Issue 19 / Fall 13
TRACE

MAGNITEXTS

THINKING

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Issue 19 / Fall 13

TRACE

This issue explores physical remnants and selective memories, tangible and intangible reminders of a past that influence our present and future. At the same time, it discusses the traces that we continue to leave, both physical and digitally, and how those will affect us in the future. What are the consequences and opportunities that can emerge from the new traces we create? Who benefits from the generation of new traces? Which traces should we embrace and which ones should we dismiss or even fight against? Is ignoring all traces the only way to truly move forward and foster radical changes?

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MAS Context is a quarterly journal that addresses issues that affect the urban context. Each issue delivers a comprehensive view of a single topic through the active participation of people from different fields and different perspectives who, together, instigate the debate.

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Re—interpreting our traces

Issue statement by Iker Gil,
editor in chief of MAS Context

In recent workshops that Antonio Petrov and I have run as part of the Chicago Expander program at Archeworks, we have been asking participants to explore Chicago and its region (intentionally leaving those boundaries open for interpretation) through specific topics (Energy and Economy; Agency and Consumerism; and Transportation) with the idea of activating questions that challenge conventional boundaries and perceptions of the city. With plenty of room to interpret the topics along with use of photo essays, films and diagrams that highlight networks and relationships, the result is a body of work that visualizes systems but also incorporates how each participant experiences the city. The combination of both has provided richer, complex, and even contradictory readings about what the city really is and how it is defined.

This issue continues that approach, featuring a series of contributions that explore a variety of traces that shape our cities in one way or another, but also ourselves and how we engage with those cities. Traces that describe aspects of our cities as well as open up new conversations and readings. Those traces range from physical explorations of our landscapes to obsolete zoning laws that define the current urban fabric of our cities; from visible remnants of buildings to invisible systems that make our cities run; from cultural traces that we collectively generate to those personal memories that mark us forever; from a look at the what no longer exists to the reinterpretation of what is left behind. Places and conditions that go unseen for most of us become the focus for others.

In the end, the selections are intended to provide a multilayered, complex and personal reading of the urban context. We would like it to add to the ongoing conversation about how we perceive, document and reinterpret our cities, a conversation that communicates the traces we leave raising questions about the future cities those traces will generate.

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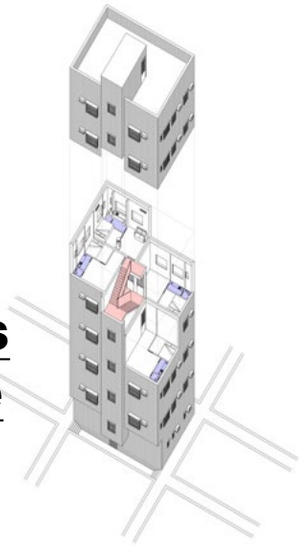

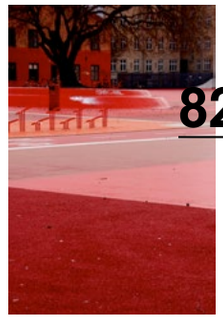

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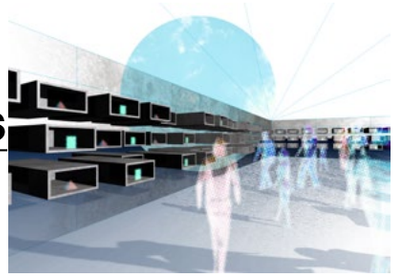

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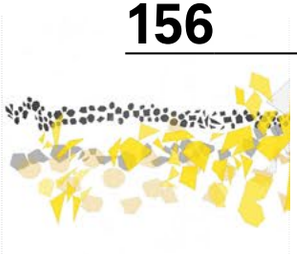

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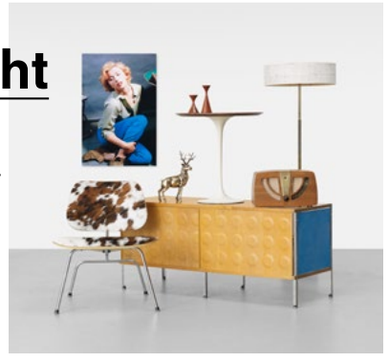

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A Year on the Road with Venue

Iker Gil interviews Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley

VLF and Stealth Object Tripods in Mono Lake, California © Venue

How did Venue start, what is it, and what are the main goals?

Geoff: Venue is a project that we presented to Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art. They got behind the idea that, rather than sitting in the city and waiting for people or ideas to come to us, we would go out on the road and seek out places that are usually overlooked, or unvisited, or don't normally have the microphone placed in front of them. The idea was that we would have this kind of traveling thing, almost like an interview rig, and we would create a venue that we could bring out with us on the road. It would be a way of reporting, but also a way to start conversations with a wider spectrum of people, sites, and landscapes.

Nicola: The mission of the Center for Art + Environment is pretty interesting. It's to explore all aspects of the human relationship with the built, natural, and virtual environment and we have taken that to heart in shaping what we do with Venue. We also partnered with Studio-X NYC [Geoff and Nicola co-direct Studio-X NYC, which is part of Columbia University's GSAPP]. The mission of Studio-X is to expand the platform for conversation about the future of cities, so we decided that this was an amazing opportunity to expand the platform geographically and to show that you can't talk about the future of cities without talking about urban hinterlands, and the landscapes of resource extraction, agriculture, waste disposal, and so on, which are actually shaping the cities themselves. So we combined those two collaborators and set ourselves on the road.

Does the goal of Venue tend more to uncover things that are not evident, is it about establishing relationships between disconnected things, or is it about defining areas were possible interventions could happen afterwards? Or is it a combination of all those?

N: Definitely more of the first two, although I think our hope is that all of the different threads that we pull together will add up to new connections and new ideas for people. So, it's not that we are planning on creating big interventions or recommending interventions ourselves, but rather that the larger idea is that by going to particular sites and talking to particular people we are assembling a new core sample of the American landscape, incorporating as many perspectives as possible and tying together all these aspects to identify larger themes.

I guess my comment about intervention relates less to an architectural intervention and more about understanding the system and identifying where the system could be improved or tweaked.

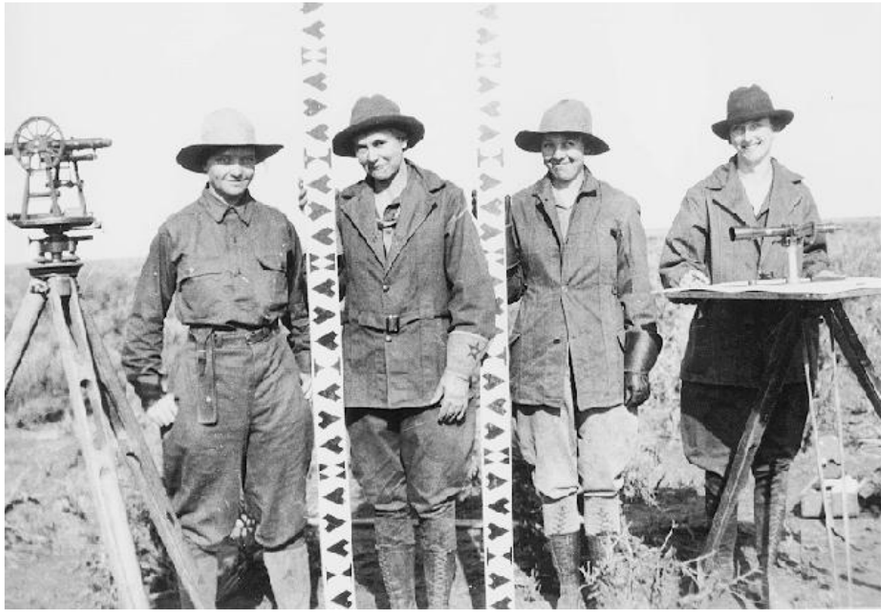
G: Along those lines, I think one of the things we want to do is put people in conversation across fields than don't normally overlap. That could be seen as an intervention, in the sense that you are making a military officer who works on the GPS system, for instance, realize that maybe they could have a conversation that they haven't had yet that would be interesting. One example could be the ranchers in the American West. In one of our stops we visited someone who is looking at GPS technology, how it affects ranching, and how it might even affect the way we allocate private land ownership in the West. Suddenly, you are now getting two people who wouldn't normally have a conversation—a soldier and an agricultural scientist—and now they´re aware of each other's work, and something might come out of that

in the future. I think that's the kind of thing we are after. It's showing someone from this place that someone over here is doing similar work, or at the very least thematically related work, and that they should be getting into a dialogue and that maybe they could even work together.

N: Or maybe even just offering the people that we are talking to a different perspective on their own work, by seeing it on the context with all the other interviews we're doing. I think the more people we talk to, the more that kind of thing happens. We keep telling our interviewees about other conversations we have had so they can go to the website and learn more.

Were there any references when you began to think about Venue?

G: Broadly speaking, the notion of the exploration party is a huge part of it. That goes back to everything from literal survey parties, when they would send people to the West after the Civil War to map the United States and say, "What do we have out there? How do we measure it? How do we understand where it goes?" That's part of it—USGS surveys literally mapping out the country. But also things like Ant Farm, with their Media Van—that idea of hitting the road in sort of a gonzo documentary way. Originally, we even talked about getting a van and we were going to do the interviews inside the van and we were going to turn it into this type of punk rock thing. There is also an on-going event series called Postopolis that we've both been a part of. But, instead of creating Postopolis New York again or Postopolis Chicago or Postopolis Miami, we thought, "What if Postopolis became a sixteen-month experience bringing the venue to other people around the country?" So Venue is like a decentralized Postopolis.



All female survey crew - Minidoka Project, Idaho, 1918 © U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Puente Hills landfill, the nation's largest active municipal dump © Venue

Knitter NO.-1, AstroTurf headquarters © Venue

How do you set the itineraries and select the people that you are going to interview? Do you set it from the beginning or does it evolve as you travel?

N: Part of our methodology is actually focused on using the routes that we plan as the methodology—we find people that fit within our curatorial themes on our routes. If we say we visited a landfill, for example, some people then say, "Oh, you should visit this other landfill." But it's less that we want to visit all the landfills in America and more that we are tracing a particular route in the landscape. One of our themes is landscapes of extraction and disposal so, if there is a particularly interesting landfill on our route, then we should stop. That's sort of how it comes together. The themes are very much our own interests. One of our subthemes is simulation and landscape analogs. We have visited places were NASA has trained astronauts going the Moon but also the factory where they make Astroturf, the idea being that we could learn a lot about how we perceive the real thing by how we make fake things. There is a whole cross-species theme running throughout, which I think very much ties to my own Edible Geography interest in how plants, humans and animals coevolve and shape each other. On this latest trip, for example, we were looking at bird's perceptions of different panes of glass in a specially created pivoting sun tunnel in rural Pennsylvania.

G: Just to go back to the earlier point, we are definitely using the route as the methodology. We are not deciding, "Hey, let's do something on simulation," and it turns out there is someone out in Idaho who would be great for that, so we book a ticket to Idaho and interview them. It is more that we decide to do, say, the Pacific Northwest as a route, or the southern Great Lakes as a route, or the Shenandoah Valley or the Appalachian Mountains. That's the type of territory that we are trying to cover. Then the notion is, "What is in this territory? What should we see? Who should we meet?"

N: And then there is serendipity to it that way.

G: There are people that we wished we could have interviewed but they were not around so we had to interview someone else. But then, the plan B person ended up being better than the original one. You never know.

N: Also, there are parts of the country that we couldn't cover. We have one part of the trip we have to make shorter, because we couldn't leave town due to Hurricane Sandy. We will never get to do as much as we want to do, basically.

Another thing that I find really interesting is how you are looking at above-ground/below-ground, and the natural and the man-made conditions. From the caves with crazy instruments, to all the mechanism for the cable cars in San Francisco. It's interesting that in the end nothing is natural or artificial.

N: Exactly.

G: I think that is definitely a running theme. In the same way that some of the things we are doing relate to Edible Geography, a lot of the underground exploration is definitely connected to my work on BLDGBLOG, exploring caverns, mines, and extreme waste disposal sites, like the radioactive waste disposal site in New Mexico that we got a tour of. For an above ground or aerial theme, next week we'll

The keyboard of the organ inside the Luray Caverns in Virginia © Venue

Simulated battlefield at Fort Irwin located in the Mojave Desert © Venue

be in North Dakota visiting the first undergraduate degree program in unmanned aviation systems—basically, drones. If you want to fly a drone airplane, the first place in the country to offer a B.A. in flying drones is in North Dakota.

N: It's the headquarters for all things drone because that's also where the US army does all of its Predator training.

G: They have a Predator simulator, which is pretty interesting.

N: We may never leave North Dakota. (laughs)

I guess it's good that we are doing the interview now! You are looking at physical elements but you are also looking at other conditions, like the singing city, and aspects that are more technology-related. Again, an interesting balance between mapping the landscape and overlaying that with other cultural and event aspects.

N: To go with that, I also think that it's important that we're not just speaking to people who are, I guess, practitioners: farmers, scientists… We are also speaking to novelists and artists as they add an additional filter over some aspects of the landscape. It's an extra layer of reflection added to it.

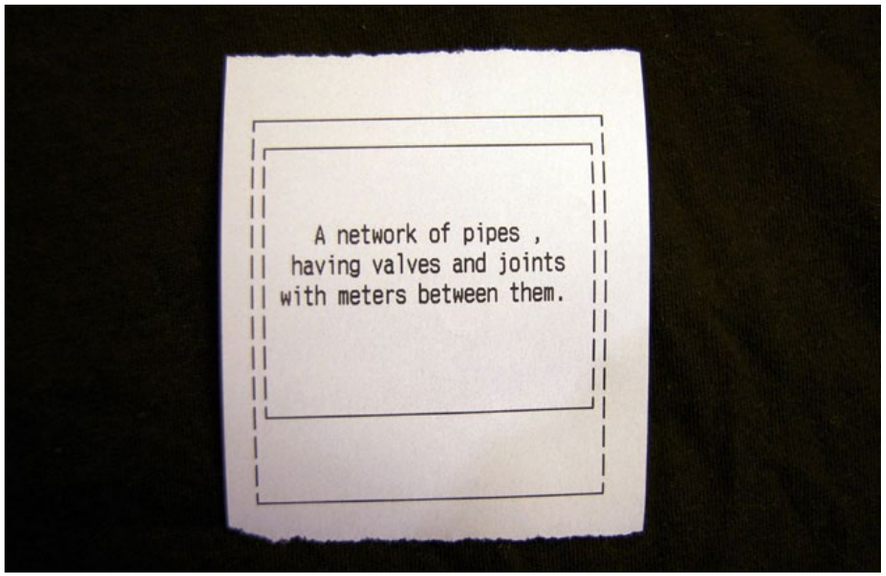
G: Another theme that we keep referring to is navigation. It's the question of how human beings have surveyed the landscape, as we've talked about, but also how they've navigated the land, how they understand how to get from point A to point B. That also includes all kind of cultural impositions that involve measurement, that involve mapping traditions, that involve tools like compasses to get around, that involve celestial navigation, that involve GPS. The notion of navigation is like an equation, where landscape plus humans plus directionality equals navigation. It's an extreme cultural addition to understanding the landscape.

What type of surveys are you taking throughout the landscape and what type of instruments are you using?

G: We are doing a bunch of different things. The basic idea of the instruments was to do something that was between actual functioning instrumentation that we could take on the road and art objects or props. Those tripods that you have seen were designed by Chris Woebken, who worked with us for about six months to fabricate them. Those are actually functioning devices, like an ultralow frequency radio that picks up the magnetosphere so you can hear what's referred to as space weather. But, then, there are other instruments that are more like art objects or props. For example, there is a perspective grid, which plays with the notion of the European tradition of learning how to see a landscape through perspective and looking through a grid as you sketch it.

N: It is really a self-conscious gesture to the fact that the devices that you choose to bring along with you already are embedding assumptions onto the landscape. So we decided to just bring along a ton of instruments, almost to self-consciously admit there is not such a thing as an objective survey. We know that. This is very much a metaphoric, poetic, and sometimes whimsical survey, and by no means objective.

Edward Burtynsky taking a photo with the descriptive camera. Nicola and Geoff gave him 24 hours to select a subject in the Nevada Museum of Art, and this was the spot that caught his eye. © Geoff Manaugh



"A network of pipes, having valves and joints with meters between them." Edward Burtynsky, in someone else's words. © Venue

G: Once you have the instruments to measure the landscape, you start paying attention to that thing that you maybe would have not otherwise thought about or noticed. Suddenly, you are thinking about ultralow frequency radio signals when you are in Chicago or when you are driving in the middle of New Mexico and you realize, "Hey, we can turn on the radio and see if we hear anything."

N: We also have a logbook sheet for each interview. We just document a whole bunch of things. In addition to the wind direction on the ground and wind speed, we also have a solar wind direction and speed. We do sun spots, barometric pressure... We do a lot of different things and part of the reason is that we then put those as tags on our posts. We have the normal thematic tags too, but you can actually explore the landscape of the sites we visited by looking at all the ones we visited when the moon was a waxing crescent, or when there were 73 sunspots.

G: It's funny that, for example, you can see every interview we have done at 600 feet above sea level. Ironically, we have noticed that a lot of our best interviews are happening when there is a waning gibbous moon, for example. Obviously, that is a total coincidence but, nonetheless, it is interesting to see certain patterns emerge.

N: Another interesting thing is amassing big amounts of data about the landscape and not even knowing how to make sense of it. That's part of what we are doing by collecting all this data.

Let's talk about the descriptive camera, which I also find quite fascinating. Do people sign up to review the pictures? How does it work?

N: The descriptive camera is designed by Matt Richardson. We bring a different guest device on each one of our trips, and that was the one we took on our first trip. Matt's camera sends the picture to something called Amazon Mechanical

Turk. It's a workforce, run by Amazon, of totally anonymous workers. You post jobs there for a price and they will do the job. A lot of companies use it for sorting through vast piles of data or tagging images. It's totally anonymous, you never know who is doing the work. What happens is that the photo, which you never see (that was really devastating when we had Edward Burtynsky take the photo), goes away into the cloud. You give the anonymous worker instructions: describe this picture using no more than 100 words or something like that. They type their description, hit submit, and it prints from the front of the camera. Like a Polaroid. And that quickly.

I saw the video on your website and it's surprising how quickly everything happens, it's really instant.

N: It comes back from a person who has never seen the thing that you are seeing, but who has written a description of a photo that you have never seen.

I love how it changes formats, how it get translated from image to words, and its immediacy. In terms of the end product of the 16-week road trip, is the idea to create some sort of publication, or an exhibition given the relationship to the Nevada Museum of Art? Or is it intended to be a recording that lives primarily online?

G: It will definitely stay online. The website is the number one product that we are making. But we are entertaining the idea of doing a book or a small exhibition to document the whole thing as well. We are still trying to figure out with the Nevada Museum of Art exactly what we'll do, including some sort of recap event that would tie into their next major conference. Every three years, they organize a big conference on art and the environment. The next one is in the fall of 2014, so that would give us an entire year at the end of our project to put together some sort of exhibition, publication or event. Either way, we definitely want to do something that can do justice to the amount of material we have accumulated, because, at the end of the project, we are going to have 55-60 interviews, 50-60 site visits, thousands of photographs, video, audio, artifacts, souvenirs…

N:There is a lot of potential with remixing it. How you put it together will shape new narratives. I am personally really excited to figure out if we can do something interesting with data visualization.

G: Which reminds me that, in the July-August issue of Popular Science, we have a 6-page feature that is a road map, almost like a "go do Venue yourself" kind of thing.

N: A lot of the places we visit are readily accessible to the public, but a lot of them aren't very well known.

G: For that feature, we chose the most interesting ones that are publicly accessible and don't require you to get permission or to meet a particular scientist. Anybody can get this map, hit the road and visit these places. I like the idea of turning it not just into a book you buy, but an experience that you can have. So next summer, you could visit lunar simulation landscapes outside Flagstaff, Arizona, or you could visit the Mercer Museum, an amazing archive of pre-industrial tools displayed in a poured concrete castle outside Philadelphia. It's that idea of giving you an experience, not just a product.

I think that each format, whether it's a road map, a book or an exhibition, can address a specific audience and each one becomes an opportunity to show the work in different ways.

N: I completely agree. And, I think, for the NMA's Center for Art + Environment conference, there's also an interesting possibility to bring some of the people that we spoke to together. It is sort of reversing the whole Venue travel idea, by bringing everybody together into one place and keeping those conversations going.

You have touched on this earlier but, how does Venue tie into your respective research work in BLDGBLOG, Edible Geography, and Studio-X?

G: In one way, it continues the work we are doing in those platforms but, at the same time, I think it's a good challenge to try something different. I don't want to just treat this as BLDGBLOG on the road. It's fun to keep some of the interests, like the underground or some of the military stuff, but I want to find a different way to approach them. For instance, we're interviewing a lot of people who it would be strange to include on BLDGBLOG, so I enjoy doing that with Venue. Every once in a while, we'll do something food-based or on agriculture and I think I am stepping into Edible Geography-world—but then we'll do things that would be really strange to see on Edible Geography. I think it's nice to have this third space where we can do things that we would typically not do on our own websites.

N: I also think Venue is much more grounded in a physical way. I think it's really rare these days for a blogger to actually go places. Instead, you are writing about it from your apartment in New York or San Francisco and saying it's amazing—but you are just pulling photos from the web and things like that. There is something really fun about the very tangible places we visit and the people we meet personally.

G: It's very human. You have to meet them, you have to see the thing, you have take a photograph of it yourself.

N: Having worked with the Center for Land Use Interpretation, I have come to realize that the idea of "ground truthing" is so central to what they do. I really only appreciated the value of that by doing Venue—how important it is to actually go to the place rather than just writing about it or making a phone interview. When you asked if it added anything to our own work, in some ways it makes me appreciate other people's work more too.

Thanks so much for a wonderful conversation!

Reading the Ephemera of Caithness

Essay by Dimitra Ntzani and John Barber

Caithness landscape © AOC Archaeology Group

In the northeastern Scottish county of Caithness, local volunteers are taught to *read the landscape*.[1] During a public engagement program led by AOC archaeologists,[2] members of the local community are introduced to archaeological practices and are asked to unravel the *time depth* of slight but extensive archaeological remains, also known as *ephemera*. The reading metaphor, frequently present in archaeological discourse, is employed by the designers of the workshop to inspire the participants' creative interaction with the ephemera.[3] The metaphor has also been employed to interpret the function of recollection in memory literature;[4] it presupposed the interpretation of memory as a form of *writing/inscribing* upon a soft or waxed surfaced. The paper examines how the writing and reading metaphors influence people's engagement with landscape elements of their cultural heritage.

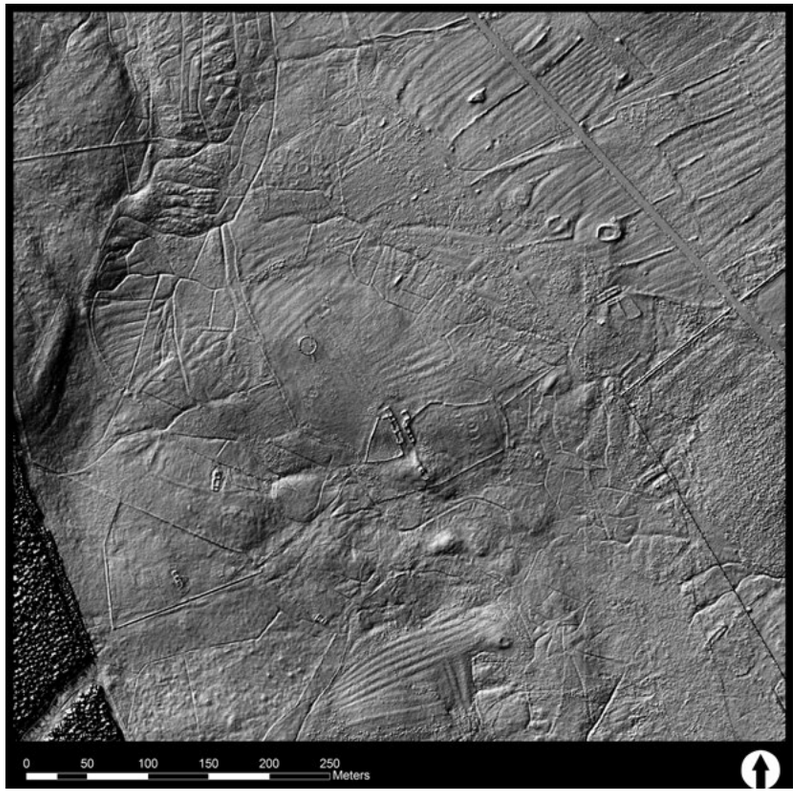
During the AOC workshops, the memory metaphor supports two kinds of reading, the distanced reading of the expert and the embedded sensory-rich reading of the expert + apprentice team. Archaeologists look for shapes of interest upon LiDAR topographies[5] that resemble archaeological formations. These are later parsed in the field by teams of archaeologists and local participants. While the use of the reading metaphor exposes the archaeological intention for non-invasive interaction with archaeological elements, it also triggers the inscription of new traces. AOC workshops forge new connections between the local population and the fragmented remains and inspire new cultural practices embedded in the moorlands of Caithness.

The Caithness landscape is here presented as an infinite database of memory traces. The paper draws a thread between the memory metaphor of the "mystic writing pad"[6] and the archaeologically overwritten landscape of Caithness. It presupposes that the locus of metaphor is thought not language[7] and it examines emerging cultural practices by the means of ethnography. The paper unravels the spatial qualities of the readings of the expert and of the novice and it points out how the metaphor enhances and constrains locals' interaction with the ephemera.

The mnemonic apparatus of the mystic writing pad

Archaeology and psychoanalysis share an interest in the reconstruction of the past. Archaeology seeks to reconstruct a spatial and textual narrative, the host of collective memory, while psychoanalysis aims to construct a personal narrative, the host of personal memory. The two memory disciplines often employ similar metaphors while at least one of them was employed as a metaphorical frame for the other.[8]

Wax slates or tablets, core components of ancient inscribing devices, prevail in memory's metaphorical discourse. These mnemonic apparatus can be traced in Plato's Dialogue *Theaetetus*,[9] in the Aristotelian discourse on Memory and Reminiscence,[10] in Cicero's De Oratore[11] and in various handbooks on mnemotechniques.[12] The era of typography weakens their appeal but one may still track their presence in Descartes[13] or even Shakespeare's discourse.[14] The metaphor of the wax tablet makes its grand return in the beginning of the 20th century in Sigmund Freud's writings. This time, it has developed layers and each layer preserves imprints of distinct qualities. Freud's mystic writing pad consists of three surfaces; the upper celluloid surface that prevents direct contact of the perceived object with the actual



A palimpsestic landscape of settlement and agricultural remains near Broubster, Caithness.
© AOC Archaeology Group

memory slate, the intermediate wax-paper surface that temporarily preserves the new traces and renders them visible and the lower solid wax slab that preserves all impressions long term.

The wide use of the writing/reading metaphor exposes a number of popular presuppositions on memory, which were severely questioned during the 20th century by new approaches in psychology and by cognition theories.[15] Up to that point, memory was mainly discussed as storage of imprints and it evolved in three sequential stages: the writing or the engraving of memory traces, the storage of the acquired traces and their reading as part of a recollection process. It also entailed an action of detachment. During the first stage, the framing of the engraved form was considered an essential act of perception. The framed traces had initially a delineated shape whose reading became the centre of psychoanalysis. But, the more a trace was read, the less faithful to its initial formation it became. Memory traces were stored upon the waxed slate in chronological sequence. Accordingly, memory would be explored in depth; recent traces would reside on the surface and older ones underneath.

Reading the ephemera of Caithness

A wind-farm development at Burn of Whilk was granted planning permission on the condition that it would "…include measures to improve public access to the Hill of Shebster and Cnoc Freicedain scheduled ancient monuments…"[16] Funding a local community engagement program was one of the planning requirements. AOC archaeology was commissioned to design and execute the program.

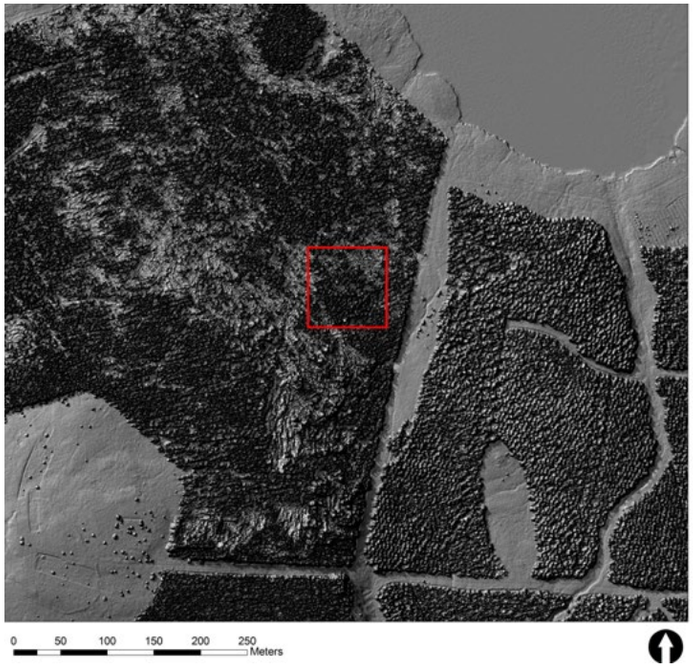
The word *ephemera* has a 5th century BC Greek origin. It initially described short-lived insects, a drug that brought death in a day or a plant that sprung up and died within a day. Today it is used to describe any object or action that has a short life span, or that is of no lasting value.[17] The archaeological *ephemera* are obscure, fragmented and scattered traces of past human activity. While monuments, which constitute the subject matter of archaeology and architectural history, tend to represent only a few percent of human activity, the ephemera arise from the land management activities of common people. The ephemera can be the last imprints of previously present spatial formations (e.g. penannular imprints of Bronze Age huts). They may be the remnants of archaeological interest that have not been identified before in this area (e.g henges in Caithness), or archaeological sites whose recording, excavation or preservation has not been a priority (e.g. remains of agricultural activities like enclosure or tillage). In Caithness, the *ephemera* survive from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages through to the Post-Medieval periods, constantly transformed by successive interventions and always subject to the erosion of time, the encroachment of peat and to current land management or amenity practices.[18] Taking into consideration their long lasting presence, their characterization as ephemera seems to reflect the persistence of their forms and functions and not their "life span."

AOC public engagement practices are organized as outdoor didactic performances, as group-research tasks. The participants identify and record their sites of interest and improvise on their historic interpretation and significance. Volunteers are actively involved in all archaeological practices up to the point that the completed records and the retrieved artefacts leave for AOC conservation lab or for museum storage. The public and outdoor character of this cultural practice then ceases.

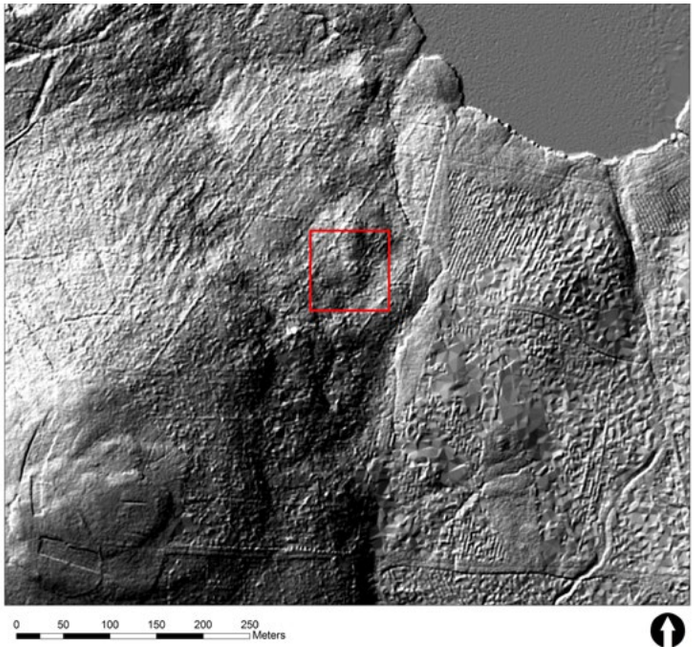
The readings of the expert

Digital information technologies facilitate AOC's public archaeological explorations. Possible sites of interest are initially identified from LiDAR scans. "LiDAR stands for 'Light Detection And Ranging', and is a means of surveying large areas of terrain from the air… The survey data can be sampled and 'cleaned', to remove vegetation and buildings, providing what is known as a 'bare earth' model of the survey area. This can be used to help identify archaeological sites without the distraction of bushes and trees growing around archaeological sites."[19]

Through the use of appropriate software, LiDAR scans uncover traces buried in the deeper recesses of the landscape, what soil processes, vegetation overgrowth, harsh winds and human activity rendered invisible. LiDAR also reveals sites of interest in areas to which human access is rare or difficult.[20] It supports the identification of traces that lie hidden. LiDAR technologies support a distant reading of the ephemera and they presuppose that the reader is well acquainted with the old spatial languages. They are instruments of landscape analysis, of the archaeological interrogation of process.



Unprocessed LiDAR image of an afforested area south of Loch Calder, Caithness
© AOC Archaeology Group



Bare earth model of landscape shown in figure 3 revealing a settlement site (in red square) and many preforrest traces © AOC Archaeology Group

The reading of the apprentice

Navigation in the field is achieved with GPS devices and hard copies of the area's map or through the use of specially designed software installed on iPads that merge map and LiDAR data. While in the field, the participants have the choice to amend their predesigned route, by constantly comparing the rich-sensory input of their navigation with the data-output of the digital maps. The participants along with AOC archaeologists navigate through time and space in a field with an infinite number of traces.

Interestingly, the identification of these sites *in situ* presupposes a working knowledge of the local vegetation, of qualities of soil, of geological formations, of local history and social customs. Apparently, the "upper layers" that the project-software has uplifted to unravel the ephemera play a key role during their identification while in the field. During the exploration of the ephemera, the experts seek a higher point to sit on, for a new kind of aerial view that would allow them to observe the general shape of the dismantled signs, while the novice struggles to keep hands on. The readings of the expert are sensory deductive and the readings of the novice are prosthetic.

Having located the *ephemera,* the participants are then challenged to explore their surroundings and settings. They frame the area of interest, delineate the site's current and previous forms and unravel its *time depth*. They also investigate possible functions, ways of construction and causes of erosion. The site is then recorded by means of sketching and photography in augmentation of a written description. The *reading the landscape* practice evolves as a highly kinetic group activity, embedded in the site of interest.

Permanent traces: Participants walking along an irrigation dam, looking for hut circle imprints © AOC Archaeology Group

Under the spell of the metaphor

Caithness landscapes are palimpsests of traces representing quotidian human interventions. Sequentially overwritten traces form a spatial riddle that the workshop aims to record and to resolve. Figuring out which traces were first engraved and how many times they've been attuned to later demands is a Sisyphean task. Old traces seem to attract new ones, while the latter take advantage of the positions and the formations of the old ones e.g. a quarryface transforms into one wall of a shepherd's shelter. Just like a deep carving on the lower waxed Freudian slate may divert the hand from its route and affect the shape of new engravings, old traces work as an actively modifying context for the newly inscribed ones.

The mystic writing pad metaphor hosts three kinds of memory traces: the intangible traces of the celluloid layer (the layer that permits the recording of the movement), the temporary traces on the waxed paper (the layer that renders the signs visible) and the permanent traces on the wax slate (the deeper layer of the unconscious infinite storage). During the AOC workshop, experts aim for the readings of persistent traces, carved on the *unconscious* of the land. The apprentices, on the other hand, struggle to establish a tactile relation with the upper layer; they search for the haptic relation that the celluloid layer eliminated.

As noted, the *reading* metaphor is employed to serve the design and the execution of a non-invasive archaeological workshop. The metaphor discourages the addition of new traces and up to a point it serves its goal successfully. But, to reassemble the fragmented pieces, the expert and the apprentice create new traces, some of temporal and intangible character (traces that emerge during the recording practices), and some of permanent and irreversible character (traces that emerge during the excavation practices). Freud suggests that the engravings that rest on the two upper layers of his mnemonic apparatus are rendered visible only for as long as these layers remain in contact with the lower storage area. Once they become detached, the temporarily stored information disappears. To render the traces visible, the team needs to establish an intermediate layer of temporary traces between the silent past and the enquiring present. The participants track down previously recorded landmarks and use them as a geometrical reference to assign coordinates to the ephemera. A Cartesian interpretation of the ephemera produces a virtual grid, which consists of tangible and intangible, temporal or permanent, mobile or immobile landmarks. Trekking paths, metal fences, irrigation ditches and geological ridges are some of the tangible elements used to establish the grid. The latter is aligned and signified through the use of mobile elements e.g. metric rods and tapes, the participant's bodies (participants are used as temporal landmarks and as short-term recording devices of the incoming information). The overall practice produces an intermediate layer, which temporarily reveals geometrical analogies, dismantled shapes and metric relations.

Archaeological and museological approaches have been struggling for more than two centuries to establish a protective celluloid layer upon significant cultural inscriptions. Conservation techniques, showcases, barriers and CCTV cameras are some of the practices that support the detachment of the significant cultural elements from the erosional aspects of everyday life. Freud suggests that the detachment of the two upper layers from the lower third one is an essential

Temporal traces: Sequential frames from video recording, during the setting of a grid © AOC Archaeology Group

mnemonic act; it prepares the upper layers for new inscriptions and it signifies the storage of memory traces to the deeper areas of our unconscious.[21] In Caithness, detachment works as the essential lapse of time between what is perceived and what is already stored. It establishes an essential inertia for the constantly transforming present to leave a clear mark. AOC archaeologists acknowledge the essential character of the detachment but they also acknowledge that each reading has an immediate effect on the *ephemera*. AOC rephrases the controversial enquiry regarding the invasive or non-invasive interaction with elements of cultural heritage: If every spatial reading is inevitably a form of inscription, what kind of inscriptions would we like to leave behind? Would these traces inspire a creative engagement? AOC works directly on the gap that the detachment left behind, on the void that temporarily hosts both the past and the present.

Handing over the *writing pad* of Caithness © AOC Archaeology Group

In conclusion

Memory literature that makes use of the *writing* and *reading* metaphors, often refers to a popular enquiry; Do the encoded signs of written discourse support or weaken memory? In the Platonic Dialogue *Phaedrus,* Socrates refers to an Egyptian myth that sums up a relevant debate between two Egyptian gods, Theuth and Thamus. In the myth Theuth is the inventor of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and alphabet and Thamus is the ruler of Egypt. Theuth praises the benefits of the written signs to Thamus and suggests that they will "…make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories." By contrast Thamus believes that the alphabet will "…create forgetfulness in the learners' souls… they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves."[22]

During the *readings* of the Caithness *ephemera,* the persistent enquiry is rephrased: Do these fragmented traces support memory as a collective embedded practice or they weaken it? To answer the question, one should take into consideration the particular qualities of the ephemera. The latter are not the delineated signs

of an ancient and well-studied language. They are inherently resistant to immediate readings and any attempt to syllabize their engravings ends with a question mark. Severely altered or dismantled, they spread out in the vast fields of Caithness as half-stated enquiries rather than as well-hidden answers. These obscure traces work more successfully as memory triggers than as memory deposits.

In the frame of AOC's workshops, the ephemera present significant advantages compared to *coherently read* monuments. Their enquiring character and their possible connection to everyday folk activities adds engaging value to them. The workshop's participatory and public character restores a sense of trust, which is commonly absent from people's interaction with musealized cultural elements. Moreover, a sense of apprenticeship is added to cultural educational programs. Finally, the ephemera work as evidence of the fallacies of history and archaeology. The readings of the ephemera in Caithness do not support the re-collection of a well-preserved memory deposit. They re-enact the creative qualities of an embedded and embodied collective memory; they put the mystic writing pad of Caithness back in the hands of the locals and in use.

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ENDNOTES

1 Words or phrases used metaphorically by the AOC archaeologists and local participants during the public engagement programs are presented in italics at first appearance.

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13 "I do not posit any other difference between the soul and the ideas than that between a piece of wax and the diverse impressions it can receive" (Letter to Mesland May 2, 1644) quote from D. F. Krell, 'On the Verge of Remembering, a Discussion of Casey,Edward,S. Remembering, a Phenomenological Study', *Research in Phenomenology,* 19 (1989). P.56-74

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16 http://community.caithness.org/article.php?id=3716

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River Ending

Photographs by Sreedeep

Intro text by Kamalini Mukherjee

She had a life once. She was the life once. Now she has become a shadowy respite of the environmental battle that has left her rotting, slowly turning to mulch and landfill. Her life was the pride of civilizations. Her tumultuous beauty was the refuge of sages and poets. River Yamuna, on the banks of which Lord Krishna played his flute to the sunset until the women of his village found themselves mesmerized, at his feet. Yamuna, on the banks of which Shah Jahan built Taj Mahal, the monument of love's eternal testament, and the world still amazes at the glory of that love. Today, urban development has pushed her to the fringes, struggling to survive the inevitable decay. The largest tributary of Ganga, now lies in the despair of a long forgotten lifeline as one of the most polluted rivers in the world, especially around Delhi. Once considered the most sacred of all rivers in India, it was also geologically one of the most important rivers of Northern India, now presents the picture of a frothing pool of stagnant toxic waste.

There is a stark contrast of beliefs and practices, in this country. Yamuna River has a history older than its geo-ecological life. It has a religious significance that still drives hundreds of devotees taking dips in its contaminated waters every year. It is still part of the daily prayer to many, as it retains its rights of purity even as excrement and fetid remains are but ordinary items in the river water. Yet, life still teems around the diseased river. Trades still exist, those of washer-men or linen-launderers mostly; a few rickshaw-pullers also call the riverbank home, as well as some settlers who have lived on these 'camping sites' for generations. The children play in the midst of decomposition and dirt, the women clean their utensils in the same water, ten meters away from where their community toilet dispenses extra flow of sewage. The filth and putrid air in the area is something that has become a part of their existence.

Incredibly, the contrast exists even in the character of the river as it faces its mortality. Yamuna dies as it reaches the state of Delhi, as it lies followed by a wasteland in the middle of the metropolitan city, buried within the invisible spaces in the city's pace of life. Forlorn and forsaken, an immense horizon wakes up each morning to the sound of passing traffic, overlooked by the multitude of destination-prone humans. Incredibly, the contrast exists even in the character of the river as it reaches its mortality.

Yamuna may have perished years ago to accommodate Delhi's teeming émigrés, but the trades of a river have salvaged the hopes of nostalgia and reclamation still attached to its corpse.

All the images one may traverse here are memoirs of beauty and an imagined retrieval only death can be guilty of.

The blank canvas of the dry riverbed now paints pictures of those who leave their footsteps behind, walking through the morbid remains of a river. The Okhla barrage and the traffic laden bridge that connects and some of the southern most parts of Delhi to Noida can be seen at the backdrop, while on the other side of the traffic lies a coagulation of filthy chemical waste popularly known as Yamuna waters in these parts. © Sreedeep

Investigating the dead river that regains life for a short while during the monsoons. The relationship of those who still reside and survive alongside and with the river, is almost parasitic. The treasures buried within her, are still being searched, pursued, possessed and pawned. Yamuna flows until her last wave falters at the feet of marching modernity, but humanity still bores holes in her being, to find those last dregs of life. © Sreedeep

The riverbed, strewn with carcasses from local slaughterhouses, near a settlement in Okhla, punctuated by afternoon gilli danda games. The Delhi-Noida-Direct Flyway (DND) on one side provides only a vague view of this hidden neighborhood.
© Sreedeep

Ferry boats await on the shore of a long dead riverbed. The vast expanse of sand dunes was once carried to this very spot by Yamuna, now the decaying boats remain as the only witness to the remnants of a torrid temptress. © Sreedeep

It may seem quite difficult to believe, but quite a few of us cross this scene everyday on our commutes, a bullock cart crossing through a desert of decay. © Sreedeep

These are attempts at using the riverbed for crude vegetable farming. The harvests are a product of local settlements along the embankment dwelling between non-legality and leased out legality of the sold out river bed. © Sreedeep

The river bed is still strewn with the mortal carcasses of man's divine faith. The river may have once held the promise of flowing to an eternal destination, carrying with it the material embodiments of religious rituals. © Sreedeep

The sun slowly meets the horizon over the elongated shadows of a languid afternoon, almost giving this sad aftermath of a river its due beauty. Cutting through its heart is man's cruel intervention, like the electric poles that stands guard as if a hunter over its hunt. © Sreedeep

Truckloads of fish are brought in to this spot almost every day, and the ice that the fish is brought in, melts to create a mirage of water. Even though there exists no real river anymore, except the sad reminders of the occasional fish-market. © Sreedeep

Silhouettes of 'unloading', against the falling dusk and to intensify the irony of the situation further, against the roller coaster of a water park near around. © Sreedeep

As if humoring the extent of irony, a group of wholesalers of fish brought in from other states put up a daily market on the sandy embankment of what can only be explained as the haunting 'memory of a river.' © Sreedeep

Whole sale lease on progress. Yes, the highest bidder buys the load, the rest buy whatever is left behind. © Sreedeep

The homebound empty trucks leave with the promise of brig back more supplies of fish to be traded on the shores of a dead river. The flurry of activity is shortlived. © Sreedeep

Fisherman spreads out his fishing net to dry over the parched riverbed. The Ferris wheel at the distant was supposed to be Delhi's answer to the London Eye. Now it sits idle as the view soaks up heat with every step into another emotionless summer.
© Sreedeep

Since the river provides no solace of water, the tube-well stands like a lonely soldier in the Desert of Yamuna.Fishermen wash up before dispersing. © Sreedeep

Essay by Matthew Hung. Photographs by Greg Girard.

Kowloon Walled City:

Heterotopia in a Space of Disappearance

Kowloon Walled City, Tung Tau Tsuen Road, 1987 © Greg Girard

Kowloon Walled City night view from southwest corner, 1987 © Greg Girard

Aerial view of Kowloon Walled City, 1989 © Ian Lambot

The Kowloon Walled City is known by many as the informal settlement that once existed seemingly out of place within modern Hong Kong. Many dared not enter this lawless zone that had developed a reputation as a place to be avoided, somewhere that harbored vice and illicit trades. A place where triads and criminals were in control and those brave enough to enter risked having their cameras smashed or worse their throats slit;[1] apparently at odds with the rest of Hong Kong.

It was often considered an anomaly, a place defined through difference from its context and little has been written to understand it beyond this limited scope. This opinion of the area was placed firmly into view when a Chinese government spokesman described the Walled City strikingly as "a problem left over from history,"[2] essentially claiming it was superseded before it had reached irrelevance. For such a complex territorial entity with a population content with their surroundings,[3] this comment has obvious contradictions.

Historical Account

This architectural phenomenon was born out of a rich nineteenth century political environment where the conflicts of the Opium Wars and the subsequent Unequal Treaties led to Hong Kong being ceded to Britain and in doing so turning the Walled City into a Chinese enclave. The British invasion of the Kowloon Walled City in 1899 and unilateral act of legalizing the change of sovereignty then provided the ambiguity for the area to develop into a political no man's land. Existing as a diplomatic black hole, the area provided a place where the surges of refugees escaping China's political turmoil could find freedom. The uncertainty of the Nationalist Party in the 1920s, the civil war after the Japanese occupation of WWII, the communist reforms from the late 1950s to the mid 1970s, all precipitated influxes of refugees from across the border into Hong Kong. Though the colonial government tolerated these refugees, the Walled City was a rare corner where these migrants were free from the control of the state.

Occupying the void between the two sovereign nations, the Walled City's unique context manifested itself most clearly during the numerous territorial disputes. China saw the ceding of Hong Kong to the British after the Opium Wars as unfair as they were in a vulnerable position when the Unequal Treaties were signed, claiming that they were void having been signed under duress.[4] As China could not meaningfully dispute the ceded territories of the treaties but had a valid claim over the sovereignty of the Kowloon Walled City, it became a place where the politics between the two nations were played out. The ambiguity over its sovereignty allowed the Walled City to be disputed but neither side were willing to relinquish this area nor did they want to take full control. For China, the enclave was a visual reminder of the Unequal Treaties hence the illegitimacy of foreign rule over Hong Kong, but they were also weary that claiming the area would suggest the rest of Hong Kong was rightfully British territory.[5,6] Likewise, allowing the Chinese to lay claim to the area legitimized British rule as it provided a contrast between lawlessness and order, but without control over the area Hong Kong would have to tolerate the enclave as being outside their jurisdiction.

Aside from the successful evictions in the late 1930s, any further forays into the Walled City by the colonial government were met by riots and resistance

of the squatter population, constantly reminding the colonial government that they were rightfully living on Chinese land. Many of these disputes escalated into political incidents and with China siding with the Walled City residents, the colonial government were repeatedly forced to withdraw. This included eviction attempts in the late 1940s, the redevelopment proposals of the mid 1950s , the plans for a neighboring resettlement estate which encroached on the Walled City in the early 1960s, and the attempts to remove and preserve two of the Walled City's original cannons in the 1970s, all of which the Hong Kong government had to concede on.

Following the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on 19 December 1984, when it was agreed that Hong Kong's sovereignty would be returned to China on 1 July 1997, the political ambiguity that had protected the extralegal community and allowed the illegal structures of the Kowloon Walled City to be sustained disappeared. It was clear that after the declaration was signed, China would no longer protest if the British exercised jurisdiction over the area as the whole of Hong Kong would be returned to them after 1997. As a result the Walled City became vulnerable, suddenly finding itself existing on Crown Land.[7] Within three years the residents and business owners were compensated for their loss and the decision was made to conserve only the old deputy magistrate's office from when the Walled City was a Chinese fort, the rest was reduced to a hundred and fifty thousand cubic meters of rubble.[8]

Spatial Account

The inherently selective nature of a historical account and the linear temporal framework it adopts is restrictive and cannot offer a balanced picture of a historical subject. Portraying the Walled City solely in such a way, it becomes an isolated element within the urban landscape of Hong Kong; a place that was shaped and defined by the incidents out of its control. The linear temporal account also suggests that the Walled City had only one eventuality: destined to be a political no man's land as a result of the nineteenth century treaties and the following invasion of the Walled City; destined to be an attractive place for crime and illicit trades; destined to be demolished after it's ambiguous jurisdiction had been resolved. Although this was the outcome, this portrayal allows it to be considered as inanimate and without agency. It therefore neglects the inherent relationships that the Walled City had with the rest of Hong Kong. For it to grow to such an extent and be sustained for such a long period in history there must have been a vast number of social, economic and cultural links with the rest of Hong Kong. Some of these links can be uncovered by examining the Walled City through the spatial concept of Heterotopia and in doing so begin to provide a more thorough understanding of the area.

Heterotopia was a term first coined by Michel Foucault in 1967 to an audience of architects where he used it to explain the spaces of otherness. These spaces are sites that are places outside all places but at the same time relates to all the other sites from which it is located against.[9] Foucault used the mirror as a metaphor for a Heterotopia due to its ability to reflect and disrupt. When considered in such a way the Kowloon Walled City can be seen as such a mirror to Hong Kong where some aspects of it confirm through its similarity with the rest of the colony but also unsettle through its rejection of the norms outside the informal settlement.

Children playing on Walled City rooftop, 1989 © Greg Girard

Walled City rooftop view, 1989 © Greg Girard

Cathay Pacific Jet Passing Walled City Rooftops, 1989 © Greg Girard

Foucault outlined principles or characteristics that are present in all Heterotopias and these can be seen in the Walled City. One such principle is that Heterotopias exist in diverse forms but can be broadly categorized as either Heterotopias of Deviance or Heterotopias of Crisis. Heterotopias of Deviance are places where those "whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed"[10] such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Meanwhile, Crisis Heterotopias are places where those who, in relation to the society they live in, are in a state of crisis such as adolescents and the elderly but could equally apply to the refugee. During the Walled City's time in Hong Kong, it provided a place where those people that were in a state of crisis could reside. In particular, it allowed those refugees who had been alienated by China, but also inconsistent with the new orders of the colonial government, a place to live in a state of crisis. The impermanence of other squatter areas were solidified in the Kowloon Walled City by the ambiguous political environment and provided an area of relative stability. Therefore, this area naturally attracted skilled migrants who found they could not legally practice in the colony. Doctors and dentists could operate without costly retraining in order to obtain a license and customers from across Hong Kong enjoyed the cheaper service. Similarly, the manufacturing sectors found the lack of regulation desirable enabling them to keep overheads low. The tailors, the textile manufacturing, the fish ball factories and the many other businesses, all linked the Walled City to the wider society. The one-room factories that existed within boundaries of the enclave created products from raw materials that would have been sourced from or through Hong Kong. Likewise, the products processed by them would be sourced not only by the marginal such as street vendors but also by mainstream businesses.[11] Therefore, the market mentality that prevailed in the rest of Hong Kong also existed within the Walled City. Shielded from the forces of the market and the state, the business owners can be seen as opportunists that parallel those in the rest of Hong Kong.

Foucault also defines that each Heterotopia has a precise function within a society but can have one function or another depending on the "synchrony of the culture in which it occurs."[12] This change in function is evident when we consider the Kowloon Walled City in relation to the change in the government's attitudes during the 1950s. Although the Walled City had connections with illegal activities as far back as the early colonial period and the multiple attempts to demolish it demonstrates the concern the Hong Kong government had in this regard, it was primarily another squatter settlement in a sea of other squatter estates during the 1950s. These places were the normal way of life for many migrants at the time and were even considered an accepted part of the unofficial housing policy.[13] They were considered desirable by the colony as they provided cheap labor to Hong Kong without the need for any British intervention.[14] The position the colonial government held was that the squatters were not invited to Hong Kong and therefore the taxpayers did not have any obligation to attend to them.[15] However, with disastrous fires becoming increasingly common in the informal settlements and a growing concern of how this may be perceived as a mistreatment of the Chinese people by China, Hong Kong embarked upon an enormous re-housing program.[16] This program would eventually become the biggest public housing program in the world, affecting forty-five per cent of the Hong Kong population by the 1980s,[17] and would change the context of Hong Kong completely.

Noodle factory and residence, 1989 © Greg Girard

Walled City apartment interior, 1989 © Greg Girard

Walled City apartment interior, 1989 © Greg Girard

Walled City shop and residence, 1989 © Greg Girard

In doing so it shifted the Walled City from being a place accepted in society to an area incongruent with the rest of Hong Kong.

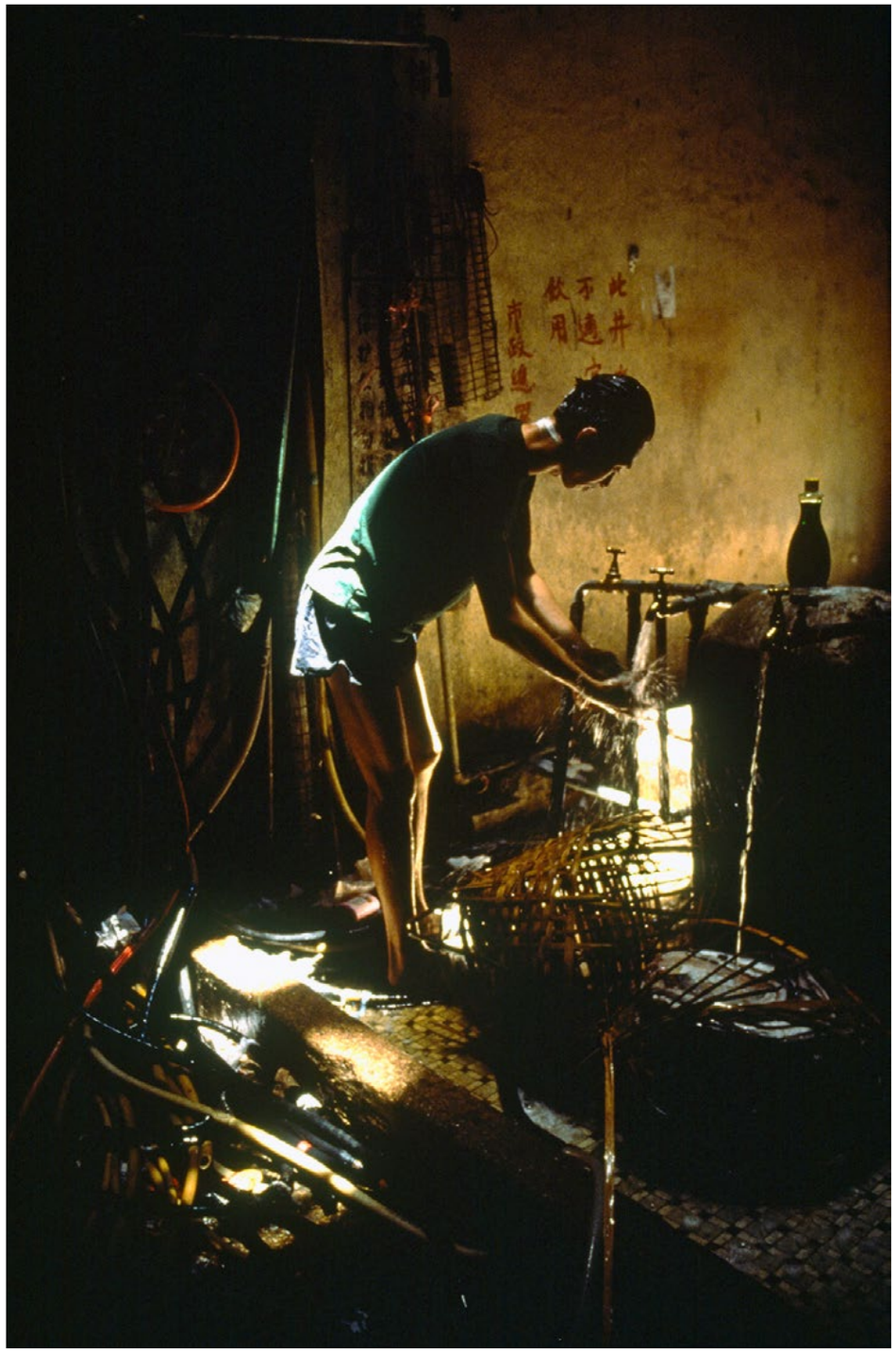
The remaining characteristic that particularly relates to the Walled City, is Heterotopias function in relation to all other spaces in one of two ways; as Spaces of Illusion that relate to the suppressed aspects of life within a society such as a brothel or as Spaces of Compensation where it is a space that is perfect in relation to the wider society such as a the seventeenth century colonies founded to be a pristine model in contrast with the colonial centre. The Walled City was predominantly a Space of Illusion where it fulfilled the actions that the government suppressed and provided for demands that were considered incompatible with society. The ambiguity of the jurisdiction over the Walled City meant that it became a natural haven for all forms of vice. Prostitution, illicit shows, drugs, restaurants offering dog meat and gambling dens found a place to operate with relative stability within the six and a half acre site. Though these illegal activities were in high concentration, it is wrong to assume that their business thrived on the residents. Many of the clients of these trades were from beyond the walls of the city. It has been described as a "Dark Twin" to Hong Kong, providing a shadow economy to fulfill the needs that a formal economy cannot meet.[18] This shadow economy was in obvious conflict with the Hong Kong government yet it was also a place that provided products and services that were in demand. The idealized illusion of Hong Kong as a perfect place the government endeavored to create, could only have been plausible if there was another place which represented all that the administration stood against. The Walled City was therefore portrayed as self-sufficient and isolated, able to represent the moral shortcomings of the colony.

Cultural Account

It is clear that both the British and the Chinese governments had political agendas in allowing the Kowloon Walled City to develop and for a negative image of the area to be maintained. However, once it had been agreed that the sovereignty of Hong Kong would be returned to China after 1997, the Kowloon Walled City turned from being a political tool to a political embarrassment for both sides, and thus quickly swept under the carpet. What remains unclear is why there was such little protest over its demolition. As shown by the spatial account, the Walled City had developed alongside the rest of Hong Kong and is arguably a key part of its history; its role around the time of the Opium Wars; its role as a refuge during the influxes of migrants from China; its role as a shadow economy to the city. Despite its historical lineage, the heritage value of the Kowloon Walled City was never a consideration. However, when this situation is placed in its cultural context and within a particularly unique cultural space as theorized by Ackbar Abbas, the lack of resistance towards the Walled City's demolition can be explained.

It is said that there is a distinct lack of any sense of national identity in Hong Kong[19] and this is partially due to colonial tactics where political expression is purposefully subdued and hence providing no outlet for political idealism. In the case of Hong Kong, this resulted in the attention being directed towards the economic realm. Engaging in the free market gave a freedom to those blocked from democracy by allowing them an alternative context from which to improve their own

West Side street (overhead pipes), 1990 © Greg Girard



Water standpipe (man washing), 1989 © Greg Girard

situation, albeit at the individual level rather than the collective level of citizenship. The focus on the individual fragmented the need for the imagined community of the nation. This lack of a collective identity is also due to Hong Kong's primary role as a facilitator. Existing as a far eastern entrepôt, it facilitated the meeting between the east and west which made a floating identity desirable.[20]

However, this malleable identity that Hong Kong created for itself became increasingly problematic during the period of uncertainty between the initial discussions of the sovereignty question over Hong Kong and its handover to China ten years later. The resumption of sovereignty represented a threat to Hong Kong's way of life with many fearing that it will be subsumed into a politically alien China. It redirected the trajectory of Hong Kong from a place content with the status quo to moving down an unknown path. A path that threatened to return the Hong Kong people back to a communist regime that they themselves or their immediate ancestors had once fled. The anxieties of the time was compounded by the events of the Tiananmen Square Protest where clashes between the public demanding liberal reforms and the People's Liberation Army ended with thousands dead and many more injured.

The imminent threat 1997 posed was expressed in the increased attention to define a Hong Kong culture in order to develop a more resilient identity able to distinguish itself from China. "The imminence of its disappearance," Abbas argues, "was what precipitated an intense and unprecedented interest in Hong Kong culture."[21] He believes that the reason why Hong Kong seems to lack a culture was due to the import mentality under colonialism.[22] This gaze saw culture along with everything else as coming from elsewhere, whether it is the modernist architectural styles from the West or Chinese traditions from the mainland. This was not because Hong Kong did not have any culture as the popular term of Hong Kong as "a cultural desert" may suggest, but rather that Hong Kong did not recognize it as being their own culture. This "reverse hallucination"[23] of not seeing what is actually there was what existed prior to the Sino-British Joint Declaration. After which the sudden intense awareness of culture produced a special form of culture, what Abbas calls the "Culture of Disappearance". A culture in which its appearance is stimulated by the imminent threat of its disappearance. This "Culture of Disappearance" does not mean a non-appearance but rather a misrecognition. The pressure to build a cultural identity leads to the acceptance of readily available images and identities such as the use of the old binaries of East and West that mask the complexities of space. This "Space of Disappearance" was the unique cultural space that Hong Kong found itself in between 1987 and 1997.

It is within this volatile context that the lack of protest over the Kowloon Walled City's demolition can be situated. It is clear that under colonial rule the area was neglected in some respects such as the physical appearance and infrastructure whilst other provisions were maintained by the government such as postal services, basic health measures such as vaccinations, and social welfare.[24] One can speculate that this soft approach to government services maintains the colonial agenda of utilizing the area to legitimize colonial rule. Rather than concentrating on expressed infrastructures, there has been greater emphasis on tactics that are less perceivable to the outside. This selective neglect maintained the poor physical environment in

Walled City rooftop with Kai Tak Airport in background, 1990 © Greg Girard

which the image of vice and illegality continued to be expressed, long after it had reached irrelevance.[25] The consistency in its physical appearance and its place within Hong Kong's "Space of Disappearance" meant that the dominant image readily grasped by the Hong Kong people was the one the colonial enterprise had promoted throughout their rule. This further embedded the reading of the Kowloon Walled City as a place isolated and incompatible with mainstream Hong Kong.

In exploring the Kowloon Walled City through multiple viewpoints, a new understanding of the informal settlement begins to appear; a reading that shows it as porous rather than isolated, affected Hong Kong as much as it was affected by Hong Kong, and a place that was an accepted part of society until the public housing program. The spatial account revealed the countless links it had with the rest of the colony and in doing so further highlighted the government's attempts to isolate the Walled City. Meanwhile, the cultural account showed that the negative image the British created in their attempts to marginalise the area throughout their time in Hong Kong, became the only image that was consistent and readily graspable as a result of the unique cultural landscape at the time. It can be seen through these viewpoints that the imaginations of the Hong Kong people were controlled under the colonial government. However, these subtle assertions of control can be foreseen in the future by avoiding a reductive portrayal of space. In particular for Hong Kong, the problematic of the image within a "Space of Disappearance" and the significance of a spatial reading in both portraying and examining a historical subject should be given added attention. Only then can we avoid another piece of Hong Kong being considered as merely "a problem left over from history."

Walled City mail delivery, 1987 © Greg Girard

BBQ Meat Factory, 1990 © Greg Girard

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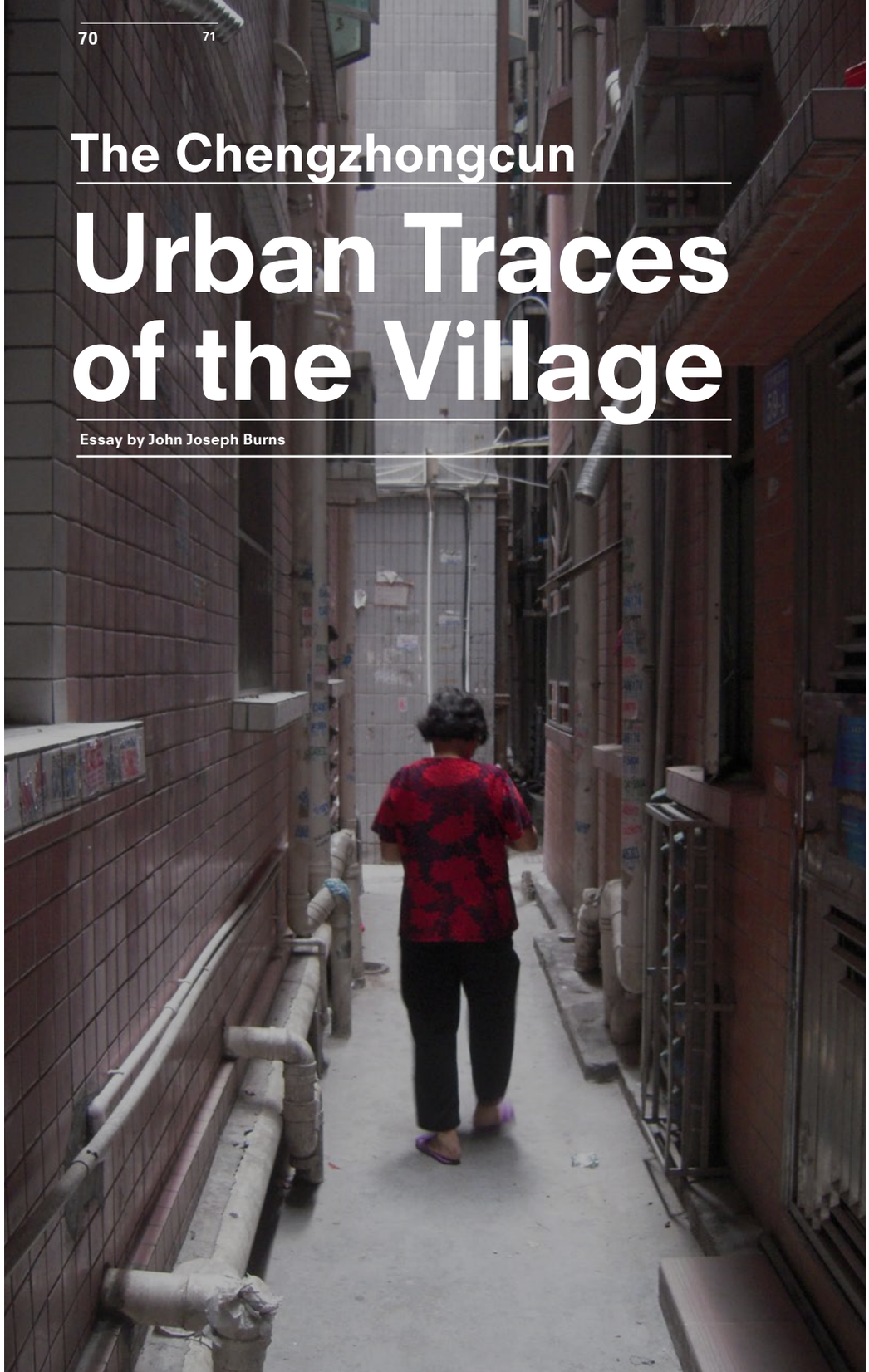
The Chengzhongcun
Urban Traces of the Village

Essay by John Joseph Burns



Villager going about daily life in the alleyways of Xiasha Village, Shenzhen, 2011 © John Joseph Burns

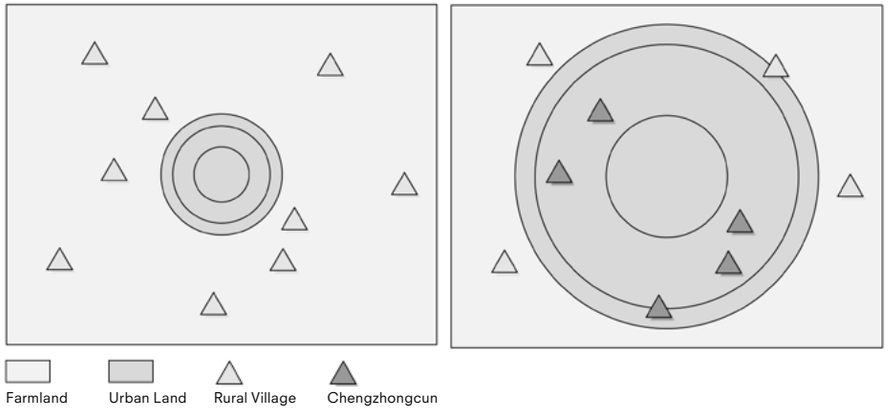
'To get rich is Glorious'

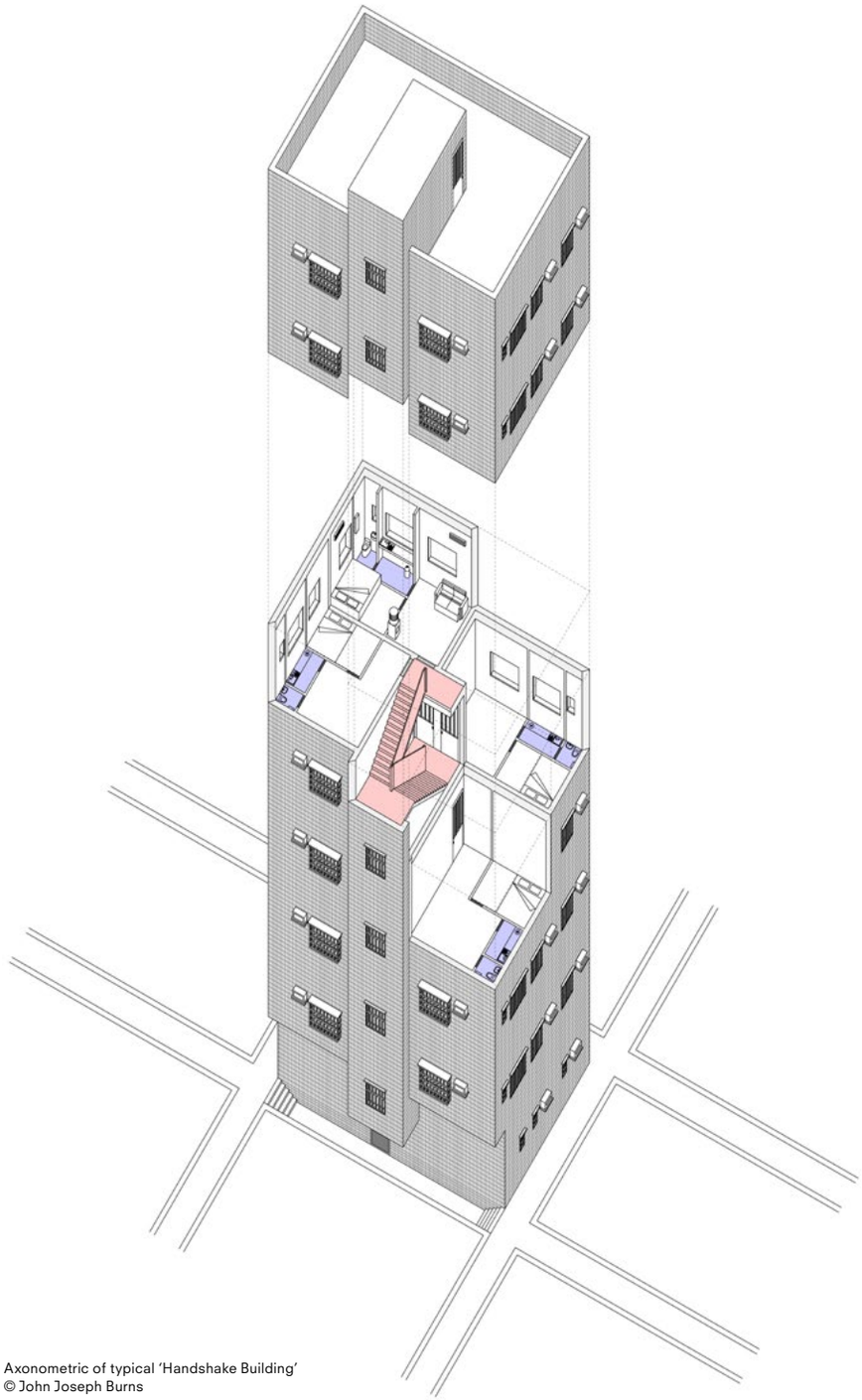
Much of modern China stems from the economic reforms brought in by Deng Xiao Ping in the late 1970's and since that time an unimaginable and unprecedented expansion has occurred in its urban areas. The vast majority of the urban development we see being developed can be described as the 'Great Street' and 'Vertical Block' (Hassenflug 2010) which can be argued is in its pace of development creating generic and often soulless urban environments lacking in a sense of place or urban community. This is why looking for traces of the past or lingering urban forms here may be seen as a futile exercise.

Indeed this drive towards progress isn't just expanding existing urban areas but creating entirely new cities, and in some cases mega-cities. The prime example of Deng Xiao Ping's fundamental belief that 'to get rich is glorious' is the city of Shenzhen, located across the border from the Hong Kong in Guangdong Province. Since 1978 Shenzhen has now expanded into one of the world's true mega-cities with an unofficial population of around 14 million. This means that what is effectively a modern prosperous metropolis has been created from scratch in a mere 30 years. If you were to look at areas within Shenzhen such as the CBD (Centre Business District) of Futian District you would see the typical urban signatures of any modern city such as grand highways and towering skyscrapers.

However the process of creating Shenzhen, and expanding other urban areas within Guangdong such as Guangzhou and Zhuhai, has had a surprising and fascinating consequence. As Shenzhen expanded it swallowed up the surrounding agricultural land in order to develop an urban landscape. This land was forcibly purchased from the local farmers in order to develop, essentially leaving the local villagers without any real means to sustain themselves. The only thing the villagers owned was their 'village land' on which they lived and which was being surrounding by the apparent progress of generic urban development (Song, Zenou & Ding 2003).

Diagram showing the process of rural land pockets remaining within expanding urban areas © John Joseph Burns





Axonometric of typical 'Handshake Building'
© John Joseph Burns

Re-Building the Village

China, however Communist it may claim to be, is in fact a modern capitalist state, but there is a hangover from Mao's time which is completely contrary to the idea of a free market and that is the dual land ownership policy which is still prevalent in China today. Simply put all land is divided into two distinct groups, urban land owned by the state and leased to developers for development and rural land which is owned by a village collective made up of the local inhabitants (Song, Zenou & Ding 2003).

What this means in our story of the development of these urban-locked villages is that the local villagers themselves retained control of their land and by consequence their community. This land despite being surrounded by state owned urban land was in fact a rural piece of land meaning it could be developed independently from the city itself. But the question remained what were the villagers meant to do with this land?

The answer is as pragmatic and capitalist as you can imagine, left with their land as their only asset and seeing a need for affordable housing for rural migrants flocking to the new city they built low income housing (Yan 2008). The form in which they built this is what is truly fascinating; because of the rules governing rural land they could only develop family homes, approximately 10m x 10m. During the thirty years of development these evolved and expanded vertically becoming eight story high residential towers separated by narrow village scale alleyways. The height of these little towers being capped at around eight stories due to the simple fact they don't have elevators in them. This creates a unique architectural form of the 'handshake building', so called because you can reach out and shake the hand of your neighbor.

What is produced is a dense urban landscape, such as Shui Wei Village in Shenzhen which is based on a set of rules developed for rural settlements and a rural scale layout. In fact when they are observed there is no trace to suggest they are a village, they look urban and are urbanized in every sense. However they still retain their villager population and their village communal collective, now rebranded to fit in with the capitalist way forward as a 'village holding company'. They had become a 'village-amidst-the-city' or the Chengzhongcun.

Unregulated Assets

At the time of this expansion upwards and increased density, the mid 1990's, the city authorities were willing to ignore these Chengzhongcun as they provided low income housing which allowed the rural migrants vital to the creation of the city somewhere to stay (Wu & Webster 2010). However by becoming a magnet for low-income migrants and being independent from the city as a whole lead to lower investment in basic infrastructure and the quality of the built environment is not of the highest quality. Coupled with the fact that these Chengzhongcun seemed to have a higher rate of crime has produced an image of almost near slum status.

These areas aren't slums but compared to the brand new 'fully planed' developments around them which consist of gated residential high-rises and commercial shopping malls they don't appear far off. Instead of considering them slums they should be considered as unregulated assets. They are vital to the overall housing needs of the city and they provide small scale economic opportunities which are

Aerial view of Shui Wei Village, Shenzhen, 2010 © John Joseph Burns

not catered for in the larger developments (Yan 2008). In fact it is because these areas have not been planned that they are valuable. The local villagers weren't developers and were taking a pragmatic approach to their own survival; they went from 'growing crops to growing homes' (Song, Zenou & Ding 2003).

But in order for these Chengzhongcun to have survived for so long and to have prospered there must be some fundamental benefits of their composition other than their low-income rooms for rent. They are an asset, but more than just an economic fix that the government didn't allow for, they have other benefits unique to their spatial dynamics.

A Rural Urbanism

The Chengzhongcun are an easy target for the city authorities, with a large low-income rural migrant population, reports of widespread crime and poor infrastructure (Campanella 2008), but from an urban point of view they are infinitely fascinating. This is because they are not a completely new form of urbanism or even a form which is based on previous principles or rules. They are an organic and pragmatic continuation of a rural Chinese spatial layout. The trace of the once existent village remains in the urban layout but hidden in the scale of the urban development.

When viewed amongst the cityscape the Chengzhongcun present a very different set of spatial conditions for daily life to carry on in compared to the great streets and vertical blocks of the rest of the city. Fuxin Village shows a fully 'urbanized' village set in a strict grid with replicated 'handshake buildings' which provide the built fabric. But when examined with a little scrutiny these Chengzhongcun can be seen as a microcosm of urban life, an antonymous urban block.

Each Chengzhongcun has its own school, hospital, village holding company office, local history museum, public gathering space (some even have their own

Street view and aerial view of Fuxin Village, Shenzhen, 2011 © John Joseph Burns

amphitheater for outdoor performances). Apart from just these public services the area is alive with bustling small businesses which populate the ground and even first floors of the 'handshake buildings'. The high density of these varied activities brings a sense of unity and consolidation to the overall environment. It may seem at first that the incredible density which characterizes these areas would be a problem, but which is the factor that actually serves to make them a success living environment.

An issue which the surrounding city has, which the Chengzhongcun doesn't, is the distance its inhabitants have to travel to certain amenities, such as from their homes to the supermarket or their workplace. The high density and varied land use within the Chengzhongcun allows for its residents to be walking distance from everything they need, including employment. This scale means that the local villagers have retained their almost insular village lifestyle but have the added benefit of having a mega-city and the benefits that brings on their doorstep.

However this density must be brought into context of what it is like to live within one of these urban landscapes. The Chengzhongcun is a vibrant place which is alive twenty-four hours a day and there is a constant hum of activity. The 'handshake buildings' over look one another and it is easy to see directly into your neighbor's living room. These facts should not be considered a negative, but they are the consequences of living at such a high density. It can be argued that such a model of living would not be acceptable in a Western society but in the Chinese context and culture this model is perfectly acceptable and actually thrives.

The boundaries between private and public within the Chengzhongcun as so blurred that even your own home becomes part of the public realm being overlooked. It can be said that this layered living actually reinforces a sense of inclusion and a sense of belonging almost, a sense of belonging to a place and a community. Unlike living in a faceless gated high-rise were you are sealed in your own

Street life in Shui Wei Village, Shenzhen, 2011 © John Joseph Burns

apartment, living in the Chengzhongcun binds you to a place, you are constantly aware of the environment you are living in and constantly feel part of a wider social group. This is perhaps how a social trace of a village community has remained despite all physical traces of the village disappearing.

The constant flow of daily life spills out onto the alleyways and brings with it a vibrancy which can only come from people living on top of other people. The constant social interaction and the constant feeling of an urban society that is ever present within your life. The fact that everything you need from supermarkets to workplaces to entertainment is literally round the corner. These are elements that a mega-city designed in zones of activities and connected by vast transport links can't replicate and these are the exact characteristics that give the Chengzhongcun their atmosphere and sense of place.

Traces of the Past - Superficial & Meaningful

When viewing these Chengzhongcun they appear fully urbanized and little remains of their rural past, but there are urban and architectural fragments which show the history that is inherit in these places. Many of these Chengzhongcun retain an ancestral temple which in some like Xiasha Village is given pride of place or in Nantou Village where the original village gate and in Huanggang where original houses are hidden amongst the 'handshake buildings'. These built fragments of a collective past have been important enough to retain and maintain through urbanisation.

These elements add yet another unexpected layer to these Chengzhongcun that adds to the duplicity inherits in the nature of these areas. In order to survive they have had to pragmatically strip away their past to become sustainable but have retained small fragments of history which have been deemed important to them. Again this simply reinforces the sense of village community.

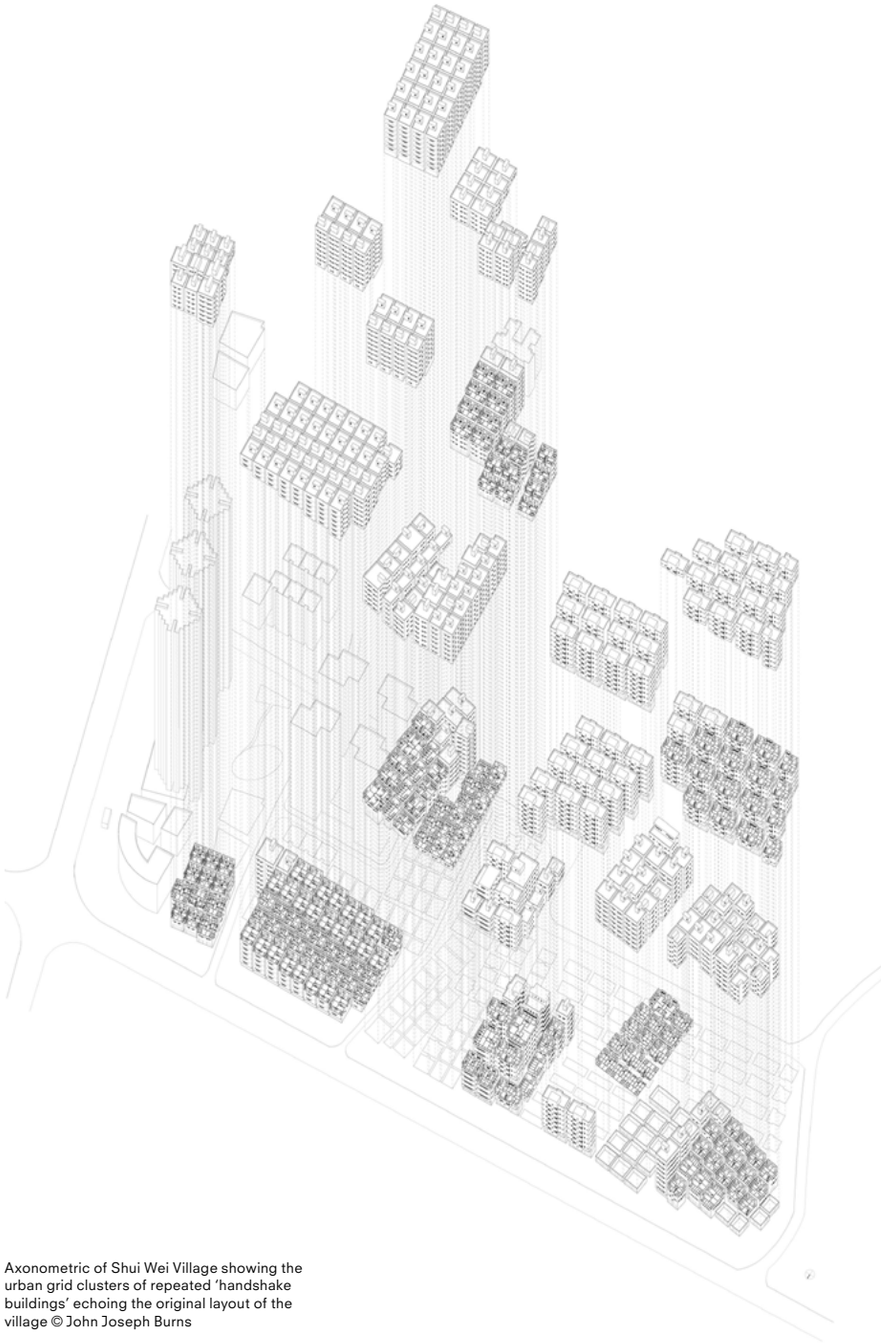
Left: Original village gate in Nantou Village, Shenzhen, retained as village entrance, 2011 Right Original village temple in Nantou Village, Shenzhen, nestled in modern 'handshake buildings' with mock 'Chinese' street level decoration © John Joseph Burns

Original village houses in Huanggang Village, Shenzhen, which are still occupied, 2011 © John Joseph Burns

Street view of abandoned original village houses in Huang Bei Ling Village, Shenzhen awaiting demolition, 2011
© John Joseph Burns

However retaining some small village temples is a minor yet superficial way of retaining your culture. What is more fascinating is that the gridiron layout of these Chengzhongcun is not merely an enforced urban form which best utilises the available land, it itself is a form of conservation which can't be immediately observed. If we consider villages like Huang Bei Ling which hasn't fully been urbanized yet it is clear to see the gridiron pattern of development which the 'handshake buildings' is based on is in fact taken form pervious village layouts. This means that the alleyways, which are extremely narrow has been an inherited inherent Chinese feature brought forward organically. It isn't only that it is acceptable to have high density in a Chinese context but that density has always been present and the social acceptability of density is much greater than say in the West at present.

Not much of the physical past may remain within these villages, apart from a few preserved ancestral temples and some built fragments but that isn't actually what is important to survive. What can be said to be the real important traces of the past is the spatial dynamic, perhaps not vertically, but in terms of the appropriate scale and relation of building to building. When examined these new urbanized villages are built in clustered grids just as the original village was. The true trace has been ingrained into the pragmatic urban response to surviving forced urbanisation. This is why these Chengzhongcun aren't merely slums packed as tight as they can be, they have an urban form which has developed and which has been tried and tested and accepted by its inhabitants.



Axonometric of Shui Wei Village showing the urban grid clusters of repeated 'handshake buildings' echoing the original layout of the village © John Joseph Burns

View of abandoned original village house in Huanggang Village, Shenzhen, with a 'handshake building' over shadowing in the background, 2011 © John Joseph Burns

Collectivity through Individuality

Only in China can the most extreme form of urbanisation be said to have a rural community at the heart of it. The Chengzhongcun are a fascinating phenomenon, they are an example of an organic Chinese urbanism in which density and scale have shown that a successful urban community can be developed that is not the standard commercial podium and vertical block that characterize the modern Chinese city. In fact an urbanism with community and social interaction, one which has grown out of a rural beginning can sit just as comfortably within the context of that most 21st century form of a mega-city like Shenzhen.

So how can you best describe a Chengzhongcun, well I would describe them as Collectivity through Individuality. In terms of all scales, from one-to-one details to the overall layout of 'handshake buildings' there simultaneously exists this feeling of a strong collective community and yet a sense of personal expression. What I mean is even in built form each 'handshake building' although individual and unique combined with the overall mass presents a visual and spatial cohesion. This nature reflects itself in every social aspect as well from the idea of ancestral history to individual family shrines, from the Village Holding Company to individual family businesses within the 'village'. Perhaps this is the ultimate clash of an inherited communist collective system with the individualistic free market translated into the built form of Chengzhongcun.

One thing I can conclude with certainty is the value of the Chengzhongcun. I believe if you truly want to understand contemporary China then you should try and understand the Chengzhongcun. The traces of history mixed with pragmatic development, the hap-hazard approach and determination to achieve progress, the self-regulation and social cohesion, the density and intense atmosphere of social interaction are all elements that are present at all levels of Chinese society. Here in the Chengzhongcun they are exaggerated and amplified given an insight into the Chinese mindset. For me the Chengzhongcun are in their way a summary of China at this moment in time. To have architecture achieve this is quite special, it was organically produced from the people themselves and the value lies with the villagers and migrants who live in these places, the people who produce the vibrant lifestyle and preserve the ancestral heritage and create their shared communal living. It is that quintessential Collectivity through Individuality that is so appealing and produces these fascinating communities and fascinating communal urban space that is uniquely Chinese.

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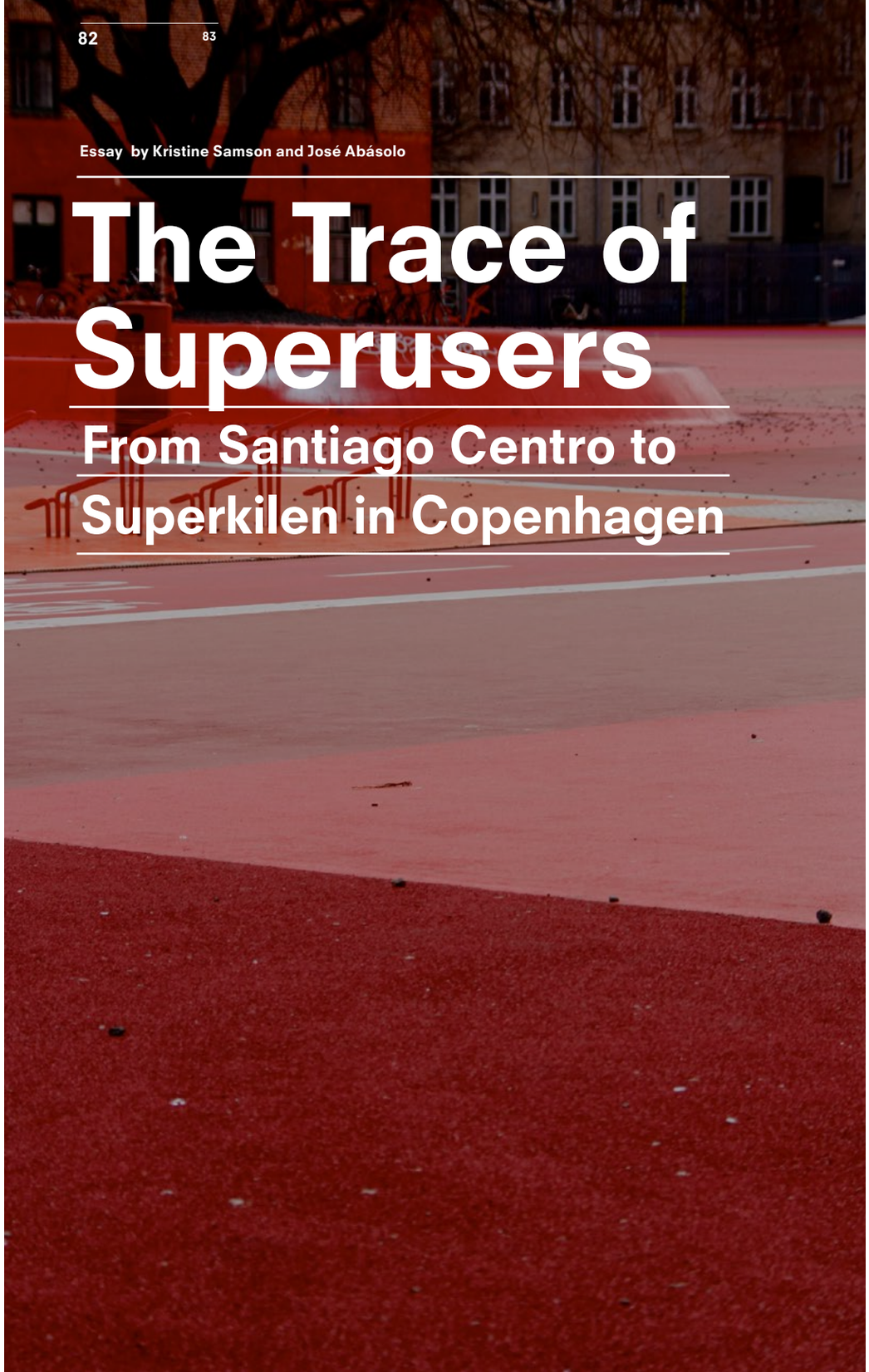
Essay by Kristine Samson and José Abásolo

The Trace of Superusers

From Santiago Centro to Superkilen in Copenhagen



Ground © Kristine Samson

The city and its urban spaces can be seen as a fragmented whole carrying meanings and traces of culture, use and politics with it. Whereas architects impose new stories and meanings on the urban fabric, the city itself is layered and assembled and bears witness to social flows, routines and everyday spatial arrangements.

However, in master planning and urban design, these traces of culture are often neglected. In cities such as Damascus, Rome and Berlin, the traces of history and shifting empires and ideologies are evident. Traces are left in the urban fabric, in architecture and the way urban spaces are shaped. In Damascus, traces from the Roman Empire, Christianity and the Ottoman Empire are materially present in the old city, whereas the French influence and modernist urban planning mark the area around Umayyad Square in the west. Here straight lines, structured through the star formed "etoile" similar to the Parisian Place de l'Etoile, points to a rationalization of urban life contrasting the labyrinthine and layered collage of the old city. Structures such as the Etoile are the ultimate example of representational urbanism in French rationalist planning as carried out by Baron Haussman. Rationalist modernist planning as carried out by Haussman and later Le Corbusier are examples of how modernization and rationalization of the city seek to organize and often control the informal materialization of everyday life in the city.

Cultures and religions, through shifting planning rationalities, leave traces in the city. Everyday life and citizens shape urban spaces. They may be ephemeral and temporal, yet they can be the traits giving a neighborhood its unique identity, its atmosphere. Whereas urban monoculture is identified in many western cities today due to global transactions and capitalist consumer culture, immigrants carry other traces of globalization with them. The traces of immigrant culture reassemble urban spaces through heterogeneous signs, habits, symbols, informal economies and commercialization.

However, traces of culture, the routines and everyday habits of immigrant culture can emerge both from an informal colonization in everyday life and from intentional design practices. By juxtaposing immigrant spatial traces in Santiago Centro with the intentionally-designed traces of immigrant culture in Superkilen, Nørrebro in Copenhagen, it's possible to see how cultural traces influence public space, and how various ideologies and politics are interwoven into the urban fabric by means of urban traces.

Children playing in the fountain at Plaza de Armas de Santiago © Kristine Samson

Cafe with Legs Tsunami © José Abásolo

Santiago Centro

During the transition to democracy after the military dictatorship, the area of the economy remained heavily defined by neoliberal economic policies. Chile, due to the economic openings that resulted in a number of free trade agreements, presented a suitable area for immigrants from neighboring countries in search of new job opportunities.

Since the beginning of the 90s, there has been an increase in immigration in Chile. Whereas immigrants initially came from neighboring countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Argentina, the immigration today has broader coordinates: Colombia, The Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Haiti. The intensity by which these Latin American immigrants use the city can be observed in various neighborhoods: Recoleta, Independencia, La Chimba, Barrio Brasil, but most characteristically and with the most intensity in the historical center of Santiago. In Santiago Centro new forms of spatial appropriation, occupation and manifestation of public space take place.

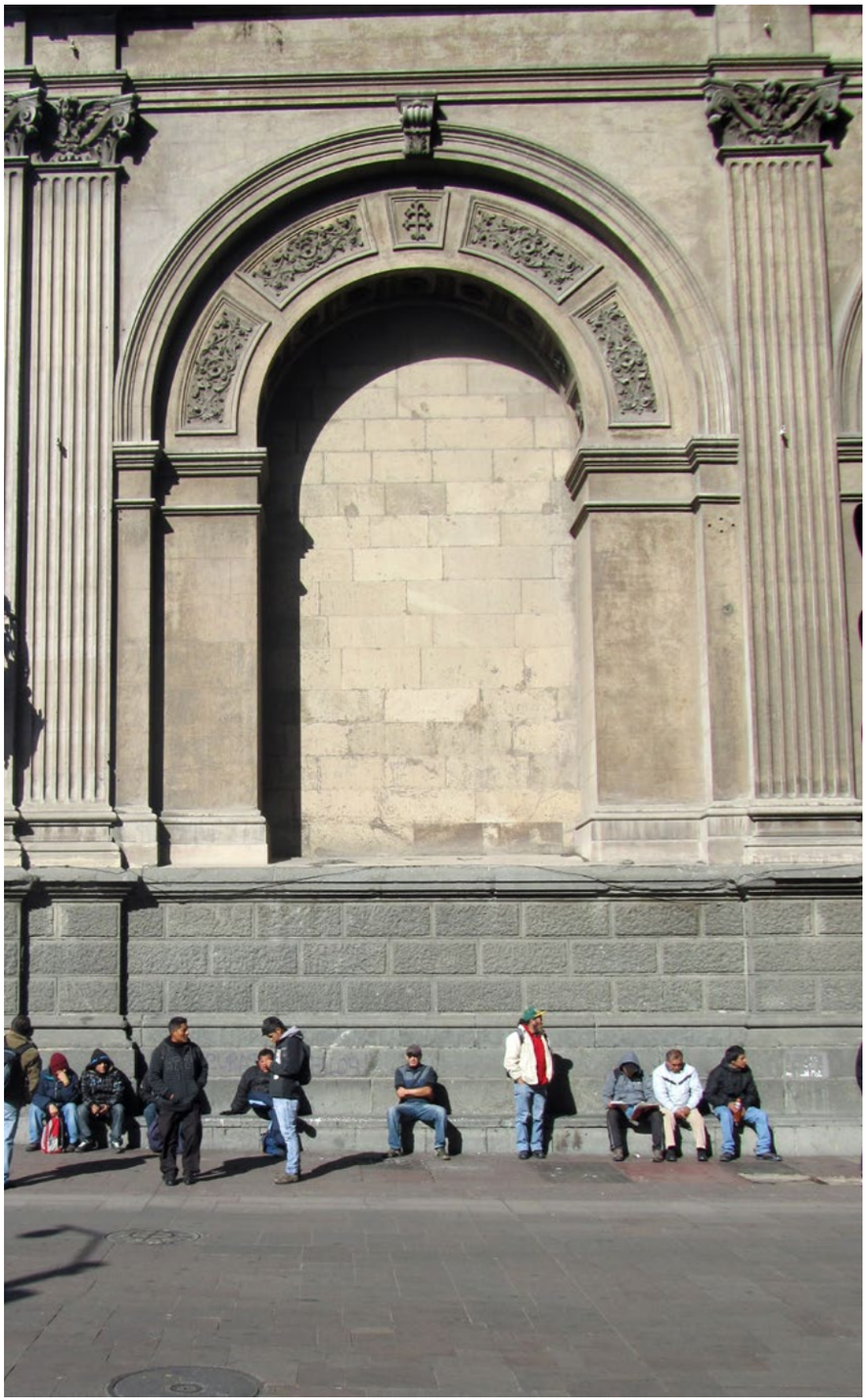
Transcultural Spaces

The city that emerges reveals new organizations, traces and geometries and tracks the interaction of bodies and constant flow of immigrant movement across the city. These immigrant flows redefine the spatial characteristics of Santiago Centro. You can see a series of spatial logics being modified by the new inhabitants. For instance, the walls are no longer borderlines; rather, they transform into central screens where these cultures manifest themselves and where they can express their traditions. The wall acts like mediators for the diverse cultures, a place for cultural encounters where new hybrid urban forms emerge.

Rather than separating urban cultures, the walls support the encounters of cultures across borders. Furthermore they are sites where you can find an exemplary use of public space. In that sense, the Latin American immigrants become super users and reshape Santiago Centro as a space for the public, created by the public.

Walls I

The wall on Santiago Cathedral, with its characteristic stone façade, is a territory conquered by the immigrants, a kind of bastion providing space for daily meetings between different personalities of the Peruvian community. On this everyday venue outside of the sacral church space, construction workers, informal traders and the unemployed mix with women, kids and youth. In this way, the cathedral street, also known as Little Lima, takes on a laid back character as people assemble and meet on the wall, reading newspapers and exchanging local news, information and goods. Whereas the wall is the place for daily encounters, the opposite side of the cathedral street is colonized by different programs and uses that come out of necessity: long distance phone booths, remittances, stores, restaurants, bars, nightclubs and salsa clubs. In this way the wall is the kilometer zero mark of immigration in Santiago, a space that draws lines to other places, to long distance relationships and where the city is reenacted as spaces of longing and belonging.



The Cathedral Wall © José Abásolo

Chicha Culture © José Abásolo

Walls II

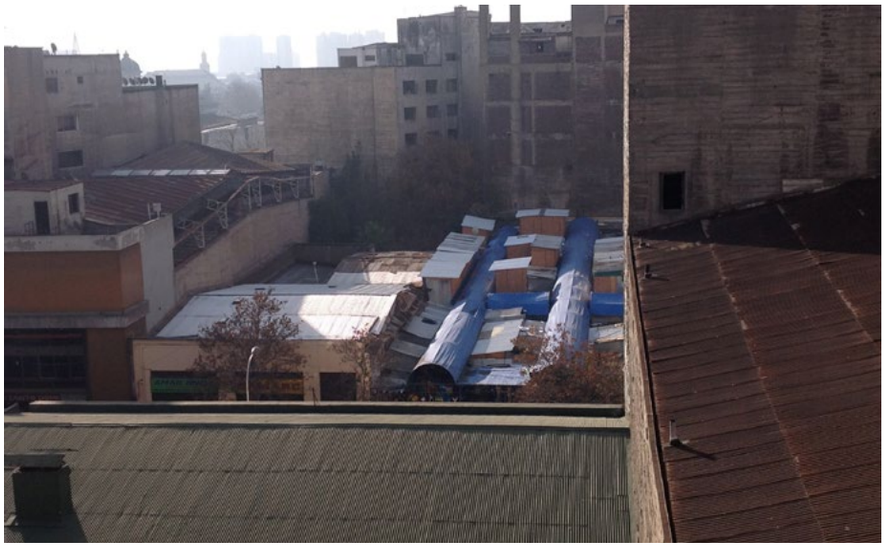
Through a visual intervention, the Peruvian community makes a public invitation to a block party. The public wall is used for private interests, thus transforming public walls in Calle Bandera into a script of vernacular culture. These imported visuals and graphic expressions from Lima are part of what is called "cultural Chicha." In the graphic elements of colors, food and popular culture are brought together in a hybrid visual language unconcerned about identity, but rather referring to cultural layers and mixed style inherent in Peruvian culture. Thus the informal breaks with all rules, cultural norms and good taste.

Walls III

The prostitutes working in San Antonio Street originate mostly from Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Sometimes they develop certain types of street interventions on the walls or in the display windows. It is an aesthetic way to express feelings or personal conflicts with the street as a venue for everyday conflicts. The neighbozrs and the passers-by refer to what they see as "macumba" — a word with African roots, which in some parts of Latin America, relate to rites of black magic and witchcraft.

Rooftops

The market place in Santiago Centro is called "Trade and Persian Markets," referring to the traditional typology of the bazaar found in Muslim and Middle Eastern countries. In this particular case, the Persa Santo Domingo Market is very close to the characteristics of the bazaar. A labyrinthine organization, it is a covered space with high density and a constant flow of people buying and selling. Here, immigrants have established their local stores to offer and sell products. Incrementally, the adaptations have occupied the inner space of the market in a vertical manner. The adaptations and extensions of the local shops have extended into



Rooftop Persa Santo Domingo © José Abásolo

making roofs covering the products. Like a living organism the ground of the market hall has informed a new layer separating the private sphere from the flow of the city; the rooftop structure is basically reserved for dwelling.

Ground

The process for getting residence and work permit is not fast in any country. Santiago is no exception; in public space, you often see large queues of immigrants waiting from early morning to late evening. In the Passage Irene Ariztía, outside the Department of Migration and Immigration, the same patterns and geometries are reproduced. The patterns repeat themselves and differentiate according to the spontaneous organization of the people. Are these patterns, in fact, informed by the desire and hope for a better and more peaceful life? What dreams lie behind these ephemeral organisations? And will the desired document change the material manifestation of globalisation taking place in Santiago Centro?

Passage Irene Ariztía: immigrants © José Abásolo

"Superkilen" The Red Square, bicycle lanes and playgrounds © Kristine Samson

Superkilen_CPH

Superkilen is a public park in Copenhagen, Denmark. Situated in the periphery of the multi-ethnic neighborhood Nørrebro, it was designed to give the ethnic communities a public space for recreational use. The Parallel Competition was won by a notable team of architects, designers and artists: Danish architect Bjarke Ingels group, Berlin-based Topotek 1 and the Danish art collective Superflex were chosen due to their innovative concept dealing with issues of user involvement, place branding and visual design tactics. Most interestingly, the art collective Superflex approached the design as a participatory project involving the users and citizens in the neighborhood. Claiming to conduct "extreme user involvement" in opposition to the conventional public hearings of the municipality, Superflex went out in the Nørrebro neighborhood asking the citizen immigrants what kind of urban furniture they wished were part of the design. The result is a maximalist and heuristic fusion of taste, signs, and commercial cultures from all over the world. A bus stop from Kazakhstan, benches from Brazil and donut signs from the US are but a few of the visual objects found in the park. Framed by three zones — the Red Square, the Black Market and the Green Park — the urban furniture draws signs and consumer culture together. As a visual and spatial assemblage of the mashed-up aesthetics in a globalized world, the design of Superkilen is an interesting yet troubling interpretation of how cultures leave signs in public space. However, are these objects and components authentic traces of the ethnic communities living in the neighborhood, or is it rather an ingenious and clever spatial branding of the Danish capital? On the surface, the design promises the ideologies of a welcoming; the user involved in a non-hierarchical society. But what meanings do the intentionally designed traces of culture bring with them? How do they portray urban culture in Copenhagen? And does the design correspond with the everyday life and routines of ethic minorities and immigrant cultures in the neighborhood?

"Superkilen" The Red Square © Kristine Samson

Colonization – From the informal to the formal

Before Superkilen, the area was a former railway track cutting through Nørrebro. Despite being a vacant space without any programmed facilities apart from a biking lane and a green landscape, the area was used for picnics by the local Turkish and Middle Eastern communities. Informal economies of various kinds were also said to take place in the forgotten strip of land. Today, the urban design of Superkilen has re-furbished the vacant lot with strong imagery and a colorful representation of the multicultural communities in the neighborhood. Symbols and signs take over where everyday practices formerly took place. Design programming for specific actions lay out forms for social behavior. The black square rhetorically points back to the former informal economies. Today, however, you do not find a black market, but the opportunity to play chess and backgammon. The strict line of chess tables suggests an ordered form of gambling in public where informal bets and negotiations are visually ordered. Despite tracing Middle Eastern culture in the design, the chess tables become a formal, designed colonization of otherwise informal, playful activities.

Rooftops © Kristine Samson

Rooftops – signs of longing or belonging?

Mjølnerparken, the residential area next to the green area, is on the Danish "ghetto list". The ghetto list is developed by the Danish government to trace demographics and neighborhoods with a high degree of ethnicity. Being a neighborhood on the ghetto list connotes a lack of integration into Danish society – a societal failure in the eyes of many politicians. In the efforts to change the negative connotations related to the ghettos, Danish urban design has increasingly become a tool for communicating a more positive image.

The parabolic antennas of Mjølnerparken point in one direction. The colorful surfaces and playful signs at the Red Square point in to one another. While the white parabolic antennas on the red brick buildings in Mjølnerparken leave traces of what goes on in the private spaces of the immigrants, the public square outside tells another story. The parabolic antennas on the rooftops point towards a longing for home — a longing for the signals from TV shows and images from the country left behind. The parabolic antennas secretly compete with the empty signifiers on the Red Square — American donut signs juxtaposed with the word Moscow Russian. On the rooftops of Mjølnerparken, longing, and the lack of belonging in Danish society, seem to intertwine.

Wall Mural by Shepard Fairey © Kristine Samson

Wall Allende graffiti © Kristine Samson

Walls

Two walls draw attention in Superkilen: the mural of former Chilean president Allende and the street art collage by American artist Shepard Fairey. Formal street art aesthetics meet informal everyday graffiti. Whereas the latter has been erased and repainted after gradually falling apart, the former is a political gesture signaling red ideology and sympathy for the democratic elected President Allende, who was brutally evicted in the military coup in 1973. The mural is a reproduction of Valparaíso marking the 100-year birthday of Allende in 2008.

The mural made by Shepard Fairey juxtaposes his own brand, the face from OBEY, with a Korean partisan made in propagandist style. However, local graffiti artists quickly took over the wall, inscribing their own signs and style. The re-appropriation of the wall, from Fairey to unknown everyday street artists in the neighborhood, clearly marks how signs of commodified culture exchange with local sub-cultural inscriptions. Interestingly, the Fairey mural was recently repainted into a homogeneous red surface, whereas the local re-appropriations on the Allende mural have been cleansed leaving the stencil image of Allende free. Thus, it is not only local citizens interfering in the writings on the wall, but it is also local authorities deciding what should remain visible and what should be repainted, breaking with the informal way urban signs emerge and disappear over time.

Play

Much of the urban furniture at Superkilen proposes bodily movement and play. It showcases sports facilities from all around the world; thai boxing, for instance, and open air gym equipment create venues for social participation and play. The facilities are popular among the young people and children in the neighborhood. You can swing, play your music on the Jamaican sound system or play chess in the black square. Just the fact that young Palestinian girls, an old Danish couple and a guy from Jamaica went travelling around the world to collect their dream objects for the square witness a playful process for integrating desire and dreams in the urban design. On more levels, the design of Superkilen represents a vision of a society where playfulness and social interaction between the citizens equals a healthy non-hierarchical society.

The objects also represent a culture of fitness mania where working with the disciplined body is preferred over playing video games and hanging out in the local mall. Thus the design objects for play are at the same time ideological traces of the health policies in Copenhagen. The welfare state wants the population to be healthy — running tracks, fitness instruments and bicycle lanes are significant design tools in shaping the ideal healthy society. But how does this correspond to the notion of play? As noted by James S. Hans, “It is through play that man adapts to his changing world, that he constantly challenges and changes the rules and structures by which he lives." But if play is already designed, how can the citizens adapt to the urban environment through their own playful activities?

Play © Kristine Samson

Ground 1

Evidently the former ground in the area is hidden to give space to the programmed areas, the Red Square, the Black Market and the Green Park. The natural ground is replaced by the symbolic representation through design. Whereas informal economies most likely took place in the area of the Black Market, these activities are today only metaphors underlined by the black asphalt and the name: the Black Market.

Ground 2

The soil is visible only one place: on top of the hill in the Green Park, where a red-brownish area forms a small path. On the sign you get the story for this remarkable open wound in the otherwise strictly programmed design: The soil origins from Palestine are collected by Hiba and Allaa as a part of Superflex' participatory art project, along with the two Palestinian girls living in the neighborhood. Thus the act of collecting and transferring Palestinian soil into Danish ground becomes a thought-provoking political gesture supporting Palestinian rights to their land. As Jewish symbol or objects are nowhere to be found in Superkilen, it has become a common interpretation that the design of Superkilen has underlying ideologies connecting left wing ideologies and support for minorities to a market based and global society.

Culture as commodity

In Superkilen, cultural acts and everyday performances from all around the world are made into design commodities. A commercial on a bench for shoes in Sao Jose, Brazil, gains new meaning in Nørrebro, Denmark. The participatory design of Superkilen points to the city as a complex assemblage of global signs, commodities, and ideologies. But the design says little about the people making it. Superkilen is an example of a visual representation of a presumed multicultural diversity. However, it does not imply that the urban space is multicultural. Local citizens are represented as

Ground © Kristine Samson

cultures through signs and objects, but do they inscribe their daily habits and culture? What traces of people are left behind?

Traces – In urban life and urban design

Based on the two urban spaces Santiago Centro and Superkilen, we can identify two forms of traces in the city. The first is socio-cultural inscriptions based on everyday performance, and the second is intentionally designed representations of culture.

A comparison of the two ways of leaving traces of culture and use in public spaces thus questions basic assumptions in urban design. How do designer and urban architects design for the users? How can design take existing traces and take them into consideration? Is spatial programming necessary? How can designers profit from the cultural multiplicity and complexity already present in the city?

In Santiago Centro, a representational fountain was turned into a pool through the everyday use of the immigrants. The wall of the cathedral was turned into a place for reading the newspaper and discussing politics. Spatial appropriations are significant traces of the everyday city. It may not be visually significant and perhaps it does not qualify as design, however, everyday routines and acts leave significant traces in urban space. Actions and use give form to space. In Superkilen, the designed intentions were to involve the users. Superflex carried out a process of radical user involvement. However, the end result is more representational than performative because the design does not directly give form to space. It gives form to a highly sophisticated design solution, breaking with the Danish modernist tradition. But compared to the transformations of public spaces in Santiago Centro, the design by Superflex, BIG and TOPOTEK 1 take the shape of an original way of visual representation and even branding of ethnic minorities.

Brisbane, 2010 © Moby

Embracing Idiosyncratic Weirdness

Iker Gil and Andrew Clark interview Moby

Since he moved to Los Angeles two and a half years ago, Moby has been documenting the "strange and beautiful architecture in Los Angeles." During a recent visit to Chicago, Iker Gil and Andrew Clark met with him to know more about his relationship to L.A. as well as how cities are evolving, his love for emptiness, and his view on creativity and ownership.

You lived in New York for twenty years, then moved to Los Angeles two and a half years ago. Can you describe your relationship with those cities and the way New York influences the way you see L.A.?

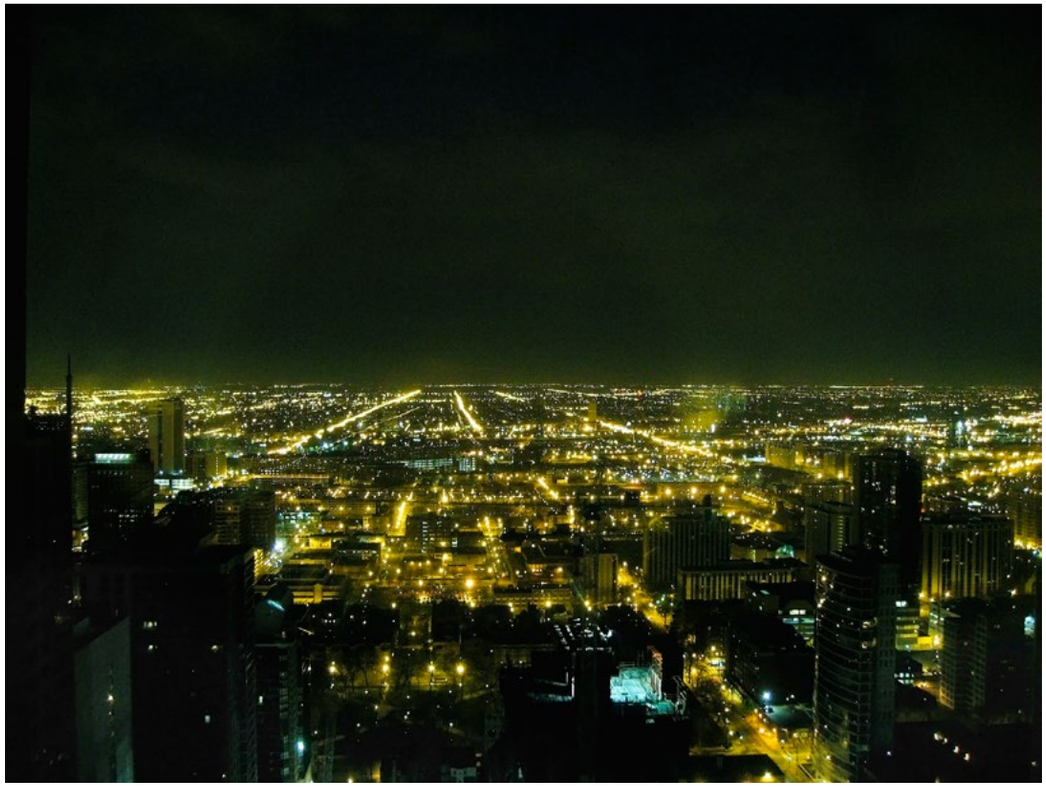
I was born in New York City, and grew up in New York and Connecticut, just outside New York. So, in some ways, from an architectural perspective, I only had two environments growing up and they were very cohesive. One was suburban Connecticut and everything there looks like suburban Connecticut with colonial houses, very cohesive. Going to the city, everything in New York looks like New York. It was all really cohesive, and with that there's a lot of predictability. Going to a Connecticut town, you knew exactly what you were going to get. Before you even got there you knew how things were going to be laid out, what the stores were going to be, what the houses were going to look like. In New York, it was exactly the same thing: you knew what it was going to smell like… everything about it was familiar. Two and a half years ago I moved to Los Angeles and L.A. is the exact opposite. There is no cohesion, no predictability; everything architectural and design-wise is completely arbitrary. That makes it really interesting, but also makes it very confusing.

Do you relate to New York in a different way now that you live in L.A.?

What happens now is that cities become victims of their own success. To an extent, I feel that this is starting to happen in Chicago, perhaps at a slower pace than in other cities like New York, London, Paris, Sidney, or San Francisco, cities everyone in the world wants to be in and, as a result, people move there for the caricature of the city. Suddenly, wealthy people move there and they want the city to stay exactly as it is, and it almost becomes like a necropolis, or like a museum. In a sad, melodramatic way, it heralds when the city stops breathing. I feel like that's what unfortunately has happened to New York. It feels like it's a city of voyeurism. People who are not born in New York come to New York to look around, which is great because it's a beautiful city, but I feel people are not contributing to it anymore, not in the way that I feel people were in the 60s, 70s, 80s and into the 90s. Then people would come to New York and be like, "Oh, rent is cheap, I can live here, what kind of weird thing can I do?" Now people move to New York thinking, "We need to preserve this museum of the city exactly as it is and get rid of the unseemly bits and make the nice parts even nicer."

Similar to Venice in Italy.

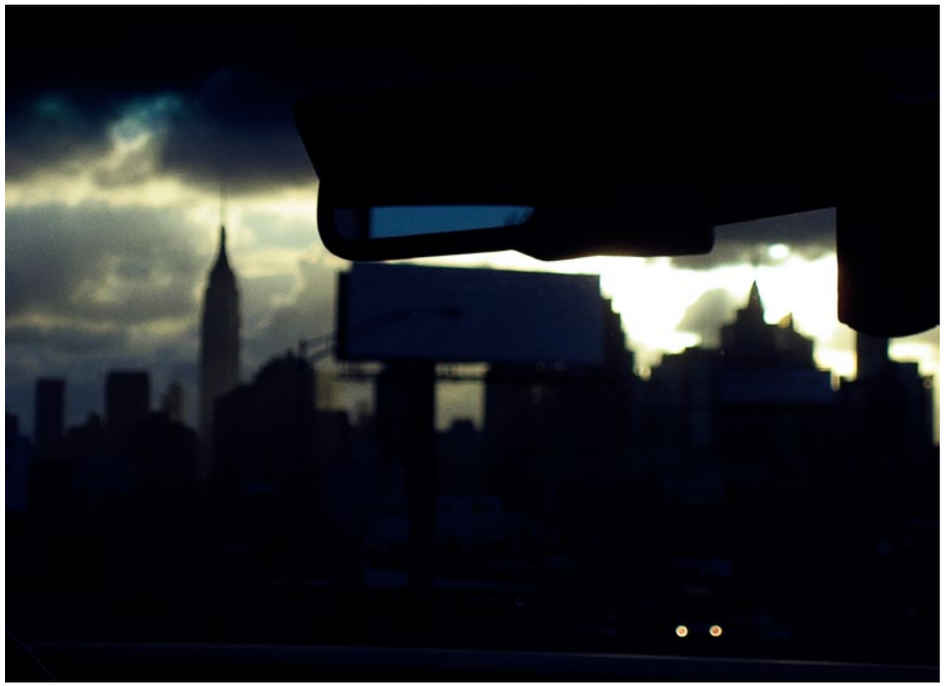
Yeah. Last time I was in Venice, it made so sad. I just thought, "I wish I had a time machine to go back to Venice 300 years ago," when it was this vibrant, dynamic city that was the product of the people who lived there. Now Venice is a museum. It's beautiful, unspeakably beautiful, but with no organic life. That's one of the reasons why I moved from New York to L.A., because L.A. almost has too much organic life. It's the weirdest urban environment in the western world that I know of.



Chicago, 2008 © Moby

You mentioned Chicago earlier and you have been in this city many times. Your song "South Side" was inspired by that part of town. Have you had time to experience the city and its architecture?

I am not saying this because I am here, but in a way, Chicago is like a perfect hybrid of a city. On the one hand, it has the beautiful iconic elements that New York or Paris have, the things that you can go and take pictures of. But also, because it's not so expensive, it enables people to live in a very natural way. Most big cities have lost that. San Francisco has lost that. New York has lost that. London has lost that. Paris has lost it. Certainly people live there and do great things, but those cities mainly exist for the very wealthy who just want things to be pretty, where I think Chicago has the wealthy parts where people want it to be pretty and there are surrounding parts where actually almost anybody can afford to live. L.A. only has the affordable part without the conventional urban environment.



New York, 2010 © Moby

Among others, you have lived in an abandoned factory in Stamford, Connecticut, the El Dorado, an apartment in Little Italy, and an art-deco apartment on the Upper West Side (all three in NYC), a house you built in upstate in New York, and currently in a 1927 house with a 1962 John Lautner guesthouse. Quite a variety. What is it that attracts you to a place that makes you want to call it home?

My approach to space, to architecture, to home is almost reductionist, the reductionist values or qualities that someone wants in a home. To me they come down to light, quiet, lack of bugs, space, and access to interesting things. Those are the big ones. For example, I lived in an abandoned factory for a few years and it had such great light, such a great space, that I was really happy there. It was in a crack neighborhood, I didn't have running water… but because the light and space were amazing, it was wonderful. I lived in other places that ostensibly were a lot nicer, but didn't have basic light and space and, even though they were expensive and fancy, they felt terrible. When you are on tour, you are in a different hotel room every day. That provides this basis of comparison for what works and what doesn't, and what works are the basics. For example, I stayed at this one hotel in London called The Hempel Hotel and it was excessively minimalistic. They put me in this very expensive, very fancy room, but it gave me panic attacks. It had tiny windows, relatively low ceilings and it was so minimal that it felt like hell. But people would stay there because it was in a nice part of town, it had a good name attached to it, and it was expensive. But it didn't have those basics of light and space. It's one of the reasons why I like the early modernists. They were really trying to figure out how they could craft a great domestic environment to meet people's basic needs for light and space. When I lived

in a very fancy art deco building, it was beautiful, but I was a little happier in my abandoned factory, because of the light and space.

In a previous issue of *MAS Context*, we discussed the topics of ownership and creativity with Kirby Ferguson, the author of "Everything is a Remix." He mentioned that the goal of his series is to illustrate that feelings of absolute ownership over a creation are illusory and he argues that Copy, Transform and Combine are the key ingredients of creativity. What's your take on creativity and ownership?

Well, it's interesting. A friend of mine is a painter, and now he takes his own photographs and paints those photographs. But for a while, he was painting other people's photographs. He would take four photographs, in Photoshop make a collage of them, and then paint that. And, he would get sued for it. In one of the lawsuits, a photographer took a picture of a street scene, my friend painted that street scene, and the photographer sued him. But the fascinating thing is that the photographer was just documenting something that already existed and, in the picture, there were tons of copyrights: a Nike hat, an Adidas shoe, and those types of things. The photographer didn't get sued by Nike or Adidas but the photographer who documented copyrighted material sued my friend for painting a document of copyrighted material. I understand the propensity that people have towards ownership. Sometimes ownership has a very specific utility that enables you to make money and pay the rent. But it's also the compulsion that we all have to justify our own significance. To say, "I did this." And it's really hard to be able to step back and say, "No, I facilitated its creation, but I certainly didn't make it."

It is also how much you are pushing it forward, how you take the original work to another level. The new work has its own identity.

Yes. It's funny because in the course of my work, all I have tried to do is music that I love and I don't really care what elements are involved. It's almost going back to the beginning, when we were talking about domestic space. All I want is my music to satisfy some basic emotional criteria. Sometimes that means that I sing a song, sometimes it means I use vocal samples, sometimes someone else sings... I don't care who sings as long as it has an emotional quality to it. I have sampled a lot of other people, but I haven't sampled just for the sake of sampling. I have sampled because I want interesting music elements in my work. I clearly can't take 100% ownership if I sample something. And I have been criticized for this. Anybody who samples gets criticized by other people who say, "That's not original." I was a philosophy major and I love logic, and a big part of philosophy is applying scrutiny to logic and say, "Does you argument hold up under scrutiny?" Nobody's arguments hold up under scrutiny. It's almost too easy poking holes in most conventional arguments. But the argument here is that if you make a record that samples a vocal, someone says to you, "Oh, that's not your creation." They're right, but then if you make a record that uses synthesizers, drums, computers… that's not your creation either. You didn't make the synthesizer, you didn't make the drums, you didn't make the guitars, you didn't make the microphones… how can you then claim ownership? You've used other people's creation to make your own creation. How can someone say, "this is 100% mine"?

New York, 2009 © Moby

New York, 2007 © Moby

Are you creatively satisfied?

I love that I have been able to spend my life making music. Some of the music I have made I like, some of it I always think could be better. I just finished making my next record [Innocents] and I like it but, of course, I think certain songs could be mixed better, I could have written a more interesting chorus… Almost every piece of music that I have made serves as an opportunity for me to be self-critical. I like it but, at the same time, there is always that critical voice.

Is there any other field that you would like to explore?

Like everybody else on the planet I'd love to be a film director. Once I heard an interview with David Lynch where he was talking about the magic of movies. And he is absolutely right. To go into a dark space and have this audiovisual experience that has been crafted and giving yourself over fully to it, it's just such an immersive experience that there's a part of me that would love to play around with that more.

In your album "Destroyed," accompanying a photo of New York, you write, "I really like cities where there's no trace of the people who actually live there." Can you elaborate on that?

Part of it is that I've always loved, as silly as this might sound, emptiness in almost any form. Conventionally and collectively we all agree that certain empty spaces are special: an empty gothic cathedral, an empty monastery, an empty concert hall… everybody walks in and says, "What a beautiful empty space." But going back to the idea of rudiments, every empty space does the exact same thing. It's just that most empty spaces have not been sanctioned in the way a monastery has been sanctioned. What I especially love, and am baffled by, and sort of freaked out by, are completely artificial empty spaces. When you walk into an old monastery, there is stone, there is wood… there are some natural elements. But if you are in an airport at 2 o'clock in the morning and it's completely empty, there is not a single living thing there. It's a vacuum. I think that it's fascinating that, as a species, that's our penultimate accomplishment: creating lifeless spaces.

Los Angeles, 2011 © Moby

Continuing with this idea of emptiness, there is another photo in "Destroyed," this time of a hallway in Los Angeles, that is defined as "the world's best hallway." I am curious to know what defines the world's best hallway?

Transitional spaces that almost nobody pays attention to. Yesterday I was in LAX, and United in LAX has two terminals with an enclosed walkway that connects them. There were people sitting there because there are outlets, and it felt so weird to see people sitting in this transitional space. Normally, transitional spaces are just ignored and people hurry through them to get from one place to the next. The utility of a transitional space is how effectively it enables people to move from one place to another. Nobody pays attention to it except for, is it wide enough? Is it well-lit? Does it smell funny? It's almost the fact that we ignore these spaces that make them so interesting.

A lot of your music is about creating a specific atmosphere. How is that compromised or challenged by the idea that people can be listening to your music with an iPod on the train, in a stadium at one of your concerts, or in their house in a more controlled environment? Does that challenge how you think about your music?

I haven't read it in a long time, but at the very end of the Herman Hesse book *Steppenwolf,* if I remember correctly—and I probably don't—it has this hallucination where he meets Mozart. He meets Mozart and there is a Mozart concerto playing on a crummy little radio. It's a bad version of this concerto playing on a terrible radio and the Steppenwolf is very angry. I think that in the book the Steppenwolf is quite controlling. But Mozart is in the room laughing and I think the Steppenwolf says to Mozart, "How can you laugh at his travesty?" And Mozart basically says, "You know, life is complicated. Life is messy, to pretend otherwise is to drive yourself crazy." I feel that way about making music now. You do the best you can, you put it out into the world and, once it's out in the world, what happens is not up to me. In the analog age, it was very easy to control how people bought and experienced your work. If someone wanted to hear your record, they had to go buy it. You could control that experience. Then, they would take it home and they would listen to it on their stereo. Most musicians thought, "Well, people's home stereos are similar to the environment where the record was mixed, therefore I am ok with it." But now people don't pay for music and they listen to it anywhere. Musicians are driven insane by this. Some musicians will say, "There is only one right way to listen to this." My perspective is, "The world is messy." A friend of mine was listening to Led Zeppelin's greatest hits on her iPhone speaker and my first thought was, "What a travesty!" And then I was like, "It actually sounds pretty good." It's amazing that we can still have an emotional experience to music coming from a tiny tiny tiny little speaker. So my response is, I don't worry about it. With so much music in the world, with literally hundreds of millions, if not billions, of pieces of recorded music out there, if someone would ever take the time to listen to one of mine, I certainly can't criticize them for the way in which they listen to it. If they steal it and listen to it on an iPhone speaker, at least they are listening to my music.

Essay by Krishna Bharathi. Photographs by Frank Thiel.

Tracing Intentions

The Photography of Frank Thiel

untitled (Palast der Republik #35), 2007 (detail) © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.
Courtesy for all images, of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, Galeria Leme, São Paulo, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna and Galeria Helga de Alvear, Madrid

Stadt 12/52 (Berlin), 2006 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Stadt 5/31 (Berlin), 2010 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.
Annex of the former Preußisches Ministerium für öffentliche Arbeiten (1878-1921), responsible for the railway structural engineering. Leipziger Straße 125, Berlin-Mitte by Paul Kieschke, 1892-94. Empty since the wall came down, now recently sold.

Frank Thiel's photographic work centers on Berlin, an epicenter of weighty social, political, and technical narratives. Whether Thiel documents the demolition of historic GDR era buildings of aesthetic and historic value in their own right, marketing follies superimposed onto actual buildings, or peeling paint in forgotten interiors, his subtle observations provoke insight into universal themes of decay, renewal, memory, integrity and legitimacy within the context of the urban landscape and encourage viewers to engage in a collective imagination beyond local understandings of place.

Although the "detailed details" of technical execution is critical to the aesthetic expression in the imagery he creates, Thiel asserts that it is his preference to speak more generally about the work as a whole as it "can and should be understood in more than one way," and when left "a little bit open, usually encourages people to do this."[1] Despite the intent here to do just that, that is simply show the images and allow the viewer to draw connections, it is of interpretive use to briefly locate Thiel's efforts in relation to photographers working in apparently similar ways. As the option to view the corpus of his work in its entirety, chronologically and embedded in its historical context is not available here[2], comparative readings can effectively locate alternate purpose in methodology.

Thiel's work is often grouped amongst a certain set of artists that could be called the German school of large format photography or the Becher progeny. This association might better be attributed to the force exerted by the subject of documentation – the built form, the individual portrait, and their complementary details or essentially, the object of the artists' scrutiny. However, it is the intent behind the gaze that critically differentiates the work. A succinct discussion of Thiel's so-called Becher school contemporaries in large format photography—Candida Höfer, Andreas Gursky, and Thomas Struth—outlines strategic differences that mark their respective efforts.

To date Thiel has primarily focused on aspects of transformation within Berlin and its surrounding locale. This stance varies from Struth whose images intimate objectivity even in his portrait work; from Höfer whose particular interests lie in documenting building typologies more in the tradition of the Bechers; and even also from Gursky's early non-digitally enhanced work that consistently underscores composition and the artist's distance through his high-angle, large-scale panoramas. Highlighting intertwined conceptions of public social space and the built environment are not central ambitions to the work of Gursky, Struth or Höfer, and accordingly, their respective output conveys serene stability. Additionally, in the work of Struth and Höfer although the places, objects and individuals documented, physically extend beyond their image boundaries, the selected scenes appear to ¬reside comfortably within their frames.

Second, Thiel's work encourages symbolic readings into architectural materiality and public space that is largely absent from the visual occupations of Struth, Gursky or Höfer. Although this is salient throughout the work, it is particularly poignant in the close frame imagery of Communist era blue paint peeling in disused buildings; in delicately detailed historic facades whose formerly glazed openings

untitled (Palast der Republik #30), 2007 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

are now boarded with plywood[3]; and in marketing imagery of a poorly photoshopped family of specters that is no less ridiculous than the building façade follies which hang in their vicinity[4]. These images reflect an inquisitive, watchful eye, but also a voice that often articulates a gentle critique. For example in discussing the site selection of the tightly framed images of degrading paint, Thiel explains that he had "always wanted to include the economic reality of the city," and for some time had sought for the correct means of expression. He explains that it was not until he, "started paying attention to these walls and ceilings," in former government and industrial buildings in East Berlin that he recognized that he had "the perfect metaphor for this subject" since these spaces had witnessed "the downfall of East Berlin's industrial sector and the disappearance of a complete political system."[5]

Lastly is Thiel's use of the photographer's most expressive multifaceted tool - framing. Here *framing* refers to the intersectional dimensions that inform photographic judgment, execution and presentation. That is the balance of image content, perspective, scale, technique, as well as physical formatting. It is within this context that the respective efforts of Thiel, Gursky and Höfer diverge. Post-1990s Gursky has come to heavily rely on digital enhancement to achieve his intended scale, color saturation and hyper realistic graphic impact. Alternatively, Höfer initially worked with a 6 x 6 cm middle format camera for an extended period of time, but as quality limitations of greatly enlarging 6 x 6 negatives hindered the ability to print larger exhibition works, she began working with large format cameras. This is

Stadt 9/33/A (Berlin), 2001 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.
Digital simulation mounted on scaffolding. Bertelsmann Media Group bought the land with the prestigious address Unter den Linden 1 to build a new representative headquarter in the German capital. The building is a mix of the reconstruction of Berlin's former Stadtkommandantur or city garrison headquarters, which stood on that land historically, but did not survive WWII. This is the modern rear view. During Bertelsmann's annual summer event, a huge party tent was erected behind the simulation. Limousines stopped in front, and guests literally walked through the simulation into the party tent.

evidenced in the format shift of her physical output from square prints to rectangular. Essentially it appears that her use of large format cameras followed the intent to physically print larger scale images, rather than a pointed interest in capturing a wider context driving the equipment change. This is also suggested by the visible thematic stability across the technical change in Höfer's work.

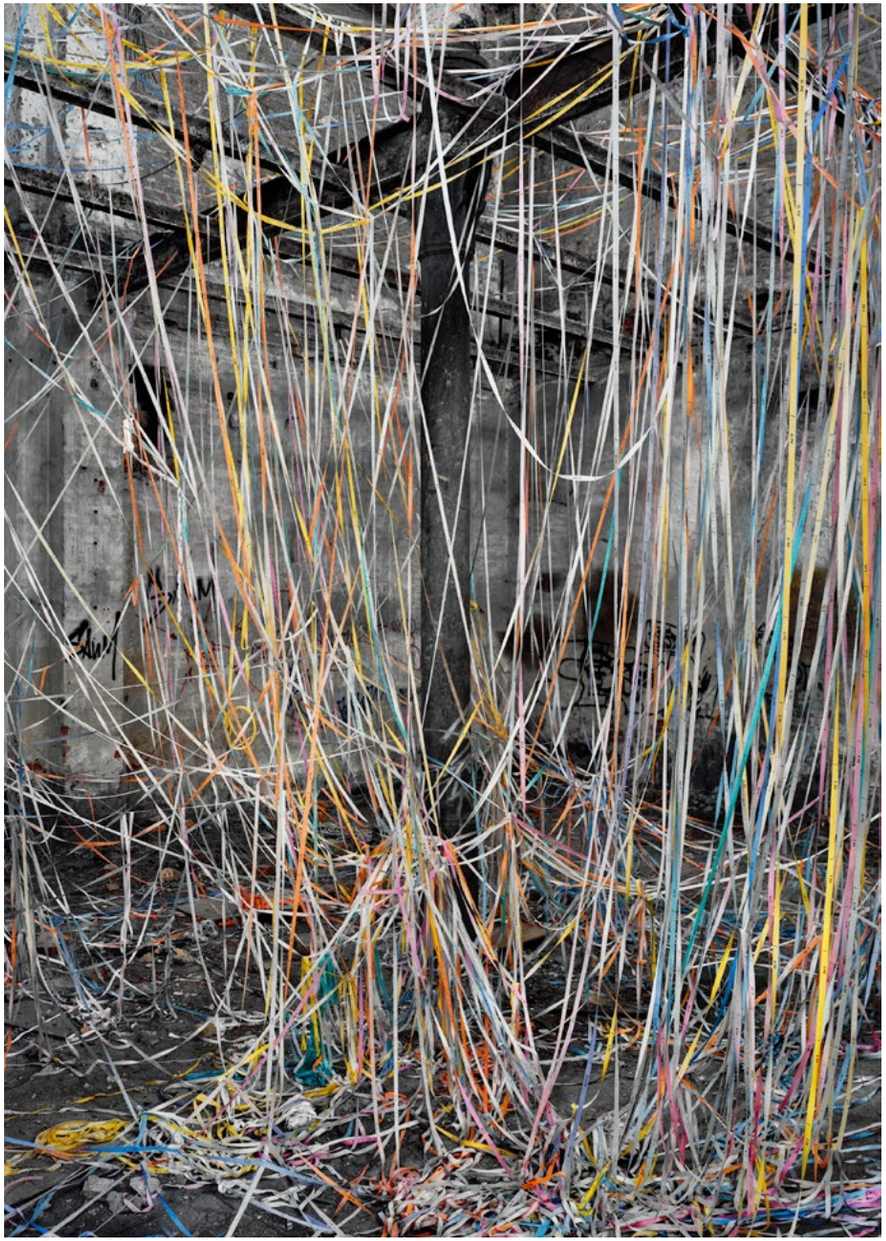
Lastly, unlike the diversity found in Thiel, Gursky or Struth's respective efforts, Höfer's work primarily highlights comparative variations in symmetric, receding interior perspectives of voluminous spaces, occasionally employing elevation and detail views.[6] In contrast, the work Thiel, Gursky and Struth mixes image content, perspective and object scale freely. However like Höfer, Struth's alternatively scaled views do not explicitly inform other pieces, and to a certain extent neither does Gursky's imagery, although the sense of infinite immensity in his work is consistent. In Thiel's corpus, the viewing scales of his images are carefully chosen to elicit or extend the perception of the action across multiple frames. The image formats within each series are not always consistent and follow logics of narrative, rather than being strictly technically prescribed. In Thiel's work these interests have directed his progression from tighter frame elevation images of buildings to depictions of larger, more complex scenes where the image construction shifts from a two-point construction to three. In a two-point perspective the viewer is more easily able to imagine the contents of the frame as something or somewhere they might actually encounter at or near eye-level, whereas a three-point perspective from a

untitled (Palast der Republik #57), 2009 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.
Digital to scale simulation, printed on plastic and mounted on scaffolding of the future Berlin Castle. A historic replica in part, located on a significant site, it will replace the Palace der Republik (PdR) that had been constructed by the GDR after the demolishment of the remains of the Berlin Castle.

bird's eye view immediately signals to the observer that the frame allows them access to an atypical viewpoint - a perspective of detachment and visceral oversight.

For example note the framing variations in the demolition images of the Palast der Republik, a significant GDR era building which programmatically embodied its social ideology and possessed architectural value in its own right.[7] Consistent perspectival framings function as narrative devices here. By holding a single element steady across images, attention is drawn to what is animated from frame to frame. Another observable strategy in this series relies on the architectural cohesion shared by the stripped interior steel brace detailing, theatre floor plan and ceiling grid organization that transparently connects the frames as well. Despite public protest, the demolition of the asbestos ridden building proceeded, and the controversial reconstruction of the baroque style Berliner Stadt Schloss or City Palace associated with former imperial Prussian rulers will be rebuilt on the same site.

Throughout the work it is evident that the enmeshed narratives of physical place, materiality and symbolism are articulated by weaving images of the detail, building and urban scales. Yet, Thiel is clear that his ambition is not to exhaustively document an earlier historical reality. Rather his interest is in contextualizing the rapid transformative processes of destruction and reconstruction within the city, by capturing the remains of an alternative aesthetic and social vision.[8] The exploration



Stadt 16/01 (Berlin), 2011 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

of robust understandings of place in Thiel's work mirrors the inherent diversity present in experiences shared by many, and has led him to focus on the transformation of key renovation sites within Berlin, a city once physically and formally divided through its architecture.[9] Thiel's examination of the incomplete encourages a curious viewer to delve further in any direction, whether into the past, present or future, and depending on that choice, provides an introduction to a very different understanding of the challenges of the site beyond the technical efforts of construction and demolition. The careful assembly of his work reminds us of what changes in our built environment represent contextually—politically, physically and for the collective. However, it is his long visual engagement in Berlin's particular mix of discursive tensions that grounds Thiel's corpus of work and anchors his distinctively refined, but singularly incisive tone.

It's not that I have a new intention or idea for every single image. These 20 years of work are like a process, almost organic for me, like the branching of a tree. If you put a timeline on the works you could see that almost everything refers to everything, that I go back and forth all the time, that I intensify certain elements and others I don't follow anymore (at least for a certain time). One observation leads to the next and many aspects run parallel consciously or unconsciously simultaneously. It's the incomplete, temporary, in-between, progressing nature of the things I photograph that mirrors my way in working which is of a very similar nature.[10]

Frank Thiel

ENDNOTES

1 Correspondence, July 17, 2013.

2 Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid; Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, eds. 2006. *Frank Thiel: A Berlin Decade 1995-2005*. Hatje Cantz: Wein. 260 pp., 168 ills., 153 in color.

3 Correspondence, July 10, 2013.

4 Ibid.

5 Correspondence, August 16, 2011.

6 Höfer has also shot an international comparative series of Zoo interiors.

7 Correspondence, July 10, 2013.

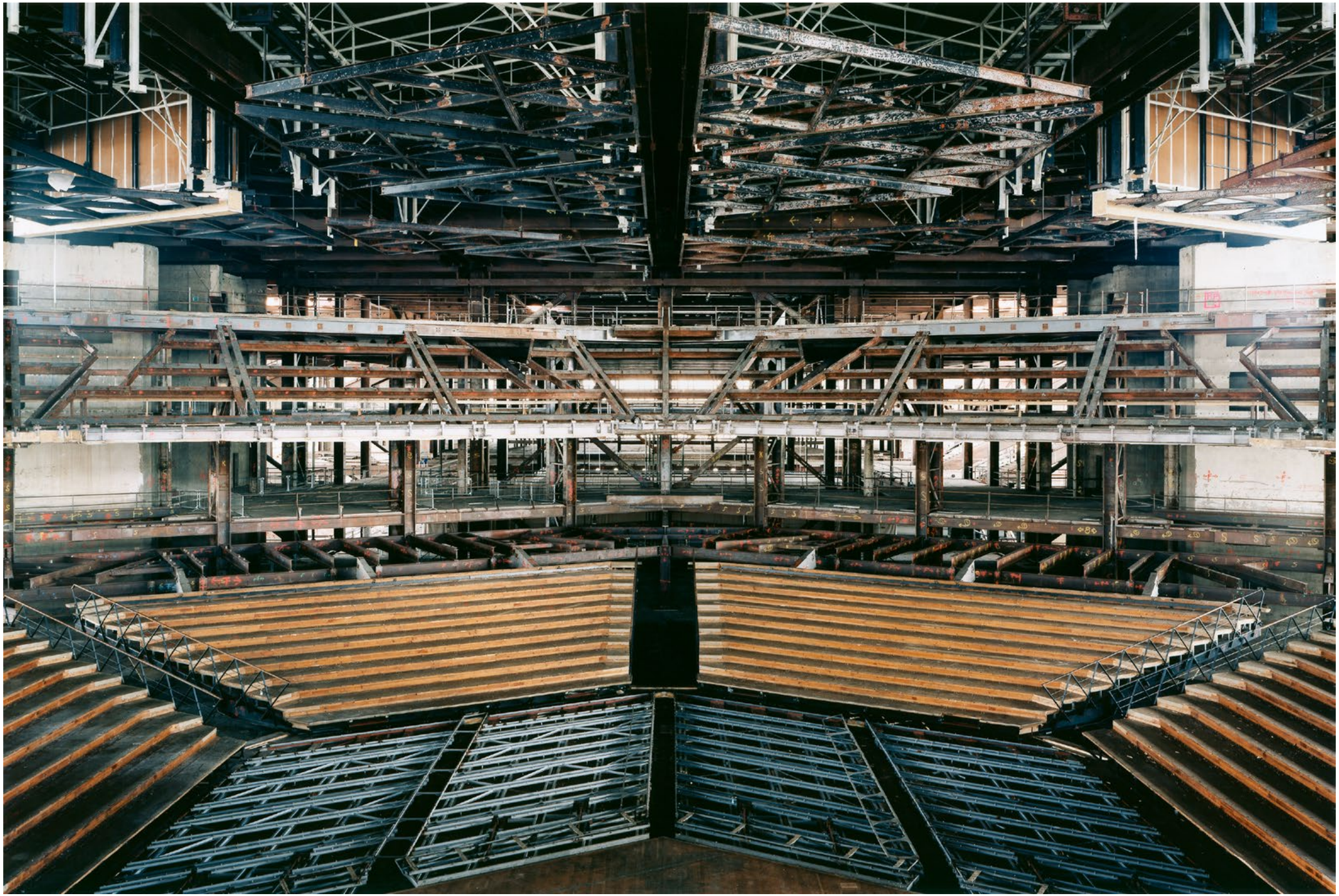
8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Correspondence, July 16, 2013.

untitled (Palast der Republik #33), 2007 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

untitled (Palast der Republik #47), 2008 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



untitled (Palast der Republik #13), 2004 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

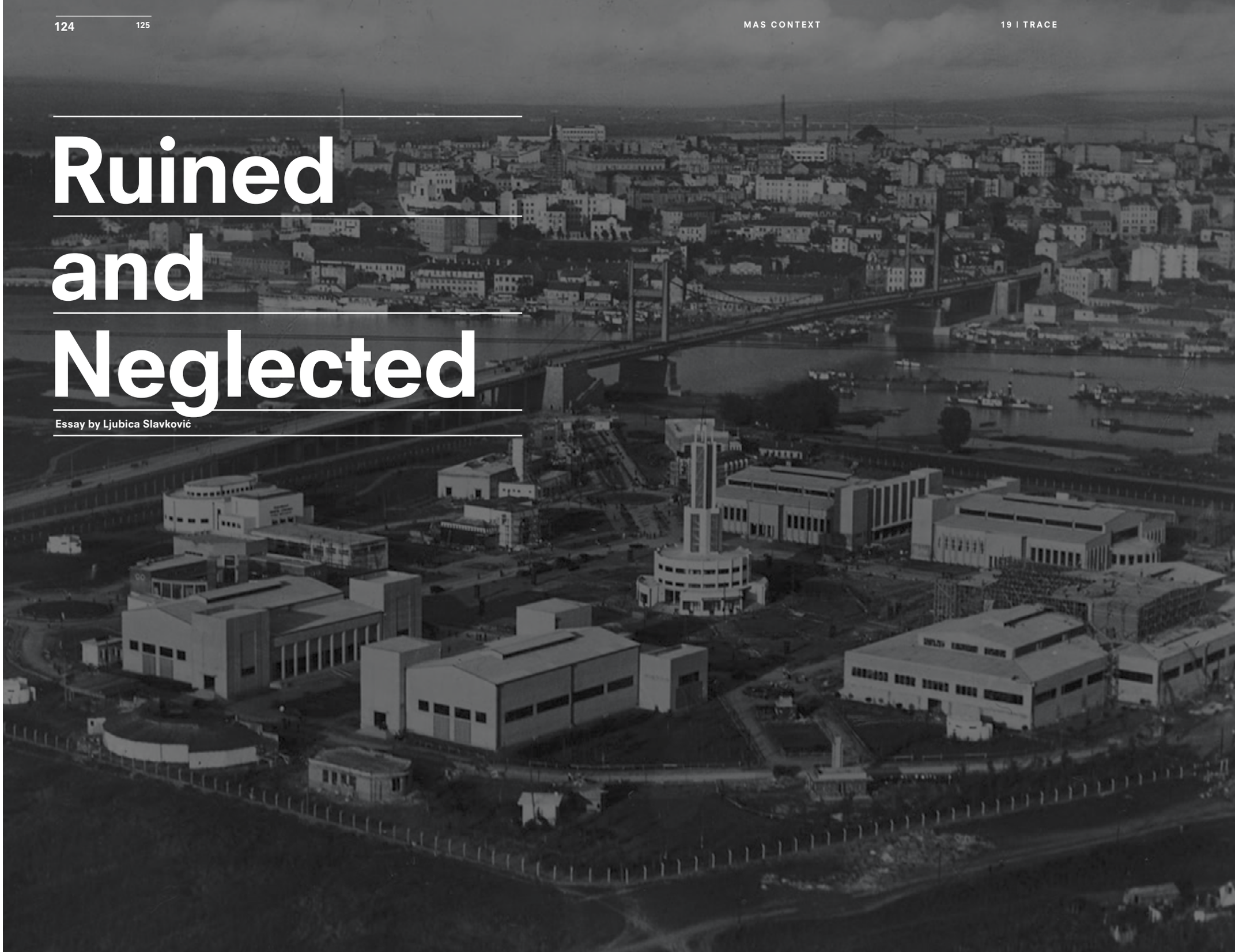
untitled (Palast der Republik #28), 2007 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Stadt 15/06 (Berlin), 2011 Detail of an investor's digital simulation of a new shopping center at Leipziger Platz (Berlin-Mitte). © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

untitled (NSA Field Station, Berlin, Teufelsberg # 14), 2005 © Frank Thiel and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Ruined and Neglected

Essay by Ljubica Slavković



The newly built Sajmište – The Fairground with Belgrade in the back, year 1937 © Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade

The Central Tower of the newly build Sajmište – The Fairground, year 1937 © Courtesy of Miloš Juriši

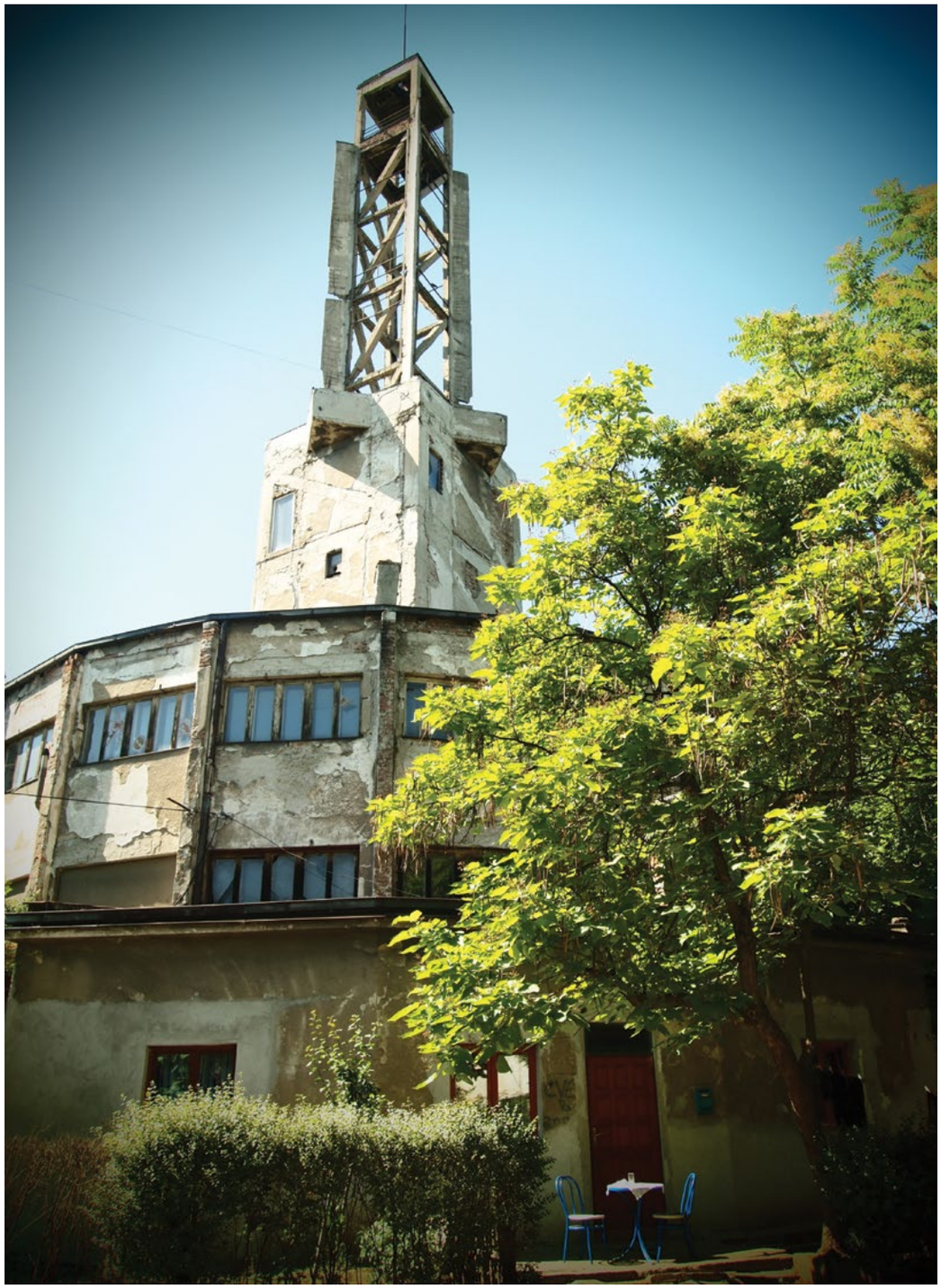
Belgrade, the Serbian capital, is located on the European crossroads, where east meets west and north greets south. The only European city bombed three times in the 20th century, it has been demolished over forty times in its two thousand year-old history. Traces of its turbulent past are woven into its built environment. Layered within it are the ways the city deals with this history; selective memories alongside constant reminders are the daily life of Belgrade.

For a long time, Belgrade was a border city, a point where one Empire faced another. The end of the 18th century brought liberation from the centuries-long Ottoman reign. The young, independent country was eager to prove that it was more than just geographically in Europe. Signs of modernity began to rise all over the capital. With political changes at the beginning of the 19th century, the rivers ceased to be borders and Belgrade's territory expanded into the vast and empty marshlands on the left bank of the river Sava. The first transformation of the marshy site turned it into exhibition grounds. This new built Sajmište—the Fairground—heralded the westward expansion of the capital, and between the two world wars, it became the pride of modern Belgrade. Located just a short walk from the city center, every exhibition held on the site become a must-visit among trend-thirsty Belgraders. In the ten days of the First International Belgrade Fair, over two thirds of the entire city population visited the Fairground. However, the popularity of the City Fairs and the Belgraders' rush to the first and only settlement on the left bank of the river stopped abruptly when World War II broke out. Once again, the river Sava became a border, leaving Belgrade on one side, staring at the Fairground on its other side.

The Fairground's chosen design emanated out of building urgency and planning difficulties. Its enclosed form and centrality was a subject of criticism. It was not suitable for organically connecting a further urban development on the left bank of the river. Bizarrely, the design was perfect for organizing a Nazi concentration camp. The transformation was as simple as enclosing it all with a piece of barbwire. Established by Nazi Germany in December 1941 on the outskirts of Belgrade, the Sajmište concentration camp was one of the first camps in Europe and the largest one in occupied Serbia. During World War II, over 7000 Jews were systematically murdered there, and over 10,000 Serbs and Roma people also died there.

The end of the War and the new liberation changed the state border again. This time, the new regime saw the empty marshlands on the left bank of Sava as perfect ground for the new capital of the young united state. The plans for New Belgrade, the pride of modern Yugoslavia, rose on Le Corbusier's principles, from a completely blank paper. The only built structure on the left bank, Sajmište—the Fairground, the camp—was ignored. It succumbed to the blind spot of the rise of the new modernist capital. No interventions were made on the site, except for shacks built for the workers and creators of New Belgrade. The settlement was neglected and started to decay. People with lower or no income found their home in this city a blind spot.

Staro Sajmište—the Old Fairground, as it is called nowadays—although recognized as a place of horror, was never given the proper commemoration. With democratic changes, sole initiatives were taken regarding its transformation into a memorial complex, but up to this day its rich and tragic history remains excluded from public memory. Today, artists and people on the edge of poverty live their daily lives in the former pavilions and houses of death. Most of them are completely unaware



The chairs of the current inhabitants in front of the the former Central Tower of Old Fairground and Semlin Concentration Camp © Ljubica Slavkovic

of the terror that soaked their land. No one has used or benefited from the neglected, valuable property in the very center of today's Belgrade nor have the victims of the concentration camp had their due remembrance. The Jewish Community in Belgrade has not had its Holocaust closure. Today's radically different city tissue may explain why the traces of such vivid historical events are given a blind eye by its citizenry.

Not so far away from the Staro Sajmište, Belgrade welcomes most of its visitors to the Generalštab buildings. These Ministry of Defense buildings are a masterpiece of the well-respected Serbian modernist architect Nikola Dobrovič, the demiurge of New Belgrade. Although all of the architect's work was appreciated as he brought many modernist gems to socialist Yugoslavia, it remains unknown why his masterpiece, the Generalštab—the Ministry of Defense building—was not placed under cultural protection. "Unprotected," it was just a couple of army buildings and thus one of the main targets in the 1999 bombing of Belgrade, when they were heavily damaged. In 2005, they were finally put under state protection as a cultural heritage, that is, what was left of them. For the past fourteen years, the large, dominant and vacant ruins greet Belgraders every day. In one of the most beautiful and important streets of Belgrade, guardrails surround what is supposed to be a cultural heritage. This sends a clear message of how we deal with our traces: we do not; we choose to ignore. The future of these buildings is still undecided.

In the first case, the traces of horror are layered by the ignorance of everyday life. In the second, the constant reminder is daily ignored by thousands of passers-by. These two cases differ in time and historical situation, as well as ideological and political background. What they share is an important place in our heritage, and in a future yet to be decided upon. Both lay on some of the most valuable city property, ruined and neglected.

The lifeline of the Serbian capital is entwined with disruptions and new beginnings. Every regime presents its interests through the built environment, ignoring what their predecessors have left. Some may wonder if ignoring all traces is the only way to truly move forward. But we also wonder if we ignore the past, where will we find solid ground for our future? New generations cannot see the events that occurred before their time. They read and learn from the traces; they see the ruins and neglect.

The ruins of Generalštab – the Ministry of Defense next to the State Parliament © Ljubica Slavković

Passing by family in front of the ruins of Generalštab – the Ministry of Defense © Ljubica Slavković

A young woman, a businessman, Serbian flag and the advertisement saying cash / The ruins of Generalštab – the Ministry of Defense with its direct surroundings / overlaid © Ljubica Slavkovic

Text and photographs by Lisa Hirmer

Elliston

Newfoundland

Elliston, Newfoundland, Canada, 2013 © Lisa Hirmer

Elliston is a tiny, remote town at the tip of the Bonavista Peninsula in Newfoundland Canada, a few clusters of clapboard houses and narrow meandering streets that cling to craggy dark cliffs that drop fiercely into the booming waves below. Salty winds blow constantly across the landscape with a relentlessness that fits perfectly with the well-told depiction of Newfoundland as a place of harsh beauty surrounded by a remorseless ocean.

In many ways Elliston is a typical Newfoundland town that, once a busy fishing settlement, lost its primary industry with the collapse of the cod stocks in the nineties. Then, like much of Newfoundland, the town turned towards tourism as a strategy for new economic growth. Unlike official provincial schemes, however, the tourist attractions of Elliston are decidedly local, clearly initiated by enterprising residents hoping to bring some portion of Newfoundland's hundreds of thousands of visitors towards this part of the island.

In 2000, Elliston declared itself the *"Root Cellar Capital of the World,"* hoping that the numerous sod-covered structures dotting the landscape made them unique enough to warrant a visit. The town counts over 130 root cellars across the town and surrounding terrain. The earliest are over two hundred years old but there are many that date from the 1950s since some parts of the town were without electricity until the early 60s. Most of the cellars remain in obvious relation to individual houses, though some of the older ones were built into the sea-side face of the cliffs—presumably for the wind's cooling effect—and others, mostly grass covered, seem to have outlasted whatever structure it was they once served. These root cellars were once a critical part of life in Elliston, helping residents survive in the remote location and difficult terrain during a time without electricity and no local agricultural supply to rely on, keeping vegetables and other provisions warm during freezing winters and cool in the summer months.

The tourism effort involved mapping the cellars, restoring some of the structures in anticipation of visitors, creating interpretive signage, and opening a local restaurant focused on the foods that were traditionally stored in the cellars. The hope behind this initiative seems to have been that those interested in subsistence living would seek Elliston out in order to learn about the logistics of an era when all food was locally sourced and self-reliance critical to survival.

Elliston, Newfoundland, Canada, 2013 © Lisa Hirmer

But, in the years that followed its launch, the energy behind the root cellar initiative seems to have waned, and the town has refocused its efforts on more popular attractions, particularly a colony of puffins visible from a much-visited point of land just outside of town. The map is still available and the *"Root Cellar Capital of the World"* sign remains prominent. The root cellars of course persist, popping up across town in various states of usage and repair. But, the restaurant is closed and a cellar visitor is unusual enough to warrant curiosity from residents. The artifacts of this project are themselves beginning to seem like traces of an earlier moment—a moment of great optimism and intrepid, if eccentric, vision—which though perhaps unsuccessful as a tourist draw, continue to bring attention to the lingering infrastructure of the root cellars.

Even with the waning of the tourism scheme, the persistent structures continue to serve the residents of the town, not as curiosities but in their original function. Though now made redundant by electrical appliances, many of the root cellars remain in use, allowing residents to stock healthy foods in an economical and reliable way—surely still a convenience in such a remote location.

As supply and demand systems get ever larger and more complex and our reliance on them grows, the simple self-reliance of the root cellars seems both elegant and novel. Especially when viewed within the context of a collapsed natural resource economy, the old root cellars together with the newer traces of the local tourism initiative form a compelling narrative that points to the importance of resiliency in the face of changing circumstances. In Elliston it is easy to wonder about the level of impairment a collapse of infrastructural systems could bring. In such an event it could very well be traces of older technology we turn to. Even without collapse, the remnants of earlier systems provide us with alternatives, ways of opting out of prodigious networks that leave us reliant on them.

Elliston, Newfoundland, Canada, 2013 © Lisa Hirmer

American Postmodern

Essay by Jayne Kelley

Panoramic photo of downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota © Bobak Ha'Eri

"No, in ten minutes, it's history! At 4 o'clock I'm a dinosaur!"
—Wall Street (1987)

In the 1987 movie *Wall Street,* one of the first things Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) does with his illicitly gained wealth is outfit a high-rise New York apartment to postmodern aesthetic excess: contractors layer fake brick on a wall only to cover it with plaster and reveal it again; decorator Darien Taylor (Daryl Hannah) glues gold and silver leaf onto new molding; a painter materializes a fresco from drywall. It's no coincidence that Darien—Bud's trophy girlfriend—is an interior designer who caters to clients in finance. In the film, architecture and interior design are marks of status, if not values; luxe postmodern style coincides with wealth and power. When Bud's insider trades on behalf of his quotable, greedy mentor Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) are discovered, he's forced to sell. For Bud, postmodern style is as impermanent as bad stock, its worth just as fleeting.

Wall Street's characterization of contemporary design is canny in retrospect, but it also reflects trends in both architecture and general culture during the mid-1980s. The rise of postmodern architecture in the United States, and especially its quick adaptation to a corporate setting, occurred alongside vast economic expansion and a shift in economic activity. To generalize, credit cards, private equity, and venture capital proliferated at the same time that the country's workforce moved increasingly into service-based industries. *Wall Street* exhibits a clear anxiety about the financial system's loose ties to reality, even as it is fascinated by these abstract instruments and processes (and the lifestyles they enable). But while postmodern interior surface treatments are actually paper-thin, buildings — like the hulking postmodern office towers commissioned by corporations and governments during this time — are more permanent, undeniably real investments.

A significant percentage of the tallest buildings in a handful of medium-sized Midwestern cities were constructed between 1982 and 1992, during the height of architectural postmodernism. Six of the ten tallest buildings in Columbus, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis, five of the ten tallest in Milwaukee, and four of the ten tallest in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Cincinnati were built during this stretch. If a bigger city's skyline can absorb its share of 1980s boom skyscrapers, these less dense and tall Midwestern cities have become inadvertent showcases of an outdated style. As unexpectedly massive traces of postmodernism, these prominent but unassuming skyscrapers are examples of how the image and identity of a city might be shaped, and perhaps unintentionally dominated, by a particular moment of enthusiasm within architectural culture and practice.

It's true that the influx of investment in postmodernist skyscrapers during the 1980s extended equally to cities outside the Midwest. In Dallas, eight of the ten tallest buildings were built during this span; Houston, Atlanta, and Philadelphia have seven, and Los Angeles and Seattle six. But these cities are either parts of much larger metropolitan areas, like Dallas, or rely less heavily on a downtown or single city center to generate their identities. Stereotypical perceptions of these cities hardly hinge on their tallest buildings. In Midwestern cities, however, skyscrapers often have

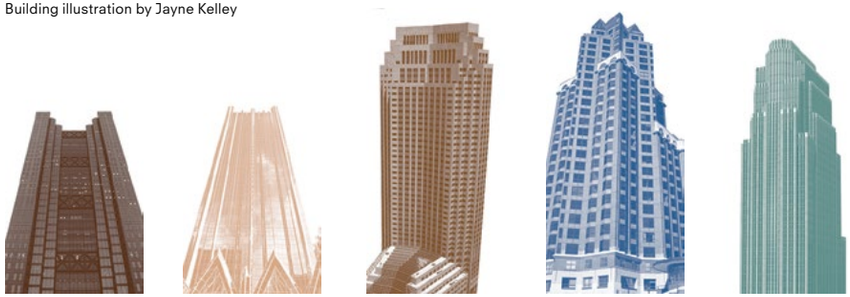
a way of solidifying and perpetuating a city's status; they're overwhelmingly visible, a point where people and money appear concentrated for a good reason. Without much else to compare to, and in a region where there are many medium-sized cities and few very big ones, a person can easily begin to identify with these relatively modest towers. "Even Indianapolis has a skyscraper taller than us now," Nick Coleman, a staff writer for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* complained in 2008, "us" standing in synecdochically for Philip Johnson's 1972 IDS Center, Minneapolis's tallest.[1]

Tall is also strangely relative in the Midwest, with the obvious exception of Chicago. (The average height of the tallest building in each of the seven cities listed above is 757 feet, roughly half the size of Chicago's Willis Tower, tallest in the world for the 25 years after it was built.) On one hand, other Midwestern cities are simply smaller; with fewer residents and less powerful economies, they haven't had the opportunities or means to build quite as high. But these cities are often set onto seemingly endless, wide-open flatness. Nothing around is tall, so all buildings above a few stories stick out above the horizon for miles around. In turn, they take on an outsized importance. "We only think of our tall buildings as tall because they are bigger than the corn cribs on grandma and grandpa's farm and even taller than the fancy silo they put up in 1972," Coleman explains. "But in the context of big buildings, we are still Little Houses on the Prairie."[2]

Using Indianapolis, Columbus, and Minneapolis as case studies— the three cities where a majority of tallest towers were built during this span—it is possible to generate a sense of the development and aesthetic qualities of Midwestern postmodernist skyscrapers, and from there to extrapolate on their particular effects. Fittingly, most of the postmodernist towers discussed here were built as headquarters for banks and other financial service firms. Although corporations built some tall towers in these cities in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic growth of the 1980s — a 92-month-long economic expansion that took place between December 1982 and July 1990[3] — prompted corporate reinvestment and speculation in downtown office structures at an unprecedented pace. (In Indianapolis, the Chase Tower was completed before the Postal Service could assign it an address or a zip code.[4]) Paradoxically, mergers and acquisitions by and of these tenants also means building names often change, leaving city residents unsure how to refer to the towers that define their skylines. One extreme case, the Capella Tower in Minneapolis, has changed names four times in the last twenty-one years.

That so many postmodern towers were built in this ten-year span was not only economic coincidence, however; postmodernism also fit the needs of these towers well. The controversy that Philip Johnson's AT&T Building and Michael Graves's Portland Building generated in the late seventies and early eighties had faded, giving way to a general acceptance of the style, especially by corporations eager to capitalize on its cultural currency. Showy but reflective of local context, postmodernism communicated with a public left cold by modernism, engaging audiences via (earnest or ironic) historicist reference. Its mannerist tendencies seemed of a piece with the consumerism and maximalist culture of the era (*Wall Street's* excesses, but also Disney World's vast, relentlessly cheery construction of new themed resorts). At the same time, postmodernism's emphasis on the façade—the site for its communicative efforts—meant that tripartite towers could be more or less sheathed

Building illustration by Jayne Kelley



Huntington Center
Columbus
1984

One PPG Place
Pittsburgh
1984

200 Public Square
Cleveland
1985

Milwaukee Center
Milwaukee
1988

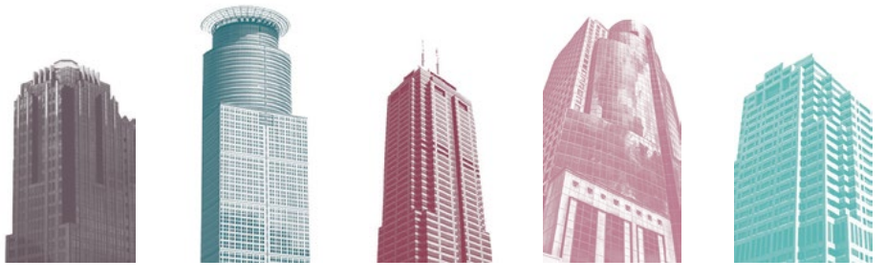
Wells Fargo Center
Minneapolis
1988

in the style, creating basic office floor plans covered in surfaces of varying depths and topped with faux-historical decoration.

Indianapolis's Chase Tower (until 1995, the Bank One Tower; originally developed as the American Fletcher Tower), for instance, became the tallest building in Indiana upon its completion in 1990. Almost fifty stories tall, its dark-blue glass and neutral granite taper to a pyramidal point at the building's peak, a reference to the nearby mid-1920s Indiana War Memorial. 300 North Meridian (1989), the city's fifth-tallest building, is squatter, with a surprisingly asymmetrical side elevation. Like the Chase Tower, however, it also traffics in abstracted art deco: the planes of its greyish-red rectangular base begin to cut away as the building rises, clearing space for a glass protrusion capped by concrete faux buttresses that attach to a coppery pyramid above.

Columbus's Huntington Center, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and completed in 1984, cuts a very different profile. Although it is built from similar blush-colored granite, it seems to invert the shape of many other postmodernist towers. Two thin rectangular slabs loom upright on either side of the structure; shorter and shallower slabs are placed inside of these two edges, stepping inward towards its smallest piece, a bronzy-glass core. Far more typical is the boxy William Green Building (1990), at least in every aspect but program — its primary tenant is the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation, a government agency. Here, the stacking of base, column, and cap is especially evident. Archways and oversize circular windows line the ground levels, and the highest element — another coppery pyramid — is perched lightly on top. Rather than emphasize the vertical, however, the windows between read as dark horizontal stripes, undermining the effect of the building's chunky stepped-back corners and producing an almost graphic patterning.

Minneapolis's Capella Tower (1992) introduces curves to the type; here, a squared-off, granite and glass office block attaches awkwardly onto a taller bright-blue-glass cylinder, topped with a circular piece Twin Cities residents have termed a halo. On its thinnest elevation, these two pieces appear equally wide, making the glass portion seem to emerge bluntly from the more regular tower. Out of all these



300 N. Meridian
Indianapolis
1989

Capella Tower
Minneapolis
1990

Chase Tower
Indianapolis
1990

Scripps Center
Cincinnati
1990

William Green Building
Columbus
1990

examples, the Cesar Pelli-designed Wells Fargo Center — the city's third tallest — makes most explicit reference to towers of the 1920s and 1930s, specifically to Rockefeller Center. The skyscraper (originally the Norwest Center) garnered attention in the national and international architecture press; in *The New York Times*, Paul Goldberger called it Pelli's best tower up to that point, with "strong verticals and handsomely proportioned setbacks culminating in a top that evokes the jazzy rhythms of the 1930's without ever becoming too literal."[5] Indeed, its vertical strips of glass and local Kasota limestone appear more attenuated and finely detailed than those of other postmodernist towers; they may be the exception that proves an aesthetic rule.

With these examples in mind, a relatively constant aesthetic of Midwest postmodernist skyscrapers emerges, one that differs slightly from the wider postmodern movement's garish colors and populist appliqué. Generally, the towers are muddied reds or tan stone paired with blue, black, or bronze-tinted glass—in other words, a self-consciously natural palette of midwestern stone offset with slick, contemporary sheen. Building stepbacks (or inverse stepbacks, as at Huntington) emphasize verticality and allow for additional corner offices, but these forms are often handled more brusquely or diagrammatically, their corners more bulky, than in the deco towers that inspired them. Ornament is abstracted enough to be read from far away, almost fusing with these stepback planes rather than living uncomfortably on their surface. When these formal characteristics accumulate in a skyline, the effect is curiously understated: for being so tall and vertical, the colors blend into a familiar, bland neutral, while the flourishes appear generic (especially to contemporary eyes), provoking little of the disorientation of the giant, eccentric ribbons affixed to the Portland Building, for example. The skyscrapers' sheer size prevents them from being pathetic, but their shared aesthetic is surprisingly self-effacing. One easily forgets how uncommon their style is nowadays.

What happens when cities (or their residents) want to move past these traces, making a convincing case for urbanity without pointing to ruddy, dusty, thirty-year-old evidence? Tearing down these structures is almost unthinkable, especially

for stylistic reasons alone. Rather, to move past this legacy, the towers can only be built "over" — literally, with taller towers, or figuratively, by developing new urban arrangements where the skyscrapers matter less. The former seems unlikely. Although populations in these three cities have grown steadily since at least 1990, corporations now often seek out qualities (and value) that skyscrapers may not provide. A 2000 article in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press,* for example, cited security, flexibility, and the need to accommodate technology as reasons behind a turn towards "fat boys" — "low-slung office buildings with huge floors" — and away from the "lofty tower perches with corner offices" of the 1980s.[6] Without offices to define a skyline, hotels (as in Las Vegas) and mixed-use condominiums (as in Miami) often take on the mantle of building tall. In Indianapolis, for example, the only building over 300 feet tall built in the last twenty years is a JW Marriott.

At least until Indianapolis and other similar Midwestern cities become a major tourist destinations, then, there's not much choice but to accept the continued quiet dominance of their postmodern skyscrapers. But there's more than (already questionable) historical value in keeping these towers around. If eventually the center of gravity in these cities is pulled outside the area where tall buildings are, or other tall buildings go up beside them, maybe we can see these out-of-scale showpieces with fresher eyes. It's probably impossible to ignore their visceral association with the 1980s upon closer inspection; the aesthetic character and tropes of postmodernism are just too ingrained in American culture. But, unexpectedly, the more residents might wonder about these bizarre insertions into the urban fabric — the more the towers' ugliest details become removed from contemporary urban life, even surreal — the more architectural and urban power they might have. In this sense, postmodern towers could conjure an alternate, dramatic version of reality, one that's both valuable for its distance from us but also more in keeping with the fluidity and impermanence of *Wall Street* than with the kitschy, dingy connotations postmodern architecture carries today.

ENDNOTES

1. Nick Coleman, "Capella Tower sports a cap, but it can't topple the IDS," *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* March 24, 2008, 1B.
2. *Ibid.* There also may be something quintessentially midwestern in the seemingly contradictory modest skyscraper. As Columbus Mayor Thomas Moody was quoted in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1980, "Though we may not be first-class in anything, we're not third-class in anything, either." Paul Gapp, "COLUMBUS Quintessentially Middle American," *Chicago Tribune,* March 29, 1980.
3. Stephen K. McNees, "The 1990–91 Recession in Historical Perspective," *New England Economic Review* (January/February 1992): 14, http://www.bos.frb.org/economic/neer/neer1992/neer192.pdf.
4. "Across the USA: Indiana," *USA Today,* January 24, 1990, 6A.
5. Paul Goldberger, "Architecture View; Cesar Pelli Seeks the Perfect Skyscraper," *The New York Times,* January 15, 1989, Late City Final Edition, sec. 2, 30.
6. Jim McCartney, "A Tale of Two Towers; The IDS Center and the New American Express Financial Center, Former and Future Minneapolis [sic] Home for the Same Company, Are a Study in Contrasts," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press,* April 30, 2008, 1D.

Personal Monuments

Text and Illustrations by John Pobojewski

Eyeglasses, Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum © Courtesy of the author

2012 was the most significant year of my life. In May, I lost my father to a sudden heart attack, and in December, my daughter was born. It was without question the most overwhelmingly emotional time I have ever had to navigate, alternating between tremendous sorrow and great joy.

In the chaos, I found myself looking at objects that had suddenly become very precious to me. Dad's old t-shirt he had given me many years ago that I still wear. My daughter's little hat that they put on her the instant she was born. These objects seem to guide me as to where I had been and where I was supposed to go. They had became sacred overnight—monuments to the moment when my childhood officially ended, and the next chapter of my life began.

We all seem to cling to our past. We erect monuments of bronze and marble to commemorate specific dates in history. We teach our children about them. We ask each other, "What were you doing when…?" We remind ourselves that these shared moments teach us important lessons about the realities of life in our age.

But, more often than not, the personal moments in our lives touch us more than any shared tragedy or celebration ever could. These moments become our turning points when we are challenged with looking at life differently than we had before.

Our personal moments have monuments too. While the material won't last for generations, the objects are no less valuable. They are precious to us because they are a reminder of our individual experience, of the chapters in the book that we write for ourselves.

Porcelain Cat, eBay © Courtesy of the author

The Undesigned Memento

Consider for a moment the tchotchke — an item designed specifically for the idea of preserving a memory. These objects often reek of commerce, are usually purchased on a whim, and are forgotten just as quickly. The price is low, and the quality is not far behind.

As designers we talk about how important it is for our work to be keepsake quality. We dream that what we do will stand the test of time. But keepsake quality and a true keepsake are two very different things. A keepsake has a deep association with a significant memory — that is its power.

It is incredibly difficult to design a memory, much less an object to represent that memory. Most just end up trying too hard.

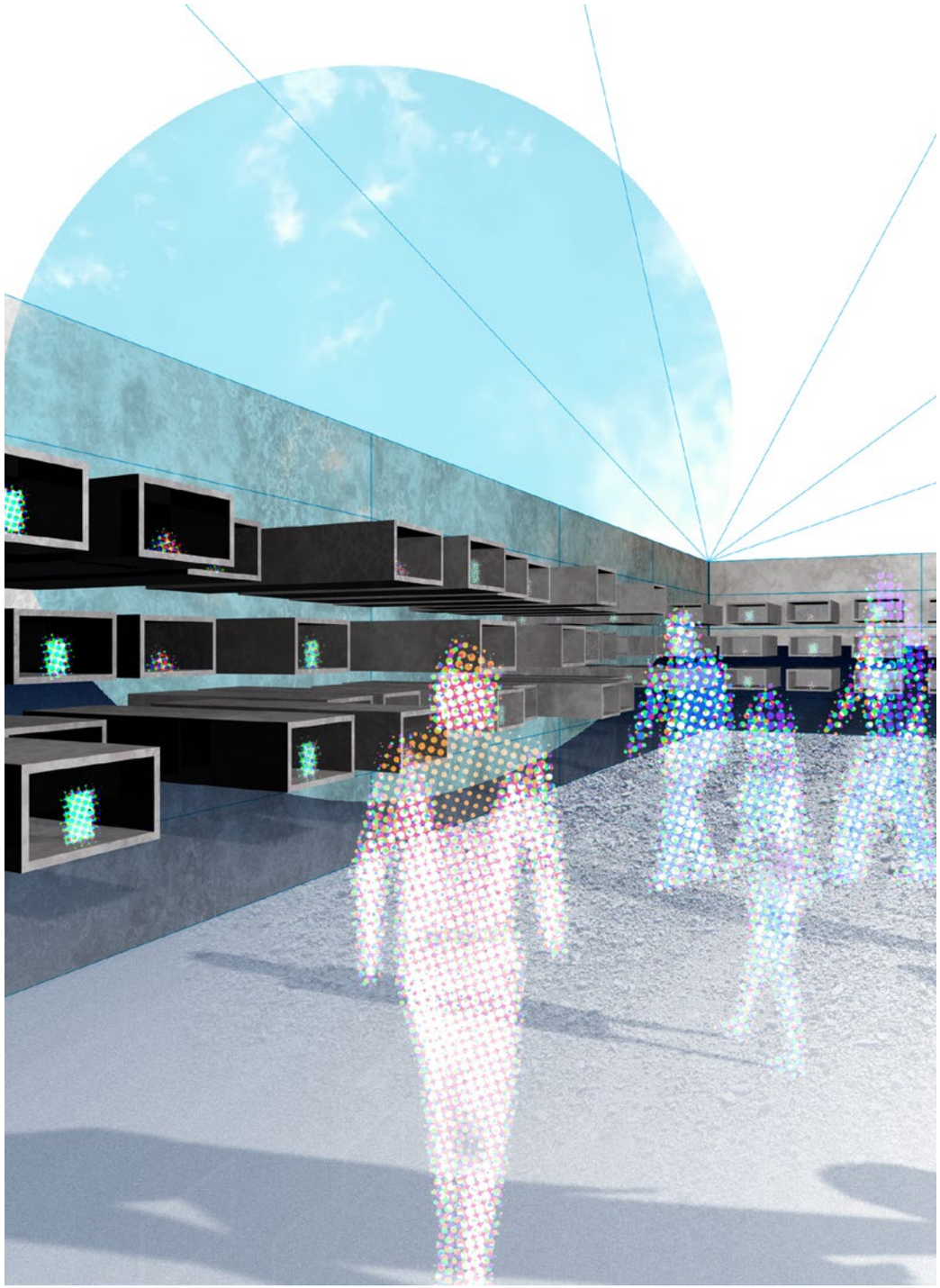
A Citizens' Temple for Objects of Importance

We need a place where we can come together to celebrate our own memories and be touched by the memories of others. We need a place where people from all walks of life can share their keepsakes.

Amongst all the junk that we accumulate, there are real memories of real importance. This fact should not be ignored. There are times we can learn from these personal monuments in ways that could bring us together, ways that bring us to common ground, ways to teach each other of the real human emotions that lie beyond our differences.

Perhaps by creating a place of respect and reflection, we can amplify the power of these items.

An Open Place that Preserves
The Memories of All Within
A Destination for Families and Friends, Young and Old



A Citizens' Temple for Objects of Importance © John Pobojewski

Shrine at W Grand Avenue and N Artesian Avenue, Chicago, 23 May 2013
© John Pobojewski

The Infrastructure of Shrines

A daily experience of city life is passing by a humble shrine, often made up of cardboard, photographs, flowers, and small objects. No doubt this was a site of significance — a traffic accident, a gang shooting, a life lost. Here, an entire installation of personal effects is cobbled together to honor those who passed as an offering of remembrance.

These shrines are always so deeply personal and yet so public — whole neighborhoods pass by without a fleeting thought. And then, with a certain cold efficiency, the city swallows the shrine overnight. Next year the installation may return, only to have the process repeated.

Here We Remember Those
Who Lost Their Lives
In Ways Both Untimely and Unfortunate
Please Be Respectful

Perhaps a simple and modest system could be developed that allows the city to maintain her streets while still respecting these real life monuments. Then we could begin to acknowledge these gestures of the surrounding community as honest design worthy of preservation. Real love goes into these shrines — why not give them a more permanent space within the urban fabric?

The Infrastructure of Shrines © John Pobojewski

Wedding rings taken from inmates, near the Buchenwald concentration camp. Germany, 5 May 1945 © Courtesy of the author

A Million Shared Souls

In 1945, as American solders liberated different Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe, they were struck by the number of personal effects of the executed Jewish people that were left behind — entire crates filled with gold wedding bands, piles of suitcases, rooms full of eyeglasses. The scale of this unspeakable horror suddenly becomes very personal when we look in the mirror at our own pair of glasses or down at our hands to our own wedding bands.

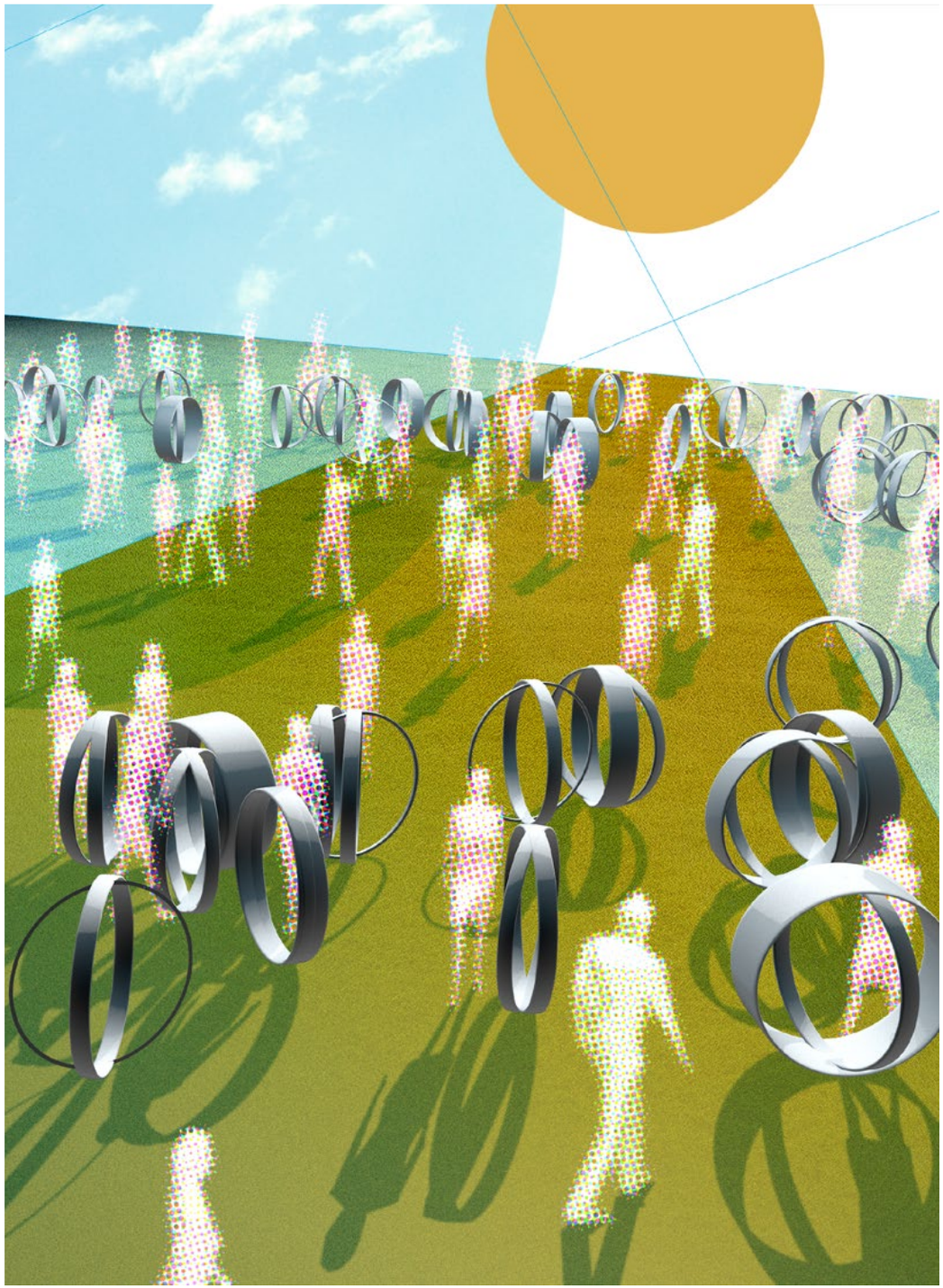
When a familiar object is seen outside of our everyday lives, it transports us into a situation we might not otherwise even imagine. We see ourselves in these objects, and in turn feel a deep connection to individuals we've never met. Multiply this gesture over and over, and the power of this connection grows. Perhaps it can help us cross great divides, learn from one another, and better understand each other.

A Place to Commemorate the Livelong Commitment of Love
Between Any Two Peoples
Of Any Race, Creed, Mean, or Orientation.

Our personal memories define us as evidence of who we have become. And our keepsakes are monuments to these memories that we visit every day. They remind us of where we've been. They allow us to grieve and to cope. They help us see ourselves in others.

While the discipline of design encourages us to re-imagine a brighter future, we cannot forget our individual pasts. There is real power in our own personal narrative, and the treasures we keep help tell these stories. If we can bring them together and create spaces that acknowledge their value, perhaps we can come together.

And when we come together, we are bound to one another, and therefore we are united.



Marriage Park © John Pobojewski

24COA A Visual Score

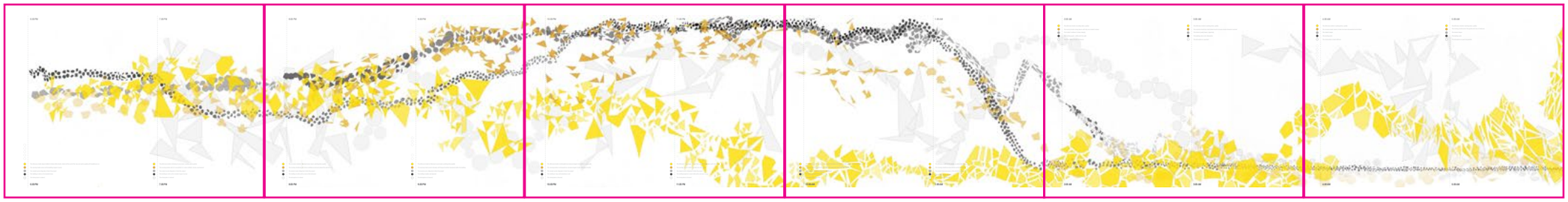
Project developed as part of the Pen & Bow workshop

at Georgia Tech's College of Architecture led by Andrew Ruff.

Visual score interpreted by ETHEL.

'It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear.'
Italo Calvino, The Invisible Cities

24COA visual score © Courtesy of Andrew Ruff



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Each Performing Entity (PE) is represented by one color

- *PE 1 same instrument type as PE 2; here played by Kip Jones, on violin*
- *PE 2 of same instrument type as PE 1; here played by Tema Watstein, on violin*
- *PE 3 here played by Ralph Farris, on viola*
- *PE 4 here played by Dorothy Lawson, on cello*
- *PE 5 here played by the audience*

During the performance, students will guide the Performing Entities (PE) throughout the building

- *PE 1 Daniela Cardona*
- *PE 2 Jasper Meng*
- *PE 3 Riana Dawson*
- *PE 4 David Howard*
- *PE 5 Emily Fong*

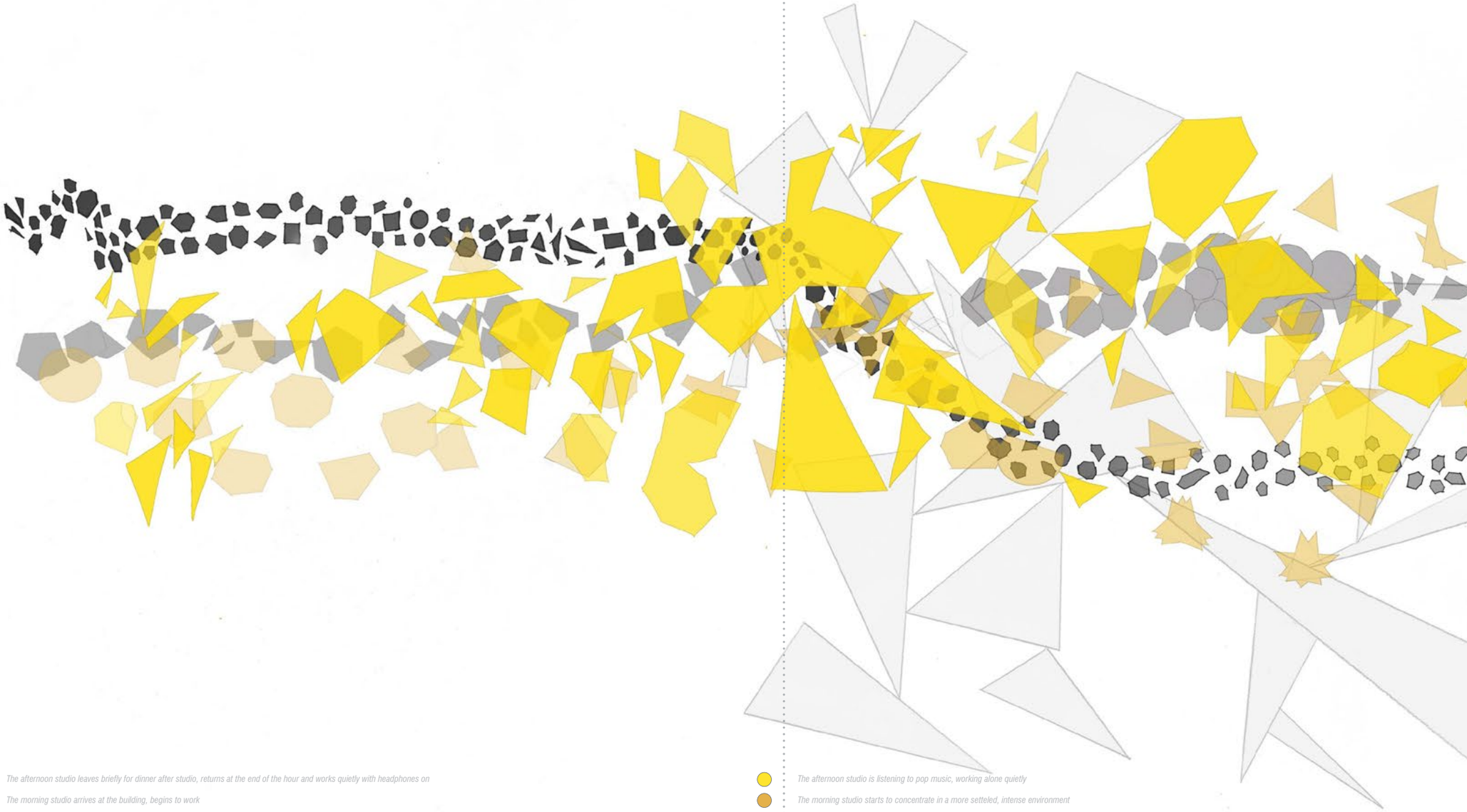
Architecture and music are kindred spirits: structures and rhythms bound in the pursuit of visceral experience and poetic harmonies. The ephemeral nature of music lacks the permanence of architecture, yet physical space has always been jealous of music's agility. Together, space and sound bind into an encompassing sensory narrative, occupying the tactility of our fingers and ears.

Through a collaboration with the acclaimed string quartet ETHEL, we analyzed and diagramed the central atrium of Georgia Tech's College of Architecture. This analysis did not solely investigate physical aspects of the building, but sought the rhythms, patterns, and narratives that define the essential experiences of the space. After compiling initial mappings of these temporal narratives, a series of visual strategies and techniques were developed to transcribe these specific spatial observations into legible musical notation. The resulting visual score, entitled *24COA*, spans 110′ and acts as a record of a single 24 hour period within the building atrium (the first 12 hours are shown above and in the following pages). ETHEL, in turn, interpreted the visual score as they performed *24COA*, bringing to life this inherently autobiographical and reflective narrative on the building's subtle rhythms and atmospheres.

For more information about ETHEL, please visit www.ethelcentral.org

6.00 PM

7.00 PM



The afternoon studio leaves briefly for dinner after studio, returns at the end of the hour and works quietly with headphones on

The morning studio arrives at the building, begins to work

The student works diligently to finish the project

The building is calm as the students leave

The atmosphere is relaxed

The afternoon studio is listening to pop music, working alone quietly

The morning studio starts to concentrate in a more setteled, intense environment

The student works diligently to finish the project

The building is calm as the students begin to arrive

The atmosphere is relaxed

6.00 PM

7.00 PM

8.00 PM

The afternoon studio is listening to pop music, working alone quietly
The morning studio begins to lose confidence and worry about the work ahead
The student works diligently to finish the project
The building is active with a room of full stomachs
The atmosphere is relaxed

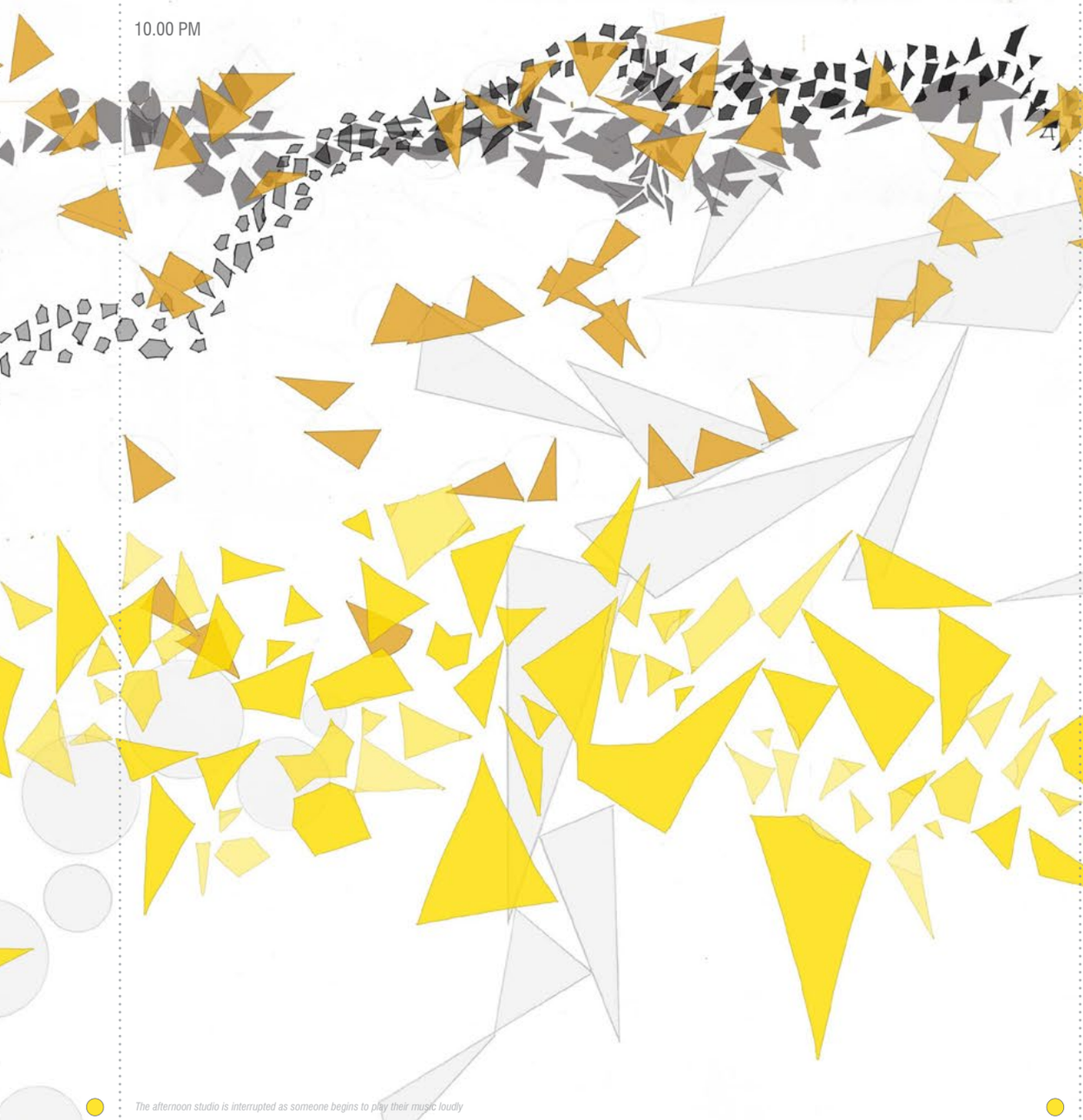
8.00 PM

9.00 PM

The afternoon studio is listening to pop music, working alone quietly
The morning studio works intensely, with frequent vertical movement within the building
The student works diligently to finish the project
The building is active and dynamic
The atmosphere is focused

9.00 PM

10.00 PM



- The afternoon studio is interrupted as someone begins to play their music loudly
- The morning studio is interrupted as someone begins to play their music loudly
- The student works diligently to finish the project
- The building is busy with industrious work
- The atmosphere is focused

10.00 PM

11.00 PM

- The afternoon studio begins to feel tired, and the mood goes south dramatically
- The morning studio's instinctive ideas are converging
- The student works diligently to finish the project
- The building begins to come to life with a nervous energy
- The atmosphere is focused

11.00 PM

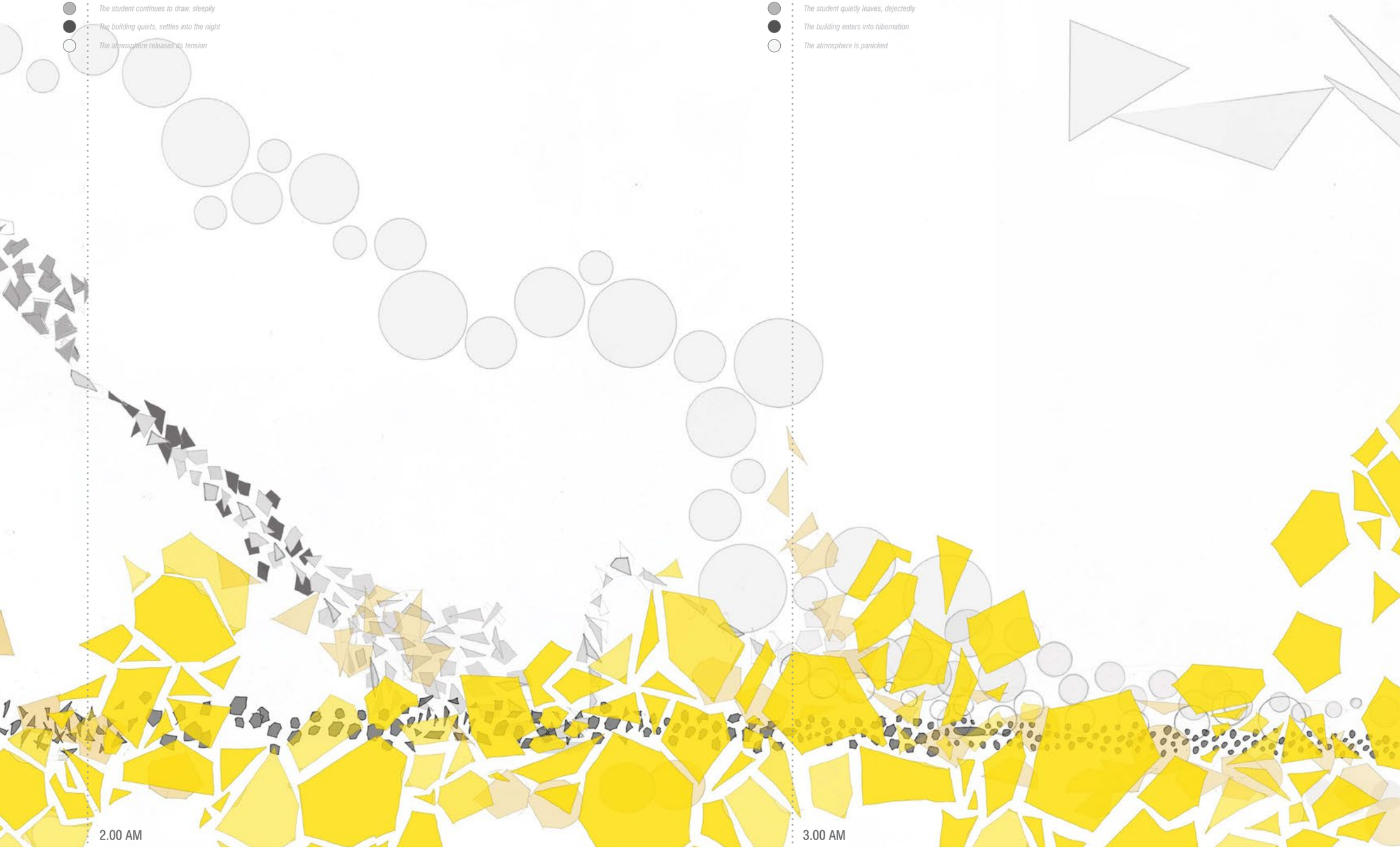
12.00AM
1.00 AM
The afternoon studio becomes annoyed with the music, and begins to intermittently traverse between floors
The morning studio realizes that the day has ended, and slowly begins to leave
The student works diligently to finish the project
The building erupts into chaotic panic
The atmosphere is anxious
12.00 AM
The afternoon studio works silently as productivity ceases
The morning studio becomes listless and unproductive
The student becomes aware of the slackening pace
The building relaxes, breathes
The atmosphere is anxious
1.00 AM

2.00 AM

- The afternoon studio is working alone, quietly
- The morning studio slowly leaves until only one student remains
- The student continues to draw, sleepily
- The building quiets, settles into the night
- The atmosphere releases its tension

3.00 AM

- The afternoon studio is working alone, quietly
- The morning studio has a last minute burst of energy, begins drawing in earnest
- The student quietly leaves, dejectedly
- The building enters into hibernation
- The atmosphere is panicked



2.00 AM

3.00 AM

4.00 AM

The afternoon studio is working alone, quietly

The morning studio begins to fade, becomes disappointed and irritated

The student sleeps

The building rests

The atmosphere is harsh stillness

5.00 AM

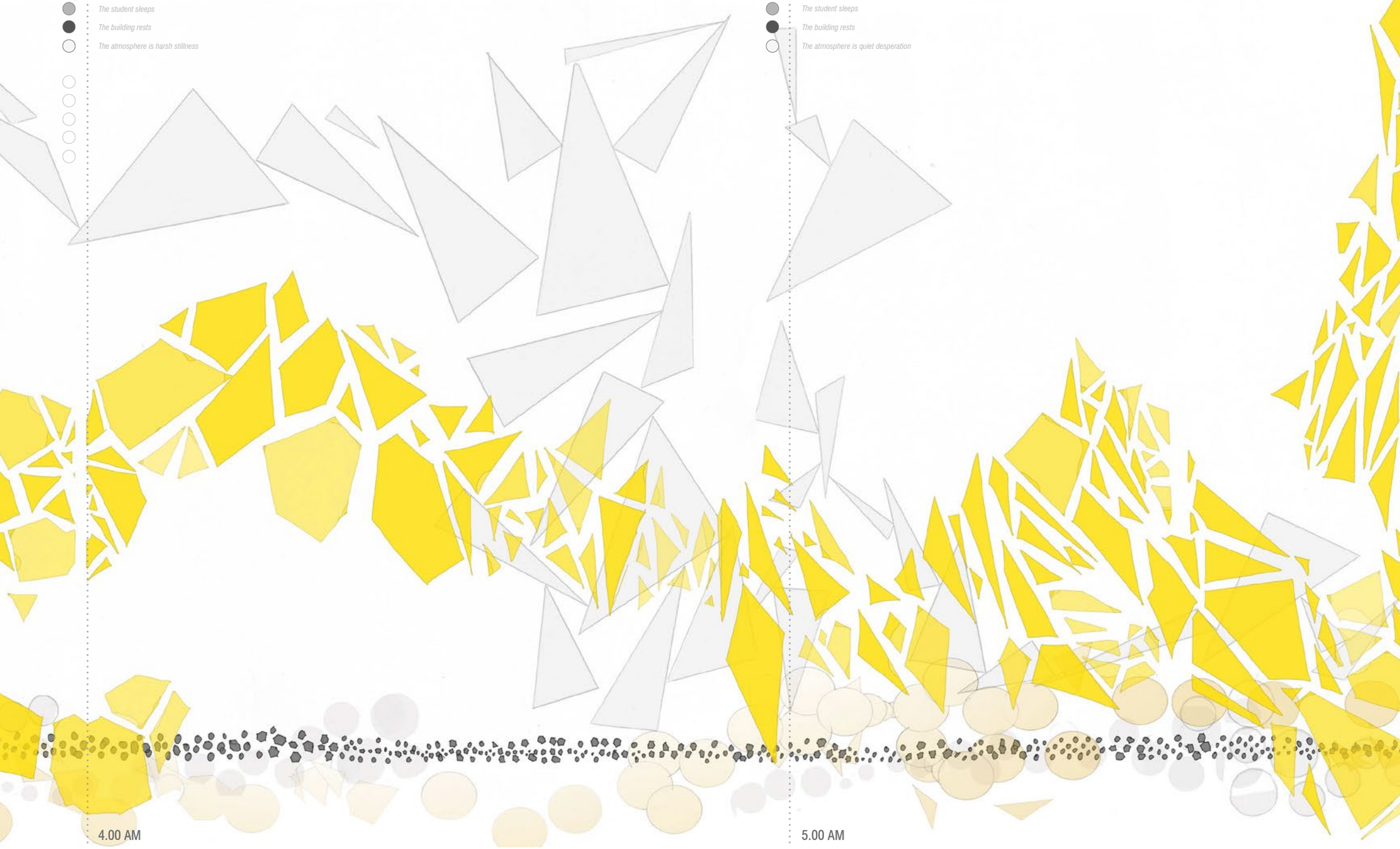
The afternoon studio is working alone, quietly

The morning studio works through the last hour of darkness

The student sleeps

The building rests

The atmosphere is quiet desperation



4.00 AM

5.00 AM

True Love Leaves No Traces

Essay by Daniel Luis Martinez

Leonard Cohen in Concert on June 9th, 1976 in Reims, France © Original by Claude Gassian manipulated by Daniel Luis Martinez with permission from the author). From the personal collection of Dominique Boile

Scan of a record released in Italy for "True Love Leaves No Traces" © From the personal collection of Dominique Boile

Biographers and journalists have generally marked the end of Phil Spector's Wall of Sound era with the over-the-top production of "River Deep—Mountain High" for Ike and Tina Turner in 1966. A massive flop in the US, especially when compared to the enormous success of "You've Lost that Lovin' Feeling" from the Righteous Brothers, now acknowledged as the song with the most airplay in the 20th century, "River Deep" was the album that "just never found a home."[1] There is no straightforward explanation for the Wall of Sound's decline. Despite all of its ingenuity, it may only be natural that things remain temporary in the world of pop music. Yet the Wall of Sound did not disappear so gently. In fact, one might argue that from the moment its popularity began to wane, it forged new ground as a trace of its former self.

This is the context for Spector's foray into film,[2] work with the soon-to-be crumbling Beatles[3] and his collaboration with Leonard Cohen on *Death of a Ladies Man* (1977). Cohen, kept in the dark about the final mixes by Spector, was famously disappointed with these sessions. The songs themselves have always elicited mixed reactions. There is evidence of the Wall of Sound's dissipation at the very beginning of the album in the aptly titled, "True Love Leaves No Traces." Based on one of Cohen's poems, the song itself is a series of repetitions (intro/ verse/ chorus/ intro/ verse/ chorus, etc), dramatized by Spector's decision to use a protracted fadeout. Hang in there long enough and the song's cyclical structure is revealed as you hear the faint start of a third chorus. It's as if you've been invited to hear four minutes and twenty-five seconds of an endless loop.

The Wall of Sound here is a veritable shadow of its days backing the Ronettes. By 1977, Spector's layered production evoked the aural equivalent of physical collapse. The flanged hiss in the chorus of Nino Temp's open and closed hi-hat rhythm implies multiple takes out of synch with each other. Also, Spector's usual lengthy decay of echo is pulled in closer to slab-back lengths. These effects are even more intense by the second track, "Iodine," where drums flutter with delay, guitars are soaked with heavy phasing and Cohen's voice actually warbles at times ("You let me love you till I was a failure / your beauty on my bruise like iodine"). These are, rather notoriously, Cohen's raw, scratch vocal takes on the final versions. It seems worth asking whether Spector's famed technique was ever that stable to begin with.

The name 'Wall of Sound' was always intended as an architectural metaphor, though it's really not as straightforward as it seems. The simplified interpretation is that a wall is built in a way that embodies structural integrity, as with masonry, where the repeated pattern and placement of the individual components form a compounded rigidity. A wall in this sense is the outcome of a precise logic whose endgame is often to divide. The common analogy for Spector's work is that through the methodic layering of identically played parts he achieves a similar kind of structural integrity; a thick and solid foundation which forms the backbone of his pop arrangements. Yet Spector's walls simply do not work this way.

Denny Bruce once said, "The Wall of Sound was structured the way an architect *will* build a house."[4] (author's emphasis) The shift in grammatical tense is important because, whether it was intended this way or not, it highlights Spector's inventiveness. His method is not modeled on ways of making something easily served by the analogy between big sound and solid wall. The far more compelling view is to consider the fact that he produced an actual sonic blur from the raw

material at hand — in his case, pop music instrumentation multiplied several times over. As opposed to building towards solidity, Spector's walls are ambiguous, and though he was notoriously methodical in his approach, the result was profoundly shapeless. These recordings tend to diffuse the space around more centralized lead vocals, an act which inverts our traditional sense of wall building since the more Spector built up, the less distinct his construction became. As Larry Levine put it, "Phil never wanted to hear horns as horns... you'd hear chords changing, but there weren't any instruments to say 'I'm changing';"[5] an insightful description that leads Spector's biographer Mick Brown to assert that the Wall of Sound shares more in common with "a dense impasto, like a Rothko painting."[6] If one can imagine a translation of this into an architectural language, the results might reveal blueprints for buildings yet seen.

Spector's use of repetition and modulation transformed the medium of popular music into a blurred wash of standard chord progressions. These experiments have had a significant impact on music culture ever since (Brian Wilson to Shoegaze to Chillwave all owe a debt). By now, however, the language of this sound is so well understood that it becomes nearly impossible to grasp its initial significance. Its meaning has atrophied, a fact with significant spatial consequences. The Wall of Sound's legacy, redefined as an active trace, is an attempt to describe the decay of such phenomena over time. As a matter of historical coincidence, it was pop which exploded into the world of visual art in the 1950's and 60's with a heavy dose of pomp and irony. At the same time, art slid through the back door of pop music as a form of production. This was a direct result of Spector's paradoxical longing "to be in the background... but... to be important in the background."[7]

Unfortunately, the value of this transaction has been slowly erased by his personal decisions, which more often than not displayed the lack of moral conscience that eventually consumed his image. This has become more complicated still by the recent Lana Clarkson murder case. It begs an important question: Is it possible to separate the moral pigment of a story drawn with such a broad ethical stroke? After all, ethics begins with our actions. Morality introduces the categories of right and wrong. This divide, situated on the hazy edge between two highly intertwined and historically charged categories, might only be built with the understanding that it will eventually break down. Given what we know about the instability of such constructions, it may even resemble that infamous Wall of Sound.

ENDNOTES

1. Tina Turner quoted in Dave Thompson, *Wall of Pain: The Biography of Phil Spector,* (London, Sanctuary Publishing Limited, 2003).
2. Spector's "foray into film" was primarily a role in Dennis Hopper's 'Easy Rider' from 1969. Around this time he was also making a handful of cameos on TV shows like 'I dream of Genie' and others from that era (not really that consequential).
3. By 1969 the Beatles were already falling apart from their own internal problems. They needed someone to finish producing the album that would eventually become their last: *Let it Be.* Spector was eventually hired, against Paul Mccartney's will, to produce the album as we know it today with his very layered technique. (In fact, Paul McCartney remixed and released the album as *Let it Be... Naked* in 2003 with the thought that it would better represent what the album should have sounded like if Spector hadn't gotten involved). Spector went on to produce George Harrison's first solo album post-Beatles (*All Things Must Pass*), as well as several solo albums for John Lennon (including *Plastic Ono Band* and *Imagine*).
4. Mick Brown, *Tearing Down the Wall of Sound: The Rise and Fall of Phil Spector* (New York, Alfred P. Knopf, 2007), P. 120. A telling anecdote of this quote is that Bruce goes on to cite Spector's longtime cohort Jack Nietzsche as the real "architect" of the wall of sound while maintaining Spector's primacy as the "visionary."
5. *Ibid.,* P. 113.
6. *Ibid.,* P. 115.
7. *Ibid.,* P. 51.

Essay by Enric Llorach

Anthro— pocene

Through the eyes of Gabriele Basilico, Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark

Le Tréport, France, 1985 © Gabriele Basilico

The blackness of space and Earth's horizon form the backdrop for this view while Space Shuttle Discovery was docked to the International Space Station during the STS-114 mission. © NASA

In an article published in the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia,* Mariano Marzo, Professor of Energy Resources at the University of Barcelona recalls the applicability and popularity of the term, the *Anthropocene.*[1] The article was referring to the 2002 Nobel Laureate chemist, Paul Crutzen, who suggested that "the environmental impact of population growth and economic development would suggest that humanity has left behind the Holocene and is now entering a new geologic age termed the Anthropocene."

The previous Holocene had emerged slowly over 12,000 years and is now undergoing major changes due to the impact of human activity on the ecosystems. Overpopulation of the planet and its repercussions have exponentially increased CO2 and methane levels, have decreased both terrestrial and marine biodiversity and have massively increased continental erosion with losses much higher than those seen in strictly natural processes. According to Marzo "it is reasonable to conclude that we have now entered a new phase in the evolution of the planet and there is sufficient evidence of biological, sedimentary and geochemical changes to meet the criteria required for the differentiation of a new stratigraphic epoch."

This new term is re-examined here in the context of three artists: Gabriele Basilico (1944-2013), Robert Smithson (1938-1973) and Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978). Basilico's photographs, categorized into three groups that reflect on the landscape, territory and the city, will serve as the backdrop for an analysis of the work of the two post-minimalist artists, Smithson and Matta-Clark.

Through Crutzen, Professor Marzo likens the force of man's action[2] to that of nature itself, and this is a central theme in Robert Smithson's work. Way back in the early 70s, Smithson issued a warning which was later picked up by Gordon Matta-Clark and transformed into a post-industrial, but mostly post-late capitalist, vision of the city and territory. From Smithson to Matta-Clark, a line could be traced from one to the other as they alert us to the environmental issues of our time and the agony of a dying economic and cultural system.

Basilico

In 2001, Francesco Bonami published a book titled *Gabriele Basilico*[3] which included 55 prints by the acclaimed Milanese photographer. Many of the photographs reflect on a rather specific issue relating to urban and landscape photography. Basilico often presented the city or territory as a point of convergence/divergence of man and nature. The time span of the book is extensive, but it can generally be divided into three thematic areas:

1. Landscapes marked by the force of the industrialized world including images from the French towns of Le Tréport (1985), Ault (1985), Boulogne-sur-mer (1984), Dunkirk (1984), Dieppe (1984) and the Spanish city of Bilbao (1983). During the late industrialized period, now called the post-industrial period, man's action on nature acquired such a force that it emerged as the dominator in the photograph. Albeit rather banal, this phenomenon is quite recent as it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the issue came to light. The pre-industrial age was, with its limited development and low demography, predominantly natural.

2. Basilico's second group of photographs include scenes from the historic cities of Rome (1997, 2000) and Naples (1982). They depict historical monuments, the ancient ruins, as if they were a piece of nature inserted into the urban setting, or as if the old ruins had metamorphosed into another "second nature" erected in a more natural environment. This aged, decontextualized, anachronistic architecture acquires echoes of a natural landscape but with the striking distinction that it is man-made.

3. Basilico's third group of photographs taken in Beirut (1991), Berlin (2000) and Palermo, Sicilia (1998) allude to a traumatic event associated with human activity that has transformed the landscape as if thousands of years had passed. This event, be it a war (Berlin and Beirut) or a chronic economic recession (Palermo), rapidly decontextualizes the status quo of the area, converting the landscape into "premature" ruins and abruptly ending the normal course of things.

Thus, industrialization, history and traumatic events are the forces that transform the landscape in Basilico's photographs. These three forces take centre stage and are clearly visible on the terrain, all too often dominating it.

Spiral Jetty, 2013 © Christa Lamb

Smithson

The work of Robert Smithson is categorized under Post-Minimalism, at a time when many questions relating to Minimalism were already being challenged. The main criticism, emanating from the artistic realms close to institutional critique, decried the complicity between minimalist art and the museum. This led to the seeking out of other physical spaces for art away from the museum or gallery.[4] In taking his work outside, Smithson criticized the museum as an institution as well as expanding the spatial and temporal boundaries of this artistic thinking.

Smithson's work presents a notion of time which goes beyond the limits of Modernity. There are two forces at play in his work; one could be described as the geological vector and the other the mythical. The geological space veers beyond the space reserved for Modernity, while the mythological relativizes modern culture within a much broader spectrum. These new reference points span thousands of years as opposed to a few hundred.

These new mythical or archaic spaces could also be defined as scientific if we consider entropy in the context of the second law of thermodynamics. Entropy defines a final resting phase for any given system. Basically, it is understood as the vital instinct of all living beings to devote most of their efforts against this second law which will, however, ultimately determine their death, dissipating their energy and integrating it into a greater homogenous system.

In the human context, entropy would also herald the inevitable destruction of established systems. The blind faith of Modernity in progress, in the entire project of the Enlightenment, would thus appear to be challenged. The simple idea of permanent economic growth associated with capitalism (at a rate of 3%, below which the system enters into recession) is unsustainable under entropic parameters. Such growth would only be possible at the expense of other economies, asphyxiating them as they would have to enter into one crisis after another to allow other economies to continue in steady growth. This is, for example, how the economic inequalities of the different continents should be considered. While there is a high level of scientific knowledge and technological production in modern times, the geological vector of this author is directed towards the mythical and the archaic to discover premodern ways of thinking. Broadening the cultural framework is another way of challenging Modernity.

Spiral Jetty (1970)

Smithson most celebrated work is the *Spiral Jetty* which was constructed on the shores of the Great Salt Lake in Utah in 1970. This spiral mound of earth and boulders stretches about 457 meters into the lake and is about 4.5 meters wide. The Great Salt Lake is an endorheic basin, a dead sea, where water is only lost through evaporation as there is no outflow.

Spiral Jetty © Name

Smithson also produced a video, recorded from a helicopter and also from the spiral itself, which shows how the spiral was constructed from mud and stones using a mechanical digger. The width of the spiral was defined by the amount of material that the digger was able to drag onto the shallow water. Upon completion, the machine had to reverse back the entire length of the spiral until it reached the shore.

Once constructed, the spiral was left to the mercy of the lake's salt composition and seasonal weather variations. It is often submerged in water, only to be seen from the air or nearby unpaved road. During times of drought, the spiral emerges creating a blanket of white crystallized salt which forms as the water evaporates. The chemical composition and high salinity of the water plus the presence of sand oolites and calcium carbonate (hydrated lime) taints the spiral with unusual shades of orange, red and pink and purple and violet.

While the tool which facilitated the creation of spiral belongs to the industrialized world, the spiral itself becomes geological as it develops close intimacy with the lake and its characteristic composition and climate. But it is also mythical as its shape is resonant with the archaic: the symbol of the spiral has been represented in various ways in ancient civilizations. This is how the mythical and geological vectors expand the framework of the work, but for Smithson the origin always lies in a mere circumstantial element: the mechanical digger, a modern industrial tool.

Never before had artwork been so far removed from the museum and gallery and this can only be construed in the context of institutional critique. In this context of Post-Minimalism, questions of authorship are also raised. Who is the author when the work is produced by an industrial machine and a specialized operator?

Still, unlike some other works, the *Spiral Jetty* attains a certain beauty, and the environmental impact of its creation did not alter nature's course. Rather, the jetty is embedded in the natural environment where it lays at its mercy, keeping it company.[5]

Matta-Clark

Although some years his junior, Matta-Clark knew Smithson and worked along similar lines albeit using different scenarios. Matta-Clark's work could also be defined as post-minimalist but with a surrealist legacy inherited from his father, the Chilean painter, Roberto Matta.

Like Smithson, Matta-Clark (M-C) also abandons the museum to work in the city. As a trained architect, M-C offers a politicized vision of the urban space. He understood the city as the reification of the capitalist economy, and resorts to the centre of economic activity in New York City to produce his work. He would surreptitiously enter abandoned or about to be demolished buildings and alter their spatial configuration. Brandishing an electric chainsaw, with all the revolutionary echoes of such an image, he cut out pieces of architecture to transform the space and to highlight the dysfunctionality of the abandoned. All the functional attributes of constructed spaces become meaningless when the space is abandoned. By modifying these, M-C emphasizes the loss of social or residential purpose to highlight their belonging to the capitalist economy. This now dysfunctional city becomes the artist's extended canvas just like Smithson's post-industrial landscapes: the city assumes the form of nature, already marginalized from economic activity or from speculative expectations and is converted into M-C's workplace.

Again like Smithson, there is subversive element to M-C's work insofar as his "constructions" are created from the excision of material rather than the traditional accumulation. M-C subtracts instead of adds. This methodology constitutes a critique of all that is supposed to be evolutionary; of the positivist vision whereby advances are only made by surpassing that which preceded, and at the same time offering a critical view of the capitalist system.[6]

M-C work is also revolutionary as he yearns to change things that disturb him. Surrealism, including his father's work, had delved into the world of dreams as an alternative to the bourgeois lifestyle, and into communism as a new collective system. M-C's vision in the 70s was deeply engrossed in this individual-community system, and this called for aggressiveness in its materialisation.

Despite the negative connotations of both destruction and subtraction, there is a delicate beauty to M-C's work, wherein lies a most powerful metaphorical paradox. With his knowledge of architecture, M-C forges negative volumes out of abandoned architecture. These alien-like immaterial volumes transform dysfunctional spaces into emblematic ones. Carved out of thin air, embedded in existing building, these negative constructions shape the political and economic thinking of M-C.[7]

With Basilico's holistic vision in the background, Smithson's work is viewed as an expanded field that magnifies the devastating action of mankind on the planet. Through Matta-Clark we see how the globalized economic system -late capitalism- is unremittingly pushing the Holocene towards the *Anthropocene* and the principal culprits are human activity and its economic organisation. Through the eyes of these three authors, Gabriele Basilico, Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark, artistic activity is converted into urban thinking and a future prediction. Through their work, the true and troubling implications of the new term coined by Crutzen are revealed.

ENDNOTES

1 Mariano Marzo, "El Antropoceno", *La Vanguardia*, Financial Section, Environment pages, 24 March 2013, Barcelona, pg. 12-13.

2 In this text, the term "man's action" is used having failed to find a more appropriate less gender-biased term.

3 Francesco Bonami, *Gabriele Basilico,* Phaidon Press Limited, London, 2001, reprinted in new format 2005.

4 Part of the criticism was directed towards the presumed anti-representative nature of minimalist artwork. In other words, the non-representation of the minimalist object ends up being illusory, as there is always at least one context in which it occurs and which transcends the strictly phenomenological experiences of the spectator.

5 However, other pieces by Smithson impact the landscape in a more critical fashion which are briefly described here:

Monuments of Passaic (1967) was created in Smithson's home town of Passaic a few years prior to the Utah spiral. The work consists of a series of photographs depicting places which were modified by industrial activity and highlighting the destructive capacity at a level that could be viewed as geological or late modernity. Also, the monumentality granted to some unique elements in the photographs give them a totemic character. Again, geological time and ancient time determine the nature of the work and these are always presented in a problematic relationship with modern time: industrial activity and its effect on the landscape in this case.

Created in Rome in 1969, Asphalt Rundown simulated the creation of geological strata by pouring liquid asphalt from a trailer down a small hillside. Its movement, like that of volcanic lava, stained the landscape through an unhindered process where over time it settles, dries and begins to disintegrate. A geological type process which once again depends on available industrial tools: on this occasion a dump truck loaded with molten asphalt.

Between 1968 and 1969, Smithson produced numerous *Nonsites:* Bayonne and Franklin in New Jersey (1968); Oberhausen (1968) and Essen (1969) in Germany and Cinders, near Black Point (1968) in the USA. The Nonsites addressed the issue of representing the territory and how the specificity of the "site" represented is lost. The change of scale, adopting the codes necessary for communication, the necessary simplification and consequent loss of the existing as well as its inevitable decontextualization challenged how the territory could be represented as such. In a critical mode, this was returned to the gallery and the museum with all its associated problems. The *Nonsite* is thus presented as an unsolvable problem, as another encounter between scientific knowledge and its geological counterpart.

Executed in Rozel Point (Utah) in 1970, *Partially Buried Woodshed* was quite an eloquent work compared to the bulk of Smithson discourse and it also pointed in the direction which his young friend Gordon Matta-Clark would take up. Twenty truckloads of earth were dumped on the roof of a wooden shed. The stress of the load eventually caused the structure to weaken, become deformed and collapse. Again, the industrial truck and digger simulated the geological processes that ended up burying the civilised object, the shed, under a ton of earth.

Amarillo Ramp (Texas, 1973) was completed posthumously by Smithson's wife Nancy Holt, Richard Serra and Tony Shafrazi after the artist was killed in an unfortunate accident when out photographing the site on a light aircraft. It is very similar to the Spiral Jetty (1970).

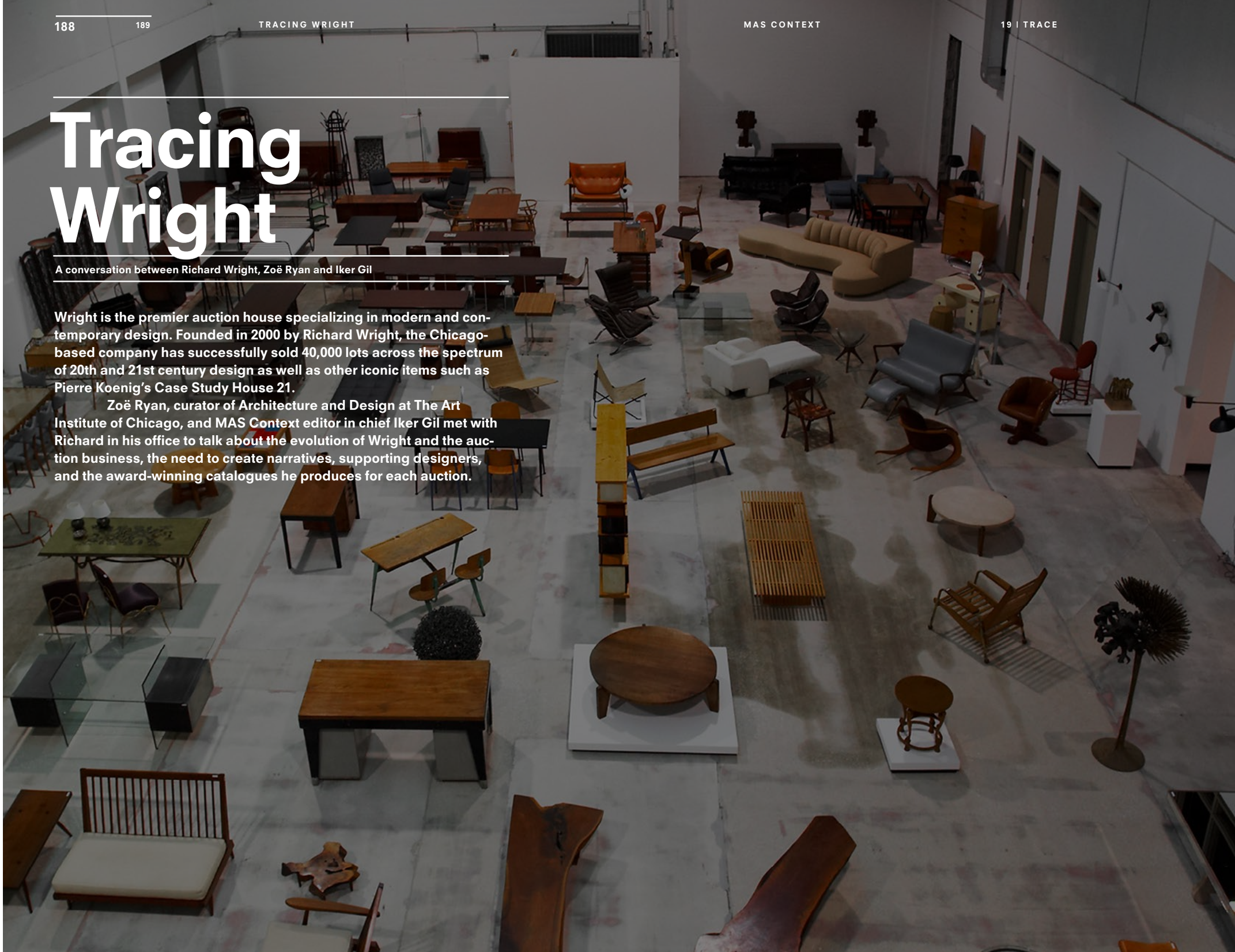
Note: The information on Smithson is taken primarily from Eugenie Tsai, Cornelia Butler (Ed.), *Robert Smithson,* The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004.

6 In this sense, Matta-Clark is the antithesis of Pop Art, with the disappearance of the ambiguity of Pop Art regarding the predominant economic system. Andy Warhol, its greatest exponent, confined his work to the only place that exists in the context of a late capitalist economy: the surface. Warhol resided in the surface at all levels, including the personal, where there is nothing that is not merely circumstantial. In true dramatic fashion, the unfortunate attack that Warhol suffered in June 1968 ruptured this liminal state upon which his artistic activity and biography lay. The bullet that struck Warhol broke through the surface injuring the artist.

7 In this context, we find some works in the seventies such as *Bronx Floors* (New York, 1972-73), *Photoglyphs, Graffiti Truck* (Mercer Street, New York, 1973), *A W-Hole House: Roof Top Atrium and Datum Cut* (Genoa, 1973), the very memorable *Splitting* (332 Humphrey Street, Englewood, New Jersey, 1974), *Bingo* (Niagara Falls, New York, 1974), *Conical Intersect* (27-29 Rue de Beaubourg, Paris, 1975), *Day's End* (Hudson River, New York, 1975), *Office Baroque* (Antwerp, Belgium, 1977) and *Circus—Caribbean Orange* (Chicago 1978).

The restaurant named *Food* inaugurated in June in 1971 by Matta-Clark, Carol Goodden, Suzy Harris, Rachel Lew and Tina Girouard on the corner of Prince St and Wooster St in New York SoHo was a subversion of the capitalist business idea. It remained open for two years and was operated thanks to contributions from about 300 artists, who selflessly contributed to make it a meeting place.

Also, *Reality Properties Fake Estate*s (1973) involved the active participation in the capitalist flow by buying waste lots, which were unattractive and thus unable to entry the property or speculative market. At a cost of $25 dollars per lot, Matta-Clark became the owner of small lots in Queens and Staten Island, New York.



Tracing Wright

A conversation between Richard Wright, Zoë Ryan and Iker Gil

Wright is the premier auction house specializing in modern and contemporary design. Founded in 2000 by Richard Wright, the Chicago-based company has successfully sold 40,000 lots across the spectrum of 20th and 21st century design as well as other iconic items such as Pierre Koenig's Case Study House 21.

Zoë Ryan, curator of Architecture and Design at The Art Institute of Chicago, and MAS Context editor in chief Iker Gil met with Richard in his office to talk about the evolution of Wright and the auction business, the need to create narratives, supporting designers, and the award-winning catalogues he produces for each auction.

Wright Auction House © Wright

Z: When I moved here six years ago, you had made a commitment to contemporary design with exhibitions on Ron Gilad and Martino Gamper for example, at a time when the limited-edition market was more robust. You are still selling work by contemporary practitioners, but you seem to have gone back to the core of your original business and realized how strong of a position you have in mid-century modern design.

R: I have also come to see the difference between primary and secondary markets. That was not as apparent to me and I think that it was not as apparent to a lot of other auction houses. I think that auction houses are not well served doing it. I did a series of exhibitions and financially it was really tough to do. Several auction houses got involved in some of this, but the mechanisms of auctions are really about pricing. At the end of the day, it doesn't serve contemporary designers that well to just promote the work and put it in an auction or promote it through the framework of an auction model. So I've retrenched into doing more secondary market auctions, which I think I have a stronger basis to work from. I certainly understand it more but I also think it is the way the auction prices are set. It just works better with older pieces.

Z: When you were commissioning the projects, you had to take on a dual role. You were the client, and the manufacturer, and a collaborator in many ways.

R: It is always really interesting to learn that if you give carte blanche to a designer you probably don't end up with as good a design as when you start to create restrictions. Design works better when it's placed into a tighter box, when it has to answer to problems and react to things. I didn't fully understand that. I understood it conceptually but at the end of the day it was like, "Hey I want to let you do your thing, you are the designer and you run with that idea." I think that was part of the problem that came out of the whole design-art time, which thankfully people don't call it that anymore. And also, maybe you just need the experience. If you don't have that experience in manufacturing, and if you're just make one-off pieces, you can create a design brief that is so broad it doesn't lead to the best design. It actually can lead to over-exuberance, or just plain bad design. I think Ron [Gilad] did really great work for me but there were things that if I had to do it all over I would change certain. At the time, I didn't understand how much he was actually looking to me to create boundaries and to give that kind of muscle, the framework to the design itself. I wish I had done more of that. Piera Pezzolo Gandini, the person behind Flos, came in and took one of Ron's better designs, reinvented it for production and really sharpened it. And Ron was really challenged and turned on by that process. I really saw, "Oh, that's how real design works! It not just let's make this thing."

Z: That's the benefit of hindsight. With the secondary market you can benefit from history and existing interpretation. The work has already been validated by its place within history.

R: Secondary market has chosen the winners. It is pretty easy to trace now what has already been decided.

Z: Do people feel more comfortable investing in this work? There are people who like to speculate and go out there and identify who they think will be the next big thing. Yet there are others who look at the vintage market and fall in love with pieces because they understand their historical trajectory or are knowledgeable of a designer's body of work.

R: I think that speculation can be a problem. Clearly, if you are buying from the secondary market you are buying more proven assets. In that sense, it's a safer investment. I really try to discourage people from using this as an investment per se at all. But, if you're speculating on work by a younger designer, it is much better to take the model of being a patron. You need to support emerging design. I think that on the positive side of the little experiments I did, it certainly helped Ron. As much as I was arguing that you need a tighter design brief, there is a place for design to be able to take chances and to make a bad design or something that doesn't work. It is necessary to have somebody that supports that on the backside or it can't continue. So I ended up becoming the patron, unbeknownst to me at the time. For the people who are buying contemporary, I'd much rather see them approach it with that mindset. And it really is much the same with art. You have to realize that the vast majority of the time it's not going to be a great investment vehicle, especially in design. We do not know which of these 3D printed things is going to be important. [To Zoë] That's your job to figure out and you know how hard that is.

Important Design (2013) and *Harry Bertoia The Standard Oil Commission* (2013) auctions © Wright

Z: I do. I don't have a crystal ball either but my job is to follow closely new developments and identify work that has a relationship to contemporary society and that tells us about the world we live in. I look for work that I believe has relevance and signals new developments and inventive directions.

R: And that may or may not even tie to market value. One thing I see in the secondary market is that I am offered things that are in the Museum of Modern Art all the time. There are incredibly expensive things in the design department and there are very pedestrian things that are great design. They are just not valuable. I get emails every single day with an Eames chair and they almost always reference the MoMA. But they sell for $500 or $700. The two don't always correlate in that sense.

Z: I never think about something in terms of whether it is going to be of monetary value later on. I think about cultural value. I'm interested in selecting work based on how it furthers an understanding of the world we live in. However, the history of ideas is not an exact science and work that was deemed important in the past can go out of favor and then cycle back into contemporary discourse. Post-modern design is a great example. We've witnessed a renewed interest in the work of greats like Ettore Sottssas in the past years. For us, much of the decision-making process isn't reliant on singular works. Sometimes we acquire singular

Mass Modern (2013)auction © Wright

works because we just think that they are so important that they need to be in the collection. But at other times we are looking to fill holes in existing aspects of the collection, or determine acquisitions around an exhibition we are working on. Our thinking is multi-faceted as we try and make the most out of limited funds.

R: Are you trying to fit it into a narrative?

Z: Yes, but it's multiple narratives. It can be a narrative about an exhibition, it can be a narrative about process, material, contemporary conditions or societal change, for example. We are living in a time of great plurality of approaches. We need to go across party lines. Our strength is in being able to show a breadth of different ways of working. I am really interested in writing people into art history who have been ignored or overlooked: women, marginalized groups, etc. We are currently working to identify practitioners that will open up dialogues and enrich the history of design.

R: Just to reference the market, within your collection, with your decision making. Would you have a bias in choosing the less expensive example? For example, if you are you are going to add one of Ron Arad's pieces you can add different examples of very different price points. You are certainly going to try to add the one that you think is the most successful.

Mass Modern (2013)auction © Wright

Z: Ultimately I am looking for the most inventive work or a piece that tells us something about that designer and their interests and helps us chart their career. I am really interested in industrial production as I've shown through exhibitions with designers such as Konstantin Grcic. However, we also collect work by designers such as Studio Formafantasma, which is known for working on limited editions because of the intensive craft processes they employ. We are also keen to commission new work, which we have done consistently. I feel that one of our responsibilities is to seed ideas and produce new knowledge. Commissions can be some of the most challenging projects but they can also produce the most inventive outcomes. Some fail and some are really successful but they provide a platform for a younger generation of talent and at best provoke dialogue and exchange, which is something I am interested in stimulating.

R: It's interesting to me because I know that you have no concern about the future monetary value, or at least that it isn't so important. But you are involved in the market in that you have a limited budget and you have to make the best choices. If you make one very expensive choice then you have to limit your other choices. You may be more actively involved in the market than you may first think.

Z: Absolutely. We have bought some limited-edition works that we know has helped increase the value of this series of works. If you really believe in something though then this is not what is important.

I: You have also auctioned other pieces like houses by Frank Lloyd Wright or Louis Khan, collectible cars and other specific pieces. How is auctioning those pieces different from your other auctions?

R: Each of those is a different category. Auctioning real estate has been an interesting process. I would do it again, but the process of auctioning a piece of real estate in an art auction context, to me, is really problematic. One has to understand that it really only works for a very limited number of properties. The property has to be really important. It also has to be priced right for the real estate market. People want their property to be treated as art and they want to price it outside of the real estate norms, and that has been a problem. I think that at the height of it, it was an expression of the excess of the market. I helped sell a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Rockford. The world had collapsed so I didn't do it because it was an overheated market. I did it because nobody would buy this man's house. He was the original owner and he was in failing health so, through the auction process, we ended up motivating the local people to buy it and turn it into a house-museum, which he had been trying to do for nearly a decade. Not that an auction is the only place for it, but I think that the mechanism is there and it can be powerful. Cars are a whole other industry that I am not involved in, which also has its own collecting world. We have taken select cars, an Avanti, for example, purely to show them to our design clients. We also sold a really great bicycle a couple of auctions ago for a really nice price [a Spacelander bicycle by Benjamin Bowden that sold for $35,000.) but we don't want to sell collectable bikes. This was just a particularly visual one and it went to a design collector. Like Zoë, we

Spreads from the Pierre Koenig's Case Study House #21 catalogue. This lot was part of the *December Design Series* auction (2006) © Wright

are trying to tell historical narratives and we are trying to bring you something you haven't seen or you haven't seen in the market. But we want to tell a story. I've come to see that I enjoy being an editor as much as being an auctioneer. It's about creating the stories and bringing your own eye to them.

Z: One of the most interesting things about your auction house is the commitment that you have to design across all platforms. The catalogues are beautiful, and I am sure that these are a labor of love. They have become collectibles. They seem so luxurious in this current economic climate.

R: Believe me, I struggle with this and I think about it a lot. I love print and our catalogues are an integral part of our brand and success. I often say that it is one of my favorite parts of the entire process because it is pure. We take small items and show them on a single page, because they are really beautiful visual things. Objects are not laid out by value. Objects are not photographed by value. We just try to find the best expression of the piece, even if it is inexpensive. I want to bring the same experience to the web. I think the web is incredibly good at the deep dive, at delivering in-depth content on a piece, something that you can't have in a print catalogue. The web is excellent at that. We are expending a lot of time and money right now trying to define that compelling web experience but I can tell you that nothing holds your attention at this point like a print catalogue. When you are on the web, and we are all on the computer all day long, we are terribly distracted. Your level of focus and your level of attention is so different from when I hand you a book. Even if you only look for a few minutes, you form a really strong impression. I've come around to see the enduring power of print, for at least the next 20 years.

I: The catalogues that you did for the houses that you auction are also an opportunity to create your on narrative. To bring Julius Shulman to photograph the Case Study House #21 by Pierre Koenig 50 years after he had photographed it for the first time is a big commitment. But you also are creating something invaluable that is much more than what is needed to "sell" the house.

R: I think that's one thing that I am most proud of. Look, we want to have a successful business, but when we realized that we could do that, it was such a compelling idea that we had to do it. We could have saved money and not done it and still have presented a beautiful book with great photos, but that story was too good.

I: And it was also good because you sold the house unlike the one of Louis Khan.

R: The Louis Kahn house was a heartbreaker.

I: But the books was great (laughs)

R: Yes, the book was great.

Wright catalogues produced for their auctions © Wright

Z: How do you see the auction market or buying market changing online?

R: It's really changing very rapidly right now. We have all lived through the rise of the Internet but also the rise of people's level of comfort in purchasing luxury items and high-end expensive items on the web. A web-only experience is pretty new but it is really starting to happen. Sothebys.com imploded in 2003 and they lost something like 20 million dollars because people were not ready, but now it is changing fast. In the design world, 1stdibs has gotten huge. I don't know if you look at it but, for secondary market people, they do an excellent job. I don't love it, but as a phenomenon they are an incredible aggregator of design and they do it at a very high-level and they have done it incredibly successfully.

The challenge for me is that people used to wait for our auction catalogues and it was an exciting auction season. Between us, Christies, Sotheby's and Phillips, there were hundreds of items being offered and that was very exciting. Now, that's almost happening all of the time. So we have to struggle to find things that are really fresh or really fairly priced and present them in a compelling manner to break through. That level of really great material being accessible in just a few keystrokes is something that we are all going to be used to.

The Collection of John R. Eckel, Jr. auction preview © Wright

Z: It's also about how interactive we can make websites. The Art Institute is currently working on a range of web-based initiatives. We are using programs such as Google Goggles and have made a commitment to digitizing our collections and making them more accessible online. For architecture it is more complicated because we have to have large-format rapid imaging machines because the drawings are so large. But we are working on this. For other objects, it is simpler. We can produce 360° views of an object or zoom in deep on a painting because we now have the technology. There is a benefit to having this be accessible to people who can't come to the museum, but nothing replaces being able to experience the artwork in person.

R: I don't think there is going to be a reaction against it, but I think people also come to value the tangibles that you get when you see something in person. They are two completely different things, the experience is just different. A couple of years ago I said we have to shoot every mark and we believe all the labels. We take more shots of a piece than anybody else, we include multiple sides. I am proud to the extent that we archive everything that we have ever sold.

Z: That's really fantastic.

R: I am trying to unlock that content and make it easier for people to find it. To your point Zoë, nobody knows exactly what the next platform is going to be and that is really expensive and time consuming. The level of investment for you is more justified because it is a permanent collection. Meta-tagging all those items is a nightmare but it's cool because we are in the thick of it. Museums have been kind of slow and it drives me crazy. I want to see how things are marked, I'd love to be able to access more documents online.

Z: We are working on it.

Dizzy

Project by Charlie O'Geen and Frank Fantauzzi. Text by Phreddy Wischusen

Dizzy, Volume Gallery, Chicago, 2012 © Travis Roozee

Some things to know
845 West Washington Blvd. was once structured to hold cars
845 West Washington Blvd. could hold 125 cars if full, resting on 500 tires
500 discarded tires were used for this work
500 tires weigh 4 tons (8,000 pounds)
500 tires are discarded every 90 minutes in Chicago, Illinois
12 million tires are discarded every year in the state of Illinois
12 million is approximately the current population of the state of Illinois
2.8 ft3 is the space occupied by both the human body and a single tire

Some things to consider
Buildings are bodies
Tires are bodies
Buildings are made of units (bricks)
Tires are units (bricks)
Buildings are made of layers
Tires are made of layers
Buildings are made of bodies
Tires are foundations for cars
Cars are buildings

Dizzy, Volume Gallery, Chicago, 2012 © Travis Roozee

Once the spinning has stopped

Charlie O'Geen will tell you that his collaboration with Frank Fantauzzi, *Dizzy,* is about potential. The work demonstrates that used tires, the most onerous refuse of urban sanitation departments, have use as a building material. *Dizzy* as an architectural study, proves the usefulness of second stage tires with cheek and aplomb. But after having viewed their piece in Chicago's VOLUME gallery (a design gallery), I feel obliged to also consider *Dizzy* in the context of "art". And as art, it tells a more challenging story. The story not just of the can-ness but the importance of the how-ness. Not simply of potential, but maybe even hope.

I was fortunate to get to see *Dizzy* as O'Geen de-installed it. I got to avoid crowds of people most likely smarter and slimmer than me. I'm always paranoid that these slim witty art gallery people are judging me or at the very least taking note of every trip I take to the complimentary cheese and cracker table requisite at most art openings. And its hard to listen to the work over a cacophony of neuroses.

The installation consisted of two large structures each approximately ten feet tall and made of 250 coiled tires. One, I shall refer to henceforth as "Pyramid," was a very sturdy structure with a wide base that as it swirled upwards narrowed into the impression of a pointed spire. I say impression, because by nature there is nothing pointed in a car tire. The spire effect is part of Fantauzzi and O'Geen's whimsical genius. The inside of Pyramid was hollow but for a dizzying kaleidoscope of wooden supports. I could still easily step in to the center through a portal cut in the tires. The atmosphere inside was both energizing and calm. Within the Pyramid's embracing bosom, I swear I was one bong hit away from totally understanding Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings.* The concept of building a dwelling from the tires is relatively simple, but the artists' execution was remarkable. Tires are normally a bland necessity I've learned to unsee in the world around me, but somehow Fantauzzi and O'Geen had rendered something not only feasible but charming. If I wasn't concerned about coming off "weird," I would have chilled in there for hours.

Across from the Pyramid was a structure I will refer to as the "Cyclone". Its black mass hung over me like a bad dream. There were tension wires and 1x2s to keep it from engulfing me. Cognitively I knew escape was both easy and not necessary but the logic of my body, the logic of my panic told me that I could not. Could not just wake up. Could not just get out from under it. Top edges swirling wide over its tiny base. Beside me the Pyramid stood placidly, uninterested in responding to Cyclone's Dionysian chaos. Its imminent threat. Truth cannot stoop to the moment—it stands in the harmony of eternity.

Structurally, I learned, Cyclone was almost as sound as Pyramid, maybe more impressively so given its counterintuitive design. O'Geen proved this as he scrambled over the lip of Cyclone's summit and descended into the eye, armed with a drill and a reciprocating saw. There was precipitous movement in O'Geen's act of liberation. The wires were loosed and the structure sagged over. Heaved and leaned. But didn't fall. After the wires, he turned to the supports. With rapid precision, he sawed through the laced 1x2 center and the Cyclone was free. Ironically, unleashed Cyclone was no longer frightening. As it gently leaned and swayed, the structure reminded me that there is a magnificent architecture in trees. A single rooted core allows a broad stretch to blossom above. Left overnight the structure didn't fail. It stood the next morning just as O'Geen had left it, undulating gently.

Divorced from youth in service of the oil wars, both tires structures matured into artistically dynamic pieces that strongly suggest they have undiscovered utilitarian purposes. The work then really questions not merely if we can live with our past but rather how we live with it. What can be upcycled is not simply a material concern but a design concern as well. Aesthetics are inalienable from utility. As a hulking form of sagging tires attached to the ceiling, Cyclone was scary. In order to repurpose, Fantauzzi and O'Geen seem to encourage us to loosen our holds on antiquated infrastructure and trust an engaged process and good material to hold things together. To trade the neurotic nostalgia that is failing us politically and emotionally for honest self-reliance, openness and creativity.

Dizzy, Volume Gallery, Chicago, 2012 © Travis Roozee

The wall is a threshold

The plaster walls prove the point. Whiteness as neutrality is a mutually agreed upon lie. The wall is neither smooth nor colorless. We ignore the walls so we can see the room. See it as definitive. Defining boundaries. Bounding our experience. Our experience "inside." Inside a "room."

Beneath the plaster is a layer of honeycomb metal lath. Beneath the metal lath is more plaster. Beneath that plaster is wood lath running side to side—all hips and no legs. Beneath the shimmied lath are vertical furring strips. They are reaching for a sky they will never touch—never see. Beneath the climbing furring strips are the cool silent bricks. Bricks can neither move nor aspire. They are not cosmetic. They have purpose in the structure. Intrinsic purpose necessitates being taciturn.

Five circles in the plaster expanse—
one for each secreted layer.
Could you stack them together you wouldn't make a wall, you'd make

a wormhole—

a map into the development of that moment for you in the gallery,
an archaeology of time, an anatomy of myth
of the inside/out dialectic

to make a wall you simply have to put together what was removed
the contents, most likely, of a dumpster in the alley behind

but what remains is the story
and the story is the arrow
into the wormhole
into the past
into your moment in a gallery recognizing it's the plaster
that really isn't there.

Dizzy, Volume Gallery, Chicago, 2012 © Travis Roozee

Dizzy, Volume Gallery, Chicago, 2012 © Travis Roozee

Night Works

Project by Dennis Maher

Mist © Dennis Maher

Springs © Dennis Maher

Rivers © Dennis Maher

In the island of Ortygia, near Syracuse, there was a fountain Arethusa, "the gusher"; in the Peloponnese on the west coast there was a river Alpheus. A persistent belief existed that between fountain and river there was an undersea connection, and that any object thrown into Alpheus would appear again in Arethusa.

Preface to Arethusa and the River-God
Ovid, The Metamorphosis: Selected Stories in Verse

This work documents a series of installations undertaken upon an active demolition site in Buffalo, NY in 2005. Throughout the duration of the project, I was employed as a demolition laborer on the site of the Farrar Mansion, a historic structure (c. 1870) that was once home to steel baron Chilion Farrar. The building had fallen into disrepair and was vacant at the time that I was contracted to work on it.

My responsibility as a member of the demolition crew was to clear 1500 sq. ft. of interior space on the third floor of the mansion. Over the course of a sixteen-day work period, and according to the supervisor's instructions, various wall, floor, and ceiling components were removed layer by layer from the building's interior. Materials designated to be saved were taken to adjacent storage locations. The remaining debris was cleared from the premises.

Each night, after the day's labor had ended, I returned to the site, collected those materials that were removed during the day, and assembled them in new arrangements on the site. The installations were documented photographically and were then dismantled. All materials were returned to their prior locations before the next work day began. The resulting photographic images record a series of events which solidified and dissolved within an environment of accelerated change.

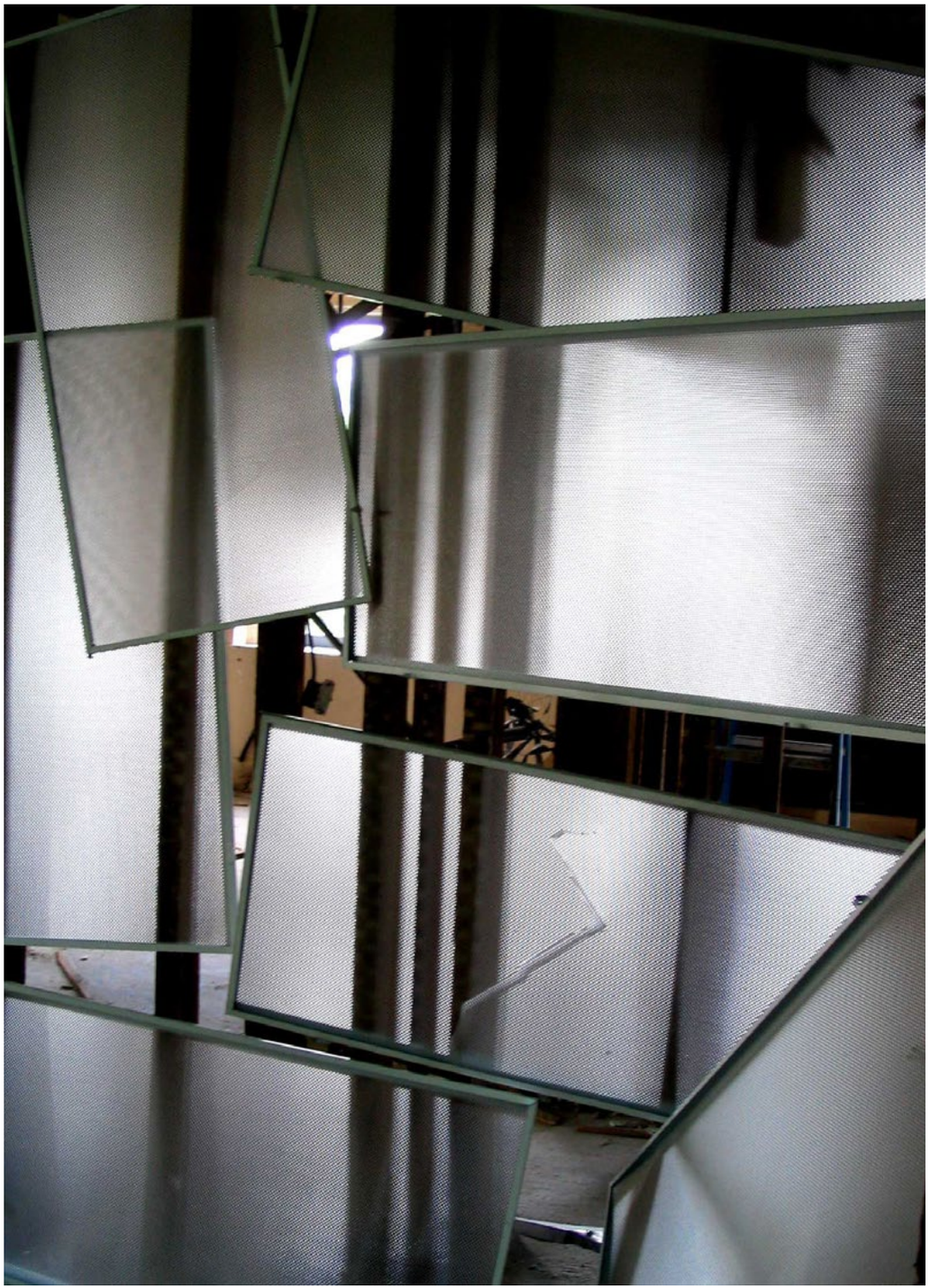
The titles of each of the assembled works are borrowed from the creation mythology described in Book 1 of Ovid's Metamorphosis, a narrative that begins with the formation of land, sea, and air, recounts the emergence of shelters, and concludes with eyes on the rising sun. My aspiration was for the works to mirror landscape transformations, and to provoke resonances with naturally occurring phenomena.

Collectively, the installations functioned as a foil to the production machine that prevailed during the 8-hour work day. During the nights, my role as an autonomous author was re-asserted amid the residue generated by this machine. I approached the site each night as the double of my un-making self—as someone who was complicit in the site's un-doing, but who endeavored, against the fresh memory of a day's work, to find the site anew. The protest implicit in the project necessitated the machine in order to yield a landscape of counter-production, but under the cover of night I could forget my previous destructive imprints.

As I reflect on this project today, almost 8 years after its execution, my thoughts are unquestionably colored by the fact that the renovation of the mansion was never completed and that the building is still vacant. I am tempted to see the photographic records as materialist drawings that traced and re-assembled the site in order to counteract the pull of progress. Each installation was a form of confrontation between my body and the momentum of the site's future constitution. The impending transformation of the place must have been slowed by my nightly efforts to resist the entropy of each laborious day.

Mountains © Dennis Maher

Seas © Dennis Maher



Lakes © Dennis Maher

Shrubberies © Dennis Maher

Branches © Dennis Maher

Sun 3 © Dennis Maher

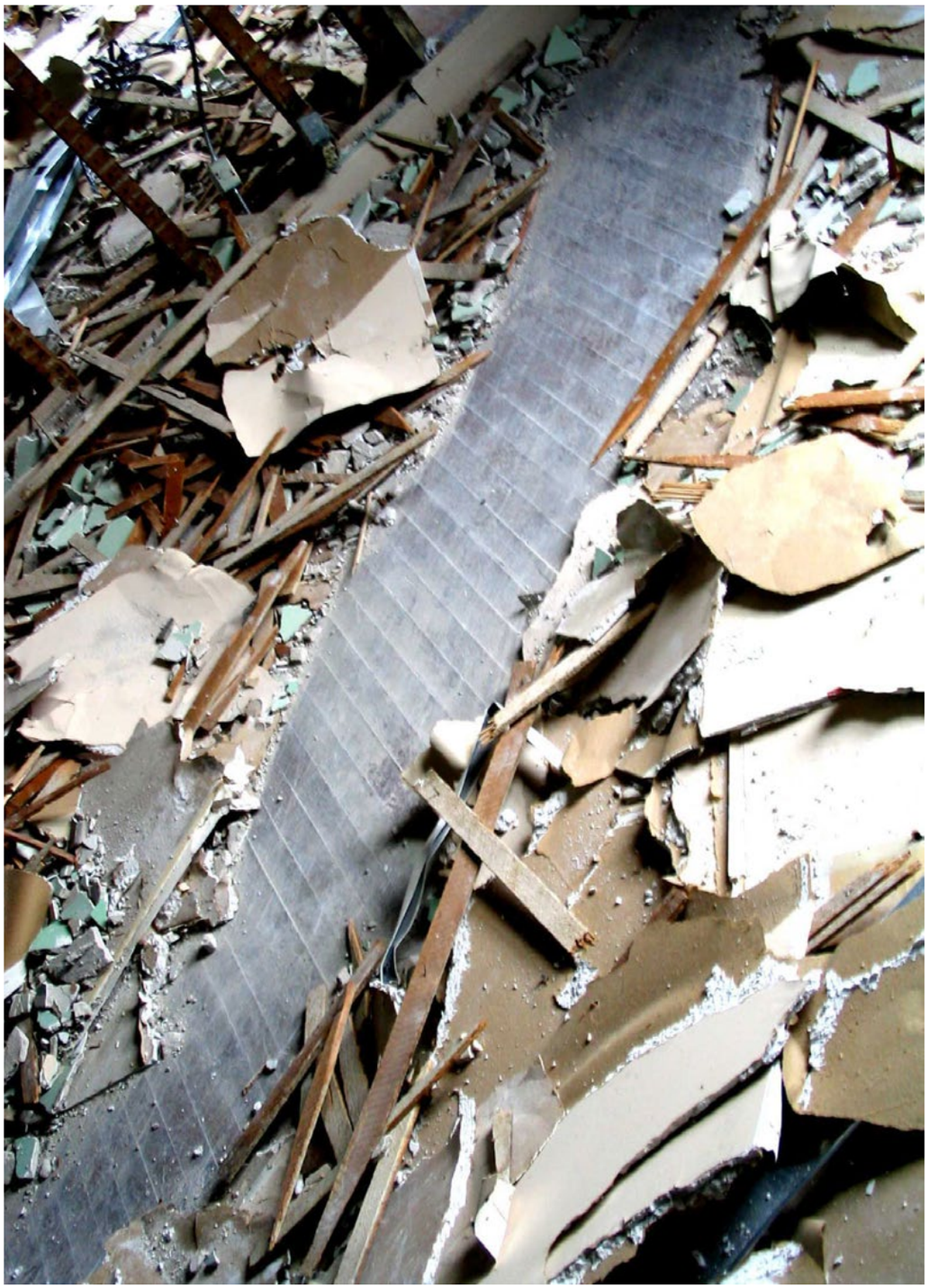
Lightning 2 © Dennis Maher

Sun 2 © Dennis Maher

The Day © Dennis Maher

Plains © Dennis Maher

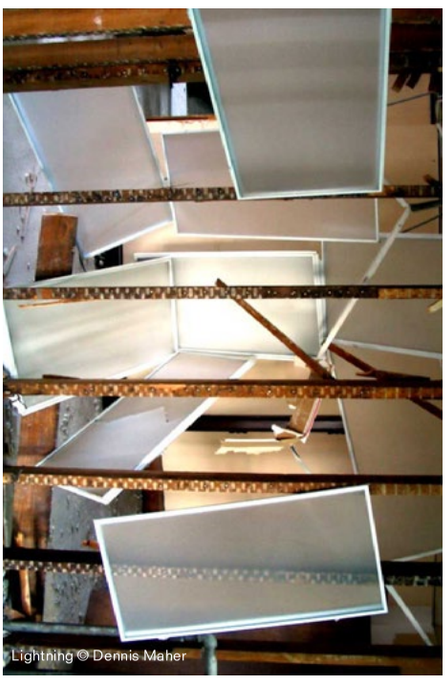
Plains 2 © Dennis Maher



Valleys © Dennis Maher

Woods 2 © Dennis Maher

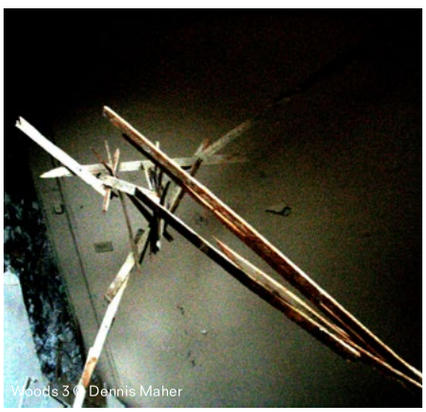
Woods 1 © Dennis Maher



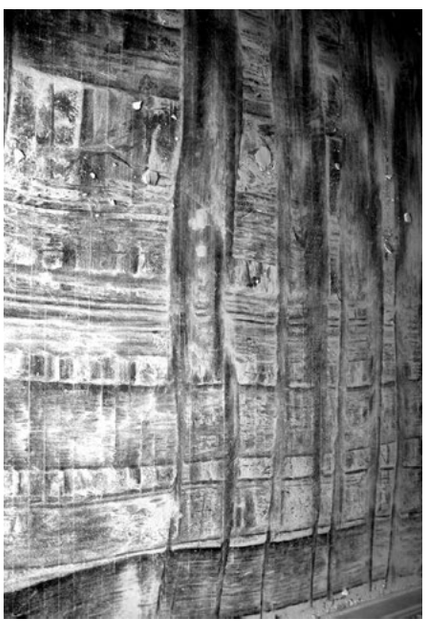
Lightnihg © Dennis Maher

Mist © Dennis Maher

Woods 4 © Dennis Maher



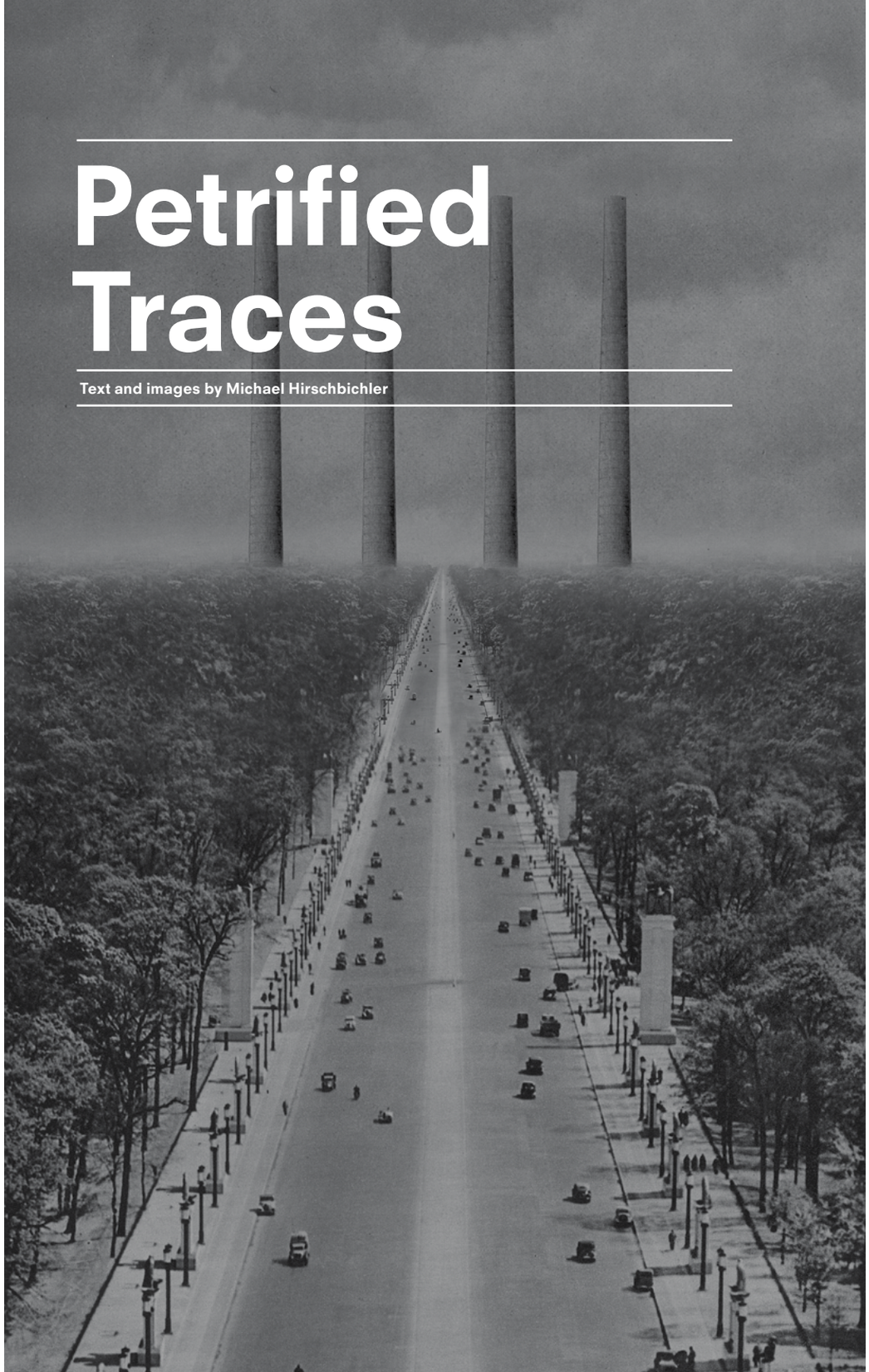
Woods 3 © Dennis Maher



Winds © Dennis Maher

Petrified Traces

Text and images by Michael Hirschbichler

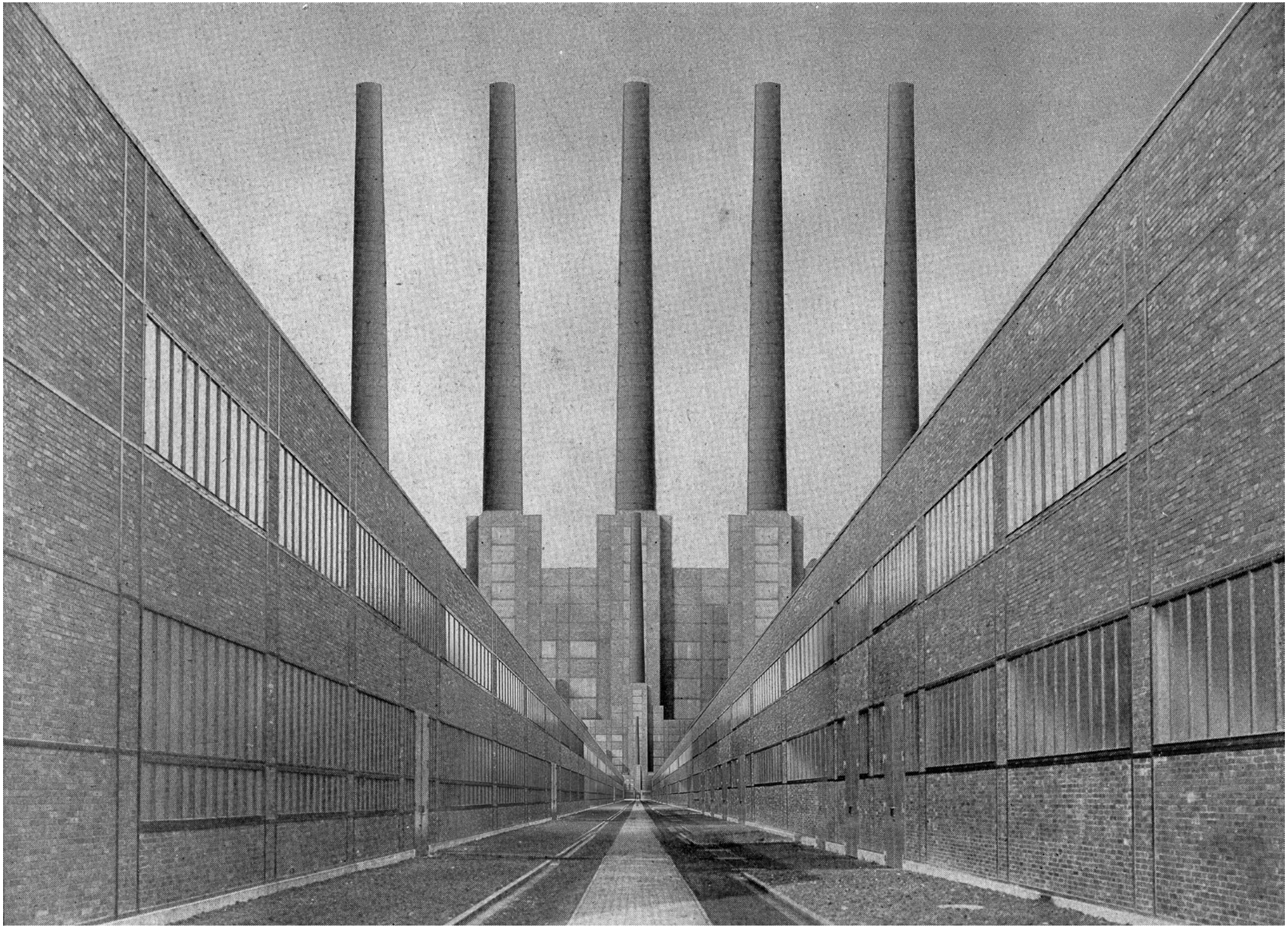


Axis, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Architecture can be understood as a petrification in a literal sense—the transformation into stone of society systems, worldviews, reigning regimes and historical events. The work series *"Theatrum Orbis Terrarum"* investigates and challenges traces of past events, social and political struggles and various constellations of power that are inscribed into the planned and built environment.

Ideologically drenched architectural manifestations of various historical epochs and political regimes remain as fragmentary traces, leaving complex palimpsests of physical and ideological structures, landscapes of guilt, monuments and ruin fields of past instances: architecturally formulated geographies.

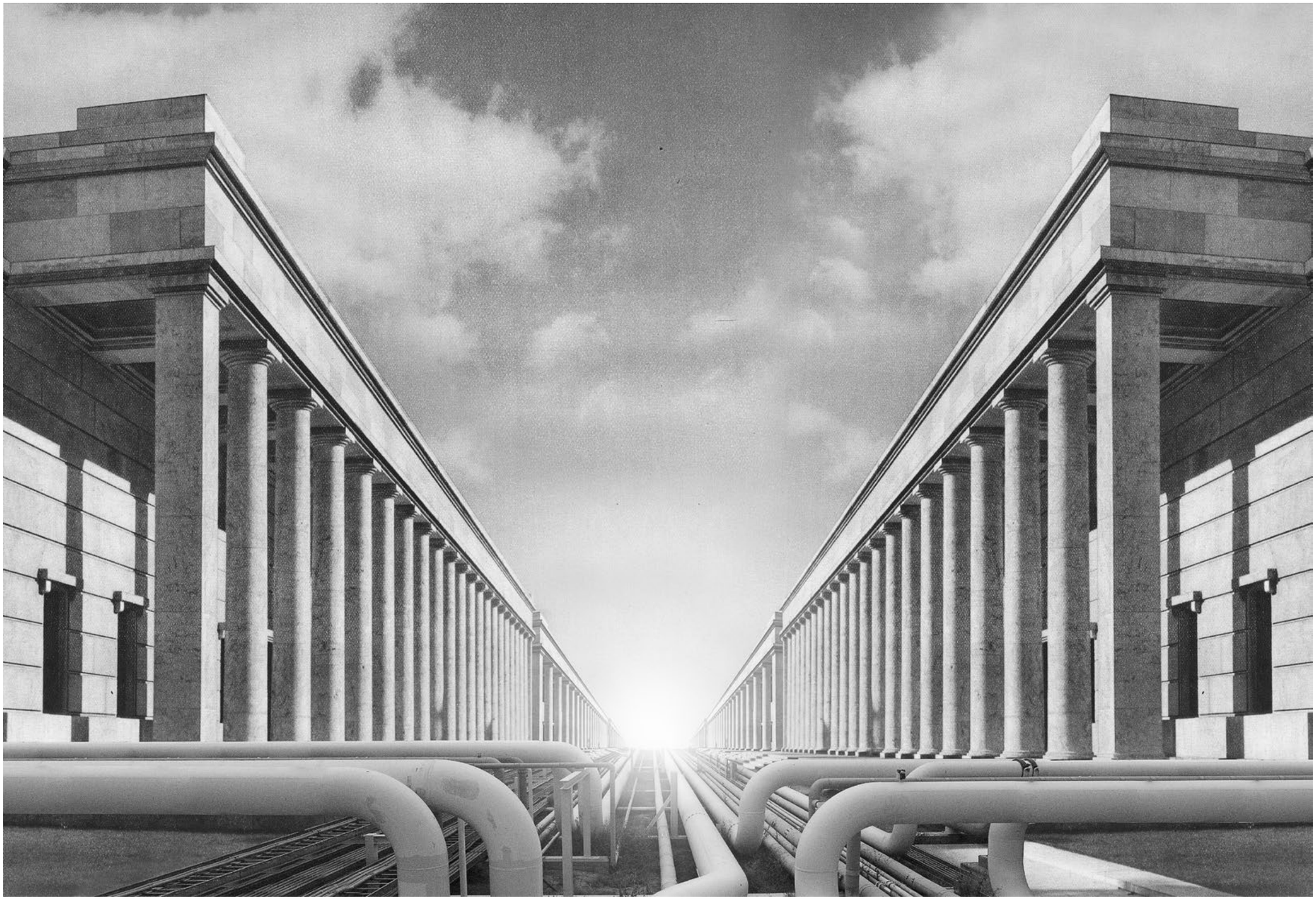
Employing the technique of a "speculative-critical archeology" and relying on the media of the digital collage, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* attempts to investigate and manipulate the traces inherent in spatio-architectonic fragments and to montage them into compositions that, in their exaggeration and seeming absurdity, serve as tools to reflect on contemporary conditions. Mediating the sterility of everyday functional space and the sculptural exuberance of representational buildings, it forges an insight into built reality, uncovering from seeming objectivity the existential drama of choreographed designs and spatial contestation. Endless enfilades unfold in monotonous repetition; abandoned scenery flows between harsh, towering buildings; and men appear lost, dominated by their built environment. Archetypes and palaces, monuments and landmarks, cathedrals and temples, prisons and camps, fortresses, bunkers and superblocks are woven into an architectural phantasmagoria which, though fictional, is formed from and reflects on the existing realities—petrified traces of human action, hope and suffering.



Industrial Complex II, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

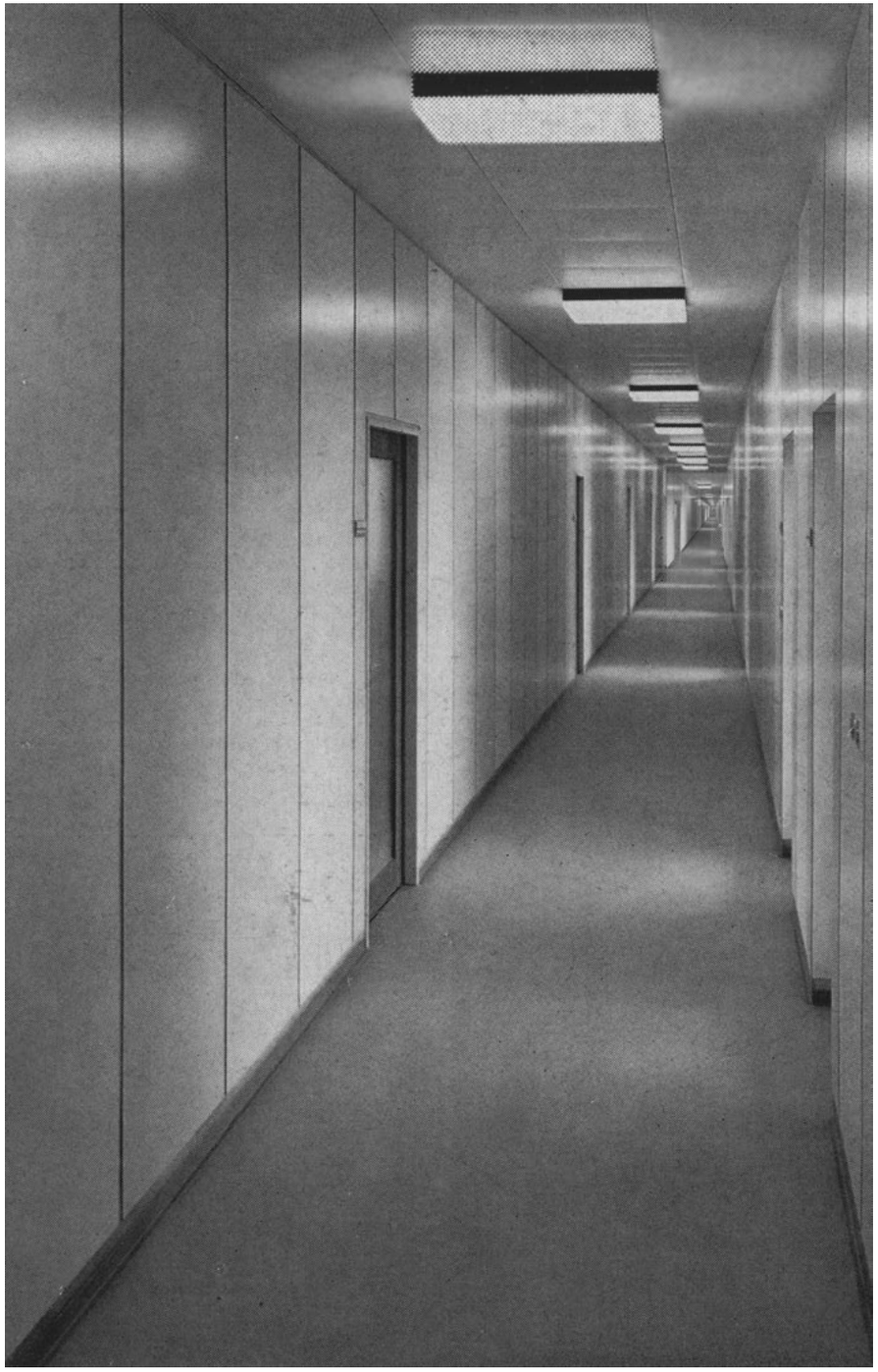
Square III, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Industrial Complex I, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler



Colonnade, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Locker room, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler



Corridor, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

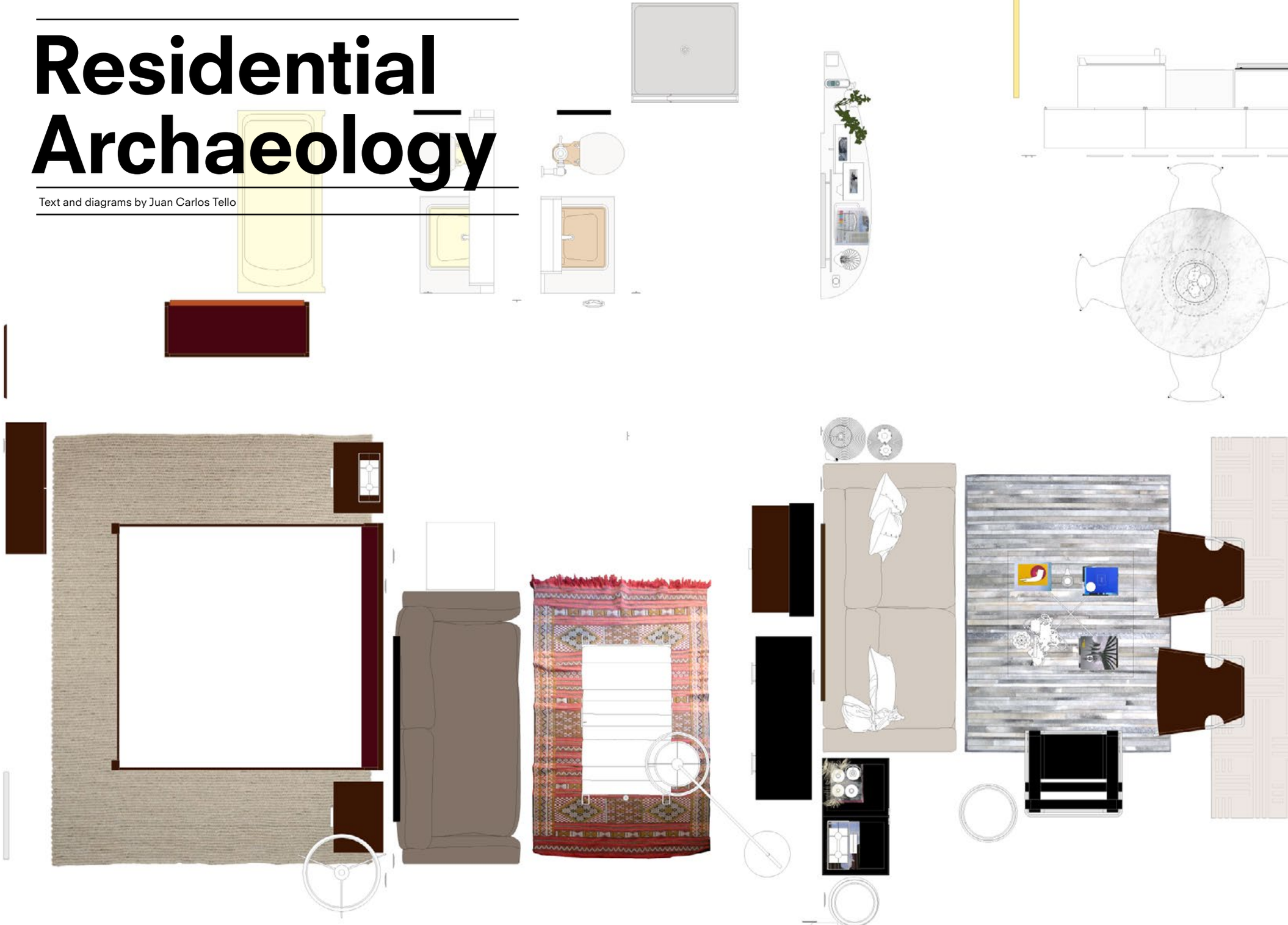
Hall II, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Hall III, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Palace II, print on drawing paper, 2013 © Michael Hirschbichler

Residential Archaeology

Text and diagrams by Juan Carlos Tello



CUPA, Mario Pani, Mexico City, 1949, © Juan Carlos Tello

The cultural phenomenon of *customization*, the appropriation of things to make them personal, has been the focus of study for years. We can see it daily in the objects that we transform and recycle, between efficiency and aesthetics. If we extrapolate this idea to the discipline of architecture, it becomes even more interesting, albeit of varying intensity: from the wallpaper to the added floor level and through various degrees of appropriation in between.

The approach of Modern Architecture, such as the universal space from the early 20th Century, becoming even more common in the 1950s in houses by Craig Elwood or Richard Neutra among others, has been transformed nowadays into the idea of neutral space, empty, ready to be occupied.

There are also curious examples such as the *Appliance House* and the *Put-Away Villa* by the couple formed by Peter and Alison Smithson. In the first one, architecture and household goods are the same, taking to the limit the idea that we are only passing through the spaces. Ideas such as comfort are taken to the extreme in the growing amount of advertising of autos and appliances.

From the industrialized architecture of those spaces we had to extract the particular aesthetic related to the prefabrication process. It is time for architects and manufacturers to address the problem from the opposite end of the scale and make buildings that emanate living habitats and reflect the needs of those who inhabit the spaces.

In the second example, a few years later and almost in opposition, the *warehouse house,* where we all *collect,* resulting in the need for a *deposit,* which requires the occupation of a third of the house: the place for objects-that-you-don't-use-now-and-that-perhaps-won't-be-used-anymore. Ultimately, it is the domestication of the spaces.

Let's recall the performance "I Like America and America Likes Me" (1974) by Joseph Beuys. In it, Beuys is separated from his usual space in order to be placed in a single space along with a coyote, also separated from its natural habitat. Cohabitation and making the space human, space *domesticated.*

Finally we are generally talking about two things: first, how we get to the spaces and second, how we fill them and therefore, how we transform them.

We must pause and think, how do users (of different social class) personalize their spaces? What can we learn and understand from the materiality of life? Does this have anything to do with the materiality of the projects designed by architects and with any social commitment?

Le Corbusier, Mario Pani, Teodoro González de León, among others, have focused on the constructive materiality, in methods of self-construction or low-cost construction. But, what about the materiality of the everyday? What happens between the mere representation that the architect proposes and the everyday occupation by the resident?

Residential Archaeology consists, therefore, of:

1. Drawing in an archeological way three things: the space occupied by the architecture itself; the everyday life infrastructure, that is, furniture; and the elements that provide use to the furniture, those that humanize them.

2. Studying the impact in terms of occupancy, density and time. An archaeological GPS that subtly gets transformed by the passing of the hours and the collecting of objects, and sometimes their final destination. What we called earlier the objects-that-you-don't-use-now-and-that-perhaps-won't-be-used-anymore. How do they alter and reconfigure the space?

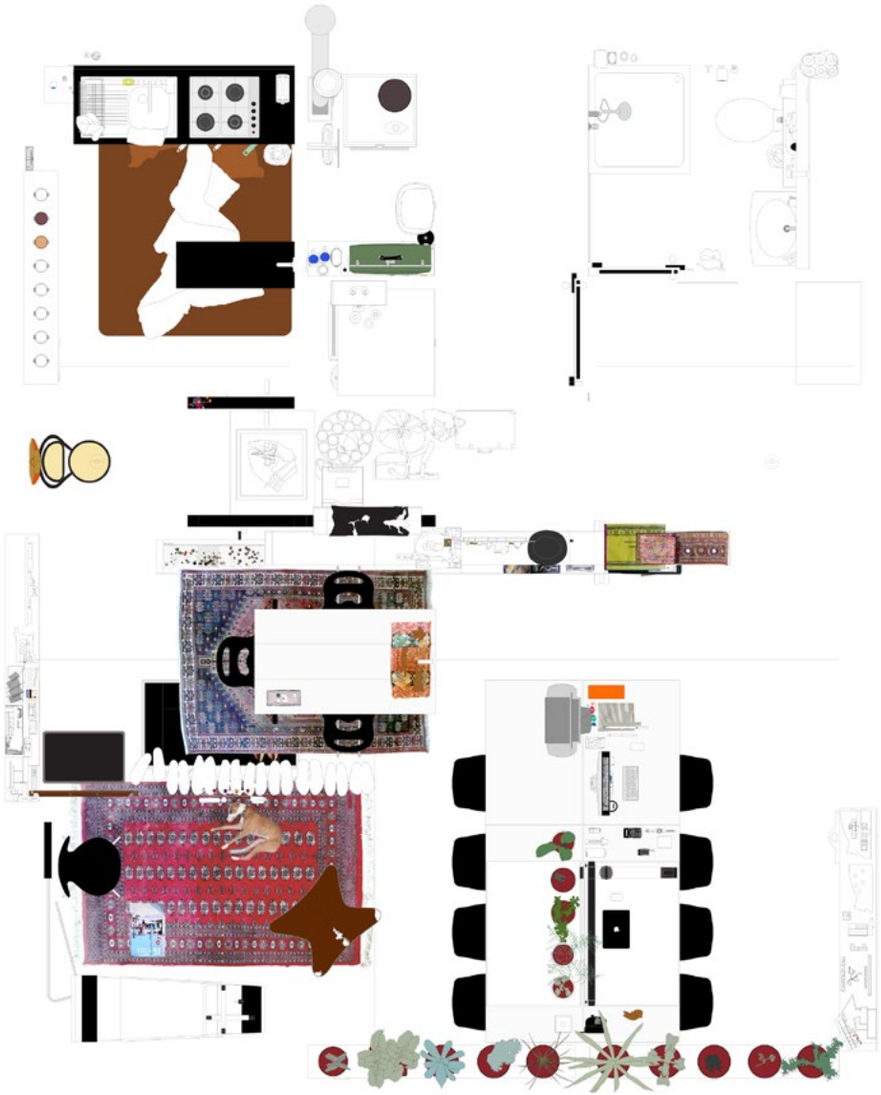
3. As a result, the project proposes the registration of these styles-modes-adjustments of life in an electronic file in order to observe their impact and make the design and use evident. Additionally, the project makes a 1:1 scale comparison of each unit: a rug-map, as if drawn by hand on the floor itself, recalling the images we have of when we did so as children on the street or sidewalk. It is, in the end, a recording as George Perec explains in *Life A User's Manual.*

The project places the Unité d'habitation in Marseille, the Tlatelolco housing complex, the Mixcoac Towers, the CUPA and Unidad Esperanza under equal conditions Le Corbusier, Mario Pani and Teodoro González de León. All are perhaps pieces of the same puzzle that builds and shows more faithfully what, perhaps, we should take more into account, *how we domesticate the spaces.*

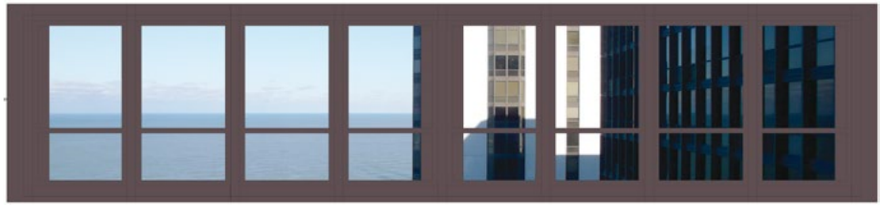
Citing [furniture and interior designer] Clara Porset, "we could not impose the tenant to acquire the furniture that had been created specifically for his home, nor did we think about convincing him. Instead, we chose to instruct him about design in general, providing him with a culture of housing."

This project has been developed with the support of:
FONCA (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) in Mexico.
www.fonca.conaculta.gob.mx

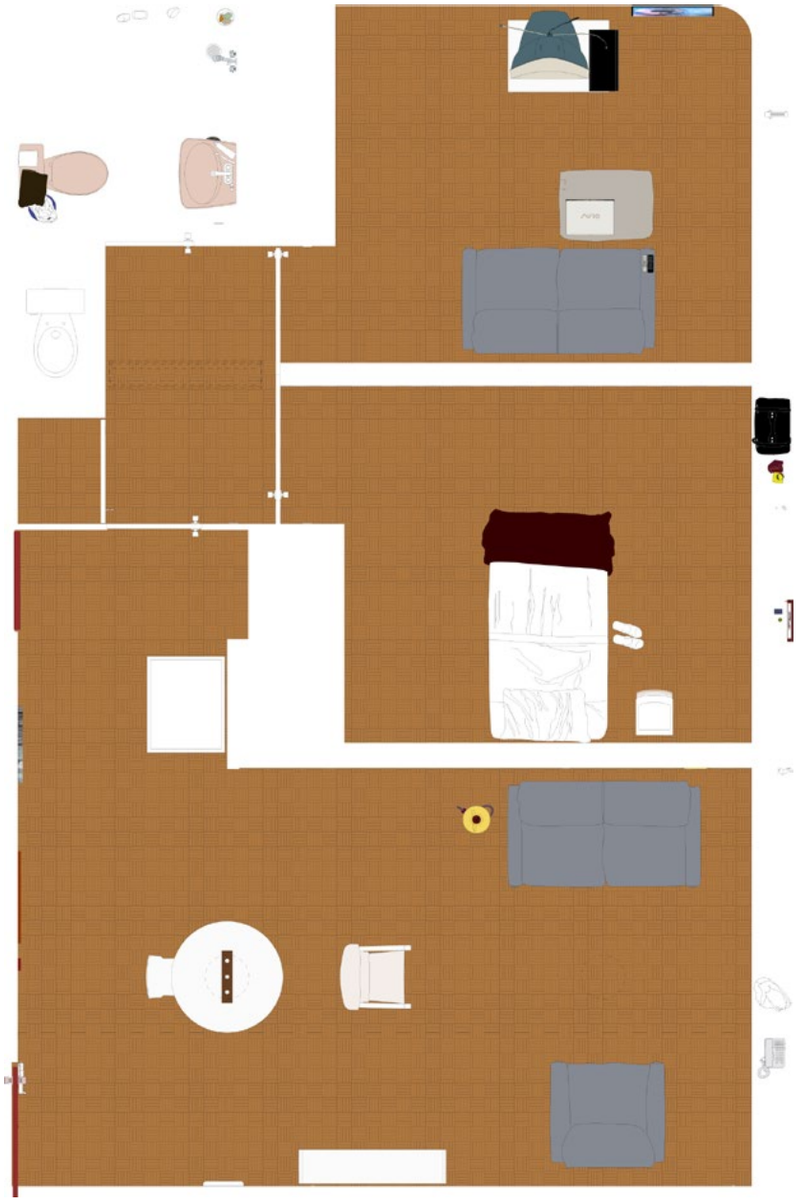
CUPA (Conjunto Urbano Presidente Alemán),
Mexico City, 1949, Mario Pani

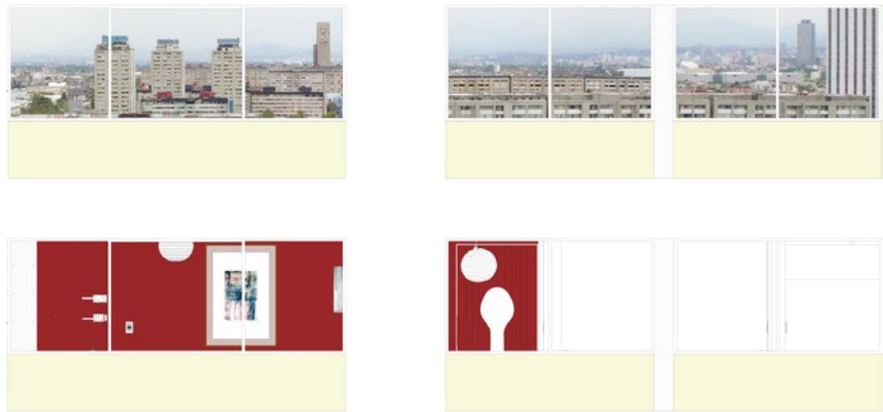


900–910 Lake Shore Drive (Esplanade Apartment Buildings), Chicago, 1956, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe



TLATELOLCO,
Mexico City, 1964, Mario Pani





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is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. He has taught in numerous architectural programs in Canada, the United States, and Finland. His research focuses on the question of alternative forms of critical architectural practice. Parallel to teaching, Fantauzzi has also been engaged in an active art practice founded in 1989. His work is often collaborative and focuses on large-scale installations and outdoor constructions. Fantauzzi's work is multidisciplinary in nature and explores the built environment and cultural dimensions of society and the parallels between social and tectonic structures.
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IKER GIL

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is a Canadian photographer who has spent much of his career in Asia. His work examines the social and physical transformations taking place throughout the region. He has published numerous books, including "Hanoi Calling," "In the Near Distance" and "Phantom Shanghai." His forthcoming "City of Darkness Revisited," with Ian Lambot, revisits and updates the seminal 1993 book "City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City."
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is an artist, writer and designer based in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Her work can be divided amongst two main practices, though the thematic overlap is significant: She is an emerging photographer and writer producing work that reflects her background in architecture and is primarily concerned with examining material traces found in complex or hybrid landscapes, especially those that act as evidence of unseen forces. She is also a co-founder and principal of DodoLab, an experimental arts-based practice that has been producing innovative public research and socially engaged projects since 2009.
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CHARLIE O'GEEN'S

work involves architectural investigations that respond directly to site specific conditions and often utilize found objects as building materials. He received a BSArch and an MArch from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo and then went on to earn a second MArch from Cranbrook Academy of Art. O'Geen currently teaches architecture at Lawrence Technological University, is the construction manager for Powerhouse Productions, and lives in Detroit where he works on full-scale architectural and building experiments.
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FRANK THIEL

moved to West Berlin in 1985 and attended a training college for photography from 1987-1989. His work describes a type of architecture in transition; the formation of a new political space within urban structures. However, the narrative of the incomplete - processes of construction over final results, of temporality and change - is present throughout his work. He has exhibited extensively in museums and galleries worldwide and his works are included in the collections of many major international museums.

NICOLA TWILLEY

is co-director of Studio-X NYC, author of the blog Edible Geography, and an independent curator with exhibitions at New York's Storefront for Art and Architecture and the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Los Angeles. She is currently writing a book on the spatial history and technological future of refrigeration.
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runs Wright, the premier auction house specializing in modern and contemporary design. With over 30 years experience in the field, he is widely recognized as the expert for modern design. He, and his assembled team of specialists, singularly focus on the modern and contemporary time period.
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TRACE

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DEDICATION

This issue is dedicated to our contributing editor Andrew Clark and his wife Ann Clark who welcomed their baby girl Emery Grace Clark on September 12, 2013. We look forward to the positive trace she will leave on the world.

SUPPORT

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The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

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MAS CONTEXT

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NARRATIVE

Our next issue will focus on the topic of NARRATIVE.

As we have done in the past two years, the winter issue of MAS Context will be developed in collaboration with a guest editor. This year, the guest editor will be the architect, cartoonist and scholar that hides behind the penname Klaus.

This issue will be tackling on the intersections between architectural practices and different forms of narrative, primarily focusing on the interactions between architecture and graphic narrative. Within this context, the issue will be roughly divided in three areas: The first one will deal with the presence of graphic narrative in disciplinary architecture; the second one will discuss the crossing of borders of comics artists who also make forays into the built world. Finally, in the third one we intend to move towards both sides of the spectrum, and try to briefly cover the tangents with written narrative and to visual narratives.

20 | NARRATIVE WINTER 13 will be published in early December.

Narrative, 2013 © Klaus

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