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MANIFOLD 4

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# MANIFOLD 4

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# **VIRTUAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE STRUCTURING OF SOCIAL PRACTICE**

## **in cedric price's fun palace**

Paul Morel

While the connection between the revolutionary aspirations of the socialist theater movement and those of Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood's Fun Palace is well established, the social and spatial mechanisms Price and Littlewood translated from the realm of theater to architecture have implications for the design of contemporary public spaces that merit further analysis. Bruno Latour has proposed that the public sphere in the west is suffering from a "crisis of representation" in which the most crucial matters of debate—including the procedures and apparatuses that structure debate—are taken to be foundational and hence above discussion: what demands public discussion is effectively resolved by tradition or expert decision makers before reaching the public sphere. Beyond simply embodying the zeitgeist of the early 1960s, when faith in science and technology commingled with the desire for popular democracy and revolution, the Fun Palace explored the potential for a changeable representational space—expanding on the model of representation used by epic theater—to empower many

users to carry on a multitudinous public dialogue. In the Fun Palace, anti-mimetic drama, in which a narrative point of view is enunciated while disclaiming any privileged authority and exposing the mechanisms of its own representation, became a model for democratic public space.

The defining characteristic of epic theater is its concern for the way in which the mechanisms of the drama structure belief in the story. Bertolt Brecht, the foremost exponent of the genre, felt that although the "realistic" bourgeois drama of the nineteenth century was capable of moving the passions of its audience, the seamlessness of its illusion implied a completeness that held the audience's impulse to action in check. Realistic drama purports to show what has come to pass, and the audience is powerless to affect the outcome. In contrast, epic theater hopes to inspire the audience to action by first convincing it (through craft) of the legitimacy of the story and the moral outrage it inspires, then emphasizing the fact that the theatricality is distinct from the world it depicts, which remains subject to change.

Twentieth-century epic theater utilized two related strategies, often in combination, to achieve this. The first was an anti-mimetic style of theatrical presentation. Epic theater productions made use of non-dramatic methods to advance the plot, such as projecting information on screens or using reportage by an omniscient narrator. Characters on stage broke with conventions of realistic drama to directly address the audience and indeed remind viewers explicitly that they were actors in a production and that the story

the audience was viewing was only a fiction. Some directors, Brecht in particular, insisted upon a style of acting that came close to pantomime, lest the performers become too deeply associated with their roles. Brecht referred to this contradictory impulse to illustrate a story without allowing the audience to identify completely with the characters as the “alienation effect.” The objective was to engage the viewer in a moral dialogue by explicitly articulating a view of the world and provoking a reaction.

In order to engage the audience while preventing its emotional capitulation to the illusion of the drama, epic theater directors made extensive use of new methods of staging that drew the audience into the space of the performance. This second innovation allowed the active, changeable, affective space of the stage to interpenetrate the traditionally receptive, static, ordered space of the auditorium. New staging techniques ran the gamut, from simply planting actors in the audience and having the dialogue leave the stage, to kaleidoscopic montages of projections and dance that enveloped the audience. Among the practitioners of epic theater, the German director Erwin Piscator was the most aggressive in pursuing new possibilities for staging. His approach to drama, which he termed “total theater,” combined acting with acrobatics, projections, and sing-along musical elements. As he developed his conception of total theater during the 1920s, his performances were enabled by an increasingly elaborate array of mechanical devices and electronic equipment. Trapezes hung from the ceiling, phalanxes of projectors enveloped the theater in changing washes of color,

and sliding platforms on rails kept his actors in constant motion.

The culmination of his efforts was a design for a new theater, made in collaboration with the architect Walter Gropius, consisting of nested tiers of rotating platforms. This Total Theater, which Piscator had hoped to build in Berlin, allowed the stage and the audience to slide around each other. In its most basic conception, this would have allowed the director to choose among proscenium, thrust, or arena staging; however, the ability to change from one to another during a performance allowed the re-territorialization of the space of performance to become part of the show. The mechanized space of the Total Theater allowed audience and performer to switch places, disrupting assumed roles of actor and observer. It aimed to make the audience self-conscious of its participation in a representational event. In this it raised to the level of architecture—of building schema rather than temporary staging—that which was already an integral part of epic theater. It was this progression from innovative staging to schema that Price and Littlewood would continue thirty years later.

The idea for the Fun Palace originated with the dramatist Joan Littlewood. Though she was one of England’s foremost directors by the early 1960s, having produced a string of successful productions in the West End, she had nurtured a lifelong vision of a utopian socialist theater capable of engaging and educating the working class. As part of a worker’s theater group in the 1930s, Littlewood had been inspired by Brecht’s approach. After staging a number of his works in

England, she became frustrated with the theater community’s indifference and began staging more mainstream productions in order to fund her visionary projects. Yet her success in the West End, and mounting pressure for her to repeat it, only left her disillusioned. At the time of her first meeting with Price, she had come to the conclusion that theater as it was conventionally understood was not capable of being the revolutionary teaching and organizing tool she envisioned.

In her frustration, Littlewood had developed a greatly expanded conception of theater—one indebted to Brecht’s revolutionary socialist educational approach, but less ideological. She added an element of play and individual exploration derived from Johan Huizinga’s concept of “Homo Ludens,” then ascendant in cultural circles. A chance meeting at a party brought her and Price together. Littlewood recalled her encounter with the famously cantankerous designer in which she attempted to explain her vision:

*He started to make fun of theatre, which provoked me into telling him my idea of space where everybody might learn and play; where there could be every kind of entertainment, classical and ad lib, arty and scientific; where you could dabble in paint or clay; attend scientific lectures and demonstrations; argue; show off; or watch the world go by. It should be by a river. We need the ebb and flow of water to keep us in time. I went rambling on... but he wasn't listening. I was wasting my time with this weirdo.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Mathews. *From Agit-prop to Free Space: The Architecture of Cedric Price*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 63. I have cited Mathews extensively in this article; however, my interest in the Fun Palace and my understanding of the project differ from his in some important respects. Mathews’ book is a survey of Price’s career that follows the evolu-

It was Price who realized that the impediment to her vision of a transformative, dialectical theater was one of architecture rather than performance. In his design for the Fun Palace, he took the concept of changeability inherent to epic theatrical staging and expanded it to encompass the entire building. The structure consisted of little more than a set of open steel towers spanned by trusses. Gantry cranes running along the bays allowed dismountable partitions, moving walkways, and specialized modules to be reconfigured on the fly. The base was open, allowing people to flow in from all sides.

Although Price’s design bears little typological resemblance to a theater, its lighting and projection systems, and the moveable structure that supports them, are similar to staging equipment. In a sense, the Fun Palace was to be an inhabitable set, where users could assemble a space for staging their own presentations. The spectacular nature of the Fun Palace’s approach to public space (even the name is over-the-top) and the startling variety of simultaneous events it was intended to support seem calibrated to create a self-aware experience on the part of the visitor. As would a member of an epic the-

tion of Price’s personal ideology. Though Mathews clearly recognizes the importance of Brechtian theater as an ideological impetus for the fun palace (a fact clearly established by Littlewood’s quotation), he doesn’t acknowledge the way in which the design is reflective of the Brechtian aesthetic of revealing material conditions. (He cites Mike Webb’s early projects and Constant Nieuwenhuy’s New Babylon as its antecedents.) Further, he does not note the way in which the scientific content that Price and Littlewood insisted be part of the Fun Palace’s mission intersected with the scientific research being conducted into cybernetics for its operation, and the implications that may have for the design of complex public forums.

ater audience, visitors to the Fun Palace would be aware of participating in their own representational event.

It is strange to note that in addition to various kinds of self-expression (the natural concern of a dramatist and central to the effort to sell the Fun Palace to the people of London in various renderings and publicity materials), Littlewood specified that “scientific lectures and demonstrations” should be among the Fun Palace’s activities. At first it may seem gratuitous—just another form of learning, a counterbalance to Littlewood’s own right-brained predilection. However, the need for public scientific presentations was a recurring theme in Price and Littlewood’s explanation of the project, and it was consistent with the Brechtian imperative of explaining the staging apparatus of a constructed social experience.

The Fun Palace was unabashedly hi-tech, and science and engineering were central to its operation. In the early sixties, many thinkers were in a fever of Cold-War-induced futurist speculation, and Price was an avid student of the latest theories and discoveries. He put his interest in technology to use in resolving the central organizational problem of such a changeable building: namely, what could happen there and when. Because the program of the Fun Palace was intended to change with the desires of its users, it would be essential to develop a systematic approach to planning for different uses of the space. That created something of a catch-22: in order for a user to do something in the Fun Palace, the building would first need to be able to provide for that use. If a theatrical production was in

the offing, a stage, lights, sound system, and seats would need to be available. The next night, open space, chairs, and easels might be needed for an art class. The modular building systems would need to be on hand in both cases, not deployed for some other purpose. In order to accommodate such variation, the building would have to anticipate its own use.

Early in the development of the Fun Palace, Price began researching the emerging fields of game theory and cybernetics to help make such predictions and to allow adaptation to user demand. As Stanley Mathews explains, “Cybernetics allowed dynamic systems to self-regulate and self-correct without an end-state or definite telos. The performative objectives of cybernetics are in reality fluid criteria and are as subject to modification as is the system itself.”<sup>2</sup> Through a virtual architecture of code, the anticipatory planning algorithms of the Fun Palace could be adjusted to better reflect popular demand. In theory, then, the catch-22 of anticipatory design could be eliminated over time as the expectations of building planning and building use converged.

Price recruited a number of prominent scientists and engineers, including the computer scientist Gordon Pask and design renaissance man Buckminster Fuller, to be part of a technological advisory committee he set up to help administer the project. It was Pask, a provocative futurist and charismatic public intellectual, who pointed out that the virtual architecture of the Fun Palace could be a form of social engineering. As Mathews explains, Pask “regarded cybernetics not as a uni-

<sup>2</sup> Mathews, 73.

lateral system of one-way reactivity, but as a two-way ‘conversation’ between entities.”<sup>3</sup> He understood architecture as well to be a fundamentally interactive system that mutually shapes and is shaped by human activity. The ability of the Fun Palace to change so dramatically over time made the prospect of a cybernetic building particularly beguiling: it brought the “conversation” of use and adaptation into a human time scale, making the Fun Palace more of an “entity” than a conventional structure. Through the embedded intelligence of the Fun Palace’s cybernetic planning, the “will” of that entity would become part of the interaction.

Pask’s analysis stands in sharp contrast to Price’s naïve hope of being able to write himself out of his own work. Over the two-year development of the Fun Palace, the idea that the anticipatory planning processes would tend to support certain behaviors became part of the mission of the project. However, Price, according to Mathews, was never comfortable with the idea that he would be directing, however remotely, the activities of his visitors. He held out hope that as the system improved, his role as planner would gradually be superseded. Yet the problematic fact remained that the developmental trajectory of the anticipatory algorithms would bear the mark of his influence. The whole process, including the initial conditions Price set, would be invisible to the casual visitor. He or she wouldn’t likely be aware of what wasn’t possible because the planning algorithm of the building hadn’t expected that users would want it to begin with—or did expect it and denied it. Any “conversation” with a cybernetic

<sup>3</sup> Mathews, 75.

space would be essentially an illusion, the interaction of explicit desires on the part of the users and invisible or unacknowledged limitations on the part of the facility. The need to be able to anticipate potential uses before they were implemented created limitations on activity; these limitations nonetheless would be much less obvious to a user than would those of a traditional structure. The great risk of the Fun Palace’s virtual architecture as a forum for social democracy was that it could create the illusion of openness within a system that systematically limited possibilities because of an excess of potential.

Curiously, Price seems to have been sufficiently enamored with the idea of “artificial intelligence”—no matter how flawed and gimmicky—to return to it throughout his career. His Generator project of 1979, for instance, was designed to solicit information from a visitor, then configure a space “tailored” to his or her personality. The programming was designed to simulate the unknowable autonomy of a human intelligence. Price even suggested that if things didn’t change for a long time, the computer might grow “bored” and move things on its own:

*At the entrance, a computer interface would engage visitors in a dialogue to tease out their particular interests and preferences, and the modules would be automatically adjusted to suit the visitor. The site would therefore endlessly vary as a result of the input from successive visits. If the site had not changed in some time, the central computer would become “bored” and initiate random changes on its own.<sup>4</sup>*

In this case, “intelligence” is a special ef-

<sup>4</sup> Mathews, 245.

fect in media historian Norman Klein's sense of the term: a hyperreal element in an illusionistic narrative about power. The stakes were fairly low in Generator, which was to be a public art piece at the headquarters of the Gilman Paper Company. It created a sense of approachability and fostered visitor interaction with a faceless institution, personifying an immaterial "corporate entity" and eliciting an empathetic reaction in an exchange that masked the enormous difference in power between the lone visitor and the corporation.

In this later version of a cybernetic building, we can clearly see an insistence on illusion—a kind of cybernetic acting—that is related to the realistic bourgeois theater that Brecht challenged. Price and Littlewood's insistence upon scientific demonstrations exposed what might have appeared to be an incidental factor in the operation of the Fun Palace as a conscious decision on their part. Like the physical structure and mechanical devices that created the space, scientific theory was a framing element of the Fun Palace. In the form of computer theory, it bounded the potential activities that could occur, and it therefore needed to find expression in the representational arena.

In its need to limit some activity in order to provide an orderly environment for others, the Fun Palace is exemplary of the systematic limitations inherent in all forms of public representation, including the political. Although it anticipated Latour's response to the "crisis of representation" by four decades, the notion of the Fun Palace as a place whose own technology of operation could be dis-

seminated is an example of Latour's concept of the "public proof."<sup>5</sup> Democracy, he asserts, has typically been practiced within a framework of regulating rules, modes, and structures whose influence is assumed to be neutral; in matters where facts are at issue, experts adjudicate. Latour envisions a new democratic practice in which all the objects and parties that structure public dialogue become central to that dialogue. Rather than be taken as a neutral object that hosts public activity, the Fun Palace acknowledged its own ideological apparatuses and made them part of the representational event. The Fun Palace was messy, contentious, assumption-laden, and ideological, but it was forthcoming about its ideology and assumptions, and it subjected them to the scrutiny of those who would be influenced by them. Despite Pask's influence, the impulse toward social engineering was checked throughout the project by a Brechtian impulse to reveal material conditions.

Epic theater in its various forms was part of an influential avant-garde, and its most significant innovations have become standard elements of the dramatic reper-

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: *Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, Making Things Public (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 14-41*. Although he introduces the term "public proof" specifically to refer to the process of how public knowledge is formed around complex and contentious public issues (like global warming, the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and so on), his broader concern in the exhibition is with how the terms and assumptions that enable such a discussion are made evident to the public and allows it to enter into the consensus-forming process. I am using the term in this broader sense of demonstrating and explicating the conditions that structure public knowledge - that allow specialized knowledge and expertise to be utilized in public debate without being cloaked in shadowy authority.

toire. However, the potential it implied for the design of democratic public spaces—spaces of ideological exchange—has not been well appreciated by architects. The Fun Palace became highly influential for a later generation of designers, but mostly because of its radical reordering of the relationship between conventional architectural elements such as skin, structure, and systems. The origins of the Fun Palace have been subsumed into the ongoing discussion of architectural modernism's obsession with material expression, standardization, and flexibility. (It was in this context that the Fun Palace had a clear impact on the design of the Centre Pompidou, for example. The Pompidou is a monument to the power and vision of the French president. And although Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers's flexible design suited the Pompidou's unusually open-ended program, there was never a mission for the building to change with the whims of its audience; it was a projection of centralized government authority, not a "people's palace.") By understanding its debt to epic theater, we can see the Fun Palace for what its designers hoped it would be: an arena for freewheeling ideological exchange; an apparatus for the practice (in the sense of rehearsal to develop skill and facility) of social democracy. By extending the changeable space of the drama to encompass the audience, epic theater (or, as Brecht preferred, "dialectical theater") pointed the way to a space of hypothetical reality, where different activities and social arrangements could be tried out, interrogated, revised, and developed. The Fun Palace was the culmination of that impulse, where the distinction between "actor" and "spectator" approached zero. The ideological

exchange that Brecht's theater fostered became the basis for the Fun Palace's radical new idea of democratic public space.



## FREEWAY FREESPACE

Nkiru Mokwe

### Go Slow

In the densely populated city of Lagos, Nigeria, the term “go slow” is a local colloquialism used disdainfully to describe a common condition known well to its inhabitants. Trapped by the city’s limited motorways, thousands of drivers participate in this performance involving an almost glacial motion of metal, inching forward at a rate of less than two miles an hour, “v boot to 504,” or bumper to bumper. *Go slow* is both a collective event and a place in the city, emerging with an unpredictable temporality. To the millions of informal traders living and working in the city, the *go slow* is also prime real estate for roaring trade. Termed *bridge market*, *cloverleaf market*, and *expressway market*, all are thriving forms of successful commercial space in this modern-day megalopolis.

### Population Explosion

In the fifty years between 1950 and 2000, the population of Lagos increased by over sixteen million, the fastest growing urban agglomeration among those of more than ten million inhabitants in the world. Unlike the urbanities of the first industrial revolution, which developed over two centuries, Lagos resembles other third

world cities in facing an unprecedented rate of urbanization; it maintains an average growth rate of 7 percent per year, thirty-four persons per hour. By 2015, Lagos with twenty-three million inhabitants will be the third largest city in the world, behind Tokyo and Mumbai.

At the event/place of a major intersection in Lagos, the privacy of citizens in their motorcars is unceremoniously violated by the visible, the audible, and the olfactory presence of an urban public, pushing back against the stream of traffic. “*Ojuelgba, Isolo, Bariga, Ojoto!*” can be heard—cries from the conductors of the ubiquitous yellow *danfo*, a nine-seater Volkswagen combi carrying up to twelve passengers, who hop on and off regardless (and fearless) of surrounding motorcars. These minibuses form part of a giant informal trade network that accounts for more than a third of the Lagos economy. They are the only extensive public transportation system in a city where 95 percent of all journeys are taken by road. They service the informal squatter settlements that expand and coalesce to form established districts, in a battle of the planned and unplanned that is taking place on the Lagos mainland, an extension to the original Lagos Island. Three bridges over the Lagos lagoon connect the island and commercial center to the mainland. Traffic crossing the lagoon can be upwards of 150,000 vehicles a day.

### Intersection

*Lagos* is a Portuguese word for “lake” or “lagoon,” an intersection of trade routes. The only natural break in 2,500 kilometers

of West African coastline, Lagos emerged as a point of exchange between merchants and indigenes. Its urban components were early affected by movements and interactions on a global scale. The markets of *Obun Eko* and *Ebute Ero* have been sited on locations advantageous for trade in the shelter of the lagoon. These were once the Lagos forums of social activity and local politics, the only source and distribution point of all manner of goods, from food-stuffs to vegetables, animal products, and imported conveniences.<sup>1</sup> All city life must pass through the market in a temporal migration to and from the edge.

Although Nigeria was colonized by the British for fifty-nine years (between 1901 and 1960), as Lagos grew, public space in the European sense never formed as a de-

<sup>1</sup> Akin L. Mabogunje, "The Evolution and Analysis of Retail Structure in Lagos," *Economic Geography* 40, no. 4 (October 1964): 304–323.

fining element of its urban morphology. The traditional civic square, an open area in the center of the city reserved for communal congregation and public amenity, is not a functioning entity in the city of Lagos. Instead, it is the market area that represents the main communal space of the city. However, its form is not determined by a converging dynamic leading into a center, but by a transient linearity of movement across a threshold.

Following the establishment of the British encampment, on the side of Lagos Island more exposed to the mouth of the lagoon, a great market emerged. *Isaleko*, literally "bottom of Eko," the local name for Lagos—or a way of saying "downtown"—straddled the length of a boundary, the intersection between the old indigenous city and the British encampment. It was a thronging linear entity that would grow along the road to the island's edge at the

base of the Carter Bridge, then the only connection between the mainland and the island. The market would later take the name of the primary stop along the tramline built by the British to circle the boundary of their encampment. *Ebute Ero* was a major communication link between the new and old citizens of Lagos.

Traditionally, the Lagos market embodies a temporality that sets the pace for Yoruba society (Yoruba is the most common tribe among Lagosians). The character of the morning market—a combination of scale, diversity, and amplitude—differs entirely from that of the night market, which differs again from the four-day periodic market. The spatial qualities and temporal rhythm of the markets of one Nigerian tribe affect the community so far as to define time and the structure of the week, divided literally into market days.

In Lagos the market is a space of transition—between day and night, week and weekend—an edge condition or boundary between two zones: the water and the city, one neighborhood and the next. Strung out according to the course and motion of the passerby, the market itself is a vector. There is no center.

### Infrastructure

The city has since expanded beyond its lagoon setting into an amorphous urban agglomeration of more than two hundred formal and informal neighborhoods. A poly-nuclear urban form is held together by an inadequate and incomplete mobility infrastructure of expressways, cloverleaf and diamond interchanges, junctions, and bridges, connecting slum settlements and wealthy neighborhoods in an ad hoc



Oshodi Market Place Junction. Photograph: Nkiru Mokwe



patchwork of urbanism, junction to junction and node to node. The incomplete infrastructural network accompanying the partial modernization of Lagos, then the capital city of Nigeria, was built in the late 1960s to early 1970s, stimulated by the escalating value of the country's natural resource and primary export: oil. Its intention was to alleviate Lagos Island from the symptoms of congestion, but following the crash of the world economy in the late 1980s, the project was never completed at the scale required to order the massive population into an efficiently functioning modern city.

Today these largely unregulated roadways are the only free and public space in the densely populated city, their wide tarmac surfaces offering literal relief from the warren of narrow, crowded local roads. These conduits carry the thousands of people who traverse the urban plane daily, accumulating into a public realm of hyper-congestion. Estimates of transport demands fall within the range of seven to ten million passengers a day. Accommodating the multitude of transient consumers are over thirty markets, defining a unique typology of modern public space.

Street traders in Lagos have transformed the congestion of the rapidly growing city into a unique commercial condition, a staccato flow where the zone of arrested motorway traffic merges with the zone of pedestrian micro-scale trading. This trading is the primary source of income for self-employed informal workers in the city. The atomization of the individual vendors and their saleable goods, which they ingeniously transport and display,

is juxtaposed against massive infrastructural elements, transforming bridges, highways, and cloverleaves into instant markets. The structure of these markets is loose and undefined. The goods themselves, forming and reforming as transactions occur, generate enclosures. The majority of these markets rely on no built structure at all and instead are made up of informal and illegal pavement and roadside stalls, the most common form consisting of an open tray of goods, a wooden stool, a bench for the owner, and an umbrella for shade from the blazing sun. Motorcar driver and pedestrian hawker coexist in a space of continuous transformation, organizing dynamically according to the flow of traffic.

There can be no stronger sense of the public, or the collective, in the city of Lagos than when descending from the Carter Bridge onto Lagos Island and its crowd of pedestrians, socializing, networking, and consuming. The senses are subject to a spatial blurring, and it becomes unclear where the road ends and the city begins.

### Field

*With its massive traffic jams creating instant markets on roads and highways, Lagos is not "a kind of backward situation" but, rather, "an announcement of the future."*

—Rem Koolhaas, *Lagos Wide & Close; An Interactive Journey Into An Exploding City*

Throughout the first world, public space within the modern megalopolis is disappearing. There are few remains of a traditional local center, once the convergence point of multiple trajectories frequented

by dwellers and visitors, the site of news and goods exchange. Public spending on the built environment falls annually. The seeds of this inevitable disappearance are already firmly planted in the modern conurbations of London, Houston, and Hong Kong. The responsibility of providing local social space in the city is firmly in the hands of the private investor who, without much resistance, delivers the city a multitude of privatized coffee gardens and heavily programmed event spaces. To locate a site of active and constant collectivity, one must look to the mobility networks. It is on the freeways of Houston and the underground metropolitan public transportation systems of London and Hong Kong that any sense of "polis," a true cross section of the city, is retained. Models of organization, essential for massive populations to coexist and for the city to function, revolve around access within it and through it. These movements and trajectories define the urban field. The London underground fragments and distorts the city. The ability to transport oneself from point to point in London compresses time and space, and reinterprets the city: as you emerge from the underground onto the "high street," not entirely aware of the distance traveled or your exact location within the urban field, an abstraction takes place that allows the city to retain a sense of the local and intimate.

Major nodes where the mobility network intensifies become arenas of public life, and the predictable presence of the masses is a much exploited, capitalistic opportunity. The underground is at once a vast network of mobility and a linear system of commerce and information.

Information must be administered, however, in short, sharp bursts. The average waiting time at the station is just two or three minutes. Multiplied by thousands of daily commuters, this renders the "Tube" into a space of rapid micro trading.

In growing cities in Asia, these underground wormholes emerge directly into large shopping malls. Here the mobility fabric and the commercial fabric are literally merged with one another. Not only is the commuter targeted en route, but the mall becomes a forced final destination, which the commuter must pass through before emerging into the city again.

However, the attempt to hybridize the space of public transportation and the space of commerce in first world cities produces a mono-functional regularity that deadens their viability as a valuable contribution to urban life; their uninterrupted landscapes instead are there to ensure optimum efficiency within a closed system.

The modern freeways were introduced principally to overcome the constraints of density on urban passage. Today they proliferate across and boldly define the glorious city of Houston, lined with advertising billboards and seamlessly connected to box stores and strip malls via the well-marked exit ramp. It is here, driving from Sharpstown on Highway 59 toward the private retail outlet just over the junction of Interstate 10 and the 610 loop, that you will see your fellow citizens of Houston.

The freeway represents a twentieth-century fantasy of uninflected, uninterrupted

flow, facilitated by the motorcar and the mono-functional landscape, ever expanding and ever improving the connection from the center to the periphery. But its growth is often to the detriment of the many local neighborhoods that it crosses, effectively snuffing out the vibrancy of their local centers. The city life contained in the freeway has no relationship with what surrounds it. In the half-century since the inception of the freeway, the tension between its metropolitan scale and the local scale of the city street has seldom been addressed and remains as yet unresolved. Many once thriving neighborhoods in the city of Houston have been extinguished by the shadows of the freeway built over or often through their blocks.

In Lagos, where an exploding urban pop-

ulation is trapped by its own geography with limited governance and laissez faire regulations, the motorway “functions” as a multipurpose surface and active public space. Its appropriation is part of a long Lagosian history. The result is an inherently post-Fordist attitude that balances the scale of vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle movement. This blurring of territories defines the city: the fuzzy edge, the blurred boundary where public and private space continuously cross with one another. Perhaps this is the terminal condition of all modern cities referred to by Rem Koolhaas in his studies of the city.<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly not an ideal situation by any

2 Koolhaas: *Lagos Wide and Close, An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, DVD, directed by Bregtje v. d Haak (Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Submarine, 2006).



Project and Rendering by Nkiru Mokwe

means, and at moments, on heavily congested roads overloaded beyond capacity, mobility breaks down altogether, so much so that parts of the infrastructure seem at first to be a market appropriated by a motorway. However, by learning from Lagos’s “publicangestion” infrastructures, new types of hybrid spaces for the public realm of the future city may emerge.

## Speculations

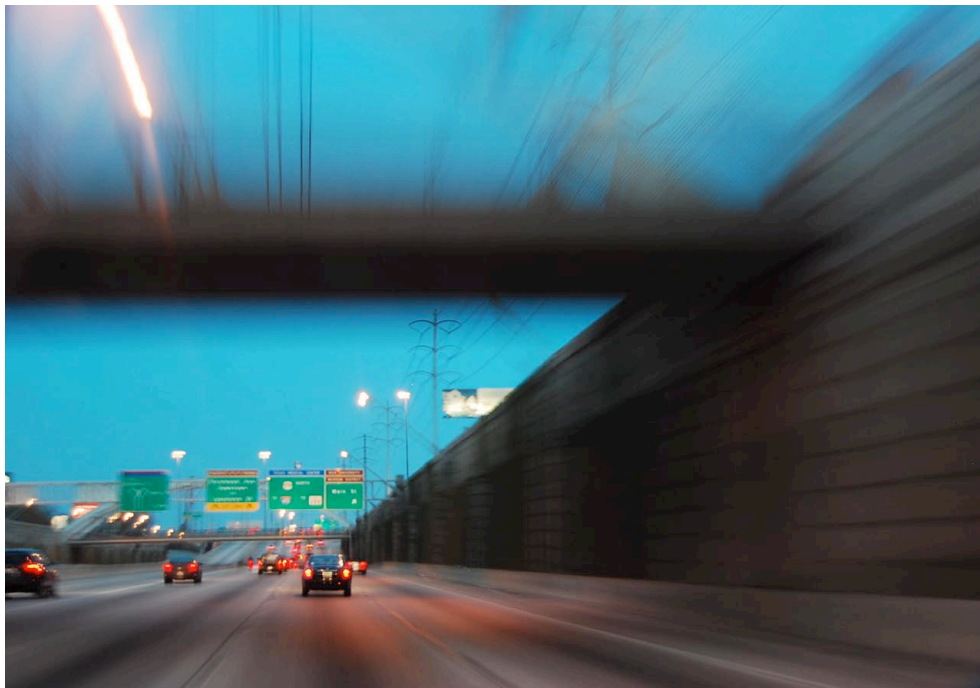
The future of public space in the city lies not in single elements but in a formal partnership between multiple flexible infrastructures responsive to the ebb and the flow of the urban field, where public space comes into being as a result of open and active adjacencies. New diagrams of speed and movement, such as weaving, emerge from a post-Fordist perspective.<sup>3</sup> The modern motorway fulfills the desire for individuated space, but it also holds

the potential for a flexible public realm, its navigation now ever more dependent on mobile and satellite technology.

Surface and speed geometries typically employed to negotiate the intersection can be de-optimized and curvature can be appropriated to facilitate a “flowscape” of speed transitions and sustained friction appropriate for a public space of exchange as well as mobility. As an architecture of percolation, the flowscape facilitates conveyance and interaction at once, filtering volumes of vehicles through a zone of activity.

Visions of this alternative reality are already the topic of science fiction, like the landscape of Steven Spielberg’s 2002 film *Minority Report*; however, these projections do not explore the latent potential of the return to a sense of community that such space may hold. By learning from Lagos, we can visualize the temporal formation of a dynamic urban space, the potential of a new transit culture.

3 Jonathan D. Solomon, *13 Projects for the Sheridan Expressway, a.k.a. Jump, Slump, Hump, Bump—Guide Specifications for a Post-Fordist Infrastructure* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).



Houston, Texas. Photograph: Nkiru Mokwe

# THE URGENCY OF THEORY

Jason Nguyen

António Pinto Ribeiro, editor. 2007. *The Urgency of Theory*. Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd.

Few would disagree that the events of the past decade have provided fertile ground for any discussion regarding the socio-political state of the world. From the atrocities of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the questionable wars and policies that were waged in its aftermath to the recent worldwide economic downturn, contemporary culture finds itself in a state of flux and uncertainty.

It is within this shifting milieu that *The Urgency of Theory* surfaces – a fascinating collection of thirteen scholarly essays which were presented in 2007 in Lisbon, Portugal, continuing the dialogue that was begun in the *State of the World*, published in 2006 by Carcanet and the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. While many of the authors spoke to particular European concerns (European post-colonialism, for example), the content of the book remains profoundly relevant for anyone who finds that today's environment requires thoughtful, intellectual and theoretical solutions to guide us successfully to a more just future. As a comprehensive whole, these essays collectively ask: How should we best understand the inter-re-

lated complexities that define early twenty-first century existence? What conceptual and theoretical modes of inquiry will guide us most effectively into the future? And what roles should we, as intellectuals, play in the active development of an equitable socio-political culture?

As Homi Bhabha, who pens *The Urgency of Theory*'s first essay, "Ethics and Aesthetics of Globalism: A Postcolonial Perspective," stated at the 2008 Aga Khan Award Cycle at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, "[an architectural] project must be accompanied by a measure of ethical perspicuity in the planning and building process that proposes a design for living, an architect's plan, an artist's vision, a politician's worldview, which then aspires to some version of the good life and contributes to the construction of the common good as a mode of habitation, a way of coming home."<sup>1</sup>

As a catalyst for a truly theoretical and interdisciplinary discussion on contemporary culture, the book succeeds on two fronts:

First, it refuses overly simplistic synopses of the current state of global political affairs. In fact, if anything, this book acknowledges its complexities, as well as the varying analytical methods that one could, and should, employ to holistically understand our cultural existence. Each author proposes a particular way of thinking about the world, spanning the politi-

<sup>1</sup> See Homi Bhabha's "The Tenth Aga Khan Award Cycle" in *GSD 08 Platform: A Year of Research Through Studio Work, Theses, Exhibitions, and Conferences at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design*, Ed. Lluís Ortega (Barcelona: Actar, 2008), p 141.

cal (Bhabha, Stiegler, Gilroy, Magalhaes), the historical (Ferro), the philosophical (Kacem, Cicero), the anthropological (de Almeida, D. Miller), the economic (Pratt), the aesthetic (P. Miller, Cohn) and the environmental (Santos). Moreover, this collection of essays traverses, and subsequently challenges, traditional disciplinary boundaries in seeking new, progressive methods of critical analysis.

Miguel Vale de Almeida's "On Difference and Inequality: The Lessons of Ethnographic Experience," in particular, fuses both theoretical and anthropological methods in discussing the socio-political aspects of race, immigration, ethnicity and post-colonialism in contemporary Europe. Vale de Almeida, Professor of Anthropology and Researcher at the Centre for Social Anthropological Studies at the ISCTE, Lisbon, begins his essay by recalling a note that he received in his personal mailbox: "Ukrainian woman provides cleaning and laundry services at home. Ring mobile number such and such."<sup>2</sup> In but a few words, this simple advertisement conveys various messages and meanings about both the cleaning person herself and contemporary Western Europe. What does one's Eastern European ethnicity mean in the wealthier, global nations of the European Union? Historically, how has the concept of the nation-state developed, both in Europe and in the lands that Europeans colonized (i.e., Brazil), and what have been its social ramifications? What does one's gender

<sup>2</sup> See Miguel Vale de Almeida's "On Difference and Inequality: The Lessons of Ethnographic Experience" in *The Urgency of Theory*, Ed. António Pinto Ribeiro (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2007), pp 59-47.

suggest in a post-feminist environment? And what is the relationship between an identity of cultural difference and social (in)equality?

This attention to difference and inequality stands as the overarching concern in the essay, which proves timely given recent generations' assertions that a celebration of difference and diversity leads to social equality. Vale de Almeida, as an anthropologist, "cannot and must not take phrases such as 'all different, all equal' merely at their face value," but instead must "see them as the manifestation of a discourse, as a representation, or even as a belief..."<sup>3</sup> Yet, he refuses to view such concepts as identity as a merely cultural constructs. Instead, he adopts a broader understanding by investigating the theoretical underpinnings of signification in defining identity in society today. Regarding this interdisciplinary method of analysis, he states:

*I don't want to lecture you by arguing from grand theory, from the top downwards, nor by arguing from an impossible position of empirical purism, from the bottom upwards, as one might expect of an anthropologist, who is always inclined to praise the methodology of fieldwork with participant observation...I should instead like to situate myself at a level that we might term ethnographic: when the observation of the real experience of practices and discourses (the fieldwork of the anthropologist) encounters social theory (the intellectual work of the social scientists) in the analytical, but also inescapably political, act of the writing of a text by an anthropologist...It is...a question of systematizing areas of critical tension between the analytical and the political.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p 49.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp 59-60.

In addition to Vale de Almedia's essay, Paul D. Miller's *Uncanny/Unwoven* develops an entirely innovative method of analysis, which fuses philosophical thought and poetry itself as a means of exploring contemporary culture. Miller, a New York City based writer, artist and musician, digs deeply through the history of philosophy and aesthetics, touching on the likes of Freud, Plato, DuBois and Derrida, as way to understand how 'art' today relates to the shifting realities of the world. Though as a topic this study is not new, it is his analytical method, partly composed of poetic verse, which is challenging and convincingly effective. Through this analytical poetry, he fully explores and employs the temporal, non-linear qualities that art can assume in critically coming to understand its own dynamic place in the world. He states:

*Art and imagination – the physical and mental – linked like the first installment of a loan made from the future. Payment is due. Prosthetic realism – a mirror of the mind as its expression unfolds in time (I break it down with a rhyme): From now to the beginning, let it be like a record spinning / a poetics of presence / contents under pressure / got caught in an electromagnetic lecture ... Like William Carlos Williams observed a long time ago, 'poetry is nothing but a machine made of words.' The task of art now is to somehow speak of this plurality of 'reals' in a world moving into a polyphrenic cultural space: the Greek agora, the city centre, the museum – all of these places of social mutuality – all find themselves adrift. Art is our guide to the new terrains we have, in pursuit of techne and logos, opened within ourselves.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> See Paul D. Miller's "Uncanny/Unwoven" in *The Urgency of Theory*, Ed. António Pinto Ribeiro (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2007), p 171.

Due to his nonlinear poetics, the conceptual thread of Miller's piece can sometimes be hard to follow. His casual and quick references to theorists, from DuBois to Derrida, seems at first careless and overly simplistic. However, upon closer reading, one realizes how thoughtful and well considered these references actually are. Overall, the piece suggests appropriate means by which artists can enter critical discourse using in the language of aesthetics.

Though the legitimacy of such a hybridized method of inquiry could (and should) be disputed, the methodological audacity as employed by Vale de Almedia and Miller, among others, is part of what makes their essay so utterly fascinating. Furthermore, it raises a host of questions regarding the evolution of "disciplinarity" and "method" in twenty-first century cultural criticism, which many, especially those in architectural scholarship, should find intellectually compelling.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the essays in *The Urgency of Theory* seek a new kind of discourse appropriate for our time – a time yearning for intellectual solutions to the global crises facing contemporary culture. While much "theory" in recent years has done much to dismantle the historical, philosophical and critical discourse, *The Urgency of Theory* introduces new, diverse and decidedly critical methods for comprehensively understanding the world as we move deeper into the next millen-

<sup>6</sup> For, if we are to believe art historian Rosalind Krauss, it is for method that criticism is seriously read. See her "Introduction" to *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), pp 1-6.

nium. In most cases, the ideas presented attempt, with varying success, to move beyond Frankfurt School abstractions and Situationist claims of subversion – the dialectical methods against which much so-called "Post-critical" theory rebels – while deliberately eschewing the rhetorical aberrations promoted by many within the Post-critical camp.

Bernard Stiegler's "Attention and Solitude in the Twenty-first Century" serves as but one example of a productively critical discourse. In it, Steigler, who is currently the Director of the Cultural Department at the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris, chronicles the transformation of Foucault's concepts of biopolitics in our increasingly mediated environment. He begins his study by revisiting Foucault's assertions that "the technologies of power constitute power much more than law does."<sup>7</sup> Stiegler, however, moves beyond Foucault's strict preoccupation with the power as exerted by the nation-state in attempting to place these concepts in a contemporary light. Like Gilles Deleuze, he evolves Foucault's understanding of society by focusing on psychologically based powers and messages as transmitted by technological and mediated means. What has been lost by much of society, he claims, is a critical consciousness of our own environment. Unlike Frankfurt School critiques of the "culture industries," though, Stiegler moves beyond abstraction in his notion that the acquisition of knowledge (and not merely the absorption of information) through education

<sup>7</sup> See Bernard Stiegler's "Attention and Solitude in the Twenty-first Century" in *The Urgency of Theory*, Ed. António Pinto Ribeiro (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2007), p 107.

can give rise to a practical, temporal and critical consciousness.

Education is not primarily learning knowledge constituted by itself and enduring for ever, but the capacity to make such knowledge our own, so that we are able to transform it by the mere fact of internalizing it and thereby making ourselves able to take care of the world – of ourselves and others and of what we share as our common good – including and especially showing ourselves capable of challenging the set ideas that always risk becoming knowledge in the hands of those not trained to receive it for what it is, namely not set ideas but questions which must be continually discussed.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Mehdi Bellhaj Kacem's "Nihilism and Democracy" which discusses the "democratic nihilism" which has taken shape in France in the past thirty years and Antonio Cicero's "On the Concept of Civilization," which re-examines contemporary ideas of savagery, barbarity and civilization in an historical context, stand as other well-conceived essays which successfully incorporate both critical and progressive means of analysis in attempts to make sense of our complex, contemporary environment.

In the end, *The Urgency of Theory* raises many more questions than it answers, which, given the uncertain state of the world today, is perhaps the most productive function of the book. It forces a critical dialogue of our dynamic and inter-connected existence – politically, philosophically, anthropologically,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p 111.

economically, aesthetically and environmentally. As the book fails to include a discussion between the various scholars (which would have proved fascinating), it remains the responsibility of the readers to offer this type of critical conversation. In architecture particularly, how can we as a discipline play an effective, progressive and critical role in shaping the present and future of culture? How should we (if at all) incorporate the other theoretical methods of inquiry in our discipline? It is in these discussions that the success of books such as *The Urgency of Theory* will best be found.

## COOPER QUESTIONS COLONIALISM

Etien Santiago

Frederick Cooper. 2005. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Given that historian Frederick Cooper opens his book *Colonialism in Question* with a discussion of the challenges brought forth by the rise of interdisciplinary interest in colonial studies—not least of which include the grave intellectual pitfalls that come with it—right from the very first pages of the book, readers who are neither historians nor historiographers become acutely aware of the paradoxical nature of their position. On the one hand, interdisciplinary exchange is often celebrated today for its ability to endow ideas with new life and audiences. Yet on the other, as Cooper knowingly warns us, “the basic problem with interdisciplinary scholarship is the same as that within the disciplines: conformism, gatekeeping, [and] conventions [...]” (5) What is more, “one is likely to fall for conventional wisdom in another discipline, miss internal debates, and pick up tidbits without exploring [further]” (6)—all of which creates a serious possibility for diluting and flattening ideas, not enriching them.

With this introduction in mind, any outside

review of such a complex and thoughtful book must necessarily tread lightly. Yet rather than frightening away non-historians, *Colonialism in Question*’s introduction provides a clear and useful demonstration of the incisive approach that Cooper uses throughout the book, effectively drawing in readers with its methodical rigor. First, by questioning a concept as prevalent and accepted as ‘interdisciplinarity’, the introduction launches the first in a string of such critiques, foreshadowing Cooper’s commitment to destabilizing words and ideas that we take most for granted. And second, Cooper’s introduction proves that the difficult questions and issues raised by interdisciplinary dialogue are actually analogous to the very similarly-entangled struggles which constitute history. Rather than advising us to abandon any attempt to relate what seem to be irreconcilable differences among adjoining disciplines—or, even worse, pursue a futile struggle to mash them together into a single whole—Cooper prefers to emphasize how it is precisely these kinds of struggles (like those that he sees in historical processes) that lead to redefinitions of the context for the struggle in the first place.

In short, Cooper’s book is a subtle, thoughtful, and judicious examination of the issues raised by the study of colonialism. Instead of constituting a mere compilation of colonial histories (although the chapters abound with historical examples), or arguing a particular opinion of these histories, *Colonialism in Question* is first and foremost an investigation into the *manners* of undertaking historical work and the *ways* in which the use of histories and concepts (even and

especially by laymen) are inextricably bound to the histories themselves. As we will see, Cooper repeatedly emphasizes the complexity of the topics at hand, refusing to simplify issues for the sake of argument. His understanding of history is decidedly a non-linear one—where historical events repeatedly fail to align themselves to grand axial narratives, and in which the smallest and most prosaic events and concerns continually open and close new paths for future developments. Most importantly, Cooper's book strongly emphasizes why we—historians and non-historians—should be critically aware of the ways in which we think and discuss historical concepts.

Let us begin by first examining Cooper's own approach to colonial history, which is unique and lucid in its potential for opening new ways of seeing this history. Frederick Cooper bases his study of colonial history upon a rejection of its two dominant 20<sup>th</sup> century models: on one side, the vision of colonialism as the inevitable expansion of "progress", or in other words as the justified authority of a more highly developed people over one that is less highly developed, and on the other side, the vision of colonialism as a destructive totalitarianism that crushed the richness of local idiosyncrasies. (Needless to say, the latter view has unseated the former in the realm of acceptable discourse.) However, both of these approaches, as we will see, are based upon the same mistaken assumption: the idea of colonialism as a *one-way* process, or an outwardly-directed movement *from* one bounded entity *towards* another. Both essentially simplify very long and complex histories into an abstract caricature: the

condition of "authority spread outward from a civilizational center." (158)

Yet even within today's widespread acceptance of the unjustifiable nature of colonial power, another mistaken dichotomy repeats the futile opposition of the older one: between those who argue that colonialism corresponded to a precisely delineatable moment in history, from which humans have now been freed thanks to their progressive enlightenment, and those who argue that colonialism never truly ended, and that its tyrannical authority is now equally everywhere. Once again, Cooper insists that both sides of this argument fail to take into account the complexity of the dynamic processes that constitute history. To reduce colonialism to a determined moment in time (usually 1492-1970s) and place (primarily the European colonies) is to ignore forms of empire that not only existed over various spans of time—up to thousands of years ago—but also existed throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas. On the other hand, to label colonialism as merely a unique name for an unjustified authority that still exists everywhere today is not only to deny a very real and sudden conceptual change that, about fifty years ago, caused empires to become unacceptable as a form of political power, but also to dilute the specificity of colonialism to such a point that, by using it to describe everything, it effectively describes nothing. According to Cooper, it is possible to constitute serious histories of colonial pasts without either seeing them as a solely negative moment in history or belittling their authoritarian crimes. At the same time, constructing colonial histories with illusions of global human progress or,

conversely, with visions of inevitable human evilness, are equally just as flawed. Instead of choosing between these unproductive oppositional stances, all of which oversimplify the large and complex histories of colonial empires, Frederick Cooper emphasizes how the dynamic *processes* of colonial histories shaped and changed these histories in ways that could not have been predicted from the start. Against the idea of colonialism as a one-way force—of Europeans spreading their supposed 'essence' and rules throughout the world, destroying whatever lay in their path—Cooper offers a different model of scholarship: the study of how both the colonists and the colonized shaped each other through the frictions and boundaries that were constantly at play. Rather than a world of hard power and limits, this view emphasizes the working process of gradual redefinitions and the ways in which common everyday processes, located in ever-unique contexts and situations, constantly bring into question the forces involved, eventually shifting the grounds of the debate under its very feet. As such, Frederick Cooper's historical approach is first and foremost an appeal for a synchronic study of historical events—ever open to their endless developmental possibilities—and a critique of the widespread tendency to use history as a support for substantiating decontextualized, ubiquitous concepts.

The first fallacy that many researchers of colonial studies—whether historians or not, and regardless of which side of the debates they find themselves on—blindly support is the mistaken idea of colonial empires as constituting outwardly expansions of a nation extending itself over oth-

ers. "Empires," says Cooper, "should not be reduced to national polities projecting their power beyond their borders." (11) Indeed, no nation can conquer numerous others without fundamentally changing itself; nor was it possible for any to smoothly assimilate others into a pre-existing system. Cooper demonstrates how the very development of a colonial presence fundamentally changed the colonizers themselves, putting them in unprecedented situations and forcing them to rethink their prevailing practices. Therefore, it would be a mistake to conflate the nation before its colonial conquests and the one after them as one and the same. Rather than extending their people and customs over new territory, most empires grew in an inconsistent and leap-frog manner, and in many cases were uninterested with changing or completely replacing local cultures and powers as long as these acknowledged the colonial authority. Instead of an extension outwards from the colonial capital, Cooper defines the prevailing trend in colonialism as the creation and definition of a "space of empire", or a terrain constituted of connections and routes—*not* a national identity. Just as "post-revolutionary France [...] cannot be understood as a nation-state pushing into colonies external to it" (22), and "what made an empire British was defined both by metropolitans and provincials" (172), so too the Spanish and Portuguese conquests of the Americas "were not, indeed could not have been, an extension of national power." (163)

Furthermore, many empires with the ability to deploy colonizing practices obtained it (and simultaneously created themselves) through the formation of

unusual combinations and alliances. For example, “The Spanish Empire wasn’t entirely Spanish and certainly not national; it was a ‘cosmopolitan conglomerate.’ [...] it extended over, but hardly integrated, much of central and eastern Europe, Burgundy, modern Holland and Belgium, Castile, Aragon, parts of Italy, and the conquered territories of the New World; [...] Its emperor—a native French speaker—had to learn Castilian Spanish on the job. [...] The navy was Genoese and scholars were trained in Italy.” (164)

In addition to this understanding, in Cooper’s opinion it is just as important to reject any over-simplified dichotomy between a clearly-defined colonizer and a clearly-defined colonized. As any thorough examination of history reveals, the separation between the two was never quite as clearly cut; instead, it was constantly debated and decided upon. “The distinction between colonizer and colonized,” writes Cooper, “rather than being self-evident, had to be continually reproduced, which led colonial regimes to pay inordinate attention to relatively small categories of people on crucial fault lines: racially mixed children, colonizers who ‘went native’ [...]” (49) The truth is that the shifting constitutions of settler groups, local elites, slaves, and immigrants repeatedly changed the givens at hand, engaging interactions that progressively lead to new situations—and thus subsequently to different groups and interactions, so on and so forth.

As a matter of fact, the relationships between the many different groups involved in empires (and their positions with respect to the empire itself) were

not only very complex but also in continual upheaval. In some situations, colonial powers would leave existing social structures largely intact, willing to merely benefit from a part of the profits made by the local ruling class. Alternatively, colonial powers would sometimes ally themselves with the merchant classes of the conquered territory, as both would work to unseat the local elites. Of course, colonization also instigated the migration of people from one part of the empire to another, which only further complicated affiliations as well as distinctions between colonizers and colonized, especially as immigrant populations on both sides produced new generations. These situations, and countless others, often coexisted within the same empire—in both time and space. Yet it is important to qualify these statements by emphasizing that such developments certainly did not lead to a loss of all boundaries and distinctions between groups—history and social study would strongly counter such a claim. Instead, the key point here is that these movements forced all actors to continually question and define themselves in relation to the others, and thus, inevitably, to change. In Cooper’s words, “colonizer and colonized are themselves far from immutable constructs, and such categories had to be reproduced by specific actions.” (17)

The seventh chapter of *Colonialism in Question*, which focuses on the history of labor strikes in post-war French West Africa, serves as a vivid demonstration of how difficult it is to fully distinguish between the colonizers and the colonized. By creating worker’s unions emulated on mainland French labor unions, and

even forming official bonds with them, African unions instigated a series of developments that eventually put the entire system of French colonization into question—even though this had not been their original intention. This story illustrates well the complexity of colonial practices, as clear lines of opposition were not only difficult to draw at any given time but were also shifting. By striking for better wages and benefits in the late 1940’s, West African workers may appear to have been countering colonial dominion. Yet, as Cooper recounts, this was not really the case. The African unions were in fact acknowledging their membership in the French Union, using its very idea as the basis upon which they could ask for rights similar to those of their mainland counterparts. In Cooper’s words, “[t]hat movement’s strength was not so much an implacable opposition to everything that smacked of French colonialism, but instead an engagement with it—the molding of postwar French rhetoric into a language of claims, plunging into the details of French models of labor agreements in order to claim benefits for colonized people.” (213)

Meanwhile, although the colonial government was not immediately willing to give in to the unions’ costly demands, it in part recognized that by forming unions like those of their French counterparts, African workers were not only substantiating the colonial system, but were furthermore organizing themselves in a way that made it possible for the colonial government to deal with them on familiar grounds. Indeed, “The administration could not counter directly the argument for equality [...] because officials hoped that Af-

ricans might, after all, act in the manner expected of industrial men.” (214) When we compound these facts with the large variety of African unions present, each with its changing alliances amongst each other, with mainland French unions, and with the colonial government—in addition to the fact that previously-existing African sustenance networks allowed the strikes to go on for much longer than any mainland strikes ever could have—we obtain a complex and unique situation that refuses the idea of colonizer and colonized as fully opposed to one another and fully separate. In short, “the effectiveness of the strike”, says Cooper, “lay less in the stark confrontation of subaltern and colonial power than in the ability of the strikers to widen fissures *within* the institutions and ideology of postwar colonialism.” (218)

As a result of this volatile situation—charged with potential, yet never violent, as not a drop of blood was shed—all participants got more than they bargained for, as eventually history “brought both sides of the colonial divide to a place where neither, in the mid 1940’s, had wanted to go”: independence. (204) In the space of less than ten years, African strikes that had meant to reinforce the prevalence of French ideals and rights throughout French colonies precipitated the creation of independent states. Cooper repeatedly emphasizes that in this case the result should be seen less as the successful ‘liberation’ of colonized territories from an over-bearing host than a refusal on the part of mainland (not local) French authorities to pay for the cost of universal French rights. In any case, this story proves that colonizer and colonized

distinctions could never be taken for granted. They not only changed through time, but were furthermore developed on the ground, enmeshed within the changing everyday needs and practices of the actors involved.

Another common fallacy in thinking about colonialism, and closely tied to the previous ones, is the idea that empires ruled completely over their conquered territories, deploying their power in an unequivocal manner. Cooper warns us that “[e]ven though we need to recognize the long-term importance of empire in modern history, we should not get carried away with the power of empires”, or the “conception of empire as a totalizing power.” (200) Careful historical analysis reveals instead that on countless occasions empires did not exert as much power as they could have, and that even when they did it was greatly uneven and temporary.

Rather than corroborating our image of colonial powers as immense totalitarian infrastructures of control, Cooper reveals how in most case empires were actually made of very brittle, unstable, and makeshift political constructions, ones which were continually attempting to adapt to the changes that they themselves were causing: “in practice a great deal of improvisation, contestation, and uncertainty.” (173) In certain cases, imperial authorities were worried that the exertion of too much power upon the colonized would disrupt economic patterns, of which they were getting a share. In other cases, imperial authorities would at times largely ignore the ruling of certain colonized lands, distracted by issues at home or in

other parts of the empire.

As we have already seen, empires were not so much based upon the smooth extension of a national core, but rather a leap-frogging strategy for defining a zone of exchange. According to Cooper, “[c]olonial states, the British among them, were thin.” (184) Exerting full control over an indigenous population was quite costly, and oftentimes this strategy was implemented only when the empire thought it absolutely necessary, in quick and sudden bursts. Imperial governments concentrated on situations and questions that seemed urgent and/or valuable at the time. Furthermore, the colonists themselves were not always in agreement about the rights and obligations of the colonized, as depending upon the situation some of them would argue for more relaxed or more severe forms of control. Thus, the very role and interests of the imperial power itself were never clear or fixed. Just like the distinction between colonized and colonizers, it was something that shifted over time and depending upon specific contexts. Rather than applying their power evenly, colonists always had a range of possibilities for how to act as colonizers—a range which itself changed as the thoughts and processes of the people involved also changed. So although “[s]truggle was never on level ground, power was not monolithic either.” (25)

Beyond their own doubts and debates about how to deal with and profit from colonies, empires were also quite vulnerable to frictions that they unwittingly catalyzed. To quote Cooper, “[e]mpires were vulnerable to the still powerful in-

igenous polities around them, to downturns in trading systems they did not fully control, to the vagaries of interempire warfare, and to the possibility—given that their strength was a network focused on Amsterdam or Lisbon—that their own agents or settlers might see an interest in finding a niche in a different part of the overall trading system.” (166) Ironically, it was precisely because of their large size, as well as the networks that they themselves help create, that empires were actually quite fragile.

Therefore, scholars who use “empire as an epithet for any form of power” are deeply misguided. (12) Empires did deploy and develop various forms of power, yet in many cases this power was surprisingly uneven and weak, unable to fully control the territories to which they lay claim. The paradox that emerges is one that is difficult to comprehend—that such huge and potentially powerful entities were at times unwilling and/or unable to shape things as they desired—and as a result, many scholars prefer to ignore it. “That strong imperial states should have found acceptable the exercise of relatively weak power in certain circumstances is so puzzling that many commentators prefer the myths of total exploitation or of modern governmentality to examining a more confusing reality”, says Cooper. (157)

Such a view is important to reflect upon, because it suggests the idea that subordinated entities are never *fully* in a complete position of subordination, and correspondingly that ruling entities are never *fully* in a complete state of authority. To profess such a statement is certainly not to apologize for the horrors that, through-

out history, dominant powers unjustly imposed upon those they dominated. Instead, as we will discuss more lengthily later on, it allows us to bypass the futile opposition between the idea of power as being either inherently ‘good’ or inherently ‘bad’, forcing us to rethink our very conception of power itself. What is more, these insights into the limits of colonial power demonstrate how history provides its own paths for escaping itself.

This discussion leads us to the fourth fallacy about colonialism that Cooper denounces: the idea that colonial powers were trying to implement, or at the very least were harbingers for, a particular global project. As we have just seen, the power that colonial governments could exert was actually quite limited, and many historical examples demonstrate that only rarely did political results on the ground match their desires and expectations: “Europe’s ambivalent conquests [...] made the space of empire into a terrain where concepts were not only imposed but also engaged and contested.” (4) But moreover it is important to recognize that colonial powers neither had any single, clear project to be implemented, nor were they unwittingly the forerunners of one. In Cooper’s opinion, scholars too often amalgamate the history of colonialism with a teleological, universal concept (such as ‘modernism’, ‘capitalism’, or ‘globalization’)—either in support of it or as a critique—and, in doing so, effectively flatten that history’s contradictions and complexities into an unreal abstract narrative.

First of all, it is not true that empires consistently tried to subjugate the colonized

populations under their own rules and beliefs. In any given context, the former simultaneously switched between, on one side, arguing for universal principles that applied to all members of the empire, and on the other, delineating insurmountable differences between certain groups. As we just pointed out, imperial powers were often more concerned about revenue than imposing their way of life upon the colonized. "The best success stories of colonial economies," recounts Cooper, "such as cocoa production in the Gold Coast or Nigeria" demonstrate how "colonial authorities happily benefited from [African farmers'] efforts without asking too many questions about the producers' subject positions or how they adapted 'traditional' kinship systems to agricultural innovation." (144)

Indeed, those who argue that empires began (or at least significantly contributed to) a practice of controlling and labeling individuals in order to turn them into manageable subjects are just as mistaken. Once again, historical evidence points to a wide variety of approaches used by colonial powers in addressing the populations of their empire; at times, this approach included a complete disinterest in trying to identify people with respect to mainland standards. For Cooper, "Colonial states did not necessarily want or need to see individual subjects in relation to the state or to classify and enumerate them on various axes." (143) Just like the other examples that we discussed previously, many different approaches to colonial populations coexisted in both time and space within any one empire.

Second, it is also untrue that colonial

activities necessarily formed part of any large, abstract, and global trend, as if any such one existed independently of the everyday events of history. One of the most widespread views today incorrectly represents colonialism as the handmaiden of European Essentialism and Rationalism, as if such a dogma had spread outwards from Europe through the practices of colonialism on its way to achieving (for good or for bad) global domination. Indeed, Cooper points out that "[b]ashing the Enlightenment and criticizing modernity have become favorite activities within colonial and postcolonial studies." (6) Throughout his book, the author repeatedly denounces this approach and the futility of its good-or-bad debate. The facts of history instead reveal that colonialism was never a linear process; nor was it ever directed toward any specific global outcome. To pretend that history was a fast-track for arriving where we believe to find ourselves today (what Cooper disparagingly calls "doing history backwards") is to ignore the diversity of colonial practices, their doubts, and the significant struggles they entailed—struggles which redefined their contexts and lead to new, different kinds of struggles.

What is more, when confronted with the complexity of history, simplifying notions such as 'modernization' and 'globalization' are unable to hold their own. Cooper dedicates a significant part of his book to taking apart these words and the various ways in which they are used. In his opinion, scholars too often take these concepts for granted, as if they truly existed outside of specific actions and events. Such words are employed to signify total, inescapable

processes that would dictate events on the ground, simplifying history into a smooth and unidirectional narrative which conveniently ignores the details of a more complicated truth. In their most pure and fanatic sense, words like 'modernization' and 'globalization' hint at some kind of force that would have inevitably affected (or would still be inevitably affecting) humans everywhere in a similar manner, like a divine impulsion: "modernization, like globalization, appears in this theory as a process that just happens, something self-propelled." (97) Of course, such a totalizing and teleological concept is not only absurd, but also belied by the more ambiguous facts of history. To acknowledge recent changes in the social and economic conditions of many populations is one thing; to place all of these under the banner of 'globalization' or 'modernization'—buzzwords we hear so often that we rarely think of questioning their validity as something that *must* be either supported or condemned—is another.

Therefore, in Cooper's view it is equally just as foolish to decry the ills of 'modernization' and 'globalization' as it is to praise their supposed benefits. By arguing against 'modernization' and 'globalization', many leftist academics today are actually making a crucial mistake: assuming that such processes actually *do* exist. As Cooper points out, "[t]oday, friends and foes of globalization debate 'its' effects," yet "[b]oth assume the reality of such a process." (92) Moreover, scholars who try to give 'globalization' a softer and more elastic meaning by playing up the importance of difference and change (for example by speaking of 'multiple globalizations') effectively dilute the term

to such an extent that it no longer means anything. In an attempt to reform and recycle a term whose deepest (essentializing) presuppositions were already flawed to begin with, they merely end up with a contradictory and meaningless word.

To better illustrate the uselessness of such words, let us briefly examine the term 'globalization', to which Cooper dedicates the fourth chapter of the book. Today, it is quite common to hear that we live in an epoch which is more global and more connected than any other (to the point where some quip that our world is now "flat".) The truth of the matter, however, is that global processes have taken place since the dawn of human existence. Even in its most rudimentary forms, civilization already involved travel and exchange. For those who argue that large-scale communications networks truly came into their own only in the twentieth century, Cooper cites numerous examples that prove otherwise, from the Mongolians' horse-bound system of messengers, to the 1791 Haitian revolution, which "showed that in the eighteenth century as much as the twentieth economic processes and political mobilization both crosses oceans." (98)

From this point of view, colonialism was neither a launching pad of global interconnectivity nor necessarily a promoter of it. Instead, colonial processes merely constituted a mix of particular ways for organizing (opening, closing, and everything in between) interactions across space; ways which changed to the tune of the successive problems catalyzed by the colonial processes themselves. "To study colonization," says Cooper, "is to study the

reorganization of space, the forging and unforing of linkages; to call it globalization, distorted globalization, or de-globalization is to hold colonization against an abstract standard with little relation to historical processes.” (105)

Just as it is impossible to reduce the contemporary world to the concept of ‘globalization’, it is equally impossible to conflate our present era with the presumed ubiquity of ‘capitalism’. Such a view fails to take into account alternate economic systems that cohabit with capitalist exchanges, fuse with them, or thrive within their gaps. Likewise, nor can the history of empires be systematically linked to the rise of capitalism. Instead, as Cooper’s anecdotes demonstrate, colonial powers were quick to deploy a wide range of economic strategies (or, more precisely, mixes of different strategies) in order to meet the dominant moral and economic imperatives of the time. Even when capitalist practices were implemented to some degree, colonized populations often had little incentive to follow the capitalist rule-book and instead relied upon make-shift measures that satisfied their current needs. In fact, apart from a few notable examples, many colonial enterprises proved to be less profitable than hoped, as resources traced complicated paths on their way back to the empire’s seat. And even those that were profitable did not necessarily succeed because of the implementation of a market economy. For Cooper, “[n]either Lenin’s notion of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism nor the apologists’ notion of colonialism as the agent of development of a forward-moving market economy held up.” (186) So to use colonial history as a way to

either criticize or praise the presumed inevitability of a single capitalist system is to make the same mistake as with globalization and modernization, or in other words to presume the actual existence of such abstract essences.

In the end, the basic problem that all such approaches share is their common failure to acknowledge that present-day conditions came into being not *already formed*, but rather *through* the twists and turns of history itself. As such, colonialism was not a package that came ready-made with modernization, globalization, and capitalism packed inside of it, but rather a series of struggles that in part lead to conditions which we now identify through those concepts. “Too ready identification of an actual Europe with post-Enlightenment rationality not only leaves out the conflict and uncertainty within that continent’s history,” says Cooper, “but also the extent to which even such constructs as bourgeois equality were not some essence of the West but products of struggle.” (21) For example, the things that we can call ‘modern’ today emerged not out of an invisible force which irreversibly pulled everyone and everything towards a presumed ‘modernism’, but rather they are merely temporary products of struggle. As such, colonialist practices catalyzed a significant part of our present world not in the fact that they were striving (or at the very least helping) to advance a specific project, but rather in that the conflicts they unwittingly engendered shaped not only their own developments but also many of our current preoccupations. To quote Cooper again,

*Scholars working within globalization para-*

*digms differ over whether the present should be considered the latest of a series of globalizations, each more inclusive than the last, or else a global age distinct from a past in which economic and social relations were contained within nation-states or empires and in which interaction took place among such internally coherent units. Both conceptions share the same problem: writing history backwards, taking an idealized version of the “global present” and working backwards to show how everything either led up to it (“proto-globalization”) or how everything, until the arrival of the global age itself, deviated from it. In neither version does one watch history unfold over time, producing dead ends as well as pathways leading somewhere, creating conditions and contingencies in which actors made decisions, mobilized other people, and took actions that both opened and constrained future possibilities. (105)*

It is important to point out that deconstructing epoch-making concepts such as ‘globalization’ and ‘modernization’ “is not to say that nothing changes under the sun.” (110) We cannot deny that “the commodity exchange system, forms of production, the modalities of state interventions into societies, capital exchange systems, let alone technologies of communication, have changed enormously.” (110) Rather, the author’s argument is “for precision in specifying how such commodity circuits are constituted, how connections across space are extended and bounded, and how large-scale, long-term processes, such as capitalist development, can be analyzed with due attention to their power, their limitations, and the mechanisms that shape them.” (110-111) Thus, instead of looking for change in *what* exists, and trying to explain it through large, teleological, and abstract concepts that live separately from the material world, Cooper insists that we should study in-

stead the specific changes in *how* things are done within everyday problems and processes. Reducing history to grand narratives only impedes such work.

Finally, we now turn to the fifth misconceptualization of colonialism: the widespread tendency to see it as a bounded and uniform epoch in history, one which was uniformly replaced by a so-called ‘post-colonial’ condition. As we just pointed out, the practices undertaken by colonial powers were never fully new, but can instead be found (albeit in different forms) in other moments in history. “[N]or can either a colonial or postcolonial period be seen as a coherent whole,” writes Cooper, “as if the varied efforts and struggles in which people engaged in different situations always ended up in the same place.” (19) In fact, as all of the previous discussions make evident, colonial practices were both deeply varied and shifting. For all of these reasons, Cooper strongly criticizes scholars who attempt to reify a colonial essence and/or a distinctly-bounded colonial epoch. “We can set out a family description of *empire*, if not a precise definition,” says Cooper (in a phrase that brings to mind Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance”). (26-27)

Just as he questions the usual caricatures of colonial history, the author also questions the existence of any consistent *post-colonial* situation. The disappearance of empires did not necessarily leave both colonists and colonized with a standard legacy that all were forced to confront. Instead, decolonization was a process in and of itself, whose own twists and turns lead to various conditions: “The *process*

of decolonization, not just the heritage of colonialism, shaped the patterns of postcolonial studies." (230) Once again, rather than emphasizing a *state* or presumed *essence* of post-colonialism (and colonialism), in Cooper's view the key is to study the processes that unfolded, and how debates and decisions on the ground shaped the context for future ones.

In summary, instead of upholding the flat and caricatural story of one population taking over another, followed by the latter heroically fighting off their captors, Cooper presents us with a much more nuanced and ambiguous view. Empires were not formed through the radiation of a national entity outwards into the world, and nor could the separation between colonized and colonizers ever be fully established. In addition, not only were the powers of imperial governments relatively limited, but furthermore any implementation of power was never defined by any clear project or conceptual package. Therefore, colonialism was important not so much in the idea that one population was "subjugated" by another, or in the "status" of it having happened, but rather in the way in which its developments reshaped all the parties involved. Colonialism was less a thing, an '-ism', than a multitude of specific actions that continually triggered and retriggered change.

All of the ambiguities that we discussed can be traced back a more general paradox: the idea of engaging an 'outside' while attempting to maintain some kind of 'inside'. As Cooper describes, this paradox can be found throughout colonial dealings:

*...colonial rulers needed to co-opt old elites and generate new collaborators, but such ties might soften the colonizer-colonized distinction and strengthen the indigenous social and cultural practices colonial ideology was trying to denigrate; rulers hoped at times to profit from indigenous trade networks and productive systems without fostering the autonomy of indigenous economic elites; they need to raise levels of exploitation without fostering rebellion or undermining local authorities vital to the maintenance of order. (28)*

Therefore, "[e]ach colonial state had to manage a particularly complex set of contradictions." (51) This is precisely one of the reasons why studying colonial history is so valuable today. Although empires may no longer be present in the contemporary world, the important questions posed by the cohabitation of 'inside' and 'outside' certainly still are. Rather than trying to resolve these questions or find a final solution for them, Frederick Cooper suggests that it is studying the changing ways in which we confront these that can offer a way out. Indeed, "[w]here to find a balance between the poles of incorporation (the empire's claim that its subjects belonged within the empire) and differentiation (the empire's claim that different subjects should be governed differently) was a matter of dispute and shifting strategies." (154) Perhaps by examining the appearingly-contradictory yet practical ways in which members of empires addressed these questions, we can eventually reformulate them in a completely different way.

Another paradox inherent to colonial empires, which is closely tied to the first, is the inability for some of the strongest political structures that the world has ever seen to fully control their activities

and their outcome. Cooper calls this "the central paradox of the history of colonialism: the limits faced by the colonizing powers with the seemingly greatest capacity to act and the fullest confidence in their own transformative power." (183) Empires, Cooper says, had "long arms and weak fingers." (197) In other words, they stretched immense distances and possessed a tremendous capacity for precipitating new conditions and situations, yet at the same time were marked by a striking inability to realize their ambitions and to control the effects of their power. This paradox brings up some important questions about the nature of power and its limits, which we will discuss again at the end of this essay.

Most importantly, it is crucial to keep in mind that "imperial systems were shaped as they developed", defined not by some inner essence but rather by the very processes that they provoked. (165) Instead of conquering the world in a regular and foreseen fashion, empires basically invented themselves on the job: "The confrontations that ensued had consequences that neither rulers nor ruled could anticipate, and produced lines of political connection more varied and complex than a dichotomy of superior and subaltern or the horizontal affinity characteristic of nationalism." (201) This means that all members of empires, including their colonized populations, effectively participated in their construction.

Therefore, rather than focusing on the status of colonialism, or an abstract condition of authority, Cooper insists that we see "the complex way in which Europe was made from its colonies and how the

very categories by which we understand the colonies' past and the ex-colonies' future were shaped by the process of colonization." (3) As we will discuss once again in the conclusion of this essay, this conception of history provides a model in which radical change comes from within the very structures that attempt to keep it at bay. The study of colonial history can now be seen as being less about the limits posed by authoritarian regimes than the possibilities for change that they unwittingly give birth to. As Cooper's book effectively demonstrates, "both the makers of empire and the leaders of social movements operated within an imperial framework and by using that framework changed it." (12)

To conclude, let us briefly reflect upon some of the most profound ideas that historians and non-historians alike can carry away from Frederick Cooper's book. Why does the examination of colonial history carry so much importance for all fields of study? The answer, in my opinion, can be found in two twin directions of study, that of *limits* and that of *power*.

First, investigations of colonial history clearly underscore the value of considering the nature of boundaries. As the examples we discussed previously made clear, limits simply cannot be taken for granted as static elements. Instead, they are constantly created and re-created through everyday processes. In fact, our very idea of what constitutes a limit is also subject to change, as its questions are continually being reframed. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that even though boundaries may not exist in the manner in which we usually think of them (hard

and unambiguous), this is not to say that no boundaries exist. All of us are perfectly acquainted with, even in the most prosaic of practical terms, the difference between an opening and a closing. To pretend that all limits can fade away, that the world can be merely speed, freedom, and hybridity, is not only to deceive oneself but also to pose serious risks to intellectual endeavors (as the work of philosopher Paul Virilio warns us).

Therefore, we must neither take limits—including the limits of our knowledge and the limits of our disciplines—as solid and certain, nor as inexistent. Boundaries are simultaneously more complex, fleeting, and powerful than we could ever imagine, a fact which forces us to reconsider our very understanding of them. Through *Colonialism in Question*, Cooper makes a strong case for rethinking how we understand limits, how we create them, how we deal with them, and how they exist in time. What is more, history demonstrates that limits and connections are fundamentally intertwined, instead of being opposed to one another at opposite ends of a gradient. Since all changes come with their own limits, Cooper pertinently asks “[w]hat are the limits and mechanisms of ongoing changes? And above all, can we develop a differentiated vocabulary that encourages thinking about connections and their limits?” (112) The idea that all connections necessarily have their limits and that limits inherently come with connections is one that could have great repercussions in all realms of thought. Second, colonial histories obviously address important questions regarding the nature of power. As we mentioned numerous times, “[f]or all the emphasis on

the military, technological, bureaucratic, and cultural power of the latest round of empire-builders, the story of empires is still a story of limits.” (190) Historical analysis of colonialism makes evident that, contrary to popular belief, all forms of power necessarily come with limits. Power is never certain, nor lasting, nor insurmountable. Instead, Cooper demonstrates to us that power is fundamentally *spatial* and *chronological*, very much entangled within the real world (“[t]o study colonization is to study the reorganization of space”). (105) Thus, contrary to our common perception of power as existing on a scale ranging from the powerless to the powerful, in truth power can never be total.

Furthermore, it is impossible to rely upon a simplified notion of power as being inherently bad or inherently good. Nor can power be conceived as existing in only one form; once again, colonial history attests to the many different forms of power. All of these ideas point to the fact that power actually comes with the very tools to deflect and denature itself. Indeed, Cooper asks us to consider “...the importance of thinking precisely and historically about the vulnerability of structures of power and the possibilities of political mobilization across space, but also about possibilities of change in the future.” (203). As such, change comes from within, not without.

Cooper’s book also repeatedly illustrates how historical concepts, even those of laymen, play an important role in the constitution of history, and how these are continually re-appropriated and redefined by various groups for various purposes. As

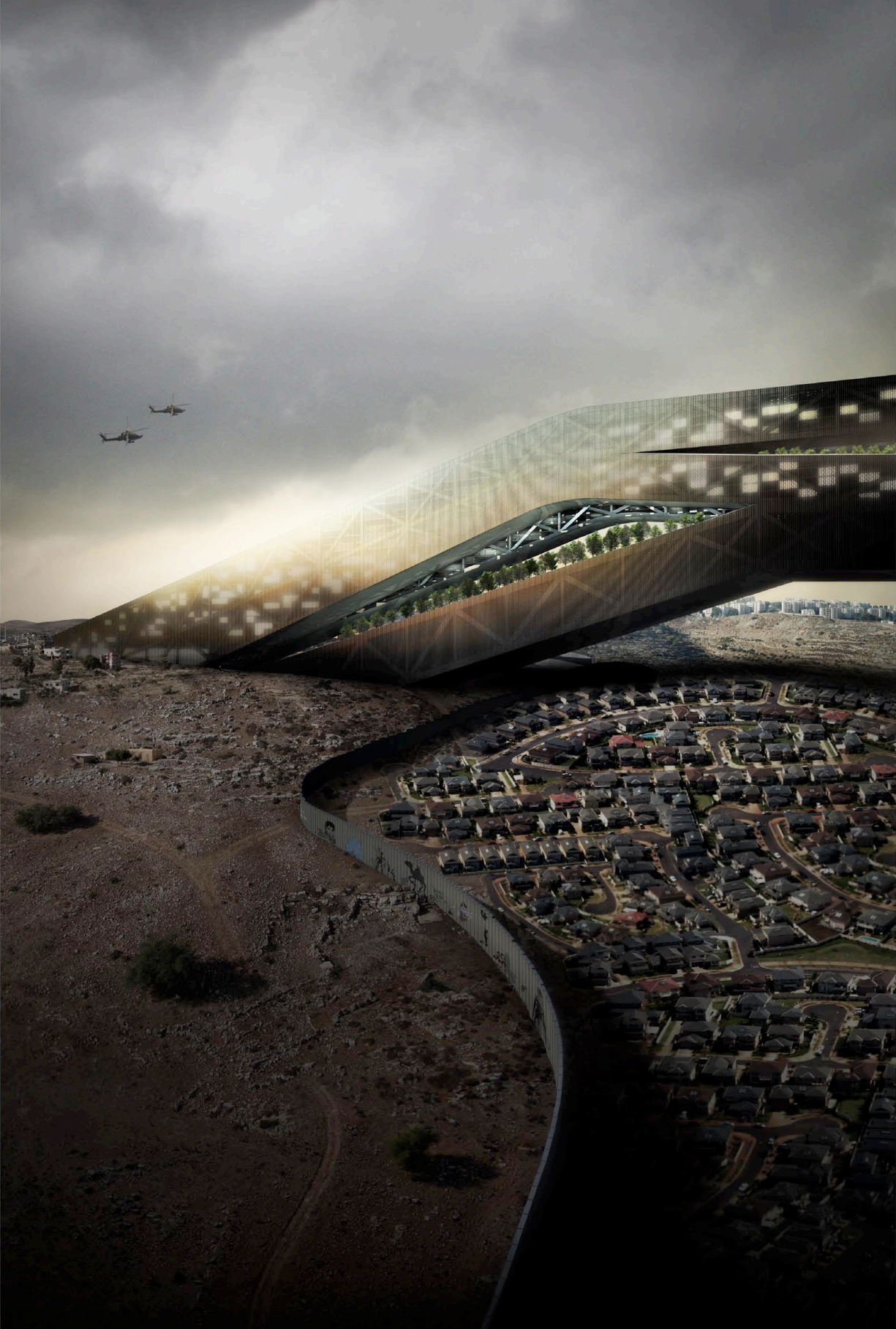
we discussed, concepts of history are not just academic and analytic tools that are applied onto situations, but rather fundamentally embedded within the historical situations themselves—within very real actions and events undertaken by various agents. Cooper’s ambition is “to advocate a historical practice sensitive to the different ways people frame the relationship of past, present, and future, an understanding of the situations and conjunctures that enable and disable particular representations, and a focus on process and causation in the past and on choice, political organization, responsibility, and accountability in the future.” (149) Thus the conceptual implication of entities that are not necessarily ‘in power’ nonetheless introduces them within the power structure itself. Even when addressed by laymen, historical concepts play a role in opening and closing future possibilities for power.

This view highlights the large responsibility of all humans in shaping future possibilities. In opposition to the widespread belief that those who are not in power play only minor roles in influencing developments, the facts of history prove that the truth is precisely the contrary—or in other words that the greatest changes emerge from the most humble proceedings. Too often today, Cooper laments, “[w]e lose the power of their example to remind us that our own moral and political choices, made in the face of the ambivalences and complications of our present situation, will have consequences in the future.” (25) This attitude ignores how quickly and unexpectedly the most radical changes can come about:

*The most important fact about empires is that they are gone. A once ordinary part of political life became a political impossibility. Thinking about how this came about allows us to appreciate the limits of power at its most extensive, the ability of people to find niches and fissures within systems of control and constraint, the conservatism of the most progress-oriented states, and the adaptability of supposedly traditional people. (203)*

Although forms of empire may have disappeared from the Earth, there is no doubt that forms of power have not. One of our greatest mistakes is to believe that power is total, and that it can take on only one or a handful of forms. As such, it has become a widespread tendency to not only yield to forces of power that are encountered—which is after all an understandable reaction—but moreover to submit *intellectually* to current conceptions of power as if these were inevitable—which is in itself a grave and unforgiveable reaction.

In the end, Cooper’s book makes a strong case for the idea of historical openness and the responsibility of all our ideas and actions. “Inequality of power, even extreme inequality, persists in other forms and with other names. Those forms too will become objects of mobilization across space and difference, and perhaps what is ordinary today will become politically impossible tomorrow.” (203) Rather than giving into the idea of a ubiquitous, inevitable ‘capitalism’ and ‘nationalism’ that would forever limit the framework of our lives, or critiquing these as if they actually existed in and of themselves, Frederick Cooper reminds us that in fact the tools to escape and recreate our current world already lie within it.



# THE CONTINUOUS ENCLAVE

strategies in bypass urbanism

Viktor Ramos

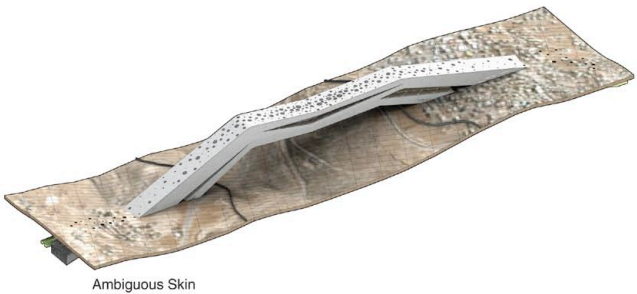
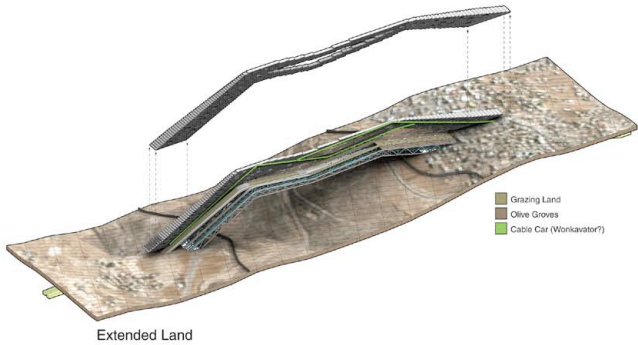
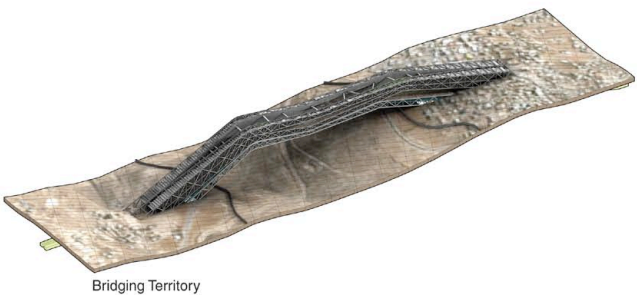
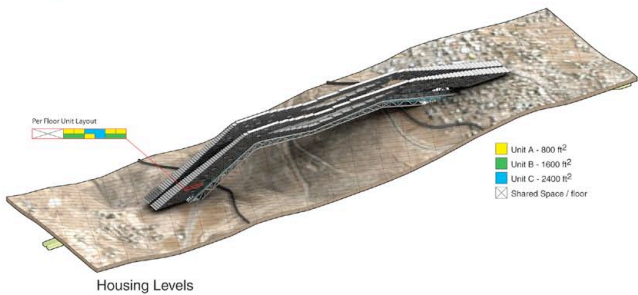
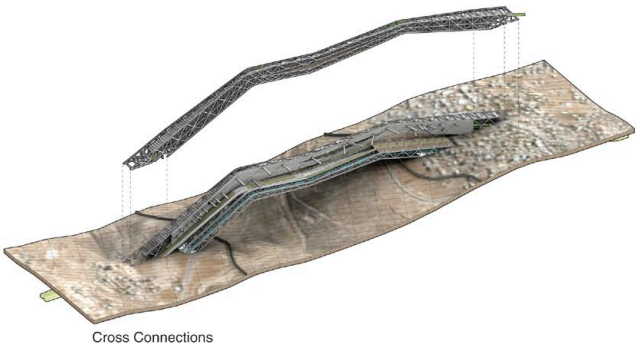
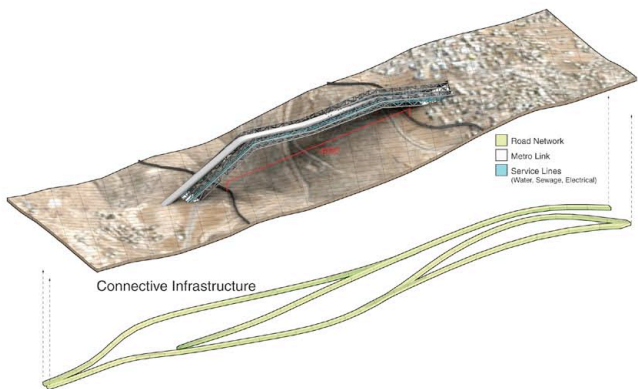
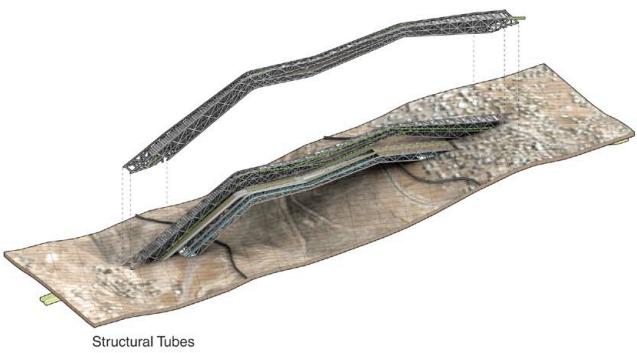
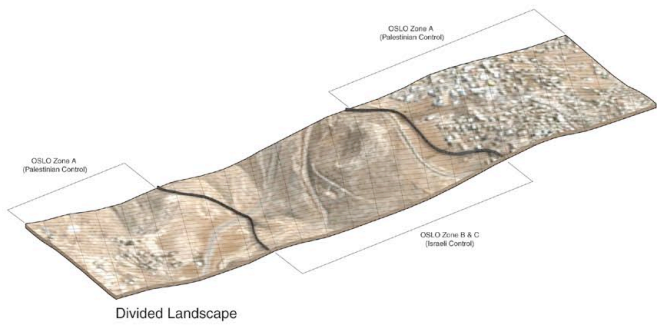
This thesis takes a formal approach to understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by studying mechanisms of control within the West Bank. The occupation of the West Bank has had tremendous effects on the urban fabric of the region because it operates spatially. Throughout the conflict, new ways of imagining territory have been needed to multiply a single sovereign territory into many.

The Oslo Accords have been integral to this process of division. By defining various control regimes, the Accords have created a fragmented landscape of isolated Palestinian enclaves and Israeli

settlements. The intertwined nature of these fragments makes it impossible to divide the two states easily. By connecting the fragments through a series of under- and overpasses, the border between the two states has shifted vertically.

One feature of the Oslo Accords is the bypass road which links Israeli settlements to Israel, bypassing Palestinian areas in the process. These are essential to the freedom of movement for the settlers within the Occupied Territories. Extrapolating on the bypass, this thesis explores the ramifications of a continuous infrastructural network linking the fragmented landscape of Palestinian enclaves. In the process, a continuous form of urbanization has been developed to allow for the growth and expansion of the Palestinian state. Ultimately, this thesis questions the potential absurdity of partition strategies within the West Bank and Gaza Strip by attempting to realize them.







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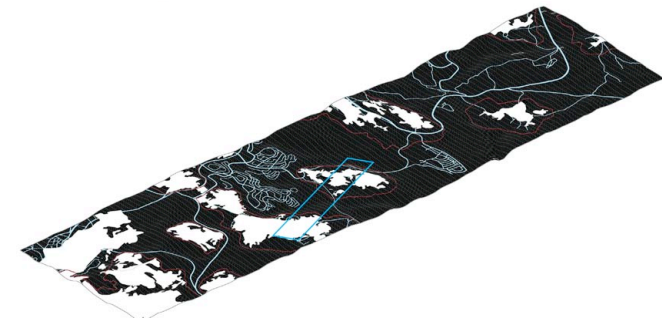
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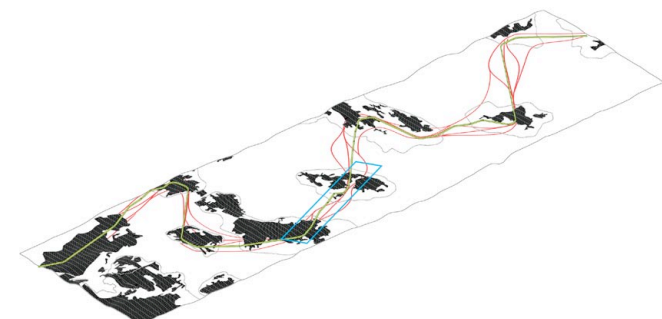
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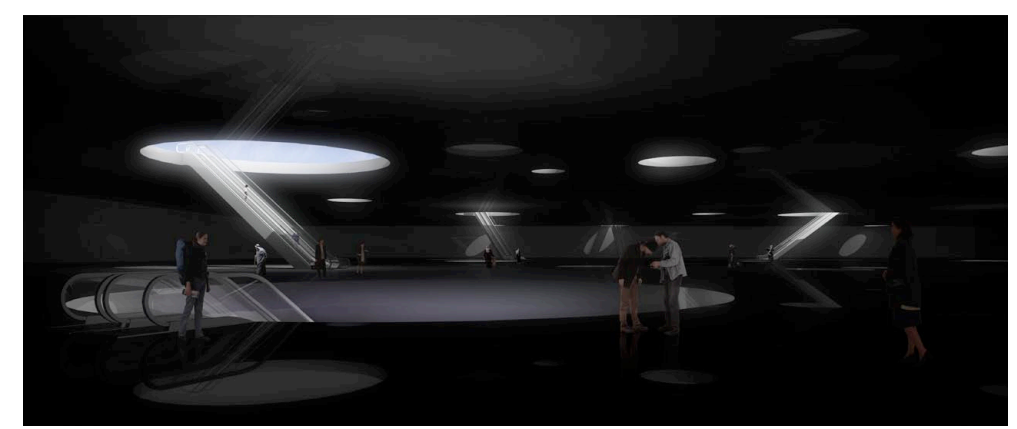
Divided Landscape



Israeli Continuity



Palestinian Continuity





# INTERVIEW WITH PETER TRUMMER

## typology and population thinking

Etien Santiago

**Santiago:** *What is a “type,” and why should it concern architects? What role does typology play in architecture today?*

**Trummer:** Probably one of the major reasons for our long-held refusal to address typology is, as Rafael Moneo stated in 1978, that doing so would force us to face much greater questions. In his words, “To raise the question of typology in architecture is to raise a question of the nature of the architectural work itself. To answer it means, for each generation, a redefinition of the essence of architecture and an explanation of all its attendant problems.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet after nearly two decades of their notable absence, we are now witnessing the rebirth of typological debates in architecture. For example, FOA—composed of Alejandro Zaera Polo and Farshid Mousavi—wrote an entire book around the idea of *phylogenesis*, and the Architectural Association in London recently published a book on typological formations, specifically relating to renewable building types in the city. While I fully weigh the importance of Moneo’s remark, I would like to raise the exact opposite question: instead of asking how to interpret the idea of ty-

pological thinking in architecture today, I would like to ask how *population thinking* can change the nature of our architectural work.

This question might sound like a completely new one, but in truth it is not. The aim here is to continue a debate that began in the late 1980s and went on into the early 1990s, one that effectively started a process that would subsequently erase the idea of typological thought within the discipline of architecture.

What does it mean to think typologically? In its most simple instance, we can define typology as a concept that describes a group of objects characterized by a certain formal structure. This structure is the group’s “essence,” or the features that all of its entities share and that make each one resemble the others. So we can say that thinking in typologies roughly means thinking in species.

Now what does this mean for architecture? On the one hand, architecture is like any form of art: it produces unique, singular objects. Their uniqueness places them at a certain moment, in a particular place, and responds to very specific demands. On the other hand, even a work of art can be seen as a practice that belongs to a class of repeated objects. From this point of view, architecture can be seen as a practice that repeats generic attributes—such as the “hut,” or the “arch” of stone construction. Therefore, as Moneo says, to think about the question of “types” is to think about the very nature of architectural work, or how it goes about approaching its problems.

<sup>1</sup> Rafael Moneo, “On Typology,” *Oppositions* 13 (Summer 1978): 23.

**Santiago:** *What are the historical precedents for thinking about “types” in architecture?*

**Trummer:** To respond, we should go at least as far back as Quatremère de Quincy, whose ambition was essentially to help architecture reconstruct its link with the past. For him, it was absolutely necessary that this link remain constant throughout history. De Quincy hoped to explain this continuous link between one architectural object and another through architecture’s social and cultural relevance. He wanted to present architecture as a coherent system of creation and to construct a theory of the originating principles from which it is born. His approach to the idea of types, as Sylvia Lavin describes so well in her book on de Quincy, was to radicalize it by secularizing its meaning in order to eliminate Platonic ideas behind the types. In other words, types were no longer seen as coming from God, but rather as coming from man. Therefore, for de Quincy, “type” chiefly expressed an abstract notion of historical continuity in the architecture produced by man.<sup>2</sup>

For example, de Quincy believed that the evolution from primitive hut to advanced construction paralleled the evolution of primitive society as it moved toward the creation of civilized nation-states. He was essentially arguing that society was represented in its architectural work, and vice versa.

In this way, de Quincy laid the foundation for seeing architecture as a mode of rep-

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Lavin, *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

resentation. He distinguished between the notion of the “type” and the notion of the “model.” While type “is the result not of nature but of an inspired idea and is an act of self-conscious creation,”<sup>3</sup> its application is the model, the endless variations that emerge from one idea.

During the nineteenth century, however, architects seemed to have paid little if any attention to de Quincy’s ideas. Instead of thinking in types, they developed models. Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand was one of the best-known followers of this trend. Although he never used the words *type* or *typology*, he nonetheless became a major contributor to the debate on types.

In manuals and handbooks, Durand presented examples of how past architectural knowledge could be applied to new kinds of programmatic building types, as Nikolaus Pevsner would later call them. In opposition to the type-form problem of de Quincy, Durand’s focus was to open a new field of theory, which he called composition.

If we look at the techniques that Durand used to achieve this, he basically proposed that two instruments rule his templates. One is a continuous undifferentiated grid, and the other is an aesthetical axis to support its parts. In order to achieve the specific, he established a generic model of endless flexibility that avoided all constraints.

As Moneo wrote: “Durand’s work anticipated the nineteenth century’s theoretical approach to architecture: a knowledge based on history as a quarry of available

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

material, supported by an idea of composition, (...) and its principles later finalized in the Beaux Arts architectural system of the last years of the century.”<sup>4</sup>

Through his work, Durand established an architectural kind of typological thinking that escaped the theoretical work of de Quincy and that later became the dominant approach of twentieth-century architectural practices. Later he would be criticized by architectural historians such as Werner Oechslin. Oechslin lamented how the discourse of the early 1980s eliminated any intellectual debate on typology. He believed that the cause of this

4 Moneo, “On Typology,” page no..



A quarter-mile section of the raw desert landscape of Maricopa County, Phoenix, Arizona, with its specific vegetation distribution areas, known as ‘washes’. These washes evolved out of the seasonal floods within the unconsolidated soil conditions of the Sonoran Desert basins

disappearance could be traced to an entrenched obsession with superficialities, which arguably started with Durand.<sup>5</sup>

But a discussion of types reemerged in 1960s Italy, where a group of architectural researchers—most notably Saverio Muratori and Gianfranco Caniggia—effectively engaged and revisited de Quincy’s idea of typology as a way to criticize modernism.

The modernists of course rejected the idea of an academic theory of architectural typologies, and eliminated any link to history by claiming that architecture had to offer a completely new language—a new

5 Werner Oechslin, “Premises for the Resumption of the Discussion of Typology,” *Assemblage 1* (1986).

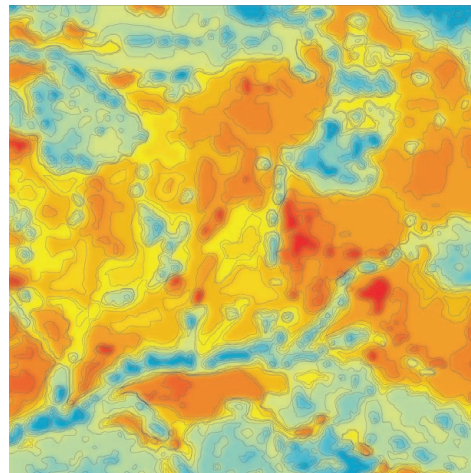


Image: Fairus Reza Razali, Mika Watanabe and Lin Chia-Ying

This diagram visualizes the radiation effect of the soil conditions from the same area. This intensive property of the desert varies with the surface type. In areas with a high density of vegetation, the radiation is low (blue); while it is quite high in the parts that have no vegetation at all (red). This technique of measuring radiation is used to indicate heat island effects within the urban fabric, especially in desert environments.

way to describe physical space. Based on developments in the discipline of physics, architecture effectively became the materialization of space. “According to this notion, the architect’s task is to capture the idealized space through the definition of abstract components. Like the physicist, the architect must first know the elements of matter, of space itself. He is then able to isolate a portion of that space to form a precise building.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the idea of “type” that the modernists inherited was cut off from all of its historical references and was translated into architecture as prototypes.

However, it was thanks to the approach of people like Muratori, and later his student Caniggia, that the discussion on typological thinking was once again linked and confronted with de Quincy’s early nineteenth-century definition.

In opposition to the blatant ignorance of modernist city planning, Muratori pointed back to the formal and structural continuity of traditional cities. In his *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia*, he examined the idea that the city fabric constitutes continuities among different scales. So, in contrast to the modernists’ definition of type, he understood it not as an abstract concept, but as a real element that formed the pattern of the city’s growth. He and his pupils labeled “type” as the product of spontaneous consciousness, or the underlying principles of a city’s specific layout—a concept that simultaneously echoes and readjusts de Quincy’s ideas.

What Muratori did in Venice, and which

6 Moneo, “On Typology.”

Caniggia later continued, was to unravel the urban fabric over time. Both architects basically redrew the material organization of the city fabric in order to identify each unit and its specific characteristics. As Caniggia explains, “If we see that two or more houses have similar characteristics, we label them together and say that these two houses belong to the same ‘building type.’ (...) If I retrieve the elements that I recognize as being similar in a unitary definition, I obtain a statistically derived ‘building type’: in order words, I see numerous buildings existing of two dwelling stories placed on the top of a ground floor, with two windows per story and with a large door, and a small door on the ground floor.”<sup>7</sup>

This methodology clearly led them to identify the features that would lead them to the underlying “house concept,” or what they called the “mental map.” What Caniggia and Muratori define as a typological process is the progressive differentiation of building types within the same cultural area. To quote Caniggia again, “14th century builders build their houses according to type and house concepts of the time, 15th century builders build their houses according to the concept and type in force during their era.”<sup>8</sup> This process of changing house concepts, and their important influence upon what was built, resulted in the individuation of buildings through the typological process.

Thus, the work of Muratori and Caniggia formed strong analogies between the ty-

7 Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei, *Interpreting Basic Building: Architectural Composition and Building Typology* (Firenze: Alinea, 2001), 51.

8 *Ibid.*, 41.

polological process of earlier architectural discourses and biological conceptions of “type.” The urban fabric of the city was seen as the organism, unfolding out of the cells defined by the individual buildings. By seeing the city not as frozen pieces but rather as a biological process, Caniggia and Muratori actually got very close to the idea of population thinking. For the first time, the specific variations of the city could be seen as very real and important. Ultimately, however, the biology described was nothing more than a figurative metaphor, not a performative model, and Caniggia and Muratori continued to reduce the variations to nothing more than statistical abstractions—all of which decidedly maintained the grip of the typological approach. They were basically trying to find a way to find the essential features that gave identity to the individuation of the buildings, rather than identifying the morphogenetic process that defines the species as a population.

**Santiago:** *What is population thinking? What are its (biological) origins?*

**Trummer:** Population thinking is a concept that thinks in species, a term that comes from the discipline of biology. In order to understand its specificity, we should start by pointing out some of the “species concepts” that have until now dominated the discourse of architectural research and practice. The term *species* is used to designate a class or a family of similar things. This term usually describes groups of living organisms, but it also has been used to describe inanimate objects. Physicists talk of nuclear species, mineralogists consider minerals as belonging to certain species, and even books on the

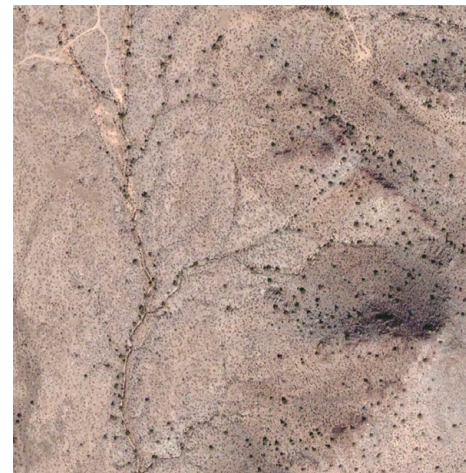
evolution of design categorize furniture such as tables and chairs according to species. And this description of organisms, inanimate objects, or animated objects using the concept of species has led to various applications (as well as contradictions) in practice.

Here is an illuminating quote from biologist Ernst Mayr:

*The assumptions of population thinking are diametrically opposed to those of the typologist. The populationist stresses the uniqueness of everything in the organic world. What is true for the human species, that no two individuals are alike, is equally true for all other species of animals and plants ... all organisms and organic phenomena are composed of unique features and can be described collectively only in statistical terms. Individuals, or any kind of organic entities, form populations of which we can determine the arithmetic mean and the statistics of variation. Averages are merely statistical abstractions, only the individuals of which the population is composed have reality. The ultimate conclusions of the population thinker and of the typologist are precisely the opposite. For the typologist the type (eidos) is real and the variation an illusion, while for the populationist the type (average) is an abstraction and only the variation is real. No ways of looking at nature could be more different.<sup>9</sup>*

By describing the difference between population thinking and typological thinking, Mayr is replacing one species concept with another. Providing further support to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, population thinking went on to become the only accepted species concept within biology. In this way, population thinking must first and foremost be

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 4.



Another quarter-mile section of desert landscape in Maricopa County, Phoenix, Arizona.

understood through the idea of multiplicity. To quote Gilles Deleuze, a multiplicity—in opposition to the idea of typology, which reduces the many into one—“must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organization belonging to the many as much, which has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, population thinking not only replaced typological thinking, but it actually went as far as erasing its roots. In order to more explicitly describe the difference

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 182.

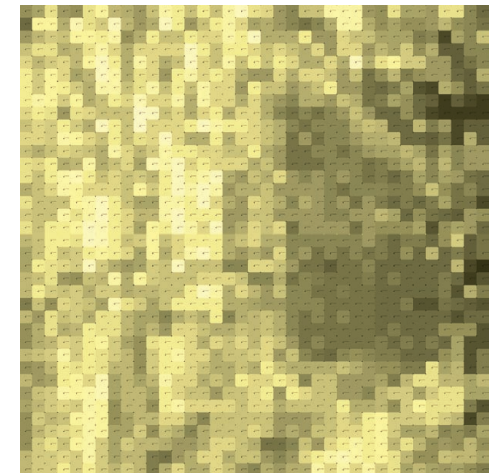


Image: Fairus Reza Razali, Mika Watanabe and Lin Chia-Ying

The image shows the land value, an intensive measure of the economic value of a raw piece of desert landscape based on the current market potential. The value is the sum of various given objectives, with values ranging from 0.1 to 0.5. The objectives are: topography (TC), water retention (WR), existing feasibility (EF), vegetation density (VD), sound comfort (SC), precipitation level (PL). Thus Land Value = TC+WR+EF+VD+SC+PL.

between the two, let us consider two questions. The first is how a group of objects or individuals is defined as a species, and the second, perhaps more important than the first, is how to understand the genesis of forms.

“A species,” according to Mayr, “is a group of interbreeding natural populations that are reproductively isolated from other such groups.” First, we must note that “it is a protected gene pool, whereby an individual is merely a temporary vessel holding a small portion of the contents of a gene pool for a short period of time.” Second, a “species is also an ecological

unit that, regardless of the individuals composing it, interacts as a unit with other species with which it shares the environment.” Third, “the members of a species constitute a reproductive community.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand what a population is, or how it differs with respect to other concepts of species, we must understand the way in which it defines itself as a “many.” On the one hand, each individual has to be different from the others. At the same time, these differences among individuals must also sustain its identity as a species, compared to other species. Yet it is important to note that without the diversity of the individuals, the whole species could not even exist. And this is exactly what defines population thinking. Each population needs a critical mass of different individuals in order for it to constitute a whole. Unlike typological thinking, which classifies species by morphological characteristics (or different takes upon a geometrical template), a population acquires its identity through its morphogenetic processes (or the forces that drive the differentiation between the individuals). Therefore, the approach of population thinking is radically different from that of typological thinking.

For their part, typologists understand changes and differences in a completely opposite way. In the field of biology, there were at one time two main currents of typological thinking, or two kinds of essentialisms. One was called *transmutationism*, while the other was called *transformationism*. Both of these were based upon a typological approach, but each

one had slightly different explanations for how types change throughout history.

The transmutationists believed that change could only occur through the birth of new types. “Since a type (essence) cannot evolve gradually (types are considered to be constant), a new type can originate only through an instantaneous ‘mutation’ or ‘saltation’ of existing types, which thereby gives rise to a new class or type.”<sup>12</sup> Supporters of this stance, as Mayr explains, saw the world full of discontinuities. While it is difficult to prove that such ideas have been directly taken up by architects, we must nonetheless agree that modernist approaches were defined by a similar kind of understanding. Indeed, who to better demonstrate this stance than Le Corbusier and his contemporaries, all of whom placed faith in the invention of new types as sources of radical mutation, while ignoring the continuous threads of historical (or evolutionary) processes?

While the transmutationist rejected any forms of gradualism or gradual transformation, the transformationist believed in the idea of evolution and developed the concept of gradual evolution. There were essentially two subcategories of transformationism, each of which had a different understanding of what causes changes to occur within a species. One movement of transformationism “postulated that types (essences) are steady improvements of types or essences by intrinsic drives, and that evolution was believed to take place not by the origin of new types, but by the

transformation of existing types.”<sup>13</sup> In the realm of biology, this theory became known as “finalism.”

The second group of transformationists was composed of followers of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who saw evolution as the result of each organism’s struggle to acquire better traits. For example, the transformationists explained the length of the giraffe’s neck not by natural selection, but rather by the neck-stretching practiced by each subsequent generation of giraffes as they strove to reach high tree branches.

I do not know if Muratori or Caniggia even came across these biological theories, but their idea of spontaneous consciousness seems to side with the transformationists. In any case, what is definitely true is that Muratori and Caniggia defined the variations of building types as a process of differentiation due to the environmental forces of a particular period. Spontaneous consciousness defined the form of all the buildings that shared a similar spatial and temporary zone.

By going back to biological concepts, what I want to emphasize here is that architectural thinking is always, in one way or the other, affected by a much wider production of knowledge. I am not trying to prove that architecture copies or literally applies knowledge from other disciplines. Instead, I would like to demonstrate how ideas of other disciplines “became originated in architecture,” as Jeffrey Kipnis likes to say. We should not forget that all of our ideas and knowledge emerge out of the same pool of genes—to use a scientific expression.

**Santiago:** *How can population thinking contribute to architectural research?*

**Trummer:** Of course it is very difficult to apply population thinking literally to architecture, since architecture is not composed of a set of interbreeding individuals. In order to re-originate the idea of population thinking within the discipline of architecture, I would like to show how we can learn from its genesis of forms and its understanding of matter not as a static entity but as a dynamical process. The reason population thinking has something to offer architecture is not because it “deals with biological taxa, but because the definition is biological.”<sup>14</sup> It is within this frame of mind that we can ask what a biological species concept can contribute to our understanding of forms.

Since the early 1990s, there has clearly been a massive influx of knowledge from other disciplines into the discipline of architecture. People like Sanford Kwinter, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Greg Lynn especially have noted this. Today we know that “the dynamical potential of interacting systems that can process information, such as biological molecules, cells, or organisms, emerged (in the 1990s) as a new theory of dynamical systems collectively referred to as sciences of complexity.”<sup>15</sup> This understanding formed the paradigmatic shift from essentialism, with its ideas of types, to the understanding of identities produced by the morphogenetic processes. It is this shift that Deleuze wrote about in his ontology of difference.

<sup>14</sup> Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots: The Evolution of Complexity* (London: Phoenix Giants, 1994), xii.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is* (London: Phoenix, 2002), 85.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution*, 21.

In order to originate population thinking into architecture, we must understand how biology explains the morphogenetic process of the concept of species, beginning with Gregor Mendel's ideas of the genotype and the phenotype. The distinction between the phenotype and the genotype is that the "genetic material itself is the genome or genotype, which controls the production of the body of an organism and all of its attributes, the phenotype. This phenotype is the result of the interaction of the genotype with the environment during development. The variation of the phenotype produced by a given genotype under different environmental conditions is called its norms of reaction."<sup>16</sup> To illustrate this point, Mayr points out a simple example: "...a given plant may grow to be larger and more luxurious under favorable conditions of fertilizing and watering than without these environmental factors. Leaves of the water buttercup (*Ranunculus flabellaris*) produced under the water are feathery and very different from the broadened leaves on the branches above water."<sup>17</sup> So it is the phenotype that is exposed to natural selection, not the genotype. This distinction between a mortal body and an immortal transmitter of hereditary instructions is exactly what revolutionized biology.

After understanding the difference between genotype and phenotype, the logical next step is to study morphogenetic processes, or the ways in which differences come about and develop. When applied to vertebrates, this is the work of embryology. Its job is to define the gen-

esis of form and the process of unfolding that an organism goes through to result in the creation of "differentiated tissues and organs."<sup>18</sup> This unfolding is called "progressive differentiation." As Manuel DeLanda astutely points out, "If we were to replace the essences as the explanation of the identity of material objects and natural kinds, we need to specify the way in which multiplicities relate to the physical processes which generate those material objects and kinds."<sup>19</sup>

So before we can discuss population thinking in architecture, we must look at how such processes of progressive differentiation can be defined by physicalities, by their metrical and non-metrical properties. Only when we understand differentiation as a means of materializing objects can it make sense to introduce this discourse into architecture. So how do things materialize through the forces of their environments?

Let us take water. Given its appearances, it can occur as either a gas, a solid (ice), or a liquid, depending on the external influence—which, in the case of water, is temperature. As Brian Goodwin says, "If you hold a crystal, made out of carbon, it could take the shape of a diamond with its beautifully regular tetrahedral form. But it could be graphite, whose hexagonal sheets sheer off as it is rubbed over paper."<sup>20</sup> So it is important to remember that any one substance can occur in many forms.

<sup>18</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed its Spots*, 9.

This type of understanding, which Goodwin illustrated with a chemical property, can also be found in the discipline of geometry. Look, for instance, at an example given by DeLanda. To define groups of geometrical objects through progressive differentiation, he says, "we need to consider groups whose members are not objects but transformations.... If we perform, for example, a set of rotations of 90, 180, 270 or 360 degrees on a cube, an observer who did not witness the transformation would not be able to notice that any change had actually occurred." He continues, "On the other hand, the cube would not remain invariant under a rotation of 45 degree, but a sphere would."<sup>21</sup> In mathematical terms this means that a sphere has more degrees of symmetry under a set of rotating transformations than a cube. This kind of approach to organizing differences between entities is radically different from that of classifying objects by their essences, since the latter looks at only the set of properties that all cubes share and not the effects of transformations upon them. It is this process of differentiation that is the underlying principle of Deleuzian philosophy as it pertains to the ontology of difference. Deleuze states that everything, when repeated, only appears as pure difference. This accounts for our metrical properties, like the sections of a cone that appear differently between one instance and another. At one moment it appears as an ellipse, at the next as a parabola, at the next as a hyperbola, and finally as the form of a line. Deleuze pushes his conclusions even further, effectively demonstrating that this can also be applied to all non-

<sup>21</sup> DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 18.



Top: Projected neighborhood model for Jua Zhu-Jiao in the wetlands of the Jiangnan River Delta in Shanghai. The intensive properties of the site determine a population of housing units. These units vary in size, organization and degree of collectively shared spaces in accordance with the vagaries of market demands.



Bottom: Another projected neighborhood model. The intensive property of accessibility determines a population of courtyard environments with different degrees of public-ness. These range from offices spaces to local facilities, all designed in relation to infrastructural access points.

<sup>16</sup> Mayr, *What Evolution Is*, 98-99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

metrical properties, demonstrated by the appearance of languages as a process of progressive differentiation of phonological systems. What we can state here is that the re-origination of population thinking in architecture can occur as a process of differentiation of our metrical properties of space, such as lengths, widths, heights, surfaces, and volumes—all of which are extensive properties of the built environment—under the influence of our non-metrical properties of space, defined as degrees of temperature, pressure, tension, and potential differences and capacities—or the intensive properties of our environments.

So what if we were to understand architecture not as typologies or types, which progressively transform from the primitive hut to the complex construction or which exist as spontaneous consciousness, but rather as a population of material organizations unfolding along the relationship between the metrical properties of building materials and the non-metrical properties of their embedded environments?

Let us examine, for example, the traditional Chinese courtyard house. If I were a typologist, I would define the features that characterize its identity by its essences. This means that I would define the courtyard house as a house with a courtyard in the middle.

On the other hand, how would I understand it as a populationist? If we look at all of the variations of Chinese courtyard houses, we can see that each of these houses forms a completely different organization. Houses in the north are

organized as individual housing units arranged within a framed landscape, while houses in the south take the organization of a compact block with vertical wholes of different sizes. Once we have realized this, we must now try to identify what drives their morphogenetic process as a population of houses.

I would answer that each of the houses forms a material organization that becomes actualized by three kinds of external forces: the structural, the climatic, and the social. Indeed, the most obvious influence on the layout of the houses is the climatic one. Each house works either as a heating or as a cooling machine, depending upon the climatic condition. The sun penetration in the north is important and presses the layout toward the creation of freestanding heat islands. In the south, the whole house acts like a cooling machine, as both of its pieces—one larger than the other—create air circulation through the pressure differences generated by the different temperatures of the skylights. At the same time, the internal organization of the circulation informs the social distribution of family structure and formalities through its range of possible depths and paths, and by deploying various kinds of intimacies. In this way, the materialization of each of the houses is embedded within the structural performance of its framework. In opposition to the idea of repetitive standards, the Chinese have developed throughout their history a building system that performs according to the associativity of its parts. This structural system is based on rules of relationships between the various wooden components and formal geometries, which today we would call a parametric design approach.

For example, in this kind of approach, a change in the diameter of the wood used to construct the house reorganizes the entire structural system.

We thus could call the Chinese courtyard houses a population of material organizations, differentiated by the performance of the structural system through its metrical properties and by the ecological forces through its non-metrical ones. It is perhaps the earliest known architectural practice based upon associative geometry applied over various scales.

Through a technique based on associative geometry, using metrical parameters to create an infinite number of variations, we can re-link the various regimes operating in the construction of urban environments into a mode of interdependency. But in opposition to conventional urban planning, an associative protocol generates at each scale degrees of freedoms that allows each one to become specified within the next scale. Each neighborhood or urban agglomeration is specific to its environmental forces, but they also can vary or take different forms as a result of the decision-making processes between the various scales and the manufacturing process they are based on. To re-originate knowledge from other disciplines in architecture is not something new, but in the case of population thinking it allows projecting new forms of realities that have not yet been actualized.

# REVISITING THE CITY ITSELF

## the museum for missing places

Eric J. Leshinsky

If you lived in Houston between August 2005 and January 2006, you were perhaps, willingly or not, a visitor to city's Museum for Missing Places. You would have encountered the Museum while waiting for the lightrail, while walking the streets of the Museum District, while crossing a neighborhood esplanade, while grocery shopping, while making a routine trip to the recycling center, or while driving around Midtown. Such was a museum that, by treating the unheralded public spaces of the city as part of its own facilities and in turn exhibiting many of these public spaces as worthwhile cultural content, attempted to reconcile established museum culture with a city that was itself seemingly at odds with it. In its six month existence, the Museum for Missing Places both interrogated the practices of Houston's existing museum institutions and provided a prototype for a new form of museum in Houston.

*Houston's stability is literally attacked by time and motion; it is a city formed in a series of conjunctive episodes that hold their relationships for relatively brief periods.... Displacements of traditional patterns of stability and urban rituals have become the norm. Time has become a prime variable in determining the genius loci.<sup>1</sup>*

1 Bruce Webb. "The Name Game" in Cite Magazine

Initially designed as a response to the systematic dismantling by housing developers of a neighborhood near Houston's Museum District, the Museum quickly became a more general response to the city of Houston itself. Unusual among major American cities, Houston's historical continuity has long been defined strangely by the impermanence of its built landscape rather than its fixity. Propelled by a culture of rapid change that privileges short-term gain over long-term vision, Houston is literally formed from a never-ending series of geographic disruptions-- the buildings of the city are quickly altered, roadwork and redirected streets are the norm and volatile weather continuously pummels the city, to cite just a few examples. These disruptions create a city of revolving contradictions and perpetual disjunction, and the job of making sense of this city is left to a scattered population.

*The underlying grammar of the suburban metropolis is atomization and fragmentation, and it is unproductive to resist this premise. The public realm must follow suit. But even this essentially physical reading is deceptive. 'Public space' in the suburban metropolis is not the plaza of the city, but a peculiar blend of soft and hardware, more vapor than pavement, more dynamic than stable, because bound to events rather than manifested by places.<sup>2</sup>*

These types of urban conditions insure that the places and locations in Houston that might harbor the public life of the city too often lead short lives—perpetually caught within an economy and a culture that values the private deal over the public exchange. And yet, these places where

46. Houston, Texas

2 Lars Lerup. *After the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

informal conversations might happen, where coincidences might occur, where the unprescribed life of a city might be staged-- these places are the potential foundation for an evolving urban identity of this city. The principal challenge of the Museum for Missing Places was to document and activate these less-acknowledged public places, to make these forgotten, excluded, marginalized places into worthwhile museum content, and to frame them from a new perspective that would allow them to be freshly appreciated as more than what they seem. At the time of the Museum's founding, Houston could already claim a host of remarkable museums dedicated to the exhibition of precious artworks and antiquities. What Houston did not have was a museum that could exhibit the fleeting set of provisional places that constituted the city itself.

Realizing that museums may be Houston's most viable form of public space, the Museum for Missing Places was founded to be a new sort of public space: one that not only activated the public life of the city but also studied it. It was also a place where the critical role of the museum, as an arbiter of public values, was reasserted. Although situated in dialogue with Houston's Museum District and sharing the mission of existing museums in presenting cultural information of broad public interest, the Museum for Missing Places distinguished itself through curatorial practices that affirmed the instability of the surrounding city, through an attention to collecting information that was ephemeral (and often not tangible) and through the active inclusion of anonymous city residents in the workings and evolution of the museum. In short, the Museum for

Missing Places proposed an institutional structure that would allow a museum in Houston to better integrate itself with its surrounding environment.

*The difference between the museum and collective memory, therefore, lies in the method by which the museum keeps an object's subterranean attractions within well-defined limits, which memory seeks inevitably to explode. Can material objects and verbal images give up their role as muffled actors and speak out, project, touch, surprise the spectator? Are these objects and images allowed to point self-critically to their own exhibitionary qualities?<sup>3</sup>*

Less a set of discrete spaces, the Museum for Missing Places was best defined as a set of processes, practices and procedures for gathering, ordering and exhibiting information that could not be easily curated by Houston's existing museums. Web-based interactive exhibits, site-specific public surveys installed in public places, temporary gallery installations within other institutions-- these were the principal devices used by the Museum for Missing Places to present itself to the public at large. Operating as a feedback loop, the Museum would use site-specific artworks, each featuring a public survey element, to target specific public places-- tactical media interventions positioned to solicit responses about those places, in writing or speech, from passers-by. These public interventions acted as interactive, dialogue-based exhibits for the Museum by initiating conversations in places where they had never existed before. The individuals who responded to the public surveys would, in essence, contribute to a body of knowledge about the place

3 M. Christine Boyer. *City of Collected Memory*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1994

of the exhibit, which in turn formed the primary content of the Museum. The responses—that is, if anybody responded to these surveys—were gathered by the Museum and included in a more thorough online exhibit about the place in question on the Museum’s website. As the Museum evolved, a cycle was created, in which visitors would encounter the Museum’s public surveys in the physical space of the city, then were directed to the Museum’s website for more information, and from there were directed to other public interventions staged by the Museum in other parts of the city. Through this process, the Museum and its audience became indistinguishable from one another.

By existing in a space that was neither here nor there and never truly grounded, the Museum for Missing Places certainly risked never becoming a part of the city that it struggled to understand. However, the flexibility and diffuseness of the Museum’s practice allowed it to do what other museums could not: mediate a city’s increasingly complex public life—that which happens in physical space as well as online—and create a means of chronicling a city of rapid and unregulated urban change, not simply through its architecture, but more importantly through the eyes and actions of its inhabitants.

*In the city the perpetual myth and desire for origins, for a secure site of explanation, is constantly deferred by their being retold and rewritten.<sup>4</sup>*

The Museum for Missing Places ceased its operations in January 2006, but the

places investigated by the Museum in its seven exhibits continue to lead lives independent from the Museum. These are dynamic places which resist both memory and easy categorization. While most museums aim to archive objects for posterity, and attempt to control their provenance, the Museum for Missing Places was both incapable and unwilling to archive the unarchiveable. Instead, the Museum aimed to leverage the specter of these places for only a brief period of time, hoping that the short-lived acknowledgment and public inquiry of these places could trigger collateral urban effects well after the tenure of the Museum.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Chambers. “Architecture, Amnesia, and the Emergent Archaic,” in *The Unknown City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001





## Exhibit 1: Location Uncertain

To promote its first exhibit, the Museum for Missing Places produced business cards and fliers to create interest around Houston. This publicity, as well as word-of-mouth, generated the main substance of the exhibit, reproduced on the following pages. The need to promote this inaugural exhibit through printed materials quickly became symptomatic of the larger dilemma of creating a museum with only an online presence. As a consequence, later exhibits would aggressively employ interventions in physical public space as links to the ongoing development of the MMP website.

As a central feature of Exhibit 1, visitors to the MMP were introduced to an interactive map that allowed them to input notes about locations in Houston, something like a geo-referenced bulletin board. This basic metaphor notwithstanding, the map only existed because of a unique open source software agreement provided to the public by Google in 2005. The functionality of the map was adapted from an existing online mapping resource developed by Greg Stoll and Scipionus Mentus to aid refugees of the catastrophic Katrina and Rita hurricanes that hit the Gulf region in 2005.

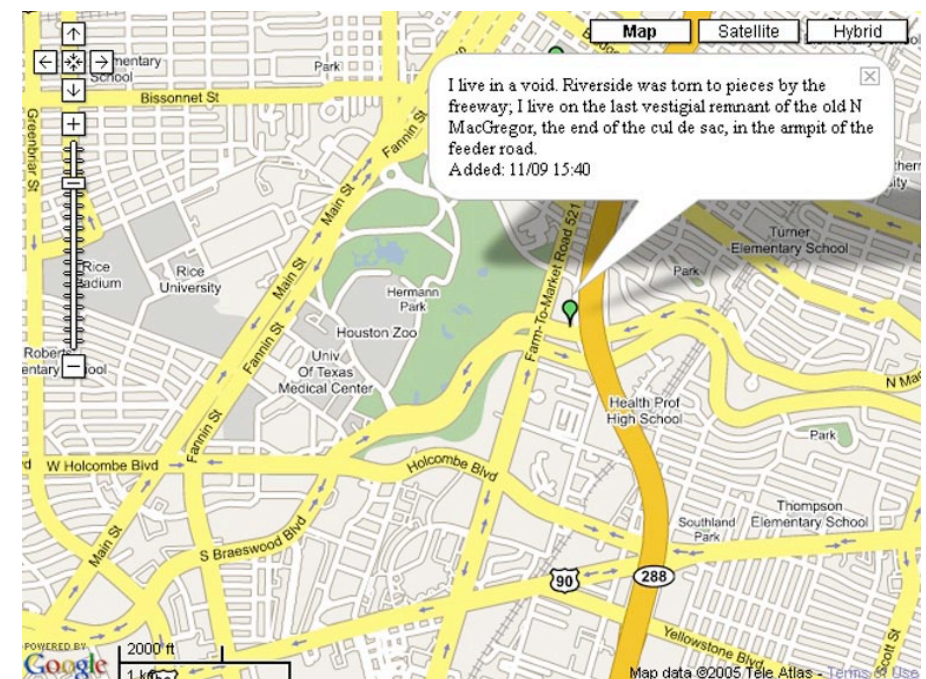
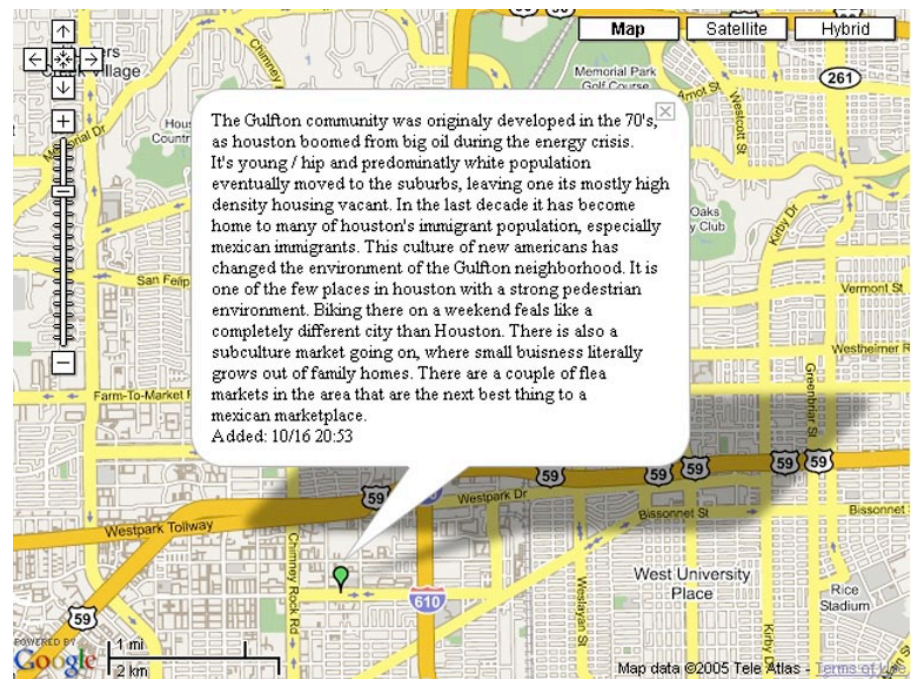
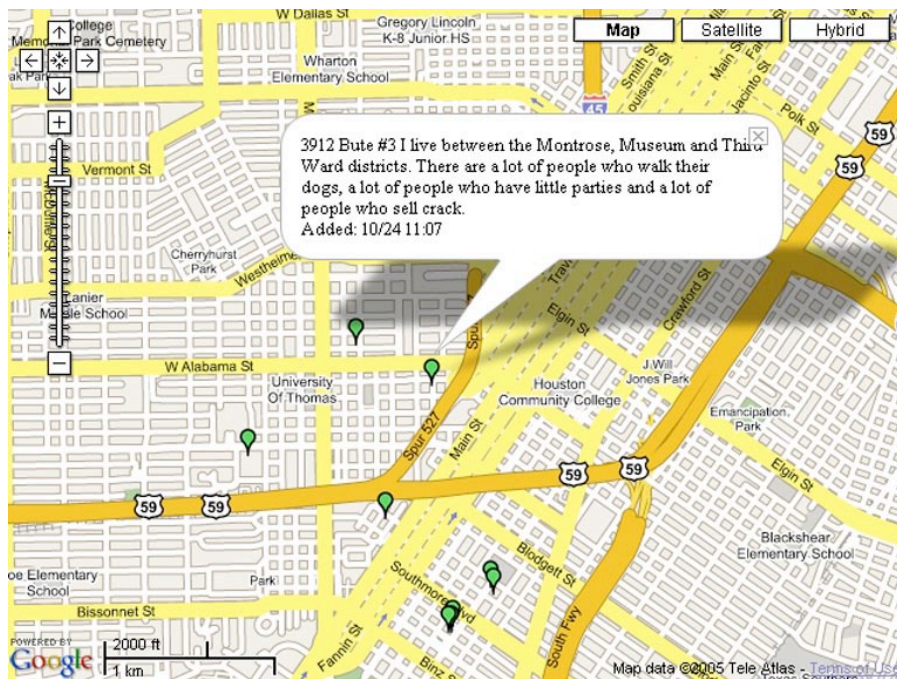
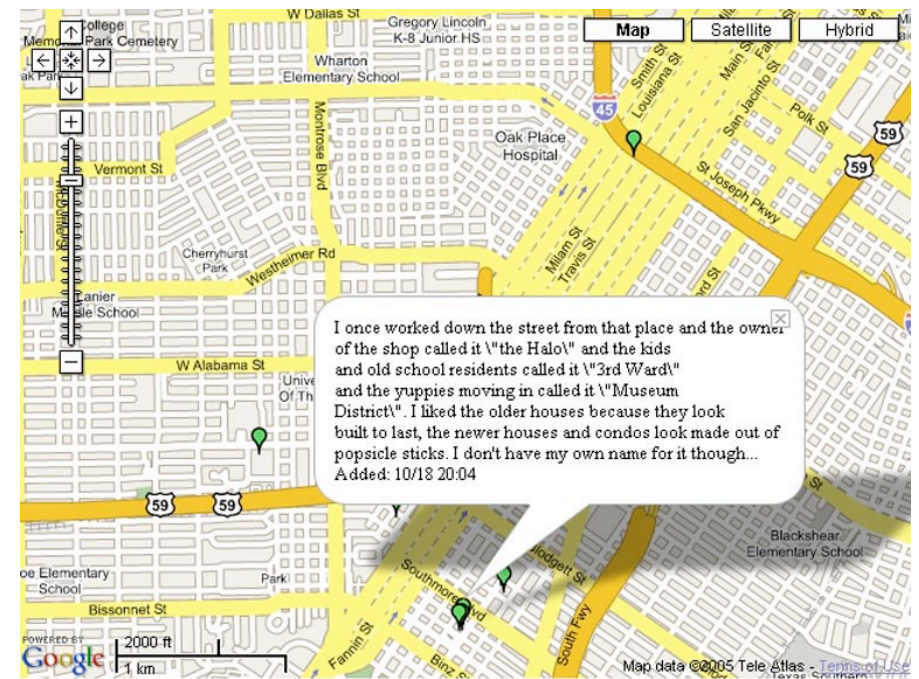
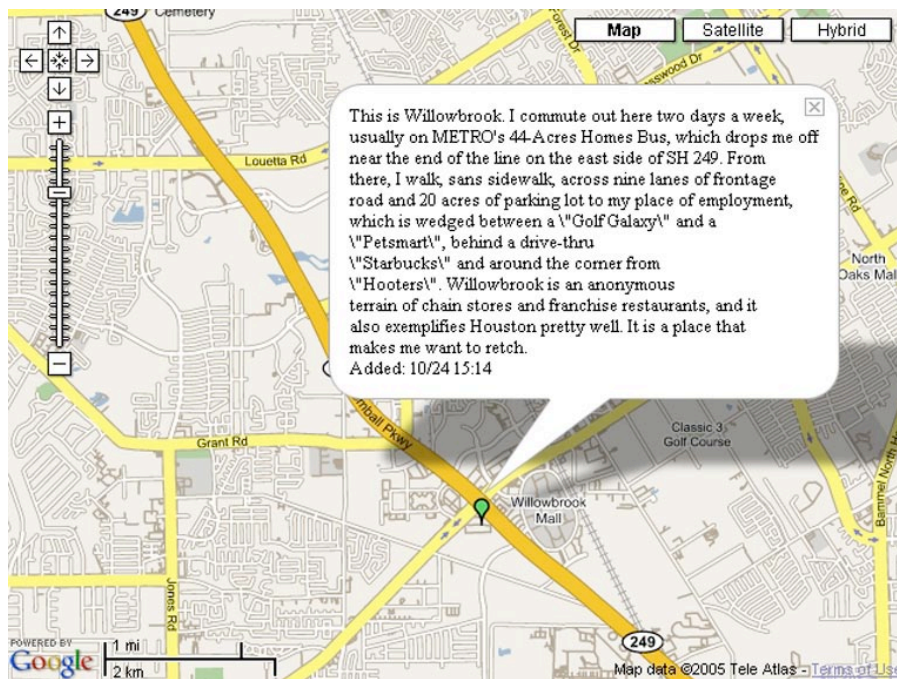


Image: This image, and all subsequent images in the Museum for Missing Places article, are credited to Eric Leshinsky.





## Exhibit 2: Redistricting

**Where does the Museum District begin and where does it end?**  
( please respond )

1. from southmore To Be N TARD
  2. IT STARTS AT YOUR FEET AND ENDS NEXT TO THE ☆
  3. At the rail
  4. at the diameter of a communities thinking of what/where it should
  5. Point A to Point B ☺
- [www.missing-places.org](http://www.missing-places.org)**

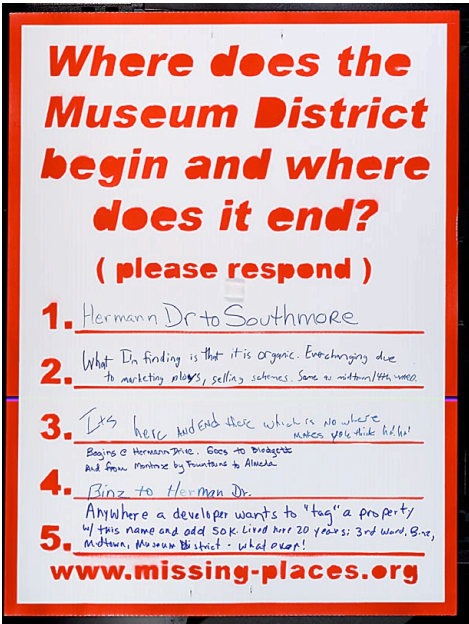
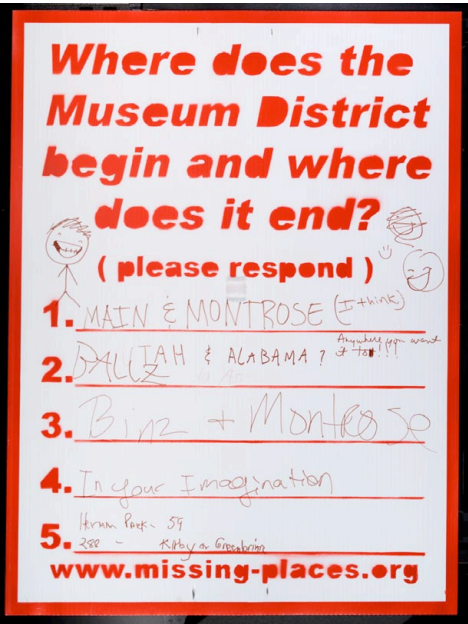
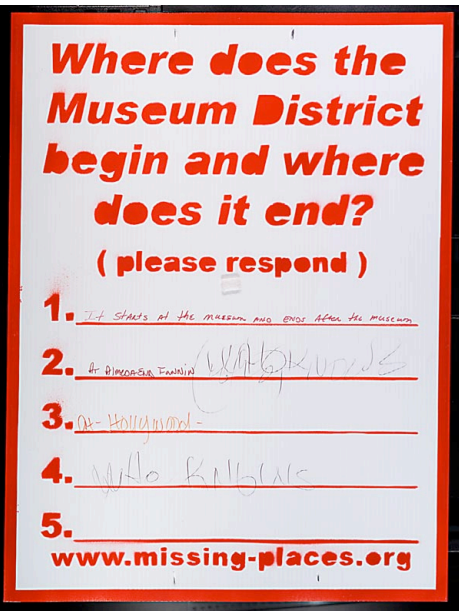
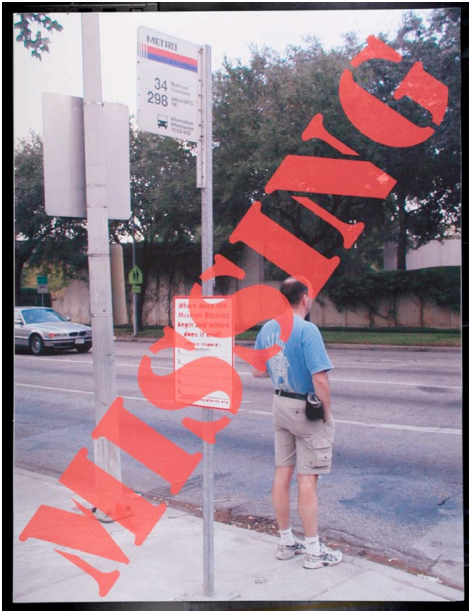
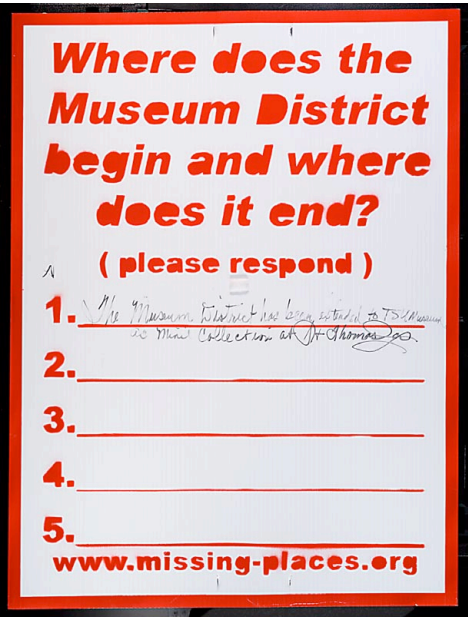
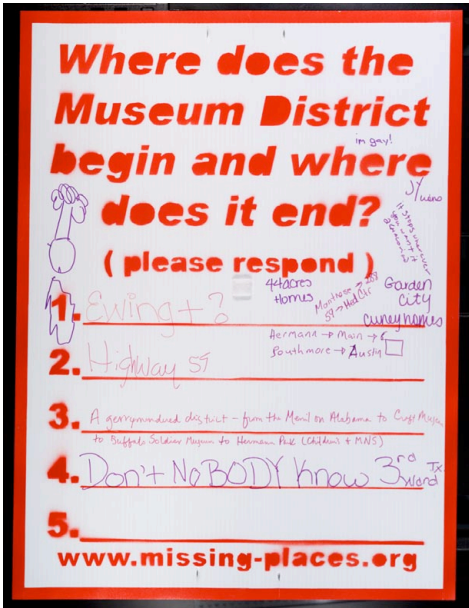
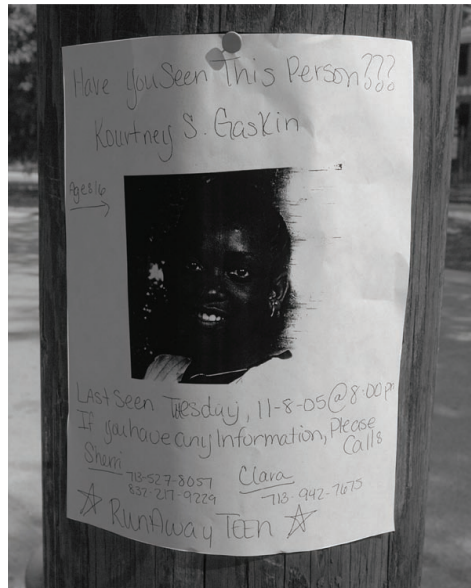


Exhibit 2 initiated the concept of a designed "survey object": a sign or other means of communicative public art that could be used as the centerpiece of an exhibit. A "survey object" would be installed in a physical public place, its design both posing questions to passersby about that site and providing some means of response. In all cases, specific mention was made that the solicited responses would become part of the exhibit at the Museum for Missing Places, and participants were directed to the MMP's website at [www.missing-places.org](http://www.missing-places.org). In the design of the "survey objects" used in Exhibit 2, a deliberate attempt was made to emulate the cheap signs that cluttered Houston's Museum District area, advertising anything and everything related to a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood: homes for sale, homes for rent, landscaping services, demolition services, etc. The stenciled signs were made on the same 18x24-inch coroplast board used by virtually all the other signs in the area.



## Exhibit 3: Valuing Vacancy



*In a city like Houston, with its scattered and exceedingly private population, city life is often observed in unexpected ways. Indeed, the Museum for Missing Places was founded in part as a means of locating the disparate forms of public life in the city, often taking cues from existing signs of life such as the fliers on this page—desperate appeals to a public that may or may not exist.*

Stenciled signs—for their affordability, ease of reproduction, and sheer efficiency—were employed for Exhibit 3. With a new theme and a new set of sites, the signs made for this exhibit needed to be bigger and more visible from a distance—ideally readable by motorists as well as pedestrians. Rather than asking passersby to respond in writing directly on the sign, as in the previous exhibit, these signs provided them with a phone number to a service where they could leave a voice message. Audio files of these messages became a significant feature of the exhibit on the MMP's website; transcripts of these messages are reproduced on the following pages. At 2x4 feet, the signs turned out to be grossly undersized, especially when situated next to the more prominent political campaign signs all over town.



Main at Holman



La Branch at Alabama



Milam at Alabam



Milam at Francis





## Exhibit 4: Passing-thru

The popular drive-thru recycling center RecyclExpress became the site for Exhibit 4 and initiated the concept of collaboration between the Museum for Missing Places and another institution, in this case the City of West University Public Works Department, which manages the facility. Though heavily used at seemingly all hours of the day and

every day of the week, often functioning as a de facto social hub for environmentally conscious people from all over the city, RecyclExpress was an enigma, one of the less acknowledged public spaces in Houston. Through this exhibit, the MMP endeavored to understand who was actually using the facility and why it had become so popular.

The MMP also reasoned that the exhibit might be of practical value to the managers of the facility. To this end, it designed and produced a series of "Guest Books" using genuine recycled paper bags from RecyclExpress. In a brief phone conversation with Bradley Neighbors, General Services Superintendent for the City of West University, formal approval was granted to the MMP

to use the site in exchange for formal documentation of the exhibit. While the exhibit was installed seamlessly and generated tremendous attention from visitors to the facility, the original arrangement was soon forgotten by both parties, and no further communication was made between the MMP and West U.

HOME ADDRESS  
(APPROXIMATE IS OK)

WHAT KEEPS YOU COMING  
BACK TO RECYCLEXPRESS?

1. Kirby/Richmond

W 8th St

2. Kirby/Holcombe

3. myparkham@academicplanet.com

3.5 - JARRARD ST

4. Cypress Tx. 290

5 University Blvd 77005

6. Hawthorne/Garrott

7 - 4100 DURNES WAY 77025

8) MONTROSE 77006

9) 1800 El Paso 77054

7447 CAMBRIDGE 77054

10.) Montrose 77006

1. Help the environment save it for my children so they can enjoy it? Thanks  
2. ONLY ONE AROUND

2. Open and available to receive recyclables  
help to see glass here is a good thing for environment

3. ditto  
CONVENIENT / MY TIMING  
4. Only one around!

Easy to get to - open 7 days a week

Easy - always open  
a good thing to do  
City of Houston just recycle - location

TAKES GLASS, NEARBY,  
ALWAYS OPEN

only place I know of doing

I MOVON NOW FROM SOMETHING  
AND IT WAS SHORT TO FIND  
A PLACE WHERE I COULD  
CONTINUE MY TREASURE  
RECYCLING!

me to.

W 8th St

PULL HANDLES UP  
NOT OUT

1. Kirby/Richmond

close by - City of Houston  
doesn't pick up everything

Montrose

close by - no  
recycling by city

Woodhead St @ Gray

Best facility close to  
me, takes all except  
photo & video (shredded paper!)

3702 Eastside St

closest facility

4

FAIRVIEW

CLOSE TO MY HOME

4403 Silverwood

IT TAKES 2000 years FOR  
GLASS TO RECYCLE

North Blvd.

close to home, can  
exchange glass & metal

3245 Bellefontaine

5353 Institute Ln

Very close by - just  
taking care of mama earth!  
Great location / Good for  
the EARTH

HOME ADDRESS  
(APPROXIMATE IS OK)

WHAT KEEPS YOU COMING  
BACK TO RECYCLEXPRESS?

2800 Lake Ridge  
2411 Mission

Debra Ann - Cursons  
Ella Lee

Prison/College Station

6606 Auden 77005  
5432 Venice 77007

7772 Greenleaf 77080

1704 BOWEN ST  
HOUSTON TX 77008

5930 Valkeith  
Houston, TX 77096

Southwest Houston

77089  
MIDTOWN

I have wrote

your letter and post

Excellent design Can it be marketed  
to other cities?

Recycling in my community is not as easy  
as it is here. I am keeping them  
some to visit my family.

I Love this Earth, and it  
would be nice, if ALC would do  
there best to help save it!!

It saves the earth!

~~10/10/80~~  
I WORK for the company that  
recycles all this. I love the  
Earth good.

We feel that it is good to help the cleanup  
the earth despite the drive. Great hours. Saw  
Greater variety of items to recycle. Recycling has  
decreased our amount of trash by over 1/2.

CONVENIENCE in the  
SAVE THE EARTH  
Only place to Recycle  
SEE ABOVE



Enjoy all  
rewards o

Instant discounts on  
ms every day • Special  
st customers • Special  
ification • Automatic S  
try • Free Epoints

Mark & Peggy Groeth  
Dallas St  
Houston 77019

Lynn Nazareth  
Montrose, 77006

MILCE NEAL, Amberstar Drive, Westu.

26031 Nottingham  
Houston 77005

Michael & Leslie LaNier  
12602 Cannonwood  
Hou., TX. 77040

Paula Hertel  
Museum District  
(77004)

Kay Muenster  
Westbury 77096

7/24, convenient,  
full range of recycling  
(glass plastic etc etc)

Convenient, environmentally  
friendly

- my wife led the effort to fund a  
Bottle Bank, so we are legal  
users  
Convenient

promotes healthier living;  
Only 1 earth- we must preserve  
it, wish we had a local  
program (like Austin does) &  
facility

Closest to my house,  
accepts paper/plastic/cardboard  
and glass & cans,  
pick-up service in my area  
unreliable

Want to reduce landfills  
encourage recycling

Exhibit 5: Train to Somewhere

\*PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE\*

THIS SURVEY WILL REMAIN FOR 1 DAY ONLY

DECEMBER 1, 2005

# YOU ARE HERE

IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, HOUSTON SUDDENLY HAS TRAIN SERVICE AND 26 NEW TRAIN PLATFORMS. THE MUSEUM FOR MISSING PLACES IS CONDUCTING A SURVEY ABOUT WHERE HOUSTON'S LIGHTRAIL STATIONS ARE LOCATED WITHIN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

IF THIS TRAIN PLATFORM IS ON YOUR ROUTE TODAY, PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY BELOW. YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE PRESENTED AS AN EXHIBIT AT [WWW.MISSING-PLACES.ORG](http://WWW.MISSING-PLACES.ORG)

WHERE ARE YOU  
COMING  
FROM?

WHERE ARE YOU  
GOING  
TO?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

With its focus on Houston's nascent light rail system, Exhibit 5 had the potential to include a collaboration with Houston Metro, the city agency that manages Houston's public transportation. Unfortunately, this potential was shortlived; it became clear that Metro's lengthy approval process would not be sufficiently sensitive to the tight schedule of the exhibit. In fact, as Metro's marketing director explained, there was actually no person on the staff at Metro that could give approval for a project like this. So, with no formal approval from Metro, which had a zero tolerance policy toward advertising at light rail stations, Exhibit 5 claimed the shortest life of any of the Museum for Missing Places's exhibits.

Anticipating the worst, the MMP had designed "survey posters" mimicking existing way-finding graphics on the train platforms that could be affixed elegantly to the glass partitions with specialized suction cups. After the logistical nightmare of installing the posters on twenty-six train platforms, the MMP was able to collect only five of them before their confiscation by Metro Police (often shortly after their installation). However, the few posters that were collected revealed that the exhibit drew an immediate response from rush-hour train riders, an immediacy of response that would prove unparalleled among other MMP exhibits.



\*PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE\*  
THIS SURVEY WILL REMAIN FOR 1 WEEK ONLY  
December 1 - DECEMBER 8, 2005

# YOU ARE HERE

IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, HOUSTON SUDDENLY HAS TRAIN SERVICE AND 25 NEW TRAIN PLATFORMS. THE MUSEUM FOR MISSING PLACES IS CONDUCTING A SURVEY ABOUT WHERE HOUSTON'S LIGHTRAIL STATIONS ARE LOCATED WITHIN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

IF THIS TRAIN PLATFORM IS ON YOUR ROUTE TODAY, PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY BELOW. YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE PRESENTED AS AN EXHIBIT AT WWW.MISSING-PLACES.ORG

WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM? / WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO?

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Rice University | Telephone @ Dumble   |
| 2. Herman Hosp     | Main @ Helman        |
| 3. BEN TAUB        | Herman PARK          |
| 4. ALKER Bldg      | UHD                  |
| 5. UT-H med school | Downtown             |
| 6. Hermann Hosp    | Museum               |
| 7. Herman Hosp     | Scott & Houston Blvd |
| 8. VA HOSP.        | U.H. Downtown        |
| 9.                 |                      |
| 10.                |                      |

\*PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE\*  
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December 1 - DECEMBER 8, 2005

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IF THIS TRAIN PLATFORM IS ON YOUR ROUTE TODAY, PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY BELOW. YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE PRESENTED AS AN EXHIBIT AT WWW.MISSING-PLACES.ORG

WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM? / WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO?

- |                                    |                            |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. DRYDEN II                       | FANNIN-S II                |
| 2. Knighwood 205 / Preston Station | Dryden Station             |
| 3. University of Houston Downtown  | Fannin-S                   |
| 4. Texas Woman's University        | Fannin S                   |
| 5. MED ORG                         | Holcomer / Seane Place     |
| Scott's Yellowstone                | Med. Center Transit Center |
| 6. S.E. Transit center             | Bellview & Blinnat         |
| 7. BAYLOR                          | Reliant Park Station       |
| 8. UT Houston Dental Branch        | Arborea Medical Center     |
| 9. MEXICO                          | Fannin South Station       |
| 10.                                | SNICESS                    |

\*PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE\*  
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December 1 - DECEMBER 8, 2005

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WHERE ARE YOU / WHERE ARE YOU  
COMING / GOING  
FROM? TO?

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Museum Dist           | Bell                     |
| 2. Museum Dist           | Downtown                 |
| 3. HEIGHTS → Museum Dist | Downtown Main St. Square |
| 4. Hermann Hrgo          | HCC                      |
| 5. _____                 | _____                    |
| 6. _____                 | _____                    |
| 7. _____                 | _____                    |
| 8. _____                 | _____                    |
| 9. _____                 | _____                    |
| 10. _____                | _____                    |

\*PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE\*  
THIS SURVEY WILL REMAIN FOR 1 WEEK ONLY  
December 1 - DECEMBER 8, 2005

## YOU ARE HERE

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WHERE ARE YOU / WHERE ARE YOU  
COMING / GOING  
FROM? TO?

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Preston             | Dryden/TMC           |
| 2. North Shepard       | Dryden (H&P)         |
| 3. Spring              | TMC (Dyson)          |
| 4. Kerkendahl Park     | Medical Center - MDA |
| 5. Kingwood (P&R)      | TMC                  |
| 6. Katy (Kingwood)     | Dryden/TMC           |
| 7. Northwest Forest Rd | Hermann              |
| 8. Kingwood            | Dryden (TMC)         |
| 9. Spring              | Dryden (TMC)         |
| 10. Kingwood (P&R)     | HCC                  |

## Exhibit 6: Monuments in Hiding



The idea of identifying new landmarks and potential monuments in Houston may seem at first a counterintuitive, even perverse, endeavor in a city where buildings of impressive historical pedigree are routinely demolished with little recourse. Indeed, with this exhibit the Museum for Missing Places tried to redefine landmarks and monuments not as architectural artifacts that have withstood time, but rather as architectures of time that exist today but perhaps not tomorrow. Participants in this exhibit were encouraged to revise their understanding of architectural permanence in the context of Houston, where permanence is most certainly untenable. In its place, visitors to the exhibit were asked to consider architectural landmarks not just for their perceived permanence, but also according to other novel criteria that might open up this staid architectural typology to new forms.

Postcards, with their ability to reduce and repack-age monumental places within 4x6 inches, were used as the medium for soliciting responses to the questions posed by the exhibit. And the supermarket, widely valued as a temple of commerce and necessity, becomes perhaps the most obvious first example of the MMP's new definition of monument. Indeed, a significant part of this exhibit involved the MMP's distribution of 200 pre-stamped postcard-coupons ("Good for nominating one living monument") randomly on car windshields in the parking lots of four distinct Houston supermarkets. As part of this effort, the MMP opened a P.O. box at University Station in Houston. In the end, none of these postcards was returned to the MMP.



### DIRECTIONS:

- 1) Print this page out on paper stock slightly thicker than normal printing paper.
- 2) Cut around the edge of the colored area.
- 3) Cut along marked cut-line near the top of the colored area.
- 4) Fold in half along marked line.
- 5) Slide flap through cut opening.
- 6) Describe your monument in the space provided.
- 7) Mail postcard with standard 23¢ postcard stamp.



## Exhibit 7: This Is Between You and Me

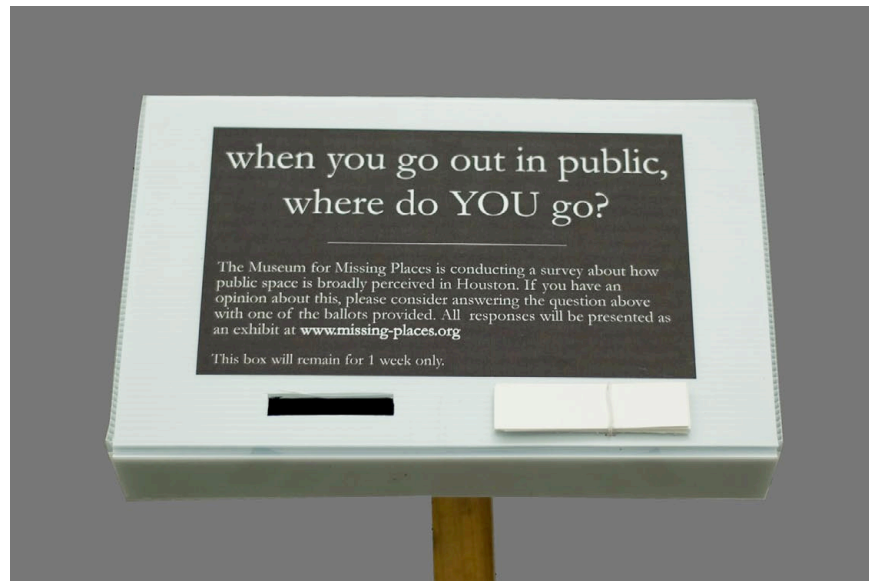


Exhibit 7 would prove to be the final exhibit of the Museum for Missing Places, but ironically it focused on a public site of more lasting significance to Houston than any of the previous exhibits. The MMP had in fact recognized Houston's rambling esplanades early on as both gratuitous in their value as public spaces and timeless—they seemed to be one of the few urban elements of Houston that could actually transcend change and yet, in spite of this or perhaps because of it, the esplanades still seemed to be invisible. With no real program or function other than to

decoratively divide street neighborhoods in half, the esplanades seemed to be pleading for alternative use. Rather than simply rebrand them as new linear parks, the MMP opted to leverage their position as middle grounds, or neutral zones, between private residential households. Using comment boxes mounted on ten different esplanades (designed economically from salvaged plastic real estate signs), the MMP asked Houston residents a question that could only be asked from the middle of an esplanade: "When you go out in public, where do you go?"





Public space in Houston  
could be prettier -  
I'd love better sidewalks to  
stroll on. Wouldn't it be nice?

if all public areas of  
Houston resembled  
Rice campus?!

HISTORIC BARS

My family mainly goes on  
walks around Museum District/Rice  
out side of shopping  
there really are very limited

I keep away from ~~thoroughfare~~  
SERVED DIRECTLY BY PUBLIC TRANSIT -  
BUT THIS IS CONSIDERED SUSPICIOUS BY  
THE POLICE

"PEOPLE OUT HERE" AND MUNICIPAL  
POLICE PATROL ~~TO~~ BE NOT STAYING  
ON "THE MAIN STREETS".  
[2]

Small restaurants in Rice Village  
and walks in the area

Miller Outdoor/park

Walk through neigh-  
borhood, Herman Park,  
Sudotvic Garden

The Streets in this area -  
Fleming Park

to signs in the middle of  
medians by work.

I GO OUT FOR A WALK IN  
MONTROSE OR SOUTH AMPTON.  
J.S.W.K

To Parks? But so few  
& no where to  
Park?

Restaurants, park (clog  
people)

Roads and sidewalks and parks and  
parking garages and bridges over freeways

Cafe Gemini  
Mark 5

Restuarant, Shopping  
or Park

nl HARP

friend's house

RESALE SHOPS  
& GROC. STORES

TO THE "FORTRESS"

Hughes House on Yorkum  
+ Greenwood Cemetery

RICE UNIV, WALK IN  
Memorial, Neighborhood

place Hwy 59  
below street level - all the  
way to 288

TO HOE HOUSE

I go to a restaurant or cafe.

WALK my DOG  
AROUND MONTROSE

The Garden @ Hogg Mansim  
(Great in the Spring!!)

# The 2009 Kennon Symposium at the Rice School of Architecture:

**Everything Must Move**

*Rice University's 2009 Paul A. Kennon Symposium, "Everything Must Move," addressed the long-term concerns of departing Dean of Architecture Lars Lerup by offering a wide range of views on the workings and development of the contemporary city.*

*A selection of presentations from the symposium, transcribed and edited, are offered here as a record of the event. This special section of Manifold also includes a number of written responses to the presentations and concludes with an interview with former Dean Lerup.*

## THE FLIGHT OF THE FALCON

Sarah Whiting

President Barack Obama recently signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which includes approximately \$140 billion for construction, most of which must be used by September 30, 2010. If the recession has a silver lining, it's that architecture has now been given a voice in the national conversation. But how should we enter into a public conversation about architecture without either adopting an ineffectual, "lowest common denominator," herdlike sensibility or reducing our role to that of mere problem solver? That's an urgent question that needs to be asked in architectural practice, research, writing, and teaching.

The dominant model that architects of our generation have inherited for architectural discourse comes from Hegel. "The Owl of Minerva," he famously wrote, "spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk." Hegel was arguing that philosophy—or architectural theory—arrives too late to give instruction as to what the world ought to be. This model turns architectural discourse into reportage, which tends to inflame nostalgia for past radicalisms or amplify the tsks-tsks of facile condemnation. Most tragic of all: Hegel's owl necessarily prevents criticism from being progressive—that is, it forces criticism to look (and be) backward or regressive.

The Owl of Minerva must be replaced by

another bird—the falcon. This bird of prey pursues sustenance by diving headlong forward. Architects are similarly wide-eyed and opportunistic, far better at provocation/exaltation than reportage/condemnation (though, thanks to the spell of the Owl of Minerva, we all too often fall into the trap of fancying ourselves as experts in the latter). The falcon depends on a sound *bite* (as in "sink your teeth into it") more than a *sound* bite (as in "here today, gone tomorrow"). It follows that sustenance is wholly dependent upon turning provocation into ambition. Yet we—meaning the generation that came of age in the last twenty years—were taught to be wary of ambition. We were handed a mandate to steer clear of totalities because of their reductive flattening, their homogenizing tendencies, their scary prognostications. Our fear of The Large Assertion has left us stranded in the margins, where ambition can never flourish because the very notion of ambition is itself suspect.

No ambition means no project, which in turn means, well, nothing. And as Italian philosopher Paolo Virno describes it, that's a frightening fate. He wrote, "If the publicness of the intellect does not yield to the realm of a public sphere, of a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs, then it produces terrifying effects.... It is the same situation, moreover, which is brought about in a spiritualist séance in which the participants are bound together in a fused relationship which seems to nullify every trace of individual identity."<sup>1</sup> In other words, not only is there no common project and/or common identity, but even individual identities have been entirely voided. Every

<sup>1</sup> Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Semiotext(e), 2003), 40–41.

possibility, every aspiration, has been nullified in this new whirled order.

Our interest at WW lies in reinvigorating architecture's potential as a progressive, collective, and public adventure. Or, to put it another way, we're interested in putting forth a shimmering totality that fattens rather than flattens architecture's aggregate condition.

Such a project has its precedents. Already in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville had noted that elastic totalities constitute a particularly important quality of American democracy, particularly in the American reliance upon what might be called catalytic language. He wrote, "Democratic citizens will often have vacillating thoughts, and so language must be loose enough to leave them play. As they never know whether what they say today will



fit the facts of tomorrow, they have a natural taste for abstract terms. An abstract word is like a box with a false bottom; you may put in it what ideas you please and take them out again unobserved."<sup>2</sup> De Tocqueville recognized not only the potent elastic relation between abstraction and meaning, but also how this supple relation served to mediate the tension between American individualism and the collective.

This elastic totality—the infrastructure of civil society—operates in this country like a second political register. As de Tocqueville elaborated, "Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute.... Hospitals, prisons and schools take shape that way."<sup>3</sup> We often overlook the absolute value of associations and institutions in the United States. As we contemplate the potential transformations under President Obama's mandate, we should take heed of this collective vigor. Significant advances in urbanism in particular have no choice but to emerge from associations, collectives, and institutions—not from individual initiative and not from the state.

The political stratum of a "thousand different types" (as de Tocqueville called them) of associative relationships returns us to the question of how to talk about architecture and how to engage the public in

2 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence (1835–40; New York: Doubleday, 1969), 482.

3 *Ibid.*, 513.

that discourse. Of late, conversation in our field has become more like Oprah's or Dr. Phil's ersatz dialogues, where statements are made and advice is given, but there's always a cut to a commercial break before any productive disagreement or exchange can occur. In his recent book, essayist Stephen Miller suggested resuscitating the railleur (a term that's been obsolete since the eighteenth century). The railleur is a banterer—an attentive listener who disagrees, provokes, and agrees, but who does so with wit, sailing back and forth from light to serious conversation.<sup>4</sup> Engaging an audience does not mean that we simply offer design charrettes intended to accommodate the suggestions of a lay audience. We have no choice but to advance our ambitions instead, albeit in the context of a collective subject. We can no longer confuse proliferation with ideology, but need to revel in the prospect of attending to our subjectivities instead of fearing that our views are loaded with bias. We ought to emulate the falcon's headlong dive into a broader "biased" engagement, even as we wrap the inevitably fierce exchange in the discursive tone of serious raillery.

4 Stephen Miller, *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).



## BETTER SHEEN THAN HERD

Ron Witte

We're interested in architecture's sheen today. We're interested in how to steer architecture through the pachinko-like chatter about buildings and cities that fills the air right now. We want to distinguish our interest in architecture's capacity to accumulate from the tendency to think of architecture as a series of expert fiefdoms. Accumulation trumps proliferation. Think of the innumerable commitments to exclusivity made recently: "the digital," "performance," "intricacy," "green," "materiality," "data," "landscape," "continuity." Even the big dogs—program, technology, and form—have become only so many peed-upon fire hydrants.

At WW, we've been trying to come to terms with architecture's estrangement from its generalist legacy for several years. Sheen refers to an unabashedly generalist architectural overlay. In one sense, our interest in sheen is a self-conscious echo of the aphorism-driven architecture that saturated the twentieth century—meta-sentiments that came in lots of shapes and sizes:

- "Architecture is, and always will be, concerned with carefully stacking horizontal things on top of vertical things."<sup>1</sup> A variant on the basic-building-block aphorism, unassailably elegant in its simplicity.

1 James Cubitt, quoted in "Stocktaking," in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, edited by Mary Banham, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 50.



• “Humanity is heading toward forms that, once reached, will forever remain unchanged and unchangeable in time.”<sup>2</sup> A gives-pause aphorism—as in whoa—that makes no bones about our destiny

• “I want to thank the blokes that worked the steel, and the ones who did the concrete.” A blue-collar version of the more famous Mies aphorism, “Technology is far more than a method, it is a world in itself”<sup>3</sup>

• “Tread softly if you carry a big stick; tread how you like if you carry a clipboard.”<sup>4</sup> An aphorism-in-non-aphoristic-clothes that

<sup>2</sup> Pier Luigi Nervi, “Is Architecture Moving toward Unchangeable Forms?” in *Structure in Art and Science*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 96.

<sup>3</sup> Mies van der Rohe, quoted in “Architecture and Technology,” *Arts and Architecture* 67, no. 10 (1950): 30.

<sup>4</sup> Reyner Banham, “Power Plank,” in *A Critic Writes*, 184.

translates as knowledge = power.

These declarations are easy to find. The history of modernism’s aphoristic thinking is well known, as is the more recent history of its critical dismantling. Jumping ahead to where we sit now, it would be hard to claim that the decades-long effort to crack open the modern monolith (a monolith founded on aphoristic compactness) has been anything other than a complete success. The Critical Nutcracker has been working overtime: architects have made it to the margins, diversified the discourse, eliminated essentialisms ... all told, it looks as if we fought the good fight and won.

About fifteen years ago, WW began to look at our position within this modernism-to-postmodernism arc. Working in various offices, in academic institutions, and in our own practice, we had collected specialized experiences with programmatic, technical, and formal modes of practice. As we turned toward production, our first thoughts were that program, technology, and form were themselves a resuscitation of the Vitruvian triangle: commodity, firmness, and delight. In other words, architecture has changed very little for a very long time.

Furthermore, we had an Oedipal problem: collectively, our experience had exposed us to two would-be princes ruling their separate Vitruvian sub-fiefdoms: Rem Koolhaas (program) and Peter Eisenman (form)—along with a host of other players and thought in orbit during the late twentieth century. Surveying this 1980s/1990s universe, we grew ever more aware of the specifics of our

historical context and of our formation as architects. We had both been educated in the age of the *not*-modern, which by definition meant that we *hovered*. We floated among the ideological vapors of the moment. Difference, heterogeneity, flattened hierarchies, multiple meanings had wafted up from an intoxicating aeration of the discipline. We sat at architecture’s oxygen bar, breathing these rarefied gases until we were happily dizzy.

By the mid-1990s, however, our intoxication had grown soporific. As we looked around, it seemed to us that there was a time when Architecture meant a lot. Right after that, there was a time when ~~Architecture~~ meant a lot. Then there was just ~~architecture~~ and a state of exhaustion that sometimes had sharp-things, lumpy-things, data-things, or all of the above sprouting fitfully from its anemic substrate.

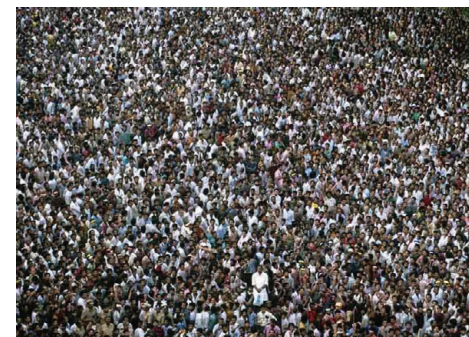
*Program: “Mix it up; it’ll be great!”*

*Form: “Gimme some NURBS!”*

*Technology: “Make damn sure it’s cantilevered!”*

*Sustainability: “Get a grant!”*

We found ourselves bobbing around in



this white noise. There was plenty of emphatic chatter, but it all sounded like the peas-and-carrots of dubbed film crowd scenes. Some of it was interesting, some of it wasn’t, but most of it struck us as remarkably repressed, weighed down by the burdensome legacy of paradigmatic futility. If one were to try to characterize the greater ambitions of the last ten years, what might they be? Or for that matter, the greater ambitions of any five- or ten-year slice of architectural life during the last half century?

The big picture hasn’t just been elusive. It was, and arguably is, taboo.

This taboo emanates from architecture’s having become a niche game. Specialization has become synonymous with *correctness obligé*. There are formalists (who think program is toothpaste); there are program aficionados (who think form is bankrupt); and there are technologists (who, like Nike, just want to do it). Each of these domains is further shattered into myriad expertises. Modernism’s big aphorisms have been replaced by *not*-modernism’s little atomizations. Our intoxicating ether has become a murky smog, with two stultifying effects: (1) architecture’s generalist status is teetering on the brink of extinction, and (2) any sense of progress has become mired in the minutiae of the minor.

The flattened field of architectural and urban potential stretches before us as a strange anathema, a limpid provocation to begin rethinking architecture and urbanism in more fully spectral terms. “Limpid” because it is impossible not to take pause from a half century of new thinking, new

techniques, and new technologies, all a result of pushing the modernist Humpty Dumpty off the wall. “Provocative” because the entire history of architecture is an ongoing cycle of gathering architectural matter only to take it apart and



gather it again.

So, sheen.

Our interest in sheen runs parallel with WW’s interest in the figure; more precisely, we are looking at sheen as a way of furthering our work on the figure. This work can be characterized as an effort to *make the figure shimmer*. Figural sheen doesn’t constitute discrete objects, although it’s entirely dependent upon, and entirely at ease in, the world of objects. It instead establishes constellations of relations. Legible relations. Catalytic relations. Compound relations. We’re particularly interested in how the figure enables organizations, materials, structural systems, infrastructures, and forms to “jump their tracks,” so to speak. Form invigorates program, technology enables form, and program exploits technology. As a standalone construct, the figure is fleet—it freely organizes all of architec-

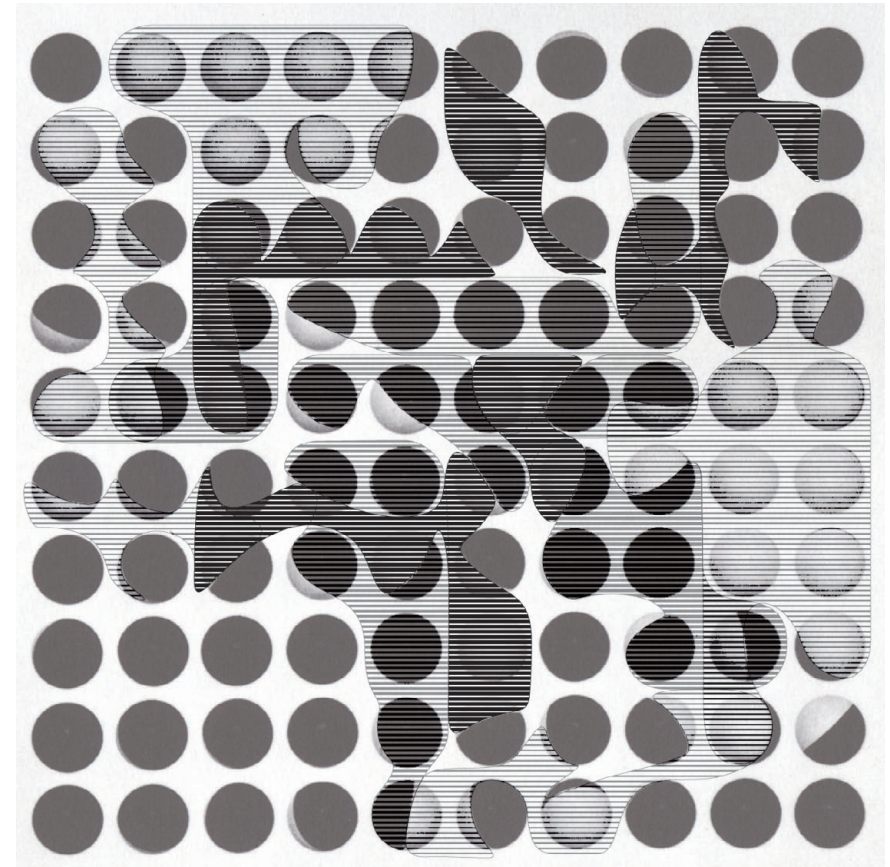
ture. We’re entirely uninterested in the figure’s representational role. It doesn’t signify anything, but instead winds through, overlaps, and glances off of program, form and technology. Which is where sheen comes in. Figural sheen necessarily mingles relationships across the architectural spectrum. These associations come in and out of focus because of alignments and spatial affiliations that continually merge and distill part-to-whole relationships. The figure’s fleeting status supersedes any mandate that it be singularly legible. It has a quality that is inherently glancing, inherently concerned with forging multipart relationships *outside itself*.

Of course sheen smells like totality. It is *supposed* to. And of course this poses problems for all those Critical Nutcrackers who found (and who still find) the smell of the total to be repugnant. But it is defeatist, duplicitous, or just plain dreary to think of architecture as anything other than an act of accumulation. Lots and lots of accumulation. With lots and lots of sheen.

*We would like to thank Lars Lerup for inviting us to this event in honor of his significant tenure as Dean of the Rice School of Architecture; we have always admired Lars for his intense optimism, wit, and conviction, and, finally and importantly, for his sustained support of a younger generation.*

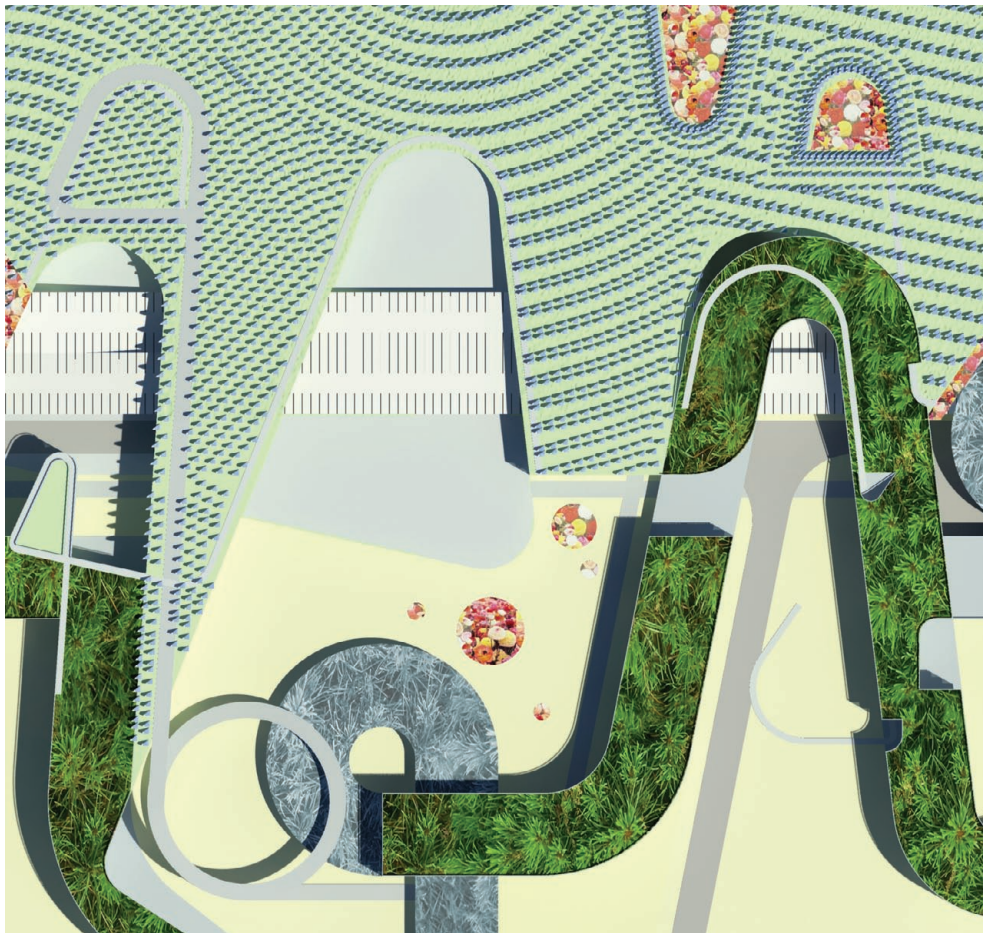
## SELECTED SLIDES AND PROJECTS

WW Architecture



*In contrast to a two-part system (black, white) , in which regions are circumscribed by absolute boundaries -black is black and white is white- here we have a three-part system (black, white, and sphere-rotation). Here regions are defined by compound black/white relationships that supersede single-sphere loyalty.*

*Figural definition is a result of the affiliations (rotations) of the black/white sides of each sphere in relation to one another. Figural definitions oscillate in and out of focus within the greater matrix of continually compounding regions.*



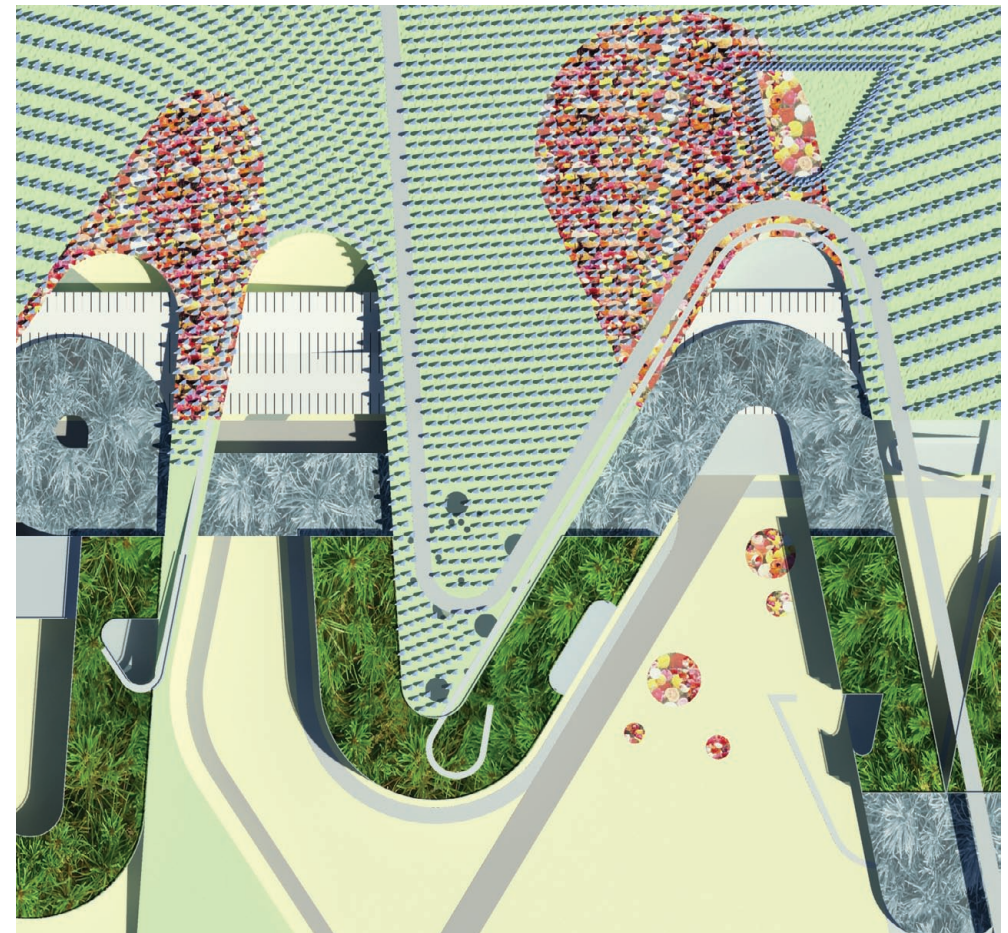
### SURROUND SOUND, SCHIPHOL AIRPORT Amsterdam, The Netherlands

*If the charge of this competition is to dampen sound, its loftier aim is to amplify life in the site's surrounds.*

The sound barrier is comprised of three components: 15,800 acoustic/solar panels, a continuous inclined surface, and vertical walls. Each panel has three roles: acoustic buffer, solar collector, and landscape feature. Collectively, these panels operate as a deep acoustic barricade—a perforated, aggregate surface that is calibrated to reflect, absorb, and scatter the most problematic sound frequencies. The panels amass along the incline, producing additional depth as individual panels overlap one another.

Solar panels are mounted perpendicular to the acoustic panels. The combined unit creates a sound vortex—a deep pocket—that traps sound in the corner recess of its geometry. The top of each acoustic panel is curved to reflect sound downward and back toward the runway. The acoustic panels and the backside of the solar collectors are made of folded/perforated metal sheets that add another scale of acoustic frequency control. The perpendicular relationship of the acoustic and sound panels optimizes each face for its particular function.

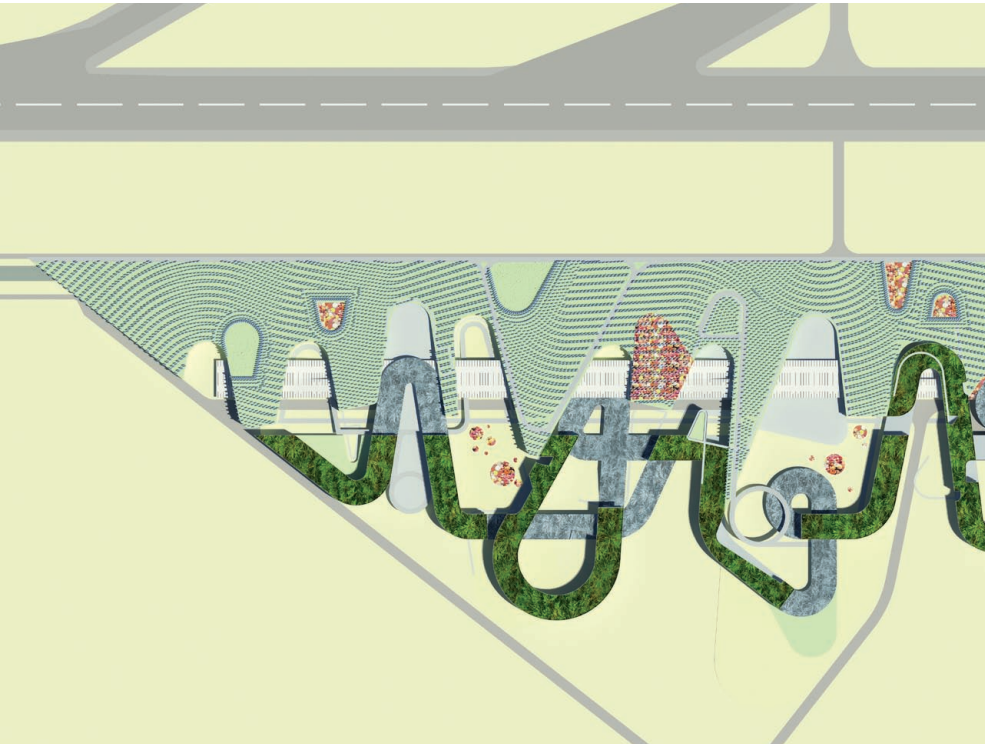
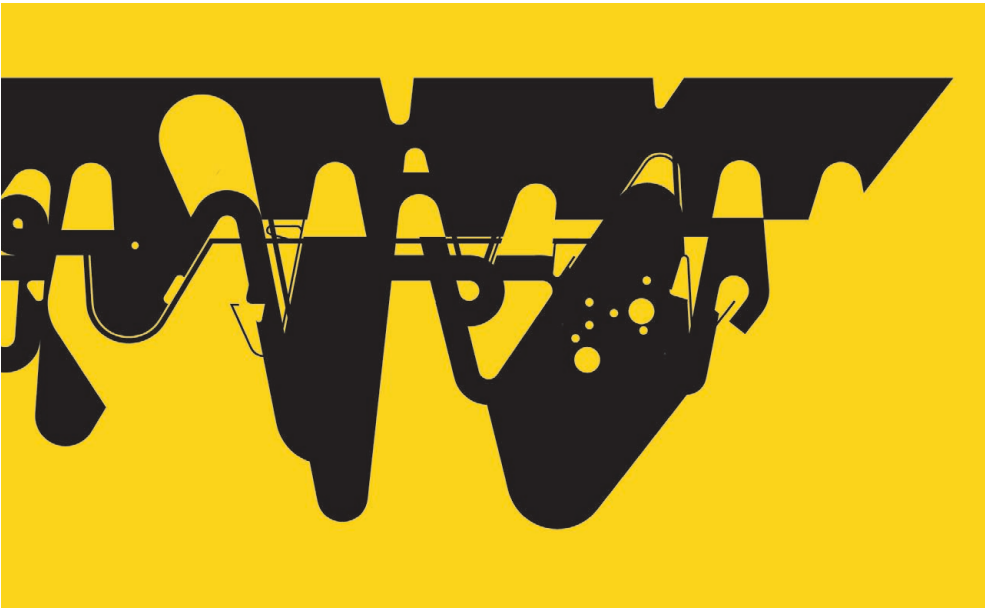
An innovative 21 hectare sound park is overlaid onto the acoustic/solar landscape. Foot paths, bike paths,

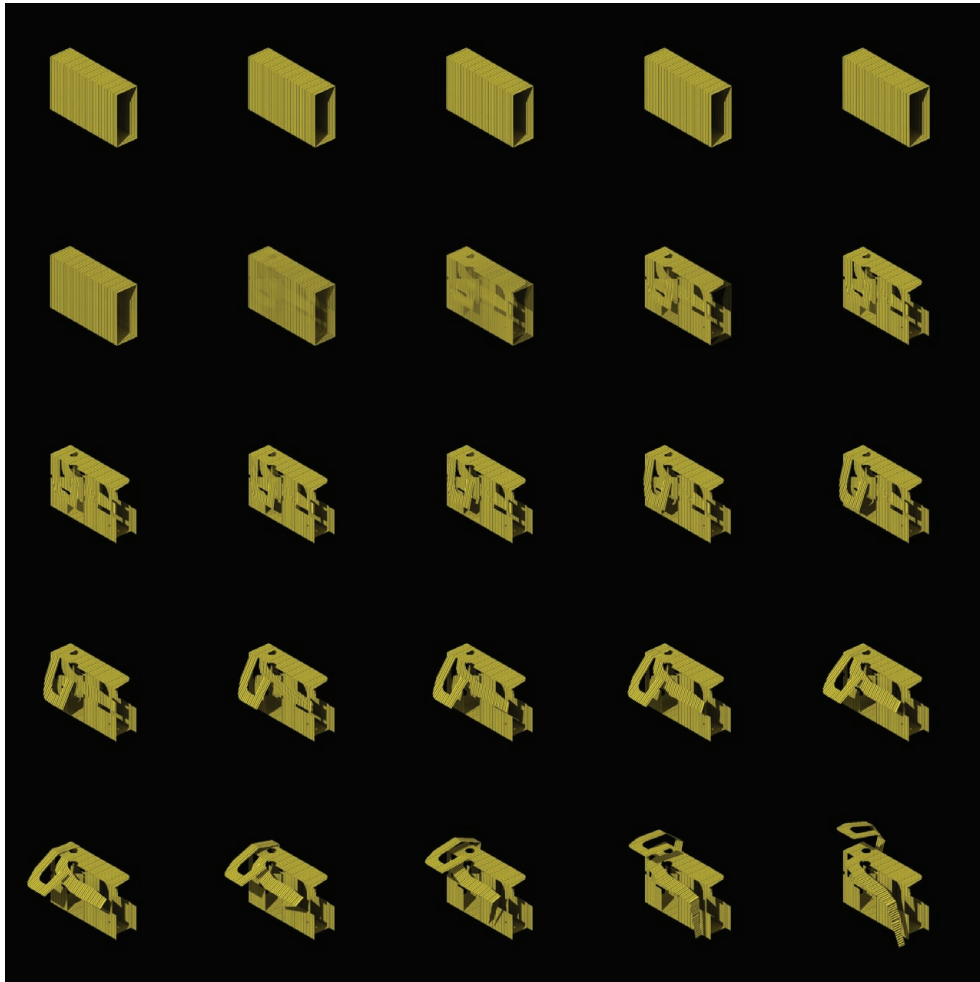


par courses, plane-watching plinths, cafes, stroop-wafel shops, herring salons, cycle shops, and tulip patches dot the landscape. Explorers in a productive landscape, visitors will walk among the panels, gardens, and programs. A single large program area is included in Phase 1, a 5000m<sup>2</sup> building housing an acoustics research facility, a visitor center, and a development agency for the planning of Phase 2.

The control of sound in Phase 1 is entirely integrated into a set of larger Phase 2 ambitions for this site. 200,000m<sup>2</sup> of green-roofed buildings have been included to the west of the main acoustic control area (the inclined landscape of acoustic/solar panels).

A three-level, 4,000 car parking structure weaves through the inclined landscape, discretely providing another layer of acoustic control as it satisfies the parking needs required by program development. Outdoor terraces, paths, roads, services, and landscaping further complement the Phase 1 development.





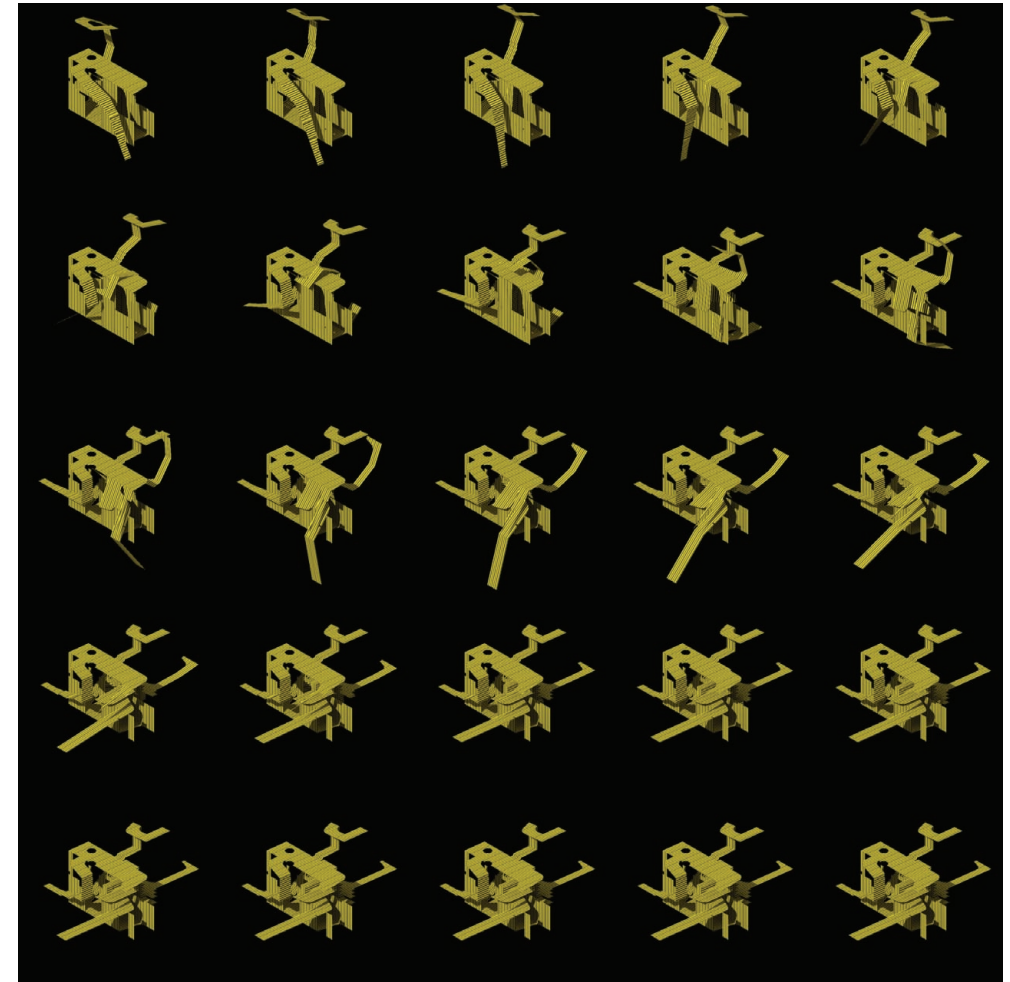
**GOLDEN HOUSE**  
Princeton, New Jersey

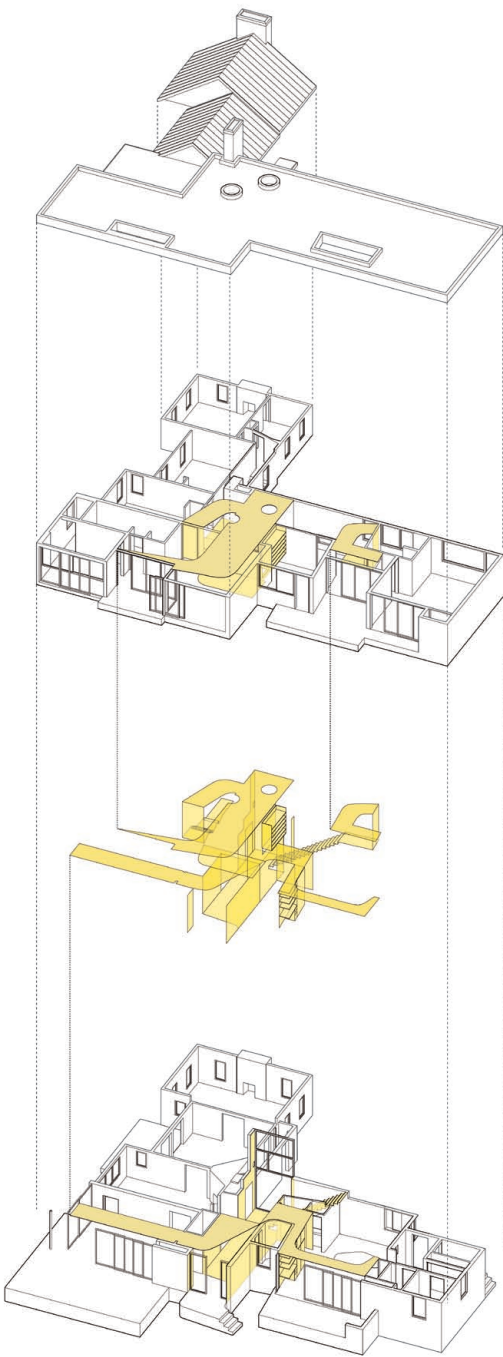
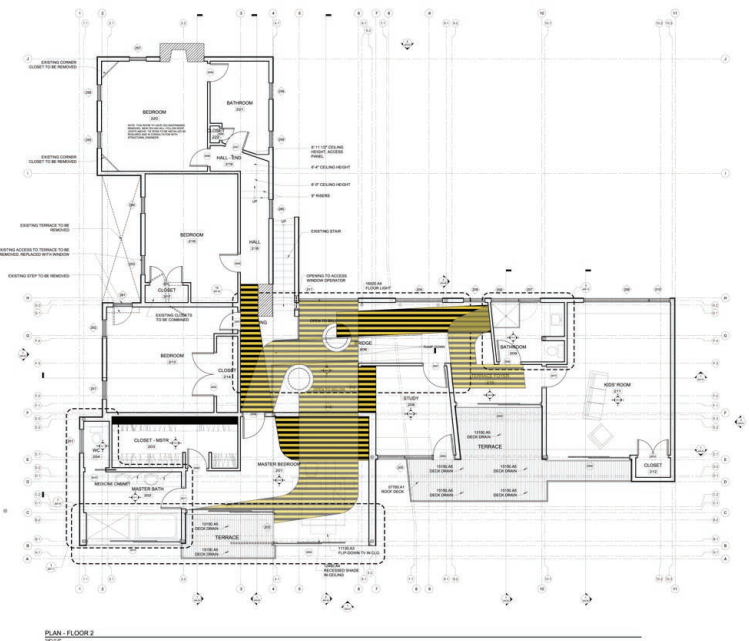
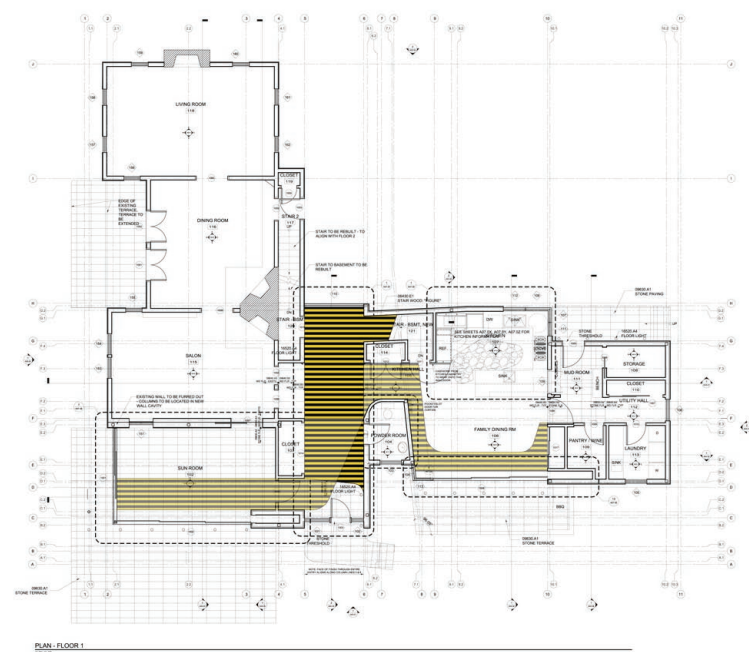
*An open-ended box unfurls within the gaps and overlaps of the new and old spaces of this house. Teak surfaces tether rooms to circulation, floors to ceilings, and public to private spaces. Alignments, silhouettes, and offsets are used to create parallax-drenched relationships that move from shallow to deep and back again.*

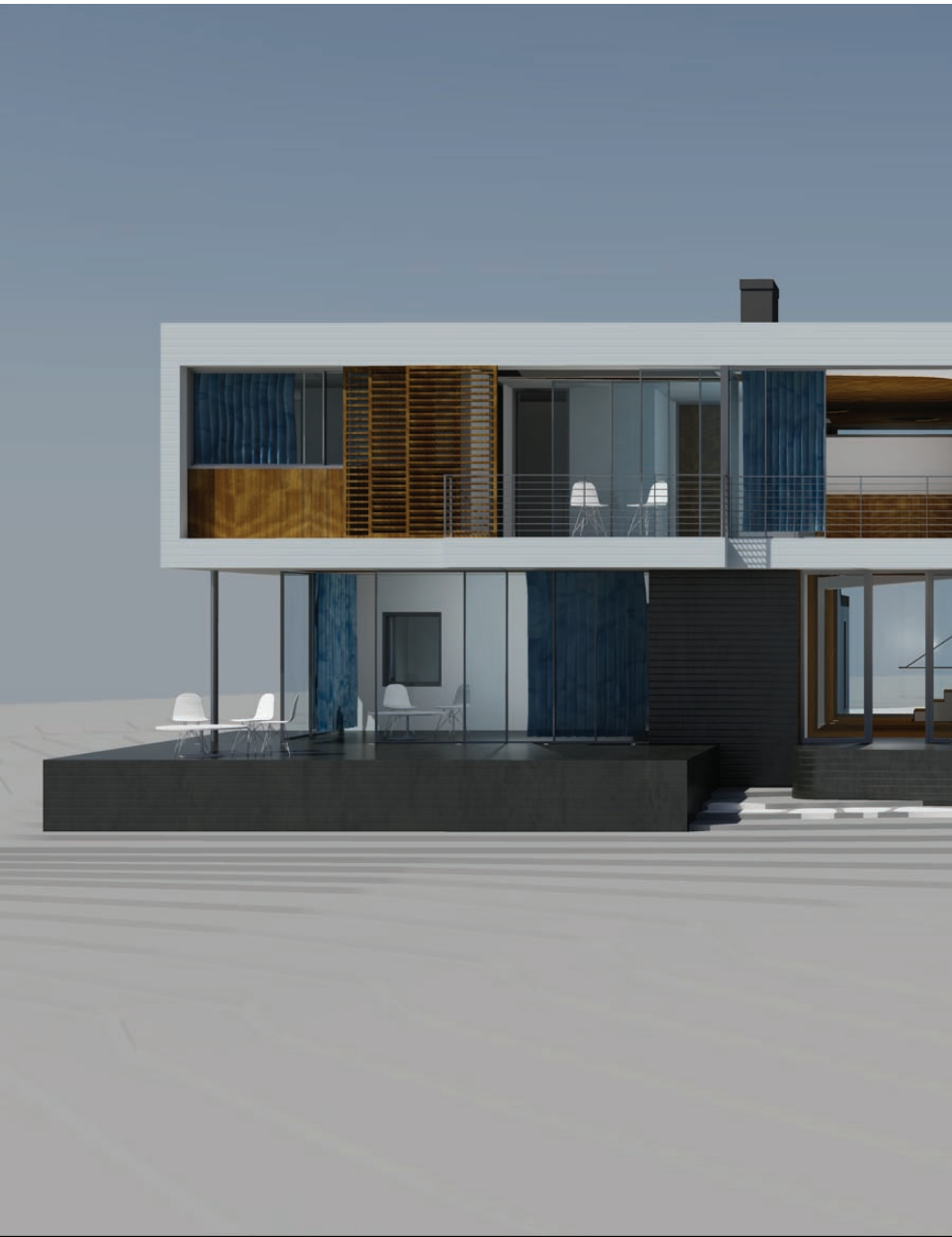
*The teak tube lines the double-height entry, traversing the depth of the house from north to south. It is transparent in the north-south direction and opaque in the east-west direction, a “baseline” state that is altered to enable its surfaces to mi-*

*grate into the house’s deeper recesses.*

*A minimal sectional height in the existing 18<sup>th</sup>-century house (6'-2" from floor to ceiling at places) required the consolidation of all building systems – structural, mechanical, storm water, and electrical – within the floor between the first and second levels. The dense compaction of these systems into a 13-inch depth is countered by finished surfaces that revel in their superficiality. Wood and sheetrock are detailed to allow thin to triumph over thick, fleet to conquer heavy, and consolidation to prevail over the expression of tectonic assembly.*







## Response to WW Presentation

Ned Dodington

Sarah Whiting would have architects exchange the wisdom and clairvoyance of an owl for the aggressive, headstrong tendencies of a falcon. The time is ripe for action, she claims; the Obama administration has just signed over \$140 billion to new construction projects — better eat while we can and pursue our sustenance “headlong forward” like the falcon. Hegel’s “Owl of Minerva,” by contrast, always arrives at dusk, at the closing of an era, and therefore is sadly too late to be of any immediate or practical use. This owl is reflective and descriptive, always telling of a past, never shaping the present.

But this really isn’t the point. The point for Whiting isn’t that architects must feast when they can, but that, now that potential success is upon us, the possibility of achieving it depends on our ability to engage in collective dialogue. What architecture needs now, it seems, more than money, birds of prey, or good projects, is a body of individuals who are willing and ready to talk openly and with wit, or to talk as *railleurs* with “productive disagreement,” “banter,” and “provocation.” But mainly to not talk like Oprah or Dr. Phil, but like, well,.... Here Whiting has trouble naming an example.

In the absence of any role models, I’d like to offer one up: Steven Colbert. Or, from the other side of the spectrum, who could possibly be a larger public provocateur than Rush Limbaugh? Perhaps we need to look to media personalities who defy American complaisance by provoking the public and fueling political disagreement and controversy from *inside* the otherwise nullifying mass media machine. Certainly, these figures achieve Whiting’s goal of a “headlong dive into...‘biased’ engagement,” for better or for worse (and not without humor and irony). This unnamed individual might indeed be an architect, but providence has shown that some of the more pronounced architectural pundits are, well, not architects — or they are niche architects carving out their particular brand of discourse. Peter Eisenman might be generally better respected for his words on architecture than his actual built work. But a niche theoretician is certainly not what Whiting has in mind. The *Railleur* as Architect must certainly also build, but as a practicing architect? Or with wit and sarcasm embedded in the form and mortar of each built project and realized design?

Ron Witte’s preoccupation with both literal and metaphorical sheen in “Better Sheen than Herd” suggests a similar call to arms for the collective forces of architecture. For Witte, the individual designer is not a hero (as the idea of the “individual” still smacks of totalitarianism and the “myth of genius,” a myth few architects are eager to ascribe to), but a figure that is eschewed for a stance of cumulative architectural production in which “the entire history of architecture is an ongoing cycle of gathering archi-

tectural matter only to take it apart and gather it again.”

In the end, the crisis confronting architectural discourse is its complete atomization. Witte suggests that after the false floor of modernism has collapsed beneath us, we find ourselves in a hall of mirrors in which “modernism’s big aphorisms have been replaced by *not*-modernism’s little atomizations.” This parallels Whiting’s description of the current state of discourse as succumbing to a “fear of The Large Assertion.” Whiting suggests that in the atmosphere of such extreme pluralization, we must stake out our positions as participants in a collective discourse, voicing our individual biases loudly and openly, without dodging dissent and provocation. Witte, on the other hand, suggests we don a cloak of reflective devices so that we can blend, deflect, and revel in the multiplicity of partial truths as a collective. Both are viable notions to be considered, for sure. And yet the thread that binds both ideas together is an obsessive drive to reestablish a totalizing context for architectural discourse that ultimately fails to escape modernist thinking. Both of these views openly support a kind of unconscious totality (Witte) or functionalism (Whiting). As such, WW lands itself in an uncomfortable spot, and Witte’s trapdoor (“of course sheen smells like totality — it’s *supposed* to”) is of little consolation.

So what are we to make of each talk, both separately and together? On the one hand, we have a totalizing theory of radical multiplicity, and on the other, we have a foreign mascot to champion architecture from outside the tradition (falcons

are not Hegel’s owl). In a way, Witte’s talk provides the theoretical context to justify Whiting’s *railleur* — in a cacophony of design, all we can do is enter the fracas as loudmouthed individuals. But the connection is never clearly made, and each presentation doesn’t quite answer the provocations of the other. Thus we are either in Witte’s hall of mirrors or in Whiting’s willfully headfirst dive into the melee. In the end, we are asked to take our pick. But a *railleur* would know better than to choose sides, particularly if he or she were interested in sheen.

# BLACK HOLES IN THE MEGALOPOLIS

Bart Lootsma

*"I'm a believer." —The Monkees*  
*"Rock My Religion." — Dan Graham*  
*"The medium is the message." — Marshall McLuhan*

If we look at Houston, especially at the dramatic photographs of architectural debris taken by Bas Princen just after a hurricane, we are tempted to answer the question, "Can a Megalopolis ever be more than the sum of its architectural fragments?" in the negative. But when we speak about a city and about urbanism, this literal fragmentation is not what we mean. Bas Princen's photos are rather a metaphor or a parable for another kind of fragmentation: the isolation that follows extreme individuation. Houston may be the ultimate capitalist city in the world, and capitalism is known to cause differences and fragmentation—including spatial fragmentation. One does not have to be a Marxist to observe these phenomena in Houston in the social and racial segregation and the leapfrogging that create this city sprawl. There is also ample literature on the fragmentation of the city in general.

We have some consolation, of course. We can remind ourselves of Christopher Alexander who already in the 1960s, in his article "A City Is Not a Tree," explained that the city is not a tree, but a network

of networks, with special, individual programs taking shape at every point where these networks touch or cross each other.<sup>1</sup> In our network society today, this should lead to an endless blossoming of special places. The Foucauldian solution would be to celebrate the heterotopia-of-heterotopias found in this archipelago of fragments. But somehow both acts of consolation seem too easy a solution today, where we have so many collective risks and threats to deal with, so many inequalities to be resolved and desires to be realized.

Lars Lerup has already covered both the bright and the dark sides of Houston brilliantly and seductively in "Stim and Dross: Rethinking the Metropolis" and other articles and books.<sup>2</sup> It is our uneasy task to take the risk and try to see further. I will do this by focusing on a topic that Lerup has consciously avoided because he finds it too scary. And indeed it is scary because it touches on aspects that unavoidably come close to historical examples of mass manipulation, which have proven more than dangerous. But even if we try to forget about the past, the topic is scary because it is about Megalopolis's equivalent of the universe's black holes into which everything, even light, disappears. It is scary because, as in Edgar Allan Poe's story "A Descent into the Maelstrom," we have to temporarily give up our resistance to come out of it: in order to understand it, we have to become fans or believers. And why not? After all, the topic concerns everyday phenomena that are for the most

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Alexander, "A City is Not a Tree," parts I and II, *Architectural Forum* 122, Nos. 1 and 2 (April and May 1965): 58–62.

<sup>2</sup> See Lars Lerup, *After the City* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2000), 46–63.

part rather innocent, being largely about leisure. But we will see how sports fans and believers can constitute a substantial communal force.

For better or for worse, in all its fragmentation, Houston is also a city that may give us some indications of how in the future Megalopolises could become more than the sum of their parts. It may come as a surprise to many, but even if Houston is this endless, quasi-comatose city that for the most part consists of an endless sea of individual houses, shaded by what Lerup has called a "zoohectic canopy" of broccoli-like trees, it is also the birthplace of some spectacular forms of collective life. The success of these new forms of collective life depends on a symbiosis between live and televised audiences. The buildings accommodating this new collective life are basically enormous halls that can handle events from baseball to football, from Wrestlemania to rock concerts, and from demolition derbies to religious services. They exist in other Megalopolises as well. *Palais*, the magazine of the Palais de Tokyo art museum in Paris, published a series of photographs that show the different appropriations of the Superdome in New Orleans, including its use as a shelter from Hurricane Katrina.<sup>3</sup>

## Astrodome

The original 1965 Astrodome is still the most striking example of such buildings. For a long time the biggest air-conditioned space in the world, this gigantic multifunctional building is at its versatile best during the annual Livestock Show &

<sup>3</sup> "Superdome," *Palais* 6 (Summer 2008): 6–16.

Rodeo, changing the arena within minutes from a place for calf roping to one for bronc riding or a country and western gig. Giant monitors ensure that the audience can see what is happening—even if it is far away, relatively small in size, and over in a few seconds, like bull riding—because they enlarge, multiply, and repeat the event, producing collective rushes of adrenaline. Media walls deliver all kinds of statistics that make the event even more exceptional. Sometimes they simply say, "WE WIN," and we can't do anything else but believe it.

Looking for images of the Astrodome on the Internet, I was struck by what I assume was meant to be a poster for the Astrodome. In a grainy black and white, it depicted a heap of wrecked cars in the center of the arena. Launched from two ramps, cars are shown crashing in full flight, adding new wrecks to the existing pile. The text underneath reads "Il Duomo," as if we are dealing with a religious building rather than a place for competitive events.

The Astrodome changed our conception of multifunctional buildings and stadiums all over the world. Even if its role has been taken over today by the Reliant Stadium next door, the Astrodome, with its round nondirectional ground plan remains a quintessential building of collective life.

## Lakewood Church

Houston hosts the two largest television churches in the United States: Lakewood Church, a nondenominational Christian megachurch with an attendance of more

than 43,500 per week at its location on the 59 freeway, and the Second Baptist Church, with an attendance of 23,659 per week at five area locations.<sup>4</sup> Preaching that material and worldly success is a path to immortality—that the only possible way to overcome Original Sin is hard work—these capitalist churches differ little from large corporations and are taken very seriously in *Forbes*, which notes their exemplary marketing methods.

Lakewood Church is housed in the one-time Compaq Center, a building that was never meant to be a church. It began as a sports arena that was the home of, among other teams, the NBA's Houston Rockets. The arena has 16,800 seats. The pulpit is more like a theater or concert stage, with wide curving stairs to allow for spectacular entrances. Three enormous video screens that show in close-up detail the church's preacher, Joel Osteen, his wife, and the performing bands and choirs, surround it. Bible texts that loosely relate to what is addressed onstage are blended in. The pulpit or stage is flanked by two "rock gardens" that separate it from the audience. It is in this context that Osteen challenges the members of his parish to "discover the champion" in themselves.

Lakewood Church makes use of the most modern communication media, from television to streaming Internet, and it addresses a whole range of specific target groups with special programs. It reaches over 90 percent of American households and seven million people in 140 coun-

4 See "Top 100 Largest Churches," [www.sermon-central.com/articleb.asp?article=Top-100-Largest-Churches](http://www.sermon-central.com/articleb.asp?article=Top-100-Largest-Churches) (September 5, 2009).

tries. The collective trance created in the church is thus transferred to the audiences at home. You can buy CDs, DVDs, and books documenting the services. I understand that one of Osteen's books is currently on the bestseller list of *The New York Times*.

Services in Lakewood Church are more like rock concerts, with large bands and choirs filling the stage. Biblical scripture seems no more than a loose inspiration for Osteen's speeches, which come closer to motivational training than traditional preaching. Lakewood Church is in many ways a "second chance church" that takes up and helps dropouts from Houston society with programs that in welfare states would be organized under democratic institutions and financed by taxes. The question is how independent the vulnerable people that Lakewood helps really are when they subscribe to its ideals. Even if Osteen does not want Lakewood Church to be openly politicized, as is the case with many other churches in the United States, Lakewood's entrepreneurial form of welfare and the message that "everybody can be a winner" represents the real (affirmatively capitalist) message of the church.

### Rock My Religion

In his documentary *Rock My Religion* (1982–84) and in a 1985 essay of the same title, Dan Graham pointed out the relationship between American religion and rock music. This was an attempt, as he said in another essay, "to restore historical memory" by showing that history is still present today, even if it may

be largely hidden or obscured "by the dominant ideology of newness."<sup>5</sup> In his complex film consisting of found footage of both historical Shaker trancelike dances and contemporary rock concerts, rolling text, and a narrating voiceover, Dan Graham pointed out the ambivalent relation—seen as an unresolved conflict—between capitalism (or a Puritan individualism) and communalism. "In the 1950s," Graham wrote, "a new class emerged, a generation whose task was not to produce but to consume; this was the 'teenager.' Freed from the work ethic so as not to add to postwar unemployment and liberated from the Puritan work ethic, their philosophy was fun. Their religion was *rock 'n' roll*. Rock turned the values of traditional American religion on their head."<sup>6</sup>

Graham described rock as "the first musical form to be totally commercial and consumer exploitive. It is largely produced by adults specifically to exploit a vast, new adolescent market whose consciousness it tries to manipulate through radio, print, and television. Rock, modeling itself after Hollywood, often took average teenagers or established nonrock or 'pop music' singers and molded them into charismatic rock 'n' roll stars with manufactured cults of personality. But ambiguously built into rock 'n' roll is a self-consciousness that it is a commercialized form and thus is not to be taken totally seriously by the teen-

5 Dan Graham, "Video/Architecture/Performance," in *Dan Graham: Selected Writings and Interviews on Art Works, 1965–1995*, ed. Adachiara Zevi (Palano: Zerynthia, 1996), 116.

6 Dan Graham, "Rock My Religion," in *Dan Graham, Rock My Religion, 1965–1990*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 80–95.

agers who listen to it."<sup>7</sup>

One of Graham's points was to explain how in the 1970s artists like Patti Smith took this one step further, proposing "rock as a new art form that would come to encompass poetry, painting, and sculpture (the avant-garde) as well as its own form of revolutionary politics.... For a time during the seventies, rock culture became the religion of the avant-garde world."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in addition to much of Smith's own work, minimalistic compositions for rock guitar, like Glenn Branca's "The Ascension" from 1981, still bear witness to this. As Graham's film observes, "Rock performers electrically unleash anarchic energies and provide a hypnotic ritualistic trance basis for the mass audience."<sup>9</sup> On the opposite side, from the 1970s on, churches tried to win souls back by introducing rock music and rituals into their services. Pastors like Lakewood's Osteen are doing the same today with overwhelming success, which is not so surprising since, in a way, the rock 'n' roll ritual is "coming home" to a "light," even ironical form of religion (Osteen once began his sermon with a joke making fun of ambivalence).

Hillsong is a Pentecostal megachurch based in Sydney with extensions in London, Kiev, and other cities, but it's also a kind of rock band that even scored a number one hit in Australia and is now traveling the world. A Hillsong concert at Lakewood Church, which one can find on YouTube, culminated in a number that came close to techno music, underpinned

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 *Rock My Religion*, video, directed by Dan Graham (with Moderna Museet, Stockholm), 1982–84.

with an impressive light show in bright white and blue light. The excited audience reacted to it by showing the light of their mobile phones, producing a sea of small blue lights. The resemblance of this to a scene in Graham's film *Rock My Religion*, in which church-goers, encouraged by their pastor on a guitar, carry out a wild trance dance, lighting flames to show the presence of the devil, is striking.

The difference between the Shakers and the Hillsong audience at Lakewood is not so much the difference in scale—i.e., the difference between the simple shack and the climate-controlled arena. As Osteen sees it, there is not much difference in the communal functioning of the church from in his father's time, when it was in a simple warehouse, to today when it is televised on a national scale.<sup>10</sup> The difference is the media involved—by both the church performers and the church audience. Here, the medium is definitely the message. "I am a big believer in the media," says Osteen. "That has always been my passion."<sup>11</sup>

## Lagos

Lakewood Church may be the biggest television church—or rather, media church—in the United States, but it is not exceptional. We find similar churches all over the world—and even bigger ones. In Lagos, Nigeria (a city that really makes us wonder if it is more than the sum of

its parts), we find the Winners Church, another radically capitalist church. "You know every business fortune is built on ideas," the pastor says to his congregation, which consists of thousands of people. "Every living soul is a business because life itself is a business. Jesus gave them talents and said, 'Do business with this till I come.'"<sup>12</sup> As is documented in a perverse spectacle in the film *Lagos Wide & Close*, made by Bregtje van der Haak on the occasion of Rem Koolhaas's research in Lagos, dozens of volunteers collect envelopes with money from extremely poor people during the church services, money that leaves the church in enormous bags stowed into small vans. Koolhaas says about the Winners Church: "It fits in our project in making manifest the incredible scale of the city, the incredible capacity to organize, and the incredible power of potential latency in Nigeria. If that can happen, the city can also decide in five years to completely reinvent itself. Of course the sad thing about Winners is that there are also losers. I realize people are horrified by it, but I think it is a really amazing and plausible thing for there."<sup>13</sup>

Maybe the lesson to be learned here is not about religion, but about something else. Maybe it is more about hope. Or if we are being even more down to earth, we might say that it is more about the potential power of advertising and marketing. In general, there may be more potential in the media to reorganize the city than we have previously thought.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Ramirez, "No Politics from This Pulpit," *Newsweek*, web exclusive, [www.newsweek.com/id/103290](http://www.newsweek.com/id/103290) (January 25, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Tara Dooley, "Spreading Its Word," *Houston Chronicle*, September 26, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> *Lagos Wide & Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, DVD, directed by Bregtje van der Haak (Amsterdam: Submarine, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Bregtje van der Haak, "Interview with Rem Koolhaas," *Lagos Wide & Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*.

## Ruhr City

So, let's go to Europe after this, to the Ruhrstadt. I ask you to imagine a metropolis in the heart of Western Europe with an enviably strategic position. With 3.7 million inhabitants, it is one of the largest conurbations in Europe. It is a city with an excellent road, river, and air infrastructure. Several of the largest German companies are based here. It is the largest "Turkish" city outside of Turkey: one million Turkish people (whom, strangely, you do not see) are living here. There is an above-average level of education, particularly for Germany, and the Ruhrstadt has many universities and colleges. It is a city where more money is spent on culture than in London or Paris, with many museums, theaters, cinemas, concert halls, and cultural monuments. It is a real leisure city, where the proportion between areas for recreation and those built up for commercial/residential use is 50:50. You can ski in the morning—even if only in Mark Girardelli's indoor Veltin's Alpine Centre—and spend the afternoon on a beach. It is a city with several large football stadiums and soccer clubs that have won more trophies than all the other cities in Germany combined. Churches are small, and mosques are many but almost invisible. In short, it is a city that has (and lacks) everything one expects a successful modern city to have (and lack).

But at the same time the Ruhrstadt it will never be a "city": it consists of about twenty individual cities—among them Duisburg, Essen, and Dortmund—and it is divided over three regions. The particular way in which in the area's nineteenth-century cities started up and grew explosively

around and between mines and heavy industry produced a further fragmentation. In fact, more fragmentation within one conurbation is almost unthinkable. Yet it is also one incredible unity. When you look at the place as a whole on a map, it looks totally amorphous, as if it were in a state of entropy—you can't distinguish one city from the other on a satellite photograph of the area. It looks like a Jackson Pollock painting. What comes closest to visible structures are the landscape (rivers), the infrastructure, and, interestingly, the highway network.

Despite its many assets, the Ruhr region is not successful at all. It is shrinking at the same rate as cities in the eastern part of Germany. This has a lot to do with the reputation it has. The image that most Europeans, and maybe even Americans, conjure up when you speak about the Ruhrgebiet is of a rural area whose farms have been ruined by a cruel industry, as depicted in the famous photograph by Albert Renger-Patzsch from 1929. And, of course, it's apparently winter there all year. But if you zoom in on the satellite image, you will notice something completely different. You will see architectural fragments that have been carefully designed but also lose themselves in the whole. And if you go down there yourself, the Ruhrstadt actually looks quite attractive, with a lot of green space. Viewed as a whole, it is a much more interesting city, or more attractive city, than you might at first think.

## Arena auf Schalke

The Ruhrstadt with its great potential but incredibly bad reputation is like German

professional soccer, which had an exceptionally bad reputation in the 1980s (i.e., it was violent; if you went to the games, there was always bad weather; etc.). But all that changed when small commercial television stations started to do their broadcasting from the stadiums—even though they didn't have the broadcast rights to the complete matches and could only show fragments. The new media attention of these small stations led to a stunning revival of soccer. A series of new, larger stadiums was built all over Europe, many of them with covered or indoor playing fields like their original example, the Astrodome.

Among them was the Arena auf Schalke, one of the most famous stadiums in Germany. You can see it from everywhere in the Ruhrgebiet as it is built on top of a hill; from the Arena auf Schalke you can look over the complete Ruhr area. It was initially planned to be a kind of covered stadium, very much like the Astrodome, but they took it one step further because soccer cannot be played on Astroturf, and grass does not grow indoors: at the Arena auf Schalke, you can move the playing field outside. That flexibility means, just like the Astrodome, you can use the Arena auf Schalke for all kinds of different events—a rock concert, an opera, a motocross, whatever. And like the Lakewood Church, the stadium maintains a strong relationship to television and the media. The monitor screen in the Arena auf Schalke used to be the biggest television in the world. The whole building is actually a television studio, and all the bars and restaurants are styled like television studios where you have the interviews before and after the games, places in which the audience is at

the least an important background. But it is more than that: the audience has the feeling that it is part of a media event that its members would normally only be able to see at home. And for those watching at home, they are the witnesses that the event really took place.<sup>14</sup>

The Arena auf Schalke and other multi-functional buildings, whether for shopping or skiing, form black holes in the city through different phases. In the first phase, there is just the activity that takes place in open air with hardly any spatial facilities and with a negligible audience. In the second phase, audiences become increasingly important, and the scale of the events and spatial facilities increases. In the third phase, media attention produces an interest in viewers to visit and participate in the events; it also increases income from advertising and merchandising. In the fourth phase, the events move indoors to avoid the interference of the weather and to be able to have a controlled environment suitable for television recordings; to make efficient use of the building, there is a constant corollary striving for multifunctionality. Because the only thing that counts are the events, these black holes turn into relatively uninteresting "black boxes" from the outside, striking only in their sheer, sublime immenseness, made even more poignant as they usually stand isolated on vast parking lots.

<sup>14</sup> The sections "Ruhr City" and "Arena auf Schalke" are based on research on the Ruhrstadt by Bruno Ebersbach and Philipp Reinfeld, respectively, in 2003–04, under my guidance at the Academy of Arts, Nürnberg, Germany. See also Bart Lootsma, "Ruhr City—A City That Is, Will Be or Has Been," in *M City: European Cityscapes*, ed. Marco de Michelis and Peter Pakesch, exh. cat. (Köln: Walther König, 2005), 194–202.

## Conclusion

If media can reanimate soccer and if media can reanimate churches, can they also reanimate cities? Can they turn the Megalopolis into more than the sum of its parts?

And do we need a "real" event to start from, or can media reanimate a place through a vision or a fantasy? The answer seems to be yes. Heidiland in Switzerland, for example, is a land people only know from the children's books by Johanna Spyri, an imagined place. Today, you can go to Switzerland and there really is a Heidiland. It exists as a tourist destination. There was so much demand from tourists from all over the world that a whole area was actually named Heidiland; it even has an official exit on the motorway.

It should be possible to use this particular mix of specific programs, large black-box-like buildings, and media to transform the Megalopolis. They are at least proof that the power to achieve such massive phenomena is there. It could make possible larger changes in other fields and even with other contents and goals as well, as Rem Koolhaas hinted in the interview in Lagos. It would be great if that would happen. The problem is that it is still difficult to figure out if the secret of these mechanisms lies in a kind of pre-modern symbolic capital or if it has freed itself completely from capitalism and lies somewhere in the future, beyond our reach.

## RESPONSE TO BART LOOTSMAS

Seanna Walsh

Bart Lootsma took his audience on a frenetic twenty-minute excursion through film excerpts, photo essays, and maps in pursuit of the ever-elusive cure for the ailing American city. Opening with the million-dollar question, "Can Megalopolis ever be more than the sum of its architectural fragments?" the critic problematized the alienation of sprawl: "Houston seems to be possibly the most capitalist city in the world, and capitalism is known to cause fragmentation, and it's also known to cause differences." But as he cued a clip from the live broadcast of Joel Osteen's weekly sermon at Houston's Lakewood Church, Lootsma countered, "I'm a believer," and stood by as we watched thousands of parishioners hold their bibles above their heads and utter in unison: "This is my bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the word of God. I boldly confess, my mind is alert; my heart is receptive; I will never be the same."

Lootsma went on to observe, "If Houston is this comatose city, which for the most part consists of an endless sea of individual houses, it is also the birthplace of some of the most spectacular new forms of collective life." He further posited that "the buildings accommodating this new collective life are basically enormous multi-functional holes." Arenas like Lake-

wood Church, Houston's Astrodome, or German soccer stadiums, Lootsma was careful to point out, all have in the past few decades been periodically reappropriated as rock concert venues.

Following with an excerpt from Dan Graham's 1984 documentary *Rock My Religion*, Lootsma referenced Graham's thesis tracing the moshing and head-banging of punk rock concerts back to the gyrations of Shakers as they were moved by "spirits" during prayer meetings. Finally, footage of tens of thousands of fans using the light of their mobile phones to encourage encores at a Christian rock concert showed that Graham's dyad has now been collapsed into a singular contemporary phenomenon.

What is important to note in Lootsma's montage of "the new collective life" is that these events are not simply collective, but *participatory*. The individuated subject becomes a part of the collective, but is doing so, at least in part, as a reflexive affirmation of identity: "This is *my* bible, I am what it says I am." A concert's Dionysian spectacle elevates the subject, once a mere spectator, to a part of the act itself: the observer brandishing the lit phone becomes integrated with the observed. One could look once again to Graham as a point of comparison to the Osteen congregation: in his 1977 film *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, Graham announces his own actions as he observes them in a mirror positioned so that the listening audience is engaged in the same act of self-observation. Graham's narrative has the same chanted, recitative tone as that of Osteen and his parishioners: the sound of public self-affirmation.

The modern American city did not become the "endless sea of individual houses" to which Lootsma refers by accident. Any economist or real estate agent will tell you that Americans like to publicly affirm their individuated status through the ownership of property. The dispersed city model of freeway on-ramps and exits has allowed us to do so, affordably and (at least somewhat) efficiently, for decades. Of course, the uglier word for *dispersed*, when it comes to the modern city, is *fragmented*. As Lootsma pointed out before a backdrop of Bas Princen's photos of a desolate, post-Hurricane Ike Houston, with individuation has come isolation. However, his observation that the "new collective life" resides in the stadium, and not on the sidewalk or in the subway station, is astute. Unlike conventional public space, the new collective space is one that we enter by choice and with the specific objective of affirming a version of ourselves that we ourselves have chosen.

These enormous venues of collective action not only allow teeming hordes of bored suburbanites to stand up, shout, gyrate, and hold up cell phones, but also serve as giant television production studios. Therein, Lootsma argued, lies the key to their success. Recounting the rise of soccer's popularity in Germany from marginal to omnipresent, he pointed to the moment when soccer games were first televised as the beginning of the country's obsession with the sport. Through television, the individual soccer spectator gradually developed an identity tied to the local team, to an appreciation for the nuances of the sport, and to a new sense of nationalism derived from viewers' now-perceptible existence in relation

to their country at large. With this newfound identity came an urge to publicly declare allegiance in the collective assembly of the soccer stadium, where fans knew they would enjoy the company of thousands just like themselves. Unlike a public park, a coffee shop, or even a house party, there was little chance of encountering any situation for which they were unprepared; they have already seen it all from the safety of their living rooms.

Noting that Osteen's packed arenas can likewise be attributed to his television presence, Lootsma mused on how the mass media, engine of our collective desire, might be deployed to instigate a reinvestment in other kinds of collective urban space. Citing the precedent of Heidi-Land in Germany, based on the popular children's book and later TV series of the same name (and, one could add, Disneyland's similar emergence from the juggernaut of animated film), Lootsma suggested that we might "spatialize" other forms of media in this way, allowing us to play out our media-defined identities in a public sphere. Perhaps in this way, Lootsma speculated, the Megalopolis could amount to more than the sum of its architectural fragments.

Of course, injecting comatose American cities with a greater number and variety of media-hyped collectives is unlikely to be the panacea for urban sprawl (with all of its alienating, fragmented discontents) implied by Lootsma's presentation. However, a collective space that the timid suburbanite can "test out" in front of a computer screen or television seems a pragmatic alternative to the confinement of the cul-de-sac or the empty promises

of New Urbanist simulacra. This could prove particularly true if nonprofit and civic organizations were able to deploy the media-spatial experience hybrid as effectively as corporate and religious interests have managed to do. In any case, for all its chaos, Lootsma's highly suggestive compilation of film excerpts managed to map out the individuated subject's quest for self-identification through Dionysian spectacles in short order. In so doing, Lootsma demonstrated that contemporary collective life in the Megalopolis cannot be (and never has been) contained by the conventional urban morphology of public space.

## GLOBALIZATION to renew from within

Roemer van Toorn

When I was asked to moderate this forum on globalization—given the context of Lars Lerup's thinking and research, and what we, as friends here today, seem to share—I thought that we all look for routes to renew architecture (and with it society) from within. But before I ask the forum members for their opinions, and their answers to my question as to which projects, according to them, are moving either in the wrong or right direction, I would like to highlight a few issues.

Late capitalism in the twenty-first century has become Deleuzian. Disorganization, deregulation, privatization (of property and free time), and the free market economy, together with globalization and the end of the nation state, have generated the critical condition we are in today. Neither linear nor dialectical logics structure our society today; rather, rhizomic and bio-political systems do.

The once progressive Deleuzian idea that the "And" (multiplicity) will liberate us from any totalitarianism has generated a whole other idea: the bewildering interdependence of our times. In fact, a new specter is haunting the world—namely, the specter of the And, of additivity, of a world of cohabitation and intermixing, in short, of And, And, And.... It is true we live

in a disorderly order, not just a bewildering disorder, but this order is also highly interdependent, full of hidden centralities, a network society intermixed with spontaneity and control as a kind of open source ideology.

### The classical object is dead

The good news is that, as a result of this, the classical object has died. I never believed in the classical object in the first place, but in our globalized world, it simply doesn't work anymore. Understanding the world through either the hard sciences ("matter-of-facts" of the object) or the soft sciences (projections on the object) is no longer appropriate. An object is more than the sum of its technical facts and its aesthetics. Instead of trying to define what an object (or form) is, or what you can project onto it—which is almost impossible today—we have to look at the performance of a thing, what kind of relations it activates and produces in its use, what its agency is.

Until now most architects have been trained to see the objects they create through the lens of either the soft (social) or hard (technical) viewpoint, or both. And indeed, in the *classical* cultural industry—both in terms of domination and resistance—mediation was primarily by means of representation. In determining their audience, architects slotted subjects into topical areas such as the reproductive cycle of capitalism, the nuclear family, the proper place of home, etc. In the *global* cultural industry today, it is the mediation of things that dominates. Products no longer circulate as identical objects that are already fixed, static, and discrete, determined by the intention of

their producers. Instead, cultural entities move and change in their circulation. In this global circulation, cultural entities take on a dynamic of their own: with this movement, value is added.

In the classical cultural industry, production took place as a Fordist and labor-intensive production of identity. In the global cultural industry, it takes place as a post-Fordist and design-intensive production of difference (often with the help of subversive techniques). Goods become informational, property becomes intellectual, and the economy becomes more generally cultural. And the image, previously separated from the superstructure in the industrial age, becomes "matter-image." Late capitalism in our twenty-first century has indeed become Deleuzian.

In this information society based on difference, hybridity, and mutating conditions, design (and with it architecture) plays a dominant role; in fact, it does so to such an extent that the pun of Henk Oosterling's, "Dasein ist Design," has become reality. More than ever—with the help of globalization—we have started to understand that objects are disputed assemblages, or gatherings, thrown into this world. To illustrate what I mean, take a recent project of Rem Koolhaas's. Koolhaas—and luckily several other architects, too—understands that we live in the global cultural industry. Instead of creating classical objects, these architects create what I call "quasi-objects," objects that communicate with the world and with the people who use them. What matters to them is not what the object *is*, but how it can *perform*.

Koolhaas's Prada pavilion in the city of Seoul is perhaps wild and strange, but it is not a spectacular icon of hypnotic beauty. Instead of sitting uncomfortably aloof in its urban context, it invites the public to use it, to occupy it, to activate it. While it accommodates what we, as the public, are familiar with, it also sets us free. It's an assemblage of four forms that allow and provoke different events, inviting different users to give it meaning and to occupy it, from those in fashion and art, to program-makers and cinema-goers, to passersby. It is not a form you can understand from within its own architectural/technical logic—it is not self-referential, or specially made for and by architects—but it is also not there to represent the Prada brand. It instead becomes operational through the social relations its aesthetic complex allows. Its constantly changing identities give space to human activity. Its image is not intended to fix identities nor to propagate the pure or the absolute, but—like a dialogue—to challenge us to open up new possibilities.

Moreover, the Prada pavilion establishes what we might call a "counter-public" space, a public space that establishes effects of use, as opposed to those public spaces that are run by the world of shopping and ruled by techniques of surveillance. A counter-public space is not driven by consensus and control (through design), but strives to liberate the public from its clichés without disqualifying them. The object is popular in a new way, creating an idea of the public anew. It brings different contradictory spaces together to allow dialogue and exchanges to happen between them and with their surroundings without the need to classify

or to fix the social relations. This building by Koolhaas intimates another idea of democracy in space. The quasi-object is establishing what Lars Lerup found in Houston, namely, an amorous communion full of combat. It is, in my words, a space and place where contesting realities are renegotiated through interdependent “And” formations.

### A Fresh Conservatism is born

When you make shapes, assemblages, or quasi-objects, you are indeed “playing on” the ambiguities of our Deleuzian twenty-first century. Everything moves. But are quasi-objects—with their new grammar and rhetoric—by default always enlightening or consistently bold experiments in what it could mean to be modern in our twenty-first century? I don’t think so. Now that late capitalism has become Deleuzian, we face a complex problem: the birth of a Fresh Conservatism.

Many contemporary heterogeneous constructions (and their situations) do not escape what I have described as Fresh Conservatism.<sup>1</sup> They construct apolitical conflicts that bring about a lot of heterogeneous desire without any directionality beyond celebrating the neoliberal logic of banal cosmopolitanism. When I started to look for innovative practices operating within the real today, I came across the dilemma of Fresh Conservatism, characterized by the following aspects:

1. *The collection or catalogue* in which heterogeneous elements are lumped together, not in order to provoke a critical

clash nor even to play on the undecidability of their critical power, but as a positive act of gathering that attempts to collect the traces and testimonies of a common world and a common history. The equality of all items—works of art, private photographs, objects of use, ads, commercial videos, etc.—is here the equality present in the archives of the life of a community.

2. *The joke* in which the conjunction of the heterogeneous elements is still staged as a tension of antagonistic elements pointing to some secret, but the secret no longer exists. The dialectical tension is reduced to a game, playing on the indiscernible difference between procedures unveiling secrets of power and ordinary procedures of delegitimization produced by power itself, the latter a new form of domination by the media, commercial entertainment, or advertising.

3. *The invitation*, which is all about interactivity. Our “one-seater place” is invited to experiment with new relations between community and individuality, proximity and distance, all systematized in the concept of “relational aesthetics,” the art of creating not works or objects, but ephemeral situations prompting new forms of relationships.

4. *The mystery*, which does not mean enigma nor mysticism, but instead sets forth a familiarity with the strange without activating something outside the architecture itself. The Schaulager is a traditional museum with mystery as a front, while SANAA’s Toledo museum and its radical transparency, cutting through the outer layers to reveal the otherwise invisible worlds within, intensifies the

mystery rather than opening it up.

### So what else?

As I have just explained, simply embracing the conventions in a fresh (cool or provocative/contradictory) manner is not enough; generating a certain kind of stammering (or pause) through the use of foreign elements to stimulate reflexive events within a work is not sufficient. Because it is unclear where you are being liberated from, and who and what is being liberated, it is also unclear what kind of situated freedoms are being enacted. I believe we are in need of a more refined approach. You can call it a return of the political or aesthetics as a form of politics. This aesthetics is based on dissensus and equality. Its creation of new subjectives involves a technique of distantiation based on the sensible—what you could call common sense.

It goes without saying that architecture and the city do not lend themselves to parliamentary politics: constellations scattered across space cannot give voting advice, let alone convey messages about the social or political ramifications of a given problem. The organization and architecture of the city, in fact, is political precisely in the distance it preserves from those parliamentary functions. Instead architecture is political in how it frames projects in a certain kind of space-time sensorium that defines different modalities (i.e., being together or apart, organizing inside or outside, operating in the lead or toward the middle). The architecture of the city is political in the way it reveals certain things in its aesthetic and organizational syntax, or conceals them by means of specific articulations (i.e.,

orientation, suggestions of movement, directions and concentrations). The architecture of the city influences the states of being, feeling, hearing, and speaking that together create the sensation of existence as a constellation in space.

Bertold Brecht’s political theatre remains as a kind of archetype in the way it negotiated the relation between opposites—blending scholarly political teaching with the enjoyment of the musical or the cabaret, discussing allegories of Nazi power in blank verse that describes gangsters cornering the cauliflower market, etc. Indeed, the main tactic of politics is the encounter and possible clash of heterogeneous elements. This is supposed to provoke a break in our perception, to disclose the underlying connectivity of things hidden behind everyday reality, and to provide alternative liberating solutions. It furthermore does this on the basis of equality and not through the master/teacher relation postulated by spectacular architecture. Architectural design that is political uses forms of collision or dissensus (forms that put together heterogeneous elements at the level of the images and experiential space) to open new situations of freedom. It does this by continuously playing on the boundary (and the absence of a boundary) between architecture and not-architecture. This involves a continuous process of border crossings between high and low culture, architecture and commodity, etc.

Architecture having this much needed political and ethical stance shares certain aspects:

1. *It aspires to “become popular.”* In our

<sup>1</sup> Roemer van Toorn, “Fresh Conservatism,” in *Quaderns, (Re) Activa Architecture*, No. 219 (Barcelona: Actar, 1998).

neoliberal society, there is no public anymore: the people are missing. So rather than address or represent the people alleged to be already there (but are not), we should help in the invention of a people. We give this people a voice by creating imaginary landscapes, structuring the platforms where stories can be told through a nascent public sphere. Just as Brecht's goal was not to *be* popular in box office or television ratings terms, but to *become* popular—that is, to create a new public for a new theatre linked to modes of social life—our focus should be on transforming rather than satisfying desire.

2. *It knows who the enemy is.* One of our greatest enemies is the modern world of stupefying banality, routine, and mechanical reproduction or automatism. The image is not the problem, but rather the cliché is. As designers we have to help people to look again. "If the visual keeps us from seeing (because it prefers that we decode, that we decipher, that we 'read'), the image always challenges us to carry out a montage with others, with some other. Because in the image, as in democracy, there is 'free play,' unfinished pieces, gaps, openings."<sup>2</sup>

3. *It seeks open systems that challenge the status quo and invite the user in.* Through habituation, meaning can be established without a final conclusion; we should opt for such stammerings within a system. Stammerings reject a totalizing aesthetic, one where all "tracks" are enlisted in the service of a single overwhelming feeling.

2 Serge Daney, "Before and After the Image," *Revue des Etudes Palestiniennes* 40 (Summer 1991); reprinted in English translation in *Documenta X catalogue*.

Instead of what architecture is, it should be about what architecture lets us do.

4. *It makes strange the lived social world.* We create stammerings through certain kinds of foreign effects that free socially conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity, revealing them as other than natural.

5. *It overcomes dichotomies.* Entertainment or laughter can be useful—pleasure is not only about consumption—and education (even when it seems difficult) can be pleasurable. Convention (i.e., commodification) and liberation can travel together. It is not a matter of either/or logics in space—the virtual versus the real, the near versus the far, the fictional versus the real, the object versus the subject, dystopia versus utopia—but about being-in-space, which is intrinsically impure, unfinished, and full of conjunctions and relations.

It will take too long to discuss these criteria by examining specific projects. But we should not overlook the much needed ethical directionality a work can enact, one that addresses the urgencies<sup>3</sup> of our time while it creates new forms of liberation. Only by taking such a political stance can we succeed in surpassing Fresh Conservatism.

3 These urgencies include the looming threat of ecological catastrophe, the inappropriateness of private property and intellectual property, the socio-ethical implications of new techno-scientific developments, and (last but not least) the new forms of social apartheid expressed in new walls and slums.

## A RESPONSE TO ROEMER VAN TOORN

### the problem of circulation

Curt Gambetta

Globalization calls up images of movement and deterritorialization, pressing on us as a variously euphoric and mundane arrival of the new. "Deregulation, privatization, and the free market economy"—forces that Roemer Van Toorn uses as shorthand for the present—invoke dynamics of circulation and exchange that are not only economic but also social and cultural. The mobility and movement of commodities, representational infrastructures, and people is undoubtedly not an exclusive marker of the present phase of globalization. The "entropic" ruptures of the present provoke transformations that unveil as much the power of mediating forces (such as, to give a recent example, the increasing financialization of all aspects of economic life) as they do the fact that much of our cultural landscape, including architecture, is always already contaminated by alien forces and figures.<sup>1</sup>

Much has been said in both social and

1 Pheng Cheah, "Ground of Comparison," in *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler (New York: Routledge, 2003).

architectural theory about the sheer proliferation and movement of things since the 1980s and the concomitant pressures brought to bear upon existing social imaginaries and politico-economic forms such as the welfare state, models of import-substitution industrialization, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Though economists have long been invested in theorizing circulation in and of itself, architectural discourse and even social theory have until recently read the global experience of circulation through the problematic of meaning and interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Here architectural production and discourse resonates with social theory, not surprising considering the longer history of architecture as a mode of cultural critique. From the 1970s onward, circulation was more explicitly acknowledged by positioning the architectural imagination as a project of cultural translation, invested in the play of signs and the appropriation of anything from the detritus of popular culture to the spoils of historical precedent. The particular project of cultural mediation within architecture had a range of cultural fields from which to draw, whether for documentation or critique, from the vernacular to popular culture to processes of cross-cultural exchange. In the third world, looking from outside (as in transnational architectural festival circuits), this project was staged through questions of identity, vernacular culture, and the looming figure of nationalism.

2 I focus here on circulation as a largely transnational process, but this does not preclude similar dilemmas taking place within smaller-scale networks, be these national or other. These spheres are inextricable.

3 Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14 (1): 191–213.

If in social theory, as Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma write, circulation was understood as a process that transmits meaning rather than as a constitutive act or culturally transformative process,<sup>4</sup> architecture has a similar, somewhat unarticulated legacy of seeing circulation as an empty, neutered space through which things traverse. I argue here that seeing circulation in this way, as a mere tool of transmission, belies the role that the dynamic of circulation plays in both mediating architectural production and positioning architecture as an assemblage that translates cultural realities. As a result, we are primarily left with an assessment of images, modalities of building, and other catalysts of architectural production that move and circulate, rather than an account of the effects, disturbances, and mutations that occur through time.

This has had a number of consequences for architectural discourse. One, we are haunted by the dialectic of original and copy (think of all the muttering about the derivative content of architecture being produced in countries such as India and China). Two, the product of circulation is located in the mass-produced, generic city, suffusing its landscape with contradiction and irony.<sup>5</sup> Though an in-depth consideration of the generic is beyond the

purview of my comments, I do think that the conceptual frame of contradiction is untenable within the experience of global modernity. For whom is something a contradiction? Might these often ironic encounters and juxtapositions point to other forces embedded within the dynamic of circulation itself? Farès El-Dahdah<sup>6</sup> and Van Toorn raise crucial questions about architecture as a synthetic practice that both affects and is affected by dynamics of circulation, calling into question the authority of these narratives.

If Van Toorn endeavors a contemporary critique, El-Dahdah conducts an effective history of cosmopolitanism by examining the architectural vanguard of Brazil at a particular conjuncture of nation building and denationalization. Though El-Dahdah's subject is primarily Lucio Costa, he situates Costa's practice in a larger apparatus of research, pedagogy, and discourse so that Costa represents, as El-Dahdah argues, a cosmopolitanism that looks both forward and backwards. The stage is Brazil, just prior to World War II. Lucio Costa has switched camps. Once disposed to a neocolonial style, Costa, then director of the school of fine arts in Rio de Janeiro, declares his new allegiance to a modernist paradigm. From then on, he strikes at the project of neocolonial aesthetics as an inadequate architectural program for Brazil's new epoch.

Though Costa's quick change of allegiance suggests a turning away from the past, the coming body of work and discourse associated with Costa would present a more complicated picture of what it

meant to assume a modern imagination in a moment where radical disavowal was unsuited to the preservationist demands of the present. Costa was director of the architectural division of Brazil's federal bureau for historic preservation, founded in 1937 and housed, not without significance, in the iconic Ministry of Education and Health building. El-Dahdah tells us: "The same modern architects who fought for a better adequacy between architecture and new construction technology were busy studying, cataloguing, legislating, and preserving what they saw as Brazil's past. Putting it simply, if historic Brazil looks the way it does today, it is because architects who swore by Le Corbusier spent their time cleaning up eighteenth-century fabric...."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that Costa and his ilk were working toward a project of preservation of national cultural heritage, Costa, El-Dahdah explains, was arguing for a double project of cosmopolitan nationalism (a solidarity with other nationalities, a commonly held break from habit and custom shared by others) and denationalization altogether. Costa was himself attuned to architecture's responsibility to new forms of circulation, knowing full well their implications for notions of social and cultural collectivity and belonging.<sup>8</sup> One could not avoid the forces pressuring national imaginaries, infrastructures, and economies. In Costa's words, "the extraordinary facilities for swift information and communication, media, plane, cinema

and radio [that] abolish the isolation [of] countries and provinces. These are not fantasies, *these are facts that architecture cannot not examine.*"<sup>9</sup>

Though Costa's project appears to register a contradiction of intent (how does one denationalize and construct the nation at the same time?), I read this staging of the modern as the production of a "discrepant modernity" whose terms are not necessarily contradictory.<sup>10</sup> Timothy Mitchell offers us a compelling model: though modernity "reproduces social worlds" through techniques of representation such as the census, techniques of planning, etc., its authority or originality is subject to instability and rupture. "Every act of staging or representation [of modernity] is open to the possibility of misrepresentation, or at least of parody or misreading." Difference is produced by these representational disjunctures: "Every performance of the modern is the production of this difference, and each such difference represents the possibility of some shift, displacement, or contamination."<sup>11</sup> Modernity is thus not a singular stage, as in conventional Marxist teleology, but a staging open to a constitutive instability.

In this sense, the Ministry of Health and Education building was an artifact of disjuncture, conceived through a back-and-forth between Costa's Brazilian team and Le Corbusier's office in Paris. Moreover, Costa's modernism was marked by constant references to Corbusier and oth-

4 Ibid., 191–192. My use of Lee and LiPuma's argument is admittedly analogical and leaves aside some of the compelling content of their argument about the emergence of what they call "cultures of circulation" around infrastructures such as the machinery print capitalism (newspapers, novels) or, more recently, financial tools such as derivatives.

5 Rem Koolhaas, "The Generic City," in *S, M, L, XL: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau, edited by Jennifer Sigler (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

6 Regrettably, Farès El-Dahdah's contribution to the Kennon Symposium is not reproduced in this issue.

7 Farès El-Dahdah. (Paper presented at Everything Must Move conference, Rice University, March 21, 2009).

8 Here it would be productive to investigate how Costa saw architecture itself as a socially mediating artifact.

9 El-Dahdah.

10 See: Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, edited by Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

11 Ibid., 23.

ers, as in a number of domestic and hotel projects that seemed to borrow faithfully from local construction techniques but whose ultimate reference point was Corbusier's work in South America and Europe. Rather than read Costa's cannibalization as derivative, I read his project as one that wrestled precisely with the contaminations and ruptures produced by the circulation of representational technologies such as architecture. Quotations they may be, but when read against the wider pedagogical and architectural project of the Ministry building, they are inseparable from the imagination of a national modernity that has drawn a line of continuity between the historical resources of the past and the technological endeavors of the present.<sup>12</sup>

If El-Dahdah's revisiting of Costa turns in part around an inflection within the architectural object (the consequences more of circulation than of particular circulatory forms in any material sense), Van Toorn's analysis looks to the performativity of the architectural object and to the circulatory forms that animate its presence in

larger assemblages. Van Toorn notes a shift from the representational strategies of the classical culture industry, affiliated with a Fordist and labor-intensive production of identity, to the global cultural industry, in which the movement of goods is accelerated and their dissemination widened as informational content and intellectual property. Though I do not contest in full the performative role that architectural objects increasingly assume, I do not agree that this performativity has eclipsed the problem of "what an object is," as he puts it. Here I would like to conclude my comments by suggesting that it is precisely what Bruno Latour calls the "richness of the object" that recuperates circulation as a problematic. Materials of construction, techniques of production and reproduction, forms of dissemination such as publications, blogs, etc., and architectural festivals all constitute material realms that architecture traverses. Importantly, its circulation in these realms opens architectural production up to the possibility of (often unanticipated) rupture and discrepancy. Whether in countries where labor-intensive concrete construction permeated the architectural landscape in the twentieth century<sup>13</sup> or, say, where new technologies such as iron reconfigured architectural production in a city like Paris, questions of reproduction abounded (largely around the question of style) due to the inherent malleability of new technologies of construction. What kinds of mistakes, errors, or disturbances

occurred on-site, or were negotiated when a particular tectonic or technology traveled and was realized in a different assemblage of concerns, contingencies, and frictions? The dynamics of circulation play a critical role here. What role, for instance, did distance or delay play in the reproduction of particular techniques of architectural production in new geographic or social arenas?<sup>14</sup>

The status of genius, and with it the dialectic of the copy and the original, continues to animate architectural historiography and, to a degree, practice.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the agency of things, objects, and technologies has been erased or bracketed into a history of technology or "construction history."<sup>16</sup> Though some of these questions might reemerge around architectural production (the interface with the object or technology, viewing the architectural work or system as a force that physically mediates dynamics of circulation, for instance) or historiography (delay or the accounting of material technologies of reproduction), they nonetheless

less bring us back to the question of how circulation as a constitutive force might be taken up as a concern for architectural production and discourse.

<sup>12</sup> It is too easy to dismiss or bemoan the national underpinnings at work here, a tendency in the wider landscape of intellectual culture that presents members of the southern hemisphere with less a choice than a form of blackmail. Partha Chatterjee writes: "For those who cannot say 'my Europe,' the choice seems to be to allow oneself to be encompassed within global cosmopolitan hybridities or to relapse into hateful ethnic particularities." In other words, accept universality or lapse into the exclusions of ethnic nationalism. Given the experience of political movements, such as the Dalit movement in India (Chatterjee's example), that make claims precisely around ethnic identity, this somewhat false choice allows such a movement no space in national politics and elides the formation of political spheres. Partha Chatterjee, "Anderson's Utopia," in *Grounds of Comparison*.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, my own writing on the matter; Fernando Luiz Lara, *The Rise of Popular Modernist Architecture in Brazil* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 2008); and Curt Gambetta, "Cement, Design and the Spectral Architect," *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 56 (March 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Arjun Appadurai's discussion of commodities is here a relevant reference point. See "Introduction: Commodities and Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Taussig posed the question differently, drawing from Marx and Benjamin to focus not on copy and original, but on the dilemma of contact and copy. In reference to a particular form of circulation related to the political, his discussion of "The Organization of Mimesis" is especially enlightening. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Mitchell echoes this sentiment, though his object of concern is not architecture. See Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), especially "Can the Mosquito Speak?"

## CITIES YET UNBUILT

### a challenge to academia

Lars Reuterswärd

*Director at UN-HABITAT, Nairobi Office*

Think about Google Earth. You're zoomed in on Houston, Texas, now you zoom out—to the world, space—and then maybe you zoom in on Lagos, Nairobi, or Dhaka, somewhere outside the modern world. In a similar way, I'm going to "zoom out" to talk about the unbuilt cities of the world, and the strategies and professions we need to address them. I will also "zoom in" on what I believe to be the challenge for academia today with respect to this.

To provide some historical background, twenty-five years ago the World Commission on Environment and Development, or the Brundtland Commission, for the first time recognized the challenge cities present for global sustainability. What the Brundtland Commission wrote is highly relevant today, and we have done basically nothing about it. Meanwhile, a demographic change without parallel in the history of humankind is taking place: nearly two in three world cities will be urbanized soon. That's never happened before. The good news is that [according to our projections] the rural population is not going to increase: it flattens out and remains just about the same. But in the coming, let's say, thirty or forty years, the urban population of this world will double. It is at three billion people today, so it

will be at about six billion in 2050. That's a fast process. We are building a new urban world, and the speed with which this is happening leads me to believe that the old tools that we have developed for slow growth in wealthy nations will not be very applicable when we talk about fast growth in not-so-wealthy nations.

Of course, the real shame of this world is that the slum population is going to increase—which is business as usual. When many of us started our jobs, we had a billion people in cities. Now we have three billion people in cities, one billion of which live in slums. For you who are beginning your careers now, another billion people will end up in slums unless you rise up to this challenge and do something about it. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) says the current effort is not good enough. If we can find some 700-800 billion US dollars almost overnight to bail out the world banking system, why can't we find 700 or 800 dollars for each slum dweller so the problem would be solved? The answer is that it is not a question of money, but a question of priorities. It's a political issue. For instance, in Asia, which has the largest number of slum dwellers, governments find the means to build space rockets without any problem.

What is interesting is that urban population growth is not caused by people moving from the countryside into cities. The growth occurs *within* cities: they expand as more and more people survive [and propagate] in them. Also interesting is that over the coming years, from today up to 2020, 93 percent of the urban population growth will be in developing countries.

Another interesting fact that is largely neglected is that the majority of urban population growth has been, is, and will remain in cities below half a million people. It's not an issue for megacities, such as the Rio de Janeiro and the Shanghaies of this world. They're fine. They can deal with their own problems. The problem is with all the small and medium-sized cities that will expand. We're talking about the weak secondary cities of this world.

But cities are really the future! That's where we can bring people together and provide them with decent services without wasting all the forests and the agricultural land of this world. We should also recognize that, generally speaking, throughout history cities have generated most of the economic development. In the developing nations today, you can see that the gross domestic product (GDP) of cities is slightly bigger, and of course in places like the US and Europe, 30-40 percent of the economic growth is generated by cities. Cities are the solution to our problems, but we need to see them for what they are, especially as they expand in the developing nations and everywhere else.

Let me give you one example of this in the city where I live: Nairobi, Africa. This is also where UN-HABITAT is, in a nice forested area. There is a grid here with a downtown, a bit like Houston. It's not as big, but Nairobi has high-rise buildings, nicely planned. We have the airport here, a domestic airport. I have also taken the liberty of marking the slum areas with red: this is how they are distributed in the city of Nairobi. Within these red areas lives 60 percent of the population of Nairobi. They live on about 5 percent of the land. Now

I take away the wealthy areas, the nice forested areas with villas and swimming pools where people like me live, and I add some green areas. Roughly the same size as the red areas, these green areas represent the golf courses of Nairobi. So, what we see is that 60 percent of the population lives within an area that corresponds to the golf courses of Nairobi. This is not a question of not being able to provide land-use planning. You can see how Kibera, the slum area in Nairobi, the largest in East Africa, has some middle-income housing here and of course the golf courses here. What is interesting, however, is the razor-sharp delineation of this area, and what this says about the way this city is run and why we have these slum areas.

Zooming in on one square in Kibera, we find 75,000 people living in houses. Generally speaking, the houses are three by three meters, arranged as row housing, each about ten square meters [107.6 square feet]. People rent them, maybe for ten dollars a month. The problem is that those who exploit people by providing substandard housing have a symbiotic relationship with those who live there, because those who live there like the cheap rents. Secondly, 50 percent of the population of Nairobi only want rental housing—they don't want to own a house or a plot—for the simple reason that they are women, and women cannot own property or housing. If a man and a woman separate, the man keeps the property, or if a man dies, his brothers take over the property. That's why this kind of housing is popular—if you are a woman, you don't risk losing your savings. So it gets into the political economy of the country; planning and political economy are invariably

closely linked to each other. As we zoom into this area, we can see the density, the one-story houses, the one million people in two and a half square kilometers [one square mile]. No toilets, no water—water is basically hijacked through plastic pipes from the mains—and close links to the waste dump of the town, with all that that means. Most people who live here are productive: they make money and they contribute to the economy. At nighttime they come out wearing a nice shirt and whatnot. They are the guards, or the servants, or the shopkeepers, whatever. We should never underestimate their sincerity or their efforts to live a decent life. But, of course, there's a darker side to it.

A year ago we had riots in Kenya following the elections. The riots left 1,400 people dead and more than a million internally displaced from their homes. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan finally managed to negotiate peace. This shows that the poor planning of these cities is not necessarily a question of limited resources. It's a question of the politics of it, and the competence of the professions in dealing with the realities of cities like these. The realities are vastly different from the realities of my hometown of Lund—or your hometown of Houston, for that matter. We need to recognize that. For that reason, it is our conviction at UN-HABITAT that more of the same will not be able to win the game. We have to basically rethink the urban planning agenda, the architecture of buildings, and the way we run our cities.

There are a few examples of nice, livable cities. There's Coal Harbour in Vancouver, and we can also mention maybe Curi-

tiba, Brazil, which is always cited. For the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai, I was part of the jury to select Urban Best Practices from, among other places, the developing world. It was extremely difficult to find best practices. We need good examples and we need to make sure that these kinds of practices are spread to places where cities are currently being built.

Now, what are the challenges for academia here? There's a lot of talk about sustainability, but the sustainability movement is currently a bit weak because it really seeks to sustain the present—*sustenance*, as it's called—rather than pursue resilience. I think that the urban environmental organizations of this world, particularly of the rich world, instead need to concentrate on developing systems that not only sustain the urban environment, but also recycle and recreate values, as nature does. This is called regeneration. The focus of this effort has to be on the unbuilt cities in developing countries, and it requires a move to integrated urban planning. It's not a question of fixing a road or fixing a water pipe, but really a question of creating cities that function by themselves. It is my conviction that what all this boils down to is human capacity. It's not a technical issue, because we have the technologies. And it's not a money problem, because there's plenty of money available in a place like Nairobi, if only in little pockets. Why don't we invest in Nairobi? Why don't we invest in Hanoi? "Crime, corruption, and general disorder" is the standard answer from investors. We need to address the underlying human factors inhibiting investments in better futures for these unbuilt cities.

Many factors are at play. Climate change, for example, has become a catchphrase in recent years. We have been dealing with it for quite some time, however, back when nobody was interested, because climate change, while a problem for the world, is definitely a problem for the poor. Invariably, they live in the wrong places—in lowlands, on the coasts, where landslides will happen, and in areas vulnerable to other natural disasters—and in little buildings that can't resist them. So there's the power dimension to climate change that needs to be addressed. Another factor is the need for tools. UN-HABITAT is a small agency, so we can't do everything (we can do very little, as a matter of fact). But somebody needs to think about what kind of tools we can develop for students and professors who will need training to deal with the unprecedented speed of this latest wave of urbanization in places where we haven't had cities before, where we don't have water, or where we have poverty. Another factor in organizing the urban developing world is that the economy must come first. It's not about saving birds or water or coral reefs; it's about making cities that make money so we have something to invest. With that come equity matters, corruption-related issues, and a need for the rule of law. The human capacity to deal with all this has to be fostered before we can talk about sustainable urban development. A further factor is the redistribution of wealth through subsidies. Often in housing what is affordable is not acceptable, and what is acceptable is not affordable. The gap between these two has been bridged historically, in most countries, by housing subsidies. It's nothing new, but it has been neglected and even shunned in the

last twenty years. I am convinced that this good old thinking will come back, and we see it coming back in places like China. Finally, there is education. If people can't read and write, they are bound to be victims. If they can read and write, and if they get a good education, young people will not put up with the bad practices now dominating the field. So we need education for all, and education that really deals with these realities and is not too far away from them. A sustainable, resilient urban environment is the ultimate goal as we develop people and generate money and gain access to political power.

McKinsey & Company did a very interesting study on China—a study on what is the implication of big cities—that examined whether they should focus on really big cities or focus on more distributed urbanization in China. And what they came up with is that China should focus on super-cities, the big hubs, because that will attract talent and investment, which will support the surrounding small ones; in the long run, the GDP will be higher and consumption will be lower because you can invest in public transport. In Shanghai, where I happened to work, they are now building eight new underground [or subway] lines over a period of five years, increasing the underground from 150 kilometers to 440 kilometers [93 to 273 miles]. In five years! This has profound implications for resource use, of course, and for economic development. So McKinsey expects the GDP to expand rapidly and public spending for infrastructure and the like to go down. This is important, quite significant, and often overlooked. What is the morphology of cities that promote economic development and lower invest-

ment costs? I can tell you that the way that Nairobi grows—in vast areas with very low, extensive housing densities—is the opposite: it is very resource-consuming even as it creates big investments, and need for investments, in infrastructures, roads, and the like.

To change this, we at UN-HABITAT are working with universities in what we call reality-based studios. Our goal is education that actually looks at the realities of where you live, helping universities to become engines for economic development rather than scientific ivory towers. One of the things that universities could really help us with is thinking about environmental systems. In many developing countries, for example, about 40 percent of the electricity for a town is often used to pump water and sewage; we have built-in useless systems, you could say. Let's face it, we have lost the case for slum upgrading. We instead have to prevent new slums from forming. Slum upgrading is very popular, but we can leave that to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others who want to do good things like that. That's fine, but the bottom line is that we have to change the way the system works. We have to prevent slums from emerging and make sure that people are given decent housing so they can be productive. We have to go beyond linear thinking, and not only about electricity or water matters. We need to reexamine most concepts we have, and start thinking in terms of the circle, recycling, regeneration. The tools that northern Europeans have, for example, in council land-use planning do not include or predict the slum as a component. They're useless in this context. That goes for many other

planning tools that have been developed for more affluent situations.

We should think rather in terms of leapfrogging. Maybe it isn't true that everybody has to follow the same train of developments when it comes to this so-called modernization. Maybe countries can jump over the nineteenth century and move directly into the current epoch. Mobile phones are one example of a very successful strategy that has changed the face of many developing countries. We don't have to invest in copper wires and whatever because every third person in Kenya has a wireless. We should think much more in terms of how we can use state-of-the-art technologies in promoting the advancement of developing countries and cities. One such technology is that of the bioplex, which encloses all systems of food production, water use, oxygen generation, and so on; NASA has cooperated with UN-HABITAT in exploring this concept, which today has found expression in efforts like hydroponic farming in Kenya.

As planners, architects, and visionaries, we need to begin leapfrogging what is and having ideas about totally new solutions to seemingly impossible problems, finding out about them and thinking about them. We need more of that spirit today, where we generate visions about where we want to be rather than just replicating whatever is available. We should concentrate on forming a little biosphere, a little planet in a sense, that we can recreate in the laboratory; if it works well, we should then upscale the system. (It doesn't have to function at 100 percent capacity; it could function at 95 percent, and that would be great.) But this is what we, as

a city agency, need help with. Those in academia can take a lead in upscaling, testing, and promoting new solutions. We cannot do this at UN-HABITAT. We are not a university. We don't have the resource capacity or even the think-tank capacity, for that matter.

So the way forward is as follows: Remember, the future of urbanization is about unbuilt cities in unknown places that will be inhabited by people who are not born yet. So, this is a planning problem. This is also about the invisible people of this planet: those who don't have a voice, and who definitely are oppressed by their peers or leaders. Universities need to develop into centers of economic and social development; academia must assume a social role, a historical role. As I said earlier, we call this concept the reality-based studio, and we need research for developing tools that are relevant for future cities. More importantly, we need to go to full scale with our successful experimental projects. There have been far too many "Mickey Mouse" projects, however well intended—I've done them myself—but the fact is we can't wait anymore. You know, every two weeks, the population of Houston increases, and so does the global [urban] population. Every two weeks! A colleague who is not here, Dana Cuff, has written an extremely interesting book. It's about Los Angeles and matters of scale in rapid urban transformation. Now the problem with Dana's analysis is that it is about Los Angeles, and Los Angeles is basically a suburb, not a high-density city. So what are the theories she proposes, and how can we develop urbanization theories, models, and practices for high-density cities that deal with the same

speed and scale that we have witnessed in Los Angeles? That's a question for you, and I want your feedback.

To use terms put forward by Lars Lerup in *After the City*, this is a void, a lack of stim. I think that maybe you should move beyond this void and really look upon the megashapes of the future cities of this world. This is what we need support in, and I hope that maybe you would want to turn your eye to the emerging cities of the world, outside the US, and provide us with the theories and understanding of how we can meaningfully deal with them. One of the first opportunities to discuss this further is, of course, the World Expo in China next year. This will be the first world expo since 1851 with an urban theme to be held in a developing country. As the coordinator at the UN pavilion exhibition, I could provide you with an excellent venue to discuss the future of the world's unbuilt cities.

## INTERVIEW WITH LARS LERUP

with Izabel Gass

**Gass:** *Today in architecture there is an increasing interest in the term “pragmatism.” William Saunders, editor of Harvard Design Magazine, has published a compilation of writings from the last eight years entitled The New Architectural Pragmatism. The compilation suggests that since the decline of the critical-theoretical journal Assemblage, there has emerged a new generation of architects and critics who are concerned with reconciling ideology and practice, who are concerned with the pragmatic effects of architecture — what can actually be done and built — as opposed to the critical-theoretical impulse toward resignation and contemplation. But we often see that these “pragmatic” practices fall prey to a kind of naïveté, laziness, or even a profit-seeking logic, exemplified perhaps by a lot of recent Dutch architecture. I raise this issue of architectural pragmatism with you because I have always found your work on the suburban metropolis very pragmatic in that you accept the demise of the city — or the reality of life After the City, if you will. You then probe the productive capacity for design within that bleak milieu. For instance, at Rice you’ve attempted to use the city of Houston — disjointed, unstructured, sprawling, and fundamentally anti-architectural, as a laboratory or provocation for design. Everything Must Move,*

*the book showcasing fifteen years’ worth of student work undertaken during your term as dean here, points to this: your editors call it a record of “testing ideas about operating in seemingly impossible situations.” So, do you think there’s room for a kind of ideologically motivated pragmatism in architecture? Can we “utopianize” practice, or practice utopia?*

**Lerup:** Well, in desperate times utopia always shows up. It’s a visitor that has returned here many times. I remember when for years and years there was no practice and it was all utopia. There were all these very heady fantasies. Then, of course, practice opened up and everyone wanted to practice. The idea I have about this, and maybe this comes with age, is that theory accompanies rough economic times. Theory, including the new paradigm of “projection” — the point of “projective” theory being that, instead of criticizing, you project ideas — as much as the old paradigm of “criticality,” [is in an inverse relationship] with the condition of practice. If, as of today, we are facing really rough economic times again, we will see a desperate run to utopia. This is a self-fulfilling prophesy in a way — architecture will soon become ideological again.

A major problem that I saw in architecture, which was in some way the reason that I became much more interested in urbanism, was that architects (not so much in Europe, but clearly in this country) abandoned housing. If you look at the history of good architects, they always did housing. It was a big thing in Le Corbusier’s world==, and was even big for the British architects. In this country, you

start out with your mother’s house, and eventually you graduate to do a school, and then you’re off to do a museum. Those who continue to do housing for the rest of their lives are left behind.

My attitude toward suburbia is a bit like that. I don’t want to live there. I don’t like to cut lawns, and I find the housing silly. It’s extremely refreshing, for instance, when you come to Nonya Grenader’s house — she’s moved it right to the lot line so she has a good site space. That constitutes a radical move in suburbia. If somebody did a roof garden instead of this idiotic pitched roof that sheds all the water, that little change would make all the difference. For instance, in Puerto Rico, where concrete, solid walls, and flat roofs dominate, it looks almost like a Le Corbusian world and it stands up fine in hurricanes. Technical improvement is necessary in this town: the last two storms cost three billion dollars, and this [hurricane season] will probably cost six billion, and the next one is going to be twelve billion, so when are we going to bury the electrical lines? Those are the questions that are much more interesting and of course they are pragmatic questions.

On the other hand, ideology is also silly, in a way, because it’s been taken care of [by economic realities]. We know that politicians are all crooks and that greed is dominant. We know greed thrives in capitalism. Everyone wants a monopoly, so what we’re looking forward to is having Wal-Mart as the only place where you find food, Ikea where you can buy furniture, and Zara or H&M to buy clothes. And we’re back to socialism again because ultimately these all become state institu-

tions. We’re already down to one bank, JP Morgan. That’s where we’re heading. And eventually we’ll have a real collapse in the economy, and everything will be split up. Then the little businesses will come back.... So, I’m not particularly engaged in this problem. We live in a democracy and it’s ruled by capitalism.

**Gass:** *I want to talk about some of your earlier works, like Planned Assaults, in which you employed ideas of post-structuralism to subversively reconstitute the function of the suburban house. This imperative toward subversion and deconstruction (I use the term both in the sense of Derridean deconstruction and in the literal sense of your architectural deconstruction of the physical home and its accompanying “normative” standards of living) is today looked at with cynicism, at least by a younger generation who regards it as overly academic. I wonder if you could talk a little about the value of Planned Assaults, as well as similar work by Peter Eisenman. What do you think architecture’s momentary engagement with post-structuralism amounted to? Why is this engagement now considered so futile, such a “dead project”?*

**Lerup:** First, of course, I don’t think that project is dead at all.

**Gass:** *Post-structuralism in particular?*

**Lerup:** Well, postmodernism is over: we don’t believe that buildings are language and we’re not concerned with meaning. Now we’re concerned with seeing buildings as micro-climates. There’s a new kind of pragmatics: questions about how close we are to nature, how much the house is a tree. So in some ways those

particular concerns of postmodernism are put aside. But the project is very real still — engineered environments are fully alive. I think that the work that I did was, in a sense, a piece of philosophy that used architecture as its toolkit. It is still extremely relevant.

**Gass:** *Why have those concerns been put aside?*

**Lerup:** Well, I learned this from [Sanford] Kwinter — for him it was fundamental to kill the father. I never understood that. Why would you? I wish I'd had a father! [Laughter] That particular era was extremely stimulating for me because I managed to bring whatever I read to bear on architecture. The reason that's possible is that the muteness of architecture allows you to read into it whatever you want to read into it. That was a tremendous revelation that came much later for me — how architecture has this kind of wonderful capability for absorbing whatever hits it. There is a kind of logic in building that allows you to subvert it. At the time that I did *Planned Assaults*, I was very postmodern. I was also heavily influenced, in my personal life, by feminism — meaning I was essentially interested in freedom, the freedom of everyone, and I still am. That's the nicest thing about America: the noose hasn't yet been pulled tight around us; there are allowances for mavericks to live their lives as long as they pay their taxes. But I feel that the earlier work was very important.

Eisenman similarly was very stimulating for me. I found that his formalism interested me, like some strange sort of architectural engineering. I enjoyed him a lot

and we had lots of interesting discussions. So that era was very stimulating, and of course it has motivated my own devotion to autonomy. In some ways I still believe that architecture is autonomous, because of its muteness, because it's so dumb that it can't speak to us. It's sort of like an automaton. The logic that configured its system is always there, and when you start to screw around with that logic, it's interesting. Eisenman did that and lots of other interesting things.

**Gass:** *Increasingly, I sense that the element of social resistance in Planned Assaults — however attenuated by its academic context it may have been — has been lost in contemporary architecture. Do you agree?*

**Lerup:** I think that on some level there is a nostalgia for the Cold War. I do think that once capitalism won the war, we entered a slightly mind-numbing phase of our existence. It's not that I believe threats are important, but I think we need wake-up calls. For instance, this country has stopped seeing manifest destiny as something to think about seriously — once we have gone all the way to the west coast, how can we reinvent this idea of “going west” inside our own country? As I've asked in my book, is it really in the cul-de-sac that we want to end this adventure? Yet there is, on the other side of my apparent cynicism, still a kind of hope for renewal. Maybe that renewal has to happen when we have tough times, because in some way catastrophe is fundamental to our awakening.

**Gass:** *What does “going west” mean for you?*

**Lerup:** Well, I went west as an immigrant.

Of course, being an immigrant, you leave lots of stuff behind, and that amounts to a tremendous loss — I lost my culture and my language. But at the same time, you compensate for that with what's beyond the horizon. For me, going to California was part of that. It seemed in retrospect inevitable. When I finished at Harvard, I got two job offers, one from Berkeley and one from Harvard, and I went to California. I came from a social democratic society where you were taught to think of yourself intersubjectively and to care about others, and California seemed so much further ahead than anyone else in that regard. I guess “going west” means a sort of drive for change and the unknown, and I had that. Coming to the south, the gulf coast, was a kind of “going west,” too, so maybe that's why I went to suburbia — to see if there was a hope there.

**Gass:** *And what do you think? After fifteen years?*

**Lerup:** Well, [there's no hope] unless suburbia gets out of the petting zoo zone, unless the people start to value each other and get on with it, giving up a culture that they know is not sustained by downtown and so has to be somehow made up in suburbia. Otherwise it will just remain essentially a petting zoo — you know, removed from downtown and bad schools, removed from encountering people of different colors and creeds, and all that. In some ways suburbia is in dire straits without knowing it because it's just about petting. Everyone is petting — you walk out the door of your house and you look across the street and there's a guy just like you standing there (he looks exactly like you, he drives roughly the same car),

then you drive off to have your escapades in downtown and then you're back again. And in the meantime your wife, or husband, is driving your kids to school and spends all that time transporting everyone back and forth — I mean, it's ridiculous. Human life is ridiculous.

We are absurd for the very simple reason that we are badly constructed. We've compensated for our own inabilities and shortcomings with religion and all kinds of fads — all these hundreds of books on “self-improvement” — because we know that we are what the Germans call *Halbstarke*, or “half-strong.” That's also our humanity: our failings are as important as our great skills. So, it seems to me that this is pretty much inevitable. It doesn't mean that ... we can become better. Though that, in the end, is very satisfying.

**Gass:** *Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Manfredo Tafuri?*

**Lerup:** Well, Tafuri really wreaked havoc in my intellectual life. I didn't know him well. I met him only a couple of times. .... The last time I saw him, I was sitting in front of the Pantheon with a cup of coffee. He lived not far from there, and he walked by with a red pencil in his mouth, reading a book. And then he walked out of my life. Why was he so disturbing to me? It's obvious if you think about where I came from, a society that believed that architecture could change lives; I came from a world that believed that architecture had social purpose. Then here was Tafuri, who wrote that book, *Architecture and Utopia*. It was very poorly translated, but nevertheless I read it. My copy looks as if it's been through a world war — un-

derlined, read, and reread — because I found it so disturbing. That book is a bit like a building — you can read into it right away — and it affected me deeply in a negative way. It destroyed my hope for architecture; I felt an ideological collapse. But I've recovered from it. I guess I give ideology less importance now since it's been solved for us with capitalism.

**Gass:** *After fifteen years as dean of the Rice School of Architecture, you are now retiring. I suspect you will leave us with a departing manifesto. What is it?*

**Lerup:** As I've been saying for many years, a day will come when we will grow our houses. I do think that will produce a kind of new ideology, which is the greening of architecture. This greening is so necessary; we can no longer remain separate, hiding in language — we must join nature in its enterprise. [Green architecture] seems to me the most positive and the most interesting thing, and it's also the most demanding because it suggests that we have to revamp our architecture education to include engineering and biology. We need to read biology. We might, in the process, abandon Derrida and all the French thinkers (which would be a shame, too, because I don't like to throw anything out with the bathwater). Nonetheless, it seems to me that the most interesting thing for the next generation is to leave language and meaning aside, and to realize that we need to see buildings in metabolic terms — to see them as microclimates. Once that's done, they will be seamlessly attached to nature and we will never look back. That is the real utopia, but to get there is an enormous task.



