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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS: DIALECTIC III

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Dialectic is the new journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Utah. In a spirit true to dialectical thinking, the journal will bring together opposing voices in the discipline today on architectural and urban and wider cultural issues important to our school. Deliberately housed within academia, it invites voices from practitioners as much as from scholars and educators to address pedagogy as much as practice. It publishes global perspectives for taking local action. Dialectic is a critical venue for articulating alternative positions on the challenges in the highly interconnected, yet tragically disconnected world of contemporary architecture.

The second issue of Dialectic “Architecture between Boom and Bust” is dedicated to the question of economy. While the boom of the 1990s and 2000s made architects and media designers the epitome of the urban creative class, the credit crunch of 2008 and economic downturn dramatically shrunk the profession. With the bust of the US American housing market arguably the trigger for the current global financial and economic crisis, the building industry became the main victim. All this has directly affected architects, whose fees are linked to building costs and built volume.

Dramatic economic turns, while involving individual hardship, are nevertheless great indices for making visible the immanent connections of the discipline to the marketplace. They challenge our understanding of what it means "to architect." One question raised in the aftermath of the current economic (and architectural) crisis is the failure of the starchitect system that evolved concurrent to the real estate bubble in Western societies as well as "new markets" in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South America. As giddy decision makers, the public had learned to expect extravagant signature buildings, formal experiments and endless artistic ingenuity. With this, they traded the role of the architect as a keeper of a common good for a celebrity figure who would bring global fame and tourists to their communities.

The history of the profession in the twentieth century bears witness to the attempts of the Modern Movement to bring the elite cultural products to the ordinary man. Architects in the 1960s critiqued the paternalism of their disciplinary forebears and interrogated the role of an architect both as a social engineer and as a moderator of participatory design. The accompanying post-modern turn to semiotics and imagery moved the discipline to the opposite position of "art for arts sake." Ironically, architects who dreamt of the autonomy of design, build the ground for the hedonistic formalism of the 1990s and 2000s. Following the economic downturn in 2008, what one may expect from the next calibration of architecture to society?

IMAGE CREDITS COVER:

In our initial issue of *Dialectic*, I prefaced the volume with a call for persuasive dialogue and engaging conflicting issues in hopes of discovering opportunity imbedded in complex topics. With Volume 2, *Dialectic* poses questions about the cyclical boom and bust that invariably plagues the building industry. Though we seem to be gradually emerging from the great recession that was triggered by an economic bubble within the housing sector of our industry, Henry-Benham’s article, “Storytelling as Agency” reminds us this was a boom that rewarded few yet brought widespread havoc from the resultant economic free-fall and climatic events precipitated by the boom’s accelerated degradation of the environment. Many of the articles herein see the downturn as an opportunity to reassess the way we think and build in relationship to each other and the environment.

Worldwide, the building industry is especially dependent on large capital markets and thus vulnerable to the vicissitudes of those markets. The very mythology of the American West is founded upon the boom and bust brought on by the discovery of gold in 1849 at Sutter’s Mill, California. Previously wealth was viewed as the product of hard labor and productivity. This paradigm was undone overnight with the specter of a short cut to wealth. Indeed there are many of us, myself included, with ancestors who were swindled during the rush to riches that ensued. Our inability to learn from the cycle of boom and bust and its impact on social, economic and natural ecologies provides little hedge against our impulses and the recurrent boom and bust. Our relationship to nature in the American West has been characterized more by exploitation than understanding. A story told by William Kittredge best expresses the mercurial aspect of lessons learned even given the best of intentions:

“The Park Ranger [Great Basins National Park] told a story about the Bristlecone Pine. A researcher was trying to count the tree rings and set a maximum age for the Bristlecone. And he was having trouble with his core drill. So he took a chain saw to what he thought to be the oldest tree on the mountain. And it worked; he killed the oldest thing living on earth in order to count its years.”

We mustn’t let the excitement of discovering new solutions overwhelm the reality of expositions. In the article “Size Matters”, Ghazai Abbasy-Asbagh calls for new modes of architectural practice brought on by the crisis, requiring “engagement in larger territories with greater complexity”. The new practices she suggests require multidisciplinary teams that will lead to new social orders. A call for collaborative practice is nothing new; Hannes Meyer in the 1930’s identified “Building is a collective action.” It was certainly the collaborative interdisciplinary practices of Wall Street that brought on this crisis so collective actions alone won’t guarantee an end to the marginalization of whole groups of people as suggested in Henry-Benham, Patrick Haughey and Yasid Anani. Yet the challenges illuminated by the economic collapse may require as big a transformation as the enlightenment itself. The current dilemma of climate change suggests nothing less than a tectonic shift in global values from one solely based upon productivity and the commercialization of time and space that has enabled the rise of the middle class to more systematic approaches.

Recent architecture, though certainly not the cause, is very much a fixed and enduring brief on the profligacy of our era. Nangia’s reference to Koolhaas “more and more, more is more” speaks to the evidence. The current disparity in incomes between rich and the middle class suggests the great majority can only appreciate the “more” vicariously. We live in a period so reminiscent of the last fin de siecle that invited Loos’ biting critique of the Art Nouveau with its “individuality express in every nail.” Karl Kraus as Loos called for leaving “running room” for cultural and societal regeneration. However as Hal Foster points out: “This old debate takes on new resonance today, when the aesthetic and the utilitarian are not only conflated but all but subsumed in the commercial….” This is as Abbasy Asbagh in her article identifies as “the complicity with the dark side of capitalism”. Thomas Mical refers to the power of projection, longing, administration and aspiration that fuel the consumption in search for the new as evidenced by Tokyo’s Ginza District and mirrored in the material excesses of “glamorous” architecture.
Following Hannah Arendt’s observations, we should not be seduced by the sophistication of our instruments such as bundled derivatives and parametric designs and in so doing lose our humanity. Julia Sedlock in her article, “Architecture on the High Seas” sees architecture as adrift on the high seas, ferried away to undiscovered territories. She as others herein calls for the return to smallness. However we should avoid a return to utopian or absolute formulas that create too much or too little wiggle room and thus rather than being swept away we drain the pond or kill the object of our attention.

With this assemblage of articles, I hope we have taken the measure of the problem and thus begun a set of questions that may suggest ongoing debate. I invite you our readers to contribute articles to Volume 3 of Dialectic in which we will explore “installations” or smallness and the proposition of design-build experimentation especially in the developing world and societies who as mentioned herein have been disenfranchised, marginalized and indeed too often Photoshopped from our minds eye.

Prescott Muir, Chair

ENDNOTES

1. William Kittredge. Who Owns the West? (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1996), 146


ON THE HISTORY OF

BOOM AND BUST IN ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITECTURE IN THE AGE OF INEQUALITY

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Architecture costs money. Yet historians of the city and architecture, as well as architects and other design professionals have little knowledge of how this process functions or fails. This essay bridges the gap between financial research and architectural critique, revealing the decades-long stagnation in median income that paid for Moshe Safdie’s 1.2 billion dollar Crystal Bridges Museum. It provides an economic critique of the high costs of aesthetic myths regarding density and walkability and argues that architecture and its stars have failed as high-profile avant-gardism reinforces ever-increasing levels of inequality throughout the world. In short, this essay turns a critical eye towards architecture's blindness – both pedagogically and historically – exposing human costs of urbanist myths and avant-gardism through the financial and resource hungry aesthetic assumptions that make architecture possible.
INTRODUCTION

Architecture is expensive. Yet historians of the city and architecture, as well as architects and other design professionals, have little knowledge of how this process functions or fails. This essay begins to bridge that gap, connecting the real economy to the cost of the broader environment. It is a history of the law of unintended consequences demonstrating the material and human costs of architecture as we know it. Failure to understand the deep structural shifts in the global economy reveals a theoretical failure of not only the aesthetic assumptions about building and development from urban planning to housing, but also in the assumed cultural benefits of well-designed yet costly projects in the Modern era.

Recent research has revealed a decades-long stagnation in wage-earner income in the United States (Figure 1). The architecture that speaks to this condition is largely masked in our discipline by a preference for highly visible and celebrated products of expensive avant-gardism. Yet, how can architecture begin to speak to issues such as poverty, the costs and benefits of urbanization, or globalization, and its corollary in the West, deindustrialization? This essay critiques long-held assumptions about the value of what we call and teach as architecture, by looking closely at some of the most prominent recent architectures and wondering what they are hiding. Who bears the cost of this architecture? What does this architecture do to the global landscape and its inhabitants? This essay turns a critical eye towards architecture’s aesthetic blindness—both pedagogically and historically—exposing the economic and human costs of both urbanism and the cultural benefits of avant-gardism.

MOSHIE SAFDIE AND THE DECLINE IN MEDIAN INCOME: AN ARCHITECTURAL TALE

Contrary to ideas about general prosperity, most of the inhabitants in the United States have not been slowly becoming better off, with inflation-adjusted wages relatively flat for decades, amidst rising debt payments and costs. Indeed, for the younger population, the rise in poverty has been extreme. In 2011 the Pew Center issued a report with an astonishing statistic: “Among households headed by adults younger than 35, the share of income below the poverty line has jumped since 1967” (Figure 2). This and other research in the past five years has revealed a number of striking structural shifts in American culture, namely, that for the first time, children not born to an affluent family are likely to be worse off than their parents’ generation. While popular media outlets and political theatrics have used this information to drive up sales and fire up support for a variety of issues, the true underlying impact on communities, prior to and after the recent credit crisis, is far worse than the headlines, and is actually visible in a world largely obscured by dominant design pedagogies.

Fig. 1: Share of total household wealth growth by wealth groups 1983 – 2010 (Economic Policy Institute © 2012).

Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of U.S. aggregate household income, by income tier, 1970-2010 (Pew Research Center © 2011).
They were right. Offering goods at lower prices, due to cost controls over their part-time labor force and inexpensive products imported from overseas, they swiftly grew, eventually becoming the largest employer in the country and arguably, the world. Of course, the production of inexpensive goods and the expansion into the world at large comes with a tremendous cost. This is not just born by the people, it also threatens the architectures where they live. One hundred and twelve people recently died when fire consumed their workplace at a Walmart supplier in Bangladesh that manufactures some of its inexpensive clothing. Using bribery and corruption, Walmart built a store in Mexico close one of the great monuments in human history, the remains of Teotihuacan. No one will ever know what archaeological traces of human habitation have been destroyed during the unauthorized construction of this building site.6 In the aftermath of the recent Great Recession, U.S. households, already suffering from decades of wage deflation, began to cut back even more. Recent studies have illustrated that American households in the bottom 40 percent by income spent more than 100 percent of their after-tax income just to survive, and the next 20 percent spent more than 90 percent of their take-home.7 This economic strain has thrown many of the communities in this country into deep financial and emotional turmoil, often in towns where they were barely getting by before. The Walton heirs control more wealth than the bottom 30% of the American population, despite growing evidence that most of their employees have to rely on government programs such as SNAP for subsistence.8 Indeed recent economic research reveals that the growth in inequality for the past few decades can be traced in part to the scale of transfer payments to the affluent and super-affluent in the form of tax-advantage interest payments on safe bonds (including US Treasury Bills) that make up a large component of wealth. These taxpayer-funded interest payments are not only taxed at a preferential non-wage rate, they are far bigger than the more publicized transfer payments to the poor, including welfare and the SNAP or food stamp program.9 So who really paid for that museum? Millions of Americans desperately clinging to a fading standard of life by looking for cheaper goods, under pressure from wage-stagnation, globalization, and rising costs. Is this all avant-gardist art and architecture is good for, providing a new age of Gilded Plutocrats the opportunity to acquire wealth and then give the gift of culture in the form of architecture back to the people?10 Of course the museum itself is a charitable foundation, endowed in such a way as to defer taxes. Any gift of money as an endowment to the museum, likely in the form of an equity stake.

In 2011, the architect Moshie Safdie unveiled his latest creation, a beautiful museum with fine concrete detailing and two copper-roofed bridges over a pond. “Crystal Bridges” was built for $1.2 Billion by Alice Walton, one of the wealthy heirs of Sam Walton the founder of Walmart. This cost is in addition to the $1.2 billion spent acquiring the art inside.5

Walmart went public in the 1970s. Forty years later, the Walton family remains in control as majority shareholders, and four of them are among the 25 wealthiest individuals in the world. Alice Walton is worth an estimated $21 billion dollars, which makes $1.2 billion not a sizeable amount of money, and given the dividends she receives from her shares, an amount that will be replenished shortly. Unless, of course, we ask how that museum was really paid for?

Between the mid-1970s and the present, wage income as a share of GDP in the United States has been in steady decline (Figure 3). With inflation-adjusted stagnant wages, and rising costs—housing, healthcare, and education, to name a few—so-called “middle class” Americans tried to cling to the American Dream they inherited from their parents. As deindustrialization sapped many long-term and no longer reliable jobs, the globalization of production of consumer goods moved overseas, allowing them to be purchased by a wage-constrained American consumer at lower prices. Walmart was a pioneer of expansion based upon the premise that this massive structural shift in the economic demographics of the country would last.

![Fig. 3: Real wages as a percentage of United States G.D.P., 1945 to 2012, note the peak during the 1970s](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/)

or dividends, has beneficial tax implications as does the donated art, that are unlikely to dent its benefactor’s considerable wealth.

An estimated 10% of the population is “unbanked” with little to no access to savings or credit, and many are living in excess of their dwindling means. Should read: Twelve million Americans live paycheck to paycheck and use a variety of short term loan facilities to borrow, on average, just under $400 eight times per year, often paying interest over the life of the short-term loan in excess of $500. The fastest growing form of this architecture is something like an indicator species for the health of the economy, as people move in and out of subsistence poverty. Behold the Title Pawn (Figure 4). The way a Title Pawn works is you take something you own, like your car, and use it as collateral for a loan, up to about $5000. Then, assuming you can come up with the money to repay the loan and the double-digit interest payments, you get your title back. Otherwise, you lose your car. These are found everywhere in the Southeast and in Texas, and are growing fast. Current job postings in Georgia are dominated by part-time nursing positions and exciting opportunities to work at TitleMax, the fastest growing title pawn franchise in the country. Between 2004 and 2007 approximately 31% of the population went through impoverished circumstances lasting more than two months, before the Great Recession.

THE REAL BILBAO EFFECT AND THE SPANISH BUILDING BUBBLE

Architecture history is full of stories of urban revival and triumphalism through monumentality. Long before the “Bilbao Effect,” there was the Beauberg Effect, the Sydney Opera House, the Paris Opera House and the Eiffel Tower. Yet there is little actual evidence that these expensive, unique, and significant architectures are actually a good investment for the people and urban areas that underwrite them with their labor and taxes—aside from an unproven value of tourist dollars tied to the architectures, and the cultural value they provide to the city as a whole.

The Bilbao Effect changed all that with the convincing argument that cultural monuments are actually good for the economy. In 2003, the city of Bilbao declared that the cost of Frank Gehry’s 1997 masterpiece museum was finally paid for in full. By all accounts, the “Bilbao Effect” worked, reversing an industrial decline in a formerly anonymous town with an influx of tourist dollars.

Indeed visitors to Bilbao increased steadily through 2006. Yet the declaration of success hid a tremendous cost that would not be revealed until after 2010. In addition to building a shiny new building, the city borrowed money to improve the tourist experience. They underwrote the development of new hotels, beautified the streets, commissioned public art, and improved transportation. Seemingly overnight, luxury hotels, nice restaurants and other affluent traveler amenities appeared. With these improvements, the city experienced a surge in employment, largely as a result of low-wage service and construction jobs—waiters, maids, gardeners, carpenters and others who, presumably, had to keep the museum polished.

All that changed in 2010 as the global credit crisis unleashed itself on Europe. Only Ireland has spent a larger percentage of its available resources on building than Spain in the past decade. Spain employed more people and loaned more money for building,
funds run by Goldman Sachs and Blackrock arrived in Bilbao, Spain to purchase dozens of residential buildings at distressed prices, in order to rent them out to the dwindling and increasingly impoverished population at profitable rates.15

WHERE DOES ARCHITECTURE COME FROM: EVERYTHING YOU BUILD WITH COMES OUT OF A HOLE IN THE GROUND

To achieve its unique glow and, in theory, to minimize the weight of the structure, the Bilbao museum turned to a unique material: titanium. While the use of titanium in Gehry’s museum was overt, architects for over a century have relied on its properties to fulfill their abstract ideologies of minimalism, as titanium dioxide is the principle ingredient in paint—in particular, white paint. Titanium is harvested from sands rich in minerals like rutile, largely located in proximity to the ocean. Many of these mines, like others, around the world are artisanal, meaning they are unregulated and dug by hand in out of the way locations from India to Cambodia to Columbia. To distill the pure white titanium dioxide from the ore, the minerals are reacted with chlorine or cyanide then burned. The largest titanium mine in the world is currently under construction on the coast of Africa.

If architecture is to be truly sustainable, it is important to understand the landscape interventions and economic consequences of the global trade in materials, because everything you build with comes out of a hole in the ground somewhere. Modernity has given the world many wonders, but the benefits always come with a cost. The copper that allows you to plug in your laptop or tablet, use lights, watch movies, plug in your electric cars of the future, keep your food from spoiling, and to pump your clean water into your house and cool the air in the summer comes from massive pits in South America, Africa, India, Indonesia, Australia, Canada, Mongolia, China, and even the United States. So does the coal, gas and uranium that feeds the electrical power plants, the iron ore that gives you steel, the potash that is spread on fields to grow your food, the aggregate and binders that make up your concrete, the oil that goes into the asphalt you drive on, and the plastics you rely on every day. Those pits are home to hundreds of thousands of human beings laboring by hand or on machines, using up copious amounts of land, energy and water to provide architecture with all the components and resources fundamentally necessary to produce a building. Those people have to live somewhere, which is most definitely a form of architecture. They need to eat, take
shelter and move around, which is definitely a form of urbanism. The giant warehouses filled with low-paid contract workers who rush to fill orders, using complex intermodal and software systems design to deliver your cardboard-wrapped online purchase to your door in under 48 hours—that too is architecture.17 Before what we call architecture can even exist today all of this has to happen first.

GLOBAL URBANIZATION: THE WALKABLE CITY AND THE ECONOMICS OF THE DENSITY MYTH.

In 2012, for the first time in human history, an estimated half of the world's population lived in what we call urban, versus rural, circumstances. To make room for these people we need architecture, and to make architecture we need three things: space, materials, and, given the structure of the financial system, money.

In his book *The Walkable City*, popular urbanist Jeff Speck notes that among the many advantages of cities with “high walkability scores,” one is that real estate fetches a significant premium. This is of course good for a city in need of cash, as it can increase revenue through rising property taxes and the ancillary benefits of increasing affluence. He also notes, as do many others, that the so-called “creative class prefers to live in places with street life, an unquestioned essential element of successful cities tracing its lineage back to Jane Jacobs.”18 However, the idea that premium pricing for housing in the “walkable city” is a good thing is vastly overstated, remarkably understudied, and thus unproven. Indeed, Speck seems to be saying that only a certain class of citizen should be able to benefit from the high-quality walking city, leaving the less-affluent to commute in from the less desirable driving suburb where, presumably, they can afford to live.

Gentrification has driven out residents of the desirable walking cities all over the western world. Of course, beyond the so-called West, in Asia and Africa the scale of urbanization and human displacement makes the Western experience look puny by comparison. Lovers of these walkable cities cite their density of culture as their defining feature, yet they rarely speak of economic density or actual human diversity. Density, for such proponent, is used only in reference to the quantity of multi-story buildings. If one looks at historical data for cities such as New York, London, Rome, Paris, San Francisco and many other “walkable cities,” the actual human density has decreased significantly over time. Indeed, actual density, measured by human habitation, has declined in places like Manhattan—which seems densely populated due the scale of its architecture, and has skyrocketed in cities with high poverty and seemingly low-density architecture. Why do these famously desirable cities experience this rather universal phenomenon? And is this an appropriate measurement for the quality of rapidly growing cities around the world, with their own skyrocketing prices and rampant inequality?

Again, the answer is real economics. The aforementioned metropolises have largely become unaffordable to the majority of their citizens, who are forced to move out to where housing options do not demonstrate Speck’s “premium” price combined with increasing demand from an ever-increasing affluence of a decreasing share of the population. Therefore, human density in the great cities of the world has declined, even as their populations grow. It is all well and good to design walkability into urban cores; however, the cost of such programs on the price of the “walkable” real estate location also requires an increased commuter burden, including time and transportation into such areas from the periphery, on those who are least able to bear it.

There is a massive hidden cost of the density myth as characterized by the sustainable and quality of life arguments for walkability. This largely unquestioned good has driven up the cost of urban habitation, often through debt-financed development, particularly in an era of declining wage opportunities. Indeed, the rise of the Global Plutocrat has magnified a time-honored tradition moving wealth out of politically or legally uncertain host countries, like China, to preserve it in the form of high-value real estate, usually in cities with laws and high cultural value like Manhattan, London, Paris, or favorable tax structures like Dubai or Singapore. Architects catering to tech-millionaires in the Bay Area and FIRE economy beneficiaries in cities like Manhattan, or plutocrats in Hong Kong or Singapore should ask about the habitation and urban living requirements of all the others who are necessary for city living.19 Who polishes your floors, cleans your high-style tectonic glass curtain walls, empties your trash, provides your food and clothing? Do they have the luxury of walking to work when average rents are more than their monthly wages? Where do they have to live and shop, and how much of their limited income is spent on a long commute into the unaffordable city core to work?
Who can actually afford to live in a walking city, with its “creative” or financial class, high rents and property taxes? Where do they have to buy their food and how much do they have to pay relative to their wage growth? For the top five percent, who have achieved virtually all the wage growth in the United States over the past four decades, this is no problem. What about the rest of us? Is “good” urbanism only synonymous with luxury habitation and affluent access to goods and services? Density advocates should ask themselves what real density looks like by taking a trip to Dharavi in Mumbai, India. Dharavi is possibly the most densely populated, and one of the poorest urban environments, in the world. They might want to study Lagos, Nigeria, arguably the fastest growing city on earth, adding half a million people per year to its already enormous population. I would also suggest Dhaka, Bangladesh, whose slums are rapidly filling with people driven off their lands by violent flooding and rising sea-levels associated with global warming.

Anti-sprawl New Urbanists should also ask how historical urban forms are actually funded and sustained over time. The much-admired Campo in the beautiful Tuscan hill town of Siena is a prime example of the relationship between urbanism and finance, from its original construction to its recent history and uncertain future. Siena is home to the oldest bank in the world, Monte di Paschi. Founded in the 15th century, its headquarters are in a stunning medieval villa on the beautiful Campo (Figure 6).

Over the years, Monte di Paschi has not only funded a charity that funds the neighborhoods that compete in the Pailo, it has donated money to the city and employed a large percentage of the population. Unfortunately, Monte di Paschi is embroiled in a derivatives scandal that requires billions in bailout money. The bank’s former leaders are in prison, it is shrinking its balance sheet and labor force, and it has been forced to cut off its charitable work. Siena will still have the tourists, but given the importance of the general prosperity of its residents to the bank’s revenues and the culture derived from its home-grown financial industry, what will happen now?

UNSUSTAINABLE PEDAGOGIES:
THE INVISIBLE HINGE AND THE COST OF AVANT-GARDISM

In the past decade, Norman Foster has completed a number of expensive projects, including a $500 million dollar expansion of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the new $3 billion dollar headquarters for Apple, and of course the $600 million library renovation in the midst of slashed funding for other public schools and libraries in New York City. On a tour of the Boston MFA with my students in 2010, the project architect mentioned a number of fabulous design features: the imported stone from Scandinavia...
because of the way it weathered, the state-of the art sound system that directs two speakers at every possible hearing location in the central atrium, and the giant glass cases, designed to hold amazing collections of art and furniture in context. One is even large enough for an automobile. These cases have to open for the curators, so the hinge that holds the heavy museum glass has to be very strong. Because the design of the museum embraced minimalist aesthetics, the hinges had to be completely hidden. They were imported from Italy at a cost of $40,000 for a single hinge (Figure 7). This is roughly the median household income in the United States, if you average out the wealthiest metropolitan regions, including Boston and New York. Every single design decision, even those not required for the structure, imposed an enormous cost on the completion of this building. What other forms of shelter could be bought for the cost of the invisible hinge? A house in Bluff, perhaps?

A CONCLUSION OF SORTS: MAKE NO BIG PLANS

How do historians, architects and urbanists even begin to describe a site such the one pictured to the right (Figure 8)? Aside from the one-size-fits all predictable sprawl and capitalism critique, this site actually tells a more complex story. Each lot, and each business on this site, has a difficult and shifting relationship to the city. Beyond zoning, title rules, and the generic “sprawl" aesthetics, the revenue and economic condition varies from site to site depending on the relationship of the owner to his elected representative, the corporate entity to its taxable corporate location (possibly outside the United State), the variances between state and city law, local regulations, special tax exemptions, and the ability of the debt-holder to influence the extraction of revenue on business and development loans underwritten by the municipality. And that is before one considers the economic and shelter footprint of the "jobs" equation—who built it, who works here and where do they live, and what are their economic circumstances in relation to their incomes and debt-levels? What do their neighborhoods and schools look like, and how is the city of Savannah meeting their needs on declining revenue? Within a mile of this site in several directions are relatively identical bungalow and ranch houses. In Parkside, if you can find one, they are selling for more than $250,000, while in Thunderbolt nearby and along Skidaway itself you can easily purchase any number of the exact same houses for under $100,000. The median individual income in the United States in 2013 is about $27,000 dollars, meaning that 50% of working Americans make less than that. Can you survive on that? Can you even design for those nearly 70 million people? Impoverished neighborhoods, already struggling with decades of wage stagnation, fared much worse during the recent recession and have yet to see signs of recovery.

The aesthetics of sprawl and the style of the houses themselves do not account for the difference, nor does anything in the image above. Rather, economic and demographic variables, such as racial bias in Savannah mere decades after forced desegregation, and relative neighborhood affluence, income, property taxes, crime rates, and other real estate “desirability” factors account for the difference.

Daniel Burnham, at the dawn of the 20th century, uttered what might be the most dangerous phrase in architectural history: "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men’s blood. Make big plans, aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble logical diagram once recorded will never die." In 1931, buried in the Hoover Commission Report assembled to deal with worsening
conditions of cities and wage-earner households in America at the dawn of the Great Depression, business leaders and planners took Burnham’s call to heart. In the Report on the Benefits of Bigness, they cited economies of scale as an unquestioned benefit, unleashing decades of massive government funded projects on our cities that we now refer to as urban renewal.23 Of course the benefits of bigness, efficiency and clarity, were rarely matched by the cost, imposed on uprooted communities, displaced people, forced housing programs or the architectures and neighborhoods that ended up in landfills to make room for the ideological dreams of large-scale avant-gardism.

For the future, as you try to assess the scale of your intervention, I encourage you to think small. Make a small opportunity into something special for the community that must take ownership, long after you are gone, and long before the full costs or your ideological dreams of large-scale avant-gardism.

ENDNOTES
10. This critique of the relationship between patron and artist is hardly a new idea; however, it has largely vanished from the architectural pedagogy of the university. For a popular account of the resurgent Gilded Age, see Chrystia Freeland, Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-rich and the Fall of Everyone Else (New York: Penguin, 2012).
17. Danielle Kucera, “Amazon Ramps Up $13.9 Billion Warehouse Building Spree,” Bloomberg News (August 21, 2013); see also, Mac McClelland, “I was a warehouse wage-slave,” Mother Jones (June 2012).
18. Jeff Speck, The Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time (2012); Speck is also the co-author of the popular new urbanist manifesto Suburban Nation.
STORYTELLING AS AGENCY
THE URBAN GALLERY STUDIO IN NEW ORLEANS

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Lisa Henry Benham was raised in New Orleans. She graduated from Harvard Graduate School of Design with a Masters of Architecture 1996. Lisa is currently an associate professor of architecture at the University of Utah, College of Architecture + Planning. Her research includes projects and publications which are focused on the issues of gender and race, including two projects funded by the NEA: “The Dresser Trunk Project” funded in 2006, and the “The Urban Gallery Project” funded in 2008, for which Lisa was the principal investigator. Lisa is in the process of completing her Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Utah.

The dramatic split between the tourist and resident sections of New Orleans is paralleled by the split between the New Orleans projected in the media and the patterns of “cultural citizenship” specific to it, (Flores 1997, 13). This is nowhere more clear than in images of the city broadcast following hurricane Katrina in which images of blackness, poverty and underwater neighborhoods became indistinguishable, and came to stand in opposition to images of more or less whiteness, tourism, and grounds above water. Initial plans to rebuild the city mirrored these oppositions and recreated the city for the resourceful, sparking a debate about citizenship and ownership of this place. Against this background, the University of Utah began a series of studio collaborations with the Broadmoor community in its struggle to rebuild. These projects created an occasion for the students to reflect on the opportunities available to architects for conceiving of architectural practice as a form of “cultural citizenship.”
Power and politics in New Orleans are intimately connected with acting out cultural identity. Mardi Gras, the second line, the jazz funeral, block parties, and street performances are all forms of acting-out. They are displays of pride in place and collective identity, and creators of the complex cultural map of the city. These forms are all currently associated with the French Quarter, but they have a much broader and pervasive influence in the city. They have always been means of marking place with a particular identity, set of values, and ways of being. They create community, cohesion, and ultimately political power. The first Black parades, for example, not only mocked the Creole traditions, but also acknowledged significant businesses and community leaders within a particular territory. The social clubs, which organized the parades, were active year-round in supporting their communities. These organizations were also the foundations for many of the Black political movements throughout the history of the city. This tradition continues to activate the city. It is a form of public agency, a mode of communication—talking back to those in power—as well as a claim of ownership of black neighborhoods and communities on behalf of their residents. The continued importance of these forms of public and civic acting-out in local neighborhoods is evident in the efforts of communities to claim ownership of these traditions, as well as their repetition in spite of the diaspora caused by Hurricane Katrina.

New Orleans is still undergoing a transformation due to the devastation of the city’s fabric and infrastructure. The impact of this devastation on the traditions through which its citizens have laid claims to it is being played out both locally and nationally. The dramatic split between the tourist and resident sections of the city is paralleled by the split between the New Orleans projected in the media and the patterns of “cultural citizenship” specific to it. This is nowhere more clear than in images of the city that were broadcast following Hurricane Katrina in which images of blackness, poverty and underwater neighborhoods became indistinguishable, and came to stand in opposition to images of more or less whiteness, tourism, and grounds above water. A clear reflection of the inequities of the given economic and urban policies, this mirror did not induce the planners to seize the rehabilitation of New Orleans as an opportunity to correct the injustices perpetuated by their forebears. Instead, they heightened this opposition. In the face of continued diaspora of the most affected residents, conversations about re-creating the city of New Orleans revolved around the beneficiaries of this recreation. This opposition between white and black, visitor and resident, resourceful and weak, informed the numerous plans and conversations about the future of the city. It justified in part the Action Plan for New Orleans, which relegated large portions of flooded areas to wetland reclamation and park space, and promoted the more affluent and tourist areas.

The Action Plan for New Orleans made New Orleans synonymous with the French Quarter. The new plans for the city placed the origin of cultural practices worthy of celebrating not at the sites of origin, but in the commercial district. Accordingly it was determined that if the French Quarter was preserved, then the rich cultural history of New Orleans would also be preserved. Therefore, other areas that contributed to this culture throughout its history came to be seen as dispensable. However, magical as it can be at times, the logic that governs the French Quarter was not that of “cultural citizenship” but of financial returns. It is in the nature of such a sector to repurpose culture for consumption. Important as is its relationship to the rest of the city that sustains it and is sustained by it, the cleansing of culture and the suppression of its impalpable elements are not synonymous with the culture of New Orleans. The unique brand of multiculturalism and difference displayed in the French Quarter has been carefully scripted. It is “a cultural imaginary, a fantasy, it itself not a real life culture but a constructed theatrical one.” This municipality - and business-sanctioned culture fetishizes the practices to which it alludes and depoliticizes the rituals from which it borrows. The images of blackness associated with this space fit the narrative created for the tourist. They are largely comfortable and non-threatening images of musicians and street performers, removed from the poverty of much of the black community in New Orleans.

It is this poverty that we saw following Katrina, a poverty which was not only conflated with race, but one which was also carefully constructed according to the discourse which describes Black
poverty and property value in America. This representation is critical to discussions about rebuilding which attempt to whitewash tourist areas and tourist narratives on the surface of New Orleans all over again.

The *Action Plan for New Orleans* was rejected following massive collective and individual protests. New Orleans traditions played a significant role in claiming the right to return. In addition, citizens simply refused to vacate their houses, living in horrible conditions to prevent any progress on the plan. The city then proposed the *Bring New Orleans Back Plan*. This plan required neighborhoods to reach a minimum return threshold to be included in the new map of the city. Although eventually this scheme was abandoned for a neighborhood-based approach to rebuilding the city, it placed tremendous pressure on communities and individuals to prove not only their determination to return, but also their contributions to the cultural life of the city. The actions of individuals would have a dramatic effect on the new urban landscape of the city as inhabitants re-create place through their continued occupation or displacement. The focus of the reconstruction shifted to a local process organized by community centers and individuals, as neighborhoods struggled to achieve the return rate that would put them back on the map. This activity led to the visibility of more local and localized traditions. Although the geographic map of New Orleans suggests that there are parts of the city that can be saved and parts that will continue to face flooding and destruction, the cultural map suggests something entirely different.

Against this background, the University of Utah began a series of studio collaborations with the Broadmoor community in its struggle to rebuild. Broadmoor is in the most low-lying part of New Orleans that is in the center of the city. It was flooded with up to 10 feet of water during the hurricane, and was marked for redevelopment as park/wetland in the initial plans. But this community has the oldest Neighborhood Organization, the Broadmoor Improvement Association founded in 1930, which has been a tremendous source of stability for it since the 1940s. The University of Utah, School of Architecture (SOA) participated in two graduate level studios in New Orleans. In the first of these, the SOA developed a relationship with the Broadmoor community through the collaboration for the redesign of their community center, which had been severely damaged in the flood. This studio was a first-year graduate studio conducted in the spring of 2008. It involved a traditional design process, in which students visited the community early in the semester, developed a program to serve the community’s needs, and then returned to Utah for the design process. Students presented several designs to the community as models and presentation drawings. Students’ encounters with the community and their civic practices lead to a second, more speculative studio, the Urban Gallery Studio, which took place the following fall, 2008. This second project was designed to support the community’s practice of storytelling and ownership with the design of a collective memorial. This work was installed on-site in the summer of 2009 to mark the fourth anniversary of the storm.

By the time we engaged the Broadmoor community, it had already established itself as a powerful voice for community redevelopment supporting both individual ownership and collective action. The students participating in the first studio quickly settled on a concept that focused on storytelling and community mapping. This concept was reminiscent of the “talking book,” an African-American narrative trope that appears in many slave narratives and continues to be referenced throughout African-American literature to date. It is used to describe the power relationships between the African-American oral communities and the literate communities in the United States. It also addresses the devaluation of oral tradition and worldview in this country and the tensions among African-Americans as a result of the contact with the dominant literate society. Of major importance here is the development of literacy among African-American slaves. The talking book was both a way of talking back to and against a system that excluded Blacks from citizenship. In other words, it is a way of reclaiming

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*Fig. 1: Parks and Open Space Plan:* This is one aspect of *The Action Plan for New Orleans*. The large circle in the center of the crescent is the Broadmoor Neighborhood, in this plan designated as an area for future parkland.
Another critical aspect of this storytelling was an acknowledgment of the conflicting emotions about returning and rebuilding. The community members had made changes to their everyday lives since Katrina, a central aspect of this new map. Both gaps and reconnections in the daily life of the community were highlighted. As stated by William Flores and Rina Benmayor: “Cultural citizenship, while embracing acts of political contestation, should not be limited to the broad manifestations of organized social movements. But rather should include more subtle cultural practices that nonetheless play an important part in creating social and cultural identity. We began to think of cultural citizenship as a broad continuum of social practices ranging from everyday life activities to broad social drama.”

The students realized that the daily struggle to survive here was an important aspect of claiming citizenship. The studio also recognized this storytelling as an act of spatial agency and ownership. These strong voices, and the oral map they created, were the inspiration for expanding the program of the Broadmoor Community Center into a canvas, an opportunity for individual and community expression, as well as providing the groundwork for the Urban Gallery Studio that followed.

The residents' stories expressed a desire for a Hurricane Katrina memorial that celebrated their resilience and life in the city four years after the storm. The second studio created the Urban Gallery as a collective memorial. Instead of a traditional monument that reduced history to a simple and singular narrative, this memorial would attempt to recognize the incomplete nature of the story and its continual retelling. The memorial would itself become an ephemeral map of this community. It would provide a surface on which residents could write and erase their stories of presence and belonging. It would also serve as a container where people could leave and take objects that revealed their experience and ownership of the memorial and the places it marked. It was intended to give these stories a “real presence in our physical experience of the city.”

The Urban Gallery was also intended to recognize the traditions of appropriation and improvisation, which are present in the culture, as the basis of design.

As mentioned earlier, New Orleans has numerous traditions of marking territory by activating it through civic ritual practices. The tradition of storytelling encountered by the students extended these ritual practices and mediated the physical geography with a mimetic map that told stories of transgression of the official map of the place. Community members wove their own stories into a detailed mapping of their community as they walked the streets with the students, describing each house and neighbor in remarkable detail, in some cases going back to the 1930s when the first houses were built in the area. This spoken map became a reconstruction of the community with “nothing but voice,” since it is the community “who shapes, edits and narrates [their] own tale, thereby combining action with the representation of action to define ‘reality’ by its representation.”

The first few weeks of the studio were devoted to research. Students studied the geography and patterns of development with a particular focus on the representation of race that marked the pre-Katrina map of the city. Students then did a survey of the reporting on the city in the lead-up to and the aftermath...
of the storm, focusing on the role of race and poverty in these discussions. Because we did not begin with a precise program, students also studied the history of civic rituals and art installations to develop a program that could celebrate the performance of identity in relationship to place and the value of collective memory and storytelling in a city that had suffered a catastrophic disaster.

Students then traveled to the city to study and document the neighborhood. Students also had opportunities for small group and individual interactions with residents. They walked with citizens and listened to them weave together the narratives and counter-narratives of the city with the stories of each house, each occupant present or absent, and their own stories of struggle and rebuilding. “For the people who inhabit or once inhabited these places, these spaces and abandoned buildings are not empty. In their minds’ eye, these spaces are filled with images of places that are no longer, with people who once were neighbors, and with stories of events that once took place.”9 Their stories were full of humor and irony, and their speech and tone hinted at the slow rhythm of the city. These stories inspired the students’ ideas about the relationship of architecture to cultural citizenship. The program and form took shape as the students wove the stories with drawings, collage, and design.

As the students developed the program, the memorial became a series of transient elements that would be designed to travel throughout the community and collect information, objects, stories, painting, and graffiti. The gallery had a flexible system that could be put together in a number of ways. For example, it could either be organized in a central space to mark the presence of a particular neighborhood institution, or installed sequentially to mark the route of a second line or the territory of a block party. The Urban Gallery was a temporary intervention on the existing urban fabric inspired by a tradition of constructions in New Orleans which appropriate space for art, commentary, and street performances. We chose sites to support the Broadmoor Community and recognize them for their community service.

The studio used the rough framework of a competition, a mode of practice requiring a clear articulation of form, idea, and feasibility, as well as a precise timeframe. It helped students to develop individual responses to the community. However, we used this framework as a means of communication and negotiation rather than a way to choose winners. Students developed proposals that included stories of residents’ encounters with the gallery, fabrication, budgets, and sources of recycled materials for construction. These stories were captured on a series of boards that we sent to the community for review. Rather than choosing discrete winners, we pulled together ideas to create collaborations between the students and the community members who identified with their designs. “For spatial agency to be exercised in its fullest sense though, these actions and interventions always take place through negotiation and deliberation and ultimately bring about the empowerment of those involved.”10 Ideas and elements proposed by different individuals were woven into a collective composition that could be used to map the neighborhood and serve as a canvas for community storytelling. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts enabled us to build and install three final designs. Components of the projects were initially built in Utah using recycled materials, with the final stage of construction to take place in New Orleans. For this stage we used materials salvaged by The Green Project, an organization that gathers materials from condemned buildings for construction and renovation.

Fig. 3: “Competition” board for momento.
Design team: Brad Brinton, Shalae Larsen, and Shilpa Narayanamurthy
The first installation was composed for the Broadmoor annual block party. It was installed in a line along Galvez Street. The second installation became a part of the Broadmoor Katrina Anniversary Celebration and Memorial block party, which took place at the site of the Rosa Keller Branch Library. Scheduled for reconstruction, the library was still awaiting the process, and therefore operating in a small, temporary building. The temporary arrangement was incorporated into the sequence of the Urban Gallery Project. Our goal was to amplify the stories about rebuilding voiced in the Broadmoor community and the form of culture and citizenship that it actuated.

The Broadmoor Community has succeeded in rethinking and “reacting” the map of the city of New Orleans, claiming the right to ownership of this space. The spoken map of this community valued the voices of its inhabitants. It inspired a process in which spatial agency and ownership was explored at every level. The ownership of this place and the right to tell its story was set against the official planning process that initially excluded citizens. Protesting and talking back, the citizens of Broadmoor shifted the boundaries of this process as well as the maps that emerged. This project created an occasion for the students to reflect on the...
opportunities available to architects for conceiving of architectural practice as a form of “cultural citizenship” and supporting spatial agency. It forced them to question the ownership of the process of design and the ideas that emerge from it. Was design the work of professional designers or the community members whom they served? The Urban Gallery Studio projected architecture as a negotiation. It disrupted the rigidity of the architectural competition. It undermined the notion of architecture as the work of all-knowing experts, and finally these trained experts as the only worthy spatial agents.

ENDNOTES


7. For an excellent discussion of spatial agency see Awan, Nishat, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till. 2011. Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture. (New York: Routledge). Although this text was published after the studio was conducted and the work installed, the discussion of spatial agency and the description of the operations of spatial agency in Chapter 3 capture the spirit and pedagogical intent of the studio.


PHOTO ESSAY AS AGENCY
SPOMENIKS OF YUGOSLAVIA CINO

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Laura Hardy is a Designer at Hilliard Architects (San Francisco), working on licensure. Architectural work has included positions at DesignBuildBLUFF, Gigaplex Architects, and personal work under Black&Blue. Prior to architecture, she worked at Goldman Sachs & Co. and Fidelity Investments. She’s an alumni of the University of Utah M.Arch program, where she received the Bailey Traveling Fellowship, with an undergraduate degree in Economics.

Shawn Komlos is a graduate student at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, completing the M.Arch program in spring 2014. He is an alumni of the University of Utah, where he graduated with a B.S. in Architecture in 2010. Professionally, Shawn has held positions as a Designer at Future Cities Lab in San Francisco, CA, Lead Designer at Plastik Banana Design Workshop in SLC, UT, as a Research assistant in CCA’s Rapid Prototyping Studio, and on numerous freelance design and fabrication projects.

Rejecting strict Soviet Marxist economic policies, Josip Broz Tito unified post WWII Yugoslavia under a mixed ideological socialist economy. Integral to rallying national support among the region’s disparate states and ethnicities was the commission of a network of monuments (spomenik) commemorating shared cultural histories of the events of the recent war. Cast into the landscape, the monuments are heroic constructions, built of durable materials and expressed as sculpture while occupying the scale of architecture. As Tito’s network of political and economic supporters became fragmented after his death, so did his vision for a utopian state. Spatially and formally striking within the landscape, the spomeniks once promoted and maintained under Tito’s economic umbrella now stand stripped of utility and with a heightened political identity. Their presence bears a physical reminder of the region’s collective heritage, which has come into jeopardy in light of their recently debated destruction and sequential historical void.
SPOMENIKS OF YUGOSLAVIA
LAURA HARDY & SHAWN KOMLOS

IMAGE OF MONUMENT NETWORK MAP

Base Map taken from Google Earth. All Imagery created on the map was created by Laura Hardy & Shawn Komlos. The map shows the eight monuments visited. The black dots represent spomeniks we found the location, but did not end up visiting.
MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF PETROVA GORA:

During World War II, the mountain range of Petrova Gora housed the communist Partisan’s central military hospital. The mountain range contained a system of underground chambers and cabins scattered throughout. It was never discovered by the Axis powers and operated until May 1945.
IMAGE OF MONUMENT PETROVA GORA.
Location: Outside the city of Zagreb, Croatia.
Design: Vojin Bakic (Croatian Sculptor of Serbian Descent).
MEMORIALIZED EVENT SUTJESKA MONUMENT:
The Battle of the Sutjeska was the final phase in the Fifth Enemy Attack by the Axis powers, aiming to destroy Yugoslavian partisan forces. Yugoslavia's success at this battle marked a turning point in the war.
IMAGE OF MONUMENT TO BATTLE OF THE SUTJESKA.
Location: City of Tjentiste, Bosnia & Herzegovina.
Design: Miodrag Živkovic (Serbian).
MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF KORČANICA MONUMENT:
Unknown / Unconfirmed.

Large photo: Shawn Komlos
Top photo: Laura Hardy
Middle photo: Laura Hardy
Bottom photo: Shawn Komlos
IMAGE OF MONUMENT KORĆANICA.
Location: Grmeč mountain, outside city of Lusci Palanka, Bosnia & Herzegovina.
Constructed: Unavailable.
Design: Unavailable.
Location: Outside the City of Uzice, Serbia.

Design: Current complex completed by Miodrag Zivkovic (Serbian Sculptor), Aleksander Bokic (Serbian Architect) and Stevan Zivanovic.


MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF KADINJACA MONUMENT:
Dedicated to the soldiers of the Workers Battalion who died defending partisan territory.
MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF OSTRA MONUMENT:
Unknown / Unconfirmed
IMAGE OF MONUMENT AT OSTRA
Location: Church of St. Petka, city of Ostra, Serbia
Design: Miodrag Živković (Serbian Sculptor).
MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF KOSMAJ MONUMENT: Dedicated to the Fallen Soldiers of Kosmaj Partisan Detachment.

Large photo: Laura Hardy
Top photo: Shawn Komlos
Middle photo: Laura Hardy
Bottom photo: Laura Hardy
IMAGE OF MONUMENT
Location: Kosmaj Mountain, South of Belgrade, Serbia.
Design: Vojin Stojić (Sculptor), and Gradimir Medaković (Architect).
Jasenovac was the location of a WWII concentration camp (Camp III). Operating from 1941-1945, it followed the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia (April 1941), when the “Independent State of Croatia” was established as a pro-Nazi government (the Ustashe). The Ustashe Party then began a systematic policy of racial extermination of Serbs, Romas and Jews living within its borders. Despite the awareness efforts of the Jasenovac monument of the tragedies that had occurred in the region, they have not entirely rid the region of its nationalist differences.
IMAGE OF MONUMENT JASENOVAC
Location: City of Jasenovac, Croatia
Design: Bogdan Bogdanovic (Serbian Architect)
MEMORIALIZED EVENT OF THE MONUMENT TO THE REVOLUTION:
Dedicated to the people of Moslavina during WWII, a renegade region during Axis occupation. The Podgaric village was the centre of this uprising.
IMAGE OF MONUMENT TO THE REVOLUTION (of the people of Moslavina)
Location: City of Podgaric, Croatia.
Design: Dušan Džamonja (Croatian Sculptor of Macedonian Descent).
QUESTIONS OF SCALE
SIZE MATTERS

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With the advent of globalization, hyper-urbanization, and the ensuing environmental crisis, there is an urgency for innovating in the mega-scale. Architects, Landscape Architects, Urban designers, and Planners alike are being challenged to engage larger territories and more complex issues. The modes of practice that emerge pursue seemingly utopian visions that are necessarily grounded in an idea of architecture as environmental activism. The question remains: Is this new scale the new platform from which designers will once again engage with society? Where do we go from here? What of the other scale?

This paper does not intend to re-construct the landscape of contemporary practice, and much less to produce a comprehensive narrative of contemporary architecture. It is an attempt to outline the silhouette of this moment and to situate it in the ever present, overarching dialogue of autonomy versus social engagement.
At a moment well beyond the optimism of the boom era and its often toxic relationship with the environment, fully immersed in the plethora of environmental crises and operating within an increasingly grim economic outlook, the emerging practices of today are forced to envision an entirely new mode of practice and operate in an entirely different domain than the generations that came immediately before them. In a 2009 essay titled “Landscape as Infrastructure,” Pierre Bélanger recounts that there are 400,000 toxic sites that dot the American landscape and that they are estimated at two trillion dollars. He suggests that out of this—what he refers to as “crisis and failure”—new opportunities arise for new modes of practice.

As environmental crisis has brought about an awareness of the connectivity between various social, political, economic, and ecological factors, we must ask how the design discipline will respond. The question is whether we are at a moment of true paradigm shift in disciplinary terms. This paper does not intend to re-construct the landscape of contemporary practice, and much less to produce a comprehensive narrative of contemporary architecture. It hopes to trace the activities of anticipatory practices and search for patterns in their quest for situating their work in the discipline’s frontier.

In the ‘90s in response to melting mountain caps, rising sea levels, and dying fish, architects responded with green buildings, LEED certification, and passive systems. In the past decade or so, however, as scientists impressed the connections between energy consumption in the North and the destruction of bee habitats in the South, architects began to connect the initial one-off architectural innovations to ecological and systems thinking. This necessitated collaboration with experts in other disciplines, larger intervention, and a more holistic treatment of environment and ecology.

With the advent of globalization, hyper-urbanization, and the ensuing environmental crisis, there is urgency for innovating in the mega-scale. Governments in the Global South are planning whole new cities and developing entire territories, while others are making policies that cross national borders. Architects, landscape architects, urban designers, and planners alike are being challenged to engage larger territories and more complex issues. The modes of practice that emerge pursue seemingly utopian visions that are necessarily grounded in an idea of architecture as environmental activism. The decade leading up to this moment, loosely called the “boom era,” elevated the architectural vanguard into cultural icons and reduced, if not constrained, them to the production of iconic buildings, which had very little to do with the early modernist avant-garde idealism and its sociopolitical tendencies. The complexity of our contemporary predicament, however, necessitates a wider attention span and larger scale operation. The question remains: Is this new scale the new platform from which designers will once again engage society? Where do we go from here? What of the other scale?

The shift in the scale of architectural practice today comes with a number of implications. As there is very little about the environment that does not involve policy and politics, architectural practice is implicated with policy and politics. In fact, environmental activism has brought about a whole new social order, one that ties our politics to our diet and has generated a whole new financial regime. While we have not yet observed the manifestations or the impact of this condition in architectural practice, it would appear that as these issues become part of popular and intellectual imagination, they will by necessity infiltrate the design disciplines.

For the greater part of the 20th century, the single-family house was the space of innovation for architects. Architects used the domestic scale as a testing ground for larger ideas. The house, small enough to afford an experimental approach, was one of the most programmatically and culturally complex domains of practice, where experiments in tectonics, materiality, technology, and sociocultural issues overlapped. The examples, as varied as they are familiar, span the early years of Modernism, well into mid-century and beyond. Le Corbusier’s Maison Domino, as well as Villa Savoy, the Smithson’s House of Future, the many houses...
designed by Mies, Philip Johnson’s Glass House and Charles & Ray Eames’ Case Study House are some of the examples that have long shaped the discourse of architecture. Later, Venturi, Eisenman, Hejduk and Gehry, among others, experimented in the domestic scale to make equally influential counter arguments. But in 1954, when Architecture Record compiled a “Treasure of Contemporary Houses,” it discussed them mainly in stylistic terms, stating that the “contemporary architecture” had acquired a “new look.” Whether Modern architecture was the architecture of timelessness and function remains open for debate. In the same way that Modernism, in response to the social, cultural and technological conditions of its time, produced a language entirely its own, what has been called the architecture of boom – of the ‘90s and 2000s – became absorbed in making its own formal language. And while Modernism was deeply invested in social agendas, the work produced in the boom era moved away from civic engagement. Built on new digital technologies, it responded to the demands of a market economy with fluid sumptuous forms and formal excesses, producing the “iconic” buildings that became markers of this era. Almost the entire recent oeuvre of Zaha Hadid’s work consists of fluid, scaleless, and beautifully sumptuous forms, regardless of their geographic location, programmatic specificities, or cultural conditions. UN Studio’s Mercedes Benz Museum with its trefoil organization produced a continuous surface that moves through the entire building, undoing any conventional sense of direction and scale. It is a well-known fact that many of these projects are in fact responses to an ever-increasing demand for iconic buildings. While I find the formal and spatial qualities of these projects appealing as much as the next person, it is the numbing effect produced by their cumulative self indulgent oblivion that I find most problematic.

With the same urgency that cultural, financial, institutional and commercial buildings captured the attention of the public in these two decades, installations were imagining new possibilities and generating unprecedented disciplinary discourse imbedded in the dialogue between form, technique and materiality. Architects have used the installation for exploring ideas – tectonic, material, spatial, technological, financial, etc. – and as prototypes for larger projects. Digital technologies and computation compelled architects to test boundaries while making new thinking and problem solving possible, out of which a new mode of practice emerged in the ‘90s and 2000s. A recent panel discussion at MIT considered the architectural installation as “practice and genre.” Among them were Nader Tehrani and Meejin Yoon, who have built on the ‘installation’ as a way to create continuity between ‘experiment’ and ‘building’ and as a means to an intellectual project. Tehrani’s interest in materiality and fabrication technique is evident in a range of installations such as Thin Ply (2001), Change of State (2006), and Voromuro (2006). The installations negotiate the material properties of thin-ply material with specific geometries and structural behaviors. While the latter two are built using Computer Numerically Controlled techniques, the earlier invents notational methods that became the basis for later computational experiments. Much of the research produced during these installations applies fluidly to the whole body of the firm’s work, ranging from built work such as the RISD Fleet Library, to speculative projects such as Vila Moda, Howeler+Yoon has designed and installed a series of interactive installations, such as White Noise (2004), LoRezHiFi (2006), and Windscreen (2011) that experiment with the interface of human cognition and technology. Their winning proposal for the 2012 Audi Challenge uses many of these technologies to envision a future that is more efficient, connected, and sustainable.

I would further speculate that the installation, by virtue of its small size and budget, allowed these smaller practices to maintain a presence. As evident in the examples, it also allowed these practices to develop skills and tools that would become fundamental in enabling them to take on more complex challenges. In this respect installations played the same role as the house may have played in an earlier period in time. The emerging practices at the helm of this new approach have now matured and aspire to build more substantial work. Informed by the processes of their earlier years, the work enjoys material and formal qualities made possible by a certain grain of technological savvy.

In trying to situate the discipline in respect to the expanded environment in which it operates, a look at the events of the ‘60s and ‘70s and their impact on the perception of the environment as we understand it today is prudent. Reinhold Martin points to Nixon’s 1970 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as a key factor. Nixon’s decree declared the 1970s as the decade that “America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the purity of its air, its waters and our living environment.” This was followed by a thirty-seven-point antipollution program that noted, “As we deepen our understanding of complex ecological processes […] much more will be possible.” Needless to say, this collapse of
the “national and supranational” environment and the common
goal of environmental protection, as enumerated in the decree,
were not necessarily self-evident in the wake of the Vietnam War.
Martin argues, however, that the decree contributed to an already
changing perception of the “environment,” from an immediate
and proximate “socio-biological milieu” to a complex ecological
and economical network, hence providing the framework for a
shift in popular and intellectual imagination. This perhaps laid
the foundation for a change in the perceived role of the architect
as someone who shapes and changes the now extended and
expanded environment. He further suggests that the discourse
of autonomy was largely the product of Eisenman’s effort to give
primacy to architecture in the face of the growing environmental
and communication trends of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. Martin
refers to a series of articles published by Eisenman from 1970-
73 in which he formulated a theory of environment in sharp
contrast to those attempted at the time by Banham (in The
Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment or Los Angeles:
The Architecture of Four Ecologies) and Ian McHarg (in Design
with Nature). Banham and McHarg both take an inclusionary
attitude towards the integration of nature and human needs in the
discourse of architecture. Martin states that Eisenman’s articles,
however, were an attempt to “retrieve a ground for architecture
[…] as a defensive measure undertaken to defer absorption into
the media-ecological spectacle […] pointing architecture inward
rather than outward.” Perhaps in an oversimplification of the
position of Eisenman versus that of Banham and McHarg lies
the ever-present overarching question of autonomy versus social
engagement.

Some forty years after Nixon’s environmental decree, the
discipline is staking out larger territories of operation. Where in the
past civil engineers were designing large infrastructural projects,
now landscape architects, architects and urban designers have
to be involved. The more successful projects today perform
more than one task, serve more than one purpose and operate
at multiple levels of building, urbanism, ecology, infrastructure,
etc. A great example of this type of project is the Highline in New
York, where an old infrastructure was converted to a public space.
Elevated off the ground, it affords views of the city that change
the relationship of the user to his/her surroundings. It draws
millions of visitors every year, boosting the economy of this part
of the city in an unprecedented way. Several movements have
identified this phenomenon and have established new platforms
for new modes of practice, i.e. landscape urbanism, ecological
urbanism, and infrastructural urbanism. And while most of these
’ism’s’ in fact take on more than just the ‘urban,’ it is the scale
connotation in ‘urban’ that seems to be their driving factor. In the
introductory essay of the volume published as the proceedings
to the Ecological Urbanism symposium held in 2010 at Harvard,
Mohsen Mostafavi responds to this concern by stating that ‘urban’
is the “site of complex relations (economic, political, social, and
cultural),” and that the book provides the necessary framework
for addressing these issues through “conjoining ecology and
urbanism.” In fact all three address more than just the city and in
a paradoxical twist, some suggest a mixing of the city and nature
that are not otherwise self-evident.

A number of seminal exhibitions and publications have also
explored the possibilities, potentials and strategies for a new
mode of operation in response to devastating natural disasters.
These events have foregrounded an urgency for innovation,
no longer limited to one’s immediate environment, but capable
of engaging larger territories, resulting in projects that purport
to provide prototypical solutions for recurring problems. The
2010 Rising Currents exhibition of MoMA preceded Hurricane
Sandy, the second-costliest hurricane in United States history;
Sandy flooded much of lower Manhattan. As we face a series of
environmental catastrophes, we come to realize that the impacts of
disaster are directly related to politics and economy and are never
evenly distributed. As Joyce Rosenthal points out: “Sandy collided
not only with existing social spatial inequities and disproportioned burden for some areas but also with the long term cumulative effects of neoliberal policies that shrank local governments to the point perhaps of an end-game of urban restructuring. Examples of neoliberal practices are, of course, abundantly available across the globe, including but not limited to the developing world. Needless to say, the more vulnerable strata of the society suffer most as the result of these practices. The proposal developed by Architecture Research Office and dlandstudio for MoMA's Rising Currents Exhibition exhibition imagined the entire waterfront of lower Manhattan as “a productive park network, freshwater wetlands, and tidal salt marshes.” In an iconic image the cityscape of Manhattan appears to be taken over by nature, perhaps reminiscent of a moment in the not so distant history of the island, and suggestive of the possibility of a hybrid condition, where man vs. nature does not amount to a complete separation of man-made and nature, nor does it translate to natural disaster. As romantic as this idea may be, the project takes on the issue of ‘rising waters’ with great rigor, proposing new above- and below-ground integrated infrastructures that operate as street and public space at once.

The exhibition, inspired by the research done by ARO on the topic, invited five multidisciplinary teams to respond to this pressing matter and retrospectively became a manifesto for environmental activism. Likewise, the proceedings of the Ecological Urbanism symposium became a compendium of projects that otherwise would not have been part of the oeuvre of contemporary architecture and design today. Mary McLeod writes about the inclusion of a whole range of projects in Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction which would not have been considered otherwise by many, especially students. The book Ecological Urbanism arguably plays that very same role today, taking an inclusionary attitude toward many approaches outside conventional design practice. While the books, symposia and events are very sophisticated and prescient, building on the expertise of many disciplines, many of the visions produced possess a certain grain of optimism bordering on naiveté, and recall the scale, ambition, and in many cases the visual language of the utopias of the ’60s. Utopian projects of this era have been the subject of discussion for some time and have produced an impressively voluminous array of literature, many of which have offered “caution against the dangerous tendency to idealize past utopias.” The fact, however, remains that visions of utopia have historically escalated in the presence of an undesirable sociopolitical and economic conditions, and generally tend to reinvent the current conditions and often do so in a pseudo-scientific manner, using part science, part fiction. In recent years, catastrophe, pollution, shortage, excess – in short, crises – have become a platform for new utopian visions. The significance of this work, however, lies in the fact that it is indeed a necessary starting point for addressing the challenges of our contemporary predicament. Whether these projects are tied to Nixon's decree, as Martin would suggest, or are fast responses to pressing matters, they mark the emergence of a valuable mode of practice.
Water Fuel, a project designed by McDowell+Spinoza and one of the winning entries of the Self Sufficient Cities contest,14 proposes a new transportation network for New York City that harvests energy from water. This is a relatively new discovery in its early stages of development and not yet available for commercial use. The “energy-harvesting mats,” situated on the edge of the island, create a floating landscape that combines energy production and recreational space. The image is complete with a heated beach. Howeler states; “they build on car share and other contemporary collective consumption models.”15

To their credit, these projects are not just “big”16 and are not only utopian. They may very well draw on soft science, but they also draw on overlaps of multiple disciplines. Furthermore, they build on bottom-up processes of the previous generation of emerging practices, where a specific detail, node or component becomes a starting point, hence producing systems and ecologies based on processes that would otherwise be outside the scope of architecture’s formal tendencies and possibly surpass the questions of formal autonomy and historical form. One such project is Shareway 2030, Howeler+Yoon’s winning competition entry in response to the Audi Urban Future Award taking on the entire Boston-Washington Corridor. Recognizing the interconnected state of mobility, production, exchange, dwelling, and ecology, this project consists of several proposals that cover the gamut from the scale of the dwelling to that of the suburb, the city, and the region. A new house type – “Para house,” a personal transportation device – “last mile car,” a multimodal transport hub, and a rotating multifaced panel – “tripanel” that transforms the ground plane from grass to asphalt or solar panel – are some of the ideas. The project is in effect a commentary on the American way of life, defined by the personal car, the suburban home and consumer culture. Its multiple narratives, “sharestay, shareway,” and “farmshare” are “not science fiction.”

Nonetheless, while the approach may be valid and may in fact create cultural awareness and valuable precedents, the likelihood of them being put to the test is slim, especially given our economic conditions in the West. However, in an exceedingly global world, where information can be stored, viewed and disseminated almost instantly and where many practices are active without geographic boundaries, it is possible to imagine that this mode of operation will make a mark on the landscape of a rapidly urbanizing developing world. If this is in fact the case, this debate will take on a whole new dimension. It will present other challenges and opportunities for new projects, debate, and critique, which will ultimately determine the validity of this approach. To this end, this paper should be considered not as a timeline or precise account of things, but an attempt to outline the silhouette of this moment.

Fig. 4 & 5: Water Fuel, 2010 Winner of Self Sufficient City Competition
Courtesy of McDowell Espinosa Architects
“The project proposed the development of technologies that transform salt water into energy, generating hydrogen in urban environments.”
ENDNOTES


2. In 1984 the Architectural League of New York publication on “Emerging Voices” featured 35 young practices. In the oeuvre of each practice a house is included.


5. Ibid., 25: Nader Tahiani posits the following statement in regards to ‘continuity’ of the intellectual project in the work of Skylar Tibbits and Meejin Yoon: “There is an intellectual project that through many different proposals, designs, fabrications, and all of that, constructs some kind of continuity and difficulty within the context of the discipline. The systematic ways in which a certain set of problematics are radicalized through an architectural project are easily decipherable and imaginable from the way that [...] Skylar is working, to the way in which it can be made more complex in an architectural project that deals with the kind of things that Meejin is talking about.”


9. Joyce Rosenthal, in her opening speech at the symposium [Joyce Rosenthal, “Keynote” (Paper presented at a conference entitled Post-Superstorm: Planning and Design After Sandy, Harvard, Cambridge, February 2012 at the Harvard Graduate School of Design)], says this: “Urban communities can be resilient to rapid and urban change. Despite years of warning from climate scientists and hazard scientists and some environmental activists of the potential threat for storm surge in urban communities, somehow it all came as a great shock to everybody. As for Katrina the storm exposes the social fault lines of our society, as the impacts of disaster are never evenly distributed as Mike Davis and others remind us. [...] The super storm really shook up our sense of vulnerability to increasing risks on the east coast and galvanized a very clear response in the planning and design communities to increasing climate risks.”


11. For a complete and chronological list of these publications see Christina Contandriopoulos, “Introduction,” Journal of Architectural Education 67, no. 1 (2013): 5.


13. Koolhaas writes about Bigness: “Beyond a certain scale, architecture acquires the properties of BIGNESS. The best reason to broach BIGNESS is the one given by climbers of Mount Everest: ‘because it is there.’” Rem Koolhaas, S, M, L, XL (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 495-498. It is important to distinguish this BIGNESS from the Mega-scale of today.

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If the recession of 2008 introduced the idea of small as a reductive response to economic necessity, this paper argues for a version of architectural Smallness as an expansive generator of new modes of disciplinary practice. Unlike Rem Koolhaas’ Bigness, Smallness champions architecture’s tools of scale, detail, composition and gesture, and privileges spatial interiority as a site of architectural engagement with the city. The concept of Smallness interrogates the contemporary practice of installation, illustrating ways in which the format may be a productive site of architectural investigation. A brief genealogy of Smallness is traced from the Picturesque landscape garden through the Masques of John Hedjuk to establish the terms of Smallness as they apply to contemporary practice. Three young firms provide evidence of these terms with installations that insert new physical and discursive spaces into existing institutions, demonstrating the potential of Smallness to push against conditions assumed by the global economy.
ARCHITECTURE ON THE HIGH SEAS: ADVENTURES IN THE EXCESSIVELY SMALL
JULIA SEDLOCK

We were making sand castles. Now we swim in the sea that swept them away.
Rem Koolhaas

The world’s still the same. There’s just less in it.
Captain Jack Sparrow

THE TERMS OF SMALLNESS

The economic downturn of 2008 initiated a wave of downsizing within the profession of architecture; building budgets, footprints and firm sizes shrank as architecture submitted to the fallout of the housing crisis. While it is common to interpret this shift towards the small as an efficient means of managing scarcity, this paper reveals another side of architectural Smallness. Rather than default to the small as a moral imperative, because it saves money or energy, we may actually look to Smallness for an opportunity for invention and excess, and in the process expose new modes of architectural practice.

As a counterpoint to Rem Koolhaas’ 1995 theory of Bigness, Smallness resurrects the conventions of architectural production once deemed obsolete within a global context dominated by economic forces external to the profession of architecture. With scale, detail, gesture, and composition rendered ineffective within the sea of Bigness, architecture claimed new territories by engaging the consequences of a global economy – its networks and flows of information, its unprecedented urban growth and densification – but also placed at risk the plasticity and political agency embedded in the disciplinary tools of architectural Smallness. This paper argues that we can use those exact tools for building vessels to navigate the tempestuous seas upon which we have been set adrift. To be clear, Smallness is both a spatial and discursive concept. On one hand, it privileges issues of spatial interiority as the site where architecture’s disciplinary expertise is most effectively applied. On the other hand, it is a model of discursive practice that redefines architecture’s interiority in its relationship to the city, with an agility to negotiate between a range of medium, at various scales, sites or budgets, yet always from a rigorously defined disciplinary position. Smallness operates at the edge, but not outside of conventional practice, running tangent to its operations, reordering its habits to produce an alternative reality.

In Disney’s movie series, Pirates of the Caribbean, Captain Jack Sparrow is the last of a dying breed of pirate whose raucous adventures on the high seas take place within the confines of a small ship. His lifestyle is threatened by the East India Trading Company, which uses its naval fleet to spread a maniacal corporatism across the globe, regulating, monopolizing and homogenizing the world as Jack knows it. Jack’s ship, the Black Pearl, is his “place” in the world – always a different crew, always changing course, and yet always operating under the protocol of the Pirate Code. Like the Black Pearl, Smallness can support the freedom and transience of the pirate lifestyle, roaming the open waters from port to port, pillaging and plundering where and when it wishes, yet always aware that freedom is not really free. After all, the source of Captain Jack’s booty, the scarves and jewels that adorn his body in excessive multiplicity, is the very global economy that the pirate pretends to evade. Similarly, Smallness allows architecture to operate both on its own terms and in relation to a larger world – holding it accountable to a disciplinary protocol that empowers it with a freedom to slip in and out of external contingencies at will.

SMALLNESS INSTALLED

The format of the installation can be deployed as an instance of Smallness that allows architects to perform at this edge of architecture’s typical constraints, in excess of function, pragmatism, economy, and often times in excess of discipline. As a transdisciplinary practice that operates at architecture’s boundary, the installation indulges architecture’s insistence on the unnecessary or excessive at the expense of pragmatism or economy, while gaining access to a broader general audience. However, just as small size does not guarantee qualities of Smallness, neither does the fact of installation. Although the phenomenon of the installation has taken on new prominence
in contemporary practice, its potency does not always match its twentieth century avant-garde ancestors, from Tatlin’s Tower and El Lissitzky’s Proun, to the inflatables, gizmos and earthworks of Haus Rucker Co, Archigram and Ant Farm. These instances radicalized architectural Smallness by engaging media typically outside the discipline to construct new subjective experiences and alternative forms of social interaction.

As a genealogical descendent of these avant-garde practices, the installation can be a productive arena for the investigation of a Small architecture. However, the efficacy of the installation as a thing in itself should not be taken for granted. A 2012 symposium at the University of Michigan titled “Whither Installation: The End of Small Practice” scrutinized its usefulness from the point of view of pedagogy, practice and polemic. The symposium critically examined the role of installation in architectural production in order to define more explicitly its disciplinary purpose. Among three members of the “Practice” panel—Atelier Manferdini, Ball-Nogues and Bureau Spectacular (BS)—the installation work of Jimenez Lai, founder of BS, stands out as operating from a position of Smallness. While Manferdini and Ball-Nogues are accomplished in their purposeful mastery of material effect, both are positioned within a legacy of digital and computational practice that produces field conditions whose boundaries are determined by the context in which they are installed. Given a different context, a different set of constraints, these installations would take on different configurations. Given the opportunity, they might go on forever. For this reason, they are not Small.

On the other hand, Lai describes his work as Super Furniture, “too big to be furniture, too small to be architecture,” yet its Smallness does not preclude its status as architecture. Projects such as White Elephant and Three Little Worlds (Figure 1) are discrete volumes with creature-like compositions and occupiable interiors that take on responsibilities of architecture. They organize people, they change the shape of the space around them, they question conventional designations of inside and out, and they change the nature of their given context. Instead of being responsive to a site, they seduce a site to respond to them, and in the process they produce a new set of relational dynamics. Lai’s installations derive their sensibilities from his comics, stories that take place anywhere from a spaceship to a big-box store, and describe architecture’s capacity to shape new subjective realities through its intersection with both the exceptional and the everyday. The installations reflect sensibilities and characteristics that are derived from the pages of his comics, yet in their translation from drawing to building take on a life and narrative of their own as they carve space for interaction in the world.

**THE RETURN OF THE SMALL**

This explicit relationship between architectural form and narrative in Lai’s work links it directly to the picturesque landscape garden as an early predecessor of Smallness. The gardening practice of gentleman farmer-philosophers in the English countryside cultivated not just shrubbery but a new form of environmental narrative through the hybridization of painting, landscape and

![Fig. 1a: Three Little Worlds, Bureau Spectacular, Architectural Foundation London, 2012, photo by Daniel Hewitt](image1a)

![Fig. 1b: White Elephant, Bureau Spectacular, 2011, photo by Magnus Lindqvist, Kyle D. Eberle and Kamil Kroll](image1b)
architecture. As a milestone in the development of modern subjectivity, the picturesque gardens at the turn of the 19th century celebrated and articulated the intersection of the individual and nature in the production of free society. Although a landscape is big in scale, the sensibility of the picturesque is Small because it operates as both a framed image and an interior space, constructed around the interaction between architectural form (the folly) and a literary narrative that unfolds through space and time along the garden path. For instance, Henry Hoare’s garden at Stourhead not only tells the story of Virgil’s Aeneid through its constructed scenes, but also places garden visitors as actors within those scenes, transforming them into characters within the story.

The potency of the picturesque as an alternative mode of architectural production lies in its ability to operate between and amongst multiple conventions of representation – the pictorial, the spatial and the narrative. High modernism’s formalist orthodoxy rejected the picturesque and its associations as fanciful trivialities in favor of abstraction and functionalism. If the Smallness that we see in both Lai’s Super Furniture and the picturesque depends on the intimacy and idiosyncrasy of architectural character, then modernism’s reductive rationalism rendered Smallness nearly impossible. However, the work of John Hejduk represents a return of the Small. Among a second generation of modernist practitioners who countered these reductive tendencies of high modernism, Hejduk resurrected a picturesque sensibility and emphasis on character as a source of productive slippage between conflicting modes of representation.

Reflexive idiosyncrasy is a hallmark of Hejduk’s career, in particular the autobiographic nature of his later work. The sketch book journals of his trips to Berlin (1981) and Vladivostok (1989) document his travels through the imagined accumulation of folly-sized architectural characters (masques) whose figural, zoomorphic profiles are composed of architectural elements that negotiate between the anonymity of typology and the eccentricity of personality. Columns become legs; spikes and antennae become hair; hallways and stairs become appendages, arms and noses. Once invented and at play in Hejduk’s urban architectural narratives, these characters travel with him from city to city. On one hand, they are prosthetic extensions of Hejduk, physical manifestations of a psychogeographic network that passes through and across the cities of Europe. On the other hand, they represent the potential of architecture to hold multiple simultaneous positions in the shaping of urban civic space, to possess an authority and an agency in its own right, yet at the scale of the Small where this authority is not totalizing but contingent and transient. Hejduk’s nomadic troop represents the exile of architectural agency from the 20th century European city, acknowledging that architecture had no further contribution to the ossified and obsolete urban form of the 19th century.

Nevertheless, Hejduk’s move is an optimistic one, returning the picturesque folly to its urban context as a re-instantiation and multiplication of its Small architectural position. In his 1987 Riga Project at the University of the Arts this maneuver is amplified when the masques move indoors, bringing their urban sensibility from the street to a building’s interior void. However, Hejduk’s masques are missing interiors – they are still only objects in an urban field. So, while this act of architecture within architecture foreshadows the work of Jimenez Lai, his Super Furniture advances Hejduk’s proposition by installing a second layer of interiority within these constructions. As occupiable urban characters, Lai’s interiors overlay the city, its architecture, and its subjects onto one another to produce a new condition of Smallness.

OTHER SHAPES OF SMALLNESS

This trajectory of Smallness (from the picturesque to Hejduk to Jimenez Lai) draws a fuzzy line around contemporary practices that redefine the installation in terms of architectural interiority and its relationship to the city. Smallness rejects the installation as an automatic category of architectural production, and instead demands its performance as architectural interior, engaged as a discursive proposition within a broader disciplinary conversation. The following two examples demonstrate how the small size of the installation can be translated into the operational potency of Smallness as a means to explore ideas about the construction of architectural interiors as an extension of urban life.

The work of Sean Lally and his environmental design firm WEATHERS does this by turning the idea of interiority inside-out. Lally proposes that the material energies (heat, light, sound) and micro-climates typically confined to the garden or landscape, are equally applicable to the production of architectural space. Climatic intensities and variables are manipulated to develop typologies, shapes, and aesthetics of an energy-driven architecture, which

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an optimistic declaration that rules are tools of cultural negotiation that shape relationships between public and private life in the city. They also operate under the auspice of Smallness, as moves made at the local level – the profile of buildings, the vegetation in front yards, the configuration of stairwell, curbs and driveways, the application of color, lighting or material – whose impacts reverberate as cascading negotiations between neighbors, politicians and planners, superimpose on to one another to produce urban effect. Lehnerer’s 2011 installation Minor Features at the MCA in Chicago is a representation of this effect.

Built as an offset of the MCA’s 12’x12’ gallery walls, the 5’x5’ occupiable model constructs the experience of stepping inside a 2-D architectural drawing. Three walls and a ceiling are embedded with abstracted architectural elements that are superimposed onto one another in mid-relief, notated with black line work, and then taped to produce a continuous effect with the walls of the museum.

alters the immediate physical boundaries of an individual through the amplification and perception of material energies. Lally’s project is an optimistic reappraisal of our relationship towards energy, imagining a future where energy can be harvested in excess. Though this perspective is indebted to a science fiction sensibility, it is equally grounded in efforts to bring this future reality closer to the present through the format of installations and technology research. Lally refers to these installations as “proofs” because they are not one-off products, but rather opportunities to establish new energy-based typologies of organization that may be repeated in future applications. For instance, the project Shagg is a prototype for an exterior floor system that creates a thickened surface of oversized carpet strategically embedded with light, heat and sound emitters. The climatic and tactile qualities of the installation produce a cozy micro-environment that encourages social gatherings through its intensification of localized material energies. As an act of Smallness, installations like Shagg generate a complete architectural environment on their own terms, yet simultaneously serve to illustrate an overarching narrative that engages technology directly and imaginatively in order to conjure and facilitate the formulation of new architectural futures.

While WEATHERS identifies the shape of energy, Alex Lehnerer negotiates the shape of the city as a product of its rules. Lehnerer’s book Grand Urban Rules is a study of building codes in a selection of American and European cities that illustrates the projective potential such rules have in the design of cities. The book makes...
Small, strategically placed openings provide views to the gallery walls beyond where landmarks are drawn along a fictional horizon line. Although the viewer stays within the 5'x5' confines of the model, unable to enter the interstitial space between model and gallery wall, the constructed views to the outer wall simulate the experience of movement, producing an urban narrative within the viewer's imagination that transforms the MCA's smallest gallery into an exterior urban landscape.

Despite the significant conceptual and aesthetic differences between Lehnerer’s and Lally’s projects, both can trace strands of a disciplinary genealogy to the Small qualities of the picturesque. Lally’s work advances the conceptual project of the picturesque in its manipulation of the relationship between landscape and the human body, turning the conventions of this relationship on its head, carving artificial interiors from the materials of “nature” to produce an intimate urban sensibility. Lehnerer’s connection to the picturesque is through its part-to-whole relationship, where the accumulation of architectural parts produces a legible, but contingent urban narrative. Like the picturesque, the part-to-whole relationship in Lehnerer’s work depends on the play between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representation: installation imitates drawing, drawing creates illusions of three-dimensional space, and movement through space suggests narrative. This chain of translation is valuable to Smallness as a practice that multiplies interaction and misreading. Disciplinary tools of representation provide the legible structure necessary to engage the world, while excessive repetition exposes their plastic nature, leaving them open for misinterpretation and misappropriation. This dynamic may occur at any scale, but the feedback cycle is accelerated and its effects exaggerated at the scale of the Small, where conventions of detail and composition may be readily manipulated to tell new stories and construct new collective sensibilities.

CONCLUSION

In the end, Smallness turns out to be not merely the flip side of Bigness, but in fact, an evolution away from it. While Koolhaas found new conditions for architecture within Bigness, he did so by accepting the conditions that Bigness imposed, including architecture’s inevitable submission to the whims of the global economy that created it. Though we have been swimming in this new sea for twenty years, we have not been entirely swept away by it. Rather, we are learning to populate it with our own buoys and life boats which may ferry us away to undiscovered territories, or which themselves may be the base of entirely new artificial grounds. In these constructions we find an antidote to Captain Jack Sparrow’s complaint that there is “less in the world.” In fact, Smallness is a means of finding more by identifying and amplifying the differences, juxtapositions, compressions and subjectivities already located within the confines of a limited territory, in direct opposition to the vastly entropic chaos and nihilism of Koolhaas’ Junkspace. The examples of installation discussed above are literal manifestations of this potential, where architectural practices carve small interior environments within the boundaries of existing institutional domains. The creation of these new physical and discursive spaces is evidence that Smallness is gaining momentum as a model of contemporary architectural practice that is nimble, effective and transformative. A disciplinary attitude towards architecture is the basis of these young practices where the installation of interior space is in direct dialogue with selected modes of architectural representation. Yet while this dialogue is about architecture, it is also about architecture’s relationship to the world at large and the ways in which architecture intersects with elements outside of itself like pop culture, technology and politics. It is at these intersections where Smallness is defined in its most potent form, where a confined interiority is defined as an opportunity for interaction, overlap and difference, and in the process transformed into a democratic urban condition.

Smallness brushes ideological shoulders with many popular fascinations of contemporary subcultures – the intimacy and idiosyncrasy of the local, the sampling and layering of the mash-up, the anti-heroes and redundancies of the collective – and in the process offers new perspectives on topics such as personality, authorship and ownership. Although the suggestions it offers for alternative configurations between architecture, politics and economics are impressionistic at best, these ideological potentials define a significant end game, one where architectural practice asserts its own optimistic agency as arbiter of its own destiny, riding the high seas, darting in and out of port, pillaging a merchant ship when necessary, and digging up buried treasure as it sees fit. Perhaps the pirate analogy is simply a fantasy, yet that too is the point of Smallness, to dream of what the global economy deems unfit and unreasonable, and then to make it real.
ENDNOTES


2. "Transdisciplinary practices and research view the exchange of concepts and techniques between established disciplines in terms of translation and transference...transdisciplinary work...happens at the edge or limit of our own discipline where we become acutely aware of, and in need of, disciplinary practices." Mark Linder, Nothing Less Than Literal. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004), 2.

3. According to symposium organizer and department chair, John McMorrough, "The rise of installation makes sense from the institutional perspectives of architecture schools... it involves design, technology, knowledge of construction... it seems complete as a microcosm of architectural effort... However, the installation project has supported itself by its manifest 'goodness' in that it rarely claims a position other than its existence," from Architect blog by Aaron Willette, "Whither Installation Symposium Part 1: Interview with John McMorrough," http://archinect.com/blog/article/35186446/whither-installation-symposium-part-1-interview-with-john-mcmorrough.


5. For more on shrubbery see Monty Python and the Holy Grail.


7. "It is an eighteenth-century theme park – two hundred years before Disney, and with Virgil and Poussin (not Mickey and Donald) as its animating spirits... The village Main Street...conduces us into this Magic Kingdom. The street is a passage with one end grounded in the real and the other flying into fantasy, like the looking glasses and beanstalks, whirlwinds and backless wardrobes of literature." Charles Moore et al. "Pilgrimages: Stourhead." In The Poetics of Gardens. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), 137.

8. "...the picturesque is accorded importance because it brought architecture to such a state of decline that there was no choice for what Hitchcock called the New Pioneers but to do better. He credited the picturesque with having invented the possibility of fake architecture in its garden follies, with attempting to make architecture subservient to the landscape, and for disregarding construction that the engineer was forced to abandon his traditional relationship to architecture and develop on his own." Sylvia Lavin, 18.


10. Albert Pope argues that Le Corbusier’s La Tourette is an instance of modernism that makes space for multiple subject positions; "The Unconstructed Subject of the Contemporary City," Slow Pace (Monacelli Press: New York, 1998).

11. "...character consisted of the subjective expression of the building’s purpose and was located specifically in the elements or details of architecture — roof, chimney, porch, veranda. During the nineteenth century, character and composition were associated with the Picturesque tradition as a resistance to academic architecture and ideal types, a dispute which also exhibited a shift away from the work itself to its effect on the spectator. In part, then one can begin to understand Hejduk’s focus on aspects of both detail and character... as an equivalent resistance to high modernism." R.E. Somol, "One or Several Masters?" in Hejduk’s Chronotope, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 105-106.

NEOLIBERAL DESIRE AND JUNK SPACE
ICONICITY, CONTINGENCY, JUNKSPACE: ARCHITECTURE BEYOND CRITICISM

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Pablo von Frankenberg, Dr. rer. soc., studied Empirical Cultural Studies and Sociology (M.A.) at University of Tübingen, Germany. His PhD project about the internationalization of museum architecture led him to field research in Europe, the U.S., China, and the Persian Gulf. He was awarded scholarships from Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation and from German Federal State Scholarship Program LGFG. Together with UC San Diego Fine Arts Department and Museum Elsewhere, Greensboro/NC, he developed the independent research project Museum Futures to explore alternative museum and exhibition approaches. After receiving his PhD he worked for Urbane Künste Ruhr (Urban Arts Ruhr), a public institution that produces and realizes art in urban spaces. Pablo currently works on museum projects in Europe and China for hg merz architects museum designers.

Iconicity seems to be the inevitable imperative of contemporary architecture. The design vocabulary to win international competitions and to secure global recognition is often based on playing with exuberant, multifaceted, and at the same time unfathomable meanings. The more stakeholders, decision-makers, and press can project their diverse interests onto a building project, the more persuasive and successful it is. At the same time, other aspects (functionality, social responsibility, urban planning) appear to pale. Moreover, architecture criticism evidently loses its footing in view of buildings that could be anything while obstinately remaining indecisive. Here, the structural tendency toward iconic architecture is understood as an opportunity to establish a pragmatic form of critique that reclaims its significance for both architecture and society.
Since the second half of the 20th century, iconic building design is spreading globally. In the beginning of the 21st century, iconicity seems to be the *sine qua non* in any architectural competition. Museums, concert halls, flagship stores, hotels, and corporate headquarters – they all strive for an internationally recognizable architecture. Whereas a simply spectacular architecture provokes primarily emotional responses by overwhelming the beholder,

iconic buildings in addition challenge the intellect to decode what is seen. Iconic buildings are enigmatic and simultaneously open to multiple meanings ascribed by different social and cultural groups. According to Charles Jencks, iconic architecture is an enigmatic signifier, in which "traditional, popular, and esoteric overtones are felt not named, suggested not explicit. Hinting but not stating a direction provokes the viewer to project into the puzzle certain codes or meanings." In this sense, architecture is not only judged regarding its aesthetic and functional qualities, but also by its power to work as a projection screen for different interpretive, i.e. cultural, schemes.

The Burj Khalifa in Dubai, for example (see Fig. 1), is inspired by the *Hymenocallis* (see Fig. 2), a flower said to be native in the deserts of the Emirates. The outer petals of the flower resemble the Y-shaped footprint of the building, the blossom its core. The building also incorporates the patterning systems in Islamic architecture. These local and cultural references are stressed by the architectural team and the client, even though they are only detectable when looking at the floor plan or from a specific angle out of a helicopter. However, also beyond these references, the image of this skyscraper is distinct and produces an emblem that is recognized worldwide.

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**Fig. 1:** Burj Khalifa

**Fig. 2:** Hymenocallis flower
Fig. 3: Rocky Mountains close to Denver

Fig. 4: Denver Art Museum
The Daniel Libeskind extension of the Denver Art Museum (see Fig. 4) is a similar case. It plays with local references (according to the architectural team)\(^6\) such as the fissured and cuspid shape of the Rocky Mountains that rise to the west of the city (see Fig. 3). Nevertheless, the deployed design vocabulary is similar to other Libeskind buildings in other parts of the world; in other words, the Denver Art Museum allows for other readings, too. The presented image is stimulating and the beholder can associate quite freely.

The headquarters of CCTV in Beijing by OMA, another example of iconic architecture (see Fig. 5), became a symbol for Beijing’s massive urban renewal and extension plans. Even though the CCTV is a megastructure (its gross floor area exceeds that of the Burj Khalifa), its loop-shaped exterior appears simple and catchy. Its silhouette is easily drawn on a napkin. The building plays with scales. Its enormous dimensions are covered by its shape that, when looked at from far away, seems manageable small though still unique. Like the Burj Khalifa or the Denver Art Museum, the shape of the CCTV Headquarters is memorable and at the same time puzzling, significant and enigmatic.

Buildings that are described as signature architecture, such as the works of Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, Santiago Calatrava, or Frank O. Gehry, are often instances of iconic architecture, too. Obviously, signature architecture is a form of marketing. With a specific design vocabulary, these architects established a certain “brand” which allows a clear distinction from other architectural designs and promises a certain recognition factor and a reliably spectacular result. Hence, signature architecture produces similar forms for different building types. Going back to the example of Libeskind, his buildings share a similar design regardless of the building type and the construction site. Local urban and cultural contexts, as well as the purpose of these buildings, do not seem to interfere with their design. The Jewish Museum, Berlin, Germany; the Denver Art Museum, Denver, USA; the Westside Shopping and Leisure Centre, Bern, Switzerland; the Military History Museum, Dresden, Germany; or the Run Run Shaw Creative Media Centre at City University Hong Kong – they appear similar in their shape, but differ highly regarding their function and content.

Signature architecture is an ideal example of the power of iconic forms in architecture. They express a variety of meanings to a variety of audiences. In other words, iconic architecture is all-purpose and prompts a potentially global media echo. On the other hand, iconic architecture avoids critical discussions. Almost every interpretation is right when there is no chance to prove the opposite. As a result, criticism that focuses on iconic architecture creates a bunch of metaphorical descriptions, but no concluding evaluation.\(^6\) A penetrative, closing analysis of its technical, urban, and social functionality seems to be difficult given the elusiveness of iconic buildings.

Iconic buildings are overwhelming, and at the same time fundamentally neutral. They are compatible with a lot of different cultural contexts, vertically (regarding generational, educational, financial etc. backgrounds) and horizontally (regarding regional conditions). In sum, iconic buildings cover a vast array of different interests. Consequently, iconic architecture not only has the potential of making its designer a world renowned architect, but also provides a tool to deal with a variety of stakeholders with different backgrounds. In larger building projects, besides architect and client, the development of the design depends on the jurors of the competition (other architects, representatives of the client, politicians, project managers, structural engineers, etc.), funders, occupants, policy makers and other stakeholders with more or less expertise in architecture. Marketing and tourism concerns...
form part of these vested interests, though personality and the will to make one’s mark both on client-/funder-/politician-side and on architect-side is to be considered a stronger driving force. Convincing all of these different parties of a design scheme (in the competition as well as in the design phase after the competition) is easier when discussing a shiny proposal everybody can project their specific interests onto. A more sophisticated design that takes a firm stand in a couple of fields seems to lessen the chance of satisfying the variety of stakeholders. From this angle, the basic design ingredient of iconic architecture appears to be the prevention of critique by producing a thrilling enigmatic image.

The result of trying to convince the variety of stakeholders by preventing a firm stand (which could be criticized) is related to what Rem Koolhaas describes as “junkspace.” It is related but not necessarily identical. Koolhaas bemoans a profound callousness in contemporary architecture that leads to a universal program of default sensation perverting all rules of architecture. According to Koolhaas, in contemporary architecture “irregularity and uniqueness are constructed from identical elements.” He compares junkspace to astro-garbage, seeing it as the residue of modernism, not as a style worthy of being recorded for the generations to come. More and more, both iconicity and junkspace become phenomena to be dealt with in everyday life – beyond characterizing it as ‘philistine,’ globalized, homogeneous non-places and beyond merely describing it with a vast amount of different metaphors. Whereas junkspace appears to be a well-defined entity, iconicity is still fluid. If the latter continues to be dealt with on a metaphorical level it might reveal the same callousness (towards style, towards society) as junkspace already does. However, its level of autism is not yet determined. Stressing its contingent aspects, iconicity could actually yield a new perspective on architecture.

As Jeremy Till states, architecture is based on the gap between practice and object, between how architects think of the design process as an independent and more or less perfect creation and how much architecture, the product of this process, is dependent on numerous external factors. Taking Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatic conception of contingency, Till focuses on this gap. With the contingency of architecture in mind, this paper suggests a praxeological form of architecture critique that aims for the inherent sociocultural aspects of architecture.

Contingency, Rorty claims, describes the constant co-existence of alternative ways of describing the world. According to his concept, the world “is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary.” There are no “facts” beyond the language with which we describe what we perceive. Language itself, i.e. the choice of words and metaphors we use to describe what we perceive, is contingent. Thus, every perception is contingent – and so is the world that surrounds us. Usually, the contingency of our expressions does not interfere with daily life. Fundamental justifications of actions and beliefs are already executed by so called “final vocabularies,” which help stabilize social life by unconsciously excluding the equality of other, possibly competing vocabularies. More than any other form of architecture, iconic buildings represent contingency as they offer an ambiguous appearance and a non-dogmatic bunch of alternative descriptions. They are highly visible embodiments of the barrier between language and “fact” since they demonstrate the equality of different vocabularies describing the same object. As they obviate the aura of absoluteness, they push an enlightened, disenchanted view to the world.

The contingency of new iconic buildings has to be fathomed – not only their outer appearance and technical brilliance. The architectural aesthetic has to be contextualized socially and culturally. The building has to be criticized in use, or rather, in action. When people see architecture, when they work in it, live in it, spend their leisure time in it, it transforms into a collectively shared image and practice. Architecture builds “culture,” as these images and practices become part of the multiplicity of ideas, beliefs, and values that a group of people have in common. An architecture criticism that takes this socio-culturally formative role of architecture into account should turn its focus from architecture a priori to architecture a posteriori, from drawings, renderings, models, and deserted photos to buildings that were handed over to their purpose.

This pragmatic approach to architecture criticism would analyze the effects a building has on its surrounding urban space, the flows of people it creates, the offers it provides to its occupants and how these offers are used, the way a building influences how people think and live – or at least the potential a building promises in these latter regards. Liquefying the architecture into its sociocultural momenta would be the aim of a pragmatic critique. The critics would intermingle with the visitors of a newly
built theater, concert hall, museum, or any other public building. They would watch the workers in an office building and talk to them. They would chat with the inhabitants of a residential building, stroll through a new urban piazza, check in at the new airport with all the other travelers. The criticism would move from a static point of view to a dynamic practice. Not photography, but film and physical presence would be the medium of the critics. The images and practices a building produces are unstable, and so should be its critical acclaim.

The vibrant state of iconic architecture shows the limits of a criticism that is bound to images while excluding the practices architecture stimulates. For a pragmatic approach in architecture criticism, though, iconic architecture is a promising starting point. As demonstrated above, iconic buildings evade a complete, fixed meaning in favor of an interpretive openness to numerous understandings. They challenge criticism, since the criteria for an analytic and reproducible critique lack definition — facing engineering possibilities that enable the use of a seemingly infinite design vocabulary. The resulting interpretive openness of iconic architecture calls for a new modus operandi in architecture criticism. In order to regain keenness, architecture criticism should focus to a greater extent on external factors such as the use and acceptance of architectural structures and the social dynamics it triggers.
ENDNOTES

1. For example, searching the architecture platform World Architecture News (WAN) for announcements of architecture competitions and openings of new buildings that contain the word “iconic” will result in more than 670 hits in the time from 2005 until today (source: www.worldarchitecturenews.com; own calculations; 12/31/13).


3. ibid., 111.


6. There are a myriad of examples for this tendency in architecture criticism when looking at iconic buildings. For Frank Gehry’s Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, Charles Jencks analyzed a few critics. The building was described as a boat in full sail, the cardboard boxes of homeless people, Marilyn Monroe’s skirt, a broken fortune cookie, a waste basket, a tornado, and other contradictory and profoundly empty words (see Jencks 2005, 180-182).

7. As distinct from the discourse of building heritage through architecture and its consumerist implications (see e.g. Nezar AlSayyad (ed.). 2001. Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Nrmics and Urban Form in the Age of Mass Tourism, (New York). Iconicity can create images that are suitable for tourism and doubtlessly consumed on a global level, though it still is a subdomain of iconicity, since tourism is one, but definitely not the major aim of the involved stakeholders (see e.g. Pablo v. Frankenberg. 2013. Die Internationalisierung der Museumsarchitektur. Voraussetzungen, Strukturen, Tendenzen (Volume 31 of the Berlin Series for Museum Studies) Berlin).


9. The concept of junkspace resembles Marc Augé’s non-places. Non-places “play no part in any synthesis, they are not integrated with anything; they simply bear witness […] to the coexistence of distinct individualities, perceived as equivalent and unconnected. […] When individuals come together, they engender the social and organize places. But the space of supermodernity [the non-place] is inhabited by this contradiction: it deals only with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners), but they are identified (name, occupation, place of birth, address) only on entering or leaving. […] The non-place is the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society.” Marc Augé. 1995. Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. (London/New York), 111-112. See also Hans Ibelings. 1998. Supermodernism. Architecture in the Age of Globalization. (Rotterdam).

10. Jeremy Till. 2009. Architecture Depends (Cambridge). 2. With a group of architecture students, Till visited Aldo Rossi’s housing at Gallatarese in Milan, Italy. The “pure architecture” they studied beforehand on drawings and pictures vanished in favor of all the different contexts that formed the architecture: “The drawing as autonomous object was not there, architecture was.” (ibid. 23)


12. ibid., 1989, 73.

13. See also Jencks 2005, 20. Contingency could prove to be an advantageous concept to analyze the formation of signature architecture, too. Often condemned as a homogenization of style, signature architecture contains more insights to be revealed by an analysis that takes into account the external and coincidental factors of the development and success of a signature architect. Basically, this approach would consist of a stylistic analysis that is informed by sociology, cultural studies, economics, and art history.
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Works of fictional architecture have been perhaps some of the most fascinating products of economic busts. Publications, academia, and exhibitions all enforce and institutionalize paper fictions, from Boulée to DOGMA. They provide the architect a voice, a sanctuary, a virtual space for their creations to transcend the dominance of the marketplace and become cultural productions. Students today are welcomed into the discipline through fictional architecture. To an extent, we are sheltered. We are allotted a voice to push the direction of the discipline. However, students relish in pulling on the tethers of the practical realities of capital and culture.
It is an overt truism that architectural propositions are inspired by the reproductive reasoning of the three-dimensional medium of construction. But they are additionally born out of the productive logic of the two-dimensional mediums of paper and, more recently, the computer screen. These latter media flatten architecture in a sense, making it virtual and fictional. The perspectival exercises and the axiomatic acrobatics of spinning, turning and twisting drawings fail to conquer the artificiality and artifice of the surface. The professional press, the schools of architecture, and the exhibitions all enforce and institutionalize our paper fictions. Think about Boullee’s immodest competition with the creations of the divine being in revolutionary France; the melancholic silence of Aldo Rossi’s typological studies in post-fascist Italy; and the self-referential convulsions of digital fabrication in late capitalist West. They remind us of the special poignancy of fictional architecture during periods of economic busts. It is the form in which architecture has survived, if not socially realigned itself during dry spells. It is how cerebral practices have partially circumvented the stranglehold of capital and its contradictions, but it is also not simply determined by it. It confronts the praxis logic of the marketplace with its architecture-centric directives. The trajectory of the dominant world is refracted by the spectrum of values imposed by the discipline upon its participants.

These disciplinary directives are not static. Every generation acts upon and effectively alters conventions. It is this malleability that gives us a sense of relative freedom in studios, seminars and workshops, opening up space for certain possibilities. Students entertain the illusion that they are their own clients to construct utopian programs and patrons. Their fictions are judged, not by outsiders with non-architectural criteria, but by architects, who socialize the students in their disciplinary sensibility. As a ritualistic event, the shared illusion of the presenters and judges make difference (and accord) between creativity and absurdity, revolution and reaction, critical and normative practices—seem natural. It is here, in the academic institution, that blank slates are introduced, subjected, conditioned, and critiqued.
In 2012, for a second year studio, we designed a pre-fab cabin as a weekend home for one or two individuals. The cabin was to be accommodated within the confines of a 20’ x 12’ rectangular pad that could easily be transported and placed anywhere. We were not given a site but rather a general mountain context for our site-less architecture. It was a truly fictional existence for our fictional project. The building was designed to the specifications of an abstract site in the Uinta Mountains.

Capitalizing on the license enjoyed by fictional architecture and the institutional shelter offered by the school, my proposal [H-RB] was titled A Prefabricated Walden, a satirical play that built on the idea of mass production for the few and site-specific design for standardized boxes. Satire and parody were called upon as forms of negation – a tool of language and a reasoning mind. Through it, commonly accepted assertions were undermined by first destabilizing them, and secondly by not replacing them with other assertions. It was a placeholder. It was a creator of space for possible action and rethinking. My use of it exposed contradictions in the morality that we were expected to bring to the problem. “Making fun” of the premise of the studio robbed the framework within which we were required to operate of its hold over our decisions. Satire became a negative critique of both empirical and idealist understanding of regionalism, locality, loci genius and high-minded values associated with them.

The proposed cabin mimicked the normative, reductive, and cartoonish form of a house found in the drawings of children. Picture a child’s line drawing consisting of a pitched roof, the illustration making reference to a solid object. By extruding the lines of the banal ‘mass,’ it is transformed into a three-dimensional line drawing. The normative relationships between reference and referent are broken, producing a bland cliché.

Now, the approach was pushed at all levels of plans, sections, details, site location and so on.

The idea was to unravel this singular form of a wrought kid’s drawing into multiple forms, the shells of these forms containing others like a matryoshka, or Russian nesting doll. The extruded “cave” held multiple objects. Those objects too would contain other objects. Smaller versions of this rectangle topped with a triangle were distorted and broken down into less recognizable fragments. They were punctured and slit to accommodate specific programs and functions. Each mutilated module was erected to a different scale, texture, and color. The outermost shell was finished in low-grade steel. Through time, the cabin would become black and dark orange like an industrial ruin. The first interior layer was wood bleached white, while the next layers were coated with tar on the outside and covered in white linen on the inside, and on and on. Varying degrees of light and shade, darkness and paleness, composed the entire project.

When the owner arrived on Friday evening, his or her car would be parked at the end of a long ramp just as the sun was ideally setting behind the cabin. The entire building would be cast in shadow,
appearing as a negative solid outlined as if by a halo. The ramp
guiding the precession of the visitor-cum-owner to the cabin was
placed at a right angle to the entrance. A concrete deck then
connected the two. This was the “helipad” on which the trailer was
to land anywhere in the world and firmly take up its rightful place.
But the trailer was pushed to the very end and left to precariously
dangle on the edge. The structure and function were undermined.
Their integrity was brought into question and cast doubt over the
notion of home as comfortable, stable, and protective.

Inside the cabin, windows held by mullions formed a Latin Orthodox
cross. The religious motif, standing alternately for the truth and
the moral failures of a larger society, was reproduced throughout
the cabin. At times it marked openings, at others it became a
repeated line pattern etched onto the walls. This approach made
light of this serious-minded religious and political icon. It became
a motif laden and entrenched in memories of its own history and
unabashedly transformed into mere decorations in the cabin. In
this parody, the cross became a sign of its meaning.

Moreover, moving through the cabin, the user-owner would pass
punctured surfaces that provided glimpses into additional objects
within the layers. Some of these interior spaces were functional,
while others were only symbolic. These two devices produced
multiple effects while attending to programmatic requirements.
But their spatial complexity did dominate technical aspects. Free
from the exigencies of construction documents, my renderings,
sections, and elevations gave me the opportunity to draw the
symbolic forward. The cross, along with the other symbols, was
exaggerated in the project’s flattened state on paper in ways that
could not be reproduced in building.

Cartoonish drawings were not for a lack of skill. Each made
explicit the difference between the experience of a building in
actuality and as it existed on paper. It brought out the quandaries
of the assignment. If we accept that concepts are just as much
reality as materiality, it was to be as real as the real. Kanye West
and a Peruvian landscape were collaged with the cabin in a single
photograph as a known person and a quantifiable landscape,
tying my critique to its object and stripping away a crippling seriousness. Humor stripped away prescriptive moralism, steered different interpretations, and opened up space for criticality.

Seeing the world from the vantage point of a student whose engagement with architecture to date has been through fictive propositions and codes governing academic production, architecture is viewed first and foremost as a system of representations. We lose much in the realization that we are making fictions. The discipline reinforces this loss. But we gain as much from the epiphany. It gives our schemes titles, images, and narration. Architecture becomes akin to literature.

The year before A Prefabricated Walden, our studio designed a dance studio for Ballet West in downtown Salt Lake City. The facility required four studios, a practice auditorium, and space for administrative services. As a studio, we were asked to “showcase” the ballet company on the street. The architecture was required to take a form such that passersby were drawn in to see the ballerinas at practice. In other words, the building had to function as a billboard. The borders of architectural strategies, and those of fundraising, were blurred. As a voyeuristic project at its core, our formal proposals were judged by their power to engender public curiosity and confidence in dance.

In Western art, the ballerina is a common recurring subject. Inspiration was drawn from high art, specifically two paintings: George Condo’s “artificial realist” Ballerina (2010) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s impressionist Danseuse (1874). Ballerina was part of a series of seven paintings commissioned as the album cover artwork for single songs. As a whole, each was intended to capture different mental states and conditions of the album. The ballerina was a symbolic figure. Positioned stiff in a black dress, she somewhat contradictorily and tipsily is holding out a wine glass and wearing a mustache. The loaded imagery conveyed something entirely outside of ballet, though impart, it directly implicated it. It was a high art (painting) commissioned to serve a low art (commercial music). Notions of both high and low were simultaneously questioned and dramatically altered. As a single, sold unit, the individual meanings of each work distorted initial responses and inspired new ones. The song itself was strangely sophisticated, whether in its own right or by clever and close association.

Desire and satire, as linguistic and libidinal tools, were chosen to theoretically negate programmatic requirements of commercialization. The second painting by Renoir has secured a place in the history of art due to the mastery of a technical treatment of the subject. In contrast to the sharp, realist representations that circulated Parisian salons of the time, the blurred outlines of his ballerina did not feed the observer with a highly controlled image. The abstraction of the subject required a level of participatory reading and reconstruction. As we build the image in our minds, we reflect ourselves into the abstraction. We as individuals are constructs of our conflicting and overlapping desires. Renoir’s abstraction encourages us to project ourselves and our moods, longings, ambitions, and yearnings onto his “incomplete” painting. He elicits new desires and reveals repressed ones.

I sought to create an architectural equivalent to the abstraction and distortion of context found in these works. The project worked with desire to create a moment that wasn’t immediately reduced to commodification. Desire was schematically understood in Freudian and Lacanian terms (but without the feud between
them). This Eros drive is our yearning for a fundamentally lost object. The prospect was to negotiate fact with fiction, not from a formal or physical limitation standpoint, but a sociological and critical one that would rely heavily on its representation. 2 Utopian fantasies became not a formalist machine defying gravity, but rather a socially manipulative fiction.

Two wells visually tied the public courtyard on the roof to the lobby and studios on the lower two floors. One of the walls of the wells was paneled with dented nickel. They had shallow pools of bluish-green water, reminiscent of the background of the Condo’s painting, at the bottom. The public could not see directly into the dance spaces. They were reflected onto the water and the nickeled wall. Onlookers saw fragmentary and distorted images of the dancers at practice. Dancing bodies were reduced by destabilizing images and making them unrecognizable as figural. The impressions were flipped and blurred again and again as they bounced around in these viewing chambers.

As the spectators watched, the disfigured images of the dancers were additionally overlaid with the reflections of spectators themselves. When combined, the multiple layers of reflections of the self, the other bystanders, and the choreographed bodies eliminated all lucidity. The collaged image made the subjects indistinguishable on the wall. Glass and nickel-coated walls recalled Renoir’s canvases. To create desire, meaning a lack, an abstraction, and a libidinal construction, the source of the reflections was removed many times from the spectator. The critical value of the concept of desire, must it be reiterated, lay in its challenge to commodification. 3 When fulfilled, desire disappeared or was displaced. I translated its intangible and negative state into a flattened phenomenon of abstracting reflection, removing the voyeured subject.

The lowest corridor of the building lacked a similar separation between the public and the ballerinas.

In order to avoid the fetishization and objectification of the subject in this condition, lighting techniques established an exaggerated and blatant voyeuristic dynamic between the dancers and the public. The long narrow passage was dimly lit with lighting on the furthest walls of the wells at the ends. The dance studios were designed essentially as jewel boxes, brightly lit from behind and above. The dancers were brightly illuminated, while the public was cast into high-contrast shadows. The distance here was created out of a socially and self-imposed barrier activated by the psychological position of the public as they consciously gazed.

To ensure that the public did not project desire onto the ballet dancers, it was extracted out of and away from them. This scenario was as freed and constrained by the contingencies of the material world as the cabin project. It saw the building first and foremost as a Lacanian panopticon, where it was the image-screen that created and altered the onlookers (objects of representation) and the act of looking (gaze).
It was an inquiry into the power of desire to negate commodification. It built upon the instance before the market fully absorbed and normalized desire. It joined the cabin project in its fictional form and negation of negation. Both were paper products. Architecture’s desire, as everyone from Adam and Eve to Michael Hays tells us, is to throw off its material and historical baggage, the radical negation of social, political, and moral conventions, and bleaching off the stains of economic market. “Theoretical treatises,” Mark Wigley reminds us, “are filled with perfect site-less objects and instructions on how to minimize their compromise when applied to particular sites. In reverse, architects usually remove evidence of compromise when they publish their work.” of the new human. It draws attention to the arbitrariness of the conventions that we perpetuate unthinkingly and unconsciously. It allows architecture to allude to an imaginary future. We remain merchants of utopias. The momentary space opened up for internal reflection, a dialogue in the most Arendtian way, with oneself, by negation stands, if only fleetingly, outside commodification and other modes of normalization.

This confronts us with a contradiction. Architecture, when truly radical and revolutionary, is forced into exile. And in exile, it cannot survive. Its radicalism withdraws it from the world and as such robs it of the ability to produce meaningful and far-reaching effects. Peter Eisenman’s assault on the very idea of a building teaches us a lesson. His cardboard houses of the 1970s speak of nothing but architecture’s inability to speak. Architecture cannot in reality, and arguably should not, escape its institutional engagement but act within it. Exile is ultimately a self-indulgent illusion of extreme nihilism. But the desire for exile is invaluable. It gives the discipline purpose and keeps it alive, pulsating, and striving. Longing for distance is an unattainable goal, a perpetual lack and libidinal drive that alone has the potential to place vigilance at the center of our being.

ENDNOTES

3. Hays, K. Michael. “Desire.” in: Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-garde, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 11-21: Here I disagree with the author in his belief that there is no longer any social need for architecture. “Desire” in the context of this paper addresses a very specific social condition as well as a political one.
Thomas Mical is Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of South Australia. He teaches in architectural theory and research methods, and does X-Files type research on a range of architectural curiosities including transparency & invisibility, spatial alterity, haunted minimalism, and the hyper modern condition.

This essay examines the situation of select recent high end fashion architecture in Tokyo, as a means of owning a wider discussion on the function of fashion in architectural thinking. With particular emphasis upon the resurgence of hyper modern minimalism as a form of glamour in the accelerated boom-and-bust cycles of building production, this essay also initiates a mapping of desire, commodification, and subtle permutations of style into the analysis of architectural production.

This essay examines modes of fashioning the infra-thin surfaces of select 1990s glamorous retail architecture, specifically works by Ito, Aoki, and Sejima, in Tokyo. The specific consumption model of appearance (of sleek surfaces tending towards commodification or spectacle) is often in tension with the forms of emergence of individual style – in architecture as the interplay of sensuality, the imaginary, and desire. The high retail showcases of Dior, Vuitton, and others will be shown to push Benjamin’s claims for the bipolar existence of architecture (as custom and image) fashioned in their skins towards unity. The architectural propositions and material decisions create a seamless continuity through the collapse of 20th Century department store spatial tactics into enthralling 21st Century diagrammatic surface effects. This conceptual mapping of glam architecture then introduces the subtle analytical model of desiring-machines. This paper will seek to contextualize the flattening of these historical processes within the infra-thin engineered surfaces of iconic neo-minimalist buildings, in complex relation to an austerity impulse.
GLAM ARCHITECTURE FOR DESIRING-MACHINES
THOMAS MICAL

The boom-and-bust cycles of the economy in the modern era reverberate into the larger cultural landscape, pressuring designers to fashion new sensitivities and responses. The recent shifts in patterns of work and patterns of production, specifically the cycles of voluptuousness or asceticism in the fashioning of boutique architecture to be considered here, are neither new nor original to our late modernity. The manifold relations between fashion and architecture can be seen to enact a long and complex relay: performance, style, media, and market organized around a kernel of glamour, a type of desire manifest as allure that can be seen to operate in the surfacing and detail logic of architecture for the fashion industry. The cycles of both fashion and architecture are always untimely, appearing either too soon or too late, and the chain of influence between them is likewise convoluted. Clearly the volatility and flexibility of sources for the creative process of developing high profile and designer clothing may be subtly reciprocated in the longer development cycles and stylistic shifts of architecture, which seem to move more slowly, outside seasonal benchmarks. Note that architecture still follows these cycles in search of the contemporary “mystique of commodities that has enforced fad and fashion as the ultimate new” in design.1

One need only recall the contested positions between Otto Wagner’s fashioning of modern architecture and those of Adolf Loos to see that none of the style or language of modern architecture was predetermined or absolute – contingency and emergence appear as preconditions. The premise that style will deform or transmute is a constant, in the sense that fashion can be imagined like a Bergsonian movement-image sequence ascribed to bodies in motion.5 The style of the individual work of architecture, as a type of conditional materialist cutting (style = stylus), so often associated with the fashioning of architecture as tailoring, distinguishes the procedural work of architecture from the fixed or unstyled elements of the city. This activation of potentials (later into intentions) by designers is a type of separation, one that in fashioning leads ultimately to a subtle alienation. Cutting and fashioning as process produces difference, one that is recognizable as the core of fashion (even identity is itself a type of dissociation or difference). The core of industrial-modern architecture, and more so in media-modern architecture, is just such a constitutive subtle alienation, as a cutting or separating that marks the individual from the multitude

Fashion, it should be recalled, “has a sense for the actual present, no matter where it moves in the thickets of the past.”10 The history of style focuses on the role of deterministic lines, and the lines of fashion, the lines of style, are always the results of cuts.4 Style is the imprint from the stylus, the flourishes of the signature, a line that connects and cuts, simultaneously. The drawing, the tracing pattern, the making and fashioning of the surface are determined by the micro-cuts of styling. The architectural style is legibly present in the finished project, as it is moved from generic commodity to refined product, which is also a determination not only of surface but of the exact configurations of structure, material palette, lighting, and even the environmental systems. Style, if you look, is surfacing everywhere in architecture—style as a type of emergence or formation, in that style (as language) also “…has always something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention, and, as it were, a vertical and lonely dimension of thought. Its frame of reference is biological or biographical, not historical…”11

The refinements of design as tailoring are a contouring of the specifics of spatial-corporeal situated-ness in architecture, always determined by individuals. There can be no fashion, or no fashion of architecture, without this agency (extended into a developed fashion-industrial complex). When this attention to situated-ness below is focused in the obscure typology of the flagship boutique store, we can note these are often structured in the language of a museum-like formality for commodity display, a petit grandeur. From Benjamin’s analysis of the emergence of the department store, the fashion boutique as type has moved through intermediary phases including the shopping arcade, where repetition of retail space generates a competition of window
shopping, so that fashioning and design produce a culture of spatial scanning – always on the lookout for the next emerging style.

For example, in the period of hyper-construction in downtown Tokyo through the 1990s’ bubble economy, many architects mobilized a vast range of innovative and experimental forms of building fashioning, in a stylistic competition seen explicitly in the high-fashion district of Ginza, but also Harajuku and Omotesando. Although these respond to shifting demographics pursuing vintage, Goth, and Lolita fashion tribes, the top-end brands appear to demand top-end architecture in the most prestigious districts. The allure of the fashion flagship store, as a perceptual building typology simulating a brand identity, was taken on by a range of architects in the bubble period, some working at the extremes of architectural fashioning like Atsushi Kitagawara (notable for the fascinating Rise Cinema but also his many urban projects of this era), as well as many emergent architectural practices. The design briefs seem to call for a blending of the simple retail box typology with the siting of the fictional magazine spread, distributed into mediated physical space. Within this flexibility, there is something unusual and visually unexpected in the most extreme examples that can be found in the well-publicized high-profile examples by three Japanese architectural firms: Toyo Ito, SANAA, and Jun Aoki. In these works, there is specifically a rethinking and recoding of the architectural fashion code, informed by a recall of prior modernist building language, with a sophisticated material exploration that performs both to challenge the aesthetics of austerity, but also that homogenizes the subjectively perceived sensuality of immersed spatial situated-ness.

FASHIONING SENSUALITY AND APPEARANCE

In sensuality, there is an enveloping of meaning and perceiving, which in architecture fashioning are unified through the notion of the body-in-space (functioning as the prior epistemological basis of pre-modern architecture). After 19th century industrialization, and the 21st century binding of media onto architectural thought and production, fashioning was driven to become more schematic and essentialist, more a pulsation or disturbance in the stability of the body-in-space epistemic ground (hence the 19th century style debates). The fashioning of architecture, as the styling of the building away from mass commodity into a singular identity of distinction, increasingly absorbs one or more layers of media and mediation between the previously fused body and space. Sensuality then is no longer the sensing of spatial location and situated-ness, but tends towards a dualism where the body is still in and of materialist productions of space, but increasingly it is also co-present in a media (perhaps as double-image or mirage). Thus soft codes of emerging mediated space are interwoven, or stretch across the fashioned media-spaces for bodies, all of which form a new complex that is the floating sensorium of architecture.

The specific consumerist logic is to scan for the emergence of the new, a new that slightly differentiates from the consistency of appearance of what was once new. Thus style assumes a dualism: the usefulness of the commodity is part of its value, sometimes dominant and oftentimes subordinate to its differential appearance. This dualism, of course, has always been present in architecture, as Benjamin had noted in the mid-1930s, that architecture is: “appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception, or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building […] not so much by attention as by habit.”

From use to perception, from space to mediation, the emergence of stylistic impulses can be located within this dynamic of architectural fashioning. The sensuality of architecture in this mediated age is thus reduced to a more haptic appropriation of space through the surfaces of things, surfaces themselves increasingly engineered and optimized to a super-flat default condition. These rationalized surfaces are in a curious tension with sensuality. The sleek surfaces and minimal seams are themselves a current fashion, one with a subtle interplay of sensuality, the imaginary, and desire in their function as activating architectural perception over functional use. The end is not delight but the consumption that extends from delight. Putin speaks of consumer misperception, “since consumption is inherently political, aesthetic, ethic, and economic, spaces of consumption are always produced as field of forces, exchanges, and interactions.” These stylistic field conditions are alluring to designers, and this allure can increasingly imbend into architectural design processes as shifting conditional relations that produce the new. It is well within
the discipline of architectural practice to organize these relations within the design project as mediation of designed space through new media, but this field condition is also potentially housed within the individual design instinct, or manifest architectural intelligence, of the designer to manipulate or exaggerate certain tendencies in one to produce a differentiated (fashioned) work.

FASHION-ARCHITECTURE

The architecture-fashion coupling is such a dynamic field that is schematically based on the tense co-presence of usefulness and appearance. This relation is properly aesthetic – in the pre-modern convention of utility being refined into objective beauty, a refinement that works from the neoclassical standard of arbitrary beauty (fashion) elevated towards absolute beauty. It would take a greater effort to push Walter Benjamin’s claims for the bipolar existence of architecture (as habit and image) towards a unity than to push them farther apart. To dialectically (or delicately) fuse the increasing divergence of architectural programming (tending towards event planning) and architectural image (tending towards branding) into a logically and sensuously consistent device is a demand of fashioning. The modern industrial systematization of the organization of design and construction processes, now as data and experience, and the unfolding of media forms to support this invisible process, works against this demand unity, so long as we consider architecture in this mode. The fashion system and the production codes of architecture require but resist a fixed unity.

The architectural propositions and material decisions that informed the urban consumption experiences in the late 19th century arcades mark the tipping point from the haptic to the optic in the modern, and are often understood to unfold into in the postwar industrial ethic. The shift from production to consumption means efficiency becoming austerity. The voluptuous depth of surfaces and layers of signs (anticipating architectural production codes) will be increasingly designed into thin and continuous fashioned surfacing, like an everyday abstraction or familiar image-space. The pervasiveness of increasingly identical retail spaces (e.g. “junkspace”) are marked by their increasingly continuous and seamless conditioned spaces achieved through a structural, spatial, optical, and even thermal balance and consistency. All of this seamless continuity points towards a verisimilitude, and yet there is a subtle engine of complexity operating immediately beneath these surfaces. Specifically, the allure of simplicity in high fashion, of stark dressing of modernity, and the curious legacy of minimalism will occasionally emerge within the overloaded experiential retail spaces, which are first and foremost dwellings for commodities.

If we go back to an earlier schema we can see how the optical initially dominated the emergence of modern architecture. Though Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes* argued for the emergence of a sensory culture over the optical in the rise of modernism, Mark Wigley’s examination of the architecture-fashion couple in the 20th century, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, demonstrates how the reduction of the haptic white wall “is thus stitched together with the psychosexual economy of fashion.” This “libidinal economy” of fashion, legible also in architecture, is one of the most important inflection points in fashion cycles.

It is the premise of this investigation that such a collectively pursued move towards a seamless continuity through the collapse of 20th century department store spatial tactics establishes a new normal conditioning – the ascendancy of homogenous architectural operations, specifically the enthralling 21st century diagrammatic surface effects. This move from haptic distinctions and fine-grained reality towards an optical gliding condition is heightened in the case of the ocular-centric aesthetic values sustained in postmodern Japan, a fashion-optical imperative which extends far beyond the scope of the exemplary Tokyo projects done for signature designers Dior or Vuitton, in the prior boom cycle of Japan’s bubble era.

The distortion of the aspects of optical overvaluation in the industrial-modern continues into the contemporary media-modern, erupting in the new forms of publicity, extreme close-ups, and new urgencies in the new forms of fashion (and new architecture). The sensed acceleration of the boom-and-bust resonance cycles between architecture and fashion imparts a certain fragility and anxiety to both. It would be of interest to think of such a history of architectural fragility (contra style), and the degree to which architectural works amplify or mute this economic anxiety. This sensed anxiety may be formative for new fashions and new architecture, these anxieties becoming the productive tensions driving creative works, as symptoms of emergent style.
GLAMOUR

The question of what is unique to fashion but outside of architecture may not be answerable. Both material practices respond to and reflect the economic turbulence generally (albeit on different cycles), and subtle class distinctions (which recodes austerity) more specifically. It would be more helpful to define the part of architecture that is not only shared, but is in some ways impervious to these indeterminacies. The possibility of the fusion of the two temporalities of modernity (fleeting – timeless) and the two forms of architectural consumption (use and appearance) could, with some indulgence, be covered by the singular category that in fashion (but less so in architecture) we could nominate as glamour, a category that in principle operates as a slow moding image-ideal slightly beyond architecture’s economic boom-and-bust production cycles. Glamour, itself a necessarily contested signifier (and now affect), offers the possibility of a means of subordinating the fluctuating proposals of the architecture-fashion couple across time. The incomplete project of Modern Architecture, under retrospective analysis, is itself a manifestation of an elusive construct of glamour, in the shared quest for timeless, eternal conditions of beauty through the immediacy of contemporaneous material practices. To maintain its beauty and essential distance glamour must appear effortless, and in architecture the glamour is a hiding process, where its surfaces must hide “the textures of life, and the skill and effort behind its own achievement.” As such, glamour is an ideal that comes to our senses as affect, and in effect the current media construct of glamour in architecture operates as a force of homogenization.

If we define glamour as the state of utmost refinement, thus equated with the Hollywood cinema or perhaps advertising scenes of elegant minimalism in clothing and dressing, we can map this glamorous ideal of minimalist beauty onto the larger cultural movements (in some ways impervious to economic swings, and in some ways a manifestation of minimalism satisfying ascetic or austerity impulses). Glamour, then, tends towards the smooth surface which masks much turmoil. The fashioning of modernism in honest expressions of materials with minimal or negative detailing appears as a core value of high modernism. The movement from the 1950s glam to 2000s glam in architecture can be seen specifically to attenuate the logic of the surface as ideal (and ideally as glamourous): the smooth and sleek membrane where previously “adjectives such as excessive, tattooed, and scale-less – words once employed to criticize mid-century modernism displaying nonfigurative patterning – may now be used to describe the formal characteristics of the new glamour aesthetic in avant-garde architecture.” Advanced industrial cultural turbulence and accelerated mediated cultural consumption of the new are productive forces, and combined with the ascetic virtues of mediated spaces, this convergence of forces can direct the designer to fetishize glamour so as to fold it into normative practice. In a sense, extreme pressures of efficiency can point towards a “glam architecture.”

The architecture-fashion couple in the mediated-modern age is increasingly interwoven, by choice. The rise of the brand identity is permeating our periphery, and consumption is signaled by the logo – increasingly dominating style and environment. The architecture-fashion couple have moved to a position of mutual dependence in the public imagination, an over-determining cultural norm that has met light resistance as a process in architectural design, and perhaps also in theory. Branding synthesizes the economic and aesthetic into an apparent unity. Branding, unlike fashion, is a working towards a singular identity that organizes and regulates other aspects of the distributed fashion-networks. Brand today is a sign taken for fashion, one that creates a subtle moiré effect interference pattern within the process of architectural design, so that style as searching for singularities dissolves into brand.

The mediated brand-image of the architecture-fashion couple is perhaps most clear in the retail showrooms of fashion houses (shown below) including Dior and Vuitton (plus Prada, and many others). The fashion industry itself would be expected to place a high prestige and media value on their public buildings which logically extend from Benjamin’s observations, and there is a growing tendency for this exclusive clientele to turn to analogous high-profile architectural firms with distinct styles, and certain media credibility. These fashion houses have a long history of deliberate and savvy media presentation techniques, and this process of branding and creating the allure of a style is a latency of modern architecture that is increasingly noticed by contemporary critics, students, and subtly absorbed by today’s urban flaneurs.
SOME TOKYO EXAMPLES

The strong district identity and legibility forming Tokyo can be traced back to the early modern growth of Edo from distinct villages, distinctions in building fabric and urban fabric that has only been partially erased in the media-saturated era of globalization and cosmopolitanism. Some of the earliest attempts to find modern architectural language, by modern pioneers such as Kenzo Tange and the Japanese Metabolists, were often accomplished in an emergent corporate order. 25

There have always been unique one-off stores and projects in Tokyo – indeed, the relentless advertising in the urban skins has made exceptionalism difficult. To understand at a literal and visual level the significance of fashion in architecture within high couture, consider these well-known examples, and the fashioning of their architecture: where the iconic presence as style-becoming-brand comes to the surface, it eventually becomes the surfacing fashion (tending towards image) evident in architectural production. The function of glamour was to make the ideal visible as distinction, and it is important to note the care and attention placed on optics, sighting, permeability, and even entry conditions of the fashion building type. The architectural skill lies in calibrating these optics with the market strategy and urban forces: “though glamour was defined primarily in visual terms, these buildings favored forms, features and materials that also heightened haptic and other forms of physical engagement while detaching occupants from the quotidian world.” 28

The architecture-fashion coupling is perhaps most explicit in the Dior projects. The Dior minimum style model is important in understanding the transformations that occurred in the major fashion houses, but also in anticipating similar shifts in architecture culture. Dior’s identification of the “New Look” responded to the tighter economics of the post-war period, but also created a blending of high fashion and glamour with minimalism and austerity, something that anticipated the co-opting of modernism by elite corporate culture in the US and the industrialized nations. 27

[Figure 01]: The architectural response to the pressure for distinct fashion in the post-bubble economy is determined as a sleek gelatinous skin, layered in vertical bands, in the Christian Dior Building, by Sejima + Nishizawa and Associates (SANAA), located on Omotesando Avenue, Tokyo, and completed in 2003. The sleek surface solution, reinvented as two separated punched aluminum skins, with an elegant variant moiré patterning of tactical transparency, is the ordering device for another Christian Dior Building, this one in Ginza by architect Kumiko Inui completed in 2004. “The outer skin is perforated with thousands of large and small holes which subtly reveal the illuminated inner skin, which is also patterned. In combination, they replicate the woven pattern of Thonet’s famous chair that Christian Dior adapted as his signature motif.” 29

The Louis Vuitton brand has always had a large following in Japan, perhaps the largest customer following outside France. The fashioning of the architectural surfacing is cultivated as part of a strong market identity strategy. This image strategy is interpreted by the selected architects as a singular building-image strategy, informed usually by a “passion for wrapping and drapery.” 30 This semiotic of draping also reveals the distance of conventional post-war ideals of production, less alluring than the mediation privileged today.
There is a delicate balancing act of glass volumes stacked to visually recall steamer trunks or shipping crates found in (fashion) warehouses, but with a subtle coloring and frisket system to activate degrees of translucent effects. In abandoning the building skin as a singular surface-image, the façade becomes a volumetric iconicity in the Louis Vuitton store at 5-7-5 Jingumae in Omotesando. This project, by Jun Aoki, was completed in 2002, and initiated a series of further design collaborations (and progressive façade innovations).

The scintillating glass cylinder façade that replaces layered screens with a zoom effect is a unique tactical transparency that distorts peripheral looking into opacity. This sophisticated façade treatment selected for the Louis Vuitton in the Roppongi Hills district of Tokyo, 2003 by Jun Aoki & Associates is characteristic of his innovative fashioning of this building type.

The moiré effect of perforations is articulated as light patterning in the Louis Vuitton Store in Ginza Namiki, also by architect Jun Aoki & Associates, 2004. Here the building as brand commodity is achieved through an optical-graphic strategy consistent with other fabric products of the Louis Vuitton brand, situating visual recognition of identity as a masking or delay tactic for accessing the mysterious interior.
Tod’s Omotesando Building at 5-1-15 Jingumae in Tokyo was completed by 2013 Pritzker Prize winner Toyo Ito in 2004. Here the building structure is the concrete lattice of the skin, rethought as a tree-like stencil pattern, perhaps recalling dazzle camouflage that creates glass voids as slices through the skin. The profuse visual surface is detailed to avoid the rusticated brutalism of much post-war concrete, and instead recalls the light and delicate detail ambitions in some visionary Japanese Metabolism (Ito’s original method early in his career).

Finally, the Opaque Ginza store, with the glass façade feature by Kazuyo Sejima / SANAA, is a precedent of these Tokyo works, completed in 1998. Sejima apprenticed with Toyo Ito, and her original works have continued to explore the limits and effects of transparency as a stylistic driver of diagrammatic architecture, as well as a dominant optic that replaces surface and skin with surface-effect becoming building-image. This early work is a department store, not a high fashion boutique, but it does demonstrate certain procedures that come to inform this entire lineage of built works.
These projects form a growing urban ensemble demonstrating a new glamour aesthetic in recent superflat architectural skins, which pressures the designer towards novelty within an increasingly performative and engineered haptic culture. The skins themselves, for all their reductive elegance and significant haptic activization in the fine details, are closely aligned with the fashion system that has colonized architectural reception and consumption. These skins, for all their intended originality or uniqueness, like the clothing designs themselves, come from subtle exaggerations of a coded set of materials and techniques of production that are consistent with industry standards and visual culture codes. Indeed, the similarity of the architectural works are themselves direct consequences of the prioritization of mediated design processes propelling advanced technological production. This is in tension with the material surfaces themselves, which are called upon to play with and occasionally fuse the distinction between structure and ornament, itself an obsolescing fashion from the prior century as a precursor to functionalism and industrial efficiency (nowadays mass customization and proliferating niche markets).

Between the hectic period of hyperactivity in the design sphere of Japan's closely watched bubble economy, and the retrenching afterwards in the graying post-bubble economy, there is still much to be learned concerning the cyclic fashioning of architecture. The fashion-cycles for architecture are not clearly empirical, or even like marketplace abstractions, but are a complex negotiation between designers and the allied design enterprises involved across the construction process. In examining these design works for the major fashion brands in Tokyo, which have managed to sustain an extensive retail culture of glamour. Within major cities, the iconic stores are situated within larger distribution networks exceeding the earlier zoning of fashion districts, and indeed the reliance on star architects for the custom finishing of iconic buildings sustains a larger emphasis across these production (and consumption) networks to draw the eye and the touch of the hand to select commodities. The process of design and the process of seduction characteristically plays out in both design disciplines in the details.

“Glamour isn’t beauty or luxury; those are only specific manifestations for specific audiences. Glamour is an imaginative process that creates a specific, emotional response: a sharp mixture of projection, longing, admiration, and aspiration. It evokes an audience’s hopes and dreams and makes them seem attainable, all the while maintaining enough distance to sustain the fantasy.”

And how is glam architecture possible without fantasy?

There is a strong move by architects, unique to their disciplinary skill, to absorb these volatile market pressures in the current austerity and develop original works of boutique architecture using aspects of glamour (glamour is in the details) in the increasingly competitive fashion-industrial complex. Like the early modern museum building type (which is not antithetical but analogous to fashion), the building type of the glamour fashion boutique appears the most permissive and tolerant building type along the functional axis, but less so along the specular axis. The essentialist programming of the shop is amorphous and spectacular, and the client expectation for one-off artistic architectural experiments, tending towards optical hyper-performativity, does not wane in dire economic states. This glam architecture represents a certain tendency to dress architecture in a sophisticated but ultimately conservative surface fabric. These new skins above were developed to stylize reflectivity, transparency, and translucent glass surfaces as emblematic perimeters, but also the infra-thin surfaces of these 1990s glamorous retail architecture produce a self-similar effect of transparency. The resulting displacement of the image of the buildings, under this optic of reflectivity, is also a visual relay that signifies the flux of late modern urbanism. The fashioning of architecture into image is significant, and a
fashioned building’s identity arises from its close proximity and juxtaposition to other makes and models, to other architectural brand statements in the sea of late modern flows. Buildings float in the flux of the city, but buildings also float in the flux of fashion – in a second-order system. Within these works of glam architecture, the iconic building-images expand and project outwardly into the surrounding city, but the contraction of the urban into these works of “glam” architecture is heavily constrained and regulated.

The social function of dressing works analogously in the urban mix (where building fabric and urban fabric sit closely together), as identified in Barthes’ peculiar semiotic reading of Tokyo’s central generative void as linguistic code.32

Fashioning, in clothing or architecture (or language) is a network for transferring significance and influence. The paired semiotics of fashion and urbanism, the role of clothing and wrapping of voids, easily presents the city as a fashioned (recombinant) construct – borrowing from history and forcing the new. Pursuing the obvious analogy further, in the manner that clothes are expected to hang on the body, often building skins hang on the structure. In the iconic designs by Ito, Sejima / SANAA, and Aoki, the fashion code that elevates simple clothing into high fashion seems to operate as a stylistic device in elevating skin-and-bone architecture into exquisite singular fusions of ornament, structure, and iconic brand, bundling together what is often separated by professions and industry regulation. In so doing, the tell-tale threads, cuts, sutures, and marks that trace that most elusive design generator – desire – become hidden and embedded within the materials of construction.

GLAM ARCHITECTURE, SURFACING DESIRING-MACHINES

For this reason, it would be possible to write an elaborate secret history of architectural fashion, one that moves beyond analysis of techniques of the culture of the spectacle or commodification of the culture industry, into a more nuanced reading of economies of desire partially legible within the thin material of building skins themselves. The old mechanisms of luxury and industry are in these above Tokyo design works (and many others internationally), disconnected and reconnected in new permutations that call our attention to the increasingly cool engineered materiality of architectural surface, and speculation of what really lies within. The fashioning of architectural commodities has increased the sense of a slight disembodied and haunting of architectural style-fashion as a value unto itself, something that moves into and through the skin along signifying chains, something like a phantasmal quality radiating outwards that allows us to discern emergent style and fashion code formations from the blankness of rote construction (or couture from commodity).

The work of architecture in the fashion industry appears to follow a general tendency to smooth over the irregularities of boom-and-bust cycles along a bias towards optical and spatial continuities. The observed movement from production to consumption in the postwar period sets up the question of corresponding changes to desire, which we would propose as a slight exegetical tool for examining the cultural formation of these built avatars of urban high shopping (which no longer follow the window shopping of Paris, capital of the 19th century). In the new mirrored surfaces of consumption, desire tends towards becoming invisible, beneath the surfaces. In fashionable architecture, desire is indexed but rarely called out.

Following this proposed non-rational force model of volatile styles under the limit of absolute glamour as absolute minimalism, we might do well to invoke a provocative alternative model of desire and production. Specifically, if we assume the viability of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of individual desiring-machines as the sub-surface forces in play in everyday subjectivity, we can see a resonant reciprocity between the subject of late modernity that is a site of production of desires, like a micro-factory, and the glam architecture which arrests and places under glass the forces of consumption driving desire. Both schemas allow us to calibrate the work of glam architecture as a subtle form of libidinal economy, and in the fashion showrooms of Ito, Sejima/SANAA, and Aoki, the this other (secret) economy is sublimated by the designers into sleek, austere, and emaciated building skins, neo-minimalist in complexion but enthralling in optical effects. The flattening of these historical processes of consumption, bundled disciplines, and outwardly radiant fashion codes are still flickering through the ultra-thin engineered surfaces of glam architecture.

In this unorthodox Deleuzo-Guattarian model of the psyche in the city, the subject is enmeshed (mediated) within a circuit of movements and transferences and projections – and desire is this force that produces meaning and value, and pulls us from modernist inattention into something more sensual and present.
Though this relation is most explicit when architecture icon-locates with advertising (i.e. branding), we should be careful to address those unexpected or unresolved aspects of desire in the apparatuses of architecture, as these incomplete gestures are the Barthes model of style itself. Desire has a place in the flows of architecture just as much as the electrical lighting or air conditioning, and its codification or standardization through repetition in the present as a means of reducing the novelty and the new of once-fashionable architecture. Like the waning of the boom-and-bust cycle of building economics, which surely must pair with these secret architectural libidinal economies, there is a movement towards minimizing difference. Through repetition the novelty of fashionable architecture wears down like a battery, and these works of “glam” architecture eventually operate as a damping effect for desire, so that even the status of built work as architecture is diminished. Architecture, we can conclude in these dual changing economic situations, is in these cases a smooth skin designed which could attract and conduct and fashion some of our desire, but just as easily may trigger other mysterious desiring-machines inside and nearby to other destinations.

ENDNOTES

7. See for example, Heinrich Hütchins et al. In What Style Should We Build? The German Debate on Architectural Style. (Santa Monica: Getty Research Institute, 1980).
8. Sensourism is used here to indicate the situating of a diverse ranges of senses inside the cognitive apparatus of neurobiology, as examined in Caroline A. James, Sensourium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
13. Rem Koolhaas. “junkspace”, October, Vol. 100. Obsolencecence. (Spring, 2002), 175-190. Note also the omnipresent gauntlet of mandatory duty-free retail shopping increasingly existing in the most unexpected places.
15. See Jean-Francois Lyotard. Libidinal Economy. (London; Continuum, 2004), 79 and passim.
17. See the classic text on emergent media theory. Beatriz Colomina. Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). The influence of media is perceptible in significant publications on fashion architecture, including Bradley Quinn. The Fashion of Architecture. (Oxford: Berg, 2003) and Josep Rosa, ed., Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design, Architecture. (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art / Yale University Press, 2004). Media spectacles of fashion, for example such as the Victoria’s Secret broadcast shows, are slowly extending into spatial design and practices, as well as the collective unconscious through media.
18. Much is said of the importance of recessions, as painful as they are for interfering with livelihoods, as an important pause for architectural design firms to rethink (and retool), as in Jonathan Glancy. “The Architecture of Recession.” The Guardian, 07 March 2009.
23. One example of capitalist branding in architecture is HAKN’s mobile retail outlets, the Uniqlo Cubes. See Peggy Deamer. Architecture and Capitalism. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), historicizes the social and industrial context of this media phenomena. Naomi Klein. No Logo. (New York, NY: Picador, 1999), opened up the public critique of branding, which is still a strong motive in most high-end design styling.
24. Although Koolhaas can be seen as the originator of this model of practice, his sources would obviously include Le Corbusier’s early forays into media, and his mentor Peter Behrens formations of industrial design branding for AEG.
27. This stylish observation is included in the internet fashion directory located at http://www. mimosa.eu/projects/tatay/Tokei/Dor_Ginoza accessed 15 April 2013.
29. The insights regarding the semiotic of fashion are to be found in Roland Barthes’ seminal text The Fashion System (1967) (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1983).
32. The construct of the desiring-machine is an obscure but powerful tool for understanding the flows of desire from the unconscious to the material-conscious world, and individual subjectivity as something more factory-like. The seminal work by Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, subtitled Capitalism and Schizophrenia, points to the semiotic riot that forms our sense and situation in spaces of consumption. To put it (too) simply, the desiring-machines in us are the refined industrial-era forms of impulses and attractions to qualities and conditions external to us, also given through industrialization. All forms of desire are so fashioned, and are also therefore unique and somewhat transitory.
NEOLIBERAL DESIRE AND JUNK SPACE
PACIFICATION BY CAPPUCCINO: SCHIZOPHRENIA BETWEEN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL REALITIES

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The drastic transformation of Palestinian society fashioned by neoliberal economic policy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has somehow failed to initiate any academic or political discourse for imagining different options and alternative directions for the current crisis of the Palestinian liberation project. What the peace process had imposed is a middlemen administration, managing a quasi-state apparatus, whose ultimate mission is to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation aimed at building the alleged future state. This has created schizophrenia in a nation that is tormented between the persistence of Israeli colonialism on one hand, and a hallucination of living in a postcolonial state building project at the same time.
"Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world."¹

It all collapses to a cup of cappuccino at ZAMN Café in Ramallah, where there is a utopian sense of a Palestinian middle class society. Fathers push strollers and tend their children, and mothers dressed up in their best trendy clothes discuss yoga, fitness, parties and vacations. All gather and meet at the café that stretches to the sidewalk, drinking their cappuccinos and admiring the trendy new cars displayed on the street.

It is the ideal environment for the new urban middle class that strives to embody a ‘universal yearning for cappuccino culture’ as expressed by Sharon Zukin in her book Naked City.² This is a universal neoliberal culture that has one narrow imagination for a ‘good life,’ distancing the middle class from their long restrained history under Israeli Occupation and allowing them to breathe, to be free; where it’s ‘finally possible to raise kids,’ as parents of young families often say.

It can always be argued that it is their right and personal choice; nevertheless, the rupture between the ‘cappuccino’—drastic transformation of society fashioned by the neoliberal policy of the PA has somehow fallen into a discourse of rectifying the causes and effects of neoliberalism rather than imagining different options and alternative directions for the current crisis of the Palestinian liberation project. What the peace process imposed are middlemen managing a quasi-state apparatus, whose ultimate mission is to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation aimed at building the alleged future state. This has created a kind of schizophrenia in a nation that is tormented by the tension between the persistence of Israeli colonialism on one hand, and a hallucination of living in a postcolonial condition on the other.

This confusion can be read in the rapid transformation of cities like Ramallah. Architecture becomes particular to other forms of cultural production, in a sense of reflecting in its physical manifestation the socio-economic conditions of society and its power structure. Ultimately, the daily visual urban experience gives architecture and urbanism important cultural values grounded in the everyday life of people. Hence, this perplexing ‘personality disorder’ of the current Palestinian conditions between the colonial and postcolonial can be read in the production of space, where cities like Ramallah are constantly engaged in a struggle to reconstruct a new urban image.

This paper is concerned with the visual material and representation of architecture as a barometer to understand the current urban transformation of Ramallah. The urban renewal of the city and the visual material consumed by the new middle class culture generate a considerable power to mobilize people’s passions and desires. The visual in architecture becomes a space of hallucination, amnesia and erasure, hence, a strategic site for obliterating the past and distorting history by means of the anesthetics of neoliberal aesthetic.³ For the scope of this paper, the new Palestinian planned city ‘Rawabi’ will be taken as an exemplar to study the current spatial transformations and their repercussions.

NEOLIBERALISM OF LIBERATION

Since the establishment of the PA, Ramallah has become a site of massive redevelopment, with bulldozers tearing down old buildings and neighborhoods. Craters are ready for new construction in every neighborhood, and cranes pop up like mushrooms in the city’s skyline.

So many landmarks have disappeared; in particular, those coined with social historic values (such as cinemas, hotels, and mansions) were replaced by concrete and glass towers. The feeling of neighborhoods has been shattered by business towers, which followed by a daily influx of unfamiliar clientele claiming the space. Neighborhoods have lost their small scale and local identity to commercial areas and the proliferation of restaurants, coffee shops, and bars.
This physical transformation is strongly associated with the emergence of the new urban middle class that is engaged in operating in the businesses and financial industries, as well as in non-governmental organization (NGO) and donor organizations. Yet this new urban class becomes the main consumer of the neoliberal renewal project and its dynamo by means of easy credit and loans from banks.

Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian Prime Minister with whom the neoliberalism project is associated, has clearly understood that his mission was to help establish a broad base for investment and to solve the unemployment problem through urbanization. The project of building the foundation of a Palestinian State has evidently absorbed huge quantities of labor and investments; nevertheless, it was a primary vehicle of social stabilization. This has also been combined with suppressing the aspirations of popular resistance against the continuous Israeli colonialism in the West Bank. “This fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood.”

Fayyad’s economic plan has operated based on the ongoing flux of donor aid money for some five years. It has involved not only a transformation of urban infrastructures, but also the construction of a new way of life and urban persona. Ramallah has become the ‘liberal city,’ the great center of consumption, tourism and pleasure, cafés, shopping malls, and cultural institutions. All this has induced changes in the urban experience and facilitated the absorption of vast fiscal surpluses through consumerism. This urban liberal life is founded on an overextended and unsustainable economic system and credit structures that are about to crash without the instant and continuous flow of international and Arab aid money.

In an interview with the former Palestinian Prime Minister in March 2013, Fayyad asserted that “the Palestinian Authority now has reached the point of not being able to pay the salaries of about 150,000 government employees... The number of Palestinian poor is bound to quickly double to 50 percent of the population of roughly 4 million...The Palestinian Authority already owes local banks more than $1.3 billion and can’t get more loans. It also owes hundreds of millions of dollars to private businesses, including suppliers to hospitals, some of whom have stopped doing business with the government.”

The “freedoms” neoliberalism has introduced to Palestinians, on the margin of their current financial crisis, is very selective to those who have the money to enjoy its emancipatory privileges. Moreover, neoliberalism also privileges those who are exempted from the Israeli colonial constraints and advantaged with freedom of mobility in the geography between Israel and the West Bank—mainly PA officials, investors, businesses, transnational corporations, and those in the financial industry.

URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

The post-Oslo urban transformation is marked in three main folds where money, by means of urbanization, has found its way through different urban forms. The architecture of transformation can be marked in new governmental and security structures, commercial buildings and projects, and in the housing sector.

The PA embarked on erecting its governmental edifices from its inception in 1996. Ministries have been accommodated in residential apartment buildings scattered around the city. Through repartitioning schemes of merged residential flats, the experience of a visit to a ministry feels like a suffocating walk through a maze of corridors and offices with stacked files, papers, and plastic chairs.’

Unlike the 90s, the era of urban spraws during the Peace Agreement, which were unplanned, locally funded, aesthetically atrocious and extremely commercial and utilitarian, the latest crusade of suburbanization in the West Bank is hurled forth by
public-private and transnational companies with major investment from the gulf.

The present era of planned suburbs and cities has caused radical transformation in lifestyles, pushing forward an aggressive consumption of new construction technologies and related products through perceived and planned obsolescence. The dream house depicted in billboards and bank advertisements comes with a tiled orange roof, a green lawn, and an interior image of a liberal family enjoying a smart TV and a satellite receiver, while sitting in a very stylish living room.

For the newly advertised housing projects, 3D rendered images show the buildings surrounded by a tropical paradise or a western European forest landscape. The bird’s-eye view of the building depicts air-conditioning units and four wheelers, Mercedes and BMW cars in the parking lots. There is abundance of visual material in cities like Ramallah through which one can analyze the construction of people’s passions, desires and aesthetics. “Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy.”

Suburbanization has also altered the political landscape widespread home-ownership mortgages by the middle class changed the focus of popular action towards the fear of losing property and class consumer. This has managed to turn the Palestinian community, especially the leftists, to total obedience and servitude. Burdened homeowners are less likely to revolt against the PA’s middlemen with their quasi-state liberation project.

RAWABI – A PROMISE OF PARADISE

The new city of Rawabi, unlike other projects, claims itself locally and internationally as the first palestinian planned city, and Rawabi claims to differ from other large scale real-estate projects in size, style of management, donors and marketing approaches. According to a press release issued by Bayti Real Estate Development Company, one of the companies of Bashar Al-Masri, the investor behind Rawabi, the new city will accommodate 4,000 affordable income housing units, with its infrastructure facilitated by the PA. In the press release, quotes from Bashar Al-Masri praise the public-private partnership with the PA: “We believe this is a great opportunity for a private-public partnership which will boost the Palestinian economy.”

The project, funded majorly by Qatar with a total estimate of $200 million, hosts roughly 25,000 persons in up to 4,000 apartment
units, with a price range between $37,500 and $75,000 per unit. The project sounds ideal and genuinely fulfills the need of ‘affordable’ housing for the growing Palestinian population. However, there has been a shift in the reporting of the project since its inception 2007. The total cost of the project has elevated to $700 million in 2012. Additional residential and commercial units were announced to raise the number of population to 40,000 people. The word ‘affordability’ has eventually ceased to exist in later reporting and public statements; likewise, the prices of flats that once looked tempting have also managed to disappear from public view.

While the draft law for the conservation of cultural heritage has not been endorsed since 2004 by the Cabinet of Ministers nor by the Palestinian president, Rawabi managed in 2009—2 years after its inception—to endorse a decree by the president to expropriate 185.6 hectares from three surrounding villages for what they claimed as ‘“public use.” The owners were forced involuntarily to give up their lands; moreover, they had to accept compensation by Rawabi based on the official estimation of land market prices. These lands were mainly reserved for the future expansion of Rawabi. The same historic policy of land expropriation for public use has been perpetually used by the Israeli Occupation to seize land for settlement expansion and infrastructures in the West Bank. Beyond the fusion of public and private interest that the unprecedented presidential decree has established, the analogy between Rawabi’s land grab with that of Israeli settlements underlines a similar dilution of the meaning of ‘public use.’ Both cases ultimately signify the exclusive use of expropriated land for the benefit of a small group of elite separated from the surrounding communities either by hegemonic religious and ideological differences, as in the Israeli settlements, or by exclusive class and cultural difference in Rawabi.

The location of the new city was selected to be central to the West Bank and surrounded by the countryside, where all the peasants live. The sovereigns of the new urban class and those who are indispensable to the functioning of the PA and its liberal politics find Rawabi a promise of paradise. Rawabi is sought to be spatially central to the PA’s reign and in proximity to Ramallah; otherwise, it would not be able to exercise all its necessary, foreseen functions. Ostensibly, there appears to be an aesthetic and symbolic relationship between Rawabi and the rest of the West Bank. Rawabi is planned as an ornament of the territory, the utopia of a new Palestine.

In its construction of postcolonial aesthetic, the planning and architectural style of Rawabi becomes a reflection against the history of colonial attack on the Palestinian ego and its rendition of backwardness and not modern. This reactionary aesthetical paradigm becomes not only important to assert the perpetual yearning for the colonized to become as powerful and as modern as the colonial, but it also pertains to the aspirations of the Palestinian Liberation Project since the 1970s to become part of the universal. The question of ‘who am I?’ becomes inevitable as Palestinians cast away visual traces of cultural backwardness, through disconnecting themselves from historical and geographical continuity. Rawabi with a masculine ego, a pioneering Palestinian national project, embraces the aesthetics of power imbedded in postwar suburban culture to compensate for its long colonial suppression. Harvey describes the post-war suburbanization crisis by asserting “the suburbs had been built, and the radical change in lifestyle that this betokened had many social consequences… the soulless qualities of suburban living also played a critical role in the dramatic events of 1968 in the US. Discontented white middle-class students went into a phase
of revolt, sought alliances with marginalized groups claiming civil rights and rallied against American imperialism to create a movement to build another kind of world—including a different kind of urban experience."""11

One can also acknowledge the monumental connotations of the city, as in the case of the Israeli settlement, saddling on the top of the mountain overlooking the surrounding villages and landscape. It is nonetheless a foundation of a self-sufficient exclusionary space for a cappuccino culture, projecting a division between the social exclusivity of the inhabitants and that of the history of the rest of the society and its spatial production. “Monumentality, for instance, always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say – yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military, and ultimately fascist in character, monumental building masks the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought. In the process, such signs and surfaces also manage to conjure away both possibility and time.”12

The monumental exclusivity of the location and architecture induces a political relationship such as the example of good citizenship and what a contemporary liberal Palestine means; this model can be implanted in the rest of the territory. It establishes itself as a dream to be attained by those unfortunates who did not fit in and become citizens of the city due to either social or financial conditions. “[l]t seems obvious that [Rawabi] is quite capable of becoming an idol in its own right—that is, a potent, ideological representation that serves to naturalize power relations and erase history and legibility.”13

Eventually, Rawabi becomes a moral example, and a reference for people with regard to their ‘Palestinianity’ and ways of conduct and lifestyle. It is a phenomenon of a total disconnection from the Palestinian colonial present and the suppressive backward history, which is required to be forgotten and replaced by the temptations of neoliberal urban culture.

The peril at this specific time of political and social crisis in Palestine is the normalization of a schizophrenia where the new liberal urban culture a rupture in time and history by inducing a utopia of sovereignty and liberation. It is a reality with a superimposed, fast-forwarded imaginary of a postcolonial sovereignty that is in denial

of history and the present reality of colonial conditions.

The promotion and marketing of Rawabi through different forms of advertisement become not only a target for the new urban middle class through promises of the universal cappuccino culture, but it also obliterates the contingency of the historic values of the meaning of home, land and culture. The rendition of the surrounding landscape seen from windows and balconies of the family houses in Rawabi selectively purges any sign of cultural evidence (villages and agriculture). The Palestinian landscape represented as empty lands without any indication of being historically populated.

THE PARALLEL

This gradual yet inevitable reinvention of cities like Ramallah is a determined, concentrated process of the PA’s general manifestation of its political neoliberal ideology. It is striking that a historical parallel can be constructed between the building of the Jewish state on “A land without a people for a people without a land,”14 and that of the PA’s project of building a viable Palestinian State.

In his book Landscape and Memory, Simon Schama describes the Jewish National Fund’s forestation project of the land of Palestine to realize the Zionist imagination and dream of the Promised Land: “The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation. And while we assumed that a pinewood was more beautiful than a hill denuded by grazing flocks of goats and sheep, we were never exactly sure what all the trees were for. What we did know was that a rooted forest was the opposite landscape to a place of drifting sand, of exposed rock and red dirt blown by the winds.”15
The rationalization of forestation of the land, and hence the erasure of the existing cultural history, was not only a means of claiming a biblical right to a vacant land for rooting the Jewish diaspora. It was also a determined process of erasure of the existing cultural history and demolition of 418 Palestinian villages,14 henceforth reinventing a new geography by juxtaposing the imagined pine forest landscape on the created tabula rasa.

Likewise, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) imagination of a liberated Palestine was incrementally created and built in exile. The base of this imaginary has originated from the PLO’s militia governance in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunis vis-à-vis the personal and political relations with the national projects of Arab countries. Although there were always strong ties and strategic modus operandi with resistance and political leadership in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and inside Israel, the making of the Palestinian liberation project has been the creed of the PLO alone. This imaginary has manifested itself in the formation of the PA and its management of the archipelago of Areas A and B in the West Bank based on the impossible confines of the Oslo Interim Accords. With a careful examination of the peace negotiations and the transition to post-Oslo, it is obvious that the imaginary of the liberation project was not negotiated with other possible imaginaries by Palestinian leadership and intellectuals in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, exile or those living inside Israel. Parallel to the tabula rasa used for the foundation of the Jewish State, the PA’s state building project and its’ imaginary has established itself anew in the West Bank and Gaza without connection to the social history, culture and values of the place.

CONCLUSIONS

The neoliberal conditions created by the PA to built their imaginary of the Liberation Project has drifted, as Fanon would place it, to the abyss where: “colonialism tries to disarm national demands by putting forward economic doctrines. As soon as the first demands are set out, colonialism pretends to consider them, recognizing with ostentatious humility that the territory is suffering from serious underdevelopment which necessitates a great economic and social effort.” 18

The critique of these conditions is not a yearning for any historical sociopolitical conditions that existed before, or a rejection of the global culture that has become dialectically as much as the colonial culture part of the identity of the colonized.

It is rather an attempt to realize the schizophrenic contention of living simultaneously a normalized mode of liberation while under a persistent occupation. It is exactly like reading a book about a utopia that describes Palestine after decades of its liberation from the Israeli Colonialism, and while you read you are thinking that this is a nice imaginary of a possibility of what might happen in the future after liberation. You recognize suddenly that the liberation didn’t happen; however, the imaginary of what might have happened is actually happening. It is a time rupture and a collapse that exterminates the liberation project, yet the same time eradicates any possible, diverse imagination of a different future.

ENDNOTES

FALL 2013

September 18 / Julio Bermudez
Catholic University of America, Washington DC

October 23 / Jorge Colón
University of New Mexico's School of Architecture + Planning

SPRING 2014

February 12 / Lance Hosey
RTKL.

February 19 / James Richard
Richard & Bauer Architecture

March 05 / Todd Saunders
Saunders Architecture

March 19 / Byoung Soo Cho (Martin Brieten Memorial Lecture)
BCHO Architects, Seoul, South Korea
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DREAM OF BUILDING OR THE REALITY OF DREAMING

CHECKING OF PULSE: DESIGN BUILD

DEADLINE:
June 1st 2014

REQUIREMENTS:
Abstract (350 words)
Short CV

In Spring 2013, the School of Architecture at the University of Utah regarded its association with the Design Build studio in Bluff, Utah as a great accomplishment. Bluff is part of the emergent wave of design build studios in the United States tied to the critically acclaimed Auburn University Rural Studio established by Samuel Mockbee in 1999. Alternatively praised for promoting socially responsible architecture and criticized for aestheticizing poverty, these studios have attracted almost universal interest from faculty and students of architecture programs. In the past decade and a half, 100 out of 123 NAAB accredited architecture schools participated in some variety of the studio, and one out of every six students passed through design build education during their tenure in architecture schools.

The third issue of Dialectic focuses on the history, theory and practice of design build studio and non-profit design industry. Surely, these studios work on the margins. They are realized in geographies and neighborhoods off the cultural grid. They take students away from the grounding certainties of home and school. They transport participants to a world incompatible with the accepted norms of their educational institutions. They confront them with the limitations of high tech spectacles born of tourist economy for the vast majority of the world that lie at the heart of disciplinary imagination. They force participants to investigate the ordinary, the understated, and the invisible, born of necessity. Most of these programs invent projects paid for with soft funds and produce clients. They do so in communities too poor to be of interest to the real estate industry and too voiceless to be heard by their councilors. They teach design's reliance on skilled labor.

In an article on the power of Rural Studio, Jeremy Till and Sarah Wigglesworth note that it is only from this spatial, material, social, constructional, economical, and pedagogical marginality that one can clearly see the center and recognize its closures, blindness, and restrictions.

At the same time, the body-centric pedagogy of design build studios is susceptible to incredible shortsightedness. It is in danger of reproducing power relations within the society: among the educated and the uneducated, the enfranchised and the subjugated, the resourceful and their reverse. Dialectic 3 calls for papers to explore this double-edged sword and think through the strengths and challenges to the resurfacing of construction as part of architectural pedagogy. At a sublime scale, what does it tell us about the direction the discipline is headed?

We invite abstracts on the history and prehistory of these design build studios. Contributors are encouraged to evaluate both its powerful and toothless practices, and reflect on the value of this enterprise. Suggestions for photo essays are welcome as well as timelines that list the history of design build movement in any part of the world. It is not without significance that this wave of interest in the concrete, hands on, collaborative, site specific, low tech, time- and money-bound approach to architectural education has risen in concurrence with growing commitment to the abstract, automated, independent, screen-specific, high tech, and computation-led (rather than served), screen-centric approach to architectural education. Are these models two sides of the same architectural currency? Can they inform each other and create a dialectically related new definition of architecture and architect’s responsibilities in the 21st century? Does this marginal practice have the strength to hold up a mirror to the center? Or will it be subsumed under the homogenizing tendencies of normative architectural practice? How does design build education and not-for-profit building construction
define and refine the social responsibilities of the profession? Do we have examples where high-tech solutions have created humane environments for culturally (also read economically, politically, and educationally) marginal communities? Finally, since these practices create a market for their goods in defiance to the logic of the mainstream marketplace, they impose very trying demands on the time, finances, and logistics of the schools, faculty and organizations committed to them. Are there strategies and tactics that can ensure their sustainability and secure their future? Contributors are welcome to suggest other pertinent issues tied to the non-profit architecture and design build education.

The editors value critical statements and alternative practices. An abstract of 350 words and a short CV are welcomed by the editors Shundana Yusaf shundana@arch.utah.edu and Ole W. Fischer fischer@arch.utah.edu by June 1st, 2014.

Accepted authors will be notified by June 15th. Photo essays with 8-10 images, time lines, and full papers of 2500-4000 words must be submitted by August 15, 2014 (including visual material, endnotes, and permissions for illustrations) to undergo an external peer-review process. This issue of Dialectic is expected to be out in print by March 2015.

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