* (in which populations diverge randomly with no geographic isolation). For further reading, see Nicholas H. Barton, Derek E.G. Briggs, Jonathan A Eisen, David B. Goldstein, and Nipam H. Patel, *Evolution*, (Cold Spring Harbor, New York: Cold Spring Harbor laboratory Press, 2007).


11 Greg Lynn, “Multiplicitous and In-organic Bodies,” in *Folds, Bodies and Blobs, Collected Essays (Books-by-Architects)*, (La Lettre Volée, 1998)


13 Greg Lynn, “The Folded, the Pliant and the Supple”, in *Folds, Bodies and Blobs, Collected Essays*, 113.

14 Greg Lynn, “Multiplicitous and Inorganic Bodies,” in *Folds, Bodies and Blobs, Collected Essays*, 53.


16 “Our buildings need not look alike. After all, there are 10,000 species of seashells. They don’t look alike but they have the same principle”.—Mies van der Rohe, quoted by Peter Blake, in *The Master Builders: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 259.


I.

Adolf Loos is the only architect of his generation whose thinking is still influential today. In this he may have fulfilled his own prophecy that his work would last longer than that of his contemporaries because it would be passed on by word of mouth rather than by photographs in architectural journals. Loos was a humorous, mordant, and prolific writer whose theories were organized by a radical opposition to the Viennese Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte (fig. 1). The essence of what he said over three decades of polemical arguments in leading newspapers and journals, public lectures and manifestoes is that art did not have anything to do with the everyday utilitarian object: “Everything that serves a purpose,” Loos wrote, “should be excluded from the realms of art.” The practice of artists and architects of his time of designing everyday objects was illegitimate. Those objects were already being designed by craftsmen, who perfected them over time in an anonymous, continuous, collective process of design. The ‘objet type’ of le Corbusier, the ‘objet trouvé’ of the Surrealists, Duchamp’s ‘readymade’, the ‘as found’ of Alison and Peter Smithson, and so on, are anticipated in Loos’ appreciation of the generic wine glass, the American bathtub, the Thonet chair, and the English raincoat.

When, after an absence of three years (in America), I appeared in Vienna in the year 1896 and saw my colleagues again, I had to rub my eyes: all the architects were dressed like ‘artists.’ Not like other people, but—from an American point of view—like buffoons . . . . People laughed, but the government, which was advised by journalists, made all of them Doctors and Professors. I was in favour of the old Viennese carpentry, tradition and quality—their work was like their clothing. I was left out of their circle. I was no artist, as was demonstrated by my clothing.

Loos may have had in mind Gustav Klimt, who went around dressed in a long artist’s smock even when he wasn’t painting. In the group photograph of the Secession members taken in their building in 1902, Klimt is the only one wearing a robe (fig. 2). He was the ‘undisputed leader’ of the Secession and yet for all Loos’ continuous and virulent attacks on that institution and what it represented, the figure of Klimt remains surprisingly untouched. Loos never criticized Klimt by name, as he did with Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich and Koloman Moser. On the contrary, during the controversy over Klimt’s University paintings (1897–1905),
tique? Why protect the very figure that most exemplified the tendencies he so famously denounced? Why, throughout all of Loos’ extensively published writings, are there no references to Klimt, the most renowned and controversial artist of his day? Why would Klimt’s extraordinarily rich and intricate layering of color, pattern and symbolism not offend the formulation that ornament is a crime because it is not of our time? The architect, so proud of his muted Goldman and Salatsch suit and the austere exterior of his buildings, stands unusually silent before the flamboyant, loud, overly sexualized, technicolor artist in a smock.

Klimt is also one of the rare subjects about whom Loos was not in agreement with the critic Karl Kraus, his great friend and ally in the campaign against the Secession. Kraus had repeatedly criticized Klimt in the pages of Die Fackel, holding him up to scorn: “Now the same gentleman [Hermann Bahr] proclaims that a picture by Klimt in the Secession (the ‘Schubert’) is simply the best picture ever painted by an Austrian. Well, the picture is really not bad at all. And the good Herr von Dumba, who in his old age has had his living room decorated by the Secession, only needs to hang it in a dark corner.” About one of the University paintings, Kraus wrote that Klimt, “who had already painted over the pale cast of his thought with luminous colours, wanted to paint ‘Jurisprudence’ and [instead] symbolised criminal law.”

Loos came to his defense: “With the Klimt affair we saw a band of professors ally themselves with the haranguers from Naschmarkt whose motto was ‘Down with individuality.’” Loos, the great defender of anonymous form, sided with the unique individual.

Why this unexpected solidarity with Klimt? Why was the leader of the Secession exempt from Loos’ usual devastating cri-
What was at stake in this argument was two rival ways of rejecting pseudo-historical styles, two modernities. Kraus accused the Secessionists of a “false modernity,” of “fighting the wrong antiquarianism for the propagation of an inauthentic modernity”:

A dramatic revolution has occurred in Viennese artistic taste: the salons of our wealthiest men are no longer furnished by Sandor Jaray, but by Olbrich or Hoffmann; and instead of the youngest Ninetta by Blass or the oldest invalid by Friedlander, they are adorned with the newest creations of Klimt and Engelhardt. What does this mean? Simply that those gentlemen who today are rich and tomorrow might be poor always take care to buy commodities that are as marketable as possible whenever they invest a part of their fortune in art.

The Secession group, which had split from the academy (the Künstlerhaus) on the grounds that art should not be ruled by the market (“the Künstlerhaus is a mere market hall, a bazaar—let the traders set their wares there”) was now criticised in precisely those terms—the market of the art fair replaced by that of interior decoration. As with Loos, Kraus’ critique of the Secession is bound up with a critique of the new Viennese bourgeoisie, the ‘Poor Rich Man’ of Loos’ famous story, who had commissioned a house from a Secessionist and was afraid to go from room to room because the clothes designed for one room were not appropriate for the next. Everything down to his slippers was designed by the architect and could only be used in the designated room. As Karl Kraus put it: “They have the dirt off the streets in their homes, and even that is by Hoffmann.”

II.

The clients and supporters of the Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte were primarily young, progressive and Jewish, and the critique of the Secession is bound up in racial stereotypes, if not in anti-Semitism. Karl Kraus, born to a prominent Jewish family, had renounced Judaism in 1899—the same year that he started the magazine Die Fackel—reported that the great success of the Viennese Secession at the 1900 World Exhibition was due to the fact that Parisians had called the style “un goût juif” (a Jewish taste). This is also how Hermann Bahr described the reception of Klimt’s Philosophy (1900), one of the polemical University ceiling paintings. In a number of texts that were excluded or edited from Loos’ volumes of writings (Ins Leere Gesprochem [Spoken into the Void], 1921, and Trotzdem ['Nevertheless'], 1931), he explicitly associates the Secession with the Jewish bourgeoisie, even arguing that the new ornate gilded interiors constituted a new “ghetto.” In an article entitled “The Emancipation of Judaism,” Loos writes that the interiors of Hoffmann and Olbrich “betray” their owners as much as their new names do: “Surely there must be Moritz and Siegfried who are Aryans, just as there are Aryan owners of interiors by Hoffmann. They are exceptions.” Having abandoned their caftans sometime ago, Loos argued, they end up wearing a new one. The Secessionist interiors are “no more than masked caftans.” Loos, like Kraus, was in favour of the assimilation of Jews and saw it as a key symptom of modernity. “Every sympathiser of the emancipation of Judaism, every person hostile to the ghetto, therefore every person favourable to our culture, must suffer seeing how the Jews create a new ghetto for themselves.” Most of Loos’ clients, his collaborators, his students and his friends were Jewish intellectuals, and two of his wives were also Jewish. In place of the pseudo-modern caftan of the Secession interior, Loos
offered with his architecture an alternative form of clothing to his clients—an English raincoat.

Loos’ critique of the Secession and Wiener Werkstätte was also gender loaded. His association of ornament with femininity and Jewish ambition remains unexplored, perhaps because of the reverence that Loos still inspires in architects, but it clearly organises his polemics. In a lecture delivered by Loos in Vienna in the Spring of 1927, “Dans Wiener Weh (Die Wiener Werkstätte): Eine Erledigung” (“The Viennese Woe [The Wiener Werkstätte]: A Settlement of Accounts”), Loos criticised the Austrian Pavilion at the Paris exhibition of 1925, which had been designed by Josef Hoffmann and filled with Wiener Werkstätte objects, in these terms:

*I warn Austrians against identifying themselves with the Wiener Werkstätte movement. The modern spirit is a social spirit, and modern objects exist not just for the benefit of the upper crust but for everybody. . . . To bring us first-rate work no architects are needed, no arts and crafts students and no painting, embroidering, potting, precious-material-wasting daughters of senior civil servants and other Fräuleins, who regard handicrafts as something whereby one may earn pin-money or while away one’s spare time until one can walk down the aisle.*

Loos’ attacks on “daughters of senior civil servants and other Fräuleins” were not without foundation, as Werner J. Schweiger has pointed out:

*The WW had been numerically dominated by women even since the initiation of the workshops in 1913, and after the deaths of Dagobert Peche in 1923 and his successor Julius Zimpel in 1925, there were practically only women left as designers, except for Hoffmann and Max Snischek. Ten out of the thirteen members exhibiting in Paris were women.*

Loos was warning Austrians against identifying themselves with women’s work, with the effeminized world of interior decoration. The figure of modernity for Loos, as for most writers of modernity, was emphatically male. Women and children were primitive, ignoble savages, as distinct from the heroic figure of modern man as primitive noble savages. The heroic male figure—energetic, cool and detached—was the figure of architectural modernity. Architectural order here, the control of the senses, was first and foremost social control.

For Loos, “the lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power.” “The Critique of Pure Reason could not have been created by a man wearing five ostrich feathers on his hat, the Ninth Symphony did not spring from one wearing a ring around his neck the size of a dish.” But this intellectual power, which is presented here as above the “brutalities” of the “savage,” seems in other passages to be an exclusively male attribute, as when Loos writes: “Ornament at the service of woman will last forever. . . . The
ornament of woman... answers, at bottom, that of the savage; it has an erotic meaning." The ornament, which for "the child, the Papuan and the woman" is a "natural phenomenon," for modern man is a "symptom of degeneration":

The first ornament that came into being, the cross, had an erotic origin. The first work of art... was in order to rid himself of his natural excesses. A horizontal line: the reclining woman. A vertical line: the man who penetrates her. The man who created it felt the same urge as Beethoven... But the man of our time who daubs the walls with erotic symbols to satisfy an inner urge is a criminal or a degenerate.

And when this "degeneration" of the masculine into the feminine becomes associated with homosexuality, Loos' raid against ornament is not only gender-loaded but openly homophobic. The main target of Loos' attack becomes the effeminate architect, the Secessionist and Wiener Werkstätte figure of the "decorator," Josef Olbrich, Kolo Moser, Josef Hoffmann: all these "dilettanti," "fops" and "suburban dandies" who buy their "pre-tied ties in the women's fashion displays."

More than any other member of the Secession, Klimt created a cult of the feminine, and was the favourite artist of the Jewish bourgeoisie. Most of his clients were women and he produced increasingly eroticized images in which women, clothing, ornament and walls became fused together in symbolic narratives—images often literally filled with gold as if the very emblem of Loos' target. Yet Klimt is absent from Loos' critique. Perhaps Loos' position was similar to that of his close friend, the poet Peter Altenberg, who wrote: "Gustav Klimt, you are at once a painter of vision and a modern philosopher, an altogether modern poet. As you paint, you suddenly transform yourself, fairy-tale-like, into the most modern man, which perhaps you are not in daily life." Separating the personal from the public, Klimt becomes a "modern man" through his art. But what is it that makes Klimt modern despite his embrace of the very things that hide modernity for Loos? Not eroticism as such, since for Loos "all art is erotic," as he wrote in Ornament and Crime. Rather the question is the relationship between this sensuality and the design of objects of everyday use, including buildings. In the end, it is the line between art and architecture that Loos wants to draw, and as long as Klimt remains on the side of art, he can be exempt from criticism. As Loos wrote:

The work of art is the private affair of the artist. The house is not... The work of art is answerable to no one; the house, to everyone. The work of art wants to shake people out of their complacency. The house must serve comfort. The artwork is revolutionary, the house conservative.

III
The clues to Klimt's unique status for Loos can perhaps only be found in what he says about the figures he denounces the most. Loos' real enemy is not Olbrich, as it is commonly believed, or even the Secession itself, but Hoffmann, Klimt's closest friend and collaborator. This did not escape his contemporaries. As Richard Neutra wrote: "Hoffmann was the professor whom Loos demolished in my eyes, or had tried to demolish in the eyes of his generation."

The intensity and lifelong repetition of Loos' attacks on Hoffmann seem to be driven by the fact
that they began so close. Loos and Hoffmann were both born in the same year, 1870, only five
days apart, and in the same place, Moravia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and
after the war to become part of Czechoslovakia. They attended secondary school (Gymnasium)
at Iglau (Jihlava) together, where they were friends and where Hoffmann failed the fifth year
twice, resulting in a “feeling of inferiority that never left me.”29 Hoffmann was later able to enrol
in the State Technical School at Brünn in 1887 (a school that Loos also attended from 1888 to
1889), where he distinguished himself but nevertheless felt that “he was not taken seriously
because of his failure at the Gymnasium.”30 Hoffmann went on to study at the Academy of Fine
Arts with Carl von Haseauner and Otto Wagner, and won the Roman Prize, allowing him to
spend a year in Rome. Loos, who was not a very good student either, went on as auditor to the
Technische Hochschule of Dresden (Dresden College of Technology), was in the military and
then travelled to America for three years between 1893 and 1896, coinciding with the Chicago
Exhibition. Both ended up in Vienna around 1896.

Loos had been initially sympathetic to the Secession, agreeing with their revolt against the use
of historical styles and with their support for the architecture of Otto Wagner. He even con-
tributed to the Secession journal Ver Sacrum, where he published ‘Potemkin City’, his famous
critique of the buildings on the Ringstrasse.31 He was also on good terms with Hoffmann, writing
somewhat positively of his work32 and even commissioning him to do the illustrations for his
two articles in Ver Sacrum (‘Die Potemkin’sche Stadt’ and ‘Unsere Jungen Architeckten’).33 He
only broke with Hoffmann when the latter prevented him from doing the interiors for the “Ver
Sacrum-Zimmer,” the small meeting room in the Secession building.34 Loos wrote about this
rejection in 1913: “Fifteen years ago, I approached Josef Hoffmann to ask that I be allowed to
design the conference room of the Secession building, a room which anyway the public would
never see and on which only a few hundred Kronen were to be spent. I was turned down flat.”35
From that moment on a life-long battle was launched, an asymmetrical conflict in which Loos
never tired of accusing Hoffmann, but Hoffmann never responded in kind. On the contrary, he
praised Loos’ Kärntner bar as a “jewel” and, as if to make up, invited him to participate in the
Austrian Pavilion at the Paris exhibition of 1925, the very exhibition that Loos later savagely
criticised.36 Loos, who was then living in Paris, declined the invitation on the grounds that “he
never wished to have anything to do with Vienna and Austria again.”37 Loos was invited, and
attended Secession openings (apparently even giving advice to customers on what to buy),
and was even offered the opportunity to exhibit his work there, which he declined: “They have
asked me to exhibit in the Secession. I shall do so when the dealers have been driven from the
temple. The dealers? No, those who prostitute art.”38

Despite this animosity, the different attitudes that Loos and Hoffmann reveal in their architec-
ture can be understood as different ways of negotiating the same dilemma: the modern split
between private and public, the difference in the metropolis between the space of the intimate
and the space of the social. Both Loos and Hoffmann recognized that being in society involves
a kind of schizophrenia between one’s private and public self. Both responded to this estrange-
ment by understanding architecture as primarily a social mechanism, like dress or manners,
a way of negotiating social situations. Hoffmann confronted the split in the modern individual
between his private and public being in a different way to Loos. For him, the house was to be
intentionally designed to be in harmony with the ‘character’ of its inhabitants. There is nothing
as personal as character. But the client could not add objects to the house on his own account,
nor could he hire another artist to do so for him, as if one only had one character for an entire life! This was the object of Loos’ criticism. Loos believed that the house grows with one, and that everything that goes on inside it is the business of its inhabitants.

When Loos wrote, “The house does not have to say anything to the exterior; instead, all its richness must be manifest in the interior,” he had recognised a limit to architecture in the metropolis, the difference between dwelling in the interior and dealing with the exterior, but at the same time he had formulated the very need for this limit, which has implicit in itself the need for a mask. The interior does not have to say anything to the exterior (figs. 3 and 4). This mask is not, naturally, the same as the one which he had identified as being fake in the façades of the Ringstrasse, the face of equivocal, fictitious language, which implied that nobility was living behind the walls, whereas in reality the inhabitants were deracinated upstarts. To be uprooted, Loos believed, was nothing to be ashamed of; it was part of the modern condition. The silence he prescribed was no more than the recognition of schizophrenia in metropolitan life: the inside has nothing to say to the outside because our intimate being has split from our social being. We are divided between what we think and what we say and do.

The house’s silence vis-à-vis the outside represents the impossibility of communication; but it is also this very silence that protects its incommunicable intimacy. At this moment, silence is also its mask. It is a Simmelian mask. The mask, Georg Simmel writes in his essay “Fashion,” allows the interior to be intimate. “Over an old Flemish house there stands the mystical inscription: ‘There is more within me.'” It is precisely in Simmel’s terms that Loos speaks about fashion:

3 Adolf Loos, House Horner, 1912. View form the garden 1930. From Ruksechcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 492.

4 Adolf Loos, Lina Loos bedroom, published in Kunst, Vienna, 1903.
The person who runs around in a velvet suit is no artist but a buffoon or merely a decorator. We have become more refined, more subtle. Primitive men had to differentiate themselves by the use of various colours, modern man needs his clothes as a mask. His individuality is so strong that he cannot express it any longer through his clothing. The lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power. Modern man uses the ornament of past and foreign cultures at his discretion. He concentrates his own power of invention on other things.44

Where is “he” who has assumed the condition of the modern to find an identity? This was Loos’ question. No longer protected by the fixed and the permanent, by the things that speak, modern man now finds himself surrounded by objects without meaning. In no way, Loos said, can he make use of these things, force them to speak an invented language, or to construct a false pedigree, precisely what he was accusing the artists of the Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte of attempting. The modern, like the artist and the primitive, can only restore an order in the universe and find a place in it by reaching within himself and his own creation. But the modern, like the primitive, needs a mask to make this possible.

Modernity implies a return to the function of the mask. But as Hubert Damisch has noted, whereas in primitive societies the mask gave social identity to its bearer, modern man uses the mask to conceal any difference, to protect his identity.45 Kraus did not exclude the artist from that predicament: “No doubt, the artist is other. But precisely for that reason in the exterior it has to comply. It cannot live alone if it does not disappear in the crowd. . . . The more the artist is other, the more necessary it becomes that he uses common clothing as mask.”46 For Loos, every member of the crowd has to comply on the surface by masking his interiority, his sexuality, but also his creativity, his “power of invention.” Everyone is a new “primitive,” everyone has to wear a mask, a modern mask, a form of protection, a cancelling of differences on the outside, precisely to make identity possible, and this identity is now individual rather than social. The mask constructs the private.

IV
Loos was influenced by Semper’s theories from his year in the Dresden Technische Hochschule, where Semper had been a professor between 1834 and 1849, and remained a strong voice. In “The Principle of Cladding” (1898), Loos’ most Semperian text, he wrote:

The architect’s general task is to provide a warm and liveable space. Carpets are warm and liveable. He decides for this reason to spread one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the four walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor
and the tapestry on the wall require a structural frame to hold them in the correct place. To invent this frame is the architect’s second task.47

For Loos, architecture was a form of covering. But it is not simply the walls that are covered. Structure plays a secondary role, and its primary function is to hold the covering in place. In those terms, Klimt’s friezes are a form of architecture. In the end, Klimt is as much the architect of the Stoclet Palace as Hoffmann. His work is an integral part of the design.

In fact, Klimt had begun his career as a successful architectural decorator in the Ringstrasse. Even before he left the School of Applied Arts in Vienna (Kunstgewerberschule), where he had studied since he was 14 years old, he started a workshop called the Künstlercompanie, with his brother Ernst and another student from the school, Franz Matsch, which was very successful in obtaining commissions for the decoration of public buildings. Among other things, the team completed the decorations of the Burgtheater (Imperial Court Theatre, 1886–8) and the staircase of the Art History Museum (1890–1).48 On becoming the leader of the Secession, Klimt drew some architectural sketches of the new building (fig. 5). While Olbrich ultimately designed the building, Klimt’s sketches were clearly influential. It was apparently his idea to have a blank façade without openings, rather than the columns that Olbrich’s sketches proposed, and to have the entrance centred and elevated from the street level by a set of steps. Klimt’s sketches precisely demarcate the proportions and entrance of a possible temple of the arts. As the President of the Secession, Klimt countersigned all of Olbrich’s plans, sections and elevations for the new building. It could be argued that Klimt’s most significant architectural works, the University paintings, the Beethoven frieze and the Stoclet frieze, never left behind the logic of architectural decoration he had employed early on at the Ringstrasse. At the Secession, Klimt tended to associate himself less with the other painters than with the architects Hoffmann and Moser.49 He engaged in multiple collaborations with those architects removing, as he had already done in the Ringstrasse, the line between art and architecture.

Loos therefore could not exempt Klimt from criticism simply because he was an artist, rather than an architect. Klimt operated as an architect in the very Semperian sense that Loos embraced in his own work. Furthermore, Klimt committed all the crimes Loos indicts in Hoffmann: he designed catalogues and posters for the Secession exhibitions, covers for Ver Sacrum, applied wall decorations and even created dresses and textile designs for Emily Flöge and the fashion house Schwestern Flöge (Flöge Sisters) (fig. 6). Loos’ silence about Klimt seems louder than ever.

In fact, Loos and Klimt may have identified with each other. They both were the target of virulent and moralizing critiques. Klimt was portrayed by the Viennese press as a pornographer, flaunting public lewdness, particularly with regard to the paintings for the university, where, symptomatically, Loos came to his side. Loos’ work was also the subject of a prolonged and heated controversy during the construction of his Goldman & Salatsch building in the Michaelerplatz (1901–11), involving municipal councillors and newspapers such as the Neue Freie Presse, the Extrablatt and the Kikeriki, on the one hand, and Karl Kraus, Otto Wagner and Paul Engelmann, on the other.50 It was precisely in this context that Loos had conveniently invoked the memory of the Klimt University paintings scandal, comparing it to the one then exploding around the Looshaus in the Michaelerplatz. Loos’ persona was also questioned. In the 1920s there were already a number of articles in the Viennese press attacking his moral character.51

Both Loos and Klimt had complicated private lives that became public scandals. Klimt, who lived with his mother and
two sisters all his life and had a long Platonic relationship with his partner Emily Flöge was, at his death, facing fourteen paternity suits from the women he had used as models. Loos spent four months in prison accused of pederasty, having had a succession of child-like wives and other affairs with women who never seemed young enough (fig. 7). He shared this interest with his friend Peter Altenberg (also suspected of child molestation), who used the term Kind-Mädchen (child-girl) to described the women they were attracted to. As Loos’s ex-wife Elsie Altmann-Loos put it:

I have always been a woman-child and this is what Loos loved in me. But all of a sudden, he finds that I don’t have sex appeal, and moreover, that my legs are too short. If I had longer legs, he said, it would change my life. So Loos decided to take me to a surgeon who would break my two legs and elongate them.

Loos’ public moralism denouncing ornament as a savage perversion is perhaps a pathological symptom of what it attacks, a disguise, a displacement. Loos could never object to Klimt’s overt sexual intensity. Rather, he effectively credits Hoffmann’s abstract black and white patterns with sexual degeneracy by making Hoffman his emblem of Secessionist crime.

In the end, Loos’ silence about Klimt, like the silence he advocated for modern identity, remains a mask, perhaps disguising feelings stronger than those he felt towards Hoffmann. There is no reason to think that Loos had any strong negative feelings about the person he continually attacked. Like a school bully, he simply sensed weakness and used it strategically to promote his arguments. The consequence of Kraus’ and Loos’ position was precisely that public statements don’t reveal personal feelings. On the contrary, they hide them. Hoffmann was just a convenient prop to make an argument that remains surprisingly influential today.

6 Gustav Klimt and Emily Flöge in dress. Taken from Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making, ed. by Colin Bailey.

7 Elsie Altman, 1918? Published in Rukschcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 223.
Endnotes


2 Ibid.

3 ‘Adolf Loos über Josef Hoffmann’, Das neue Frankfurt, February 1931 [my translation].

4 In 1894 the Austrian government had commissioned Klimt to paint three allegorical paintings for the ceiling of the University of Vienna on the themes of ‘Philosophy’, ‘Medicine’ and ‘Jurisprudence’. Klimt began work around 1897 and as he completed the paintings, he exhibited them at the Secession and in other exhibitions internationally, even obtaining a gold medal for the ‘Philosophy’ panel at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. In Vienna, the work was praised by some and viciously attacked by others: university professors, some members of the Parliament, journalists and the general public. See also Susan Buck-Morss, ‘The Flâneur, the Sandwich-Man and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering’, in Theory, Culture and Society, 3 (3), 37–48. See also Susan Buck-Morss, ‘The Flâneur, the Sandwich-Man and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering’, in The New German Critique 39 (Fall 1986), 99–140, where she presents the argument that the most significant female figure of modernity is the whore.


6 Karl Kraus, Die Fackel (The Torch), no.147, 21 November 1903, 10. Quoted in Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, 251.


8 Kraus, Die Fackel no.29, January 1900, 16.


10 Loos, “Vom armen reichen Mann,” in Neues Wiener Tagblatt, 26 April 1900.

11 Kraus, Die Fackel, 13 October 1913. Quoted in Schweiger, Wiener Werkstätte, 90.


13 Kraus, Die Fackel, no.41, 1900. Quoted in Rukschcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 70.

14 Bedoire, The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture, 332. See also Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, 227.

15 Adolf Loos, Die Emancipation des Judentums’, 1900, in Adolf Loos, Escritos I 1897/1909 (Madrid 1993), 251. This collection of Adolf Loos’ writings in two volumes is the most comprehensive to date. It is based on the first editions of all Adolf Loos’ published texts, as the texts published in his collected works have been extensively altered.

16 Ibid.

17 Hugo and Lilly Steiner, Gustav Turnovsky, Dr. Otto Stoessl, Theodor Beer, Leopold Goldman, Tristan Tzara. His pupils Richard Neutra, Paul Engelmann, Josef Frank, Oskar Wlach, Frederick Kiesler. See Bedoire, The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture, 333–9. Loos’ closeness to the Jewish milieu has made people assume that Loos himself was a Jew. He was even offered the possibility to settle in Palestine, but he declined. He wrote to his last wife, Claire Beck: “I am an anti-Semite. All Christians should marry Jews and vice versa . . . I am on my second Jewish wife.” Claire Loos, Adolf Loos privat (Vienna 1936), 101. Quoted in Rukschcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 295.


19 Schweiger, Wiener Werkstätte, 120.

20 As Janet Wolff has pointed out, the literature of modernity describes the experience of men: “The influential writings of Baudelaire, Simmel, Benjamin and, more recently, Richard Sennett and Marshall Berman, by equating the modern with the public, thus fail to describe women’s experience of modernity”; see “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” Theory, Culture and Society, 1985, 2 (3), 37–48. See also Susan Buck-Morss, ‘The Flâneur, the Sandwich-Man and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering’, in The New German Critique 39 (Fall 1986), 99–140, where she presents the argument that the most significant female figure of modernity is the whore.


25 Adolf Loos, ‘Underclothes’, in Neue Freie Presse, 25 September 1898, translation in Spoken into the Void Collected Essays by Adolf Loos, 1897–1900, (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1987), 75. The “pre-tied ties,” that Loos goes on and on about are cardboard-inset ties which Hoff-
mann later accused Loos of having used himself. See also ‘The Leather Goods and Gold—and Silversmith Trades’, Neue Freie Presse, 15 May 1898, translation in Spoken into the Void, 7–9.

26 Fritz Novotny and Johannes Dobai, Gustav Klimt (Salzburg, 1971), 70. Quoted by Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna.


30 Ibid.

31 Loos, “Die Potemkin’sche Stadt,” Ver Sacrum, July 1898.

32 See for example, ‘Eine Concurrenz der Stadt Wien’, (‘A Competition for the City of Vienna’), Die Zeit, Vienna, 6 November 1897, where Loos defends the entries of Olbrich and Hoffmann, even if he already recriminates their ‘sincere “Rabitzian” architecture’. (Rabitz was the inventor of a system of construction that raised entire buildings with iron, wire netting and plaster). See also Loos, ‘Ein Wiener Architekt’, Dekorative Kunst, 1898, an article on Hoffmann in which Loos praised two of Hoffmann’s buildings, even if he “can’t, in any way, agree with his furniture”; see Loos, Escritos I, 16–19 and 112–113.


34 Rukschcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 52. Adolf Loos, ‘Meine Bauschule’, Der Architekt 19, October 1913.

35 Adolf Loos, ‘Meine Bauschule’, Der Architekt 19, October 1913.


38 Adolf Loos, “Keramika,” Die Zukunft, 13 February 1904. In Loos, Escritos I, 311. In this article, Loos also writes about how a lady had asked him to accompany her to the Secession to give her advice, and he had recommended a “small block of marble by Rodin,” 312.


40 See for example, Loos, “Die Interieurs in der Rotunde” (1898), and “Interiors in the Rotonda,” Spoken into the Void, 22–7.


42 While Loos does not refer to it directly, the Ringstrasse was predominantly inhabited by Jews and built by Jewish developers. A popular city guide referred to the Ringstrasse as “Zionnstrasse von Neu-Jerusalem . . . the most splendid street of the Imperial city. The palaces adorning it nearly all belong to millionaires of the chosen people; only a few belong to Christian intruders.” See Bedoire, The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture, 321.


46 Karl Kraus, Sprüche und Widersprüche, Munich 1909, 83.

47 Adolf Loos, “The Principle of Cladding” (1898), in Spoken into the Void, 66.


52 Loos married Lina Obertimpfler in 1902, when she was eighteen, twelve years younger than him. Envious of her success as an actress, he tried to discourage her from following her career. She divorced him after two years. He met his second wife, Elsie Altmann, a dancer, when she was seventeen and thirty years younger than him. His third wife, Klara-Franziska Beck, Claire, a photographer, was thirty-five years younger than him.


54 Elsie Altmann-Loos, Adolf Loos: Der Mensch (Vienna/Munich 1968), 154. Quoted in Rukschcio and Schachel, Adolf Loos, 305.
Melissa Tapper Goldman

What’s Love Got to Do With It? Lust in Architecture

We must stop despising Desire...
We must face up to lust in full consciousness.
We must make of it what a sophisticated and intelligent being makes of himself and of his life;
we must make lust into a work of art.
— Valentine de Saint-Point, “Futurist Manifesto of Lust”

LUST EXISTS:
I joined architecture because of a lust for spaces. Sure, discourse provoked me, allowed me intellectual access to my attraction. But consider that architects, rather than being builders who theorize, might simply be space fetishists with a complex disciplinary post-rationalization. Throughout modern practice, architecture has distanced itself from the pursuit of pleasure by claiming allegiance with rational objectives. The systematic avoidance of this topic leaves us without a vocabulary with which to discuss this fundamental aspect of architectural inspiration, unable to communicate about what we feel.

I cannot prove conclusively that every architect harbors a lust for spaces, but I see it busting out all over the profession surreptitiously. Sometimes it emerges in an attraction to a “surface effect,” ornamentation, shape, texture. Sometimes it appears in spatial configurations, snugly fitted enclosures, playful adjacencies or dramatic narrative sequences. We describe certain architecture in terms of its exuberance (Miralles/EMBT’s Scottish Parliament), but even from the most restrained modern lineage, we still see enthusiastic theatricality (Siza’s Portuguese Pavilion).

What’s wrong with space lust? Lust is amoral. It is an impulse, an itch that we can scratch or ignore. We may choose to acknowledge it, address it, reject it, or pursue its fulfillment, but at root, it precedes understanding. Lust suggests the object of imagination, which is latent until the act of designing. Is space lust a fetish? To import the term fetish into any theory is
to address the discipline’s margins. Lust is irreconcilable; we cannot admit a basic drive to see our imaginations manifest as buildings while maintaining a pretense to purely rational aims. Lust is beyond discourse.

Any trip to a common priest or psychiatrist will demonstrate a basic fact of human existence: it is not obvious what to do with lust, the right thing to do with lust. It is not clear how we should control it or harness it productively. In the still-dominant academic culture of third-wave feminism, we understand that it is good to move toward lust, to seek satisfaction, to trust in the wisdom of our urges. As long as there are no children or unwilling victims, it is not only desirable to pursue one’s lusts, it is the basic obligation of a fully-developed adult.

LUST IS INESCAPABLE:
The architectural profession has gone to extreme lengths to cover the tracks of its lust. Joshua Prince-Ramus, architect of the Seattle Central Library (formerly of OMA and now Principal at his own firm, REX) claims to follow a “hyper-rational” approach in his practice. The library is not an object of desire, but a spatial representation of a natural way to organize the program—a practice that in Prince-Ramus’s words, allows the building to become “literally the diagram” of the program. The claim of a hyper-rational process forces a sense of determinism, subtracts the architect from the picture, and displaces the agency of the architect. But it is also difficult to accept that as an explanation, considering the very basic subjectivity of the analytical process that preceded the rational diagramming. Even the value of efficiency is not universal or self-evident. The practice of architecture is based on decision-making, both the science and the art. On the simplest level, lust guides the decisive mind.

There is no reason to take the claim of hyper-rationality at face value. This explanation is salesmanship, advertising legitimacy while obscuring fundamental motivations. The lust of architects for the spaces they design is unquestioned because it stays unmentioned, neatly maintained as a professional split personality between the rational (explainable) and the artistic (unutterable). Even amid economic exigencies, the creative, ambiguous space cleaved open by the architect creates opportunity for the fulfillment of personal and idiosyncratic visions. Architects will never be fully honest about this in public, among clients and investors, but all involved parties have a right to demand architects’ self-awareness of the matter.

As a person wandering through the Seattle Library, I cannot imagine it designed without a bid for pleasure. While these pleasures may align with the library’s mission, they need not be institutionally sanctioned or even recognized. In a talk given to a creative-class audience (not a paper in the discourse), Prince-Ramus mentions a corner designed as “the place we put into the building so I could propose to my wife.” Note the use of the plural—the team made a decision based on the team’s desire. This was not a singular man’s self-serving and romantic agenda.

The view, the narrative sequence, the feeling of privacy amid public exposure, the acoustics, the feeling of your shoes on
the linoleum, the color of the wall, the quality of the light through the mesh on a reading table: why not recognize this manifestation of space lust for what it is? There are no rational metrics to optimize these features. The production of lust-worthy space is a non-rational pursuit but I personally believe that it has value.

At some level, we are all always designing spaces to propose to our girlfriends in, or we should be. All design is based on lust, be it sublimated, directed, fulfilled, repressed or rejected. For architects whose job it is to professionally manifest the results of our imaginations, we need to have fluency in communicating about our basic desires (fig. 1).

SOMEONE IS USING SPACE LUST: COULD IT BE ME?
The danger of ignoring our own lust in our methodologies is that it never goes away. We are left without tools to examine the role of our still-present drives, to the extent that we embrace or resist them, or even acknowledge them. There is no inherent sin in pursuing the creation of pleasure-giving spaces, though discourse still resists. As Bernard Tschumi reminds us, “for many generations any architect who aimed for or attempted to experience pleasure in architecture was considered decadent.” Tongue-in-cheek decadence comes in and out of phase with discourse, but its object is never looked upon squarely.

Of course, this isn’t easy or even theoretically possible. “Pleasure does not readily surrender to analysis.” The analysis of pleasure is an orthogonal issue. Before pleasure comes a drive toward pleasure. What could an intelligible expression of lust look like in an architectural presentation? A groan? A poem? In this sense, expression of space lust requires that we stretch acceptable practice to include, potentially, such forms of communication. In this sense, expression of space lust is a “displacement of regulatory discourses.” We accept the “user” as a subject but pretend to reject the architect. In the creation of architect-subjects through a highly disciplined educational and professional process, some people will become architects and some will even see their lusts manifest. “The qualifications for a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.” What this means for nascent subjects, architects, is that when their expressions of lust are rejected by juries or peers, their entire status as valid subjects is refuted.

In the dense history of the study of desire, the lessons of the 1980s tell us that lust itself derives from the continual transgression of boundaries, from “ropes and rules.” Experience suggests that externally-defined boundaries are not enough to prescribe or counter-indicate desire. Perhaps transgression is not the end of the story for lust (fig. 2).

SPACE LUST: DISCIPLINARY REGIMES
I insist that my lust is valid, wherever it comes from. My lust on its own does not constitute an architecture, but the refutation of my lust rejects me as a subject. I reject that rejection.

Today’s women have inherited a conflicted blessing: the experience of our desires’ continual delegitimation, and a sense of entitlement to them. In professional appearance, architects rely equally on the conflicting roles of logical problem-solver and mystical artist. One identity silences my lust and the other glorifies it. Both are crucial but only one are we willing
to acknowledge. With the apparatus of language to talk about lust, we could get to the next, and more interesting, question: how to use it.

Sexy space sometimes looks like sexy bodies. We readily accept the thrust toward desire in the fantastical computer spaces of such architects as Hernan Diaz-Alonso, who makes no secret of his lust. This architecture looks like sex, so it is paradoxically uncontroversial. Sometimes architects create sexy drawings with sensuous linework (Farshid Moussavi’s work on ornament combines the artifice of affect with traditional architectural drawing typologies). Lust, in itself as a driver of design, is not disturbing when it informs an architecture of sex, only when it busts into the rational domain of buildable architecture. Spaces of lust are disturbing when they don’t have curves, when they look like they are performing rational work.

Creating language about lust that is intelligible to architecture will not solve my problems, but rather shift and postpone them. It will open up interesting, new discussions. I am not advocating the pursuit of lust at any cost, or promoting it above other less controversial architectural concerns. But without opening a discussion on space lust, without validating a lexicon for these feelings, we cannot properly evaluate their consequences, even in the privacy of our own minds. It is desire that opens up the imagination of an impulse not yet fulfilled. This impulse, the still-formless dream, is our greatest asset. It is within this sketchy latent reality that our least rational and most visionary desires reside, our most utopian optimism.

In his annual opening address at Columbia GSAPP, Mark Wigley spoke about the persistent optimism of architecture, the insistence that another world could exist. We are co-conspirators in an irrational scheme to ignore the damning evidence around us and demand a better world. Our lusts may bring us closer to or farther from that better world, but the practice of lusting toward the unknown, that impulse toward an idea that doesn’t exist yet, moves us forward. As architects, we bushwhack in high grasses through uncharted territories. Our lust offers a rare map: sometimes misleading, sometimes dangerous, sometimes brilliant, but always available if we choose to cultivate it, and always true. Our lust keeps us motivated, even optimistic. “We did not come here to fear the future. We came here to shape it.”

Endnotes

3 Ibid.
An Embellishment: Purdah

Jane Rendell
Her mother tells her another story, this time of her own life before she was born. She taught the Sheikh’s sister’s daughter English, so she was allowed to go inside the harem. Inside, under their burqas, she saw that the women wore make-up and perfume. For her labours, the sheik offered her a gift. She asked for a gold leaf burqa, the costume only the wives of the sheik can wear.

Her mother’s labour is not easy; she refuses to come out. She walks the dunes along the creek, back and forth, past the apartment block where she lives, but still she waits inside, for a night and a day. The chance of infection is high. There is no glass in the hospital windows. A caesarian section might kill them both, one for sure if she was carrying a son.

Fortunately there is a woman who is willing to take a chance. On the second night of her labour, the hospital is almost empty, everyone who can has gone, to feast, to break their fast. A nurse runs a drip to encourage her out. But she holds her ground. The nurse turns the drip up. Still she refuses to budge. The drip is turned up again, faster, and again.

For her labours, the sheik sends her mother a gift along with his apologies. Sorry, he said, so sorry it isn’t a boy. For a boy I would have sent you a watch, but here, with my condolences, is a gift for the girl, a gold coffee pot on a gold chain. She is a hajja, born on the eve of the haj; she will never have to make the journey to the east, to Mecca.

Surrounding her house is a moat of flints with furrows running through it at regular intervals like a ploughed field. When you run up and down these slopes, you can lose your footing and slip, and then is when you know the sharp-looking stones really can cut your knees. Still it is safer here, than beyond the walls in the waste-ground of dry bushes and stinging insects, where hyenas cry in the night.

The hallway cuts the house in half, and ties it together, with rooms leading off on both sides. The tiled floor is hard and shiny, at night she comes here to catch insects. Many creatures skulk across it, ants and spiders, and some more sinister whose names she doesn’t yet know. Trapped under her glass jar with its smooth edge that meets the marble without making gaps, she is safe to watch them.

He is a man with property: land and wives. Inside the walls of his house are sunlit orchards full of dark purple fruit. Among the trees his wives sit. Dressed in shades of red, some of the women have covered their faces, others have painted their toenails pink. From a distance, the women watch them arrive, disappearing inside as they draw closer.

Inside her house all the floors are marble, smooth and cool, laid out in careful grids, except for the big golden rug. In the evening, when the sun is in the west, the rug glows. At this time of day, she likes to follow the intricate patterns with her feet, like paths around a secret garden. But if you dance around the edge of the squares, you mustn’t fall in, who knows what lies waiting in the enchanted garden?

The hallways are dark and cool as they walk through the dark house to leave, she sees a pair of eyes watching her from behind a screen. The eyes belong to a girl her own age but whose hands glint with silver like a woman. Later she learns that this is his youngest wife, once a nomad, who carries her wealth in the jewels on her fingers.

After the meal, as they walk through the dark house to leave, she sees a pair of eyes watching her from behind a screen. The eyes belong to a girl her own age but whose hands glint with silver like a woman. Later she learns that this is his youngest wife, once a nomad, who carries her wealth in the jewels on her fingers.

Around the edge of the garden are the homes of two men, one tall and fair skinned, with light hair and green eyes; the other shorter, stockier, with darker skin, hair and eyes. They have fought each other in the past, and will again when the Soviets come to Kabul, and again, when her own people search the Hindu Kush to wipe out all evil. But for now, there is no fighting, once the sun has gone down, they sit and eat together.

Her own dress is set with tiny mirrors and a handsome square of embroidery at the front. It is hard work to get on, with no fastenings and a fabric so thin it could rip. In this dress she feels just like all the other Afghan girls. Except that they wear their dresses a bit softer, sometimes black. She wonders whether it is to match the black around the edge of their eyes.
For An Embellishment: Purdah, a two-part text installation for an exhibition, Spatial Imagination (2006), I selected twelve short extracts from “To Miss the Desert” and rewrote them as “scenes” of equal length, laid out in the catalogue as a grid, three squares wide by four high, to match the twelve panes of glass in the west-facing window of the gallery looking onto the street. Here, across the glass, I repeatedly wrote the word “purdah” in black kohl in the script of Afghanistan's official languages—Dari and Pashto.

The term purdah means curtain in Persian and describes the cultural practice of separating and hiding women through clothing and architecture—veils, screens and walls—from the public male gaze. The fabric veil has been compared to its architectural equivalent—the mashrabiyya—an ornate wooden screen and feature of traditional North African domestic architecture, which also “demarcates the line between public and private space.” The origins of purdah, culturally, religiously and geographically, are highly debated, and connected to class as well as to gender. The current manifestation of this gendered spatial practice varies according to location and involves covering different combinations of hair, face, eyes and body.

In Afghanistan, for example, under the Taliban, when in public, women were required to wear what has been termed a burqa, a word of Pakistani origin. In Afghanistan the full-length veil is more commonly known as the chadoree or chadari, a variation of the Persian chador, meaning tent. This loose garment, usually sky-blue, covers the body from head to foot. The only part of the woman to be seen are her eyes, the rims outlined with black kohl (perhaps only in a Westerner's imagination) looking out through the window of an embroidered screen.

In re-writing the word purdah across the glass, the embellishment of the window surface is an act of repetition. It is also one of separation and connection. Calligraphy has been used as a screening device by artists such as Mona Hatoum in her Measures of Distance (1988), where video images of the artist’s mother are overlaid with the Arabic text of the letters she sent to her daughter from Beirut. This image is accompanied by a two-part soundtrack, in which the artist reads a clear translation of the letters in English, while in the background a playful but indistinguishable interchange takes place in Arabic between two women. In her photographs of women covered with calligraphy, Lalla Essaydi focuses on how this Islamic art form has been made inaccessible to women, whereas the use of henna as a form of adornment is considered “women’s work.” Describing how under the Taliban regime, in Shia areas such as Herat, in western Afghanistan, women’s lives were the most oppressed, Christina Lamb's
The Sewing Circles of Heart discovers how, in order for women writers to read, share ideas and study banned foreign literature, they had to meet under the guise of sewing groups, such as the Golden Needle Sewing Circle. In taking the form of an embellishment, repetition, as a kind of remembering, can also be linked to reminiscence. For An Embellishment: Purdah, in repeatedly writing the same word, focusing on its precise formation, again and again, I recalled my school days writing out sentences, aiming to make my handwriting as small as possible so that, as a left-hander, I did not smudge the ink. In trying not to spoil the perfect letters formed of liquid kohl, I realized that I was writing from left to right, writing against the flow of an Arabic or Persian text.

The rise in interest in the veil through cultural forms—film and literature—has increased dramatically since the western invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. But these stories told from ‘behind the veil’ are often authored by those who have not experienced this reality directly, extending the problem of the western-dominated representation of the veil in the media, which, in Christina Noelle-Karimi’s opinion, has rendered Afghan women faceless and voiceless: the veil obscures their faces, while others tell their stories. The author of Swallows, for example, is a male Algerian army officer, Mohammed Moulessehoul, who took a feminine pseudonym to avoid submitting his manuscripts for army approval. Khaled Hosseini, author of another story that focuses on an allegiance forged between two very different Afghan women, left Kabul in the 1970s. Beneath the Veil (2001), a documentary famous for showing the execution of a woman under the Taliban regime, was made by Saira Shah, a woman of Afghan descent, but raised in the United Kingdom, while The Kabul Beauty School (2004) and Afghan Ladies’ Driving School (2006), both documentaries showing women’s lives in Kabul, have also been made by those from the west.

An Embellishment: Purdah does not make a judgement on the veil; rather it wishes to show how things seem quite different depending on where you are. From inside the gallery and outside on the street—by day and by night—the work changes according to the position occupied. Sometimes transparent, at other times opaque, revealing then concealing, this embellishment or decorative covering invites the viewer to imagine beyond the places s/he can see.
Endnotes


2 Afghanistan’s official languages Dari, a version of Persian, and Pashto are written primarily in the Arabic alphabet. One report states that Dari is spoken by the Tajiks (25–30 per cent of the Afghan population) and Pashto by the Pashtuns (45–50 per cent of the Afghan population). See Physicians for Human Rights, Women’s Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan: A Population-Based Assessment (31 December 2001), 17. However, another source holds that “according to recent US government estimates, approximately 35 percent of the Afghan population speaks Pashto, and about 50 percent speaks Dari.” http://www.afghan-web.com/language/ (accessed 14 May 2008).

3 Quoting Malek Alloula, David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros describe how the veil marks the closure of private space and its extension to public space where the viewer is to be found. See David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros, “Introduction,” Bailey and Tawadros (eds.), Veil, 16–39, 22–3. Referring to the writings of Hamid Naficy on the poetics and politics of the veil in revolutionary Iranian cinema, Bailey and Tawadros suggest that veiling is not fixed or unidirectional, but that it is rather “a dynamic practice in which both men and women are implicated,” and that the relation between veiling and unveiling is dialectical.


5 For example Ahdaf Soueif in a discussion of the differing practices and terms for the veil in Muslim cultures across the world including Arab countries, focuses on the history of its use in Cairo, Egypt. He explains how in the early twentieth century the tarha, a thin material to cover the hair in white or black, and yashmak, a white veil worn across the face under eyes, were adopted by women of the aristocracy, while the burqu’, a rectangle of fishnet which hung under the eyes fastened over the nose with a small decorative gold or brass cylinder—an aroussa— was worn by working-class women, and the bisha, which covered the whole face, was neutral in class terms. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, as part of the move to accept western culture, the veil was rejected, except the bisha, which continued to be worn by working-class women and more traditional women of all classes aged over fifty. The veil was taken up again as the hijab and the full niqab in the 1970s and more recently as a sign of resistance to the west. See Ahdaf Soueif, “The Language of the Veil,” first published in The Guardian, weekend supplement (8 December 2001), 29–32, and reprinted in Bailey and Tawadros (eds), Veil, 110–19.

6 Christina Noelle-Karimi discusses how the chadari was originally a town fashion, worn by middle-class women to show they did not work with their hands, and as a sign of distinction by women whose husbands has secured government employment. Rural women wore a head scarf or chadar, and reserved the chadari for trips to town. See Christina Noelle-Karimi, “History Lessons: In Afghanistan’s Decades of


11 Noelle-Karimi, “History Lessons.”

12 See Khaled Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns (London: Bloomsbury, 2007). This is Hosseini’s second novel; his first was The Kite Runner (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

13 See Saira Shah, Beneath the Veil (2001), shown in the UK on Channel 4 on 26 June 2001. See for example http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/A/afghanistan/ (accessed 3 June 2009). Her novel The Storyteller’s Daughter: One Woman’s Return to Her Lost Homeland (London: Michael Joseph, 2002) traces her journey back to her family’s lost homeland in Paghman. Both Beneath the Veil and Kandahar have been harshly critiqued by Martin Kramer, who states that Shah does not take into account, for example, the fact that the woman executed had murdered her husband, and that the same executionary practice occurs in Saudi Arabia today without comment. See Martin Kramer, “The Camera and the Burqa,” Middle East Quarterly (Spring 2002), 69–76.

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Inertia
How do you jump from a moving train?

Inertia is the tendency for a mass to remain in a constant and uniform state of motion until acted upon by an external force. Inertia is motion. Inertia is also rest. Inertia, in and through the mass of a body, resists change.

We talk about inertia as if we understand it—but what are we observing when we see inertia? Unhindered motion? Freedom? Absolute stability? A fundamental “desire” in an object? It is an explanation unlike any other: as an essential principle or law, it is present in every object but arguably never witnessed—the observer sees only motion, or the lack thereof, and this is merely a collection of forces acting in specific ways. And yet, science has named it. For our purposes, inertia is a ripe metaphor and heady philosophical problem. This bewildering concept is the topic of Thresholds 39.

Thresholds 39—Inertia—welcomes work that explores the contentious understandings of inertia, positive and negative, literal and metaphorical. Emphasis will be on the way in which art, architecture, and history approach inertia through heuristics in science and technology. Some questions could include:

To what extent have certain histories relied on conceptions of inertia to explain change? Do we depend on inertia for history writing? And what future do we float towards?

Can inertia shape the way we design and imagine our material world? How has architectural space been affected by technologically-induced inertia? Has humanity altered its inertial tendencies due to the increased permeation of life with advanced technoscience?

What is the inertial velocity behind big ideas like sustainability? What input or “force” is posed by disparate disciplines and positions, and how are these resisted? Does artistic practice conflict with these trajectories?
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thresholds is published biannually in spring and fall by the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Opinions in thresholds are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors, the Department of Architecture, nor MIT.

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology
ISSN 1091-711X
PSB 10-01-0006

Printed by Puritan Press—Hollis, New Hampshire
Text set in National and Museo
Design by Lindsay Anmuth
Cover Art by Katie Commodore

Special Thanks to:

Mark Jarzombek for his advice, advocacy, and humor; Christopher Guignon for keeping everything under control; Orkan Telhan, Adam Fulton Johnson, Lydia Brotherton, and Barbara Galletly for their support and feedback; Lindsay Anmuth for being totally right on.

thresholds is indebted for the tireless support of Yung-Ho Chang, Rebecca Chamberlain, Jack Valleli, Minerva Tirado, Michael Ames, and Puritan Press, Inc.
SPELL FOR THE IMPATIENT | BY MIRANDA JULY

ONLY DO THIS IF YOU REALLY WANT SOMEONE AND FEEL CERTAIN THAT YOU WILL ALWAYS WANT THEM.

THIS SPELL WILL GET YOU THE PERSON IN JUST 5 MINUTES, SO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE NOTHING ELSE TO DO 5 MINUTES FROM NOW.

TAKE THIS BOOK AND A PEN AND A PIECE OF PAPER INTO THE BATHROOM. LOCK THE DOOR.

WRITE TODAY’S DATE AND THE CURRENT TIME AT THE TOP OF THE PAPER.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PAPER WRITE YOUR NAME.

TRACE THE SHAPE OF YOUR POINTING FINGER AROUND YOUR NAME.

AT THE POINT OF THE FINGER WRITE THE NAME OF THE PERSON YOU WANT, WITH AN EXCLAMATION POINT, AS IT LOOKS WHEN CALLED OUT A WINDOW OR SCREAMED.

IMPORTANT TO THEN WRITE, UNDER THE FINGER, THE THING YOU WANT TO DO WITH THAT PERSON. FOR EXAMPLE, “SQUEEZE BUTT OF” OR “KISS.”

THE THING YOU WRITE WILL REALLY HAPPEN, SO THINK HARD ABOUT THIS.

CONSIDER PERHAPS, IF A THIRD PARTY WILL BE DAMAGED. OR YOUR TENDENCY TO ORDER THE WRONG THING AT RESTAURANTS.

WRITE WHAT YOU WANT.

THEN FOLD UP THE PAPER AND PUT IT UNDER SOMETHING HEAVY THAT SYMBOLIZES THE WEIGHT OF YOUR FAITH.

NOW CALL YOUR BEST FRIEND AND TELL HER “WHEN I SAY TEMECULA, YOU SAY PANGEA.”

THEN—THIS IS THE HARD PART—GO ABOUT YOUR LIFE. WORK LIKE A BEE, EAT HOT AND COLD FOOD, PULL THE CURTAIN OVER THE MOON AND TRY TO SLEEP. DO THIS ON AND ON. TRY TO FORGET ABOUT THE PAPER UNDER THE HEAVY THING.

NOW IT IS YEARS LATER AND YOU’VE FORGOTTEN. YOU REALLY HAVE. DO YOU STILL HAVE FAITH THAT IT WILL HAPPEN? I SUPPOSE YOU DO. I SUPPOSE FORGETTING IS AN EXAMPLE OF YOUR FAITH.

NOW YOU HAVE TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE PART. YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER TO FINISH THE SPELL. EVEN THOUGH THE REASON, THE PERSON, HAS SUNK OUT OF VIEW.

GO TO YOUR BEST FRIEND, WHO IS BY NOW, LIKE YOU, QUITE OLD. OLD AND ALZHEIMERED BUT STILL PLEASANTLY JUDGMENTAL. GO TO THIS OLD GIRL. YOU SAY “TEMECULA.”

AND SHE CAN’T REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE BUT, BEING YOUR BEST FRIEND, SHE SAYS “PANGEA.”