Dimensions is the annual, student-produced journal of architecture at the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning that seeks to contribute to the critical discourse of architectural education by documenting the most compelling work produced by its students, fellows, and visiting lecturers.

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A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

2000 Bonisteel Boulevard
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2069 USA
734.764.8300
taubmancollege.umich.edu/dimensions
dimensions@umich.edu

Typeset in Akzidenz-Grotesque, the original sans serif since 1898.
Haettian... I am your father.

Dimensions TwentyThree Editors
Thom Affleck
Bradley Cooper
Kai Liu
Sarah Petri
Amy Rydlewski
Matt Slingerland
Adam M. Smith
Natalie Wiersma
James McAlister Wilson
Robert C. Yuen

Faculty Advisor
Christian Unverzagt

Send tagged book photos to:
dimensions@umich.edu
DIMENSIONS
TWENTY THREE
Professor Melissa Harris is serving as the Interim Chair of the Architecture Program at Taubman College at the University of Michigan. She teaches drawing and design studio courses. She received her M.Arch degree from the University of California, at Berkeley in 1985.

In the process of scanning this remarkable cross section of work, I am reminded of a few things I love: my leather pencil pouch, my grandmother’s rolling pin, and a Marimekko orange shirt with yellow stripes my father’s colleague brought me from Finland when I was ten. Each of these treasures bears marks of wear; skins rubbed smooth with use, imprints of hands, threads straining to remain fabric, all embossed with traces of a history. It reassures me to see history’s presence in a physical way. The terror of forgetting appears held at bay, even if momentarily. This may be the emotional draw of sustainability: buying and holding, cultivating relationship.

A curriculum is also something polished and shined along the way. Traces of the past live in the form of methods—tried and maybe true. Continual revision of how architects are educated, specifically in light of current ecological and economic crises, demands squaring up with our priorities and asking what is essential, what is not.

Ways of being in the world—that is what is at stake here. How we get our students to feel more at each moment, help them to see what might be wrung from a barrage of information, contradictory instincts. From these we make things—drawings, models, and buildings. Architecture’s impact has no limits. Some may worry about relevance or prefer a circumscribed medium, but in this work you discover no fear in the collective pursuit of affirming and pushing the boundaries of our discipline. Architecture appears in the most unexpected spots. We find it and make it here at Michigan.

It is fleeting, being an interim chair, but my time and place happen to coincide with a moment of bilateral symmetry: 20 years at Michigan, half pre-Taubman and half post. From this axis of symmetry you might think things would shake out clearly into seductive befores and afters. A gradient is more the reality; slow developments, trends taking hold, igniting visions and shaping looks, then losing their grip to the next force or personality.

What unites the work presented here as a swath through design life at Michigan? No one vision or ideology, but the commitment to a collaborative and expansive view of architecture. Among many are the recent hands of Tom Buresh. He nourished this wonderful community for eight years—fabulous staff, faculty, and students. You can just about see the baton rounding the corner.

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Ann Arbor
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Marian Sarah Parker Memorial Award
A. Scottie McDaniel

Alpha Rho Chi Medal
Claire Sheridan

AIA Henry Adams Medal
Emmett T. Harrison

AIA Henry Adams Certificate
Ross C. Hoekstra
The Wallenberg Studio honors Raoul Wallenberg (B.Arch 1935) who is credited with rescuing over 100,000 Jews from Nazi persecution in Budapest, Hungary during World War II. The Benard L. Maas Foundation established a traveling scholarship in Wallenberg’s name in 1986 to fund exemplary undergraduate students and provide them with the resources to expand their understanding of the world. This scholarship is a reminder of Wallenberg’s compassion and courage and seeks to promote his ideals through travel and knowledge of one’s role in the global context.
2009
Wallenberg Studio

first prize / MARC MAXEY
second prize / ALEX TIMMER
third prize / RICK COSGROVE

honorable mention / MARIE MATTA
JAKUB SZERSZEN
LAUREN GREGORICKA
BROOKE GOODMAN
EVA LYNCH
2009 Taubman College Visiting Lecturers

January 12  Laura Kurgan / Wallenberg Studio Lecture
January 29  Marie Sester / Wallenberg Studio Lecture

February 4  Jean-Louis Cohen / New York Institute of Fine Arts
            “Architecture Between Front and Rear: Designing World War II”
February 5  David Leatherbarrow / Doctoral Program Symposia
February 10 Nicola Delon and Julien Choppin / Wallenberg Studio Lecture
February 16 Loïc Wacquant / Urban and Regional Planning Lecture
February 19 Cheryl Durst / National Organization of Minority Architecture Students Lecture

September 10 Mia Fuller / University of California, Berkeley
              Assoc. Professor of Italian Studies
              Doctoral Studies in Architecture Lecture
September 17 Farshid Moussavi / Foreign Office Architects
              Professor Harvard GSD
              Perimeter Projects Studio Lecture
September 22 George Legendre / Cofounder IJP Corporation
              Perimeter Projects Studio Lecture

October 1  Rodolfo Machado / Machado and Silvetti Associates
October 8  Daniel Monk / Colgate University
            Professor of Geography
            “The Politics of Greenwashing”
October 8  Bernard Khoury / New Wars in Progress
October 13 Henco Bekkering / The Netherlands Visiting Professor
            “The Memory of the City”
October 15 Ben Nicholson / Rural America on Steroids
            Perimeter Projects Studio Lecture
October 27 Cecil Balmond / ARUP
            John Dinkeloo Memorial Lecture
March 3  Mark Jenkins /  Alpha Ro Chi Lecture
March 11 Julie Bargmann /  Guida H. Binda Lecture
March 12 Julia Czerniak /  Max M. Fisher Visiting Professor Lecture
March 16 Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss /  University of Pennsylvania School of Missing Studies Belgrade “Almost Architecture”
March 20 Douglass Farr /  Alumni Lecture “Sustainable Urbanism”
March 24 Frank Matero /  John Dinkeloo Lecture

November 5 Russell Thomsen and Eric Kahn /  IDEA Office Max M. Fisher Visiting Professor Lecture
November 24 Robert Levit and Rodophe el-Khoury /  Khoury Levit Fong

December 1 Nikos Georgiadis /  Anamorphosis Architects
December 3 Alejandro Aravena /  Elemental S.A. Executive Director The Raoul Wallenberg Lecture
December 8 Michael Blier /  Harvard GSD Design Critic of Landscape Architecture Eliel Saarinen Lecture

April 2  John Fetterman /  Mayor of Braddock, PA
April 9  Nancy Steiber /  History and Theory Lecture “Labatory Notes: Towards a History of Dutch Modernism”
April 15 Brad Cloepil /  Eliel Saarinen Lecture
G. BRITT EVERSOLE

Walter B. Sanders Fellowship / Research
The Research Fellowship supports individuals with significant, compelling, and timely research agendas dealing with architectural issues. Research agendas could be based in such fields as architectural, urban, landscape, or cultural history and theory; architectural or environmental technology; or design studies.

JASON KELLY JOHNSON

Willard A. Oberdick Fellowship / Project
The Project Fellowship facilitates the development and realization of a significant exploration into some aspect of architectural speculation and production. Projects may range from the exploration of emergent building, fabrication, and environmental technologies to the realization of architectural works typically unsupported within conventional models of practice.

NATALY GATTEGNO

William Muschenheim Fellowship / Design
The Design Fellowship offers early career design instructors an opportunity to develop a body of work in the context of, or in relationship to teaching. Proposals for the design fellowship may focus on the development of a specific project, either individually or with students, or may center upon a particular set of pedagogical themes to be engaged in the studio context.
MAPPING THE WAKE

BEN RUSWICK
UNDERGRADUATE WALLENBERG STUDIO

studio critic /
G. BRITT EVERSOLE
THE MEMORIAL EVENT

When the twin towers collapsed on the morning September 11th, 2001, the streets sprawling from the site became increasingly saturated with ash and particle debris. Dispelled in a series of violent pulses, the ashen cloud resembled a thick fog enveloping the city—a growing, autonomous entity relentlessly surging outward with Ground Zero at its nexus. Each subsequent pulse urges the collective body of ash to further overtake the urban fabric. Between pulses, each aggressive surge gave way to an eerily stagnant and passive form of the translucent shroud. The static state of the environment during these brief intermissions produced a set of unique and unsettling atmospheric conditions—the subtle corruption of sight, sound, and touch were accentuated by collective panic and the presence of looming anticipation. The juxtaposition of these active conditions on the part of the occupants, with the indifferent nature of the atmospheric state, poses a vital and intriguing connection between the violence inherent in the act, and the way those occupying the space understood the act through the environmental situation it produced. This set of conditions forced occupants to fluctuate slightly and discretely between a phenomenological grasp of the situation and a diluted bodily awareness—between the immediacy of the event and comprehension of the act as a real-time operation.

When the last of the pulses dissipated, the ashen cloud grafted itself onto the surfaces of the urban construct—coating lower Manhattan in a fine film composed of the Towers’ ashen residue. This marks the culmination of the memorial event. Phase 1 is defined as encompassing the most immediate portions of the event, specifically the environmental conditions connected especially with the dispersal of ash. Phase 2 in this construct is the organization and codification of the event into recognizable and easily appropriated context—the “Twin Towers” as cultural imagery. The experiential characteristics that formed its original context and were vital to its definition are substituted for the iconic accessibility of “9/11” as a sign—the tragedy packaged into a format that was universally consumable and largely safeguarded against individual misinterpretation. The proposal for this memorial is the dialectic manifestation of observations concerning the role that both Phase 1 and Phase 2 have played in our collective understanding of the event.

THE FOUR FOLD INTENT

In recognizing the dissonance between the interpretation of the event as a static moment, the role it played both as a phenomenological exercise, and its continual position in reference to the events it proceeded and influenced, this memorial seeks to engage the event’s effects and affects. Rather than enabling the further celebration of 9/11 as a collection of cultural shortcuts, it is a transient experiment. The intent of the trial is to expose the disconnect between the immediacy of the event and the current interpretation of that event as a sign by mimicking and accentuating its phenomenological and atmospheric conditions. This is achieved through a series of extreme intrusions that function as methods by which the extent of Manhattan’s exposure to the ash is documented and mapped through a cleansing of the city. The duration of the event corresponds directly to the duration of the event’s real-time effects on the world.
THE MECHANISM

The sunken foundations, revealed after the debris was transported away from Ground Zero, become a “factory” for the assembly and production of the machines that realize the network’s intent. These machines are constantly being built and dispatched in waves similar to the manner in which the pulses of ash were generated from the same site during the collapse. There are three separate machines, the form of which corresponds to the task specified for each in coordination with the facilitation of the network as a whole. They are all similar in form and affect, and all directly relatable in the orientation of their intentions. They are constructed from a series of repeated gear-like members offset along a flexible axis created by a collection of six firm cables. These cables act as a spine and encourage flex in the metallic members they unify. This allows the machines to appropriately manipulate their form and orientation in order to graft themselves onto the unique geometries of the urban context.
The Cicada is an automated aerial vehicle. It hovers slowly through the city streets, moving arbitrarily from façade to façade, systematically covering each with coats of thick, ammonia based latex. It scales the building in segments, spraying a few quadrants in bulk, and allowing the heavy substance to drip along the face, irregularly and inconsistently slowly forming to the details and reveals that define the individuality of each building.

The Wurm edges along the ground, similar to the movement of an earthworm, extending and collecting its body across a distance according to the orientation of the repeated members along its spine. The defining characteristic of the wurm's structure is the series of metallic barbs protruding from its body. The barbs allow the grounded machine to grip vertical surfaces and scale the buildings in order to perform its objective: the matting of the latex coating on each façade. As it scales the building, the barbs repeated attempts to grip the building scratch and tear, simultaneously documenting its own physical effect on the city according to its place in the network.

The millipede is the most cumbersome of the three, performing the action of collecting, transporting, and exhibiting the latex.

It moves much the same way as the wurm, methodically combing the streets. The aggressive metal armatures serve as a means to scale the buildings, but also function as a means of collecting the latex—a method similar to that of a spider wrapping a fly in silk. The secretion of lubricant keeps the latex from deforming; thus, allowing it to be unraveled with ease when the action is performed in reverse atop the heights of the steel skeleton.

The operation itself is an apathetic and indifferent, but an extremely abrasive intrusion that exhibits characteristics embodied in the environment surrounding the Twin Towers at the time of their collapse. A series of automated machines act as agents fulfilling this operation—collecting ash by means of latex casts of building façades. The latex acts as a method for exfoliation as well as exhibiting a materiality that can effectively display the grime and ash it collects per its translucence. The act of producing and collecting these molds comprise the first phase of the memorializing process, corollary to Phase 1 of the memorialized event.
THE NETWORK

The latex tracings become the primary artifact created by the network, and serve as the object of the process' intent. The continual collection embodies the memorial act's connections with the event's continuing effects on the world. Fuel for the production of the memorial artifact, is the duration of the United States' military involvement in Afghanistan. In this way the network itself becomes a dialogue between a temporal event and its lasting effects, accentuating the event's dynamism rather than representing it as a static occurrence. This dialogue is further enhanced by the network's ability to supersede the extent of its original intention. Upon the machines' completion of their task, the collection of all the ash, the network will continue to grow to whatever breadth it is allowed. Consuming as much of the urban fabric as is designated by the continuation of our involvements abroad—cycling the intent of display from the physical imprint of the event to the physical institution of the network.

The second phase of the memorial act is the exhibition of the memorial artifact, and requires a shift in location and context. The latex is transported to the Black Rock Desert—which serves as a non-place, devoid of the context intrinsic to the space occupied by the event and the memorializing system—and transposed onto a towering collection of steel skeletons, resembling the structural nature of the Manhattan high-rises having been stripped of their skin. The structural skeleton is being built and draped in latex concurrent to the production of the latex in Manhattan. The organization of the exhibition is not a one-to-one homage to the parent condition (Manhattan), but rather is a conscious reflection of the process' chaotic nature. The composition of façades poses infinite juxtapositions of textures, patterns, heights, shapes, and densities, further removing Latex City's position from the mapping of a place, to the mapping of an event.

THE NETWORK UNRAVELED

As our involvement in Afghanistan begins to dissipate, as troops are extracted and efforts diminished, there will appear a correlating decline in the production and the upkeep of the machines. The mapping of New York City will have continued according to the mental, emotional, financial, and economic expenditure of the “war on terror” and its accompanying obligations and efforts. The machines will begin to die and degrade, settling amongst the heights and folds of the latex city, serving not as an exhibition of the event, but as a graveyard for the network and its agents. Over time, the latex will disintegrate, and the city will become an empty skeleton. A diluted stack of structural elements no longer serving any purpose other than to remain of something that was and to accentuate the death of the system. It becomes a memorial to the memorializing process—an artifact of mapping the wake.
COMPLICIT
EXPANSION
REMISSION
OF GROUND

ALEX TIMMER
UNDERGRADUATE
WALLENBERG
STUDIO

studio critic /
ANCA TRANDAFIRESCU
Each year hundreds of migrants die as the result of American consumerism and our desire for drugs, cheaper goods, services, and labor. Victims of fatal border crossings go unnoticed and unacknowledged. This project is a memorial, proposing a constructed territory where each death is recognized and marked physically for visitors. Because this memorial records an ongoing tragedy, it grows physically with each additional death. This project is also an act of penance, for as it grows, it takes away more and more land from the American side of the border, expanding the Rio Grande into the United States and reducing the capacity for security.

According to a study done by the United States Government Accountability Office, each year hundreds of migrants die attempting to cross the border. Between 1994 and 2004, motor vehicle accidents, over exposure, homicide, and drowning caused three thousand registered migrant deaths as a result of attempted border crossings. Efforts being made to address illegal immigration seem to do more harm than good. The Minuteman Project, an alliance of citizens who patrol the border, has voluntary forces that build fences along the border to deter crossing into the US. In recent years, the US government has also bolstered the border wall with the Border Patrol, an agency within US Customs and Border Protection. In 1994 and 1996, Operation Gatekeeper and The US Illegal Immigration and Immigration Responsibility Act started major fence building projects along the border. These elements have only served to increase the number of fatalities related to illegal border crossings. Despite the many dangers implicit to crossing the border, many migrants still make the attempt to cross.
THE MEMORIAL

The memorial is located within the Rio Grande River, in the adjacent derelict land between International Bridge One and International Bridge Two. It is accessible to citizens from either side of the border, regardless of citizenship status, through pedestrian entry points situated on the bridges. The site is a scene of constant construction and activity as pedestrians and goods cross the border to and from Laredo, the largest American inland port. Opposite to this, the space within the structure is a more measured experience, contemplative and solemn.

This memorial as proposed, constructs a territory where each death is recognized and marked physically for visitors. Each death is marked by an 84" x 28" steel plate, roughly the size of the human body when entombed. Oriented north to south, in the direction of migrant travel, no numbers or names can be found on the plates; they are void of any identity besides that which they have to the viewer and to the structure as a whole. Each plate is supported by a steel structure that also allows for occupation by the visitor. The plates provide shade and create a cooler and more somber space in sharp contrast to the arid landscapes of the region. At the same time, the territory created is ephemeral as shadows and mass intermingle. The space changes as the sun moves over it and visitors pass in and out. The shadow of the structure projects out onto the American landscape beneath it; the effect is witnessed by the passerby and observer of the structure, who may or may not be within it. One makes the connection between his own presence in this mass and that of the unknown human that lost his life.
Migrants are continually drawn across the border to the US. Americans are directly responsible for this continual flow. According to Fernando Romero:

“A significant (although sometimes overlooked) aspect of the immigration debate is the United States’ dependency on cheap labor, a large bulk of which stems directly from the undocumented immigrant community. . . According to many economists, undocumented migrants are fundamental to Americans’ access to inexpensive goods (and services).”

Another contributing factor to the negative pressure of work force and goods is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), through encouraging migration to the US by keeping wages low in Mexico while failing to create jobs or economic stability. Thus, we as Americans draw migrants across the border to propel our consumer lifestyles.
TRAGEDY
The memorial records an ongoing tragedy; it grows physically with each additional death, giving the polemic of the migrant a physical presence. The project is also an act of penance, as it takes away more and more land from the American side of the border. The continual erosion of the American banks asks each visitor to contemplate their role in the creation of the memorial, whether this role is passive or active. The project has no real end. The prospect of political resolution is grim as there will always be a desire for inexpensive goods and services, which will inevitably draw migrants across the border.
associate professor / GEOFFREY THÜN

Geoffrey Thün teaches in the graduate architecture program at Taubman College in the Thesis program, design studios, and Site Operations—a course that introduces students to a range of contemporary theories, techniques and technologies regarding an approach to site design across the nested scales of networked ecologies. He holds degrees in Architecture, Sociology, and Urban Design, is an experienced builder, and former heavy equipment operator.

He is a founding partner of the firm RVTR based in Toronto and Ann Arbor, the recipient of a 2008 Young Architect Award from the Architectural League of New York, and the 2009 Canadian Professional Prix de Rome in Architecture. Thün's current research follows two divergent streams. The first examines systems-based GeoDesign approaches to large scale regional landscape infrastructures that integrate diverse actants and ecological considerations. The second is pursuing the development of strategies for mass-customized manufacturing processes in the delivery of net-energy producing prefabricated housing, and the design of responsive envelopes and assemblies. His writing regarding the future of energy, infrastructure and mobility has been published in FUEL, WATER, the Journal of Architectural Education and most recently in the New Geographies Journal.

Thün is an avid canoeist and builder of bonfires.
Interview occurred at Cabela’s Outfitters—the most visited tourist destination in Michigan:

**DIMENSIONS 23 (D23)**

In the course you taught in the fall, Site Operations, you talked about the US National Park system as a repository for ideology and image in the manufacture of national identity. I wonder if you can talk about the collage of ideas presented in a place like this—situated in a postindustrial perimeter context?

**GEOFFREY THÜN (GT)**

One immediately thinks of the creation of the visitor’s center with respect to the formalization of national park structures. In the 1950s, when the car based populations arriving in the national parks are escalating to a point of almost total congestion, Colin Wirth’s Mission 66 program sought to mediate the impacts of automobile-based tourism through infrastructure. The visitor center would concentrate activity in specific locations, providing services, a museological program, and information in a single facility—a place of orientation providing an interpretation of the parks to the public. They were also in some ways a kind of outfitting, staging area for visiting or camping in the parks. And so, on the one hand, I can see this as a kind of massively scaled visitor’s center for an experience with wilderness in the Northern-Central US in some ways—part big box outfitter and part Museum of Natural History. If we look at the degree to which curation has been undertaken to display the multiplicity of species in an almost encyclopedic manner, it suggests “This is what you can gather if you have just the right gear.” It is a commercial encounter that enables participation in an ecology of desire, participation, and conquest. It is far more sophisticated than many retail environments, and one that fully participates in Joseph Pine’s description of the “experience economy.” Here, value is not determined by market derived commodity demand, nor the perceived value of service, but rather, is predicated upon the perceived and projected value of the memory of the experience that one takes away from an encounter. This is co-mingling the building type of visitor’s center as one program with a very aggressive retail approach that is completely embedded in the experience economy theory.
So is the design intended to foster new forms of anticipated encounter, constitute a memorable experience in and of itself, or an association with past experiences of hunting or fishing?

All of the above. The entire operation is immersive with an obvious intention to replicate an encounter either with a landscape condition that one longs for and hopes to find, or maybe recalls a previous experience. There is also the pure experience of being part of the Cabela’s scene, which is a product in and of itself—from the parking lot to the cash register, and hence probably its success as an attraction. I would imagine the fascination for many people is that this would be one of the few locations in Michigan where they could come to just find out about a whole range of fauna that they may never encounter and may never have encountered before. Even though it is not an official institutional site of public education, it may function in that way inadvertently. I think it would be interesting to diagram all of the systems of communication and classification that are deployed here. I suspect that they would not be dissimilar and almost similarly complex as to what you would find in an earnest museological installation of natural history.

This museological installation is set right alongside the “hot buy!” right up front in red text.

My favorite is the “mountainous” display depicting large mammals across a range of climatic conditions foregrounded by a skid of field sausage-making equipment for $19.99. It is not simply these moments of montage that are so powerful though—there are other building type organizations at work here. The axial plan begins at the honorific moment of the bronze bears caught mid-battle, and extends to the mountain of the wild, with the altar of the elk strangely reminiscent of Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa, eyes turned heavenward in a way that can only anticipate the moment just prior to death. It is an ecstatic death, one that projects completeness for the animal through its participation in the hunt.

We were just talking about this place as a kind of staging area, outfitter, or visitor’s center for trips into the wild at a kind of massive cultural scale and how it might operate regionally. This type of facility starts to replace the official sites of those kinds of functions or enhance the sites as a surrogate official point of collective education around the encounter with nature or the wild. This construct, as a piece of architecture, is actually fairly rigorous in terms of its resonance with the structural ordinance, the development of the dual base, and the axial relationship that sets up the whole encounter. It is a typology that on the one hand participates in retail design, but on the other hand is probably more influenced by western religious building construction. The apse is legible, the frontispiece is legible, and the aisles function in a similar way. The animals that are lined up curatorially in terms of the busts and their collections start to recall something like the Stations of the Cross…

I’m not sure how productive it will be for me to continue that analysis.

Keep going.

It is set up first of all as a very carefully thought out space with a clear hierarchical order relative to a primary experience it wants to deliver, over which then are woven the tactics of retail sales. The classic racecar matrix, where items with the highest margins are located at the terminal points and directional change points of anticipated customer circulation.

There is a fairly careful considered hierarchy of structural timber members, the detailing of joints, and the way members land on these inexplicable ‘stone’ structures that rise out of wooden display cases; there is an intended hierarchy about terrain, geography, geology, and then lighter wood frame structures. All views to the exterior are denied, but there is the effort to bring atmospheric conditions into the shopping domain with the soft overhead daylighting. With the sound of the gurgling water combined with the dappled light of the forest floor, there is more than the artifice of taxidermy at work here. Regardless of how one then processes this whole scene, either by being disturbed by or being excited by it, that is what the project sets up. And that experience extends to lunch, right? We can have an owl burger or elk stew, and fully participate in another way. This whole immersive encounter is being presented as a domesticated and consumable experience.
It engages everything, sight, hearing, and taste, with the food.

Right. I am not involved in hunting, although I am very intensely involved in outdoor activities. I think what is also quite interesting about a place like this, is that regardless of one's position on the primary activities of Cabela’s, which is outfitting hunters, it is actually robust enough as a store that it is neutral on the activities you do, in say, a wild or semi-wild condition. It has the capacity to provide you with every kind of prosthetic device required to be able to have your own authentic encounter in the domain outside of the civil: thermal underwear, multiple layers of fleece, or rain gear. Technical gloves allow you to have your hands protected in an extreme weather situation, but also allow you to operate equipment with a fine degree of precision, whether that is weaponry or camera equipment. The equipment is entirely neutral in terms of the mode or purpose for which it is deployed; therefore, this place must appeal equally to the most extreme of hunters, and at once with the most extreme conservationists as a place that is enabling their excursions. It is an interesting paradox as well. The technical gear available here is as refined a system of exterior cladding skins as one can find anywhere.

This stages a whole experience for entire families; you can come here and shop for the newest Desert Eagle handgun while your kids are learning something about the aquatic species of Lake Michigan.

Not only the catalog of aquatic species, but the re-presentation of watershed ecosystems. Water emanates from the central mountaintop, rivulets and streams empty into this small pond, lake, or a form of wetland occupied by this moose, replete with marsh. At this point, live fish are introduced, and there is an aquarium somewhere.

Nice. The relentless encyclopedic approach has been applied across the board—every fish, every mammal—also applied to product lines here the exhaustive display of reels and high tech gadgetry, sonar systems, sighting mechanisms, long distance optical prosthetics…[They approach the aquarium]

The questions of authenticity and authority are interesting—Dave Hickey’s characterization of the “fake real and real fake” resonate here (pointing to the donor plaque adjacent to the aquarium). The US Geological Survey and the Michigan State Department of Natural Resources are cited as sponsors. It is a pubic-private partnership in producing a non-official musicological condition in the context of a private / corporate space.
I am thinking about Robert Smithson. The impact on him as an artist, critic, writer, and thinker, and the trajectory of his work relative to his early childhood experiences in the National History Museum, which were formative and re-framed the way he conceived of geological time that figured so robustly in his work that followed. With reference to the anecdotal story you told yesterday, about this being a place of visitation in part of your childhood and formative years, I'm curious what the impact of visitations to Cabela's will be on generations of designers and artists in Michigan. . . Where else have you had the simulation of the experience about being below the skin of the water on the lake—from the perspective of a fish? Beyond primarily manufacturing the simulacra, this place also delivers experiences that are unavailable in the absence of these kinds of domains.

I am also curious what kind of source material resides in this place for designers—beyond artifice—the effects of looking through the cloudy water of the tank, or the qualities of the lighting emerging through the water and presented on the screens. In some ways there is much to mine here that might start to drive material decisions in an architectural proposition. I do not mean replicating the explicit techniques that have been used to make the place, but actually in this aquarium, there is a pretty rich set of effects that the exhibition delivers and which may translate as source material for glazing patterns and lighting projections for example.

D23
Are you talking about the qualities and not the material itself?

GT
Yes, the available effects delivered by the material combinations in the absence of the contexts of their artifact specificity: tendencies, typologies, or species of effects. My suspicion is that one could mine an entire approach to architectural landscape production solely from a reading of this place, that might actually be really profound. It would emulate in no way the physical construct of Cabela’s, but treat it as a rich source by virtue of what it gathers and projects.
How does visitation to this place recondition our expectations of the real? Through amplification, does authentic encounter now pale in comparison? After two species per hundred square feet, what then of an entire day behind a duck blind with only two squirrels and a Canadian goose coming into view?

That is interesting. I am not reading it as a presentation of an expectation so much as the conscious production of a completely unreal model of space-time. It delivers a digestible wilderness in an incredibly compact time frame. You could spend your entire life tracking in various climates and various ecologies and never see every one of these species, even if you were to devote the rest of your life to their pursuit in the wild. But here, it is curated and presented for convenient consumption. There is a bobcat leaping off a rock over there, attacking one of the other display items—the stagecraft of this place is attempting to deliver an intense immersive experience. How we choose to read and assign value to simulation or authenticity is entirely dependent on our individual belief structures and the cultural conditions in which we operate. In the end, one really has to hunt for the compelling in a place such as this. From my perspective, I would like to remain somewhat open in this regard, openness must be accompanied by attentiveness; it is the ability to become truly attentive in this environment that I struggle with the most.

So could a place like this help you see or observe better because it is so overwhelming; you begin to pick up more details as you look again and again? The next time you are out in any landscape, maybe one has a different view of things?

In terms of my own experience, the immersion within conditions of landscape (and I am trying to be inclusive of all landscapes and a gradient from explicitly constructed to the most seemingly untouched) has been a profound source in terms of imagining and projecting new architectures. Critical to this however, has been a condition of extreme attention that accompanied immersion. At 6:00 a.m. in the morning, pumping water on the edge of a gneiss outcropping, watching the mist rolling off the lake's surface, and catching the pattern of a lichen striation has as much to do with one's openness to notice these phenomena in that context as their actual presence and availability.

There is so much source material in terms of motivation and inspiration for design that is available simply through direct experience in the world.

How we arrive at that state of attentiveness is the challenge. I struggle to get to that state, and find it much more possible in the absence of overstimulation and distraction. Once there, the value for me is being able to simply see the essence of a thing—in the absence of its cultural readings—pure matter, phenomena, and effect. As someone who makes things, it is in this manner that I learn most from existing things, through simultaneous readings of instrumental characteristics and their atmospheric implications. So for me, the effort has always been to evacuate stimulation in order to become receptive. Emptiness and solitude are more conducive, but on the other hand, it is possible to find silence in a cacophony. If one can cultivate that ability, there is much to be extracted from this place, or from any place...

You can even purchase a boat here (pointing across tackle kit display).

You can get the boat full of gear and a truck to tow it. This is also staging a reading about the display that gives the truck an honorific position not dissimilar to the mammalian display. We start to read the threatened species of the V12 4x4 in the late 2010, “Let us defend and protect this species as we would the others that have perished.” It is the true sport utility vehicle presented here for the hard-core in its natural environment. This is where you belong - the logical conclusion to manifest destiny and the consumption of the wild. A new era of post-carbon pioneering.

The experience is ensured by the formalization of the national park system declaring landscapes as formal national monuments; then, layering in the right to mobility and the freedom to travel or to have that authentic experience is formative in the development of national character and agenda. That whole layer of cultural history and national identity is a continuous narrative that structures this entire space. But it is interesting that it is the agenda that is now being perpetuated by a corporate agent—precisely the same ethos that was being inadvertently furthered by the formation of the National Parks.
To what extent is the perception of landscape through modes of mobility relevant in the formation of a national identity?

The cultural historian James Raffan has argued that this question is essential in understanding differences in Canadian and American national identity. His thesis is that the 49th parallel describes a geological construct where to the north are located a network of lakes and rivers that support the proliferation of birch trees, to the south, we find an absence of east-west water routes. Raffan suggests that western movement in the US was driven by the technology of the horse and wagon and the logistics of staging successful “waves” of penetration into the wild; the Canadian experience was alternately staged on the networked systems of water, limited to its shores and facilitated by the technology of the birchbark canoe. He goes on to discuss this thesis across a range of considerations that juxtapose descriptions of collaboration, communications, and the expedition of extraction facilitated by the canoe, as well as describing the particular cultural influences of the operations of paddling and portage.

There is something very interesting in the nature of his argument—the conditions and characteristics that surround the ways in which we discover the world around us are central to the ways in which we view and navigate through it.
CITE SITED

PATRICK LYNCH
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS

primary advisor /
TOM BURESH

secondary advisor /
DANIELLE GUTHRIE
1 PARK SPACE
2 APERTURE SPACE

ANTI-GOOGLE EARTH

Structuring of the two sites began through factual, fictional, and fabricated stories with a greater interest engaging in heuristic fictions—an act by which allowing certain fictions a level of truth—I was able to mediate and interpret the city’s and site’s complexities. It is through the convergence of perception that an architecture in stasis will dissolve.
Rewriting itself and seeking balance, the modern landscape is never complete. This dynamic landscape is not clean; it is neither static nor certain, but rather a conglomerate of contention.

Always in search of equilibrium, a city thrives on instability.

Two sites, an embedded alleyway and radioactive park, stake their claim within the modern landscape. Confronted with the hyper flows of the contemporary city, these sites must remain swift. No longer can an architecture of omnipotence declare to be an anchor for urban stability, for the city has passed it by.

To keep pace, Cite Sited implements a new lens to empower an alternate site perception. This lens exists in opposition to the panoptic view of the figure/ground and Google Earth. Instead, explorations focus on the city as one of compositional fragments, fleeting moments, adjacent engagements, and inflated realities.
The installation, the third site, further describes my read of the original two sites rather than proposing a formal response. It does not provide the panoptic view, but rather demands a fractured aggregation towards understanding. The original reads of the alleyway and radioactive park are embedded into this new site through obstructions, detached views, and incomplete wholes.

The razzle-dazzle camouflage on the outside of this third site mimics that which was used during World War I. Its intent was not to hide, but rather to obscure the speed, direction, and number of ships in a fleet. Like the ships, this site is not intended to mask the work that lies behind, but rather emphasize my intent towards a read of partial moments and of obscuring the complete whole. These explorations are in search of architecture that is bottom up, instead of imposing form upon the modern landscape, demanding the city shifts around it.
THIRD SITE
The wall is not about curating the visualizations, but to further explore the structure of the alleyway and radioactive park. It is designed to never allow for an encompassing view of the work. Its overall position along the permanent wall and its fractured corners play a role in emphasizing moments rather than a full frontal understanding. A viewer looking at the outside of the wall can only find glimpses of what lies behind.

CONFIGURATION
The drawings take advantage of the form of the wall. The layout facilitates deeper readings of individual drawings rather than comparative analysis. Their positions begin to narrate the reads of an entrenched alleyway and exposed park. The visualizations of the alleyway are found within the most compressed moments of the wall.

ARMATURE
In contrast to the alleyway visualizations hidden behind the wall, the overhead metal armature fully exposes the park. However, just as the park cannot be readily occupied, these visualizations can only be seen once removed, through a pair of mirrors.

CAMOUFLAGE
First used during World War I, razzle dazzle camouflage’s intent was not to hide, but rather to obscure the speed, direction, and number of ships in a fleet. Like the ships, this site is not intended to mask the work that lies behind, but rather, emphasize intent towards the need for a more focused reading of the work.
HYPERDOMESTICITY
A MEMORIAL ACT

KEVIN J DENG
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS

primary advisor / JASON YOUNG
secondary advisor / DAWN GILPIN
INTRODUCTION
What if we identified and articulated our domestic spaces not by their utility, but by some anticipated performance?

Domestic performances can take several forms, Hyper-Domesticity intends to investigate only a few. The contemporary kitchen has become the stage for performing culinary arts. No longer are we satisfied with the simple preparation of food to consume and digest. Food has become an everyday source of pleasure and indulgence, from the skillful preparation of ingredients, to presentation, tasting, and finally reflection. The kitchen is where this journey begins, and is designed to intensify this sequence.

With increased access to information and an increased degree of control in the domestic, the contemporary dweller is well armed to mediate the dangerous, uncontrollable outside environment as it perpetually tries to infect his or her interior sanctuary. Rules and proper behavior are set for maintaining order and hygiene to avoid disease and chaos.

ORIENTATION
We are always working. Even at home, in supposedly relaxed conditions, away from the office or job site, productivity and management of progress continues. This industry makes itself known in the way we design spaces cognizant of cultural trends and derived expectations.

Within the framework of domestic events, spatial experiences are crafted as a series of scenes to articulate these trends and performances. At stake is a deeper understanding of our domestic relationship with emerging trends, and a new consciousness in the domestic frontier. This is architecture that creates hyper-consciousness: a hyper-awareness of architecture in domesticity, because domesticity challenges conventional domestic design and traditional programming.

BEGINNING
In moments of intense public engagement, domestic spaces are appropriate for a variety of functions for the sake of event performance. Hosting such an event consumes enormous amounts of energy and attention, leaving room for unintended appropriations and the breakdown of traditional boundaries. After the pressure of the event, domestic spaces become the archeological sites of adaptive and commutative program. Artifacts, discovered and archived, articulate past actions and densities of bodies in an uncommonly public domestic environment.
CHAPTER ONE: THE DOMESTIC THEATER

I approached the front door with some uneasiness. We had only met twice before I was finally invited to one of his famous dinner parties. From the sidewalk, the house gave me the impression of a fortress. The lawn stretched quietly, so not to cause offense. Narrow windows scattered across the stone front façade revealed only small bands of orange-yellow light, and giant wooden doors from the Old World stood guard to the only access point. They are telling me I do not belong here, and I better move along, or else.

I stepped up to the front door. It was open. I could hear the familiar sounds of a kitchen, but inside the room was still dark. I hesitated, but a coworker suddenly emerged and happily welcomed me inside, whispering something indecipherable. I was led, confused, in the dark, along the front wall toward the rest of the party. Their faces were illuminated by the stage, the arena in which our host was delivering his performance.

He spoke in instructions, descriptions, and effects. He never looked up at us, his audience, but maintained complete focus on his task. None of us, his audience, said a word throughout the entire show. As if any disturbance would pollute the purity of his craft. It was in this moment that I suddenly felt the weight of my meager bottle of wine, now cheap and expendable compared to the performance given. I turned and gently placed it on the shelf behind us, anonymous among all the other obligatory gifts.
CHAPTER TWO: MEDIATION

Pull into the garage, park the car, grab the kids out of the car. Take off their shoes and jackets; take off your shoes and jacket. Make sure they wash their hands; make sure you wash your hands.

This is my practice of arrival, and it will be yours as well. Whether you’re coming in through the garage or through the front door, you’ll know how I feel about the outside. It is dirty out there, which is why we have our temporary apparel to shield us from it, and that’s why it should never get too far inside. There is a place for these things, and you’ll feel the need to shed them as soon as you walk through the door. My house is my sanctuary, and I will not have your pollutants just lying around. Make your way into the living room or courtyard if you’d like, dinner will be ready soon. A few people are drinking outside if you’d like to join them. If you do go out, though, make sure to leave the slippers in the courtyard and to wash your hands again.

CHAPTER THREE: A PLACE YOU SHOULD NOT BE

Great, another one of these dumb dinners. Last time we were here past 10 p.m.! What am I supposed to do for three hours, by myself?! I’m not even allowed to bring my iPod. Grown-ups are so boring. They just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk.

When we got there, I went from the center of attention to getting no attention at all in less than five minutes. I was the only one less than 45 and the only one shorter than four feet. Huge smiling faces and pinching fingers, again, then suddenly a forest of tall legs and pleated khakis. I got out of there as quick as I could and started to look around. The house was pretty big and everything was super clean. Nothing was out of place or messy, and I could smell something weird cooking on the stove. Why can’t we just have pizza? Everyone likes pizza, anyway. Hmph. Everything looked expensive and no fun. I started getting into drawers and cabinets, checking things out for hidden treasure.

The grown-ups went to another room now. I found a roll of clear tape and began wrapping it around everything: pencils, cups, chairs, you name it; oh and also taping drawers shut. Hah! They didn’t notice, of course, but they will. They hadn’t stopped yapping ever since we got here, and I could still hear them as they disappeared around a corner. Fine, I’ll disappear too. See how they like it to be totally ignored. I looked around for doors to open or closets to get into, and eventually found the basement stairs.
HYPER-DOMESTICITY: A MEMORIAL ACT
KEVIN DENG
CHAPTER FOUR:
A JOURNALIST’S NOTEBOOK
Saturday, June 20, 2009—Dinner Party at 422 Livingston Avenue.

5:00 p.m.—I arrive at the host’s house. No sign of dinner preparation, though everything is ultra clean and organized.

5:14 p.m.—First guests arrives. Man and woman, couple. Gift: red wine.

5:42 p.m.—Final guests arrive. 6 men, 6 women total; and me. The host begins cutting vegetables. 8 gifted bottles of wine now stand on the counter top.

6:30 p.m.—Guests are socializing, groups of 2, 3, 4... talking and watching the host cook. Various locations.

6:42 p.m.—Tame conversations: weather, politics, movies, etcetera. Caught a strange glance from across the kitchen, between man no. 3 and woman no. 6. They approach each other and without pausing, they exchange small stone figurines: one white, one blue. They’re quickly pocketed.

6:55 p.m.—More strange connections. They’re exchanging chess pieces.
   Dining room—man no. 2, woman no. 5: red bishop for white pawn
   Living room—man no. 5, man no. 1: white knight for blue rook
   Balcony—woman no. 1, man no. 3: red queen for black bishop
Many others, but lost track. Tried to make eye contact, but no takers. Have not spoken more than 5 words to any guest.

7:20 p.m.—Dinner is served. Host describes the meal as everyone sits. I anticipated more confusion over seating, but everyone knows their place.

7:55 p.m.—Excellent food. Citrus salmon was favorite. Chatted with woman no. 4, to my right. I ask about the exchanges, the chess pieces. She acts confused. Laughs. Man no. 2 calls across the table to her.

8:32 p.m.—Dinner and dessert are consumed, people scatter. More mysterious exchanges.

9:47 p.m.—Wine is affecting people’s volume and clarity of speech. Conversations turn to gossip, philosophy, and poorly re-enacted internet videos. Exchanges continue. Haven’t yet noticed a pattern.

10:40 p.m.—People getting tired. Exchanges have stopped some time ago.

11:12 p.m.—Most guests have left. Man and woman no. 3 and I stay to help clean up. Work is quickly finished. The process is familiar to them.

11:32 p.m.—I leave the host’s house. Many unanswered questions. Chess pieces. Chess game? Social hierarchy?

12:07 a.m.—Can’t find car. All streets look similar. Went back to house, lights were out.

12:23 a.m.—Found car. Inside, red pawn chess piece atop a note:
   “07-18, 6 p.m.”
   The story continues another day.
CHAPTER FIVE: HOME ALONE

“Hmm. It’s Thursday. There’s a game on tonight.”
In his youth, friends would gather at his doorstep almost every night. He hosted poker nights, game nights, dinners, parties, after parties, and morning-after parties. At any decent hour there would be anywhere from three to fifteen people around his house drinking and talking, watching a movie, football in the back yard, and so on.

A high paying job and flexible hours afforded him this degree of socialization, as well as the equipment to support it. The big house with big kitchen and big living room; long dining table with seats for ten; couch, loveseat, and recliner, widescreen TV with surround sound, Playstation, Xbox, Nintendo Wii, each with four controllers, and so on.

In recent years, though, friends came less and less. Responsibilities piled up, people moved across the city or across the country, new friendships were made. The internet and cell phones made it easy to keep up with old friends without actually having to see them. People were excited to hear about Daniel and Sara’s engagement, Samantha’s baby, Greg’s new job in London, and so on, everything and anything through Facebook. Tom also commented on Jack’s note: “I got a new car!”

So it goes.

But he doesn’t want things to change. He keeps the light on, buys the new TV, new games and movies, and keeps too much beer in the fridge. Not waiting, really, perhaps hoping, though. Hoping, that open curtains, bright kitchen lights, and the flicker of a widescreen at 11 p.m. are still signs of action, of entertainment, and of life.

CHAPTER SIX: THE MORNING AFTER

Immediately, I knew I had a rough day ahead of me, but I had no regrets. When you wake up in your own bed wearing the same clothes you did the previous night, with your shoes still on, it is a sign. A sign that you’re still young, damn it, that you have the stamina to stay up until dawn and sleep in ‘til noon and still get away with it. So kick off your shoes and pull the covers over your eyes; the sun isn’t even over the trees yet.

But I can’t. As dysfunctionally romantic as it would be, my brain doesn’t escape the immediate responsibilities of the day. What time is it? Ugh, what year even? My mind is floating, detached from my body, but my senses eventually land on the chaos that awaits me: dry leaves in the kitchen, plates and cups in the living room, forgotten sweaters, coats, and smudged footprints all narrate a past density of bodies in motion.

Twenty-three empty wine bottles. Nine wine glasses. I’m almost proud.

A set of keys and a jacket, standard party lost and founds. Damn it, did I leave the back door open? Of course it had to rain, too.

My house, my supposed sanctuary, now contaminated by the glut of hospitality.

Oh god, the bathroom. I will leave that for later.

Etcetera. The morning after: the archive of a domestic indulgence.
CONDITIONING BETWEEN THE IN-BETWEEN

A. SCOTTIE MCDANIEL

JASON YOUNG

DAWN GILPIN

primary advisor/
secondary advisor/

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS
Our awareness of the world around us is weak. Convenience and comfort are stunting our perception and diluting our ability to interpret. We are caught in a trap, afraid to evolve. Our understanding of space is dependent on references and associations linking our (not so distant) past to the present. The world has been reduced to signs and symbols that construct a representation of reality. Standardization and commodification have induced society into perceptual hibernation. Familiar databases undergo processes of inclusion and of exclusion, our biases of reading are exposed, we are then forced to use interpretation as a tool of understanding. A thin line exists In-Between beauty and grotesque, brilliance and insanity, mundane and insight, and bold and insecure that challenges our means of perception. Hybrid conditioning allows the viewer to engage the known, while provoking the reassessment of our accepted lens. Hybridity, deployed as a methodology and pursued as a result, offers a negotiation between known parental conditions and the emergent other.

**PROCESS**

*Conditioning the In-Between* is loosely related to an original interest in the strange methods in which we collect, organize, and store within the domestic setting: storage units, china cabinets, thrift stores, estate sales, closets, junk drawers, garages, etcetera. Consequently, these are the collections formed.

A collection of images, objects, and situations that seemed strange or displaced, filing each away as a database. Each piece within the collection of oddities needed to provoke interpretation or reconsideration. Maarten Baas’s Plastic Chair in Wood asks one to reevaluate a common form as beautiful. The packaged, produced watermelons acknowledge that we live in a world of industrial agriculture. And Tejo Remy’s Chest of Drawers asks us to rethink function and form in accepted objects. The database is a collection of strange, abnormal, ambiguous, and quirky that enables us to see the space differently.

The American Dream of a home is the most precious cultural norm embedded into our minds. Despite drastic changes in the modern family, the deeply rooted idea of private space continues without modification. By *Conditioning the In-Between*, the American Dream is fractured and paired with the non-domestic program, constructing home as an area both private and public. The boundaries of home contain the art gallery + dining + fire station, bathing + laundry + park, library + kitchen + office, and sleeping + retail + living. By separating established domestic spaces into an urban landscape, our values of home are questioned and our discomfort reveals the contradictions between needs and wants.

The work takes place in a generic American landscape, to avoid biases towards particular locations. Copied, pasted, and cropped, the site model is an assembly of many cities: Portland, Oregon; Detroit, Michigan; Raleigh, North Carolina; Brooklyn, New York; etcetera. Avoiding site specificities makes it possible to remove place as a catalyst for design. Rather than assessing the work on its feasibility in a particular location, the urban context is used to invoke our internal database of cities we have encountered or imagined. Intersecting grids, city blocks, sidewalks, traffic, storefronts, fire escapes, etcetera are all instrumental in creating a context with voids to infill the hybrid building types.
FOUR MONTAGES

The four sites are designed as compositions using items from each of the drawers. These montage-like site plans act as a base drawing to extract and obscure. The site drawings attempt to dissolve objects and symbols within floor plans, sections, and perspectives. Each site plan is a distortion of the original composition loaded with preferences and design decisions. The familiarity within these drawings offers clues for interpretation and encourages the reading of new form and spaces.

After the creation of new sites, space was reconsidered and understood within each plan. By taking cues from the site plans, new formal and spatial conditions were designed through personal interpretation and drawer interests.

SLEEPING + RETAIL + LIVING

The sleeping + retail + living drawer offers spaces with temporal partnerships and slippages. The effect is a series of overlapping spaces with no definitive orientation and indistinguishable boundaries. Privacy invades the public domain, and the public in turn becomes partially private. Experiencing this hybrid situation is a condition of being both lost and found. Each program within the drawer has a shared interest in spatial recirculation, flexibility, overlapping, and alteration, producing an infill-like architecture that contradicts the generic urban rationality. This drawer responds to the spectacle’s penetration into the domestic and brings into question boundaries of personal and collective space.
LIBRARY + KITCHEN + OFFICE DRAWER

Methods of collecting, indexing, and cataloging are problematized in the library + kitchen + office drawer. Whether ordered alphabetically, functionally, or topically, we have become accustomed to the standardized patterns that organize our spatial environment. We are conditioned to remember how these programs are typically organized, and therefore, each space is oddly similar. Fruits and vegetables are located in the front right. Dairy is in the far left corner. Fiction is separated from non-fiction and references. The logic of their organization continues to dull the ability to draw cross associations. The drawer attempts to retool our understanding of spatial organizational systems. It questions how our decisions would vary if items were organized by expiration date, color, origin, or theme. By implementing constant reshuffling of items, users experience a new awareness to spatial structuring.

ART + RESTAURANT + FIRESTATION

The art gallery + dining + fire station drawer offers a spork-like hybrid condition of incommensurable dualities. Similar to Maarten Baas’s Plastic Chair in Wood, the drawer downplays the strangeness of program alignments as subtle discrepancies. Each space is integrated despite dissimilarity and contraction, resulting in a cohesive whole of distinctive parts. The drawer reveals our bias towards programmatic segregation, even under the veil of mixed use. Imaginative spatial comparisons and connections are possible by merging programs with contrasting association.
BATHING + LAUNDRY + PARK

A common need of integration was extracted from the bathing + laundry + park drawer with an interest in mutual sharing. The drawer’s contents were separated into horizontal sections to be layered upon each other. Material and formal consistencies fuse common references to each layer. Experientially the Lawn + Laundry + Bath would provoke emergent associations and radical spatial discrepancies. Each layer seems to belong, yet previous conditioning rejects the hybrid. The drawer is both oddly familiar and conventionally surreal, exposing collective tendencies and preferences.
Working through databases foregrounds discussions on inclusion and exclusion. The synthetic and logistical understanding of each hybrid type emerges through processes of collection, composition, erasure, and extraction. Conscious intuition of what to reveal and conceal is exaggerated in *Conditioning the In-Between*. The work acknowledges that all drawings and models contain selective and withheld information. The potential of interpretation and spatial imagination has been challenged to translate each abstracted architectural context into form and space. Scales shifts and functional contradictions are employed to view space as other, simultaneously familiar and unknown.

Representation is woven into the work’s intention through referencing traditional drawings and techniques. The drawings require interpretation, and they intentionally never fully allow the viewers to settle into them. Each reveals multiple viewpoints, drawing types, and details, but conceals complete design. The work is interested in the potential of hybrid representation (diagrammatic rendering, two-dimensional models, and figure-ground perspective). By blurring the boundaries of established methods of architectural representation, we question the pre-existing lens and knowledge and map into design.

**REFLECTION**

The work of a thesis forces one to make decisions along the way, as one moves forward, backward, up, down, right, and left; often finding yourself working diligently on areas just out of grasp. In the end, one finds his / herself with an immense body of work, with feelings of pride and intimidation—pride in finishing the work, yet intimidation because one still does not know what it all means. Expectations are thrown out the window, yet it all falls into place. Sometimes it ends with a building, sometimes a new way of working or methodology, sometimes a narrative is played out on the wall, and sometimes we end up with artifacts produced from testing our thesis. We conduct our presentation attempting to connect the dots between our visual evidence and ideas. But what, really, is a thesis?

*Conditioning the In-Between* is interested in moments of awaking, being able to see things differently than rational minds want to acknowledge. I have now only realized that I unknowingly became the test subject of my thesis.
Ben Nicholson is an Associate Professor of Architecture, Interior Architecture, and Designed Objects at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Nicholson studied at Cooper Union, 1974-1979, and received his Master of Architecture in 1982 from Cranbrook Academy of Art. His work has been exhibited internationally in New York, Chicago, Venice, and Montreal. His work and writing have been included in numerous publications and he has authored *A Tool for Fair Measure* and *The World Who Wants It?* Ben has an intense interest in New Harmony, Indiana, where he currently resides, and which is the subject of his studio as the winter 2010 Max M. Fisher Visiting Professor at Taubman College. He delivered the perimeter studio lecture “Rural America on Steroids” on October 15, 2009.
You went to school not too far from Ann Arbor; did you get a chance to stop by while you were here?

No, I did not have enough time. I spent three years at Cranbrook. Actually, I spent nearly four years at Cranbrook. In Daniel Libeskind's era, you graduated in two years if it did not go well. If things did work out, you graduated in three years. It is the complete opposite to what happens now in academia, where if you are super smart you graduate early! They were remarkable years with a remarkable group of people and incredibly good fun; we would laugh ourselves stupid.

I was part of the first generation of students under directors who were Cooper Union educated, rather than being from Eliel Saarinen's stock. At that time, Cranbrook served as the \textit{de facto} graduate school for Cooper Union and it got progressively more religious with the leadership. Libeskind is a very spiritual person, but he liked the pragmatism of the intellectual discussion. Then Dan Hoffman came, and after that, Peter Lynch. Peter was probably the most ineffable of the three architects and understood the beauty of quietly laying bricks and stones, akin to the method of sculptor Andy Goldsworthy—it was a curriculum of more \textit{do} than \textit{speak}, which has its dangers, because it tends to be not self-critical.

Cranbrook was always the "little engine that could," and still has an important international presence. But to have that presence, you had to actually (A) do something, and (B) articulate it. I have not followed the current period of Cranbrook: with its president an ex-magazine man, it is surprising that we have not heard much about what is going on.

Dimensions 23 wants to take a different role than the previous editions in asking lecture contributors for a personal bent; we want a bias or engagement in something that is more latent. Last night, some members of the staff had a conversation about your lecture regarding the labyrinths in the sand. In your lecture you said, "How do we start to think about design in a way that is less about building and more about the way we really experience space?" You explicitly referred to the labyrinths as architecture, and most people would not consider them architecture. It appears that there is a three-dimensional sense of space in a labyrinth; as you walk in it, you do not merely pass through, but you actively occupy the space between lines, hedges, etcetera. One consciously and methodically moves through space.

Yes. Well, in this I would refer to the Classical education that I stumbled into. The column in the round, the pilaster attached to a wall, things that emerge from the surface in bas-relief, and things that are completely flat always fascinate me. Mathematicians and geometers have always understood that the third dimension comes out of the second dimension: when geometers draw a circle on the ground they can simultaneously visualize a sphere. They move very quickly between the second and third dimensions.
I do not see the labyrinth drawings projected up into three-dimensions as if they were walls; I see them having a presence of three dimensionality in their two dimensionality. Having learned to make a quick and ready translation between the two, physically making the third dimension is not necessary. I believe that in looking at anything—this Tabasco bottle for example—you can compress it down and make it into a disc or morph it into something that we can all sit in. You can take the cap off the bottle, turn it upside down, swell it out, and poke a few holes in it; you then have something to live in. With some thought, anything you see around you can twist, change, flatten, or expand.

The labyrinth project I am currently working on is rich because it so compressed, so essential and very efficient at describing space. You could consider it to be the quintessential green piece of work. For me, this is an example of the real green: not to build anything, but reconsider how to use places and yet still have a full experience.

You could certainly respond to this by saying, “Look, labyrinths are basically a bunch of dance steps. Why do you not just call it choreography and grow up?” Well, you could say that is true. The difference between a labyrinth and choreography is the deliberation in the path and the constancy of the ground plane. You could then argue, “Labyrinths exist everywhere you go in the world.” I would agree, but the difference is evident when you maintain a piece of ground and care for a piece of ground to the extent that you take possession of it. By impressing your feet into the earth, you take responsibility for that space and start a relationship with that particular piece of ground.

D23
Then does that bring meaning to the space?

BN
That is a good question; I would not call it “meaning,” because it suggests there is an articulate description as to what it is. The meaning we are looking for here is to touch upon qualities that are not adequately described. Maybe it is time to figure out what sensory and perceptive qualities and engagements we should go after: we know that there is a quality around certain events, but we do not have the language or the measurement system to determine what it is. Once you have recognized a new spatiality, the first thing to do is figure out how to build that quality or speak about it to other people so they can access it. Perhaps these are the true tasks of the architect and theorist.

D23
In the lecture you spoke about the need to stop worrying about meaning...

BN
Just to give you an example, green architecture. Aspects of it have been so corruptive—the commercial way it is often practiced has despoiled the notion of meaning. Aside from the few well meaning projects, so much of new building talks in terms of it having a good ecological footprint. We are not stupid here; there are other options. You could opt to stay in an existing building and wear a woolly hat and be just as warm, but you will have changed your behavior. Alternatively, and this is the usual course, a new building is made to be efficient, allowing the occupier to walk around an air-conditioned room at 70 degrees in a tee shirt. In essence, nothing has changed in your behavior; you have the same abusive habits at half the price. Whilst you are just as warm in both situations, the second way has a deeply flawed sense of ethics regarding consumption of energy and materials.
So when a building is justified by it being called “ecologically green,” it suggests that the meaning of that building is that it is good for the planet, when in fact that is a fallacy. The meaning is the excitement of engaging another round of hard-core technology; “Green Bling” is the real meaning; the thrill and the excitement of getting new stuff. Just be honest. I am calling for a five-year time out (which, of course, the recession is going to give us anyway). This is why it is good to have recessions, so you do not get too wrapped up in the frenzy. Students in this period of time are heading out into a dry architectural profession. On the other hand, you have the opportunity to be part of a reflective period, which is just as exciting, even though fate has cast your time and this is something you cannot do anything about (laughing).

D23

Who has stopped worrying about meaning? Is there anyone to read, either today or in the past, someone not generally discussed who you feel is important? The best references are generally found through conversations.

BN

If you ask, I would recommend a closer reading and observation of what is actually happening. That is where I would go with that. You can look at dust on the top of the wall and start to read and wonder about it. I have never been one to read much about contemporary architectural theory, but I do listen to what people are saying.

D23

What about classical texts, and not just architecture?

BN

Love ‘em. Just love ‘em. The pieces of classical literature I am dying to read are the Roman’s techniques of public speaking. The text *Momus*, by L.B. Alberti that I referred to yesterday is absolutely fantastic. I am interested in reading minds that are very broad ranging and touch on all sorts of qualities.
We know that Alberti wrote about architecture, but he also wrote about love, the family, and political satire. He was able to write about painting from the point of view of the painter, as well as from the point of view of the viewer, the person seeing it. Those sorts of differences are amazing, and to have one mind cover all of these areas is really exciting. Alberti was also a priest, working in the administration of the Roman church; he was very cosmopolitan, clearly a wealthy and fascinating man. Whenever I can find someone who does many kinds of things, I pay attention.

**D23**

You are very interested in geometry, which is very quantitative and finite. But then you are also interested in the senses, feeling... you referred to the "sixth sense" in your lecture. How do you reconcile the two?

**BN**

Good question. It is a classic struggle every age deals with. Geometry is a means of describing and wondering what it is that is being described. In my work on the Laurentian Library of Michelangelo, a part that really consumed a lot of time was figuring out how knowledge within the library was organized. On the left hand side of the Reading Room, tucked behind the entrance door, is the Catholic 'Index' of forbidden books that includes tracts on English magic as well as Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Then you reach the Italian (vulgar tongue) poets, the Latin poets, and the Greek poets. Next, there are four desks of books I will describe in a minute. Lastly, you find Christian texts that include church law, sermons, The Fathers of the Church, the New Testament, and the Old Testament texts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Now, between these two groups of books, the poets and Christianity, are the four desks of the Quadrivium; that is, books on geometry, arithmetic, music, and geography or astronomy. It also includes the architecture treatise of Vitruvius.

In looking at that layout, it becomes clear that the cataloguing librarian considered architecture to be a device by which you enable a conversation between the poetic works of humankind and the works of God. Architecture is given a place along with geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. The books allowed for discussion to take place. It is a good model and it makes a lot of sense to me.

You cannot invent geometry; it is just there to be uncovered. The practice of geometry is a language within which tough questions become apparent. When you speak about emotion on one hand, and then geometry on the other hand, I would change that question to say that an emotion is the link that exists between the things you know and the things that are really hard for you to comprehend. Likewise, the Quadrivium is there to help come to terms with the emotion and the difficulty of trying to figure out what that question is, to know where you are and understand why you are here. Emotion and geometry are languages to enable the asking of deeper questions.

**D23**

So is anyone ever going to figure out the answer to those questions?

**BN**

It is about the journey that is taken. You go to questions like that with the full knowledge that it is impossible to figure it out, but it is worth trying anyway. You do your best to understand the problem and then it falls like a leaf at the moment you think you get it, and then someone else picks the task up and it changes. It is a living question that will always be elusive, yet has moments of respite when you...
can rest. A difficult question is asked, replied to, and then a few minutes’ rest is granted. Then comes the next one. I do not think it is a question of goal in the way you describe it. The goal here is to be open to the majesty of interesting things: the ineffable moment.

I am more interested in the sensory experiences of a space; the way that a space acts on you, rather than form or meaning. At Michigan here, there are multiple classes on parametric modeling, environmental technology classes, or the required site operations course. There is interest in it, and the courses help us with the technical skills required to work in the field. I would say if there is anything missing from our curriculum, it is a discussion-led format or seminar on how to build, design, and explore with the full consideration of the spatial and sensory qualities.

At the Art Institute, there are 20 Teacher Assistant (TA) positions. Yet the TAs have been taken away from the circle of humanities within the department. You cannot get a TA to help you with your architectural theory class because all of the TAs are being used to help out in the digital curricula. It is just mind-boggling that the leaders would fall for such a myopic and foolish distribution of labor. It is the equivalent of dumping the art classes in high school and using the resources to pay for the school’s marching band. There is a biological need for the humanities, and technological classes cannot substitute for these questions. In the end it is pedagogically destabilizing.

D23
At Michigan right now, there is a lot of focus on digital fabrication technology. Nobody will deny it being beneficial, but it seems like a hugely disproportionate amount of time, energy, and money is devoted to that aspect of academia. It would be foolish not to have an interest in software and fabrication technologies; it influences one’s design methodology, but school is a finite amount of time. We understand that you need to engage in the digital realm as soon as you can because it is ongoing and developing. You are never going to come to an answer, but these thoughts and questions also never go out of date. It is the one facet of architecture that has existed since the beginning of time and will never be just a trend. Your average person, with no training in architecture or design, may not walk into a space and feel the ineffable. It is an architect’s job to provide and communicate that experience.

BN
Actually, I do think that the average Joe can feel the ineffable, although he may not know how to articulate it, or even be interested in doing so. But an architect needs to know both the ineffable and the technical, and for the lucky ones they occur simultaneously in a work, because of each other. Good pedagogical leadership will find a way for both to be happy in each other’s company. It is a fortunate person who is able to precipitate that and it happens only too rarely.

D23
The ineffable moment is intriguing; I wonder if there is anything more you could tell us about it?

BN
You can look the word up: it means something that defies description. But even if we do not know the meaning, we know the word. Humans have a sense
of what the ineffable is. The word ineffable feels feminine, and its sound is onomatopoeic. You can look through the word and know you have been through it to the other side. It has laciness to it; it is a feathery word. You do not need to know what the word means to have the word be useful to you. By way of describing the word like this, I am trying to get to what ineffable means to me. That would be my attitude towards the ineffable: something that is feminine, that you can look through and know you have been touched during the passage, but you do not know what it was that touched you. What I am enjoying about this conversation is that your questions are asking for clarification of the terms describing my interest in the sixth sense.

Looking for words that could describe a new spatial construct is going to be useful for architecture. Architecture is always keen to investigating these moments. The City College of New York’s book *Ineffable Architecture* is coming out this year, following a conference that happened a couple of years ago. The notion is beginning to trickle out and after it trickles, the terms will be easier to describe. That is where it is at now: we are measuring the terms, trying to understand the terms.

Are you familiar with a book titled *House of Leaves*? It has a sixth sense about it, a spooky ethereal quality. It is postmodern literature and the footnotes are longer than the text itself.

All of the trouble in this book starts when the guy living in this normal suburban house realizes the house measures larger on the inside than it does on the outside. Then he discovers a passageway that was not there the day before. It goes off from there into different literary experiments that, in writing, some people like and some people do not. This talk about a specific quality or sensory experience made me think of it.

**D23**

Is this what you are getting at when you use the phrase, *sixth sense*?

**BN**

I am really talking about ghosts and poltergeists and things that go bump in the night; when you go into a room and feel a presence. You do not know how to quantify it, but something is definitely there. It is the kind of energy that is indefinable and yet present.

Robert Owen’s son, Robert Dale Owen, was part of a fairly extensive group of Spiritualists operating in the middle of the 19th century who were doing everything they could to measure the other side; that is communicating with the dead. Spiritualists were frequently hardcore scientists, legislators, and men and women of letters: Robert Dale Owen established the Smithsonian Museum and wrote the legislation for its creation. The Smithsonian Museum is all about science, hardcore science. Owen wrote the book, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, and there were many people at that time who were into this. The spiritualism movement collapsed, probably ridiculed, and I am now reading about how scientists have done their best to quantify something they feel needs to be spoken about, yet is immeasurable. Isaac Newton wrote about this sort of thing as well.
D23
You are not looking for an answer to this sixth sense though, correct? Is it more about the investigation?

BN
Yes, that is certainly true. What I am interested in is being led into a place where a wholly different set of questions are ready to be posed and then go after those. At this point, I do not know what those questions are going to be, so the project could go in any direction. The territory is fertile yet not very well covered in architecture; I have no idea what will come out. No idea. In that respect, I just want to go in there, look around, and see where it leads me.

D23
This is very interesting because what you are saying is that around that time, the 19th century, there are a lot of like-minded, intelligent individuals talking about the same thing. They know they are talking about the same thing, but because it is the “ineffable” moment they cannot clearly communicate in words.

BN
That is right, it really is spatial. What kind of room would you make that would give you this wonderful quality?

D23
Why do you not investigate that, or make that room?

BN
I am always being asked, “Why do I not actually make rooms?” It is a perennial question.

D23
You have made architecture. You made labyrinths.

BN
Yes, in my own terms. A room of the Appliance House got built and The Loaf House was planned to be built as a pedagogical project, but the politics turned sour and it was just not possible to do. Before I die, I do actually want to have a go at making something three dimensional. I really hope it will happen. So it ain’t over yet (laughing)! It may happen, if the circumstances come around.

Now and again a person who is interested and engages in this question makes an ineffable building. For example, if someone has drawn circles for 20 years and they have been thinking about drawing freely and practicing it, you will feel the 20 years of study in the circle they draw. If someone has never drawn a circle before, it might superficially look the same, but it will not have that quality to it. In a “good” circle, you can just tell there is inquisitiveness, learning, and openness to ideas. And yet, it is just a circle. The choices and the way that it is made will reflect the person’s curiosity and resolve. This is the mark of the buildings, spaces, drawings, and constructs that really turn people on.

I would like to build something, make the same old suburban house, but do it with that kind of care I take with drawing circles. I have come to terms with geometric measurement and could take a few more years to measure the ineffable. Maybe in ten years’ time, I will start making stuff. I do hope I get to this!
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PIRACY

SEN LUI
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS

primary advisor / JASON YOUNG
secondary advisor / DAWN GLIPIN
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PIRACY

Based on research, production, and personal experiences in China and the United States, Twenty-First Century Piracy is a reflective understanding of contemporary Chinese culture; it investigates the dynamic relationship between weak and strong cultures.

Culturally, China plays the role of “the weak culture” in its relationship to American culture. In any discipline, most information is in English. The huge chasm between Chinese and English often makes it impossible to translate. This situation forces the weak to submit to the strong; Chinese people must learn English in order to access information.

The area around the Forbidden City is perhaps the greatest symbol of traditional China. When one peels away this symbol, the “real” Chinese culture is revealed. The Chinese vendors within the Forbidden City speak perfect English without ever studying the language in school; they steal a western skeleton and bury it within a Chinese skin. Vendors are able to build a beautiful “Eastern Dream” for Westerners, all while pursuing their own “Western Dreams.” This process could be described by the term piracy, but who steals, loses, or gains within the piracy?
The failed states of Somalia pushed their people toward the ocean to become pirates. The vast sea allows pirates to flourish unregulated capturing the resources, intellectual property, ideas, culture, and design that fill the ocean. In global systems, the strong seek to profit by having others buy in, but the weak find strength in taking from where they cannot be stopped.

The Chinese people are moving towards a pirate culture, by copying or taking from the West. *Twenty-First Century Piracy* uncovers the linkages between the strong and the weak in economics, culture, politics, urban form, and human motivation. This is not a question of fair or just, or right and wrong.

It is about power, and how it is applied differently by the weak and the strong.

For example, the production of a Nike sneaker pays the laborer two U.S. dollars, but sells for one hundred and twenty US dollars. Furthermore, some Chinese used to enjoy eating small scorpions; however, the traditional food market replaced them with bigger bugs because foreigners like the spectacle and challenge, and they pay more for the experience. Additionally, many “Made in China” products pollute the Chinese environment before arriving in western countries. When the products are used, the countries send their trash back to China to recycle it, but who pays when the thought behind the products or structures are “re-used”??
Many of the next generation of Chinese architects will study in America; they will learn three-dimensional modeling technologies and Western methods. Piracy is usually constrained in a process of the weak gaining strength by not following the rules of the strong. High-end technology can be copied using simpler machinery, and sophisticated design can be reproduced using cheaper labor and blank CDs.

I am the next generation of Chinese architects.

Lebron James, of the Cleveland Cavaliers, is one of the biggest heroes in modern China. The “Lebron James VI” shoe is designed using digital software in Oregon, and then the design is sent to China to make samples. After samples are reviewed and adjustments are made, the sneaker is mass produced in Chinese factories, going through the hands of over one hundred Chinese workers. Its purchase price is one hundred and forty dollars, while those one hundred workers receive two dollars.

After buying the sneaker in a factory store in Michigan for eighty dollars, one hundred hours were spent digitizing the shoe using McNeel Rhinoceros, and one hundred-fifty dollars to create the three dimensional print. I could now take a photo of this model, upload the photo and digital model online, and sell it at ninety-nine dollars per digital copy.

Even more exciting opportunities abound, this digital file could transform into a complete pirating system; each separate piece of the shoe can be re-produced and restructured digitally (or physically), to be used for large scale production. The logo, brand, and marketing are already included in the piracy. One could repeat this process with any shoe and easily complete a fully detailed fake design.
PIRATED PROGRAM
THE FORBIDDEN CITY AS CLASSES
The Forbidden City itself becomes an amazing classroom, one can pick up English to become a guide for visitors or a vendor.

CONSTRUCTION SITE AS BUILDING MATERIAL
Beijing truly is a green city; green mesh and scaffolding cover all buildings under construction. If the school needs to build for another function, they can take used scaffolding from nearby projects and attach it to any building. In Beijing, nobody looks behind the green mesh.

KFC & McDoNDALD’S AS FOOD SUPPLY
KFC and McDonald stores hire people for part time jobs. If one works at lunch and dinner, a working meal is provided. I propose for the students to work one or two hours during lunch and dinner time to using the business as a cafeteria.

NIKE STORES AS ACCOMMODATION
Nike stores hire people to work the night shift as security guards. The store only needs someone to be there overnight in case of emergency, and the store then becomes a free place for students to sleep.

BOOK STORES AS BOOK SUPPLY
The area around the Forbidden City is full of English book stores. You do not need to buy a book to read it, but can read it in store. English language text books are filled with stolen information to help Chinese students pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). Publishers send staff to take every TOEFL and GRE test, but the staff only memorizes questions and compiles them in the study books. Here, the student steals the stolen—they do not need to understand the questions to answer them.
PERFORMANCE

The form of the school may be weak, but the performance is strong. In this territory, which belongs to the weak, every spot that has been conquered by strong power is actually a turning point to fight back, just like the tankers in the ocean of pirates.

There are two paths for the future of Chinese culture; either attract foreigners to learn Chinese, or make the Chinese accent the most prevalent accent in English. How do the Chinese people want their cities to look and feel? Should it be English with a Chinese accent? Will Chinese cities host and reflect new Chinese thoughts?

Without a doubt, the Chinese people can be the best pirates in the world, if they choose that path, to become the strongest of the weak. But this pirate strength will come at a cost: creativity, innovation, and inspiration are all qualities that drive architecture and societies forward. If China decides to become the largest nation of pirate designers, none of these traits are needed, and will not develop. The next generation of Chinese architects will have to grapple the paradoxes of “weak and strong,” “fake and real” throughout their lives. The line between what is real and what is fake continues to blur and becomes harder to discern. By the time this new generation of Chinese architects retire, they will have built more than any ever before, and most likely more than any will ever build again. Hopefully, they will have created something that is worth copying.
This Time is Out of joint

Computation, Politics and Participation

Fellowships in Architecture

G. Britt Eversole

Walter B. Sanders Fellow
“Permutational art is inscribed in filigree on the technological era.”

“Indeed, from our point of view, only the personal and collective generation of form, including not only houses, cities, and surroundings, but also political choice and collective aims, in a perennial dynamic equilibrium with the ecological and ecosocial situation, represents true and complete self-consciousness; it is the indispensable premise for self-realization. . . We are fully aware that without the aid of cybernetic, logical and mathematical tools it is inconceivable that man might overcome present-day ecological and ecosocial complexities. Nevertheless, our first preoccupation concerns the ethical and political use of such tools.”
As streets burned and students occupied buildings, one of the critical projects of the 1960s reconsidered architectural pedagogy to address technological progress, crises of traditional knowledge forms, political radicalism, perceived social irrelevance of the discipline, and the State’s growing authoritarianism over education. It was an international phenomenon with revolutions and counterrevolutions, but a particular set of conducted experiments merit attention for the use of concepts and young technologies that today are our daily bread.

Even if primarily conceptual, the complex geometries, calculus-based mathematics, and kinetic assemblies circumscribing our age were already laced throughout discourse fifty years ago in Italy with a politico-philosophical frame. Designers questioned how one might encourage political autonomy and subjective emancipation by challenging the role of architecture and planning in granting concrete form to institutional and economic authorities; or, in that era’s parlance, planning for power. To threaten the capitalist instrumentalizing of form, whether symbolic or empty, architects sought to empower the citizenry through constructive processes using tactics of participation, play, and self-management, autogestione, realized and expressed through computation, permutational art, povera technique, and self-organizing systems.

Among the most interesting persons working in this vein were Turinese architects Leonardo Mosso and Laura Mosso Castagno. Their research in the Centro Studi di Cibernetica Ambientale ed Architettura Programmatata at the Politecnico di Torino suggested a comprehensive reconsideration of the didactics of planning and design. Mosso and Castagno envisioned a new “ecosocial” model, filtered through the semiotic, anthropological, and ecological literature of the day, encouraging direct popular participation mediated by interactive technology in the management and production of spatial organization. Pursuing an approach to planning no longer based in power, they sought to create relations and potentialities, producing new common languages encouraging the collective alleviation of alienation through the self-management of form. Their research was published in five languages yet gained little traction in Italy as 1970s’ politics declined into terrorism and culture turned to fads. The historical significance of their work derives from its status as an early attempt to integrate indeterminacy and participation toward an agonistic architecture.

In pursuit of a material corollary to their political writings, Mosso revisited the archetypal project of the universal joint reconsidered with a twist. He imagined a “virtual joint” with its center of rotation as a void rather than matter. Fields and frameworks of dynamic joints yielded systems of potential form in a state of constant unfolding. His “proto-utopian” experiment foregrounds negotiation, conflict, and choice, not only regarding the transformation of form itself, but the initial choice to be politically engaged from the outset. The choice of the citizenry to participate was primary, one that can be offered, but not mandated by architecture.

Mosso and Castagno’s chiefly pedagogical project was premised on the disjoinedness between the practice and teaching of architecture and popular needs and problems during an intolerable present. New methods of research were required that would preclude the objectification of power relations in the built environment and avoid producing another generation of dispassionate students. Between the “destruction of the object” and the popular transformation of new tectonic languages, their project sought a political and linguistic re-origination of architecture beyond the designer’s role in perpetuating the power of the few over many.
Marxist theory was completely restructured during the 1960s because it was ill-equipped to address scientific advances that altered the communication of information, increased affective labor, and created new workers, such as the technician. New models incorporated consumer culture, new sociological analytic methods, the crisis of the European in divorcing himself from Soviet totalitarianism, and the failure of revolution due to reforms to capitalism during height of modernist culture. However, other left and militant movements emerged outside party apparatuses and intellectual canon. Anarchists, extra-parliamentary activists, and student organizers sought other approaches to freedom less burdened by theoretical anxieties and more open to visionary action using the tools of technological culture.

The phrase *la sfida elettronica*, the electronic challenge, encapsulates the technological concerns of Italian artists and architects. Aware of British and American computation and cybernetic research, the new specter sweeping across the continent was the promise and peril of technological integration in the arts and planning. As Giuseppe Ciribini noted, late 1960s designers were forced to address a general reversal in emphasis from quantitative calculation to the flux or flow of information, along with the popular diffusion of computation and information decentralization. Integrating design and the computer suggested three areas of architectural research: the technology of human-machine relations and its ergonomic implications; programming technology (software), device, memory compatibility, and

Gianna Colombo, “Spazio-elastico”  
Enzo Mari and Bruno Morassutti, “Composizione modulare”
inter-connectivity. Form and environment were understood through interaction, programming, and information exchange.

Design challenges were not only technological; rapid urban expansion and population increases during the 1950s threatened old city centers and accelerated the almost total human alteration of the landscape, rendering ineffective classic planning techniques. Even as the distinction became increasingly blurred under Carlo Aymonino’s rubric *La città territorio*, designers were encouraged to redefine their role as managing the city’s inherent dynamism and disequilibria between the city and territory. Calling for rigorous study of the potential for politically interrelating technology and planning to foreground dynamism rather than suppress it, Aymonino endorsed popular participation in planning the public sphere.

Philosophers, such as Umberto Eco, began studying new forms of logic, the implications of universal language, and the possibility of endless permutations that render every means of expression a logarithmic combinatorics. While writers such as Nanni Balestrini were generating algorithmic poetry, artists—who Eco called the “Bit Generation”—were producing mechanized, modulated, and “programmed” environments. From the Milanese Gruppo T to Gruppo N in Padova, ZERO in Germany and the Parisian G.R.A.V. (Groupe de recherche d’art visuelle), to the interdisciplinary group surrounding the Turinese Studio di informazione estetica (of which Mosso was a founding member), European artists tapped new media to experiment with visual communication through dynamic stimuli. Programmed art and kinetic art combined technological mediation and inter-activity with moving components and malleable materials articulated as machines of chance and immersive environments. Randomness, seriality, and interaction replaced the figural, “expressing reality in terms of its becoming.” Far from mere visual stimuli without signification, these environmental works drew on communications theory and semiotics to produce highly legible yet indeterminate and open-ended works—a “new objectivity”—that deferred semantic concerns and the artist’s subjective intuition.

Many architects were satisfied with the compositional potential of indeterminacy and seriality, but Mosso saw pedagogical possibility in the intersection of linguistics and computation. The planner, the architect, and their students were the form-givers to power hierarchies; as Vittorio Gregotti and Reyner Banham note, the rethinking of architecture and the city had to occur in universities, not in firms or governmental chambers. Recognizing the paradox of criticizing while critically instrumentalizing the very technologies that contributed to power inequities, Mosso and Castagno argued that tools of calculation and programming were already tools of exploitation; thus, the problem became not how to subvert them but how to harness them toward producing non-alienating, non-hierarchical environments. The times required new technological and formal models, and new forms of representation for teaching design and planning. Mosso and Castagno turned instead to an interactive model of *con ricerca* with students, rejecting the ironic and critical images, street theatriics, technological neo-primitivism, and aesthetic fetishes of the Florentine radicals, Mosso and Castagno turned instead to an interactive model with students of *con ricerca*, “through research.”
In theorizing a “programmed architecture,” Leonardo Mosso often refers to structures and systems, but his work always starts with the joint. The joint is the essential moment of translation within a structure; in linguistic terms, the connection, not the component, is the basis for the constitution of syntax. The joint is the beginning and the registration of any systemic transformation—it is both the moment where multiple components interact as well as the constantly shifting point of relation in an evolving system or topological deformation. However, the singular joint is significant only in relation to all others in the system, especially when structure is conceived as transformational rather than fixed.

Reading Jean Piaget’s Structuralism, Mosso found not only the linguistic basis for his ideas, but also a broad method for postulating the role of architecture as a mechanism of political transition:

“. . . [The] design of the future as structure (in the sense given to us by Piaget as a ‘system of transformation and possibility’) has as an essential condition that everyone designs and that not only the object of design is structural; this is to say that even the system of design activities is structural. In other words, this means that design understood as structure requires also a politics understood as structure. If everyone designs, the structure of designing in addition to the designed object has a different structuration than if it were designed by a few. Thus the structural-ness of the future is only partial if limited to the object and not extended to the process itself and thus to man. In other words, the structural-ness of the process requires the structural-ness of social-political attitudes.”

Structure is understood as a network of relational conditions unfolding diachronously. Design comes to be considered as establishing systems of relationships when the designer’s role is to project systems that encourage and empower a future community to design, program, and plan its spaces. The notion that the structure of language is dynamic was critical for Mosso’s paradigm. He understood the need to find material means for facilitating participatory actions, because language, rather than an elitist imposition, had to evolve from below. The invocation for everyone to plan, however, is not a renunciation of design. The invocation is the first choice as political will, to enfranchise the populace, even if only conceptually, in the process of programming and design. Design is a mode of resistance and survival for the architect and the citizenry, design or be designed.
Mosso knew and was influenced by Konrad Wachsmann, best known for his study of universal joints. As illustrated in his seminal book *The Turning Point of Building*, Wachsmann investigated the possibilities of prefabricated construction systems based on standardized connectors. His vision for rationalizing techniques went beyond the singular building: he envisioned adaptable systems facilitating massive and complex spatial structures. Exemplified in his raster diagrams, Wachsmann began with an X, Y, Z origin from which all constructive possibilities emanated; it was his “symbol for measure, movement and time, into which any imagined form can be fitted within the system of relationships assumed.” His diagrams depict possible material conditions that interrelate through interpenetration, ossifying the ineffable Cartesian origin.

If Wachsmann conceived of systems of possibility generating aggregative constructive scenarios, Mosso conceived of models of potentiality that had the constitution of dynamic communities as a broader philosophical agenda. He viewed his joints as post-Cartesian, both in the sense of placing the origin under erasure as well as dispersing the Cartesian subject, replacing his point of view with an understanding of space, structure, and constitution of material reality through interaction, transformation, and contest. A dynamic community forged through common language replaces the rational subject.

Mosso’s research produced at least three distinct types of modifiable connection systems. Whereas the design sophistication increased with each new experiment, each joint’s characteristics suggested its virtual limits. His initial study, “a three dimensional universal joint,” was a pin connector system: linear components, executed in wood, acrylic, or metal, were drilled through at 90 degree angles, and adjacent components were joined with bolts or dowels to create space defining structures and woven surfaces. This familiar joint is an appropriation of an existing, dumb technology, reusing it in an expressive, symbolic manner to emphasize the system’s reconfigurability. Mosso’s “mobile” and “demountable” system was cast as fruit of his pedagogical research at the Politecnico di Torino in which, “every element [is studied] with the iteration necessary for its complete mastery until it is rendered insensible, so to speak—in order to fully exploit unique possibilities and methodic, organic growth.” Mosso envisioned the system as a programmed matrix and, as a result, self-generating based on modification through users’ negotiation. However, it matters little whether the construction actually moves or is modified; rather, it is a system which reinscribes the joint within a logic of potentiality; the semiotic of the connection system produces the semantic of adaptability. The political implications, however, arise from both because the constructive technology was familiar, its semantic was easily communicable and comprehensible. The poverty of the joint precludes before-the-fact technological fetishism or aesthetics of complexity, and encourages both through transformation and legibility; the constitution of a “social language” in which “the roles of transmitter and receiver... alternate.”

Later studies explored virtual, omnidirectional joints, where virtual is understood in its philosophical sense as expressing potential. Instead of rendering the origin materially concrete like Wachsmann, Mosso conceived the joint’s “turning point” as a void: a deformable connection rather than a fixed, plug-in receiver of components. Around this theme he developed two further joints. One, which he called the “elastic joint,” literally translated his conceptual diagram: structural components slide past one another, fastened with compression straps. The elastic connectors allow free rotation, producing a quasi-topology in which deformations are translated across the structure and absorbed by the components’ slippage.

His third study, the “virtual joint,” explored the construction of dynamic surfaces. The linear components were made of steel springs and the connections consisted of the steel coil folded back on itself. The result was a structural surface in which the components “twisted” along their axes and bent in the direction of applied forces. This constructive technique produced an extraordinary effect: an implied surface could be pulled through itself or another while maintaining the integrity of system’s components.
Representation no longer constrained geometric transformation: undermining the tectonic-stereometric dialectic (additive versus subtractive, volumetric versus composition / formation), constructive acts could be enacted in the material world in real time.

These joints produced models of weak structures. The potentiality for form, material, and surface were coincident in Mosso’s conceptual designs: each was modifiable, limited only by the length and malleability of the members’ materiality, the complexity and depth of the form, the flexibility of the joint, and the entropy of the system’s originary coherence. This last point is key, because in his non-static system, Mosso’s constructions are non-specific yet they bear the trace of the initial grid. Yet the grid is never absolute, even when first erected: it is always impure, irregular, moderately yet not-inherently unstable. Though there is a vague trace of the originary condition, the initial weakness renders the capacity to re-originate a perfect form impossible.

Form results from forces producing deformations propagating through adjacent joints: one disturbance creates a field of disturbances. As the system breaks down, complex forms that both build on and erase former operations suggest that the undoing of any set of actions produces another condition rather than the retracing of one’s steps (thus it is non-indexical). And yet it is not fully entropic, for the system is still invariant because the number of joints and components are maintained and even if the originary weak order is lost, new relational conditions constantly emerge.

One must note the participatory nature of these frames. Students would assemble and then “play” with these weak structures; thus, the realization of form was not the virtuoso will of an elite mind (their initial weakness required collaboration just to erect them). Play trained students to explore form as relationships rather than objects. But this in no way was to be understood as an idealized scenario in which consensus might lead to a demonstrative form. Rather, the very openness of the system prohibited any definitive conclusion (other than the system’s collapse). The structure is a registration of human forces in perpetual conflict, and architecture becomes an inscription device for what we would now call agonistic relations.
The work of Leonardo Mosso and Laura Mosso Castagno is best described as research and experimentation instead of design. Through research with students in Turin and Berlin, countless spatial constructions at differing scales were built, documenting through photography the deformations and decompositions. The collective process of model construction and photo-documentation reveals the tension between the limitations of representation and systems' indeterminacy and immediacy. The material nature of the joints as well as the non-linearity of the systems made their drawn representation always insufficient. Experimental models replace architecture as a representational practice (in which design is the projecting of the present into the future through form); photographic images become visual artifacts of a specific moment in an unfolding system of potentiality with little concern for final causes.

These experimental constructions lay between two different definitions of the word "model." Like architectural models, they are “things” for thinking with: they are conceived by an architect, deployed in the academic studio, and exhibited and published as architecture. As Ludmilla Jordanova has noted, however, models used in scientific research do not just sit there:

“[A] model is what can be called an incomplete concept in implying the existence of something else, by virtue of which the model makes sense. This ‘something else’ might already be in existence or yet to come. It might be larger or smaller, more or less complete, or sophisticated or accessible. Models then, however verisimilitudinous, beautiful or satisfying, always refer onwards. As a result, there are interpretative gaps for viewers to fill in, the ‘beholder’s share’ in Gombrich’s words.”

Mosso’s models are not analogical of specific architectures, but they are devices for architectural process and systems—but to what do they refer onwards? Perhaps the question should be, to when do they refer onwards? For if we accept that Mosso’s representations and constructions invite the viewer to continue the process and to make changes, then they are always out of joint with the temporality of their apperception. This provisional hypothesis allows us to speculate a response to the first question—to what do they refer? They primarily refer to conditions of alterity, in which the city becomes a technologically laden site of popular action. Cybernetics and computation would have to become popular tools.

Mosso and Castagno extended their participatory experiments to the territorial scale, proposing planning schemes based on predetermined variables and values. On a Sperry Rand UNIVAC 1108, they imagined the landscape as an organizational plane for organizational simulations. Computer algorithms aided in managing the use of the earth by establishing parameters such as constructed versus open space, number of housing units, allocated space versus “void” space, “laws of probability,” and randomness as noise. The output was a field of 0s, *s, and gaps: the *s indicated built form, the 0s indicated future space for construction, and the gaps indicated voids where no construction was to be permitted. The result was the strategically randomized planning of the territory: strategic in that the system was set up in advance, but randomized to allow for constant modification and self-organization. Rather than producing an ideal design, the intent was to transfer authority of devices of dynamic control to the citizenry toward a regime of autoprogrammazione, and to set up matrices precluding the concentration of wealth and territorial exploitation. The random was a means of planning dynamic decentralization.

These cybernetic experiments were precisely that—experiments: models of the potential of computation to produce meaningful planning strategies. Their limitations were of course, obvious, and they were never intended as “realistic” proposals with infrastructure, transportation, circulation, and so forth. Rather, they were demonstrations that another approach to planning was possible—a strategy of refusal to plan for power did not mean refusing to plan at all. That they intended the output to be read as persuasive information is confirmed by printing and exhibiting the results as 20 meter square drawings (resembling artwork by Dieter Rot or the original diagrams for Archizoom’s No Stop City). Mosso and Castagno projected a condition of alterity using cybernetic means—a condition of alterity based only in language and information.
Though they wrote manifestos, Mosso’s call for popular action is clearly detectable in an essay entitled “Tutti che decidono è scienza” (Participation is Science). As the chief tool and weapon of mankind, science facilitated the rape and destruction of the landscape and the domination of one economic class over another. Yet science was the newest word in architecture culture. For Mosso, only by restoring a true objectivity to science by transferring its power to the citizenry could science recover its humanist imperative. When he wrote that science is literally “when everyone decides,” he meant that the legitimation of science had to be the result of and the fuel for popular contest (agonism), something wholly absent from other cybernetic models, such as those of Christopher Alexander. This is not to be confused with science as popular consensus, but scientific research must arise from and support contest, even conflict. Science for Mosso had to lead to the linguistic and constructive empowerment of the citizenry to plan for a different future—otherwise, it was nothing more than a mechanism of exploitation for the maintenance of the present.

Thus, architectural research as science must be understood as an act of criticism and resistance, one that by definition, in order to be efficacious, is set in contra-distinction to the present. Architectural research that merely produces new forms is not research, it is design, be it classic or cool, traditional or trendy. An architectural science must be a political practice that does not generate ideal solutions, but facilitates alternative solutions to the present state of affairs. As regards to architecture, research produces alterity; not alterity in a formal sense, but alterity to existing organizational, epistemological, and political authorities. This was the new ecology envisioned by Leonardo Mosso and Laura Castagno Mosso.

0.5 KILOMETER CLOUD
Polystyrene, monofilament, rubber, stainless steel fasteners, pulleys and cable 588 cubes 2,940 components at 18.4 cm 540 meters of material

This research included a revisiting of the virtual joint. For the installation in the Taubman College Gallery, students constructed a roughly 24’ x 15’ suspended, dynamic framework. The construction consisted of 1/4” x 7” polystyrene components and elastic connectors. Two types of components were laser cut from polystyrene sheets. Horizontal components had parallel 1/16” deep grooves cut into the member to receive the connectors. Vertical components had identical grooves as well as notches cut into the ends to receive the suspension wires; the notches were deeper to ensure the suspension wires did not slip and to encourage tautness in the line. We used 2,940 components—laid end to end they would stretch half a kilometer.
The joint assembly was a lashed connection. Elastic material was applied in alignment with the grooves, which were made wider than the rubber to increase contact between the connector and the component. The elastic material allowed a degree of sliding between components without permitting them to completely slip away when subjected to forces, and rubber, used for the joints, allowed for a wide degree of flexibility—the components could separate without the failure of the joint. Styrene was also selected for its inherent flexibility. Working together, the elastic and deformable joint with the malleable quality of the styrene leant to the system a more fluid flexure.

For the assembly, horizontal components overlapped such that two elastic connections were used for each joint. Vertical components were similarly attached with two additional elastic connectors. The structure was built in sections that were then hoisted into the air and tied together. The cloud was then lifted into place using monofilament attached to pulleys mounted to cables attached to the structural steel above.¹¹

The structure was intentionally conceived as a weak structure. Because flexibility in terms of both the joint and the material was an interest, rigidity was viewed not as an absolute, but as a variable. Though the process involved relatively contemporary fabrication technologies and materials (laser cutters and industrial plastics), the assembly was fundamentally of a povera nature. Such a method was chosen as a rejection of the techno-fetish for industrial joinery that aestheticizes the joint as a means of suggesting contemporaneity through material complexity. This is not to suggest that the povera joint is more moral or authentic, but rather to re-emphasize that the intention is the clear communication (understood in the sense of communication theory and not as the simplification of meaning such as in neo-realism or post-criticality) of the how rather than the what. The what is the territory of innovation without intent or theory, of which I have little interest. Innovation that fails to even suggest alterity is no innovation at all.
This research is the result of the generous support of the University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning and the Walter B. Sanders Fellowship. Sincere thanks are due to Architecture Chair Tom Buresh, Dean Monica Ponce de Leon, and the faculty of the Architecture Department whose friendship and encouragement were essential. Thanks is due as well to the students of my studios in the fall 2008 and winter 2009 semesters, as well as the students of the Design Fundamentals theory course—their hard work, imagination, and intellectual curiosity was as impressive as it was inspiring for my own thinking. Special thanks must be offered to my faculty collaborators in the theory course—Caroline Constant, Mireille Roddier and Tsin Yan Ng—whose weekly intellectual provocations broadened my perspective and kept me on my toes. My colleagues, fellows Nataly Gattegno and Jason Johnson were especially encouraging and inspiring. Lastly, sincere thanks must be extended to Leonardo Mosso and Laura Castagno who granted me access to their home, studio, and archive and more importantly, granted me access to their memories and thinking.


5Mosso, “Politica come struttura, struttura del progetto e scienza come linguaggio,” Parametro, Number 11 (1972) 8-11.


Construction Notes:

9The intent was to produce a construction three times this size. However, problems stemmed from the selection of materials with relation to the fabrication technique selected. We had wanted to use 1/8” styrene, this would have been structurally sufficient and would have appeared lighter. However, 1/4” styrene was what was available. The 1/4” styrene proved much more difficult to laser cut than anticipated—in order to minimize scorching and warping of the sheet styrene from the build-up of heat in the laser cutter chamber, the laser had to be set to a low power requiring multiple passes to fully cut the component profile.

10Given that each component took 2.25 minutes to laser cut, this is roughly equivalent to 105 hours of laser cutting. Given the desire to maintain the numerical constraint of half a kilometer, the pre-deformation shape of the cloud was not perfectly square.

11The original intent was for the cloud to be actively modifiable. However, this did not happen. The pulleys that were selected did not have deep enough grooves in the wheels, and the monofilament lines slipped off the track and became lodged in between wheels and the pulley housing; during its installation, the cloud did not move. The photographs that demonstrate the range of motion were taken during the de-installation of the cloud.
Annually, the Dimensions staff selects submissions from Wallenberg and Thesis students, and accepts the work of Fellows; however, the staff has control over the content of visiting lecturers. Dimensions TwentyThree engaged these characters in the critical dialogue they contributed to Taubman College, regardless of the duration of their stay. This is our take on the design of Dimensions as a publication; it is both a catalogue of content and a critical response to past Dimensions; the two work in parallel. In order to clearly expose the work and exchanges existing within the college, Dimensions TwentyThree placed a graphic stamp on the book without clouding the content. As the content is paramount, we hope Dimensions TwentyThree allows you to engage the content, both images and text, on all the levels it deserves—not just a superficial flip through the book.

Architecture is most fruitful as a dialogue. Whether the content has been communicated through image, drawing, or spoken word, this publication acts as a catalyst for architectural exchange. Some work can never really be completed. When a project is delivered, pinned up, or exhibited, the author always knows that it could be pushed further, refined, or enhanced. In an academic environment this could not be more true—this book and its contents are a product of that environment. From the time the content was created and submitted to Dimensions, it has been critically assessed and refined. Dimensions itself is an evolution from its initial output on tabloid copy paper. All the content included within these 192 pages is a product of Taubman College, and whether it is a digitized shoe, an interview at Cabela’s, or a conversation about a sixth sense, it has affected the culture where we work.

This book took TWENTYTHREE years to design, but it is not conceived of as a finished product. It needs input from the reader. It needs a mark of use. Tag it; use it to hold glued pieces of a model or to prop a leg on a table. If you do not like a page, tear it out. Add pages. Underline. Circle. Highlight. Sketch.

We had more fun putting this book together than we probably should have.

Enjoy.

21 March 2010
Ann Arbor
COUNTERFEIT ARCHITECTURE
SURROGATE BODIES

IVELISSE RUIZ UPWARD
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS

primary advisor / PERRY KULPER
secondary advisor / NEAL ROBINSON
tertiary advisor / AMY KULPER
A LOOK AT THE SELF-CONCEPT

Psychoanalytic theory describes the concept of “the body schema” as the mental representation one has of oneself, encompassing imagination, emotions, thoughts, and its spatial setting. According to this theory, our bodies and spatial setting inform and redefine each other constantly, to the extent that no “body” can be detached from its domicile and no space can be separated from the unconscious image of the perceiving self; the body is considered as the site of the senses and the medium of the mind.

Contemporary body criticism argues that corporeal boundaries have dissolved in our modern experience. This theorization proposes the critical problem of rethinking what is the experience of human embodiment in our world today. If our bodies are no longer just corporeal manifestations, but a combination of disperse experiences, how should the body be understood in relation to space? Spatial constructs play an important role in the reconciliation between the body and the world. This spatial-body assemblage sets forth architectural design as an integral component of human existence.

It is important to recognize that the terms “body” and “self” encompass a broad range of connotations and positions. For the work of this thesis, body and self both refer to the combination of surrogate objects and subjects that constitute the essence of individuality and the internal aspects that render a sense of being.

The body has been theorized as an accumulation of its own pieces and those of others, attaining its integrity through the assemblage of surrogate objects and subjects. It has also been interpreted as a unique medium; as a sensorial object and as an object to be sensed. Bodies and selves are also considered to be divisible, boundary diffusible, and unifiable; capable of possession, and introspection.

Contemporary concepts have also portrayed the body as a Self of Selves composed of multiple aspects central to human beings. These “theoretical molds” of human experience are by no means determinate, as it is impossible to talk about the self as a “matter of fact” condition. However, the fact that it can be conceptually represented denotes that the interiority of the body is sufficiently determinate to be grasped as an architectural construct. Thus, every theoretical self-construct creates a counterfeited form of the body’s interiority through the manufacture of replicas, doubles, and surrogate.
BODY DISSOLUTION AND COUNTERFEITS

Counterfeit Architecture targets two central conditions. The first is the concept of body dissolution proposed in the human sciences that establishes the dislocation of the single standardized body as representative of the self, and proposes a new body with no physical boundaries. The second refers to the idea of objects and images that conceptually replicate the body and establish them as counterfeited reconstructions of the body.

The body is understood as an accumulation of both its own parts and those of others, attaining its integrity through the assemblage of surrogate objects and subjects. Thus, Counterfeit Architecture seeks to reconstruct a counterfeit spatial condition that frames the body with no boundaries as an architectural strategy.

To create an artificial framework that reconstructs a new territorial extension for the body.

This kind of reconstruction mediates between presence and absence, providing asylum to the body from its physical boundaries by revealing its subjective extensibility. Hence, pursuing an architectural condition that serves as a medium of negotiation; setting forth the body and self as analogs to architectural design, and not as design criteria.

CHARACTERS

Schizophrenic: focuses on introverted reality, and challenges preconceived notions of boundaries, territory, and space. It concentrates in the translation from subjected and situational realities into physically tangible spaces.

Commodified: explores the idea of the body as a possession and object, as the individualized subject of modernity becoming an instrument and product of process. This conceptualization of the self, in complete ownership of himself, reveals a body oriented towards self-fashioning; a property and possession not too different from any other commodity.

Ventriloquist: examines the phenomenon where the \"I\" becomes personified and ambiguous. In this sense, it is interpreted as a kind of translation and authorship, where the dummy becomes the translator and author. This allows for the effacement of the self, while retaining a repressed presence dependent upon the original \"act.\" Thus, ventriloquism becomes a matter of displacement and dislocation, offering a strategy to displace and / or remove as means to question and legitimize a statement.
TWO SITES

The first site is based on the dislocated body used in the early explorations of the work. This is not a specific body, but the idea of the body removed. Using an element that objectified the body, a leg brace, explorations recorded, reconstructed, and mapped the material evidence of the removed body. In this way, the body as site surfaced like a subjective trace revealed through its absence, circumstance, and familiarity.

The second site was established as the work unfolded due to its parallel aspects with the concept of body dissolution. Cedar Island, a disappearing barrier island on the Eastern Shoreline of Virginia, is subject to erosion and floods that constantly displace the island’s physical boundaries. Due to its topography, the transient island shifts position throughout the year. Cedar Island is an unusual location because it was once inhabited. Today, abandoned houses resemble prosthetic elements to the island that extend its height over the rising ocean and memorialize the island’s domestic lives. The plan strategy extends the two mile by seven mile stretch of land and redefines it based on programmatic ideas about the body. This programmatic strategy initiated the emancipation of certain regions from their current condition into thematic constructs that both supported and reacted to the theoretical concerns of the work.

Translation of the dislocated body yielded a series of reconstructions and manipulations on how to conceive this process of unmaking as a tangible construct: absence through relationship, sense of belonging through partial knowledge, re-framing through multiple translations, creation of a framework to release the body from its physicality: recording, reconstructing, and tracing instead of representation. These principles suggest alternative architectural strategies, in which, space could engage with the body responding as an object of embodiment.

Building upon the concept of releasing a body from its physical boundaries by creating an artificial framework induced the emancipation of the ground through the manufacture of a false landscape. In turn, the architecture of the landscape became a temporal scaffold that employed forgery techniques, camouflage, and illusion; combining relics and fabrications, in order to mediate fact and fiction. These translations allowed the subjective body, the viewer and the island, to surface by relocating the body’s perceptual horizon and its interpretation of boundaries and territories.
EMBODIED GESTURES

As the work progressed, three main programs emerged. Along the east shoreline a hospice unfolds as a landmark of past lives, taking on the domestic program of the abandoned houses. Settled as the last place for rest, it memorializes the lives of the now orphan houses by re-framing our visual understanding and perception of them.

Along the length of the island between the marsh and the shore, a repository of house objects serve as a marker of displacement and create scrutiny through framed vistas of the unattainable landscape. The repository provides a circulation corridor across landscape and creates a space that recedes and contains. As a kind of curiosity cabinet, the repository produces a space that speaks about the past and reconstructs a false reality.

Finally, a series of autobiographical theater gardens were arranged across the southwest marsh of Cedar Island. Conceived as a collection of gardens, the theater acts as a scaffold of separated individualities. Delineated with mirrors and reflective materials, the gardens reconstruct the visual environment, displacing the body by fragmenting and relocating his perception. In this way, the body is forced to reinterpret the surrounding territory, as well as his own body, because “things are not as they seem.” Each garden places a specific view of the landscape on display, making the body participate through reference, memory, and sense of belonging. Some of these gardens are populated with thin steel rods that perform like the wild-grasses in the wind. They respond to the natural landscape by rotting with the salt of the ocean, referencing the temporal quality of life on this island. Other gardens enclose the vastness of the land, by setting the occupant as one within the space by enclosing framed vistas. Finally, slight disruptions were placed on the south end flooded banks as means to reorient the natural formations of sand.

As these spaces are set throughout the land, they trace the temporal existence of the island’s physical body, and therefore, function as markers of displacement and material presence. The counterfeit space acts like a diorama, setting the landscape as an object of display, and induces the situational and referential bodies to surface. In this way, each spatial condition attempts to carry on an embodied relationship to the body, by reconstructing the visual environment in which the body becomes subject and object as well as content.
Drift
Between
Here, There, and the Imagined Grounds

Juan Mercado
Master of Architecture Thesis

Primary advisor /
Neal Robinson
Secondary advisor /
Perry Kulper
The work is heavily personal, yet extremely foreign.

The work is a continuous struggle to align an almost nostalgic and distant place with a new ground that is strange and foreign. To look back to the place I left in adolescence and try to make sense of it with the few memories that remain; the memories are becoming less accurate, but still capable of letting your mind imagine what it was like walking over a stone paved street. It is less and less about the actual thing remembered, and more about the capability and flexibility of memory to overlay the physical space and create something that it is both out of its context and alien to its context.

*Drift Between* is a migrant project that attempts to drift between grounds, scales, mediums, and typologies. The subject, narratives of migrant workers, is used to speculate for reconstructions of familiar spaces that can reveal multiple realities and points of view. The project rather than finding a solution, raises questions of how to house and what is the house of a migrating body and mind.
MIGRATING THE BODY AND MIND

The migrating body and mind are displaced and constantly inhabiting the in-between here and the “imaginary” while simultaneously capable of recalibrating perceptions of scales.

The migrant body is defined as a displaced body between the place of origin and a desired place. The motion of in-between is caused by his economic circumstances. Upon arrival at the desired place, he is not blank or empty, but instead is in conflict with any narratives set up before him. His misuse and reinterpretations of space reconstructs place. The migrant reinterpretations of a place question orders, how we have seen, and provides alternative point of views to experience a place.

The migrant mind does not always move. Our bodies can stay in the same place with the place changing or drifting through narratives, imported from those returning to or through fictitious images constructed of physical evidence from a distant place.

This project distills migration into a physical movement and a mental displacement.

Our minds are always in search for what lies beyond what we can see, thus relying on speculations, narratives, and imaginations of a foreign place to construct the in-between.
HERE AND THERE
To migrate one does not always need to move. The there is a distant place, which is real only in the form of a mental image or a photograph capturing a specific moment in time. It is a still from a past experience or a memory that is only true to its time, and it is left there frozen, independent of the space of conception. We have moved and the remote memory is all we have left, we are free to make conclusions and speculations with the permissions of our memory.

The “imagined grounds” are the activated mental images that are only true in our minds, but become fictitious when they are put into play and reconstructed in foreign grounds. The “imagined grounds” attempt to produce tactile and visual experiences that are capable of blurring the edges of here (physical space) and there (a memory).

The first drawing collapses a mental mapping of the there, the here, and narratives to reconstruct a familiar space. Ultimately the mapping creates an imagined ground, in this case happening in the motel room, which has become the temporal and uncertain home for the migrant worker. The drawing situates itself in the city of Tijuana, a border town whose population is mainly migrant; some originally planning to cross the border, but never finished. The migrant body occupies the space between origin and destination getting caught in the non-place, never reaching destination, but being at the edge. The migrant not only interprets the place differently, but is constantly shifting to the never reached destination. A memory of home and a physical space that produce places of the imagination, which do not exactly reflect the place of his origin or the destined place.
Everyday we left the motel with our belongings, not knowing if we were to comeback. At the end of each day, we returned to the same motel, but not to the same room. The room felt the same, except the beds looked shorter than the ones we remembered from the last night. Some of the walls were made of wax, we assumed by the strong odor, the color of the room, and the deflections that it was not able to carry its own weight. We would go to bed around eleven and very often the room would glow, illuminating the entire space. Inside the wax, we contemplated a trapped silhouette moving in and out throughout the night.
HOUSING THE MIGRANT MIND

The motel establishment provides lodging for motorists in rooms with direct access to an open parking area. The typology originated around 1920 as a chain of motor hotels between San Diego and Seattle. Early versions of motels were campgrounds with parking spaces nearby, often furnished with tents or cabins. Today, the motel is an example of an independent thought, conceived a long time ago, targeted to change; however, its form and typology have lasted. The motel as a home for the migrant helps to distort our familiar view towards such a simple space housing diverse and complex events, and as a process of the reclamation of these grounds by migrants. The familiarity of the typology becomes blurred with infiltrations of stories and physical material from distant places.

The motel is the potential ground that drifts between origin and destination, in which the agglomeration of events, narratives, and facts are put into tension, in consequence of housing the migrating mind. It is through housing the illicit, lover, saint, and migrant for a night or two that the crystallized events reveal its existence even after the acts have long happened, leaving spaces out of the banality of the motel typology. The motel is a terrain that allows us to fantasize between the physical object or space and the imagination. It is a play of a ground, which is, and is not a false simulacrum of events with true tactile evidence. But also, true tactile grounds for the imagination to intrude, letting us drift from here and there regardless of being real or not.

The motel is transformed so that each room differs from the next. The party walls are thickened to allow passages and stairways to connect rooms internally. Thus, allowing narratives and events to be interlocked with one another, revealing their presence, but not completely, just the ghost of them. At instances, the party walls, partially made of wax, reveal the ghost only to let the inhabitants imagine a new possible ground. Some rooms are converted to house not only the travelers, but also their vehicles of transportation. The motel reveals its desires to house the lovers, the migrant workers, and the saints, giving the possibility to scale spaces through materials, based on the inhabitant's needs, creating grounds that question order and the matter of things, but ultimately change our perceptions of familiar spaces.

The border town motel does not serve as a stopping point.

The motel is a new uncertain line, it is what is most familiar to us,
but also what lies beyond what we have not seen.
Los Angeles architects Eric Kahn and Russell Thomsen are two of the three founding principals of IDEA Office (IO) formerly Central Office of Architecture (COA). Since 1987, their work has sought to engage a range of issues, from architecture and urbanism to technology and design. They were the recipient of both the Young Architects Award and the Emerging Voices series sponsored by the Architectural League of New York. A monograph of their work, *Contemporary World Architects: Central Office of Architecture*, was published in 1997. Their work has been exhibited and published internationally, and is part of the permanent collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Kahn and Thomsen are both senior faculty members at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), and have taught and lectured at various other schools in Europe, Japan, and throughout the US.

Kahn and Thomsen were the Fall 2009 Max Fisher Visiting Professors and lectured on November 6th, 2009.
The following is an excerpt from a longer conversation, after their lecture, between Eric Kahn and Russell Thomsen:

EK
I want to start with an observation followed by a suspicion, brought about by the name of our lecture, Driven by Dilemma. We spent endless hours brainstorming, and you offered the title as a kind of strange, counterintuitive method. I immediately recognized it as a distillation but also, more importantly as a summons for IDEA. In a moment of conceptual play, a soft manifesto, a directive, a framing device, something we might aspire to was born. I have had a suspicion, in the latter part of COA been moving away from the original inception point of that office and had been hard at work on version 2.0 of COA, now released as IDEA Office.

RT
As you describe it, I think you are probably onto something larger. In searching for a title for our most recent lecture, I think we wanted it to incite a moment of pause and at the same time capture something very honest about the way we work. That is, Driven by Dilemma implies an almost neurotic condition where one cannot “solve” the very problems that confront them. At the same time it admits the complexity, robustness, and irrationality of the world into the work, embracing it for where it might take that work. If I buy into your suspicion, I might observe that the first 20 years of COA was spent in pursuit of a kind of internal conversation about architecture, between architecture and us. Perhaps with the release of 2.0, as IDEA Office, we are turning that conversation outward, intersecting a world that challenges those (established) assumptions in extremely interesting and creative ways.
EK
After our recent lecture at the University of Michigan, Perry Kulper suggested that we were developing, and I stress developing, new techniques and strategies to realize our projects. I think he was right and I began to think about some of the work as transitional—from COA to IDEA—perhaps as early as the (N)QMA competition and as recently as the Y House in Tokyo. In reflection, it has me thinking about the research on Auschwitz (that we started 15 years ago), and its unexpected outcome: a summons for thinking about the future of the camp as site, as evidence as Tel Olam—a site of perpetual ruin—evil blotted from earth through an exile, or perhaps even banishment from time itself. The “techniques,” if we can call them that, were a long time in development, from scenario thinking methods we developed in the late 1990s to the evolution of our understanding of a broadened view of the architect’s role... Cristiano Toraldo di Francia exposed us both to this notion of the expanded role of the architect when we worked with him at SUPERSTUDIO in the early 1980s.

RT
I often recount the story of awakening on the morning of May 1st in Florence to some commotion in the street below. Opening the green shutters of my third story apartment, I was overwhelmed by the sight of ten thousand people moving slowly through the streets waving red Partito Communista Italiana flags and singing together. A wave of reality broke through my hermeticism, and the force of that wave has been breaking ever since. Perhaps our recent work is beginning to make attempts at strategies and expressions of an architecture capable of engaging that life reality within this expanded role. Not to represent it mind you, but to engage it (more) deeply and to begin to affect it.
EK
Yes, that was an integrated urban practice, so many voices and opinions—what a casino. Then came Virilio and The Overexposed City (1988). I still have a love / hate relationship with his cathode ray screen public space, the end of boundaries, suburbia, and similitude of urbanism where speed eclipsed physical dimension and architecture became annihilated. It was compelling intellectually, but my sense is that after the initial excitement of globalization, after “too big to fail” and their “New Reality,” (remember Rem Koolhaas’s New Sobriety?), an opening for optimism and working again on and in the world has appeared. “After” might follow with another “before?” Yet, it is not so easily recognizable.
If we are (again!) at a moment when architecture matters, I think IDEA is at a point where the consistency of a formal signature matters less. While all architects are formalists simply because that is ultimately how we give expression to our thinking, I have noticed that we have become more open to the possibilities of the contingencies of circumstance to drive innovation. That is not to say that the forms of the work are eclectic and without agenda, but rather that our interest seems to be in the intersection between what came out of 20 years of talking primarily to each other, to ourselves and to architecture, and being confronted with the circumstances of a particular moment. That is how the dilemma becomes productive. It places the architect in the space where (almost) irreconcilable forces compete for attention. There is a productive rub where our internal logics, formal interests, and expertise intersect with the circumstances of the (often) irrational, contradictory, and nuanced. Perhaps the signature of the work comes from the embrace of this dilemma, and an openness to what it can creatively produce.

Embedded in your point is a fundamental question: signature as reductive and singular, suggesting a certain working life span. The idea of openness is really interesting; perhaps it allows us to pick up or develop new strategies and techniques. Perry was alluding to this when he commented on how we opened up our practice to art strategies and game strategies (I’m thinking about the scenario planning). At the same time, it allowed us to invent a new intensity for architecture, opening it to work within a greater bandwidth of concerns; therefore, greater means to be effective.
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

EMMETT T. HARRISON

primary advisor / NEAL ROBINSON

secondary advisor / PERRY KULPER

tertiary advisor / AMY KULPER

THE MUSEUM OF ABSENT THINGS

THE MUSEUM OF ABSENT THINGS

MARVELS

urban
THE MYSTERIOUS PRODUCTION OF EGGS

I have been overwhelmed by chickens. The chicken house on the farm I grew up on made for the perfect fort. My brother and I slipped the lock regularly, and we once forgot to close the door behind us. We soon were overtaken by the newly-liberated birds. From that day on, they roamed uncontained with free run of the entire farm.

Boundaries removed, it always puzzled me how they chose a location to lay their eggs. There seemed to be no logic. Soft surface. Hard surface. Under or over. High or low. You would just be climbing a fence post and around the corner would be this perfect shape that seemed too natural to be natural. If this sounds like Easter, it is not. On Easter you are expecting it, but this was different. It became one of the most magical memories from my childhood—routine surprises by this perfect, geometric thing.

What would a spatial comic look like? How would it manifest?

I suspected that it might take on the logic of an urban chicken, piecing its program together peck by peck.
The Museum of Absent Things (MoAT) is encountered throughout the city as an indefinite number of episodes. Each episode privileges specialized segments of attention, which, when taken together, shift to total field. Thus, the MoAT constitutes a stepping away from the iconic, centralized landmark and into the peripheral vision of a cloud narrative. The episodes depend on one another for interpretation, forming an ecology of perception.

The observer slips in and out of the MoAT as he moves through the city. Associations are bound by the centripetal pull of learned conventions. Forensic ornamentations and delicate moments of tangible connection traverse the MoAT’s sensational boundaries, as the spatial interventions find their ultimate realization within the memory structures of the observer. Attention follows attention, swarming into phenomenal mirages that piece themselves together with newfound compatibility. The MoAT is architecture calling attention to its own fictiveness by barring its narrative seams. Marshall McLuhan suggests that “myths are the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over time—the contraction of a process.” When multiple episodes interact through multiple encounters they imply a spatial contraction and myth is produced. Or, in the words of Robert Smithson: “Memory becomes a wilderness of elsewhere’s... which reconstruct themselves as a tangled mess.”

In this sense, the MoAT itself is absent. It has no postcards of itself. Rather, the MoAT occurs at the intersection of the logic of an urban chicken and the hurried attention of a waitress on her route to work—intrinsically incomplete, its space and program are constructed subjectively by the reader’s own logic. The Museum of Absent Things centers the Mediated Subject. Intrinsically incomplete, it ticks and hums in a perpetual state of assembly, requiring the common sense to activate its completion. It is the nature of the Mediated Subject to reconstitute meaning from fragments, and the MoAT celebrates the new subject by amplifying the engagement.

While the conventional museum serves as a container for the collective identity through the curation of objects, the Museum of Absent Things becomes a receptacle for the popular imagination as an architectural event of the curated subject.
Somewhere in an indescribable lecture hall, Peter Eisenman is preaching the sins of the modern age:

“The subject-object relationships have modified, and thus the strategies for their interaction will, of necessity, change, as will the nature of reading in particular.”

“The reader currently has changed to have less motivation for more interpretive kinds of information... they no longer have the capacity to do a close reading.”

Lamenting the contemporary attention span, the loss of a close reading marks a break in the contract with his audience. Mr. Eisenman’s career has extended far enough to see the seasons change. He recounts the work of Brunelleschi and Alberti in the age of the Immanent Metaphysical Subject. He traces himself through the French Revolution to the Modern Collective Subject—to his subject—and how it is giving way to a new audience born of spectacle... a Mediated Subject.

Yet as Eisenman calculates what the new subject cannot do, four decades earlier, McLuhan was foretelling what we could do, and how it would change everything...

**PETER EISENMAN DOESN’T PLAY NINTENDO**

Media and information now constantly inundate us. While no longer afforded the time required to learn the code needed for a close interpretation, the Mediated Subject has evolved the capacity to shift gears with unprecedented agility.

If it is true, as McLuhan famously proclaimed, that the medium is the message—and if it is true, as Jonathon Crary has asserted, that with each new medium or device, a different kind of subject is created—that the very shape of our consciousness is reformed in response to changing modes of experience—then today’s subject is accelerating into one of destabilization. The Mediated Subject is an agile subject, one who does not demand the interpretive readings that Eisenman requires, but is capable of forms of attentions that Eisenman is not.

Most of us can literally feel our minds shift as we negotiate our world. We have learned to edit. We have learned to switch seamlessly between modes of perception—constantly reassembling fragments of a mediated atmosphere that is anything but passive. This is the unfixable landscape of the modern observer, designing for a fascinating subject.
Robert Smithson speaks of the failure of the cinematic to adequately address the Mediated Subject:

“The cinema is devastatingly passive, presenting a virtual space so dominant that it leaves the physical useless. The theatre fades as the eyes gaze, and perception is taken elsewhere. The body is immobilized, and little is done in the way of one’s perception.”

As a barrage of liquid images is safely contained with a rectangular frame, the subject is rendered impassive—rigidly locked into a monotonous mode of perception and shackled to an unyielding sequence—in capable of representing the mediated subject. Entire narratives in one voice are no longer appropriate, and so we complain that films are often too long. We require an approach to mediation that solicits more involvement. We require methods that tap and enhance our abilities to experience.

Comics are beautifully simple: A pad and a pen, the rest is magic. Space does for comics what time does for film. Bound to spatial strategies to engage temporal relationships, comics constitute a form of kinetic storytelling, hinged upon an informal set of rules between the author and the reader. This intrinsically loose code affords comics the tendency to advert incompleteness and indeterminacy, urging readers to take on the act of interpretation.
The magic of comic art lies within the gutters, slivers of intervention held open for the subject to place themselves.

Without the subject, the words and pictures lie fallow on the page, waiting to be engaged. The subject becomes much like a trapeze artist, leaping from panel to panel, image to word, explicit to implicit, and back again.

Comic art provides a uniquely suited lens for exploring today's spatial landscape. While privileging the static, comic art is able to employ a variety of techniques. Such that within a single strip the reader is urged into a state of instability, required to continuously adjust cognitive modes in order to construct a narrative from disparate forms of media. Unlike the automatic illusion of the cinema, comics dispel inert spectators and require active collaboration.

Comics represent a laboratory for conversational associations between media, and an arena in which dichotomies sometimes collapse while opportunities for juxtaposition abound. They constitute an approach interested in the interaction devices, and how the intrinsic limitations and capacities of each may inform the other. Comics are a media of medias.

Comics call attention to mediation by baring their narrative seams, invoking a condition in which “the state of consciousness becomes the consciousness of a state.” In fostering a more critical awareness of the conventions, comics represent an approach to mediation that celebrates the Mediated Subject by amplifying the engagement. This is the approach demanded of the designer by, who has just now made it possible to switch abruptly from media of various domains, and to expect that the subject can actively reconcile the silence while maintaining the structure of the illusion.
Marlon Blackwell, FAIA practices architecture in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and serves as professor of architecture at the University of Arkansas. Blackwell’s professional office, Marlon Blackwell Architect, has received national and international recognition, numerous design awards, and publication in books and architectural journals. In 2005, Princeton Architectural Press published the monograph titled *An Architecture of the Ozarks: The Works of Marlon Blackwell*. Blackwell was selected by *The International Design Magazine*, in 2006, as one of the ID Forty: Undersung Heroes and as an “Emerging Voice” in 1998 by the Architectural League of New York. Blackwell has lectured extensively and has been a visiting professor across the US.

Most recently, he was the Eliel Saarinen Visiting Professor at Taubman College in fall 2009, and delivered a lecture on his work on November 10th, 2009.
Your work appears to be grounded in its place, not physically, but in its larger context. In your lecture you stressed the importance of architecture outside of the city center—centers of fashion—places that normally attract architects. Could you talk about how the culture you are rooted in has affected your work and approach?

It is the culture of growing up in a Southern family and going to college in the South. To put my way through school, I sold Bibles door-to-door for five summers in the rural South. I was able to experience a part of the world few people see directly. Following college, I experienced opportunities to work in both smaller places and larger demographic places, like New York or Boston. I like them all, but I was not willing to get in line for advancement—the pecking order that exists in a lot of the cities. There were opportunities in the middle of the country and there are great examples of work done by architects working in smaller venues in a contemporary language. I knew Fay Jones had done amazing work in Fayetteville, Arkansas where I accepted a teaching position. When it finally came time to teach and practice, I wanted the opportunity to practice what I preach. As I looked at Fayetteville closer, I discovered Edward Durell Stone’s early work, and another homegrown architect, Warren Seagraves. We are building on their legacy; we are not starting from scratch.

The inspiration for architecture really comes from being in the world and looking at all aspects of life and culture as sources of inspiration, things that are born, things that are made, and looking for relationships between them. It could be a place or a building, or as focused as a dragonfly or a camper. The inspiration is directly influenced by where I am, coupled with my own experiences of traveling and knowledge of the foundations of architecture. You have to develop some kind of facility with the language of architecture in order to translate these things effectively. But it is always about asking the question: How might it be otherwise?

You must have met many interesting people during the summers you sold Bibles. How did that experience change you or your perspective of place?
I sold Bibles for twelve hours a day, six days a week, every summer, and it gave me the opportunity to learn to be self-motivated. You are in a new place all summer and the only thing you have to do all day is meet people and experience the land (and food!). I saw the best sides of humanity: genuine and welcoming people. I may talk to a sharecropper in the morning, a coal miner in the afternoon, and a state judge in the evening. I began to learn how to hold a sincere dialog with folks from all walks of life. It teaches you how to become quite agile in conversation and how to engage people with ideas, so you can operate on their level of thinking and at the same time elevate it; simultaneously you elevate your own level of thinking.

When you are working on a project you would like as much client involvement or input as possible, to get them involved and to buy in.

I understand the need to have something you believe in and that sells itself. When I first started my practice, if somebody was interested in doing something and wanted to see my portfolio, I would never show everything I had ever done. If I did not have anything built, I would show something I had dreamed up. When I built one thing, I would show a potential client a portfolio of one project, and with the next built project my portfolio expanded to two. Over time I would ask people to sleep with my portfolio overnight. In the morning, we would meet and I would say, “If you want to proceed based on what you have seen, we can work together, if not, I can recommend somebody for you.”

This process has now matured and evolved into somebody coming into our office or calling us, already knowing what we do before they pick up the phone or step in the office. We have carefully constructed and cultivated this over time, rather than saying, “Hey, we’ll do anything. We’re just here to please you. Da-da-da-da-da.” We have never taken service to the idea of, “Just tell us what you want and we’ll try to make it the best thing we can.” We have had people come in and say, “I want a Neo-Colonial masterpiece.” “Well, that’s great.” We try to qualify the project and client, and if we see that there is no latitude, we refer them to an architect who does good Neo-Colonial. We feel like we still help others out in what they want to pursue. We do not make any efforts to demean them or make them feel small for what they want.

This sounds like the message or purpose of your practice, your philosophy.
Our philosophy is to enrich the experience of the everyday; the day-to-day experience of people who engage our work. We want to elevate the user’s experience, enrich and dignify their experience, with the things we make. We think about how they engage things, and our response attempts to situate them in a sensibility about a place, that is in many ways, unconscious. It is not about being symbolic or being overt with metaphors, but more about how one engages use, material, and form, through a direct involvement with the work.

That demands us to look at the significance of the world we are in and begin to translate it in meaningful ways, at multiple scales. We want to get beyond diagrammatic schemes and ideas. Our work seeks to address the scale of the hand (detail), the scale of the building (form), and the scale of the city (site). For us, all of these scales have to be resolute in the relationships between the different parts; “the parts are to the whole as the whole is to the parts,” to quote Fay Jones.

Working on multiple scales and various levels, is that related to what you phrased “the world as we are given it, being, and the world as we find it, circumstance?”

I am very interested in the philosophy of William James’ Pragmatism where one engages the world both empirically and intellectually, and evaluates decisions based on the projected consequences of those decisions. We are not idealists, we see the world as extremely messy, and we embrace that. We draw out a moment or moments that are poignant to the design situation and begin to synthesize commonalities we may find that are often devalued, but may have value if framed in a particular way. To frame these values requires operating in a principled way where your goal is always towards the qualitative rather than the quantitative. Working with principles allows us to overcome circumstances, rather than circumstances overcoming or directing us. Our work is always geared towards the qualitative because ultimately, we are in the business of qualities as architects. As a discipline, we have little expertise in anything other than our ability to intensify qualities or instill them where they may be absent.
D23
What direction is the profession moving or how has it changed in your time?

MB
Well, I think in many ways it is much more engaged with society as a whole, from technology to environmental stewardship. Design is becoming more elastic, architecture has begun to tap into various disciplines to become more multi-disciplinary, developing relationships between the design disciplines, which is really great. It is a great time to be an architect; the profession right now is driving architecture rather than the academy, which is very different from the way it was 20 years ago. The profession is where innovation is happening, and it is not necessarily a bad thing. As a professional I have survived a lot of movements, such as Postmodernism or Deconstruction, which cumulatively inform our practice how to respond.

I am a little skeptical of the new “sustainability” movement and that may just be generational for me; I went through the 1970s and saw this train come and go before. As a practice, environmental responsiveness is embedded in what we do—it is just common sense. The commodification of sustainability is disturbing. In the profession, it is often elevated above, even substituted or confused with, what good design is. In some venues it seems to have trumped basic foundational design principles. In Fayetteville, for example, several buildings are supposedly pre-eminent sustainable buildings, but as a work of architecture, these buildings are crap. They are celebrated and promoted for a variety of reasons other than good design. It is one thing to admit the deceit; it is another to believe the lie.

D23
Is this architecture that is piecemeal—sustainable ideas or technologies mixed and combined with other sustainable ideas? Is it not synthetic or cohesive?

MB
That is part of it, when it becomes a substitute or a crutch for poor design; it becomes a marketing gimmick, not only in the profession, but in the academy as well. I am just skeptical of it. Architecture is about the “architecture” of Architecture... and everything else is everything else. We need to stay focused on that, and if we are working in a synthetic, more comprehensive way, sustainability is an integral part of architecture, but does not become it. Architecture, within the last 20 years, has become increasingly dynamic and savvier in other aspects such as building information modeling or integrated project delivery. We are a lot smarter and able to filter through more to figure out what works best for us to move forward. It is a wonderful time, and I love the breadth of it all, the
range and the realm of architecture has broadened exponentially in the last 20 years. The work I am most drawn to, from a personal level, is that which is most foundational in its aspirations.

**D23**

In your lecture, regarding wrestling the bear, you said the story was not about a particular message, an idea, or the experience of an idea, but experience itself. You went on to say that experience is the domain architecture could operate in. Is this how you wish for your work to reside, not about an idea, but more about the experience of the work? Can architecture be about the experience of an idea or should it only be about the experience itself?

**MB**

I think there is always room for both if it is done well. I am not a big fan of irony; it is a great way to kill architecture. Irony might work initially but it does not work over the long haul, and I am very much interested in a shelf life related to use and value. The best work is able to take an idea and still bring it back to direct experience, because ultimately the value of the idea is through the experience itself. It is problematic if you try to codify the idea through every aspect of the work, say in a literary way. It has worn itself out in quite a few buildings that operate mostly in the realm of representational ideas. The actual experience is incredibly compromised because it never gets beyond the diagram of the idea; the buildings are essentially one-liners.

The Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston, with the exception of the room looking over the harbor water, is an idea and a diagram. If you truly try to engage the spaces, it will be incredibly inconsistent measured against its own ideas. It essentially gets a free pass with the press, because the press deals primarily in sensation and visuals from afar. Several notable architects and I went through the building and were saying, “Uh, what the hell is going on here?” It does not say that the ideas or the articulation of those ideas is necessarily bad; it is just not done well because the experience of the idea of thing seems to be so much more important than its day-to-day experience. The effects never become affects.

**D23**

You mentioned the press briefly, but you could say the press caters to the everyday person outside of architecture. Do you think some of the problem is that the layperson does not necessarily understand or care for a total experience, but experiencing that singular idea for a moment is enough? The rest of the building does not matter as much because they experienced the “scenic overlook” that was set up for that one purpose.

**MB**

In a museum, a casino, or some other buildings, novelty sometimes works, but to what end and for how long? My practice has chosen to invest most of our efforts elsewhere. We take great pleasure in the rather prosaic realm in which we operate, because it does have a real effect on the everyday lives of people.

I am of the opinion that architecture does not happen very often. When it does happen, it is usually controversial, because it does challenge. Therefore, I am not at all disturbed when I look around and see the inconsistencies and incoherence in the built environment. I roll up my sleeves and ask what I can do to help, but
I am less concerned about trying to orchestrate radical or catastrophic change, we take a more incremental approach.

D23

Is it about catastrophic change regarding the earthquake that happened last week in Haiti?

MB

I have been reading about it and am overwhelmed, I really do not know. I was in Asia during the tsunami, a couple hours from Banda Aceh, and I saw the dire effects from that catastrophe. There are lots of government agencies, non-profits, and people that will descend on the place much like New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I pray there are no Make-it-Right initiatives...top-down programs. Whatever happens, I hope it happens in a more grassroots way, and not with store-bought strategies. There might be models that could emerge and be instructive for the culture in anticipation of the next disaster; it could help this part of the world. It certainly happened with Hurricane Andrew in South Florida, standards were enforced on the way buildings were constructed. I am hoping that what comes from Haiti is a more pragmatic approach in how they build and what they build. It is just a shame because their cultural institutions that have been around for over a century are now gone. It would be similar to an earthquake hitting Washington DC and all of our institutions collapsing. That is what it is like for Haiti right now, and I am sure from personal and cultural perspectives it is devastating.

D23

You had the opportunity to work with a family after Katrina, in Biloxi, Mississippi. Was the family, at that point in time, ready to build, and how did they react to architecture at that time?

MB

Richard Tyler’s family had an opportunity to have a new house constructed, and it was not something they could necessarily do on their own because they did not have the proper insurance. Richard was a very grateful client, but surprisingly passive in the design process. We are used to collaboration, engagement, and participation. Once he had selected our design, we would sit down and ask for any adjustments or refinements, but he would never request changes or give input. Finally, Richard and I popped open a beer together on site, and I let him know we were being sincere and wanted his input to make a good living situation for him and his family. He responded, “Anything you do is better than what I have right now. Right now, I got nothing.”
That was an eye opener, he was not going to get fussy about their new home, he just wanted a home that was dignified and allowed his family to remain in their place. This family did not want to leave, because they have been part of the local culture there for many, many generations. He has his home and he is very happy with it. We talked to him a few weeks ago and he is very thankful for what he has. He is a little perplexed by all of the attention it is getting because it does look like a dog in the middle of the block, but after all, it is an alternative model. The reason we went along with this housing program is because Architecture For Humanity was looking for new models; real meaningful responses to the whole shift with the FEMA regulations and the environmental responses that need to be made. It was really meaningful with the idea that these could be built for others; they were not just one-offs.

It is a great thing that an organization like Architecture for Humanity is dedicated to coming into disaster zones and getting architects on board to help rebuild. It is a bit riskier with the model home programs because you are trying to make prototypes that are test cases for homes that have not yet been repeated. It is a good cause, and it helps to galvanize folks and create an atmosphere of hope in areas they work in, which is very important.

D23
We have one last question. Is the bear story true?

MB
It is true that it is a story, yes. (All laughing). No, it is true. I did wrestle a bear. That is my story and I am sticking to it.
SUB-CITY

POLITICAL AUTONOMY THROUGH SPATIAL ACTS OF SUBVERSION

MARC MAXEY

UNDERGRADUATE WALLENBERG STUDIO

studio critic /

MIREILLE RODDIER
Detroit is a capital vacuum, rendering both land and object valueless. The shrinking city left an oversized bureaucracy and infrastructure, creating a negative feedback loop of entropy that sucked over thirty-six thousand properties onto the city’s books. While the dysfunctional city government continues to falter, residents and non-profits are burdened with picking up the slack. SUB_city seeks to take over Detroit-owned property through spatial acts of subversion by ignoring the political system and creating a new, autonomous city within the city by aligning residents, non-profits, and creative practitioners to wage an invisible, non-violent war on the city through a diversion of capital. Detroit is not a problem to solve; it is a problem to ignore.
The city of Detroit's monthly property auction sells over one hundred vacant parcels and buildings from prices as low as $150. This is the bottom. The sale price merely pays for the transaction itself, along with other closing costs to support the administrative duties required to carry out the exchange. Thus, the exchange value of real estate in Detroit is beyond valueless. It has a negative value. The $150 for a vacant lot, or the $1500 for an old home has strings attached to a highly controlled and regulated market that has been paradoxically set up to revitalize the city.

One must question whether or not to buy into the political regime and the spatial conditions governed by this ruling body. The transactional contingency requiring individual investment and long term fiscal commitment through annual taxes is a largely politically supportive role for any citizen to assume. Paying taxes to the government and investing capital and labor into one’s home, place, neighborhood, city is to be patriotic. But what if the system fails you? The protest may take many forms: the letter, the picket sign, the community meeting, or relocation to the suburbs or to another city; these are all passive forms. The more radical types of protest are aggressive: terrorism, rioting, or any other forms of violent direct action. But in a post-industrial, late capitalist society, the only violence that exists with extreme efficacy is monetary, the invisible warfare of capital. Freezing assets and cutting off trade are more potent than air strikes. The current financial crisis in America is an internal war of path dependence, banks against the government. The winner: that which is too big to fail.

What does 700 billion dollars look like? Does it need space? Capital is immaterial. Just data. A plus or minus. The bottom line. The Dow Jones in red or green, the deficit is in the trillions. Detroit has a population of around 850,000 tax-paying residents. Non-property holders and underground economies are netted through sales tax, so it is safe to say that if you live and buy things in Detroit, you are fiscally supporting Detroit, and therefore supplying a slow drip of life support to a comatose city. Detroit receives state and federal funds for various programs, 14 million dollars just to tear down abandoned buildings, thus the entire population of the country is supporting Detroit.

Flip the switch.
CONSOLIDATING FORCES

Detroit functions as a crippled city. A vast infrastructure of roads, highways, and utilities are parasites to a politically and economically troubled city. Public services are reduced to cope with an unbalanced budget, thus diminishing the quality of life in the city. At the same time, alternative forms of practice begin to emerge. Many of these forms have served the city well, like the Heidelberg Project or Fire Break, drawing attention to conditions often ignored by the city’s leaders, forcing dialogue and triggering action. Non-profit organizations and active residents have stepped in. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like The Catherine Ferguson Academy educates pregnant teens beyond the ordinary institutional curriculum. Taken as whole, these groups and individuals have similar agendas, but remain decentralized. Certainly they are in conversation with one another, but a strong and allied bio-political organizational structure is not in place.

Artists, activists, scrappers, sprayers, urban explorers, and appropriators are using the city as a blank canvas on a small scale. The Catherine Ferguson Academy does not attempt to transform the entire public school system, but instead focuses on a small, specific demographic. The Heidelberg Project cleaned up a city block and unsavory behavior before moving to another. The Fire Break project instigated the removal of several abandoned properties by the city. While many of these practices are socially driven, most fall into the fallacy of working “with” the city, as if to say the political structure of the city is one of collaboration.

Looking closely at these interventions one quickly sees that the collaboration is the city’s responsibility pawned-off onto charitable interests. Non-profits are picking up the slack of the city, paradoxically in both protest and support of the city’s civic leaders.
COUP-DE-VILLE

The idea of Detroit as a thing to rebuild, jumpstart, stimulate, invigorate, or clean up, simultaneously attaches the existing political regime to this larger project, which is to say they are doing their job, and the ailments that plague Detroit are something other, something more fleeting and sensitive, which confounds urban planners and civic leaders alike. As Jerry Herron explains, “The idea of the city persists in its absence and takes on a presence and value the real city never had…”

The city of Detroit, which is seemingly more of an idealized fantasy than a reality, is dead. Detroit does not look like a city; it has become a hybridization of suburban figure ground and metropolitan density. Detroit consists of a piecemeal urban fabric, dislocated and disjointed to the point that, what we know of as city does not exist in Detroit. Therefore, we must shift paradigms, and look at Detroit as a territory to take over, a government to ignore, and a space for a SUB_city to emerge: thirty-six thousand options waiting.

While one can say that the production of creative acts and socially conscious activism are political protests, they lack an agenda that aims to effectively empower individuals and the organizations behind them. By operating within the rules of the city, they recognize the city of Detroit as an operational political structure. Regardless of whether Detroit is or is not capable of competent governance is beyond the point: the collective hope these organizations share is a common thread to ultimately change the city. Looking closely at the partnerships created between these non-profits and state / city governments, the change they seek is one of political alliance rather than political subversion. This project seeks the latter.
OKAY, HERE’S THE PLAN . . .

By looking at the fine print of transactional exchange, one can enter into Detroit. One quickly realizes it is a game of taxes—to support the enormous and failing infrastructure that once supported 1.8 million residents. The buy-in can be masked by tax abatements, or seemingly “free” property. But the fact of the matter is when you sign up to live or work in Detroit, you are signing up to support a failed government, one that will pawn-off a hugely disproportionate tax liability onto property owners. The buy-in can be masked by tax abatements, or seemingly “free” property. What is the point of owning a home when it is valueless? As Detroit’s tax base dwindles, so does the quality of living, creating a vicious feedback loop of entropy.

The ultimate protest then is to operate within Detroit while ignoring the city. To claim property for productive use without being pushed into paying obscene taxes for lacking—at best—public services. What is ultimately being proposed here is to create a city within a city.

Rather than attempt to leak into the defunct city government, it is ignored and a new city begins to emerge. The pioneers, who value social equity, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, will become the operational infrastructure to carry out the transition. Through networked ecologies of organizations and individuals, a decentralized constituency will be formed to begin the foundations for SUB_city.

THE ARCHITECT AS ARCHITECT

The medium is material and immaterial. SUB_city will function at full scale, meta-scale, and invisibility. Select parcels of Detroit-owned property will be reclaimed after a strategic look at infrastructural systems such as river frontage, rail access, transportation, etcetera. The small plot makes up the 1:1 central focus as the face of the new city, the Trojan horse. The invisible city will be decentralized and dispersed through network logics and codified markings of territory through architectural interventions. This invisibility will be the most powerful form of political transition.

SUB_city will operate under a logic similar to that described by Lars Lerup in his account of the take of Sparta, which is to say that the power of a city cannot be judged by the monuments it erects, but by the efficiency of its networks, the strategic use of its territory, and its ability to mobilize its constituency.

The fragmented fabric of homes perfectly describes the figure-ground of Detroit. The notion of territory and action is the motor of SUB_city. The buy in is zero, the contract is social, and it relies on individual action and participation.

Action will manifest itself in creative acts of subversion, organizing groups and individuals for mutual benefits, and providing services to depleted neighborhoods. Territory will be marked. Just as the Heidelberg expands its territory beyond a city block by painting large “dots” on abandoned homes, SUB_city will begin marking the city through architectural interventions such as Suspended Disbelief or Linear Gardening, which anticipate a larger end: radical horizontality. These interventions become part of a curatorial process organized around a common theme aiming for the creation of an autonomous city.
LINEAR GARDENING

SUB_city will have community gardens: they will stretch for miles, in single rows. A narrow strip of corn runs through one thousand backyards, stitching fragmented neighborhoods, and connecting others. Instead of attracting community, the garden confronts community. Tending a strip of horizontal garden becomes political: to keep it alive is to vote for the community. Dying segments of the row will index non-participation.

SUPER-FAST DAY LABOR

A pavilion will be set up to create an interface between small businesses and day laborers. The highly regulated US government makes it difficult for small firms to hire employees without taking on a significant liability (workman’s compensation, insurance, etcetera), many people have trouble finding gainful employment due to inconsistent patterns in the fluctuating marketplace. Super-fast Day Labor allows workers to arrive at the pavilion in the morning and negotiate a price for their labor with small business owners and managers. At the end of the day, workers get paid cash. The risk is low for the business because there are no strings attached. Everything is based on performance. It is fast. It is free. It is self-regulating. Super-fast Day Labor provides an immediacy of return.

SUSPENDED DISBELIEF

Suspend Disbelief is an act of re-appropriation; an abandoned and dilapidated house in Detroit will be renovated whereby portions of the house will be suspended to create a floating and dematerializing structure. The valueless becomes valuable as it creates an anticipatory space; it is a house in transition, deconstructing and reconstructing itself simultaneously.

FISH RELEASE

Storm sewers and drainage ditches in abandoned areas of Detroit, have been cut off from the infrastructural network as a way to cut costs. Fish Release is the practice of buying goldfish and releasing them into the abandoned storm drains in and around Detroit. This subtly marks territory, adding to the codified language that is part of a curatorial process of SUB_city’s visibility.

This intervention is rooted in both “the real and the really made up” practices that SUB_city takes on. The condition becomes that of abandoned buildings serving as Japanese fishponds, transcending the current condition of abandonment, beautifying these spaces in a way that does not anticipate revitalization or memorialization. Instead, this intervention rethinks and responds to present conditions with a larger project in mind.

URBAN COMBINE

The Urban Combine will be composed of retired construction equipment, mashed up to create a single machine that consumes concrete, brick, and asphalt to produce gabions. Grappling paddles will move and stack the gabions into place inside old foundations to create colossal footings for The Continuous Monument of Dis_urbanization. The Urban Combine will consume the bones of Detroit.

CONTINUOUS MONUMENT OF DIS_URBANIZATION

Suspended disbelief will multiply throughout the city. One hundred abandoned and burned out structures will float above the ground plane of the city. They will be charged full of energy, and begin migrating towards a larger gesture: the Continuous Monument of Dis_urbanization. Superstudio’s continuous monument was an expression of man over nature, achieving total urbanization. SUB_city’s continuous monument is the opposite, the nature of total urbanization over man, the mass exodus of capital, River Rouge, and the power to render the city into a suburb.

ICE CUBE MAN

In January 2009, the body of a homeless man, Johnnie Redding, was found in the elevator shaft of the Roosevelt Warehouse in Detroit. The body was encased in ice. Only the man’s legs were visible. The fire department removed the corpse by cutting out a solid block of ice with a chainsaw, creating an ice cube man.

The only effective response to this tragedy is to recreate the visceral experience of the Ice Cube Man. Abandoned buildings become Ice Cube Man factories. Drawing on street artist Mark Jenkins’ urban sculptures, the bodies of mannequins will be manufactured and clothed. The ice cube men will be mass-produced and distributed around the city.

SUB_CITY COOK BOOK

You are reading it. This book will be massed produced and strategically placed for distribution in specific locations. The text will be translated in multiple languages, and broadcast over the internet and short wave radio, as a gesture of radical inclusivity, tapping the powers of grassroots Do It Yourself (DIY) networks. The idea of SUB_city becomes a virus that spreads throughout the city. Debate occurs throughout different physical venues as well as through online forums. All forms of communication are embraced as a way to disseminate ideas, information, and create dialogue, from art practices to text messages, YouTube, ring tones, and podcasts. SUB_city persists.
SUB_CITY ESCROW ACCOUNT
Mortgages in the US are typically managed with an escrow account, which functions similarly to a personal checking account. Each month, a portion of a borrower’s mortgage payment is put into an escrow account. It accumulates until insurance premiums or annual property taxes are due, at which time the lender carries out the transaction. This automates the entire process for all parties involved, and eliminates the borrower’s responsibility to “save” money for future expenses. Thus, the one payment made each month, ultimately satisfies other transactions throughout the year. Although this may simplify one’s financial picture, it also abstracts an important transaction, which is a citizen’s payment of taxes to the government. This further dilutes the fundamental pairing of property ownership to government support.

As SUB_city propagates throughout Detroit, residents and business owners will be given the option of protesting their failed city through the diversion of tax funds (sales tax, property tax, income tax) to a SUB_city Escrow Account. It will act as banking switch valve, keeping the money flowing to the city. Business will function as usual just like a typical mortgage escrow account. As the project gains momentum and more residents begin to politically identify with the new city, they will sign up to participate in the tax loop, the escrow relay switch. When there is critical mass, the switch will be flipped, creating a single violent act of capital warfare. Tax revenue that was once flowing to Detroit will now begin accumulating in SUB_city’s Treasury Department, expanding the new city’s programs and services. Detroit will instantly weaken, allowing SUB_city to emerge as a new form of post-industrial urbanization.
WHEN WILL THE SWITCH BE FLIPPED?
The anticipated tensions between SUB_city and the government of Detroit will eventually rise. One may hear a police officer pull up to a Suspended Disbelief house and say, “You do not have permission to do this.” SUB_city initially responds within the rules of Detroit, maybe with a defensive statement indicating that the abandoned house is detrimental to the neighborhood and that the project seeks to help. The officer is not convinced. SUB_city shifts the dialogue into majority rules: “no, we do have permission, ask any resident on this block . . . For your own safety, you should probably leave us alone now.” The accumulation of these moments of tension will result in the city taking action. At the moment they intervene, the Escrow Switch will be flipped and physical violence will be off the table as the scale of SUB_city will be difficult to understand; ephemeral and territorial, decentralized like Sparta. Detroit will not want to engage its resources, nor the county’s, nor the state’s to fight a ground war (the most difficult type as we have seen in Iraq). SUB_city will not have a centralized headquarters, only the Trojan horse, released of its content. SUB_city will be decentralized and atomized through social networks, immaterial relations, and physical interventions. The administration of Detroit will have no choice, but to step down.
This is it. There is no perfectly spelled out conclusion, no finish line to cross. Urbanization is not static. We must continually push and pull as its processes shift with politics, economics, and culture. The conversation of Detroit has become tired and worn out. If your only tool is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail. Detroit cannot become what it was. The only logical step in the cyclical process of urbanization is for SUB_city to emerge through political liberation. SUB_city inevitably has a shelf life, and therefore, it will be one of many forms of urbanization that will cycle through Detroit.
THE EVOLVING BEAST

Acts of Memory engages the mutual construction of matter and memory through the lens of architectural frailty, material preciousness, and acts of making. Soliciting our shared desire for permanence in the world, this project renders that desire futile through an architectural recasting of the myth of Sisyphus in the form of a dying beast, forever struggling for permanence. Sisyphus, king of Corinth, was condemned by the gods to an eternity of hard labor—to roll a great boulder up a hill only to reach the summit and have the great rock slip from his grip and roll back down. The futility of the task, the constant struggle to make, and the agony of such an act is played out in the project. The machine is a great beast made of sinew and gold. The machine roams, its telos is to scar the earth, yet the material reality of its construction and assembly—its manifestation of the precious—counts its undoing. Exhaustive and destructive, the beast struggles in the same manner as Sisyphus—always in vain.

The project is played out in three acts: creation, fashioning of memory, and undoing.
ACT ONE: MATERIAL + MAKING / CREATION

The beast’s creation is injected with signifiers of perpetuation. The preciousness of memory is translated to material preciousness, played out in the making of the machine: gold leaf and burnt paper, delicately stitched with filament, constitute together, an exquisite object. The act of making the machine is a careful and intimate act of creation.

The beast fashioned of materials that, in this project, constitute their own value set, context, and situational logic. The implementation of gold leaf in the project is an act of rendering frailty. The leaf, like the paper, the filament, and the other gossamer materials, signifies a sort of precious inherent to its make-up. The iconography of gold leaf is acknowledged, but not the driving force of the project. Its monetary value, its economic and political structure, and historical use are secondary to its materiality. Accepting the gold leaf on these terms, the leaf is part of a larger set of imagined materials in a fictive world that mimics our own.

The origins of the beast can be found in the taxonomies and ecologies of insects—looking at the kinds of things in the world that move through the earth and act much in the same way the machine would. The structure of exoskeletons and the sublime arrangement of wings of creatures began to inform the piecing together of the machine. These models began to inflect the creation of the beast. The first attempt at an exquisite object is rendered much like the delicate form it impersonates, the bird wing. Other studies included looking at parts, assemblies, and aggregations of units to form skeletal structures that would then begin to alter the earth.

By beginning to understand its pieces and their assembly, one begins to understand the undoing of them as well.

Early acts of making consisted of a found object collage and other forms of mixed media—a Hans Bellmer line drawing, discarded household items, old planners, ink, text, and orchids. The result is a series of fragments—assembled, sketched over, reconfigured, and distorted, all in an attempt to coax the beast into being. An interest in armature, the pieces at work in the machine, arose through a series of imagined prototypes. No single prototype engaged the beast in its entirety.
No single prototype succeeded in understanding the whole: these fragments act as a way into the work.
ACT TWO: SCARRING THE EARTH

The beast’s move is to mark the earth through violence—to scar its presumptive purity. In this act, the ground is rendered a container of memory. To make a mark in the earth is to begin to fashion memory in the material world. The machine begins to be referred to as a “beast,” a great living thing brought into this world with purpose and intent. The project ultimately addresses the problem of memorial in relation to permanence. The beast is essentially a memorial making machine. Its marks in the earth constitute a record of its existence; however, its death—its atomization—constitutes a more potent type of memorial.
ACT THREE: THE BEAST DIES

This memorial is not a monument. It is not edifice or stone, but an act—the act of unmaking. It is this trail of wreckage, the result of the violent act of the earth tearing apart that which seeks to mark it.

It is its expression of memory and its inability to be made concretely manifest. The residual effects of the beast’s decay—clouds of dust churn as it begins to scrape and drag itself across the ground, the creak and hum of metallic and machine parts, and the glimmer of gold and wreckage strewn across the landscape—convey the exquisite in the violence of unmaking. This unmaking gives clarity to our universal need to consequently, preemptively, and, in the most panglossian sense, struggle ceaselessly. The ground is etched with this agony, simultaneously suffused and lighted with gold.

As the beast creaks and sighs its way through the landscape, trying to make permanent the fleeting, the earth undoes it. Made of metal too soft and too rare to sustain this scarring, the machine becomes the instrument of its undoing. It crashes against the hard earth, flaking and faltering as it begins to disintegrate. It tears at the earth; the earth tears at the machine. Played out in stages, the ligatures begin to slacken, the parts, once rigid and gleaming, begin to weaken and sag under the weight of its unmaking.

The exhaustive run comes to a close as the beast sighs, scraping the earth, giving way to its own end.
SCRAMBLED EGGS
SPATIAL GHOSTINGS AND LAMINATE ECOLOGIES

BETHANY WILSON
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE THESIS

primary advisor / NEAL ROBINSON
secondary advisor / PERRY KULPER
Memories form throughout every experience; collecting, overlapping, clashing, and misinterpreting. They are archived in an additive or subtractive manner within the mind, creating scrambled understandings or manipulations of the original components. In order to explore memory in terms of place, identity, clearing, and renewal, a revisited place is chosen as the site, a grandparents’ house. It contains elements of closeness yet instances of distance.
Architecture responds to memoirs within the landscape of the memory by displacing, reorienting, and reorganizing place in terms of laminate ecologies of the mind. It leaves artifacts as spatial ghostings, referencing the past, but creating a future. Thus, *Scrambled Eggs: Spatial Ghostings and Laminate Ecologies* comes to life.

It is also defining what happens to the memories over time; they exist of the same components, but are scrambled and manipulated over time to define a new memory. Through the *spatial ghostings* and *laminate ecologies*’ manipulation, the original memory is projected into a new memory.

Spatial ghostings define artifacts that are left as traces of ecological memory triggers and define a spatial past. Ecological memory triggers are situational similarities, which activate specific memories and specific responses to memories. Laminate ecologies are layered relationships of site, context, circumstance, and memory structures that relate to one another and to the traces they leave behind. Spatial ghostings and laminate ecologies are explored along side their memory structures within the situational drawings. Each drawing tells the story of how the specific memory structure works over time. The spatial ghostings and laminate ecologies manifest themselves within the memory structures and occur as a response to the situational evolutions. The four memory structures explored are: preserve, translate, distort, and contain.

The original memories from the site work as the base layer for the redefining of the site, and are archived into memory tags. Each tag contains an iconic image or visual trigger of the memory and a short story that describes the moment. The tags are labeled as they are remembered: dancing beads, tendril enclosure, peeling layers, letter writer, climbing tree, snowball bloom, grown-up feet, tobacco trace, secret sound, sizzling yoke, etcetera.
To the care of the owners, they were placed in the garden to await the next season.

To the garden's beauty, they were placed for the first time. It was a moment of solitude, a moment of reflection.

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METHODOLOGY

Wallpaper patterning is the generator through which the methodology is explored. It is an artifact that is inherently present and representative of a grandparents’ house. Within the process of patterning, modes of burning, cutting, and carving take place, creating a clearing in order to open the site to a renewal process of the site and the mind. Through the clearing, a new system of representation occurs. It is re-making and displacing through erasure.

Beginning with the wallpaper of the house, the pattern is explored as a form that can be manipulated through scales and different modes of production. The pattern works at a one to one scale of the wallpaper on the wall of the house; it also works at a scaled version of the representation of the site. Therefore, the pattern is acting as a part of the house itself and also as a representation of the site of the house. The modes of production, such as: burning, cutting, and carving, work as a force on the site by creating a clearing, similar to that of a forest fire.
The grandparents' house is located in southeast Michigan. The neighborhood's streets form a grid, each lot is a standard 50' x 100', and the houses' façades are similar. Within the standard, ordinary, and distant, there becomes a sense of familiarity. Within the interactions and relationships that occur, memories form layers on top of one another, redefining the site.

The site drawings define the location of the original memories over time, and how they evolve and adapt to one another and to the site. The conventional ideas of boundary are under question as the memories begin to define new borders within the site. This concept is explored in terms of a larger scale within the neighborhood over time. The neighborhood is no longer defined by the lines of a lawn, a fence, or a sidewalk. Instead, borders and boundaries are drawn by the memories and their own natural selection.

The modes of production mark into the site and leave their print, a memory. They also work at a representational level by defining a border or a line. The representation creates a framework by which the site can adapt and react to new environments, as well as older memories. Spatial ghostings and laminate ecologies form in this zone of the reference of older memories and the projection of new environments.
PRETREAT
They appeared one day, climbing the side of the green aluminum. He built a trellis to help guide the growth. A secret structure began to form up and around, with tendrils curling into the air. The taste was red and sweet, at times sour. It was whimsical and secretive. As time passed the vines fell to the ground and rotted in their precise pattern. Spring came, and dandelions began to grow in the fertile pattern. The press, once used to press the grapes into wine, evolved and adapted to now press the dandelion stems. Instead of wine, the press produced milky latex that overflowed and covered the dandelions, preserving the original pattern of the grape vines.

TRANSLATE
It was always there, present and rooted. Its limbs welcomed and were strategically placed. Its shade was comfort. There were places to sit, hang, and climb. It had to go one day; it was ailing. All that was left was a footprint of what had been. Down below the ground, the bees began to eat away at the deteriorating roots. They mixed the wooden material with their saliva to create a sticky pulp for their nest. The bees translated the roots of the climbing tree into the structure of their home.

DISTORT
It was a type of decoration, a reminder of what had been. The scent of tobacco leaves lingered while it sat in its perfect place. Wear marks were apparent and one could imagine the clouds of smoke. It sat untouched for quite some time; yet when it was used, the smoke billowed through the second story attic, manipulating the space. Walls broke apart at the seams, and openings were diffused into irregular shapes. The conventions of the space were distorted until they were unrecognizable.

CONTAIN
The snowballs of spring and summer bloom with a round, plush presence and an overwhelming scent. The branches and blooms slip through the grating, extending beyond their boundary. Each year the snowballs multiply, exponentially expanding their footprint. They hibernate each fall and winter, and return in full bloom during May or June. In order to prevent the spread of the invasive species, lightning rods, as an electric fence, were strategically placed around the plantings. Throughout the many seasons, the snowball blooms managed to escape. The open space of where the blooms began was left behind. The spatial memory was contained.
XEROMAX
ROBOTS, PROTOTYPES, AND DESERT ECOLOGIES

william muschenheim fellow / NATALY GATTEGNO
willard a. oberdick fellow / JASON KELLY JOHNSON
FELLOWSHIPS IN ARCHITECTURE
XERO: meaning dry; extremely arid (pronounced “zero”)
MAX: to the greatest or furthest degree; totally

XEROmax is an experimental prototype for desert living; calibrated, tuned, and responsive to its desert habitat; adaptable, mutable, and variable to the desert ecology. Contrary to current trends in desert suburban development, XEROmax is a porous, permeable, and evolving habitat in synchronicity with its surroundings—hyper situated, indigenous, and local. XEROmax responds to the DNA of the desert: wind direction, solar orientation, temperature, and sand. XEROmax attempts to reconcile two antithetical and disparate conditions that define modern desert living: extreme climate and extreme sprawl. How can the intense heat, aridity, and blistering sunshine of the desert be reconciled with the vast expanses of single-family homes cooled by central air, surrounded by golf courses, and bordered by artificial lakes? Can the synthetic recombination of these extreme conditions spawn productive new hybrids of desert living machines, landscapes, and ecologies?
“The desert is an appropriate place for fantasies: the fantasies of dune buggy maniacs and lone hikers, the seekers after legendary gold mines, the exploders of the first atomic devices, the proponents of advanced missile systems, and the diggers of gigantic earth sculptures.”

—Reyner Banham, Scenes in America Deserta
TENT AA: aggregate solar collection: 300+ days of sunshine

DUGOUT AA: solar energy storage
Roof Area = 9000sf → 4.250kWh/day

⇒ Each roof can power approximately 73 homes/day

DUGOUT BB: the January High/Low Subdivision system of thermal

TENT: Sleeping"
Armadillos are small placental mammals, known for having a leathery armor shell. The word *armadillo* is Spanish for “little armored one”. The armor is formed by plates of dermal bone covered in relatively small, overlapping epidermal scales called “scutes”, composed of bone with a covering of horn. In most species, there are rigid shields over the shoulders and hips, with a number of bands separated by flexible skin covering the back and flanks. Additional armor covers the top of the head, the upper parts of the limbs, and the tail. The underside of the animal is never armored, and is simply covered with soft skin and fur.
As a prototype, XEROmax suggests an alternative vision for our suburban habitats—they become inextricably defined by their ability to sustain themselves—to literally survive and perform.

A community grows only to the extent its resources allow it to. The scale of the city is temporal and changing; growing when resources are available and reduced down to its primary components when the resources dwindle. The permanence of our cities is reconsidered as they become capable of redistributing themselves, growing and expanding to their minimum and maximum capacity. A different interpretation of ecology emerges; a strategically adaptive process in response to our environments, capable of yielding synthetic spaces of inhabitation with civic repercussions.

XEROmax is a single residential unit that can aggregate to make up an entire colony of desert dwellings. This aggregation is oriented to allow prevailing winds to cool the subdivision and allow the desert landscape to intermesh with hardscapes, roads, and connected infrastructure. Each house aggregates with its neighbors through the adjacent courtyards and the organization of the units according to the prevailing wind direction. The units also aggregate systemically through the interconnection of each home to the larger community. The gated, subdivided, suburban community that XEROmax generates is one that is highly interconnected. Each house uses its roof to collect water and dew, channels it through to the retaining walls, into the street infrastructure that is laced beneath with water reservoirs and filtration systems. The water is subsequently used to hydrate the xeroscape between lots. Each XEROmax house acts independently and in synchronicity with its neighbors to collect resources and regulate the desert elements.

XEROmax is a combination of two archetypal desert typologies: the dugout and the tent. The dugout burrows into the ground, taking advantage of passive thermal mass and encapsulating the daytime living programs. The tent is suspended above, and holds the sleeping quarters and a complex roof system which can be adjusted to cool or heat the house as needed. Between the two is an interstitial zone, which allows for maximum air flow, accommodates the growing of food, and provides a shaded exterior space for leisure. The XEROmax roof is designed to adjust to the prevailing seasonal solar orientation. It opens to allow breezes to course through it and shuts down during the warmest parts of the day to protect the spaces within. The faceted roof also channels and distributes seasonal rains towards the underground storage tanks.
An experimental robotic model was fabricated to explore how this system might slowly change shape and adapt to the varying conditions of a site. The model investigated how a responsive assembly might be in constant negotiation with the shifting energy cycles of its site, through harvesting light, wind, and water, and served as the testing ground for exploring how XEROmax’s behavior might gain intelligence, complexity, and richness over time. The XEROmax robot model consists of a series of actuated scissor-trusses with integrated motors. The model wove ultra thin shape-memory alloy activated truss modules, arrays of light, and proximity sensors, with a customized interactive graphic display. It is part robotic structure, part experimental interface, and part analytical drawing instrument capable of registering energy cycles and interactions over time. The desert, with its complex range of environmental conditions and energy collection potential, is the perfect testing ground for the integration of these active and intelligent systems.

This alternative vision of desert inhabitation explores dynamic issues of temporality, seasonality, change, and performance, while also experimenting with their capacity to generate new formal and spatial organizations. Extreme environments, such as the desert, require risk; they prompt us to critically rethink our desert environments and harness their potential without importing given types.
“In a landscape where nothing officially exists, absolutely anything becomes thinkable, and may consequently happen. . . ”
—Reyner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*
The methodology explored in *XEROMax* suggests an alternate set of possibilities that could generate an extremely contextual, highly responsive, and indigenous approach to desert architecture.

Christian Unverzagt is the faculty advisor for Dimensions and teaches design and representation in the graduate program at Taubman College. He is the Design Director of M1/DTW, a multidisciplinary studio operating at the intersection of design and cultural production. Unverzagt lives and works in Detroit.

Tidbit: he was a staff member of Dimensions Seven and a managing editor of Dimensions Eight.

The staff of Dimensions selected a printer for this volume on the eve of Apple’s iPad launch, in what is destined to become an era of significant transformation within print publishing; particularly newspapers and magazines with brief shelf lives unable to compete with the immediacy of new shared forms of networked communication and media propagation. Only time will tell how these devices transform the way in which media is consumed. For editors of Dimensions, continuing to conceive of the book as a serial artifact—where the act of assembling a range of works into a single collective body—will continue to be an intense, collaborative, curated project.

I hope that this convergence is the “light at the end of the tunnel” for publishing, for it seems Dimensions escaped the gangly and awkward adolescence of “on-line” publishing. Content was compromised rather than unleashed and deadlines eternal rather than rolling, effectively ending the run of many publications that made the early jump to digital media—whereas a period of increased access, distribution, and interactivity intersect, surround, and expand the realm of books and print media. Dimensions is a book best appreciated in all of its tactility, and yet the maturation of devices are quickly providing access to books in new and interesting ways.

Another light is quickly approaching the editors of this book, on the eve of its printing. While they will say they had more fun than they should have making the book, in the process, they did more work than was expected of them. As a result, they are helping document the past year, while simultaneously framing the next.

Dimensions has proven to be an important record of the trajectory of the architecture program over the last two decades and seen six architecture program (and interim) chairs along with three college deans. Dimensions is indebted to former chair Tom Buresh in its current form for the recommendations he made for volume 16 to redirect the nets it cast to more closely correspond to key moments of the program: focusing on terminal Thesis and Wallenberg studios, while building upon the strengths of the Fellows and Visiting Lecturers, which have only improved as those initiatives have developed, and proven a rich source of content for the editors, with this volume no exception.

Dimensions is now released electronically at the same time it is publicly unveiled each fall. While I hope that you are one of the lucky readers to be holding Dimensions in your hands, I am excited about the increased accessibility and reach of the journal, as it and the ways in which it can be consumed expands and evolves. Now that you have had a look through this spectacular volume, take a look back, and help move the conversation forward.

14 April 2010
Detroit
Acknowledgments:

Dimensions is grateful for the support of The Victor Gondos, Jr. Archives Fund. This fund was established as a memorial to Dr. Gondos (’25) by his widow, Dorothy Gondos Beers. Dr. Gondos was a distinguished archivist and historian who served 23 years with the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Gondos Beers’ intention was that the fund be used to assist architecture students in exercising and improving their writing skills, and the fund has been used for many years to support the publication of this journal. When she died, Mrs. Gondos Beers left a substantial bequest for the Victor Gondos, Jr. Archives Fund which generously funds writing projects like Dimensions.

Bryan Alcorn
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Beth Berenter
Laura Brown
Caroline Constant
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