Unbecoming

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IDEA JOURNAL 2013
© IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) 2014
ACN 135 337 236
ABN 56 135 337 236
Published at: Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
Registered at the National Library of Australia ISSN 1445/5412

IDEA JOURNAL 2013 UNBECOMING
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Executive Editor: Rachel Carley

PROVOCATION
Designing interiors is the process, we say, of finding a place for everything, and putting everything in its place. Alberti claimed that ‘Beauty is the reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse…’ (Leone Battista Alberti). But it shouldn’t be, and it never is for long; and Bruce Mau replies, in his Incomplete Manifesto for designers ‘Make Mistakes Faster’.

We want to know about interiors from the past that went wrong or disappeared. Interiors from the present that are ugly and useless. Interiors from the future we haven’t planned. Comedies and satires, but above all Tragedies.

Once upon a time, interiors were rooms: enclosed aesthetic – and therefore ethical – systems. Marie Antoinette pressed the button in her boudoir, and the windows were replaced with mirrors, excluding completely the uncertainty of the world outside the room, and replacing it with the perfection of her own reflection.

But when the revolutionaries dragged the Queen away, they left the doors ajar, broke the locks and smashed the mirrors, destroying the visual and moral coherence of the room. They didn’t call it the name of liberty, for an enclosed room, in which everything has been considered, which dictates to its occupants exactly how it should be used, permits of no freedom.

It is ironic that the modernist architects who vandalised the formal integrity of the room: Frank Lloyd Wright, who took away its comforting corners, Mies, who dissolved its walls into glass and polished onyx, and Le Corbusier, who turned it into an incident on a promenade, were determinists who believed that their formal genres could predict and provide the sensibility and ethics of behaviour.

The room has passed into history and has become ideologically impossible. This is something the insurgents of the Arab Spring knew as they threw the Sebastian Louis Quinze of their masters, and it is something of which even the curators of Versailles are aware: last year they refurnished the old royal apartments with contemporary furniture for a month or two, despite the inevitable catcalls.

Interrors only grant their occupants freedom if they are incomplete – either in space (deprived of enclosure, violated) or time (wrecked, collaged, rearranged, redecorated). Only then are their occupants obliged to complete them, to take an aesthetic, and therefore ethical, stance. A broken chair in an untidy room reminds us that freedom is not a right, or a luxury, but for the worse…’ (Leone Battista Alberti).

In 2013, the IDEA Journal invited interdisciplinary collaborations with landscapists, geographers, gardeners, and other lovers of the changing environment of life as well as politicians, anthropologists and theologians, papers, projects and reviews that explore the emerging consideration of the ethics of the interior: how does it, or could it, the interior provoke, rather than dictate, behaviours and responses? How can design make its users neither its objects, nor its subjects, but its citizens? 
This is a call for unbecoming meditations on the interior: ugly images, and stories about things that went wrong. It is a provocation for provocations. This is a proposal for an issue of IDEA, in which we explore the liberating wrongness of interiors, and the ways in which it can foster incomplete knowledge, the willingness to make mistakes, and the ethics of freedom of enquiry.

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+61 (7) 3630 6500
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Ed Hollis : Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland

Unbecoming

This is a collection of stories about rooms, and people.

They are unbecoming stories, in which people don’t behave as they should: a rude mechanical impersonates a wall; and Daedalus builds wings to escape the labyrinth of his own making. A little girl throws a tomato from a balcony in Bombay; and a New York decorator conducts kitchen wars. A young man wanders through an underground city; a building’s wounds are bandaged; and an empty house attracts unpredictable neighbours. Clubbers have sex in a darkened basement; and an emperor builds a cathedral in the middle of a mosque. The forgotten contents of a store cupboard are taken out, and rearranged as art. Marie Antoinette locks herself into her boudoir. She presses a button on the wall, and the windows are replaced with mirrors, excluding the uncertainties of the world, and replacing them with the perfection of her own reflection. Her interior is a room: an enclosed aesthetic system whose very enclosure represents a similarly bounded ethical conviction. Just as Alberti said of beauty, nothing more can be added, and nothing can be taken away, except for the worse. Designing interiors was the process, we used to say, of finding a place for everything, and putting everything in its place.

It was, as Fatima Pombo and Peter Aeschbacher write in this journal, a monstrous idea; and the image of the queen, endlessly reflected, could only provoke anxiety in its original. Even the desire for perfection is in itself unbecoming. It is ironic that the modernist architects who vandalised the formal integrity of the room – Frank Lloyd Wright, who took away its comforting corners, Mies van der Rohe, who dissolved its walls into glass and polished onyx, and Le Corbusier, who turned it into an incident on a promenade – E densor writes:

disorder, Richard Sennett wrote:

A broken chair in an untidy room reminds us that freedom is not a right, or a luxury, it is the obligation to think, act, and participate. We need to decide what to do with it. In order to grant liberty to their occupants, rooms have to be ugly, somehow, or at least incomplete – either in space (deprived of enclosure, violated) or time (wrecked, collaged, rearranged, redecorated). Only then are their occupants obliged to complete them.

When the revolutionaries dragged the Queen away from her boudoir, they left the door ajar; broke the locks, and smashed the mirrors, destroying the spatial and visual coherence of the room. They made it ugly – unbecoming. They did so in the name of liberty, for an enclosed room, in which everything has been considered, which dictates to its occupants exactly how it should be used, permits of no freedom; and freedom is what rooms that have unbecome afford their occupants. They are, in their specific interior way, ruins that, the geographer Tim Edensor writes:

The unbecoming interiors discussed in the essays collected here are experiments with liberty, or, at least, critiques of the monstrous desire designers sometimes have to design and to control everything. A wall enacted by an actor subverts the oppressive materiality of real walls with a gesture; and the tomato thrown over the balcony is a child’s gesture of impatience with parents who throw nothing away. The decorator uses décor to subvert the architectonic order of his apartment; and recesses in the endless tunnels under Montreal provide a toehold for the homeless and the enterprising. The bandages wrapping the walls of the asylum provoke its inhabitants to discuss its future, and the very abandonment of the house in Detroit invites neighbours to consider new uses for it before it is taken away from them. There’s nothing more exciting than having sex where it’s not meant to happen; and it’s a relief, sometimes, to find ancient buildings that, like the grand mosque (or the cathedral) of Córdoba, or the objects in Remco Roes’ visual essay presented here, remain unresolved, or find new uses that their original designers never intended.

It is ironic that the modernist architects who vandalised the formal integrity of the room – Frank Lloyd Wright, who took away its comforting corners, Mies van der Rohe, who dissolved its walls into glass and polished onyx, and Le Corbusier, who turned it into an incident on a promenade – were determinists who believed that their formal games could predict and provoke the aesthetics and ethics of human behaviour.

It isn’t enough just to imply aesthetic incompleteness, or to design it, or to use its visual language. In order to grant liberty to their occupants, rooms have to be ugly somehow, or at least incomplete – either in space (deprived of enclosure, violated) or time (wrecked, collaged, rearranged, redecorated). Only then are their occupants obliged to complete them.

A broken chair in an untidy room reminds us that freedom is not a right, or a luxury, it is the obligation to think, act, and participate. We need to decide what to do with it. In The Uses of Disorder, Richard Sennett wrote:
When a machine’s parts wear down, which is their form of experience in time, the machine cannot operate.
But the essence of human development is that growth occurs when old routines break down, when old parts are no longer enough for the needs of the new organism, this same kind of change, in a larger sphere, creates the phenomenon of history in a culture. Freedom requires us to engage with (but not to accept!) all sorts of infelicities, for the incompleteness that grants it, of its nature, unbecoming.

It’s an ugly word: a negative, the disintegration of a state of being but it is a necessary negative: interiors are misused, they fall apart, they are forgotten — because we live in them. And so the stories contained in this journal are stories about living in interiors, in ways that are messy, unintended, and for those very reasons, creative.

Agnishikha Choudhuri’s paper on waste invites interior designers to borrow from the discourses of product design a more subtle understanding of how people use things, and spaces, and how they dispose of them. Roes’ installation does just that; taking forgotten rubbish out of a forgotten store cupboard and instead rearranging and fragmentation all the time. It’s a hard doctrine for practicing designers to swallow, but it is an idea that has gained increasing currency over the past decade, and which is reflected in the essays published here. In ‘Dil Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice’, Michael Hirsch writes:

Making conflicts vivid and visible present them to a so-called ‘critical public’; this seems to be the center of this (new left) aesthetic. Where conservative right wing and totalitarian aesthetics believe in forms and images of unity and consensus, the new left-wing aesthetics seems to believe in the beauty of irresolvable conflicts and their expression. It is an aestheticism of antagonism.

And the atlas’ editors, Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar describe the ‘spatial practitioner’ as an outsider who, instead of trying to set up or sustain common denominators of consensus, enters existing situations or projects by deliberately instigating conflicts between often delineated fields of knowledge. In this context, the spatial practitioner is presented as an enabler of alternative debates and speculations.

It is no longer the necessary role of the interior designer to resolve problems, but to articulate them, or make speculation or debates and speculations.

Some papers here describe and consider speculative projects of this type, in which respond to unbecoming over time. Susan Hedges’ account of the suturing and binding of a deteriorating Victorian asylum in Auckland bears witness to the wounds that the building has suffered over time, and so does Di Cintio and Ruth’s consideration of a ruined house in Detroit. Heather Peterson’s Vanity and Entombment of Marie Antoinette occupies a more highly charged place: a particular time, a particular person, and a pivotal point in history and finds, in its momentary reoccurrence centuries after it has passed, redemption of a sort. Roes’ much quieter visual essay bears witness to the sublimity of that taken-for-granted moment in time — the present — that infinitely tiny hinge upon which the future turns into the past.

But another more unexpected theme runs through these papers — the simple fact that they are stories. In almost all of them, fiction makes an appearance to illuminate fact. Sometimes, the two are promiscuously mixed: the act of design is compared by Pombo and Aeschbacher not just to the mythical figure of Daedalus but also to the fiction writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the fictional Edith Farnsworth. Charles V’s famous regret for having built the cathedral in Córdoba is proved to be an eighteenth century fiction. Hedges’ reading of the ‘bandaging’ of walls suggests that buildings can be considered as metaphors for people; and Kirsty Volz’s account of people pretending to be walls inverts the same metaphor; turning architectural elements from passive bystanders to active agents in human dramas. Peterson’s Figment of Marie Antoinette is a fiction inside a fiction: an account made up by a made up conservator, collaged together from failed typescripts and pages torn from Antonia Fraser’s imaginative, rather than scientific, biography of the Queen.

This promiscuous mixing of discourses invites the reader to slide through interiors that are both redolent with imagined spaces and situations, and sensual and haptic experiences through clouds of organ music and Visigothic arches, solid walls that shimmer with close-painted pattern, recorded and imagined pastic people painted up and dressed down for a night out, or drifting through tunnels to unknown destinations. Fiction has one system of proof, and fact, supposedly another; but we do not have to read them separately, for both of them represent experience, and we experience both of them simultaneously.

This is a liberty of a particularly unbecoming sort, in which neatly circumscribed systems break down, and having broken down, allow the reader — and the writer — to explore all sorts of truths; truths of the sort that just like interiors themselves, slip between disciplines and discourses, between the furniture, the wallpaper, and the architecture, down the back of the sofa, where, finding themselves among everything else that everyone has forgotten about, they are liberated from the purposes for which they were made, and are free to pursue unbecoming lives and to tell unbecoming stories all of their own.
The Vanity and Entombment of Marie Antoinette
Heather Peterson : Woodbury University, USA

ABSTRACT

In his fifteenth century treatise on building, De re aedificatoria, Leon Battista Alberti argued for the expansion of architectural purview through the inclusion of objects such as sundials and dovecotes on the grounds that the former marks and fundamentally registers human beings in time and space, while the latter acknowledges the possibility of constructed environments for other species.

The long march of coincidence that denoted the inimitable life of Marie Antoinette has provided cover for leveraging subjects that have not yet been mined as architecture; much less as possibles for critical exploration. The Vanity and Entombment of Marie Antoinette attempts to goad the limits of critical spatial inquiry by examining a series of silent artefacts from the queen’s monarchical life: the guillotine as incontrovertible threshold, cleaving life from death, mind from body, thought from matter; the carriage, which widened the experience of the world past the limits of human physiology; and placed architecture on the move; curtains and crinolines, those soft precincts between body and berth, which beg the question, ‘Is there architecture in the occupation of a material condition, however tight the stays of the corset may be?’

The Vanity is a conceptual project imagined for the Hall of Mirrors, an object that is indeterminately a diminutive tomb – uncertain as to whether they had once held something of import, or if the contents have simply never arrived. As the candidate pulled at the last unopened drawer, a small sheaf of papers was revealed. They appeared to have been ripped from a book of unknown origin; the text describing a closely observed set of episodes in the life of Marie Antoinette.

The candidate was the first to notice. He was standing on the third rung of a ladder with his back turned to the room, when he sensed the emergence of a shadowy form come into focus against the silvering of piece number three hundred and three. In distrust of reflections, he lifted his chin over his left shoulder, lost his balance, and fell to the floor, bringing the eyes of the guards first to him and then to the bewildement standing at attention before them.

By all accounts, the candidate returned to his feet and approached the figment, cautiously, as if it were a wild animal. He reached out to touch its broad, soft flank, embossed with Cartesian lines – half expecting it to dematerialise like a sheet of gold leaf under the weight and heat of his fingers. But the form endured, as he began to estimate that the scores in its surface were, in fact, the embellished edges of a vast set of drawers. The candidate pulled at the surface, enlisting the guards to do the same. One after another, they found the drawers to be empty – sitting idle like raided tombs – uncertain as to whether they had once held something of import, or if the contents had simply never arrived. As the candidate pulled at the last unopened drawer; a small sheaf of papers was revealed. They appeared to have been ripped from a book of unknown origin; the text describing a closely observed set of episodes in the life of Marie Antoinette.

The incident waned through the earliest plunges of night; chasing the candidate toward a grave desire to produce substantiating evidence; a feeling made all the more urgent by the uncertainty of how long the figment might remain lodged in the hall. With a meagre set of tools, the candidate and his three conscripted aides set about the careful measuring and recording of the solid apparition. They worked tirelessly through the night, logging metrics, siting relationships, and inferring the potential root of the geometries bound up in the mysterious origins of the form. When they were assured that the figment had been secured in all manner and medium, the candidate carefully removed a small reflex camera from his satchel and raised the twin lens toward his subject; fearful that the dilation of the aperture or the sound of the shutter might cause the figment to retract like a superstitious tribal elder on the occasion of having his image committed to paper.

Dawn advanced. Shriil light, which had travelled ninety-three million miles from the surface of the sun, rolled over Poland, West Germany, and the region of Champagne, pouring down the Avenue de Paris toward the Place d’Armes. It reached the Hall of Mirrors through a sprawling reflection that rebounded from the standing water in the drained ornamental lakes, penetrating each of the three hundred and fifty-seven panes of glass on the western façade of the palace. At 7:36 ante meridiem, the figment dissolved into the air of the hall with the measured leaving of humidity burning off of a pond.

What follows are remnants of the candidate’s field notes, his drawings and photographs, and the last remaining pages of the book discovered in the small bottom drawer; whose author has never been ascertained.

THE VANITY AND ENTOMBMENT OF MARIE ANTOINETTE

On November 2, 1955, a figment appeared in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. It was late in the evening. The room had long since closed to the public, and was now inhabited by three guards overseeing the work of a doctoral candidate from the Sorbonne who was carefully sampling each of the hall’s three hundred and fifty-seven mirrors for chemical analysis, in order to shore up his theories on mercury poisoning at the Royal Glass Works of Saint-Gobain during the reign of Louis XIV.
It is often the case when we travel, that we are transformed by the journey; made different by the new and unfamiliar; it is exceptional to be untransformed. To be changed both literally and experientially by immense external forces. On the 21st of April 1770 a caravan of fifty-seven horse-drawn carriages pulled out of Vienna, conveying the young archduchess of Austria across the Holy Roman Empire and toward her future as the Dauphine of France.

The carriage would have traveled under the displeasure of an unsung road meeting the technological limits of a leaf spring. It would take another sixty-eight years for the first ride in Europe to use asphalt, and another hundred years for independent suspension to be invented.

The thin metal gable in the windows of the carriage would have warped the Baravian stands of linen, beasts, animals, and oak establishing their sheen and bloom against the amber sky as the retinue traced its way through feudal stretches of the Black Forest. At the end of her journey, the Dauphine would come to look upon the comparatively groomed landscape at the Palace of Versailles, stretching out in perspective washes — its sun must of pointed willow, pear, arbutus, and pines, and recall that the time spent staring out of the thin vitrino shelf of her carriage during her three-weeks-long half-week passage towards the royal basin of Paris, had been nothing short of a forced march into vanity. The pages of the carriage, a mere pretext to the tomes of reflection and public exposure that she would have to endure for the next twenty-five years of her life.

Among the four of us, our characteristics of this thing are collaged at best. Guillaume and Jean-Pierre think that it might be bolsentric, Louis suspects collective hallucination, and has asked a lot of questions about the prospect of mercury poisoning. I'm utterly bewildered, and mostly at a loss for words, but in our floundering attempt to triangulate the exact nature of this thing before us, we've taken to calling it "the family."

Perhaps the reason why we're having such a difficult time understanding its narrow, is due to the method of its arrival, and that it seems quite certain that a new form of interiority has been made through the intervention of this disturbance.

In enumeration of its presenting characteristics:
- the collar of a carriage and a robe à la Françoise
- a bridal veil held in suspended animation — charred, vitrified, irrelevant
- a leather dressing trunk or armoire turned inside out and dyed the color of a blushing ogea
- the heft of a model T or a French sleigh parked against an encountered, gilt crestrail.
Based on the readings that we’ve taken with the surveying transit, the vanity appears to align the distant interiors of the Hall of Mirrors and the boudoir of the Petit Trianon (which I later discovered was given to Marie-Antoinette by Louis XVI as an exclusive retreat from the intrusions of the French court). This causes me to wonder if these spaces stand in for the polarities that defined the life of the queen on the one hand, the laborious and irrational work of the aristocracy which expected their queen to be extravagant and then ridiculed her for being so, and her interest in a pared-down agenda in place with the emerging philosophical ideas of Rousseau that were fueling the coming revolution.

On the 16th day of the archduches’ brief journey to Versailles, the carriage stopped on an island in the Rhine River near Koblenz. The horses were brought to rest so the front wheels of the carriage were situated in France, while the back wheels remained in Germany. The careful positioning of the royal carriage over the finite and imagined border, ensured that the body of the Dauphine was left to inhabit the impossibility of the line itself, however brief the transaction may have been.

Geology proves that these forms of abstraction are absurd; that the divisions of Germany and France drawn along the fiber of a map, or willed across the soil of a small wet island comes to be true below the surface and in the consistency of air. But these abstractions do sometimes manage to ceremoniously and psychologically perform the cleaving of personhood, and to extract any last remaining trace of privacy that a Bourbon child might have possessed. The handful of this 14-year-old girl required the literal ablation of all clothing and possessions, including her underworld garb and Chinese pag named Mops, as well as the loss of her mock-wedding trousseau.
The posterior looks like the blossoms of a full dress arrested in chased wood, which trails onto the parquet floor and turns into a patterned inlay of blank mother of pearl and labradorite. I thought that it might be lofted by some colonial and unseen patron, and the thin lace window suggest that the pillars may have an underside.

I mounted the two small carriage steps to investigate the possibility of an interior, and discovered that the pillars of this skirt conceal a double-height space pin-pricked with votive light winking at the darkness like ancient descriptions of the stars wedded to the porous vault of the heavens.
I'm now inclined to think that this must be a tomb. Upon entering the interior, one senses a thickness between where you came from and where you are; a tight, claustrophobic space not entirely accepted into the light texture of the era.

There is something here, something lowered into place from a deep aperture in the ceiling, lined with brass and opening up to the sky. This something is a sarcophagus, perhaps is suspended over a shallow cascade of stairs, which resemble the steps so often found at the entrances to bureaucratic buildings.

This sarcophagus seems to suggest many simultaneous allusions: the asymmetry of a grotto, the elegance hitherto of Jean-Paul Serac, vestiges of marbling, no... maybe the intricate linens, patterns of a mummy's wrappings, drawn tight around a chassis, test from centuries of parbless, breathless air. But this mummy's cloth is girded in leather and pulched down to earth on a large brass bridge, echoing inside this hollow volume.
Twelve miles from Versailles, in the market of Feubourg-St-Antoine, a litanied warden began to organize their disconnect. They took up arms, and brandished demands as they marched west through thick flog in the detention of their covenets. The hem of their petticoats lapped at the girdle of a narrow street, which in sixty paces time would be widened to the proportions of an army regiment. It was the morning of October 5th, 1789. As dawn began to blush in the dark-green sky, the protestants besieged the palace. The assault resulted in no less than the beheading of two royal gunners, the looting of the apotheotic apartments, which involved the symbolic shaving of her mattress, the deposition of Louis XVI, and the repudiation of the crown and the beakery off of the king's bedchambers.

By midday the sky was washed in deep green and doused in this cloudy cover. Under hostile terror, the royal family is compelled back to Paris and displaced to the three adjacent apartments of the Tuileries. During their first night of captivity, mine all impediments to physics and the human mind under stress, the king might have imagined that the axis of his bedchambers could cut a line clear to the Alps, a realm that would be signed into sovereignty twenty-six years in the future, near the site of his wife's birth. On the second night, he might have weighed and revised the probabilities of earlier flights that had been ruled out for reasons of uncertainty or war. Eventually, the exhaustion of all other places would lead him to an overlooked concourse.

At Versailles, a royal bed with the curtains drawn had been the only place where the eyes of the court could not go. On the night of their planned escape, the king and queen pulled the shed of their beds closed and requested that they be allowed to sleep for an additional hour. While the guards took their stands to be asleep behind the opacity of their bed curtains, the royal couple managed to slink out of a ground-floor apartment with their children and a small group of attendants, fleeing in plain dress toward the Austrian border.

They made it as far as Varennes, one-hundred and fifty-eight miles from the reproach of the mob, before the plan unraveled. While stopping briefly to replenish the stock of horses driving them east toward immunity, the king was seen leaning from the carriage's unmistakable nose in silhouette against the prospect of their asylum just thirty-three miles off to the north.
We rarely think of historical events as having occurred, for instance, on a particular day of the week. Nevertheless, on a bleak Wednesday morning, as a bouquet of marigold and yeast was picked up by the wind, the deposed queen of France was carried to the Place de la Concorde and summarily executed.

When her head was removed from her body, the blade of the guillotine, which had been used to section through the neck of her husband two-hundred and sixty-eight days before, announced the inescapable threshold that she had been subjected to on her import to France, as the body of her carriage lay poised over that abstract and fluid boundary drawn by an unwriting coffnograph.

Over the course of the life beckoned by the anvil is, and the road out of Versailles, there were many indictments: accusers involving diamonds, color, libertinism, overindulgence and naive simplicity, profligacy and incest. For those who live in the hairpin turns of history there is hardly ever refuge from a violent and irremediable disrobing.

Sources:

Impossible Totality and Domesticity: Designed interiors as monsters

Peter Aeschbacher: Pennsylvania State University, USA
Fátima Pombo: University of Leuven, Belgium
* article written in full co-authorship

INTRODUCTION

In Greek mythology, Daedalus serves as a warning for the hubris of designers who fail to consider the consequences of their quest for design quality. Daedalus’ name, not incidentally, means ‘clever worker’; his skill was unsurpassed and his creations were exquisite, complex, and clever. And each ultimately led to tragedy. The complexity of his Cretan Labyrinth imprisoned the Minotaur and hindered efforts to slay the beast, yet was ultimately undone by a roll of thread. After designing the Labyrinth, Daedalus was himself imprisoned in a tower on Crete so he could not divulge the Labyrinth’s secret. He crafted wings to enable him and his son, Icarus, to fly to freedom. Icarus, exhilarated by the technology, strayed too close to the sun, melting the wax binding the feathers in his wings, and plunged to his death in the sea. And Daedalus’s jealousy of his nephew Perdix’s growing design ability – Perdix had invented the saw and the compass – led him to kill the boy by throwing him from the Acropolis.

Literature and myth use the fantastic and the extreme to convey cautionary tales. The grasp for perfection into the realm of the divine, beyond human capacity, ends in rupture, a failure with severe consequences. Daedalus’ stories are parables for the designer about unintended consequences, the limits of technology, and the hubris of total control. They have literature’s license to inhabit the world of the fantastical from which to divulge tales of the prototypical designer’s overreach.

But what of the real? Similar failures necessarily occur in the human realm – the real world, so to speak – but it is hard to find such equally extreme consequences. Life-threatening failures tend to be of a technical rather than an experiential nature: structural miscalculation leading to disastrous collapse, for example; Icarus’s plunge was precipitated by materials failure, yet the lesson is of Daedalus’ hubris in designing a device for flight, a capacity not ceded to the non-divine in Greek mythology. Perhaps the critical failures are those that occur in the human experience of dwelling and produce design outcomes so unbecoming as to be unsuited for their essential purpose of habitation.

Consider the titillating rumours that emerge from behind the scenes of architectural history: Edith Farnsworth famously unwilling to spend time in the retreat designed for her by Mies van der Rohe, for example, or John Pawson supposedly unable to live in the minimalist house he designed for himself. These stories serve as cautionary tales of the designers’ quest for a totalising absolute perfection whose product turns monstrous, overstepping the boundary of the human, the domestic, and the familiar to become strange, foreign, and unheimlich.

These stories may be so attractive because they bring the divine designer back to earth and serve as morality tales of hubris and overreach. Yet Edith Farnsworth did indeed live in her glass box (with or without Mies) as did John Pawson in his own minimalist residence. It is reasonable to assume that they did experience the fruits of their design labours, but perhaps something was just off enough as
to keep them from fully inhabiting them. Perhaps it was an anxiety bred of exposure or the simple inability to toss laundry to the floor after undressing; in any case, the aspirations of the design fold back in on themselves, causing anxiety and resistance.

This phenomenon is remarkable because it reveals our sense of anxiety and unease as a recognition of the unbecoming, something beyond our conception and belonging to the divine realm. We intuitively respond to the transgression of the strange, foreign, and divine into the familiar; the domestic, and the human. Having no place in our world, it appears as an abomination that should have remained hidden. In others words, a monster.

The same holds true for the process of design. As design reaches for divine perfection, its product becomes monstrous to us. But it is precisely because of the unbecoming that it will never fully leave the human realm. The unbecoming is a final, insurmountable boundary before the divine, one which may be trangressed in literature but in the real world is a zone inhabited by monstrous designs. Like attempting to reach light speed, the experience is asymptotic – from the Greek meaning ‘not falling together’ – one of never-becoming, not of failure to achieve ends, but preventing the creation of divine monsters. This is the key argument of the article the unbecoming is at once a quality, a state of being and an active process preventing the creation of divine monsters, and domesticity is the antidote.

The theoretical framework for this argument lies within a critical phenomenological approach to the unbecoming and domesticity. Interiors and domesticity offer the possibility to live life as it is, individuals in motion and conditioned by time, space and interaction (intersubjectivity). An orientation based on other frameworks such as Critical Theory; Actor-Network Theory; or Feng-Shui would unfold other arguments. We rely upon studies of architectural phenomenology and architecture written by architects and theoreticians who assume phenomenology as an inspiration for clarifying thinking about architecture, the experience of space, and for their own design practice. These include Gaston Bachelard,1 Otto Bolhovit2 and Christian Norberg-Schulz,3 as well as those who translate phenomenological themes into the practice of design, including Peter Zumthor,4 Steven Holl,5 Juhani Pallasmaa6 and Alberto Pérez-Gómez.

In a phenomenological approach, the metaphor of senses replaces the priority of vision. It suggests the concept of a living space as one that humans can engage through a complexity of impressions, an interweaving of senses, an encountering of emotions, and a crossing of thoughts. Architectural theorist Eduard Führ argues that a phenomenological viewpoint brings us closer to architectural matters, the experience of day-to-day existence, and thereby empowers us to understand architecture as a part of our lifeworld.7

Perceptive elements such as air flow, colour, texture, rhythm, and light are to be integrated with design elements such as planes, sections, site, slopes, and thresholds as well as programmatic elements such typology, structure, and form. In this way, imperfections and traces become the signs of the life of all days. Life thereby be-comes. Death is the unbecoming, the delta, the end, the totality.

The article first explains the interrelationship of perfection, the divine, and monsters, placing them on a continuum from the domestic to the divine. It describes unbecoming as an asymptotic boundary condition much like the ‘uncanny valley’ that occurs in robotics: a sudden drop in comfort as robots assume human characteristics, triggering anxiety in the observer. This state of unbecoming is illustrated with cases both within and outside of design, elucidating the characteristics of ‘design monsters’. In the second section, three cases of such monsters are presented: John Pawson’s uninhabitable minimalist house, Marie Antoinette’s overreach that nearly annuls the domestic realm: time and space in the cosmos of polytheistic mythologies extends from a centre (the domestic, the home) through the periphery (a transitional zone to realms beyond human experience and control) to the beyond-the-periphery (the foreign; beyond human experience). Humans inhabit the centre/benevolent deities occupy the near ground; and divinities or monstrous forces strike from the periphery. While all the non-humans can be considered monsters, a distinction is made between benevolent deities that are portrayed anthropomorphically or associated with domesticated animals and the destructive divinities who appear as non-human forms or undomesticated species such as serpents.17

The unheimlich definition of a monster also included ‘something extraordinary or uncanny’. Long before Perfect Design, the rationality of science together with development of technology would enable universal advances in quality of life, and design would both embody this new world and shepherd its implementation. As its name implies, Total Design was totalling simultaneously implosive and explosive. It would ‘subject every detail, every surface, to an overarching vision’ whose paradigm was a ‘domestic interior completely detached from the chaotic pluralism of the world’.10 At the same time, the designer’s task would radiate out into the world seen as a Gesamtkunstwerk in which ‘the planet is transformed into a single interior, which needs design. All architecture becomes interior design.’11

The interiorised world, although illuminated in numerous anticipatory utopian visions by designers, would prove to require a level of domination and logistics beyond the capacity of even its most ardent proponents. The complete interior, by contrast, was a ‘domestic interior completely detached from the chaotic pluralism of the world’.16 Through the periphery, while all the non-humans can be considered monsters, a distinction is made between benevolent deities that are portrayed anthropomorphically or associated with domesticated animals and the destructive divinities who appear as non-human forms or undomesticated species such as serpents.17

THE UNCANNY VALLEY

Capricious forces inhabit the peripheral zone between the human and the divine realms. In the tales of Daedalus, for example, it was the goddess Aphrodite’s intervention that led to the creation of the Minotaur, a monster with the head of a bull on the body of a man, and it was Athena, another goddess with human form, who transformed the doomed Perdix into a partridge. In both cases, the overlap between the realms of the human and the divine is populated by deities and monsters who serve to nonetheless clearly delineate the human from...
the divine. Whenever humans threaten to bridge the divide, something happens to keep them in their world. That this action is not infrequently unpleasant or frightening, though not always fatal, illustrates the asymptotic nature of the quest for perfection. While deities and monsters regularly traverse the human realm, humans themselves may never become fully divine. It is the gap—the unbridgeable space of the nearest possible moments—that manifests the ‘unbecoming’ of the never-quite-converging lines.

The mapping of the cosmos into three zones—centre, periphery, and beyond—the-periphery—may thus provide a useful analogy for considering overreach in design. Having established the cautionary presence of a peripheral boundary zone, the task moves to identifying the analogous phenomena in the human experience of and response to monstrous design.

Robotics striving to replicate human behaviours in machines have identified a similar phenomenon as their creations become more life-like. Dubbed ‘the uncanny valley’, it describes the experience of and response to monstrous design.

The unheimlich represents the asymptotic boundary zone of life-never-becoming-through-unbecoming. That the uncanny valley has also been explained by association with the unheimlich—literally, the unbecoming—is unsurprising. Sigmund Freud exploited the term’s dual definitions as he elaborated the concept in psychoanalysis. Freud undertook a dialectic comparison of the unheimlich and its base heimlich. The latter word concurrently represents two distinct ideas: the familiar and agreeable of the domestic (the ‘canny’ in the Anglo-Saxon origin) and that which is concealed or hidden. The unheimlich, by contrast, is that which is beyond knowledge or conception (the ‘uncanny’) and that which ought to have remained hidden but which has come to light. Both meanings parallel the monstrous as belonging to the divine realm and as an abomination. The unheimlich acts as a signal rooted in the real (the familiar; the domestic; and the human, in contrast to the strange, the foreign, and the divine), which creates angst and anxiety when the boundary is neared.

Three cases of unbecoming monsters follow. Each exemplifies an overreach in design that abandons the domestic and whose resulting unheimlich provokes an uncanny reaction. The works of design and their literary counterparts are not intended as definitive categories; rather, they are themselves parables, cautionary stories that leave room for the imaginative and deductive faculties of the reader to reveal other monsters.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, JOHN PAWSON, AND THE CLAIM FOR PERFECTION

As the last cricket tint of the birthmark—that sole token of human imperfection—faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again. Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its irrevocable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half development, demands the completeness of a higher state. 18

In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1848 short story The Birthmark, a scientist becomes obsessed with a birthmark on his wife’s cheek. His quest to eliminate that sole imperfection leads him to create a potion that, when applied, causes her to simultaneously achieve perfection and to die. Hawthorne’s characters cross into the realm of the divine—as monstrous creators and flawed objects—paying a steep price for the transgression. Hawthorne reflects on the impossibility of human perfection, writing, “It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps irrevocably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or to state that perfection must be wrought by toil and pain.” 19

The Minimalist aesthetic seeks silence and harmony through ‘empty’ interiors, eschewing decorative ‘noise’ and cacophonous materiality in favour of sobriety and purism. Its interiors are intended to induce peace and calmness. The aesthetic is defined by geometrical lines, natural materials, perfect and clean surfaces, and monochromatic colours, with white as a favourite. Only very few objects are allowed. There is a search for perfection through the purity of form, the exhaustive attention to each detail, and to the essence of elements. The house appears as a temple of silence, as a temple of no sensuous pollution. John Pawson considers himself a Minimalist in both his design work and his own lifestyle. His design work manifests an intensified experience of such pureness, cleanliness, and sublime perfection. His own residence, the Pawson House (1995), is a complete renovation of the interior of a traditional Victorian house in West London. Indeed, the interior was almost completely removed by the renovation. In the new plan:

The entrance is situated on the ground floor, which also incorporates the living room. The living room has a view over the collective gardens in the backyard. Pawson chose to place the kitchen and dining room in the lower ground, which gives entrance to the individual garden. This garden is rather a patio that doesn’t reveal much of itself to the neighbours or the public in general. The two upper floors contain the master bedroom and the two bedrooms for the children. The stairs are designed like a one-piece object, without seams. They separate the Pawson house from the neighbour’s house over the full length of the house. 20

Figure 3 shows a room of complete, pure whiteness. There’s a bench but it looks more a piece of art than an object with a function. Framed by the verticality of the walls, the bench is placed in a discreet niche, almost losing its dimension and volume, while the stairs reinforce the geometric rhythm. The immaculate vision this room presents is emphasised by the interplay of light and shadow offering the impression of design and its attentive logic as a mystic experience. The interiors of Mies van der Rohe’s Lake Shore Drive apartments (1949–1951) have come under similar scrutiny: “one perceives elegance, openness, and sobriety ... [that] however turns into exposure whilst the sobriety somehow equals glamour—thus erasing any feelings of warmth or endorsement that signal ‘home’ for most people.” 21 A totalising vision such as that of Mies’s hyper-designed interiors demands an invasive level of control to maintain the formal perfection after it is inhabited. From a phenomenological viewpoint, the architectural attempt to rid a design of the effects of any imperfection leaves individuals in an unsettled state, unmoored in both time and place. One is left wondering if it is possible to realize such a full devotion to
emptiness with the experience of dwelling: if the interior is so seamless as to cause the deepest sensation of visual silence, what space is left for the act of inhabitation? Dwelling anchors the experience of time and space by impregnating space with subjective traces and populating time with memories. For example, the concept of poverty in wabi-sabi philosophy embraces simplicity and imperfection in details, materials, and surfaces. Its intentional imperfection reflects its underlying principle of human fallibility.

Pawson’s vision of the perfect interior differs fundamentally; his ascetic formalism springs from his ethical minimalism. His quest to realise the perfect interior is at once philosophical and aesthetic, leading him to a conundrum like that of Hawthorne’s protagonist: achieving perfection annuls the thing itself.

In her apartments in the château of the Petit Trianon, Marie Antoinette had operable panels installed to block the windows. Curiously, their interior faces were mirrors. Her quest was for privacy, a centre in which she could find relief from her duties and the royal court, and her tactics had a clear spatial logic. The grounds of the Petit Trianon were themselves a retreat within the larger palace complex of Versailles. The château, one folly among several created there, held the Queen’s apartments, a further private sphere. When the panels were closed within her chamber, a final personal space was created.

The presence of the mirrors (Figure 5) make this a strangely recursive space, not only shutting out the world, but intensifying the experience of the self within. It is easy to imagine Marie Antoinette, free at last from prying eyes, gazing with relief into the mirror and able to finally see only herself.

And then, perhaps, she notices the birthmark or becomes aware of her many selves staring back at her. Jacques Lacan, drawing upon Freud’s development of the unheimlich, described this sudden moment of self-awareness as the experience of anxiety. Lacan argues that the revelatory moment heralds the subject’s recognition that he or she is not autonomous and shatters Narcissus’s impasse as the spell of self-adoration is broken. In the stories of Narcissus and Marie Antoinette, failure follows the attempt to attain a truly autonomous, and hence divine, state of existence. In fiction this state can be achieved, with Narcissus left trapped until he himself withers away. In the designed interior, however, the transgression is inexorably averted by the appearance of anxiety, the signal of the real.

**NARCISUS, MARIE ANTOINETTE, AND THE REFLEXIVE GAZE**

In the Roman poet Ovid’s telling, Narcissus was an exceedingly handsome young hunter whose high self-regard caused him to dismiss his many suitors. Amongst them was Echo, a nymph who had fallen in love with him after seeing him hunting in the forest. After Narcissus spurned her advances, Echo was devastated and withered away to just the whisper that bears her name today. Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, lured Narcissus to the pool where he would fall in love with his own reflection. Unable to pull away from the vision of perfection before him and never realising he was gazing upon himself, Narcissus eventually dies at the edge of the pool.

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In the nineteenth century, this type of interiorised private space would find its way into bourgeois culture as the gender-distinct refuges of the boudoir and the sale d’antiquités. Their intensification produced fetishistic ‘cabinets’ that showcased the bourgeois fashion of world creation, putting its subjects – trinkets, artworks, or the people themselves – on display. It was these complete-unto-themselves worlds of excessive accumulation that sparked the Early Modern ethical and aesthetic countermovement for purity, sobriety, and Existenzminimum dwellings.

MARY SHELLEY, MIES VAN DER ROHE, AND THE BELGIAN BLUE

Hubris proves the undoing of the clever worker at the heart of Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus. Seeking both social and literal immortality, Victor Frankenstein experimented with creating life through technology, first assembling and then successfully animating a human representation. His creation is at first unselfconscious of his appearance, but grows resentful at his treatment by human society, eventually fleeing to the Arctic. Frankenstein himself suffers tragedy: his (other) son is killed by his creation and he spends his life thereafter looking over his shoulder for the monster he believes is pursuing him.

In 1945, Edith Farnsworth, a Chicago doctor commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design a house for her country property. In 1951, construction was completed on a deceptively simple glass-and-steel house floating lightly above the site’s expected flood level. The design expressed the ideals of the International Style and of Mies himself – transparency, structural clarity, and lightness – all reduced to their essences. The use of floor-to-ceiling glass, an unobtrusive structural system, and the excision of traditional elements such as doors, windows, superfluous furniture – and even rooms and walls – was intended to create a seamless, transcendent interpenetration of house and nature.

Edith Farnsworth was not to experience the peaceful encounter with nature she intended when she commissioned the country retreat. Her house had become an icon of Modern architecture even before its completion, attracting unwanted visitors. ‘A less than happy Edith Farnsworth moved into her now famous house. In the morning she would come out of the bathroom in her robe to find uninvited Japanese tourists looking in not at her but at the house. Students would rent boats and row over to her house. Devoted students and professionals would hop over the gates when they thought she wasn’t there.’ And Mies van der Rohe, moved by the natural setting, privileging the visual connection of inside and outside but overlooking the privacy of the inhabitant, also allowed views inside. The Farnsworth House is a tremendous manifestation of the Modern ideal of transparency, but this aspect is pushed to an extreme degree. Farnsworth’s commentary is a clear expression of the anxiety of exposure her glass box provoked: ‘The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night.’

Yet the sensation of the unheimlich is not caused by exaggeration alone: it manifests itself when the intensity of individually coherent parts makes the cumulative object itself strange to human experience. Shelley exaggerates certain qualities by visually intensifying them to convey the monstrous outcome of Victor Frankenstein’s hubris. Frankenstein used technology to assume the role of life-giver reserved for the divine. His creation, in turn, was seen as monstrous by humans because its assemblage registered as not quite human. Its proportions were off-kilter; its scale exaggerated, and evidence of its construction made visible. A similar cognitive rupture occurs when regarding Belgian Blue cattle (Figure 8); livestock bred to exploit a genetic mutation that doubles the typical number of muscle fibres and also substantially reduces body fat. The Blue’s selective enhancement exaggerates features that are typically invisible, resulting in an excessive, unsettling version of a familiar domestic animal.

Above

Figure 9: Lina Bo Bardi, Casa de Vidro, 1951, Morumbi, São Paulo, Brazil. Image credit: Fernando Stankuns, Casa de Vidro, http://www.flickr.com/photos/stankuns/365815161/
There are, of course, other ways to integrate landscape and a glass house. In 1951, the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi designed her own Glass House (Casa de Vidro) for herself and her husband Pietro Maria Bardi. She treated the landscape as a constructive element as decisive as material, light, proportion, shape, detail, or temperature. The house is:

… hidden in a portion of the Atlantic Forest on one of the highest hills in the suburb of Morumbi (…) it is a sober, rational design, one might almost say it is ‘Miesanic’ (deriving from the architect of the Bauhaus, Mies van der Rohe), but already rendered Brazilian by the Nature that embraces it, more organic and more feminine. Feminine in the delicacy of its details, in the sky blue vitrotil of the flooring, in the curtains replacing walls, in the subtle curve of the roof and in the care for comfort. It is a house to welcome people. ‘It is an open house’, said Lina countless times. 31

As may be seen in Figure 9, the ‘Miesanic’ reference most likely stems from the similar use in both structures of large windows allowing an overview of the surrounding landscape. But the two houses are quite dissimilar concerning the phenomenon of inhabiting and heimlechism. The Glass House comes alive through an immersion with objects and the neighbouring landscape:

The years of a life lived by this house are represented by the art works, by the objects with or without artistic or commercial value scattered everywhere. The ‘junk’, as Lina would point out, should mingle with ‘high culture’. A cheap glass bottle in the form of the Jules Rimet football cup rubs shoulders with a baroque angel, a little peasant’s bench keeps company with a Chaise Longue by Le Corbusier, a child’s birthday present, rests at the feet of a sculpture by Ernesto de Fiori, and so on. Objects collected throughout more than 50 years inhabit this moving space of exceptional modern architecture that in a relationship of respect shows up the beauty of the Atlantic Forest and the necessity for its preservation. 32 (Figure 10)

Bo Bardi’s home, so unlike the Farnsworth House, reverberates with the phenomenological experience of emotion and reason, imperfection and order; and interior and exterior space.

DESIGNING FOR IMPERFECTION

This concluding section addresses the process of designing as the outcome of an attitude opposite to the desire for totality. Designing interiors for people is the antidote to designing monsters. Designing to allow imperfection is not a weakness. Rather, it is the wise consequence of considering time, atmosphere, memories, intimacy, transformation, ambiguity, fragility, and liquidity when designing a space, especially a domestic one. While it is not the aim of this article to deepen methodologies or techniques to design allowing the inscription of imperfection of daily life, we do seek to remind designers of the non-objectification of spaces to inhabit, and to encourage them to explore parameters like materiality, texture, light, shadow, colour, detail, rhythm, sound, landscape, balconies, terraces, windows, and doors as elements that mediate the experiencing of dwelling as an experience in motion.

Interiors justified by need and desire portray lifestyle scenarios and enhance the experience of time. They are bonded with present events, occurrences, memories of the past, and promises of the future. Because the individual both represents and is represented, creates and is created, s/he actively engages in what makes time a unique and subjective sensation.

‘Home’ is the space for memories and the continuity of identity – even while accommodating changes. Everything works together to create an atmosphere that awakens feelings of emotional appropriation – even if only for a brief moment. Peter Zumthor, in his book Atmospheres, 33 relates the experience of interior space as a territory of perceptions resulting from a choice of materials, volumes, and forms that unfolds a phenomenology of senses.

The desire for home is for a place of security, where identity can be unfolded and traces are left behind as signs of a personal life. Gaston Bachelard identifies ‘house’ with ‘home,’ the place of daydreaming (rêverie). The house is not only the house of the present, the house shelters all the houses where the individual lived and also all the imagined or desired houses.

And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories...
of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home, and by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams: we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.

According to Bachelard, the house is meaningful because it is where the individual finds the resonance of intimate life. This intimacy can be found in a room, attic, closet, simple drawer, or even a window. The house is the interior space celebrated to stimulate those experiences while also protecting them. The house sustains the continuity of the intimate life of the individual, sheltering the past, present and future through memories and dreams. Without it, the individual would be a discontinuous being made of fragments and contingencies.

(…) life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.

Bachelard’s phenomenology matches a deep optimism with a contagious joie de vivre. He associates warm emotions and memories with the house, namely the first house: the house of birth and the house of the childhood. This primordial house is the refuge for the most intimate memories, such as those associated with sensations. These memories are very personal and intransmissible, though they blur with the passage of time.

The concept of multiplicity leads to theorists like Robert Venturi, who defended complexity and contradiction in architecture. He criticised architecture realised in a puritan language, pointing out that ‘less is a bore’ – the antidote to Mies van der Rohe’s ‘less is more’ – arguing that architecture cannot be separated from experience of life. For Venturi, this means integrating fragments, paradoxes, contradictions, tension, improvisation … in a word ambiguity. ‘Ambiguity and tension are everywhere in an architecture of complexity and contradiction. Architecture is form and substance – abstract and concrete – and its meaning derives from its interior characteristics and its particular context.’

According to Bauman, the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in the age of liquid modernity leads to a fragmented immediacy of experience. ‘Efforts to keep the “other” the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment is not only the conceivable, but the expectable response to the existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility or fluidity of social bonds.’ Time is similarly fragmented: ‘[…] the collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting, and the disappearance or weakening of social structures in which thinking, planning and acting could be inscribed for a long term to come, leads to a splitting of both political history and individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes […].’ Indeed, life itself appears fragmented political and social life consists of short-term projects and individual lives unfold episodically. The control and exclusion expressed in attempts towards the ‘perfect’, ‘finished’ and minimalistic home is thus indeed a logical response.

However, Bauman’s concepts of fluidity and liquefaction also provide an opening for a mode of inhabitation immersed in the flow of time. Within this ever-shifting and ebbing flow, bubbles metaphorically represent the individual’s territories of inhabitation of space and time. Inhabitation fluidly integrates individual short-terms projects into new flows: recomposed families, recomposed homes, and recomposed careers. Heimlichkeit, then, describes a home that shelters memories, transformations, and uncertainties by integrating the fluidity of the present with the uncertainty of the future. Fraggity and liquidity are much more than features of an epoch; they are an expression of the human condition. Imperfection is the human protection to go through life, as illustrated by Hawthorne’s closing comment on his protagonist’s fate: ‘Yet, had Alymer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.’

Bauman’s notions of ‘fluidity’ and ‘liquefaction’ evoke Aldo van Eyck, a voice profoundly critical of architecture separated from people. His targets included the transformation of modernism into an international style ‘universally applied without respect to history, human nature, context, climate, culture or building tradition’ as well as postmodernism and deconstructivism, which exhibit the ‘same unconscionable irresponsibility towards the people who inhabited architecture’. Van Eyck called for what he named ‘built homecoming’, ‘architecture of everyday experience that embraces life as continuity with ruptures and fragmentations.’

Designing for mankind must approach domestic interiors as subjective creatures that allow dwelling to be a transitive place of its own story. As Juliana Pallasmaa states, ‘the ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete
embodied and spiritual beings. This defends the notion that what differentiates a non-place from a place are the traces and signs, the evidence of a person with a daily life in a space where ‘things’ take place. From a phenomenological point of view, to signs, the evidence of a person with a daily life in a space where

Domestic interiors actively participate in individual biographies, in stark contrast to the non-place within which the individual experiences no relations and where no story unfolds. Designing for imperfection allows a personal life and a subjective representation to the uncovering of the divine within the monstrous.

**NOTES**

4. For a representative sample of Zumthor’s views, see Peter Zumthor, Atmospheres; architectural environments, surrounding objects (Atmosphären; Architektonische Umgebungen, die Dinge die uns herum, 2006); (Basel:Birkhäuser, 2006); Thinking Architecture (Architektur Denken, 1999; Birkhäuser, 2006a).
9. Ibid., 1.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 32.
20. Ibid., 30.
27. The house nonetheless experienced occasional flooding. It was known that the site chosen, next to the river flooded. The floor was built six feet above the ground or two feet above the highest known flooding. The house flooded a few times ruining the silk curtains and furnishing. Except for planting wild-flowers, almost no landscaping was done. The road used for construction was left and not moved to a more appropriate location; Donald von Fong-Wroblecki, “A Little House in the Country/The Farmsworth House,” The Chicago Literary Club, (February 23) (2009) unpagedinated. Retrieved on 23 May, 2013. www.chicagoliteraryclub.org/2009/02/toothfarmsworthhouse56127.html
32. Ibid., unpagedinated.
34. Bachsel, The Poetics of Space, 5-6.
35. Ibid., 7.
37. Ibid., 17.
38. The aphorism less is more is very often quoted as being an expression of Van der Rohe to prune the minimalist aesthetics.
39. Ibid., 20.
43. Aldo van Eyck, 1919-1997 was one of the principal founders of Team 10 in 1953. Team 10 was a group of architects defending a more historically and contextually informed architecture and urban planning, positioning itself away from CIAM. For the writings of Aldo van Eyck see Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauwen, eds, Aldo van Eyck Writings, 2 vol., (Amsterdam: SUN-Editors, 2008).
45. Ibid., 615.
46. Ibid., 616.
48. Ibid., 11.
Reflexive Dwelling: The body as representation of wall

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ABSTRACT

In a play-within-a-play, the Mechanics’ production within William Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the character Snout announces his transformation to play the character of Wall. Snout’s portrayal of Wall is both comical and menacing as he represents the forces that separate the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe. Wall becomes a subject in a manner no different from the lovers that he separates; his influence on their situation is brought to life. The unbecoming nature of walls to demarcate, separate, intimidate, influence and control is a relationship most can relate to in their experiences with architecture. It is in these moments that architecture leaps from the sphere of object into the realm of subject; where we might be involved in some intense struggle with the placement of a wall, the wall that might separate us from a lover, justice, freedom, power or privacy. This study investigates how this struggle is portrayed through the human body as representation of walls in performance.

INTRODUCTION

Architecture, as a creative discipline, is understood as being synergistic with existing power structures. It is a material manifestation of the state, nation, and institutions; of capitalism, power and authority. There are very rare circumstances where architecture might represent some minority cause, or make a stand against a political system. The authority of architectural materiality is often gender or class, the double-bolted door that incarcerates. It enacts social and political systems through bodily occupation. This research elaborates on this unbecoming nature of architecture in its domination of the human body. As French intellectual and writer Georges Bataille describes, the way in which we endure a physical relationship with architecture that is reflexive with its domination of the human body. As French intellectual and writer Georges Bataille describes, the way in which we endure a physical relationship with architecture that is reflexive with its authoritative identity – where the architecture ‘attacks’ but is also subject to attack.

From the very outset, in any case, the human and architectural orders make common cause, the latter being only the development of the former. Therefore an attack on architecture, whose monumental productions now truly dominate the whole earth, grouping the servile multitudes under their shadow, imposing admiration and wonder, order and constraint, is necessarily, as it were, an attack on man. Currently, an entire earthly activity and undoubtedly the most intellectually outstanding, tends, through the denunciation of human dominance, in this direction. Hence, however strange this may seem when a creature as elegant as the human being is involved, a path – traced by the painters – opens up toward bestial monstrosity as if there were no other way of escaping the architectural straightjacket.

While architecture works to constrain or control the body, the body is also an instrument of choice when disrupting the overpowering act of architecture. Bodies on the rooftops of refugee detention centres draw international attention to their cause. Groups of protestors in the foyer of an office tower throw the building’s carefully planned programme into chaos, close streets and overwhelm its shadowy presence. The gathering of bodies in a public square in front of a city hall – a space designed for such a disturbance, which is nonetheless an assault on what the architecture represents. This research investigates an antagonistic relationship between the human body and architecture, through the physical body, avoiding the prevailing discussion on the body and architecture through psychoanalysis and the ‘ego’ acknowledging that architecture is a material act and that these intense associations between the body and architecture are brought about by an interaction between physical matter.

Through an analysis of performers’ bodies this paper draws on two case studies to explore the literal physical use of the body to represent walls in two plays – William Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (c.1590-1596) and The Escapists’ Boy Girl Wall (2010). At the climactic point in both plays a character named Wall, played by an actor; makes a brief appearance. Congruently, both Wall characters separate two lovers but this separation in each play is also a metaphor for some protest against authority in the metanarrative of the play. Bringing the wall to life enables the storyteller to overcome a political struggle within the play and in the broader societal context in which the play is set. Using the body to mimic architecture becomes a vehicle for the playwright to subtly portray political subversion.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE BODY

Bernard Tschumi’s work in his essay, The Violence of Architecture, forms a substantial departure point for this study. Tschumi encapsulates this control architecture has over the physical body while also describing an analogy between architecture and drama through the script. He writes:

Who will mastermind these exquisite spatial delights, these disturbing architectural tortures, the tortuous paths of promenades through delirious landscapes, theatrical events where actor complements decor? Who ...? The architect! By the seventeenth century Bernini had staged whole spectacles, followed by Mansart’s fetes for Louis XIV and Albert Speer’s sinister and beautiful rallies. After all, the original action, the original act of violence – this unspoken copulating of live body and dead stone is unique and unrehearsed, though perhaps infinitely repeatable, for you may enter the building again and again. The architect will always dream of purifying this uncontrolled violence, channeling obedient bodies...
along predictable paths and occasionally along ramps that provide striking vistas, ritualizing the transgression of bodies in space. Le Corbusier’s Carpenter Center, with its ramp that violates the building, is a genuine movement of bodies made into an architecturally solid. Or the reverse: it is a solid that forcibly channels the movement of bodies. …

The architect designs the set, writes the script, and directs the actors. Such were the ideal kitchen installations of the twenties’ Werkbund, each step of a near-biochemical analysis the focus is on the Mechanicals and their play within a metadrama. The wall itself, within the metadrama of the play, acts as a mirror within a mirror to the play, as theorist Hugh Grady writes: “The play models in its own aesthetic space an implied theory about the relation of the aesthetic to the larger social world. That it is a mirror within a mirror is the key to its metaphysical quality. And although the difference between these two realms is clear, the barrier between them, like wall in the insect play, has shrunk in it, and within each separate domain there are traces of its excluded other.”

Therefore, the Mechanicals’ play is reflexive of both the content within the play while also holding a mirror to broader social contexts, even one that is fundamentally conceptual in nature. This reflexive moment of metadrama is punctuated by a significant artistic decision: the Mechanicals’ design of their own set, which is essentially a stage within a stage, with the audience straddling the two realms of play: the physicality of the Mechanicals’ stage, and the theatricality of the audience’s experience. This dual perspective allows the audience to reflect on the artificiality of the performance, and to consider their own role as consumers of art. The Mechanicals’ play, in this sense, is both a critique of the traditional theatre and a celebration of the possibilities of the metadrama. It is through this reflexive moment that the audience is invited to consider the nature of the theatrical experience itself, and to question the boundaries between art and reality.
and political issues of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

A number of Shakespearean historians and theorists point to the notion that the mechanicals’ play was a political protest at Queen Elizabeth’s denial of a license to perform at court for amateur players. Unlike the metadrama in Hamlet — where Hamlet devises a performance that is intrinsic to the plot — the content of the mechanicals’ play is tangential to the narrative, the focus is more on the performers. The players are amateur performers: all of them are artisans, or tradesmen. They are: Peter Quince, the carpenter, who plays the Prologue; Snug, the joiner, who plays Lion; Nick Bottom, the weaver, as Pyramus; Francis Flute, the bellows-mender, who plays Thisbe; Tom Snout, the tinker, as Wall; Robin Starveling, the tailor, who plays Moondrake. Theorist Louis Montrose writes that whilst it is unknown as to whether Shakespeare worked as an artisan prior to becoming a professional playwright, a number of his contemporaries in the professional theatre had previously worked as carpenters and masons. Therefore it is likely that the purpose of the mechanicals’ play was to protest against the Elizabethan aristocracy’s restrictions on amateur theatre. Montrose provides further evidence for this argument, including Puck’s cynical apology at the end of the play.

Further to this, in this analysis I draw attention to Snout’s portrayal of Wall as being more than a mere representation of authority. In the very portrayal of Wall as being more than a mere representation of authority, the architecture, but also a representation of authority. In the very portrayal of Wall as being more than a mere representation of authority, the content of the mechanicals’ play is tangential to the narrative, the focus is more on the performers. The players are amateur performers: all of them are artisans, or tradesmen. They are: Peter Quince, the carpenter, who plays the Prologue; Snug, the joiner, who plays Lion; Nick Bottom, the weaver, as Pyramus; Francis Flute, the bellows-mender, who plays Thisbe; Tom Snout, the tinker, as Wall; Robin Starveling, the tailor, who plays Moondrake. Theorist Louis Montrose writes that whilst it is unknown as to whether Shakespeare worked as an artisan prior to becoming a professional playwright, a number of his contemporaries in the professional theatre had previously worked as carpenters and masons. Therefore it is likely that the purpose of the mechanicals’ play was to protest against the Elizabethan aristocracy’s restrictions on amateur theatre. Montrose provides further evidence for this argument, including Puck’s cynical apology at the end of the play.

BOY GIRL WALL

Boy Girl Wall is a contemporary one-act play devised by Australian theatre group The Escapists. This play follows on neatly from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, as we are introduced to two lovers, Thom and Alethea, who are separated by the wall that divides their living spaces in a block of inner-city apartments. The play is set in 2010 and the two central characters, Thom, an IT worker who has a greater calling in astronomy, and Alethea, a writer who is plagued by the demands of soulless publishers, are not aware of each other’s existence until the transcendence of the wall through an electrical short circuit in their apartments. The simplicity of the set plays with the familiar painted black walls and floor of the thrust stage as they are transformed into surfaces for chalk drawings; simple white lines demarcate and symbolise the location of walls and doors, emulating the architectural plan. The audience is made aware that they are in a theatre, not tricked by the signifiers present in a mimetic theatre set. A single light bulb suspended over centre stage flicks on, the result of the perfectly closed loop of an electrical circuit, and so the play begins. While neither boy, girl or wall is physically represented at any point during the play, each is embodied through the performance of one single actor on stage. They are realised, along with other supplementary characters (the days of the week and even the windows and doors) through the actions of a single performer — although not simultaneously, obviously.

While mostly only present through chalk lines, the architecture of the block of flats in Boy Girl Wall frames and precedes its subjects. For the characters Alethea (Girl) and Thom (Boy), the wall divides them but also draws them together. It is only when the short-circuit between the characters escalates, manifested in the building’s electrical wiring causing a blackout in the block of flats, that the separation created by the wall is transcended. The architecture that separates the lovers is initially disturbed by its subjectification. To subvert the wall that separates the lovers, the one actor that plays both characters becomes the wall. The subject becomes the signifier (the wall) and the signifier becomes the subject.
hierarchies and personal struggles with the capitalisation of art are overcome.

Between the two plays it's difficult to come to a definitive conclusion, in terms of each one's use of the human body to represent architecture. As Žižek writes in his essay, The Architectural Parallax:

This brings us to an unexpected result: it is not only the fantasy embodied in the mute language of buildings that can articulate the utopia of justice, freedom and equality betrayed by actual social relations: this fantasy can also articulate a LONGING FOR INEQUALITY, for clear hierarchy and class distinctions. Does the Stalinist neo-Gothic architecture not enact the return of the repressed of the official egalitarian emancipatory Socialist ideology, the weird desire for hierarchy and social distinctions? The utopia enacted in architecture can also be a conservative utopia of regained hierarchical order.10

A quick Google Images search of ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream Wall’ will produce a series of images of actors, professional and amateur; standing tall, arms stretched in a “T” formation with legs slightly apart, a pose echoed by Lucas Stibbard when he plays Wall in Boy Girl Wall. Neither play describes this pose, but it appears to be the universal pose to represent a wall: a pose very reminiscent of the Vitruvian Man. This pose is especially much for the lovers to converse, it is as much the catalyst of the official egotarian emancipatory Socialist ideology, the weird desire for hierarchy and social distinctions? The utopia enacted in architecture can also be a conservative utopia of regained hierarchical order.10

Here, Žižek elaborates on the reflexive authoritarian nature derived from architecture. While it represents existing power structures that may be the cause of detestation, it also expresses a longing for those power structures: for isn’t protest just a desire for an alternative power structure? Architecture might embody an unbecoming sentiment but at the same time it is a tool to overthrow it. Disrupting, as Tschumi describes, the body in the same way that bodies can be positioned to this there is a reciprocal engagement between the body and architecture. The way in which architecture references the body is broadly culturally referenced, specifically the pose articulated by the Vitruvian Man. The authority of architecture is derived from the body in the same way that bodies can be positioned in a way to overthrow it. Disrupting, as Tschumi describes, the architecture. The way in which architecture references the body is broadly culturally referenced, specifically the pose articulated by the Vitruvian Man. The authority of architecture is derived from the body in the same way that bodies can be positioned in a way to overthrow it. Disrupting, as Tschumi describes, the plays is the form that the actor takes to play a wall – there is an unspoken, uniformed bodily semiotic of ‘wall’.


CONCLUSION

While the actor’s portrayal of Wall may impart the playwright’s contest to an existing authority; the actor’s body merely becomes a representation for some alternative power structure. As Georges Bataille writes, “… for that matter; whenever we find architectural construction elsewhere than in monuments, whether it be in physiognomy, dress, music, or painting, we can infer a prevailing taste for human or divine authority if the pose taken by the actor reads as something else: limp, weak, an imperfect abject body instead of the sturdy, balanced stance of the Vitruvian Man, a very different image of architecture would be created.

Studying the relationship between the body and architecture through the body transpires to an understanding of a broader social interaction. Avoiding the limitations of psychoanalysis and the focus on the individual, the body divides a universal method for expressing architecture. This reading of architecture and the body through a broader, societal lens also enables a detailed reading of its political and authoritative scope. Further to this there is a reciprocal engagement between the body and architecture. The way in which architecture references the body is broadly culturally referenced, specifically the pose articulated by the Vitruvian Man. The authority of architecture is derived from the body in the same way that bodies can be positioned in a way to overthrow it. Disrupting, as Tschumi describes, the architect’s script.12 The body is the most significant way to refer to a person and it is through the body that we have access to architecture.

NOTES

9. Ibid., 17.
10. Wall’s first lines from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, where Snout becomes the wall, Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 24.
11. Žižek, Parallax View, X.
16. In 1996, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the play within the play is used to illustrate Hamlet’s suspicions on the murder of his father. The play is integral to the plot of the play and illustrates earlier events in the story to the audience. This is a device Shakespeare used deliberately in both plays.
Erased Domesticity: an abandoned house in Detroit

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ABSTRACT

An abandoned house in post-industrial, post-riot Detroit had been stripped of all its usable parts. The walls were cracking and peeling and nature was taking over. Erasure of domesticity was setting in yet the unconscious house breathed lives lived through its painted surfaces and its broken utilities.

ERASED DOMESTICITY: AN ABANDONED HOUSE IN DETROIT

In precedent-setting ways, Detroit’s neighbourhoods have been a focus for grass-roots activists and artists for many years. Abandoned city blocks are converted to allow urban farming. Abandoned houses are used to store bales of hay and farm equipment. Tall grasses grace the urban landscape, allowing the re-introduction of wildlife habitats most notably, the region’s pheasants – previously endangered – begin to return. The famed Heidelberg Project, known for its arts advocacy work, is a tourist destination. Paradoxically today the city of Detroit is the first American city to declare bankruptcy.

On the corner of Concord and Warren streets in East Detroit, near the defunct Packard automobile plant, a modest century-old duplex stood vacant (Figure 1). Between 1998 and 2001 our physical investigation of this abandoned dwelling (The House) produced wide-ranging discoveries regarding the politics of the city, the strife of an unemployed working-class neighbourhood, economies of construction, and comforts of domesticity – as well as insights into how, when all is stripped away, emptiness can stimulate the human spirit to imagine anew.

Probing the latent interior of The House suggested previously unasked questions about interior design pedagogy and practice. At first glance, notions of socio-spatial polarisation, anonymity of users, and makers of the interior extend phenomenological discourse on perception and experience.

DISAPPEARING DOMESTIC INTERIORS

At the beginning of the project, it was easy to draw the obvious analogy of The House as body. This body, this house, had been stripped of all its usable parts. The organs had been cleverly recycled and dispersed throughout the surrounding neighbourhood. All that remained was skin and bones. The skin was dry, cracking and peeling. The skeleton – the interior structure and foundation – was crumbling. The decay process had already begun (Figures 2, 3 and 4). Yet somehow amongst the debris and residue there remained a mysterious soulfulness. The abandoned house on its lot seemed to represent itself as an island – an island of emptiness. An unexpected empathy between the researchers formed for this apparently inanimate object we referred to as The House.
Figure 2: Interior view, first floor kitchen, 1998.
©Photo: Di Cintio & Ruth.

Figure 3: Interior view, first floor bedroom, 1998.
©Photo: Di Cintio & Ruth.
Practically and functionally speaking, we know house as shelter — protection from the elements. In the case of The House we were studying, we began to wonder: Who were the original dwellers? Why did this particular house become abandoned? Did the mortgage and/or the taxes go unpaid? In time, we would learn how meaning differs when a house is described as ‘abandoned’, as opposed to being described as ‘vacant’. When outsiders view an ‘abandoned’ house, there is an odd feeling that a crime may have been committed. They may also assume that only people on the margin would feel at home in this house. Yet, for the individuals living inside the City of Detroit, these houses were merely ‘vacant’. The living history and eventual vacancy had been due mainly to the declining economic health of those who had lived there. It became clear that the perceptions of outsiders consider the City of Detroit as still being based in the past — its historical markers emerging from the 1960s. Terms like ‘white flight’ and ‘race riots’ dominate the psyche of many North Americans in relation to Detroit.

As we reflected, it became clear that we must ask ourselves two questions. Why were we trying to preserve the memory of The House? Also, were we exploring the concept of threat? It seemed that we were bridging the boundaries of fear, and the intrigue of the disappearing domestic interior.

THE HOUSE AS SOCRATIC TEACHER

The methodology we used to investigate The House was similar to an educational tool used in the medical profession — a 400-year-old tradition in directional reading: the dissection of a cadaver. A pseudo-interactive dialogue commenced: The House presented itself as an open book — a deceased body to which questions were posed. Acting as apprentices, we began the dissection by answering the questions, explaining by means of visual responses (Figures 5 and 6).

As we dissected, revealed, experienced and processed, a new method of practice was evolving (Figures 7 and 8). We treated The House as a laboratory, an examination room, a place of intense and quiet concentration. After a year of regular examination and contemplation, we attempted to project individual and collective ideas for the future of The House.

During this time, our focus was only on the interior rooms. The contextual studies of the City of Detroit needed to be separated from our research investigation. ‘Detroit’ was too complex to fully undertake, yet we felt that issues relating to the City of Detroit were revealed through our work at The House. The contained space (The House) came to feel both safe and somewhat secretive to us.

To our colleagues, our design practice was perplexing. What we were seeing and feeling were oftentimes difficult to communicate. Unconsciously, an artificial boundary had been created. We wondered if we were becoming too protective of our new experiences. We developed a desire to be at The House as if it were some kind of an obsession. We struggled with, and were often criticized by our peers for our inability to impose a concrete design programme. We questioned
whether our attention to detail and experience was simply driven by aesthetics. Yet our curiosity about interior aesthetics propelled us more than the pursuit of a practical goal.

We felt that if we were to define a goal or attempt to impose a design programme for the project, it would be an artificial end—a task completed without full recognition of the existing power of the place. We realised that if we remained open, we had the opportunity to see aspects of The House and of Detroit that could not be anticipated. With this in mind, we made a conscious effort to bring openness to our research collaboration. We found that we had to be flexible about our decisions and impose limits as co-creators in order to work together on this experiential research project.

We saw that at times, no matter what our intentions were for the project, it was really the nature of the city’s history that would dictate the outcomes. Once we recognised the unpredictable nature of our work at The House, we encountered a kind of sensitivity and spirituality that seemed to be separated from ourselves. It may have been one of those glorious days when the autumn sunset shone through the fragmented windows, walls and doors. Or when the sun magically illuminated the exterior paint, allowing it to sparkle and seem to reveal an under-painting on a golden surface (Figure 9). For many months, we never discussed with each other these magical moments we experienced. We knew from the beginning of our collaboration that our individual pursuits were important for our separate personal desires and senses of achievement. Today, we understand that our collaborative experiences were based on our mutual ability to place an elevated sensibility on the reading of material environments to understand the intangible and human experience.
Opposite bottom

Figure 7: Interior view, second floor bedroom, paint layer removal, 1999. ©Photo: Di Cintio & Ruth.

Opposite top

Figure 8: Interior view, first floor bedroom, vinyl removal, 1999. 1966 newspaper discovered underneath, which was one year before Detroit race riots. ©Photo: Di Cintio.

Above

Figure 9: Exterior view, October sunset, illuminated under-painting, 1998. ©Photo: Di Cintio & Ruth.
Why did we feel the need to document the erased domestic interior? How were we different from those who studied via the method of deconstruction of an entire building? Perhaps, for them the visceral physicality of the removal process was the central focus. In our case, we drew parallels to the dissection process. Our approach attempted to understand the erased domestic interior from the point of view of the previous users and makers of space.

We examined and dissected The House as if it were a specimen – our method similar to that of a medical student or an archaeologist. Guided by inquiry into domesticity, issues of gendered and safe spaces, public perception of abandoned houses, and impositions of the outside practitioners, our responses were visual, material, and spatial. In some instances, we allowed the artefacts and interiors to remain in their existing conditions, while in other cases pieces were intentionally transformed to either reveal the past or create something new. In all situations, collected images and artefacts revealed multiple histories, while the project and the experiences propelled our ongoing research (Figures 10 and 11).

Our research drew on women’s ways of experiencing, understanding, and valuing the world. The investigation reflected ‘ethics of care’, in which co-operation, relationships, and care for others essentially replace conflict, confrontation, and notions regarding ‘rights’ and ‘duties’.

'Expert knowledge' traditionally grants primacy of knowledge to the educator and/or practitioner. The passive recipients of knowledge are the students and/or clients. Our pursuit was not toward a particular programmatic goal or a project in adaptive reuse. Instead, we engaged in a process of re-evaluating traditional design practice and pedagogy, specifically positioning ourselves away from the conventional approach of imposing expert knowledge.
We concluded that feminist theory and practices, and more particularly ecofeminism, were relevant to interior-design education, while our empirical and vigilant observational approach to gaining knowledge confirmed the notion that ‘making is thinking’ – a point that Richard Sennett convincingly presented in 2008 in his book entitled The Craftsman. In 2009, Juhani Pallasmaa writes in The Thinking Hand: ‘[…] There is a search in obscurity and darkness of uncertainty, in which a subjective certainty is gradually achieved through the laborious process of the search itself. This search is as much an embodied and tactile journey guided by the hand and feelings of the body, as it is a visual and intellectual enterprise.’

KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION

Initially, we struggled with imposing our ideas or remotely speculating on the place and the people in the neighbourhood. Yet during the process of clearing out loose residue and the beginnings of the photographic studies, an interesting series of events occurred. It was as if the combination of our presence and the act of clearing the space had initiated a creation of ideas. Visitors, critics, artists, neighbours and passers-by began to generate, share, forecast, dream and inspire ideas onto The House.

In the final months of the project we attempted to transfer our experience in a socially responsible way. First, we shared our visual experiences in the form of an exhibition of the artefacts found at The House (Figure 12). Then we attempted to allow The House to remain as an educational tool for community members, educators and artists (Figure 13). We invited several members of the community to listen to our proposals for conducting experiential architectural studios, symposia, and community-related activities at The House. The latter part of the project proved to be a far more complex venture than we had anticipated. Long-term commitments and funds would have been necessary to save The House. Instead, it was demolished.

As we left Detroit, we wondered how we could give more to The House and its neighbours, or to other cities with interiors waiting to be discovered or studied. It became clear to us that interior-design pedagogy needs to change.

Today The House has ceased to exist due to a mandated citywide demolition programme (Figure 14). Yet, perhaps The House did not exist even when we were there – the visible ruin is now invisible. Similar to explorers and pirates, we are left with a few fragments of broken glass, nails, and paint chips, and binders full of slide images and notes. These physical objects are our only documentation of a time shared, explored and cherished. The final statement with which we are left is this: Detroit must be experienced (Figure 15).
NOTES


Opposite top

Figure 14: Concord and Warren lot, two years after the city-mandated demolition. The boulevard tree remains, 2002. ©Photo: Ruth.

Opposite bottom

Figure 15: An interior space defined without walls, 1998 ©Photo: Di Cintio.
**ABSTRACT**

This paper suggests that the interior is a space that may become contorted, immolated, wounded, dissected, intestinally revealed and impaled through the course of its history. Through a discussion of a late-nineteenth century lunatic asylum constructed in Auckland and a series of instructional drawings for the aseptic treatment of wounds, the building's surface is seen as a physical wound that sags, wrinkles, weeps and fails to support its own weight. Through an investigation of the wrapping principles of bandages, the exposure and covering of wounds, the paper explores attempts to cover, heal and support the 'wound' of an interior.

For the body, a bandage or clothing can be seen as a wrapping that has the ability to cover or heal a wound through dressing. In this light, does a wounded space need to be ordered, clipped and slotted with edges free of distorting smears? Architect Marco Frascari uses the body metaphor to discuss the city as a ... poorly organised body, patched up by means of mechanistic and functional prostheses and organs transplanted to improper sites, a monstrous metaphor conceived ... Like the methods of applying ointment, binding or plastering a leg, do these acts from splintering further? Like a physical wound, a built surface can wrinkle, sag, weep and fail to support its own weight in a joint. If the wound is not healed will the surface be able to hold back the outside? What of infection?

Through an investigation of a series of instructional drawings that show the step-by-step principles of bandages, the exposure and covering of wounds, this paper will explore the attempts to cover, heal, and support a building's abrasions, the unsightly, unbecoming surfaces of a nineteenth century asylum that requires the prompt and kindly healing of wounds.1

This paper asks what is the essence of these wrappings before the body? What of the creases and the folds that speak of the absence of the body that wears it? The flat surface of the textile spread over the table, unbound, about to be. Through a series of drawn instructions, the methods of wrapping, supporting and healing of bodily wounds also speak of not just the surface but also the cut, stitch and fold. The accumulations of hidden edges, axes of symmetry, gridlines, facing lines, fold lines, strap lines and associated numerical values on patterns and instructions that beckon to the emergence of a human figure. Processes that take place from a flat surface to a bodily covering through painted moves, the dressing of wounds is discussed in terms of crumbling chimneys and mouldy stairwells. Architecture's repurposing of a nineteenth century mental asylum as a teaching institution in one sense surveys architecture's encounter with death, decline and munation. The building's suppurative, close scarpes, wound infection, hospital gangrene, amputations and successful resuscitations, the scourgery of surgery become the evidence of a building under failure. The surface wounds become a site for disguise, expose, and support the crumbling surfaces of its interior and exterior.

**THE INSTITUTION**

In 1865 (circa) the Auckland Mental Hospital was established on the Carrington/Oakley site in Auckland and named Whau Lunatic Asylum (currently designated Unitec Institute of Technology, Building One). Figure 1. The hospital, built on Carrington Road, designed by architect Charles E. Beaton and constructed under the supervision of James Wingley was one of the largest public buildings in the early colonisation of Auckland. Gutted in a fire in 1877, the building was reconstructed without any change to its long regular façade, the massing of the building following a Georgian tradition but with brickwork banding the façades in different colours, placing the building firmly in the Victorian tradition.2

In 1992 the Auckland Area Health board closed the hospital and there was a gradual transition from a psychiatric hospital to a design school. During the early years patients still returned to the buildings, while students were learning in nearby classrooms.3 In 1994 the building was re-opened as Unitec Institute of Technology.

Early nineteenth century asylum architecture underwent key changes; buildings were viewed as therapeutic instruments in themselves where architecture went beyond the purely social function of segregating and securing inmates from the community.
The institution was one of the first asylums to integrate family members as part of the therapeutic practices and also one of the first to keep notes on patients instead of just holding them from society. Despite the changes, what resulted was an architecture that mirrored prisons in which the cell was a major invention and constant surveillance an easily achieved possibility. The cellular organization all contribute to the unbecoming surface wounds on the Victorian building. Mould, plants, insects and animals fill the interstices, alongside internal spaces that are designed to keep people in and separated rather than work as teaching spaces. Remedies, patches and wrappings have become integrated into the building’s fabric, a somewhat temporary surface attention to wounds (Figure 2).

The institution contained communal rooms, padded cells and inspection windows. The interiors found in asylums were “...like hotels, were hybrid spaces: private in the sense that they were open only to a select minority, but public in that they housed large unrelated and transitory populations.” The building’s activities were segregated according to sex, with separate wings for women and men: the building’s layout was a custodial design for psychiatric care, designed to keep people in.

According to the conservation plan by the Auckland firm Salmon Architects, exterior features, which contribute to the cultural significance of the building, including the chimneys, ventilators and cast iron rainwater goods are to be considered features of exceptional significance. The document recognised the constraints arising out of the cultural significance of the building including the structural upgrade of elements that did not meet minimum strength levels, and that only such elements as chimneys are likely to require attention. The document remarks: Replacement of significant original parts of the building with new material is warranted only where: stabilization of the existing material has been unsuccessful or the original material is structurally unsound, or does not perform to its intended function, or is a hazard. The deterioration in the building should be arrested and their re-occurrence prevented.

The masonry exterior is predominantly yellow brick with contrasting bands and stringcourses of red brick: the building appears to slowly slip into an unsightly decay. Ceilings are home to possums, rats and cats; the heavy masonry, like any building, slowly shifting on a moving terrain. Cracks, leaks, and scars of past occupation all contribute to the unbecoming surface wounds on the Victorian building. Mould, plants, insects and animals fill the interstices, alongside internal spaces that are designed to keep people in and separated rather than work as teaching spaces. Remedies, patches and wrappings have become integrated into the building’s fabric, a somewhat temporary surface attention to wounds (Figure 2).

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Numerous adventures in hospitals where postoperative infection and sepsis presented problems broadened its scope. Even within one hundred miles of Boston, hospitals were visited where instruments were not sterilized routinely between cases; where the chamber of a steam sterilizer had never been connected to the steam supply; where waterproof duck was used as sterilizing wrappers, where the dry goods frequently burst into flame as they were withdrawn from the sterilizer; where the superintendent’s hero was an orderly who “sterilized” twice as much dry goods in half the time usually needed by the nurses by simply pushing the packages through a double ended autoclave into the “sterile” supply room.

The Aseptic Treatment of Wounds is a volume that practices the absence of bacteria, viruses and microorganisms; methods that are scientific, technologic and practical for the destruction of bacteria by chemical and physical agents in surgical environments (Figure 3). Heat sterilisation for equipment in the operating theatre, usefulness of chemical disinfectants for sterilisation of skin and instruments, the design and packaging of surgical kits, the treatment of skin and personnel, the control of airborne infection, the draping of patients and the wearing of correct apparel are shown in a ‘clear and orderly fashion, illustrated by a profusion of excellent line drawings.’ A series of illustrated instructions attempt ‘to correlate the knowledge and effort of all who contribute toward the aseptic treatment of wounds, present scientific data, and describe various techniques, geared towards all who enter operating rooms or surgical suites. A reviewer notes that the concern which the author displays for the preservation of the life of materials and instruments will be welcomed by the hospital administrator.

Drawings describe techniques employed at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. The Aseptic Treatment of Wounds was written primarily to serve as a text for medical courses in surgical techniques and was hoped to enable ‘manufacturers, salesmen, architects, trustees, administrators, contractors and craftsmen such as plumbers, steam fitters or electricians, to orient their contributions to the care of the patient and make them realise their grave responsibility for their safety.

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THE INFECTED AND DISEASED

The history of Oakley Hospital, now a technical design school, contaminated by time, weather, occupation and neglect, can be seen as a crumbling remnant tainted somewhat by its former function and associations. Unsightly stains, the fetid remains of right time occupants as they scamper across empty floors, the slow intrusion of weather and water leaving its mark on fresh paint, all adding to the unsightly appearance of what was once one of the largest buildings in Auckland. In one light the building’s unbecoming or decline can be seen as an infection from its difficult history24 (Figure 4). The visible presence of the building’s past is present in the contrast between its previous use – the role it was specifically designed for – and its new function.

The processes of the flat pattern and its instructions, the unfolded fabric and the intrusion of the subject appear to announce, by pointed moves, the gradual union of material and form. The reciprocity between the instruction, the body, the building and material where the instruction is seen as a finished bandage and the finished bandage is working instruction, the end of one marks the appearance of another. The buildings failing construction evidenced by the tightly wrapped chimneys, plastic binding suffocating the wound from further infection. Water slowly trickles into the building despite the bandages and plasters: ‘a kind of architectural disease, not unlike the eruptions of the skin,’25 materialises and slowly covers surfaces within the interior.

Somewhat futile attempts to cleanse the building of its old associations have not arrested the building’s decline as it sags, peels and frays; cracked walls and mould at the edge of sashes suggest more serious structural faults. Wrapped chimneys forecast dramatic failure. The structural health of the building, peeling paint and moulid plaster can be seen as ‘a dangerous rupture’26 in the maintenance of its seams. The veneer of the learning space is subsumed by the horror myth of the asylum. Mould reverts the site to the uncanny.

As the building slowly unravels its future is uncertain. The restrictions of a Category 1 historic listing make for a costly renovation in today’s economic environment. Its current state falls into dereliction, a slide towards ruin or perhaps a signal toward something untimely. Wrapping, bandages and splints begin to cover the building’s exterior, moving ever inwards as attempts are made to halt its slow process of decay. Chimneys are wrapped, walls are re-plastered and a fresh coat of paint is applied each year (Figure 5). Author Janet Frame, a former patient of the hospital, writes:

… that he is our red cross god who will provide us with ointment and bandages for our wounds and remove the foreign ideas, the glass beads of fantasy, the bent hairpins of unreason embedded in our minds. On all the doors which lead to and from the world they have posted warning notes and lists of safety measures … when the earth opens and the chimneys topple, run out beneath the sky … 27
NOTES


5. Walter, “The Aseptic Treatment of Wounds.” 6. New Zealand Historic Places Trust, “Carrington Hospital (Former), 1/1-144/1 Carrington Road, Point Chevalier, Auckland.”


9. Ibid., 19.


11. The name “Carrington” was derived from the name of the boundary road and was used to honour a pioneer surveyor general in New Zealand, Frederick Carrington, Unitec Institute of Technology, Te Whare Wananga o Wairaka, “Our History”, last modified January 6, 2012, http://www.unitec.ac.nz/aboutus/values/welcome-to-unitec/our-history/history_home.htm.


14. Items or spaces which should be preserved and protected at all costs, Only processes of maintenance, stabilization, restoration, reconstruction or reinstatement are appropriate for such features Salmon Architects. Former Carrington Psychiatric Hospital Avondale A Conservation Plan, (Unitec Institute of Technology, 1994), 41.

15. Ibid., 54.

16. Ibid., 57.


19. Ibid.


Between Everywhere, Connecting Everything, and Nowhere

Mark Pimlott: Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This visual essay concerns connective spaces without status of their own, spaces that are presented as though free of values, transparent, only functional. The spaces of Montreal’s ‘ville intérieure’ of the 1960s are taken to be representative. These are spaces that connect buildings, or other places, and so find themselves repositories for things and activities that cannot be placed within view anywhere else. The spaces are like those associated with infrastructure truly un-homely spaces, produced by a combination of accident and necessity, they are closest in character to ruins, to nature, and thereby, paradoxically, free, and models for spaces to come.

It was in Montréal, years ago. Moving through those endless spaces was second nature to me. I wandered along routes that bypassed the regular arrangements of streets and buildings, of outdoors and indoors, by walking through and under them, in favour of a ramble across an all-embracing, all-inclusive, continuous interior realm, an everywhere apart from the world, which one traversed like the incident-strewn landscape that was characteristic of the vacant lots and pavements of the city above.

There were times when one moved through this interior with little awareness of where one was; or, one would stride across a segment of space purposefully or without purpose; or one would encounter tunnels, perfectly designed, that simply connected spaces, or pass dull runs of shoe repair stores or dry cleaners or shops for umbrellas and luggage, or doughnut shops or coffee bars, or tobacco stores or shops with watches or transistor radios or camera equipment; those kinds of stores one couldn’t imagine being used by anyone, yet those that always came to mind when contemplating the worn elbow on one’s jacket or absorption and expulsion of huge numbers of people continued for the moment one forgot oneself, and felt free.5

One’s receptiveness to these kinds of spaces came from childhood, adolescence and young adulthood in Montréal, over a period of history – precisely the 1960s – which saw the city transformed from a conservative, colonial, laissez-faire economic capital to a city of modernity in spirit and form and act, which celebrated its awakening in all that it did.6 Central to its physical and civic change was the development of a 22-acre plot of three city blocks at the threshold between the historical centre, oriented toward the St. Lawrence river, and the burgeoning commercial blocks in its epicentre.7 Through its new interior spaces, the entire city took on the character – and appearances and connectivity – of an obligation to decision or commitment, of space itself, an intimacy and alienation and intimacy: passageways, the eddies and corners, in which one feels alone or still, and hence, at once, feels both aware of oneself and all that was around; aware of other people, of an obligation to decision or commitment, of space itself, an architecture of the interior. An attention for the moment came into focus. These places of consciousness were where form and space and material were all together, and articulate. And then, between these spaces of attention in which one was aware of oneself, others, one’s place and the movement of oneself and others and the spaces that were almost invisible – pauses in the spaces of flows – were spaces that were at once visible and invisible, a breeding between two opposite characters; at once monumental and mundane; vulgar. They tried it all on, playing casual and grand all at once, familiar and false. With their plays to being known, they offended, and usurped one’s anonymous freedom. These were the interior malls and atria, all fountains, mirrors and glass, bred from the union of opposites, and although the relatives of streets in the real world, they were, paradoxically, unbearable.8

In the great spaces of movement, the continuous flow of people was balanced with the congestion that formed at the edges and in the corners of these great spaces. While the constant absorption and expulsion of huge numbers of people continued through the concourses, others waited, as though floating in eddies of still water.9 Beyond the edges of the concourses but still moving with the flow, one was pushed into the tributaries of a network of passageways, narrowed, yet the only way through; conduits that were either clogged or clear. When the spaces of movement were purely so, purposelessness set in, and dust and filth gathered in its corners, as did its unseen denizens, like the barmaids on the side of a ship, collecting anything that would be left for them. And if there was enough space, there was a foggy souring of waffle stands, game machines, shooting galleries, and racetracks under domes, whose music played endlessly whether anyone played or not. Everyone knows there is a science to this kind of thing an ‘ecology’ of shopping,10 which transforms every pause into an opportunity to capitalise supermarkets, shopping malls, and even airports and museums are designed to calculate for these ‘eddies’, where people might pause to momentarily avoid the endless rush of people, and make them ‘pay’; but the great ad hoc spaces of the ‘ville intérieure’ were too crude to account for them, and so other forms of life gestated and bloomed. And seeing this life, while guided along with the crowd, in this space that was between everywhere and connected everything, or being part of it, settling amongst others or on one’s own, in the many folds and creases of its ambulating routes, one found oneself, and felt free.1

In having abandoned that city, an exile by choice in Northern Europe, it seems that the same places reappear; or some phenomena that share deep resemblances with them. They appear in those interiors where people come together and are aware of each other; and in those residual spaces among others in which one feels alone or still, and hence, at once, feels both alienation and intimacy: passageways, the eddies and corners, clearings. And I picture them, simply, where I have found myself, in the hope of retrieving them, and their Utopias Lost, and the expressions of some kind of desire to create another city that lived in the midst and depths of that which was known,2 and this interior had its own logic, its own character, its own monuments and mysteries.

As this network continued to spread and connect, it made streams and backwaters, and from time to time, due to a lack of funds or vision, or pure expediency, these opposites coincided; and there were occasions when the backwaters were inundated with public life, and the streams were abandoned and without incident. And so the whole network, many kilometres long, was one of places and non-places, of monovisionary and banality, of refinement and of vulgarities. Quite naturally, the proper spaces were balanced by improper spaces. The underground network was not utopian, but bore similar disparities to the city above.

Other urban episodes came to be read in the context of these interiors, which, free of cars, now defined the city’s public space. An earlier network of underground pathways that connected buildings on McGill University’s campus to the north became part of the greater network by virtue of association, though it was built earlier: This network evoked an undulating landscape, walking in its corridors, following the contour of the land, one turned and stooped as one might follow the individual branches of an extensive system of roots, alongside pipes and conduits that supported life above. A pronounced physicality characterised one’s experience of the rest of the city, whose paths and terrains were rendered more intimate, sensual, the features of a deep landscape beneath.

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Figure 1: Montréal, 1991 ©Mark Pimlott.

Figure 2: Montréal, 2010 ©Mark Pimlott.
Figure 9: Montréal, 2004 ©Mark Pimlott.

Figure 10: Montréal, 2005 ©Mark Pimlott.
Figure 11: Montréal, 2005 ©Mark Pimlott.

Figure 12: Montréal, 2004 ©Mark Pimlott.
Figure 13: Montréal, 2004 ©Mark Pimlott.

Figure 14: Montréal, 2004 ©Mark Pimlott.
Figure 15: Montréal, 2004 ©Mark Pimlott.
Figure 16: Montréal, 2007 ©Mark Pimlott.
NOTES


3. Tae-Wolke Cha, Ecology’ in Chuhsa Judy Chung [et al.], The Harvest Design Guide to Shopping Project on the City 2 (Köln: Taschen, 2001)


6. In Montréal, the English minority—who firmly established themselves after the military victory of England over France in Québec in 1763—dominated a French majority benighted by the prescriptions of the Roman Catholic Church and institutionally corrupt provincial governments. The Ville-Marie development was the making of Donald Gordon, the chairman of Canadian National Railways, and William Zeckendorf, a renounced New York developer: Gordon commissioned Zeckendorf and his in-house architects, Mappin & Webb, led by leah Ming Pei, to make a master plan for a 22-acre plot of three city blocks owned by the railway at the ridge between the historical centre, oriented toward the St. Lawrence river and the burgeoning commercial centre on the escarpment above it, in the shadow of the hill called Mount Royal. The site had been a deep railway cutting since the beginning of the twentieth century. The new development had the Central Railway station at its heart—a functional room in the mid-Depression style—and two super-blocks or mega-structures at either end: Place Ville-Marie to the north (completed 1962) and Place Bonaventure to the south (completed 1967). The underground transport network was plugged into this group in 1966, while a new metropolitan and regional elevated motorway system was completely integrated by 1967. Added to this was the utopian buildings and quasi-urban infrastructure and scenery of the Universal Exposition expo67. See Lortie, André [ed.], The 60s: Montréal Thinks Big (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2004)

7. The development, at its heart, inspired all that followed in the growth of the city centre. Central to the ‘Ville-Marie’ development—its master plan by IM Pei with Henry N Cobb and Vincent Ponte—was the idea of a congested and interconnected ‘three-dimensional multi-level downtown core’ (inspired by the ideal city ‘Sforzinda designed by Leonardo da Vinci’), which managed the movement and distribution of vehicular transport underground and pedestrians under and at street level: each were free to move as they required, and this was equated to a kind of desire. The connections to the suburban and national train line (CNR), the autoroutes and the Métro rendered unto the development a ‘captive’ population who worked in offices above and in the vicinity, many of which were connected to the below-surface network of pedestrian pathways, at whose heart was the shopping promenade of Place Ville-Marie itself, the representational core of the development and the symbol, with its cruciform office tower, of the rejuvenated city of Montréal. Any place that was connected to the Métro, or was anywhere near Place Ville-Marie, wanted to connect to its network, and so the network grew incrementally and ad hoc, (as had been Ponte’s hope), and spread out in myriad directions. In this ‘underground city’—or ‘ville intérieure’ network, the Métro stations were the monuments alongside a small group of public interiors, such as the shopping promenade of Place Ville-Marie, the exhibition halls of Place Bonaventure, the concourse of Central Station; and in a parallel, later development known as the French Axis, Place des Arts, Complexe Desjardins, Place Guy-Favreau and the Palais des Congrès; and finally, the campus of the Université du Québec à Montréal. See Peter Blake, Downtown in 3D in Architectural Forum (September 1966), Jan C. Rowan, The Story of Place Ville-Marie in Progressive Architecture (February 1966), Norbert Schoenauer, ‘PVM: Critique One’ in Canadian Architect col 8, no. 2 (February 1962)

8. Vincent Ponte, ‘Montreal’s Multi-Level City Center’ in Traffic Engineering September 1971

“Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.”

Sara Bomans & Remco Roes
Hasselt University
This visual essay is a representation of a two month residency and the resulting exhibition in the Gasthuis chapel in Borgloon (Belgium). The project was a collaboration between Belgian artist Sara Bomans and Remco Roes within the context of Roes’ practice-based PhD in architecture entitled: *The scenography of sublime space*. This research attempts to translate the philosophical notion of the sublime into a spatial form. The large and uncanny sublime is approached through the notion of immanence – ‘the sublime is now’. By focussing on the ungraspable ‘now’, the given (physical) context of any moment becomes the material fuel for exploring the possibilities of constructing a spatial sublime. This journey continually balances between acceptance of the status quo and acting upon it. Through this alternative reading of ‘the sublime’ the concept becomes useful within Roes’ spatial practice that emphasises the fragmentary, incomplete and the everyday as opposed to the grandeur most typically associated with it.

The title of the exhibition – “Nothing will come of nothing, speak again” – reflects the attempt at a continual seeking of meaning from the ‘nothingness’ of the current moment and the given situation on site. In the case of Borgloon this local context consisted of the empty chapel and over a dozen churches in the direct vicinity, suffering from shrinking congregations and facing re-use scenarios over the coming years. We decided to visit these churches and cross-reference our experiences and impressions with the spatiality of the Gasthuis chapel.

The most fascinating spaces of the local churches turned out to be the store rooms and janitor cupboards where old statues collected dust along with disused organ parts and Christmas decorations. The installations in the Gasthuis chapel are constructed out of precisely this kind of material, found in its own store room. Since this desacralised chapel is solely used for exhibitions, the store room was filled with plinths and other banal objects: these formed the building blocks for the compositions.

The two-month working process resulted in a spatial installation, a series of paintings, video projections, a soundscape and a book containing reflective texts and images of the church visits and working process in the chapel. All of these components were united in one final scenography that condensed all previous activities into one immanent constellation.

What unites the two sides is an approach of the (sacral) sublime through a much more subtle appreciation of (the imperfection of) what is given. Attention is shifted away from the apparent lack in the current situation and towards an appreciation of the peculiar, unstable state in which these spaces happen to find themselves. The installation might thus be read as an ode to this impermanence.

**“Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.”**

Sara Bomans & Remco Roes
Theo, the caretaker of the church in Jesseren, taking care of the plants.

Video stills of the constructing of spatial installations in the chapel.
Found configurations in the local churches.

Installations (in progress) in the chapel.
Unintentional bricolage.

Intentional bricolage.
Eye Candy: the Manhattan residence of Joseph Holtzman

Lisa Zamberlan : University of New South Wales, Australia

ABSTRACT

Joseph Holtzman is an interior design practitioner and the former editor-in-chief of the interior design journal Nest (26 issues printed from Fall 1997–Winter 2003/2004). Holtzman’s highly embellished interiors readdress prevailing assumptions regarding authenticity and the socio-cultural pleasure of decorated environments. This paper evaluates the private residence of Joseph Holtzman as an interior liberated from traditional concepts of appropriate discretion. By subsuming the perimeter planes and surfaces with voluble expressions of material excess, Holtzman’s residence challenges the understanding of interior design as a mannerly expression of built form. In foregrounding rather than problematising the connotations of artifice and embellishment, Holtzman’s work explores qualities of decoration that provoke, subvert, and renegotiate understandings of propriety in contemporary interior design practice.

INTRODUCTION

Steven Heller in Print magazine describes Holtzman’s work as consisting of design and content that are deliberately dissonant, aimed at provoking established and complacent expectations. Heller describes Nest as both a ‘cacophony of visual excess’ and an ‘off-kilter National Geographic’ of shelter magazines.1 Holtzman’s perspective on current practice is described by Heller as a critical assessment of the declining standards of contemporary interior design.2 Rem Koolhaas, architect and Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design at Harvard Graduate School of Design claims ‘nest represents an aggressive, deliberate throw back to content modulated with a perfectly honed contemporary pitch.’3 Blueprint magazine describes the publication as ‘all over the stylistic map’4 and restates Holtzman’s mandate that ‘we’re not Wallpaper® (magazine). It’s more subtle – not naked people but sexiness inherent in the very notion of being indoors.’5 Edward Mitchell, architectural critic at Yale University, in “Lust for Lifestyle” claims interior design is ‘better equipped to actualise the modern as the perpetually new’ and credits Holtzman as critically provocative and uncompromising in his reverence for surface in contemporary interior design.6 Holtzman’s work in practice was included in the Cooper Hewitt National Design Triennial: Inside Design Now in 2003 as a ‘current or emerging leader in design practice’ within the ‘architecture, object and interiors’ category. In a review of Holtzman’s work, Susan Yelavich, Associate Professor of Art and Design Studies at Parsons The New School for Design describes his work as ‘a lavish riposte to the modern dismissal of artifice.’7 In the enlivened interiors of his private Manhattan residence, Holtzman elaborates a definition of decoration that challenges marginalised notions of artifice and identity of design practice in a space explicitly subsumed by the pleasure of appearances.
In this private residence, Holtzman employs an extravagant emphasis on pattern as a strategy with which to question assumptions about the discretion of interior design’s response to its built parameters. In the Manhattan Apartment, Holtzman establishes a careful assembly of embellished objects and various surface treatments to effect a sense of abundance and dimensionality. Hand painted circular motifs in numerous, gridded patterns extend across the perimeter planes while positioned vertically and facing into the room. The pattern finish just before the junction of the wall and ceiling, offering an illusion of depth to the flat plane. On the perimeter walls are artworks by Kandinsky, Dubuffet, and Picasso. Lining one wall, above the picture rail, is a single row of books with spines positioned vertically and facing into the room. The pattern created by the book spines mimics the wider stripes that define the wall planes (Figure 4). Alongside a large painting by Rothko is a wall hanging comprised of three rows of hand blown multicoloured glass discs overlaid on one of the turquoise bands. This echoes the circular motif elaborated in the dining room. Adjacent to the wall hanging, a venetian blind, decorated with a black square and a series of turquoise dots, covers the window (Figure 4). The referencing of both the linear and the circular motif in various representations and in two and three dimensions builds and layers a language of the interior via the surfaces and decorative objects in the rooms. The surface treatments and objects in the Manhattan Apartment extend the exploration of the representative potential of surface by describing alternate representations of thematic patterning. The overall effect of the contrasting examples in various scales, colours and textures in the room arrangement is a densely patterned composition of two-dimensional geometries in three-dimensional relief.

The thematic of spatial geometry bounds the decoration within a language that is reiterated in carefully constructed visual fields across the wall surfaces and encompasses the objects of the living space. The décor in the living room represents a diverse mix of furniture pieces and objects from various eras, cultures and decorative styles. The seating arrangement, described in the article as the ‘conversation pit’10 features a three-seat lounge upholstered in a gridded fabric interspersed with off-white, painted timber-grain-effect panels and midnight blue velvet armrests (Figure 3). Two textured and patterned rust-coloured throws cover the lounge, facing a pair of cobalt blue armchairs and a Mies van de Rohe ottoman, re-covered in red-and-white-check patterned upholstery. The blue, red and white in the seating echo the palette of the wall finish. The occasional furniture and artefacts in the living room space consist of a combination of artworks, antiques, and found objects. A Louis XVI gilt-wood chair upholstered in silk brocade from the 1770s sits adjacent to a ‘homemade’11 occasional table designed by Holtzman (Figure 4). On the table sits a bronze Matisse sculpture. A concert grand piano is personalised with a silk taffeta dust ruffle (Figure 5). Framing the piano, a Persian carpet (c. 1600) hung on the wall is accessorised12 by a bronze Picasso sculpture on an occasional table in front. The editorial caption describing these spaces extends the commentary on orthodoxies of design practice: ‘In a well planned room, there is always one feature toward which the eye is unfailingly drawn.’13 In addition to the expression of spatial geometry, the extent of the accumulation of elements in each room infers that the traditional assumption of decoration as a well-mannered articulation of built form is no longer relevant.

In the accompanying text, Skoggard comments on the effect of the layered occupation of the space: ‘now I’m starting to think that white walls look bleached, naked. They just stand there embarrassed not knowing what to do. I do like our busy, full time walls.’14 Holtzman’s exploration of authenticity through artifice in decoration is pursued in this private residence as he defines decoration as ‘supposedly … deferential, content to serve something more important than itself. A flatterer.’15 Suggesting the role of decoration is in contestation of traditional perspectives of architectural authority and conceptions of appropriate restraint, Holtzman’s decoration is a subversive practice.
DECORATION IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Decoration holds a contested position in built environment scholarship. Largely marginalized by Modernism, claims of material and structural integrity, decoration is often sidelined as the most temporal and superficial of built environment practices; providing ambience, but superfluous to authentic built practice. An understanding that decoration and interior design merely make built space fashionable underscores their dismissal in scholarship.19 Holtzman’s practice challenges conceptions of decoration in interior design as gratuitous embellishment, and demonstrates how a reconsideration of the term makes new insights available for both contemporary practice and scholarship in interior design.19

Ironically, it is from the scholarship of contemporary architecture that the current status of decoration is most clearly articulated. In 2006, Decoration, published by 306090 Inc. and supported by Princeton University and the National Endowment for the Arts, reviewed the role of decoration in scholarship and practice.17 According to the editors, Emily Abruzzo and Jonathan Solomon, decoration is the ‘most loaded’18 term in architectural discourse, equally pivotal in debates of architectural history and contested as auxiliary in terms of its practical objectives. Architects Paul Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki and David Lewis, in the preface to the collection of essays, define decoration as a site in which the exploration of cultural politics occurs, encompassing disputes that resonate across the arenas of the identity of the discipline, society, and culture. For these writers, decoration as a site in which the exploration of cultural politics occurs, encompassing disputes that resonate across the arenas of the identity of the discipline, society, and culture. For these writers, decoration provokes debates in sexual and gender politics regarding aesthetic and theoretical concerns and represents the contested occupational territories of built environment practices.19

By addressing the specific irritation that decoration presents to contemporary built environment scholarship, the authors posit that because decoration is considered a borderline practice it is vital to contemporary scholarship: ‘Decoration exists in the gaps between things; at contested border lines, of material assemblies as well as disciplines, classes and genders. Inevitably, in a discussion on decoration, one gets caught in protracted border disputes.’20

In recent years, the scholarship of Adjunct Professor Joel Sanders of Yale University and UCLA PhD candidate and practising architect Alexandra Loew has specifically engaged with the marginalised status of decoration. Their contributions to the contested position that decoration poses to design scholarship foregrounds the possibilities of decoration in practice. While Sanders redefines the social role of the decorator, Loew offers a reconsideration of the role of decoration in relation to architecture. In both perspectives, artifice is the concept through which decoration is legitimised as particularly relevant to built environment scholarship. Both arguments are significant in current debates as they initiate discussions that interrogate the most malign understandings of decoration and thereby reframe its impact for contemporary interior design scholarship and practice.

Decoration is described by Sanders as a form of make believe, a pretence that the spaces we invest in and the image they represent provide a mirror to the authentic self.21 He suggests that the fabrication and disclosure of a desired identity, personal or communal, is represented in a particular image through decoration. Sanders’ argument is that the specific purpose of decoration is the application of artifice in order to fashion a personality.21 The role of the decorator, from this perspective, is to facilitate that expression. That is, personality, as an expression of good taste and aesthetic discernment, can be purchased. Further, Sanders argues that decoration requires a form of suspended disbelief, a belief in the pretense that the representation of interior space is an expression of personality,22 and that it is correlated with the personal identity it proposes. The professionally decorated interior, therefore, is doubly fanciful. The illusion of personality is supplied by the decorator as an interpretation of the desired identity of the occupant. Decorative practice, considered as existing beyond a role of surface embellishment to built form, thereby comes to represent the fantastical through devices of artifice and self-conscious display. The social implication of artifice as a form of caprice is related to both gender and discipline territories. Arguing for a correlation between occupational and gender status, Sanders nominate the long-standing association of femininity with notions of artifice in western cultures as critical in these debates. He suggests the prejudices and territorial disputes between the overlapping design professions can be traced through this history.

Historians Carol Morrow and Anne Massey examine the development of interior design through both the emergence of the professional decorator and socio-cultural elitism and gender politics in western culture. According to the analysis of Morrow and Massey, the history of decoration provides unambiguous evidence of the import of decoration in contemporary interior design practice. These arguments discuss the development of decorative practice particularly in association with design roles according to gender. Morrow, in an analysis of women and Modernity in interior design in Australia between 1920 and 1960,24 claims that interior design was initially referred to as interior decoration on the basis of Thomas Hope’s description of practice in Household Furniture and Interior Decoration (1807). According to Hope, interior decoration suggested an historical, decorative and fashionable approach to the production of a tasteful interior of a room.25 Historically, the development of decorative consulting work was patronised by a wealthy clientele and Morrow attests that the first professional decorators were well versed in classical architecture, literature and theory. This patronage provided the occupation with a level of social and cultural status that, along with the establishment of academies of art and architecture, offered practitioners an authoritative voice on matters of design, craftsmanship and all matters of taste.26 Historian Anne Massey claims that the occupation developed from the social circles of wealthy amateurs, who had a belief in their ability to sanction and disseminate advice on good taste with regard to the domestic interior. She notes that women served in these advisory positions during the formative years of professional interior decoration as consultant and confidante in charge of the overall appearance of pre-existing rooms.27

The correlation of the development of decoration in the nineteenth century with issues of gender is twofold. Both Morrow and Massey claim that the relationship of decoration with gender was
influential in the diminished status of decoration. Morrow notes that women became both the dominant consumers and the professional consultants in charge of defining interior space. While that women became both the dominant consumers and the decorated room calls to mind the decorated woman whose territorial prejudices between architecture and decoration of architecture, through the development of the transparent literally eradicated the distinction between the inside and outside the early twentieth century. The International building style, which interior design. Extending the arguments of Morrow and Massey, to decoration, as the impetus for a diminished credibility of the decorated home was considered a form of self expression. According to Sanders, the association of women and gay men was diminished by the extension of the association between gender and taste to interior decoration as a transient and temporal practice. Sanders argues ‘institutional prejudices and interstitial disputes not only perpetuate curtain wars, they are also symptomatic of our deepest and most ingrained anxieties about the nature of masculinity, femininity and homosexuality’ — mirroring the broad cultural assumptions that shape the impressions of both disciplines as well as our ideas about the identities of the professionals who practice them. According to Sanders, the association of women and gay men with the presentation of a constructed and desired self through decoration is no coincidence when one considers the necessity for a social minority to be adept at fashioning a public façade to foster a material authenticity over artifice and claiming a derogatory correlation between ornamentation, dress and the feminine, architects in the early twentieth century established a disparity between what was considered of value and what was undue to the practice of architecture and the articulation of interior space. Decoration, although distinct from any ‘true’ or ‘proper’ value, served a particular social agenda and the occupation became complicit in the representation of taste, as the decorated home was considered a form of self expression. According to Sanders, the association of women and gay men with the presentation of a constructed and desired self through decoration is no coincidence when one considers the necessity for a social minority to be adept at fashioning a public façade to attain mainstream acceptance. The social and gender implications of the ‘closet’ in contemporary western culture is a potent illustration of such a façade. It is this correlation of decoration with appearances, ascribing to interior decoration a sense of temporality and therefore a lack of professional and academic legitimacy that Holtzman explicitly interrogates.

HOLTZMAN AND THE INTERROGATION OF ARTIFICE

The emphasis on pattern in the surfaces and décor of the Manhattan Apartment exaggerates the artifice of decoration. In so doing, Holtzman refutes the tradition of form over ornament by foregrounding decoration over the volumes and planes of the spaces; Holtzman’s emphasis of the cosmetic nature of the affected surface draws on the decorative as a salacious pleasure, able to operate independently of mandates about authenticity in Modernist architecture. The decorated surface is thereby driven to explore possibilities of playfulness and gratification in artifice. Instead of surface treatment operating as a discrete embellishment, in this instance it becomes a subservient element in the appearance of the interior. Holtzman inverts the relationship of form and ornament and presents an exploitation of artifice as a material and formal graffiti. Liberated from assumptions that interior design is limited to discrete embellishment, Holtzman’s design approach to decoration creatively connects the notions of affectation and fabrication to contemporary practice. His reference to the two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional spatial geometries may be motivated by a desire to legitimise the complex possibilities of surface embellishment in decoration and the potential of decoration to participate in debates on the nature of authentic representation in practice. The living spaces of the apartment suggest an emphasis on conviviality and generosity in an expression of largesse, rather than a wholesale assault on traditional architectural mandates regarding the dialogue between the built volume, surface embellishments, and decorative artefacts. The design implies rather than assaults the architectural parameters of the built form. In a complex and nuanced dialogue with the decorative objects, the walls are no longer distinguished and divided by surface treatment but are instead built up with layers creating an impression of being compelled forward. Holtzman constructs layered internal panoramas with the wall surfaces and projects them forward toward the decorative objects in the room, as if to meet somewhere between two and three dimensions. In labouring and layering the perimeter planes, the room and its contents become the focus, rather than the planes that define its boundaries. The role of decoration is extended in the representation and description of the objects arranged throughout the living room as decoration exaggerates the décor to affect, accent and embellish interior space. The language of the surfaces and objects describes a defence of decoration via material abundance. The proliferation and variety of objects and surface treatments in the living spaces, however, belies the meticulous fabrication of this interior through the exploitation of largesse. The collection of artefacts and the manner of embellishment infers a generosity through crafted visual fields that describe alternate expressions of the geometric thematic. Like clustered arguments and points of debate, what appears to be a visual riot in the interior design, is, in fact, an elaborated and spirited discussion from various perspectives and in various forms via the objects of decoration and surface embellishment. Like Sanders, academic Alexandra Loew suggests that decoration is involved in self-expression through the pleasure of display. Her argument, however, makes claims for decoration as a form of social transaction. In “Décor: not Decoration,” Loew distinguishes the socio-cultural significance of interior ornamentation and embellishment from the physical parameters of architecture altogether. Loew credits Mark Wigley’s analysis of the Modernist style in White Walls, Designer Dresses with elevating the status of decoration to that of a ‘supplement’ that thing which exposes architecture’s lack. Wigley illuminates the embellished, albeit white, surface in Modern architecture as critical to maintaining the illusion of abstraction and structural integrity. His nomination of decoration as the device through which Modern architecture appears to be without embellishment, and thereby superior, is an astute articulation of the fashionable mechanisms of the aesthetic. Loew argues, however, that in Wigley’s analysis, decoration’s influence continues to be ‘covert’ in nature, limited to the surface and essentially confined to a role of galvanising the aesthetic imperatives of modern architecture. The strategic role of the decorated surface is advanced in status; however, the very parameters of decorative practice, argues Loew, are not interrogated. Loew suggests that in discussing decoration as mere embellishment of the architectural surface the debate is rendered circular, confining discussions to the bounds of architecture without defining new perspectives of practice. Loew shifts the emphasis from the surface of architecture entirely and argues that the most critically provocative site for debate in design discourse and practice lies in the objects and artefacts of the domestic décor. Loew’s argument translates what is considered as typically derogatory terminology and reinterprets it to empower the metaphorical connection between overt femininity and décor as fashionable expression. Decoration...
Dear reader,

Sound da slammin on pot and pearl Man your trouble in the Manhattan Kitchen Wars por on.

He such affect us, sours begin internment enough. Having the goal for last gangly, concreted Norwegian tank (also deep fried itself right out of a pot), 1 was doing to maihne those dishes and gray walls.

Records spinnels of a new paint scheme were already emerging; ever so lovingly where what do you suppose happened? Across the way, in the kitchen window of some grandler establishment, a hand-screeded sign appeared, freezing the single word “UGLY” in very large letters. At first I was hurt, but then I got a little ugly myself. You know how decora- tion age.

Can you get over the occupants of a floor-to-ceiling mahogany-wafered kitchen with beamed brass fittings (and antique furniture on the way) that law is clearly selling us about? It’s the big house on the corner falling down to the little house out back. On chest and digested (radily) calling Joseph and his crew of many members to order.

Being one who abhors any hint of blood, I look at least two minutes to meditate my revenge. And here it is: 

You, reader, are to decodiklyn get this pretty kitchen and who not just flip to another current feature “Kitchen Wars” and compare the two.

The only thing’s wiz is that I’m-pleae refrain from diplomacy. If you can’t say something, noisy, don’t want. Print- letter words are fine, of course. May the perieste Eddies win...

Joseph Holtzman

Opposite

Figure 6: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Kitchen Wars, nest, Winter 1999/2000, copyright Jason Schmidt.

Above

Figure 7: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Kitchen Wars, nest, Winter 1999/2000, copyright permission Wouter Dolk.
practice, according to Loew, operates beyond the control of the authorities and methodologies that dominate architecture. Extending traditional connections of domesticity and decorative practice to the feminine, she alludes to the Modernist refutation of ornament and embellishment as akin to the refutation of feminine sexuality. Loew connects the decorative to the salacious by using metaphors connected to playful and flirtatious engagements: “... décor is more like a whore in its modus operandi: no entanglements only flirtations...” Like the prostitute, décor has transactional mechanisms that allow it to provide satisfaction while remaining independent to the laws of truth and honesty to which architects so dutifully subscribe.48 Drawing on the works of Benjamin and Baudelaire, Loew’s conflation of décor with prostitution challenges prevailing assumptions of the social implications of each. Both practices, suggests Loew, are commodious and transactional in nature and draw on social relations outside accepted norms. Further, both elicit artifice as a method of practice and both practices are driven by gratification and excess.49

According to Loew, the purpose of décor is to ensure a sense of stylishness and to guard against boredom: “it aims to be plausible, not authentic to delight, not to impress.”50 I argue it is precisely this understanding of décor that represents the particular strength for interior design that, through the decorative aspects of practice, operates as a specialist discipline distinct from architecture. In the context of built environment discourse, Loew’s argument is significant particularly because it dispenses with debates concerning intellectual legitimacy and foregrounds artifice as critically germane in contemporary debates of practice. Relieved of the duty of authenticity that continues to be valued in contemporary debates surrounding some built environment practices, decoration gains credence as an aspect of artifice. From this perspective, the cosmetic nature of decoration reclaims the possibilities inferred in the notions of illusion, pretence and the fantastical. The critical writings of Loew and Sanders are central to the evaluation of contemporary interior design precisely because they give new credence to notions of artifice and the gendered terms in which interior design is understood in built environment scholarship. Interrogated through the living spaces of Holtzman’s private residence, these debates create new possibilities for practice and criticism in interior design scholarship arising from the integration of the themes of decoration and artifice as being pertinent, rather than pejorative.

Commenting on Holtzman’s decorative strategy Carl Skoggard claims, that restless talent on easy terms with connoisseurship, the tactful subversion of convention, innocent love of visual violence, delight in odd placement and delayed discovery – all this is familiar and will continue to play itself out before the two of us, a shared entertainment (for good decorators end up surprising themselves).51 Skoggard describes the aim of Holtzman’s design to ‘occupy’ interiors with delight in odd placement and delayed discovery – all this is familiar and will continue to play itself out before the two of us, a shared entertainment (for good decorators end up surprising themselves). In this account of an interior, Holtzman emphasises his social role of the decorator is to know their place. MANHATTAN KITCHEN WARS 1999/2000

A year after nest published Manhattan Apartment,52 Holtzman provided a publication of the apartment’s kitchen in Manhattan Kitchen Wars. The decorated kitchen space of the apartment represents an even more insistent strategy of gratuitous display. In this account of an interior, Holtzman emphasises his negotiation of alternative viewpoints on the nature of interior design practice, and the reaction it prompts in others; in this case the reaction of his neighbour across the light well. This exchange between the neighbours, represented in text and image, emphasises Holtzman’s view of the role of decoration as an expression of luxury that challenges the assumption that utility takes precedence over embellishment.

Holtzman’s kitchen is dominated by the voluble and repetitive patterning of the painted circular motif extended throughout the apartment. By exaggerating the cosmetic nature of decoration as applied surface Holtzman offers a strategic deployment of artifice by the layering and exaggeration of pattern to emphasise the possibilities of the surface plane. In the kitchen space, the circular motif is small and regular in size with at least four variations in colour and background (Figure 6). Beyond the cobalt blue architrave that frames the doorway to the kitchen, the painted motif is divided into three horizontal stripes that bound the perimeter of the kitchen space. The layered and complex colour patterning that is repeated across the surfaces does not accord with the junctions of the joinery. Intermittently, a circle is omitted allowing the background colour to show through and outline the shape of the negative space between. The window glazing is painted over in the same circular motif. Care has been taken when the ornamental overlaps the frame to stop the hand painted circle on the background layer. This allows light to penetrate and complete the shape. A shelf, painted in accordance with the second colour layer of the space, is suspended above the window holding five plastic decorated cakes, each dotted with artificial berries. The floor is also covered with the circular motif. In contrast to the circular pattern, a loose rug with a rectilinear geometric pattern sits on the floor. The
In Holtzman's kitchen, the decorated surface is foregrounded through excess and repetition; representative of Lipovetsky's conception of luxury as inordinate display, indifferent to utility.25 The design offers a deliberate disregard over the expectation that a kitchen is primarily focused on function. Instead, through elaborated visual excess, Holtzman questions assumptions about the value of the appearance of function. An understanding of luxury as representing the antithesis of utility has critical implications for interior design in terms of re-evaluating the capacity and limitations of the discipline. The potential for decoration, therefore, is not only in the representation of the cultural value of appearances but more specifically to reconcile notions of the value of display and alternate conceptions of excess as a measure of fiscal and social freedom.

According to the article, Kitchen Wars is titled to represent Holtzman's retort to a sign inscribed with the word ugly appearing in his neighbour's window that faces the kitchen (Figure 7). In retaliation to the sign, Holtzman publishes photographs of both his kitchen and the kitchen across the light well. The image of the view through Holtzman's own decorated window to the neighbouring kitchen is framed in the larger context of the blonde brick wall of the exterior of the building. This image shows Holtzman's painted glazing casting a magnified shadow of the circular provocation onto the wall opposite (Figure 8). The impact of the small hand-painted motif extends across the air space to shroud the façade of the neighbouring building. Decoration as an expression of the pleasure of display in the social context of propriety in social expression.

The highly elaborated spaces of Holtzman's Manhattan residence challenge the role of decoration as a representation of social propriety. The Manhattan Apartment communicates a strategic provocation to traditional hierarchies in built environment practice where decoration is limited to merely well mannered and discrete expressions of the built shell. To counter this Modernist architectural convention, Holtzman represents decoration as a vehicle of abundance. The articulated living space represents pleasure in the creation of spaces of social conviviality. The exaggerated embellishment raises questions about propriety in decoration and the role of décor in the expression of social status. The Kitchen Wars, in particular extends Lipovetsky's description of largesse in terms of inordinate inventing the role of the fabricated surface in the consideration of authentic practice. Holtzman's private residence operates as both a measure of the value of the appearance of function. An understanding of luxury as representing the antithesis of utility has critical implications for interior design in terms of re-evaluating the capacity and limitations of the discipline. The potential for decoration, therefore, is not only in the representation of the cultural value of appearances but more specifically to reconcile notions of the value of display and alternate conceptions of excess as a measure of fiscal and social freedom.

The exaggerated embellishment raises questions about propriety in decoration and the role of décor in the expression of social status. The Kitchen Wars, in particular extends Lipovetsky's description of largesse in terms of inordinate inventing the role of the fabricated surface in the consideration of authentic practice. Holtzman's private residence operates as both a measure of the value of the appearance of function. An understanding of luxury as representing the antithesis of utility has critical implications for interior design in terms of re-evaluating the capacity and limitations of the discipline. The potential for decoration, therefore, is not only in the representation of the cultural value of appearances but more specifically to reconcile notions of the value of display and alternate conceptions of excess as a measure of fiscal and social freedom.

**NOTES**

3. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Holtzman, ed., Every Room Tells a Story, 106.
18. Ibid., 19.
20. Ibid.
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23. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 83.
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29. Massey, Interior Design of the Twentieth Century, 125.
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32. Ibid.
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36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
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41. Ibid.
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An ‘Unbecoming’ Cohabitation? Reconsidering the narrative of the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba

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ABSTRACT

The Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba is one of the most well-known and visited sacred sites in Western Europe. It is also regarded as possessing one of the most ‘unbecoming’ cohabitations of interior architectural space. This paper investigates how this unique coupling of spatial types came to earn its infamy, revealing the myth and prejudices involved in its elaboration. Through a review of current research into the space it will be shown that interiors traditionally ‘seen’ as unbecoming can be reconceived, reread or reheard, allowing for new, alternate and open interpretations.

INTRODUCTION

‘This parasitical church, this enormous stone mushroom, this architectural wart on the back of the Arabian edifice …’1

Over a century and a half has passed since the renowned French writer and critic Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier pronounced his damning assessment on the cathedral of Córdoba, Spain. Despite the course of time, the abomination of the sixteenth-century intervention – the Cathedral de Santa María – embedded within the fabric of the tenth-century former-mosque – la Mezquita – remains a paradigm. It is vilified for its hulking presence, spatial disruption, and stylistic incongruity. However, the fiercest criticism and resentment is directed at the fact that the insertion of the cathedral has forever compromised the ‘authentic’ fabric, space and experience of the Hispano-Umayyad mosque. The promoters and designers of the project – and even the whole of the Spanish nation – have been rebuked by generations of historians for permitting this act of wanton spatial vandalism.2 The example of the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba has been inscribed as one of the most well-known and visited sacred sites in Western Europe.

Despite the emancipatory nature of the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711,3 the process of a new royal palace in the Alhambra, Granada, and the re-design of the cathedral of the same city from gothic to all’antica. The first of these, built within the heart of the Nasrid Palace, was likened by the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri to ‘a meteor that has accidentally lodged in the sky’.4 The example of the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba is one of the most well-known and visited sacred sites in Western Europe.

In order to undertake this reassessment, the origins of the negative topoi that surround the space in question must first be interrogated. Firstly, the spatial insertion of the cathedral will be analyzed within the contexts of ecclesiastical design in early-modern Spain, demonstrating that the decision to intervene so radically in the extant space was not alien to the design praxis of the time. Secondly, it will be argued that the epic narrative that surrounds the cathedral project is in fact based on myths, historical inaccuracies, and prejudices that are still perpetuated to this day. Lastly, through a critique of the teleology of ‘unbecoming’,5 one that has been inscribed onto the interior through its historiography, an exploration of the experiential possibilities that this particular ‘unbecoming’ cohabitation offers – spatial, visual and sonic – will be used to suggest that similar states and conditions offer designers and experiencers new ways of engaging with conflictive, complex and spatial contexts.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE CO-HABITATION

The age of the cathedral construction in Europe is generally considered to have come to its end by the close of the fifteenth century. The situation in Spain was an exception to this. The process and progress of cathedral construction in the Iberian Peninsula was firstly and fundamentally dictated by the geographic and political advance of the Christian wars against Al-Andalus – starting in the north of Spain in the eighth century and concluding in Granada in 1492 – and later, of no lesser consequence, the colonisation of the Americas from 1492 onwards. As territories and cities were captured and subjugated from north to south, and then westward across the Atlantic, new cathedrals were built as resources became available. This section of the paper will focus on the development of Hispanic cathedral-space in the sixteenth century, the epoch in which the new fabric of the cathedral of Córdoba was conceived and commenced. It will provide the context through which to interpret the reasons and tactics of the symbolic and spatial transformations that occurred at this period, which were viewed by later generations as inappropriate and unbecoming acts of vandalism.

During Emperor Charles V’s reign (1519-1556) many large-scale Spanish projects were promoted, commenced or fast-tracked for completion. The majority of these involved the demolition or major reconfiguration of extant spaces of high cultural and political significance, such as the construction of a new royal palace in the Alhambra, Granada, and the re-design of the cathedral of the same city from gothic to all’antica. The first of these, built within the heart of the Nasrid Palace, was likened by the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri to ‘a meteor that has accidentally lodged in the Alhambra’. The cathedral occupies the space of the former congregational mosque – a tactic typically deployed in the re-Christianised cities of southern Spain: Seville, Jaén, Málaga – and in a unique sense – Córdoba. This series of constructions had an explicit theo-political symbolism of Christian and imperial domination.6 Any architectural expression within the imperial sphere was designed to be as explicit as possible in the communication of the permanence and authority of the rule of Charles and his faith.
For the architects of the time, and the courtiers who managed them, the appropriate and efficacious language for these projects gradually shifted away from the particular of the Gothic to the universal, imperial and Roman Catholic one of the Classical. There was also an accompanying shift in the spatial conception and expression of these important sites that marked a clear rupture between the fractious past and the new unified Habsburg world-view. In relation to the configuration of cathedral-space in the sphere of the Spanish realm, the celebration of the Roman Catholic rite in all its pomp and splendour— with the incessant celebration of Mass, music, processions and ephemeral monuments— rendered the low-ceilinged, dimly-lit, column-cluttered spaces of extant former-mosques, or temples in the case of the Americas, as inexpressive and spatially inadequate, and from the eyes of sixteenth-century bishops and chapters, wholly unbecoming.

For the two centuries before the emergence of the Spanish Empire — and the wealth, prestige and influence that accompanied it – the model of spatial appropriation and modification of mosque-spaces had sufficed. The occupation and conversion of the principal mosque into a cathedral had on the one hand an economic rationale, especially in times of war when finances were limited, and on the other an important symbolic one. The cost of erecting a new building to house a large congregation, Spain’s cathedral had to operate beyond this and serve the additional programme of mass conversion. This same challenge repeated on the peninsula and later in the Americas, can be seen as the underlying theme that shaped the development of cathedral-space in the Spanish realm.

One manner in which to delineate space in an otherwise isotropic configuration is to construct visual barriers, either solid as in the form of walls, or with some degree of visual permeability such as screens (Figure 4). The construction of a segregated clerical reserve that contained the main altar (sanctuary) in the eastern half of the space, as well as an enclosed choir in the western half of the space, not only took advantage of the ample available floor space but also allowed the spaces near the perimeter walls to be dedicated to private chapels, and the space between the liturgical nucleus and the ring of outer chapels to be used for general circulation and processions. What was configured was in many respects a prototypical spatial distribution for all Hispanic cathedrals and collegiate churches to be built until the nineteenth century.

When the bishop of Córdoba, Alonso Manrique de Lara (r. 1516-1523), commenced work on the new structure in 1523, it was not until the fifteenth century

As outlined in the previous section, the initial impetus for the new cathedral project in the sixteenth century emerged from a desire for a more becoming space in which to enact the liturgical rites befitting an important and ancient diocese such as Córdoba. The means for this came with the financial resources afforded by the new wealth that the American colonisation was bringing to Spain. However, the new cathedral that was to emerge from the centre of the former mosque was not the first intervention in the extant fabric. As was the habit of first consecrated cathedral existed within the space without significant modification. It was not until the fifteenth century that the first main inter-invention occurred, with the construction of a vaulted space to the west of the current cathedral. This action firmly established a longitudinal axis within the isotropic space through the amalgamation of bays, the removal of columns and the addition of a clerestory. Whilst this intervention is generally considered to have been more sensitive in its location, stylistic language and modest scale, it did nonetheless profoundly alter the manner in which the space was utilised and experienced, both by the clergy enacting the liturgy and the laity who looked on. This space, in principle, satisfied the need for axiality required for the celebration of the Christian rite, yet its location — away from the geometrical centre of the entire space — caused much consternation to the chapter; a condition that Heather Ecker cites as one of the main drivers for the construction of a new centrally-located cathedral space that was not tucked away ‘in the corner of the church’.

When the Bishop of Córdoba, Alonso Marrique de Lara (r. 1516-1523), commenced work on the new structure in 1523,
which involved the removal of the central section of the ancient structure, a dispute arose between the city council and the cathedral chapter (Figure 3). The nineteenth-century British historian William Stirling Maxwell penned of the polemic that ‘the citizens of Cordoba had vainly sought to arrest the cruel improvements commenced by the Chapter, and appealed against that Vandalic body to the Emperor.’17 Wheras the majority of histories written over this act — even up to the current day — depict the citizens and council in uproar against the destruction of the mosque, recent research has brought to light the cause of the actual dispute. The problems arose over the effect the activities would have on private aristocratic chapels and tombs that were to be displaced.13 It was in essence a demarcation dispute between the city’s nobility, with its ancient connection to place, civic and family identity, and a prelate with no ties to the city apart from a stop-over placement between his previous posting in Badajoz, and his proximate promotion (immediately after construction started) as Archbishop of Seville and Inquisitor General. Bishop Manrique, with his close connection to the Emperor, was operating at the international level of imperial politics — both state and church — and it could be read that he saw the spatial configuration of the extant cathedral-mosque as completely unsatisfactory for contemporary church practices and not befitting a spokesman and cleric of his rank and ambition. The parochial concerns of local aristocrats and counsellors were not to stand in the way of Bishop Manrique’s vision of modern and globalised Spain.

Disputes between competing authorities, such as civic and church, often required the intervention of the monarch to rule on the case. Emperor Charles ruled in favour of the chapter and work continued. At this point it could be assumed that the decision of Charles signified the end of the story and, for better or worse, the stylistic reformation of the cathedral would forever be embedded in the fabric of the mosque. However, as Tafuri cautioned, it is only the start of the complex distortions of the tale, as shall now be explored.

As the work continued on the new cathedral, history remained silent on the matter apart from the original documents surrounding the initial dispute. It was not until 1637 that the issue of the story re-emerges. King Philip IV was considering reconstructing the Royal Chapel, located between the old cathedral and the choir of the new structure (Figure 5). The cathedral canon and historian, Bernardo José de Alderete was charged with writing to the king on the current state of the chapel whilst also providing an assessment of the proposed plan of works and the impact it may have on the adjoining spaces. In his letter Alderete stated to Philip IV that the king’s grandfather (Philip II) and great-grandfather (Charles V) had wished that the cathedral had never been built in the vastness of this most spacious temple.14 Alderete went on to dissuade Philip from reconstructing the Royal Chapel as he argued that this would seriously compromise the structure of the new cathedral due to its proximity and disrupt the usual liturgical functioning of the newly-configured cathedral space. Returning it once again to a work zone only thirty years after a century and a half of continuous construction. He also raised the ever-contentious issue of ownership and privileges pertaining to the numerous private chapels that would be affected, the cause of initial dispute in the sixteenth century. Alderete does not cite the source of Charles and Philip’s displeasure in regards to the spatial interventions, and it is difficult to determine whether Alderete posited this comment as a means of furthering his own stance on the Royal Chapel works.

The legend of the unbecoming cathedral does not re-emerge for another century; 1778 is the first instance that the famous reprimand of Charles V is found anywhere else.15 He noted that there were always going to be tasteless alterations,20 where Charles V is portrayed as the wise emperor and sensitive aesthete, deceived by the vainglorious cathedral chapter. In Richard Ford’s widely influential 1845 Annals of the Alcazar of Seville, the baroque additions are portrayed as monstrous and incomprehensible to the eyes and minds of succeeding generations of historians transcribed the statement in nearly every text written on the subject.

Outside of Spain, these texts served as sources and guides for non-Spanish travellers and writers of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spain had become popular for the more adventurous traveller tired of the predictability of the grand tour destinations. Spain offered the rare opportunity to see cathedral architecture as a unique and ancient structure, which was not to be disfigured by modern erections … In vain have remonstrances been repeatedly made at different times, by the lovers of the arts, nay even by royalty itself, against these misplaced and tasteless alterations,16 where Charles V is portrayed as the wise and sensitive aesthete, deceived by the vainglorious cathedral chapter. His statement was the first of many to come. In Richard Ford’s widely influential 1845 Annals of the Alcazar of Seville, he too is obliged to repeat the quote. His critique of Charles V’s contradictory position on new insertions in ancient fabric highlights the problematic nature of the supposed new architectural patrimony of Spain. Written by Antonio Ponz, who was to become the secretary of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes, it acted, and still acts as the primary reference source for researchers. Ponz’s section on the cathedral of Córdoba cites Gómez Bravo and replicates Charles V’s rebuke verbatim.21 The proceeding generations of historians transcribed the statement in nearly every text written on the subject.

The Cordobese historians have chronicled his vain retort on visiting the famous mosque of Abderahaman, which had become the Cathedral of their city, for the havoc made in its forest of fairy columns by the erection of the Christian choir, to which, at a distance, he had himself in an evil hour consented. … Charles, however, as yet knowing little of the Moors and their works, sided with the churchmen, and an ample clearing was wrought forthwith made in the midst of the long continuities of the aisles. But he came; he saw; and confessed his error; shifting the blame, however, as was natural and not unjust, upon the broad shoulders of the Chapter.22

The Cordobese chapter has been at once the source of Charles and Phillip’s displeasure in regards to the architectural merit, merely stating the design of the new cathedral was tasteless.20 Generations of critics and commentators have created a teleology of unbecoming for the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century historians the statement of Charles V served as the perfect evidence for their assessment and condemnation of the cathedral space and those responsible for it. Spanish historians and writers of the time were, like their counterparts north of the Pyrenees, swept up in the tides of Romantic historicism. In addition to the Gothic heritage it shared with the rest of Europe, Spain uniquely had Islamic architecture as a distinct national trait. The spaces from both of these traditions became the focus of revived and scholarly interest.23 Following the philosophies of Viollet-le-Duc, Spanish architects removed the later accretions to Gothic spaces, such as the Baroque organ cases, screens and retablos. The temporal proximity of the Baroque rendered it as monstrous and incomprehensible to the eyes and minds of Enlightenment thinkers and architects.24 Likewise, the interest in Islamic architecture as an archaeological artefact, rather than part of an uninterrupted spatial continuum, meant that the interventions over the centuries were seen as anachronistic and intrusive and where possible should be removed.

The first plan produced of the cathedral-mosque (1741) depicts the space in its contemporary usage. As this plan was commissioned by the cathedral chapter; it served to document the actual spatial configuration. The ring of chapels that hugs the periphery is shown, as are intermediary altars scattered throughout the remnant hypostyle space as well as the sanctuary

IDEA JOURNAL 2013 Unbecoming
and choir at the centre. In contrast, later plans, contained within the travel books of the nineteenth century and history books of the twentieth, omit the cathedral and chapels completely, presenting a hypothetical reconstruction of the mosque space. The scholar Heather Ecker noted this erasing of the present, stating: ‘The often-reproduced plans that subtract its “Christian” elements miss the point that the “original” building is not attainable, even by the most careful draftsman … The Great Mosque has been subjected to limitless campaigns of extensions, and current space. Whether this space is viewed as a functioning structure, or little more than a fixture on the glocalised museo-diorama, the interior becomes a scenographic assemblage of elements sited within an isotropic field of stone.

One of the most interesting ways in which the unbecoming cohabitation has been reimagined is by reading the space through sound, bypassing altogether the much-criticised visual afford. It was frequent for eighteenth and nineteenth-century historians and critics, ingrained within the traditions discussed above, to fail to reconcile what they saw and what they heard. By critiquing the narrative that surrounds the spatial interventions, one can reassess the benefits of dualism, the interior opens itself to new ways of interpretation.

Recently shifts in the manner in which the cathedral-mosque has been analysed have attempted to engage with the very spatial disruptions that earlier generations found so unbecoming. Particular attention is now paid to the manner in which the multiple layers of built-environment history interact, and the potentialities that arise from this. These researchers, discussed below, have looked at the sites of maximum tension, confusion and complexity as new ways of interpreting the interior; visually, spatially and sonically. Jesús Rivas Carmona studied the particularities of the new cathedral’s presence within the extant space, especially the use of interior façades. This tactic enacts a spatial inversion whereby the hypostyle hall is transformed into a covered forecourt for the new cathedral space, enclosed within, complete with four façades addressing the horizontal mosque space, as if it were architecture in an urban setting. The interior becomes a scenographic assemblage of elements sited within an isotropic field of stone.

By critiquing the narrative that surrounds the spatial interventions I hope to have revealed that behind every story of unbecoming there is generally a series of preconceptions and assumptions that form an a priori scaffold with which to reach a predetermined conclusion. An engagement with vilified spaces through alternate analysis, or simply with a set of fresh eyes or ears, can permit a reassessment of qualities and opportunities otherwise dismissed in the rhetorical storm.
Figure 1: Key to the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba: 1. The altar and sanctuary. 2. The choir. 3. The old cathedral. 4. The Royal Chapel. 5. The mihrab. 6. Courtyard. Key prepared by author. The base plan titled ‘Plan of the Mosque of Cordova, in its present state’ is taken from James C. Murphy, The Arabian Antiquities of Spain (London: Cadell & Davies, 1815), plate II.

Figure 2: The hypostyle hall of the Hispano-Umayyad mosque. ©Photo: L. Zamberlan. Reproduced with permission.
Opposite

Figure 3: The vault above the choir of the new cathedral. ©Photo: L. Zamberlan. Reproduced with permission.

Above

Figure 4: The sanctuary of the new cathedral. Note the mosque space visible through the bay arches. ©Photo: L. Zamberlan. Reproduced with permission.
Figure 5: The vaulting of the Royal Chapel. ©Photo: L. Zamberlan. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 6: One of the interesting fusion points between the two fabrics. ©Photo: author.
NOTES

All translations from original Spanish texts are by the author unless noted.

4. Ibid., 206.
13. Ibid., 120.
18. Juan Gómez Bravo, Cataño de los Obispos de Córdoba y breve noticias histórica de su Iglesia Catedral, y Obispado, vol. 1 (Córdoba: En la oficina de D. Juan Rodríguez, 1778), 419.
19. Tonia Raquejo, “The ‘Arab Cathedrals’: Moorish Architecture as Seen by British Travellers,” in Ensayo de un catálogo biográfico de escritores de la provincia y diócesis de Córdoba, con descripción de sus obras, ed. Rafael Ramírez de Arellano (Madrid: Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos, 1922), 54.
27. Gautier, Wanderings in Spain, 252.
30. Fletcher, Moorish Spain, 3.
32. Tafur, interpreting the Renaissance, 184.
37. Ponz, Viage de España, 9.
39. Ibid., 31.
The Failings of a Fleet of Fools: Encountering the interiors of disused power stations

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ABSTRACT

It is a philistine prejudice that conflicts and problems are dreamt up merely for the sake of their solution. Both in fact have additional tasks in the economy and history of life, tasks which they fulfil independently of their own solutions.1

- Georg Simmel

In November 1982 the New Scientist published a map of eleven power stations in Greater London which were lined up for decommission. With their institutional raison d'être expired these objects no longer justified their monumental scale in the heart of the post-industrial city. Two shells, at Battersea and Bankside, escaped demolition and were earmarked for civic use. The encounter with these found interiors challenges the design expert to reflect upon what these seemingly alien spaces offer to an age in which the image of the contemporary prevails over sense of continuity.

DYSTOPIC VOIDS

A man is being strapped to a chair in the centre of a circular empty space of awe-inspiring proportions. There are no windows in the rough concrete walls, rising 200 feet high towards a remote natural light above. A single steel ramp leads from the perimeter to a raised central platform: ‘Don’t fight it son, confess quickly,’ hisses one of the uniformed henchmen adjusting the buckles, ‘if you hold out too long you could jeopardise your credit rating.’2

Terry Gilliam, the director of the 1985 film Brazil, from which the above dialogue is taken, could not have found a more fitting location for the macabre torture scene concluding his dystopian satire. The cooling tower of the decommissioned power station complex in Croydon captured a type of interior that emerged during the dying days of the nationalised power supply in Britain. Coinciding with the second miners’ strike and Margaret Thatcher’s second term in office, Gilliam’s sequence portrays these spaces as failed institutions, which retain change. Through the wide-angle lens the disused industrial interior appears as a space primed for film location unwittingly depicts a historical space, seemingly disconnected from the possibility of continuity.

One of the film’s visions became reality in 1991 when the disused Croydon B Power Station, which had served for the exterior shots of the Ministry of Information, was blown to bits. Only the two brick chimneys, adorned in a reduced Art Deco-style masonry, escaped destruction.3 The demise of the industrial landscape as an integral part of the modern metropolis has been subject to rich theoretical discussions over the last decades. Tim Edensor’s scholarly contribution to the debate on the industrial ruin establishes the potential of these derelict spaces to enable remembering and social practice, as well as the perception of cultural values found within the barrier.4 Leading on from Edensor’s observation, this paper aims to point towards a critical discussion of new uses and modes of inhabiting the unbecoming remains of the past, and their changing role in the contemporary city. To discuss the potential outlined by Edensor with regard to the opportunity the industrial ruin offers, reference will be made to Georg Simmel’s essay, in which the author explores the role of conflict in the economy and history of life, focusing on two central propositions.

In The Conflict in Modern Culture, written as a lecture during the last months of World War I and shortly before the author’s death, Simmel presents a critique of the changing premise of art in the cultural context of modernity. His argument proposed the central cultural ideal emerging in the late nineteenth century in Western civilisation as life, which he describes as an infinite strive ‘to become more, gain greater value.’ 5 Despite this positivist framing of life, which he bases on Nietzsche’s original concept of ‘will to power’, he contextualises this new age as lacking the coherence and universality of the past, where art could play an instrumental role in the expression of commonly shared cultural ideas, by the proposition of an appropriate form. In modern culture, it is form which no longer is able to retain the identity-shaping role it had in the past, as it is itself too easy to comprehend to offer enduring representations of the transitional nature of life. Simmel perceives contemporary life, to which he does not attribute a finite aim, as too full of contradictions to stand still, or to give rise to a permanent form. Formulating a tragic view he concludes: ‘The bridge between the past and the future of cultural forms seems to be demolished; we gaze into an abyss of uniformed life beneath our feet. But perhaps this formlessness is itself the appropriate form for contemporary life.’6

A secondary, yet not less prominent concept that Simmel’s describes in The Conflict in Modern Culture introduces the role of the professional expert, as the central cultural protagonist of the modern age. Simmel identifies a division of approaches to the cultural challenges of the age, and attributes this to the emergence of occupational expertise as the predominant way of perceiving and producing responses to cultural questions.7 Unlike the cultural stakeholder of the past, the expert proposes a response to questions of cultural significance based on his professional bias, and seeks validation for his proposition within his own field of knowledge.

6 Despite this positivist framing of life, which he bases on Nietzsche’s original concept of ‘will to power’, he contextualises this new age as
Simmel’s pessimism informs the approach of this paper with regard to the problematic encounter with the physical presence of the industrial past in the contemporary city. This encounter can be a catalyst for reflection on the contemporary values and value makers which seek to give shape to our cultural ideas, in the form of responses to unbecoming spaces. In the first section, three protagonists of contemporary culture – the artist, the developer and the architect – are introduced through selected episodes from the tale of Berlin’s redundant power plants of the Cold War era, proposing a different type of presence of the ghost within the shell. Here the contradiction in the charge of use remains unresolved, for the benefit of what can be experienced as an enduring encounter with the past as a lived experience. Michel Foucault’s image of the ‘dip of Fools’ will be consulted in an attempt to relate the shell, the building’s figure of a post-industrial legacy within the city, to a changing content within.

The bridges with the past might have been demolished, as Simmel suggests, however, from his criticism a set of possibilities arises with regard to the potential of unresolved conflict. This paper does not cite the success stories of a developing coherence with the past as a lived experience. Michel Foucault’s image of a heterotopia in the spirit of the nineteenth century, as described by Foucault, serves as the second example of the way in which an encounter with the industrial past is presented and offered to the public in contemporary culture. Its new programme provides an example of excellence of a heterotopia in the spirit of the nineteenth century, as described by Foucault. In an ongoing redevelopment, the parasitic Tate Modern project claims to redefine the museum for the twenty-first century. Yet, denying Bankside its past might compromise the potential to retain a beneficial quality of conflict, which could set the contemporary heterotopic space apart from the its nineteenth century predecessors. The final example, the Berghain nightclub in one of Berlin’s redundant power plants of the Cold War era, proposes a vision of a user-centred political space. However, the idea of participation as fun was fundamentally didactic. A telling diagram associated with the Fun Palace project entitled Organisational Plan as Programme, introduces scientific formulae and terms such as ‘Modified People’ and ‘Individual Preference Valuations’.

It would be wrong to attribute the Bat Hat to a purely monumental impulse. More in keeping with the architect’s oeuvre, the proposal represents an uncompromising belief in the fluidity of unified space, framed by a legible structure. Price shared the abstract, modernist notion of his generation; that to set free the space within could be to hand it back to the city. His was a libertarian vision based on educated idealism. The provocation, conveyed in a set of simple sketches and collages, can be said to illustrate Simmel’s idea of occupational expertise: an architect’s stab at the Gordian knot of the fluidity of unified space, framed by a legible structure. Price capitalised on the image of the ancient temple in the state of ruin – some 140 feet off the ground. Others simply described it as an over-turned pool table, hovering over the city.

**EXPERTS WITH WRECKING BALLS**

The architect Cedric Price, in an iconoclastic vein, proposed to demolish the freshly Grade II listed non-structural walls at Battersea. Dubbed the Bat Hot, the proposition consists of a set of provocative sketches and collages produced in the spring of 1984 (Figure 1). With a sense of fluid opportunism, the architect took a good look at the four fluted pre-cast concrete chimneys that Littlewood and Price hoped to offer to the user. It was to be a form of instructive fun, in the sense of Bertold Brecht’s Epic Theatre theory, brought to an age of early cybernetics. The spatial openness and accessibility of the scheme, to which a radical rethink of the role of walls was instrumental, renders a vision of a user-centred political space. However, the idea of participation as fun was fundamentally didactic. A telling diagram associated with the Fun Palace project entitled Organisational Plan as Programme, introduces scientific formulae and terms such as ‘Modified People’ and ‘Individual Preference Valuations’.

By extension the liberation of architectural space from fixed boundaries entrusted the user with freedom, but also invested him with the responsibility to reflect and make use of it well, that is to an ideologically biased programme of self-betterment. If the Fun Palace can be understood as a radical architectural re-think of the relation between event and enclosure, it must also be seen as an instrument for the purpose of social engineering.

In architectural circles the perception has been maintained that the Bat Hot, like the Fun Palace, implies a set of playful spatial gestures. It is, however, not wrong to state that it can be read in relation to Price’s programmatic rendering of fun, and in a collaborative spirit, the Bat Hat took a good look at the four fluted pre-cast concrete chimneys, and proposed to demolish the freshly Grade II listed non-structural walls at Battersea. Dubbed the Bat Hot, the proposal consists of a set of provocative sketches and collages produced in the spring of 1984 (Figure 1). With a sense of fluid opportunism, the architect took a good look at the four fluted pre-cast concrete chimneys. By denying vertical enclosure and embracing an architecture of celebratory exteriority and tectonic transparency, Price capitalised on the image of the ancient temple in the state of ruin – some 140 feet off the ground. Others simply described it as an over-turned pool table, hovering over the city.

It would be wrong to attribute the Bat Hat to a purely monumental impulse. More in keeping with the architect’s oeuvre, the proposal represents an uncompromising belief in the fluidity of unified space, framed by a legible structure. Price shared the abstract, modernist notion of his generation; that to set free the space within could be to hand it back to the city.

**IT WOULD BE WRONG TO ATTRIBUTE THE BAT HOT TO A PURELY MONUMENTAL IMPULSE. MORE IN KEEPING WITH THE ARCHITECT’S OEUVER, THE PROPOSAL REPRESENTS AN UNCOMPROMISING BELIEF IN THE FLUIDITY OF UNIFIED SPACE, FRAMED BY A LEGIBLE STRUCTURE.**
They depict, in the highly rendered fashion which has taken illustrating the future development of Viñoly Architects and the interior architects Johnson Naylor, in January 2013 signal that the experience of Britain’s industrial history had come Margaret Thatcher’s revisionism on matters of society’s aims and Broome’s farcical endeavour - which followed in the footsteps of space for amusement rides. The scheme went bust shortly after. centred on a glorification of the Imperial past. Fittingly, instead an entrance fee for the experience of mindless entertainment Tivoli-type amusement park can serve as an example of an Battersea Power Station a type of panacea, mass-marketed to a nation displaying a present an obstacle which must be liberated from its form in order to fit in.

Once the Orwellian year was upon Britain, consumer culture, as subjected to parfège in Terry Gilliam’s Brazil, had taken hold of the public imagination. In this new context (un had become a type of paranoia, mass-marketed to a nation displaying a newly evolved appetite for consumption. Enter John Broome, the entrepreneur and free-market evangelist who bought Battersea Power Station during the Thatcher years. His scheme for the transformation of the industrial ruin into an Edwardian Twix type amusement park can serve as an example of an antithesis to Price’s proposition: retain the strong external walls as a decorative barrier against unauthorised access and charge an entrance fee for the experience of mindless entertainment centred on a glorification of the Imperial past. Fittingly, instead of Price’s dreamt of controlled demolition of the external walls, Broome paid for the roof of the building to be removed, to make space for amusement rides. The scheme went bust shortly after. The site was left barren for the next two decades (Figure 2).

Broome’s farcical endeavour – which followed in the footsteps of Margaret Thatcher’s revisionism on matters of society’s aims and values - in its loud, patronising manner, can be read as an alarming signal that the experience of Britain’s industrial history had come up for sale.

In January 2013 The Daily Mail published a set of visuals by Rafael Vinoly Architects and the interior architects Johnson Naylor; illustrating the future development of Battersea Power Station. They depict, in the highly rendered fashion which has taken on architectural representation in recent decades, a type of lifestyle enclave, fitted out with 800 luxury flats, high-end pastime facilities, exclusive corporate space; even a tennis court on the roof of the building, where Pink Floyd raised an inflatable pig in 1976. The once-mighty colossus is to be dwarfed by the raised access level to the leisure and business complex implanted within. Is this any longer an image that one can put into context of the demise of Britain’s industrial age? Battersea’s identity is no longer subject to the gate of occupational expertise by experts like Price or Broome, who set their respective schemes, each in their own more or less critical way in a national cultural context. More recently, the unbecoming edifice of the past has been rebranded as an attainable icon, or a brand. In the developer’s promotional video, the once substantive image immortalised on Pink Floyd’s album cover for Animals, appears as a framed, not to say tamed, picturesque souvenir from an alien past, hung on the wall of a luxury flat overlooking the Thames. The “pig on the wing” can no longer retain the quality of conflict it might have evolved in a generation which saw coal smoke escape through Battersea’s Doric chimneys. Form, as Simmel would suggest, has failed to endure the flux of meaning asserted by a shifting cultural context. A different quality of images of Battersea, insist on evading conflict, is proposed to potential property investors in the new development. The sophisticated 3D renders of interior and exterior views are less concerned with life, as Simmel would have it, but with lifestyle. In age of mass-communication the expert professional of Simmel’s essay has handed over the task of reflecting on cultural values relating to the past to the designer of images, whose clientele is a global audience of potential buyers. Giving definite form, or resolution, to an unbecoming problem, is the very purpose of this imagery.

DENIED SPACES

In September 1982, shortly before the power station’s final decommission, the comedy group Monty Python (minus Terry Gilliam) used the lavishly decorated corridors of Battersea A as the setting for a sequence in their feature film The Meaning of Life. J. Theo Halliday, who had conceived the overall layout and volume of the original Battersea Power Station in the 1920s, famously designed the control rooms and turbine hall of Battersea A to the highest material specifications of any such building.

The interiors speak of prestige, grandeur and corporate power. The use of bronze, Italian marble-clad pilasters and immaculate parquet flooring along the corridors lent a sense of grandeur. The Pythons took the reading of Halliday’s interior to the extreme. In the section Middle of the Film, a surreal dream sequence titled Find the Fish portrays the quest for a fish inside a house. From the exterior the house is a stately mansion shown in the opening shot, yet inside it is Battersea A. The speaking roles introduce Graham Chapman in outlandish drag, fitted with bronze-plated taps for breasts, and the director Terry Jones as a man with ridiculously long arms (Figure 3). The surreal dialogue, conducted in a mock-posh manner, reiterates the question of the missing fish and names locations in the domestic home, such as the drawers in the bureau and the wardrobe, as possible hiding places. The props, notably comfortable chairs, a hat stand, carpets and a fireplace, underscore the fantasy that this is the interior of a lavish mansion, which happens to be fitted with an excessive number of gauges, dials and consoles, manned by workers in uniforms.

Monty Python depicted the pompous glamour of Halliday’s Art Deco interior as belonging to a time of Empire and authority, an age gone by. The staging of a surreal mockery of a degenerate aristocracy in Battersea A’s control rooms took full advantage of the intelligence of the audience of the 1980s, with the assumption that they would be in on the joke, to see the irony. The opposite is true of the developer’s presentation of the object, and the public, thirty years on. A promotional video of the Battersea Power Station redevelopment project revisits the control rooms. The scene depicting future use is uncannily similar to the Find the Fish sequence, albeit deprived of the sense of irony. There are waiters, as well as a saxophone player; affluent people drinking wine. In this developer’s dream the control room has, quite literally, been transformed into the restaurant of a hotel.

The anticipated resonance of these new images, in contrast to Monty Python’s subversive mockery of a bygone Imperial past, comes close to what Edensor criticises as a sanitised, commodified version of the old. Where the artist had seen the opportunity to critically rise above the trappings of the past, the developer sees the opportunity to sell nostalgia as cultural capital. The trend to seek resolution through transformation on the basis of a complete divorce from past meanings can be described as a persisting trend in the encounter with the unbecoming.

The industrial ruin as a hollow backdrop to London’s iconic transformation of its post-industrial image can be traced back to only a few years after Broome’s defeated wrestling balls departed from Battersea, the former Bankside Power Station, designed by

Above

Figure 3: Monty Python’s surreal dream sequence challenges the perception of an authoritarian space and plays on the idea of a ‘Ship of Fools’. The Meaning of Life, directed by Terry Jones, 1983, film still. Image: Universal Pictures
Giles Gilbert Scott from start to finish and located just a few miles down stream from Battersea, is a more refined piece of architecture. The striking symmetry established by the central chimney of the detailed brick volume surpasses the more accidental composition of two halves a few miles up the Thames. Completed in 1963, the power station across the water from the City’s Anglican cathedral presents a more radical architectural proposition than anything dreamt up by Price and Littlewood around the same time. The height of the central chimney is, to date, the highest point closest to the majestic dome of St Paul’s. The revision of class relations in post-war Britain has never been monumentalised more emphatically than in this archetypal cathedral of industry. And yet, Bankside was, for the best part of its industrial life and beyond, barely loved by the British public. There was no heritage listing in sight when the power station was decommissioned. Up until only seven years before the opening of Tate Modern in 2001, the Godless cathedral was earmarked for demolition. The decision to transform it into a museum for modern art can be seen in the context of cultural revisionism started by Thatcher, a ‘Re-branding of Britain’, devised under New Labour in the dying years of the twentieth century.

Hersz & de Meuron’s initial proposal for the housing of the Tate Modern (1995-2000) as a ghost in a shell left little to the imagination, as far as the original structure’s inner world and its role in the tasks in the economy and history of life is concerned. Its construction saw an almost complete gutting of the power station in a quest to maximise the available exhibition space. From the beginning the curatorial challenge of Tate Modern has been to fill all the sprawling space with content. Ten years on, one might object that the vast amount of space available has led to a curatorial policy of hoarding, where temporary retrospectives address the artist’s work in terms of quantity often to an exhausting effect. Tate Modern might be the place to see modern art, but it is not a place where this encounter is moderated through selected quality as much as exposure to rampant quantity. Not unlike the IKEA store occupying the footprint of the demolished power station in Croydon, Tate Modern has an abundance of floor space to fill, which calls for an ever more complex programme, offering new distractions and destinations to break up the impression of wandering around in a large storage facility. The recently started 11 storey extension, the creation of yet more gallery space in an alien site, scaffold barriers and red and white tape, is populated by dwarfed figures in hard hats. The mighty turbines, painted in vivid strokes, assume the role of tragic bystanders in the scene. Between them, a building site, scaffold barriers and red and white tape, is populated by dwarfed figures in hard hats. The artist captured a moment of transition between the old and the unknown.

In the mid 1990s the Tate commissioned a series of artworks themed around the decommissioned power station. An oil painting by Anthony Eyton shows the view down the central corridor of the Turbine Hall, the dilapidated machinery still in place. The eye is led to explore and survey. The space cannot be grasped at once. Yet, from this position, where the foreman of a work unit might once have stood, the gaze of a disciplinarian past is offered to the viewer. The mighty turbines, painted in vivid strokes, assume the role of tragic bystanders in the scene. Between them, a building site, scaffold barriers and red and white tape, is populated by dwarfed figures in hard hats. The artist captured a moment of transition between the old and the unknown.

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The contribution by the German photographer Thomas Struth frames the same disused space from a different perspective (Figure 4). The tableau depicts the cluttered narrowness of a workplace. It focuses on human-scale objects, stairs and rails, raised platforms in the middle ground. A discarded piece of netting seems to have been left behind by a worker on the last shift. The image could be a look over the shoulder, a moment of departure. Equally, it could be a first glimpse, the arrival of a new, aestheticising gaze.

Nostalgia is absent from either work. Yet both depict a possible encounter between the city and the past. Here we find the terrain vague, a part of the city's fabric where life has come to a halt, captured by the image but not explained.27 The use of these spaces, or their usefulness to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination.

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POSTSCRIPT ON THE SHIP OF FOOLS28

The Berghain club must be one of the most desired interiors in Berlin. It is anything but a secret or exclusive address. Tourist web sites advertise its name along with sightseeing tips and restaurants. In a city that exemplifies the realm of the terrain vague, desolate spaces in limbo between decay and redevelopment, nightlife clubs customarily occupy niches left behind by the retreat of industry. An abandoned department store in Berlin Mitte and a disused electricity substation close to Checkpoint Charlie can be cited among the most prominent examples of the last twenty years. The infamous club Ostgut, the Berghain’s predecessor; also occupied a decommissioned railway warehouse in the Ostbahnhof area, before it was displaced across the rails by the development of the G2 World indoor arena. While none of these appropriations can be understood as solutions to the larger problem of Berlin’s industrial decay, they do trace an evolution of a type, which might be described as reaching a point of high sophistication, even mass appeal, in the Berghain today.

By 4am on a Sunday morning one can expect a long queue to have formed in front of the dilapidated façade of the former power plant from the Stalinist era. The bass line penetrates the wall, heightening expectations. It will not stop until sometime after dusk on Monday. Many will not gain access tonight. There is no guest list, no VIP; no special reason why the solemn bouncers will turn you away. Uncertainty is part of the ritual. Don’t talk back, just leave. It’s not for you.

To note the obvious, the Berghain, in the code upheld by the techno music scene, is a fiercely egalitarian space. No expensive frock or designer outfit will see you past the door. A blog entry themed around the club boasts that nobody will stand out at the Berghain. The myth prevails that when the American pop princess Lady Gaga turned up at the club one night after a gig, hardly anyone batted an eyelid. By contrast, the gruesome-looking doorman is a semi-celebrity. He has a Wikipedia entry to his name and interviews in the New York Times. In the public’s imagination he is the guardian of what one mainstream weekly titled the “Empire of Madness.” Illustrating the same article, an exploded axonometric diagram of the power plant, populated with hundreds of stylised figures, details all the levels of the club, as if it were a map of Dante’s Inferno. One annotation reads: ‘unisex toilets, always packed. to many this is a playground.’

From the dungeons of the underground fetish rooms of the ominous Laboratory, to the mainstream environment of the Panorama and the ice cream cafe, each space has a considered and coherent appeal.31 Add as little as needed, retain as much as possible, embrace what is found. Out industrial materials, such as rubber bar tops or concrete couches, are used throughout. The large format artworks, amongst photographs by the Turner Prize winner Wolfgang Tillmans, the most famous boasting a close-up rendering of a vagina, do not adorn the space, but accentuate the character of a misappropriated interior. By retaining the notion of the disused disciplinarian space, it remains a forbidden place, which can only be conquered temporarily. The transitional action is like a whisper under the hammering techno beat, that none of this, and none of the 1500 people, should actually be here. It is a ship of fools, whose existence can only be justified as long as the foolishness persists.

Between intoxicants, public copulation and ice cream, the interior world is governed by a surreal set of rules and rituals. All this is supported by the tragic acknowledgement that the institutional power to enforce discomfort and delight is limited to the parameter of the interior. Photography and film are strictly forbidden. In the toilets there are no mirrors to gaze at one’s image. The whole experience centres on a complete denial of reflection. There are no means of escape into detachment. Other than the formal institutions of society in Foucault’s description of heterotopias, here the mirror, the agent or instrument enabling the establishment of the Other Space, is shattered, destroying the real and retaining the fiction. The doorman to the Berghain grants, or denies, entrance to a mock-institution, a voluntary asylum where patients queue for admittance, to take leave from the opposite of their mirror image, the utopia of a self-directed life.

Berghain, by accident perhaps, is an assembly of the words meaning mountain and grove. The uncanny interior of the disused power plant is nowhere close to the iconography presented in Nicolas Poussin’s painting Triumph of Pan (1634). However, the contents of the two spaces, in Berlin’s hedonist temple and on the master’s canvas may transcend the ages. It is a tantalising thought that the transitional nature of the space without function could play host to a contemporary experience resembling the ecstatic pleasure we ascribe to the Dionysian Mysteries of the ancient world. In the late morning hours of Sunday the blinds above the eighteen-metre high dance floor are ritually opened, just long enough to blind the steaming crowd with a glimpse of an outside world. They are then shut again, plunging the space into countless more hours of hedonistic darkness.
CONCLUSION

‘The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.’

It has been proposed here that Battersea Power Station or Bankside could have become heterotopics but for the transformative nature found in the converted Friedrichshain power plant in Berlin. Yet, recognizing the shift in the meaning of unbecoming spaces and the tasks they can assume in our times gives rise to a subversive reading of their new role in today’s cultural economy. The quality of the transgressive nature could have become evident in the converted Friedrichshain power plant in Berlin. Yet, the city of riots and barricades, the site of struggles, the scene of transgression and subversion, could have become a friendly shelter within a large free-space for which others, and other times, can consider important - its height and familiar profile. Thus the remains become redundant power, poignant reminders of the ordering functions necessary for central ideals but define ‘specialized answers from occupational experience.’

It has been proposed here that a tantalising play with the components that help us to build better ships, which address the components that help us to build better ships, which address Simmel’s imaginative perception of conflict, rather than the image of a ‘ship of fools’ symbolically in the introduction to The Meaning of Life. Thus, the remains become testimonies to the normative ways of organizing the city and urban realm, and the police take the place of pirates. The image of a ‘ship of fools’ symbolically in the introduction to The Meaning of Life. Thus, the remains become testimonies to the normative ways of organizing the city and urban realm, and the police take the place of pirates.

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It is not strictly suggested that Battersea Power Station or Bankside could have become heterotopics but for the transformative nature found in the converted Friedrichshain power plant in Berlin. Yet, recognizing the shift in the meaning of unbecoming spaces and the tasks they can assume in our times gives rise to a subversive reading of their new role in today’s cultural economy. The quality of the transgressive nature could have become evident in the converted Friedrichshain power plant in Berlin. Yet, recognizing the shift in the meaning of unbecoming spaces and the tasks they can assume in our times gives rise to a subversive reading of their new role in today’s cultural economy.

For a collection of articles reflecting on the future of leisure and the arts in the year 1984, the theatre director Joan Littlewood wrote: ‘In London we are going to create a university of the streets – not a “glaucus” park, but a foretaste of the pleasures of 1994. It will be a laboratory of pleasure, providing room for many kinds of action.’ The article includes annotated drawing by Cedric Price, illustrating Littlewood’s vision Joachim Knape, ‘A Laboratory of Fun,’ The NewScientistMay 14 (1964): 432.

4. Edensor, Ruined factories are replete with the traces of this redundant power poignant reminders of the ordering functions necessary for the maintenance of industrial networks. There is something comical about these remaining signatures of hierarchy and authority. Like a retired officer turned back by a solitary sergeant in the middle of a deserted space, no one is there to listen and obey Tim Edensor, Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality (Oxford: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 67.

5. Croston & was designed by the British architect Robert Atkinson (1883-1952) in 1929.

6. Edensor, (…) through their very allegorical presence, ruins can cause us to question the normative ways of organizing the city and urban realm, and they contain within them simulacra for imagining things otherwise. Hidden in ruins are forgotten forms of collectivity and solidarity, lost skills, ways of behaving and feeling, traces of arcane language, and neglected historical and contemporary forms of social enterprise.’ Edensor, Industrial Ruins, 67.

7. Simmel suggests that contemporary individuals are not driven by personal ideals but define ‘specialized answers from occupational experience.’ Ibid., 380.


12. Price comments precisely. In the Bat Hall, (…) we have devoted the existing building of all that froze the immediate site; leaving only that which is considered important - its height and familiar profile. Thus the remains become a friendly shelter within a large free-space for which others, and other times, can provide uses. Cedric Price, Cedric Price: the square book (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 190.

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15. The mentioned diagram was produced by Gordon Park, who headed the Fun Place Committee Subcommittees Mathews, From Agit-Prop to Free Space, 74.


I grew up on the thirteenth floor of a twenty-two-storey structure that is one of Mumbai’s earliest skyscrapers. Each floor had three apartments; three elevators and a small-door access to a vertical garbage chute. People could literally throw the contents of their bins down the chute and each morning the garbage truck would come around to collect the mess from a room at the bottom into which the chute fed. There were often notices sent around to the houses requesting that broken glass and other potentially dangerous objects be secured in an extra bag. In addition, people would also throw rubbish out of their windows occasionally, prompting those in the know to rush through the entrance to avoid being hit by messy and often dangerous projectiles.

While we lived in a wealthy neighbourhood, my father had recently retired from the army and we were not ourselves wealthy. We had moved from living in bungalows with large gardens in small towns and cantonment areas to an apartment in a high-rise in a densely populated city. My parents brought with them practices of frugality and civic-mindedness that came from living in smaller, less anonymous communities. They often expressed disgust at the prevalent practices and I was in trouble when, at age seven, succumbing to curiosity, I tossed a tomato out of our thirteenth-floor window so that I could see it land. My mother always threw tea leaves and eggshells in the potted plants though she did not attempt a full composting in our three- by ten-foot balcony. She also regularly washed and collected the metal tops of milk bottle caps from the morning milk; scraps of foil from medicine strips, cans and food packets. All newspapers, magazines and glass bottles were also stored once their usefulness had passed. Every month or so, a scrap merchant or would come door-to-door asking for scrap and paper. He would count the bottles and weigh the paper and metal. After the traditional haggling over a rate he would pay us for our junk, load it on to his cart, and leave. If we had any unclassifiable items, it was always worth asking if he would take them; over the years we divested ourselves of old records, long defunct transistor radios, a bicycle wheel, used for daily cooking and eating.

We took this recycling micro-industry for granted. There was a strong antipathy to throwing away anything so in part from a native thrift but also in a national atmosphere of poverty and need. We stored and valued the waste because it was worth a monetary or material return. In our anonymous communities. They often expressed disgust at the prevalent practices and I was in trouble when, at age seven, succumbing to curiosity, I tossed a tomato out of our thirteenth-floor window so that I could see it land. My mother always threw tea leaves and eggshells in the potted plants though she did not attempt a full composting in our three- by ten-foot balcony. She also regularly washed and collected the metal tops of milk bottle caps from the morning milk; scraps of foil from medicine strips, cans and food packets. All newspapers, magazines and glass bottles were also stored once their usefulness had passed. Every month or so, a scrap merchant or would come door-to-door asking for scrap and paper. He would count the bottles and weigh the paper and metal. After the traditional haggling over a rate he would pay us for our junk, load it on to his cart, and leave. If we had any unclassifiable items, it was always worth asking if he would take them; over the years we divested ourselves of old records, long defunct transistor radios, a bicycle wheel, broken metal pans and innumerable unpaired metal locks and keys. Many items had value because repair was much cheaper than a new purchase. Sometimes the trader would offer a barter rather than cash. This usually took the form of stainless steel vessels and dishes that people commonly used for daily cooking and eating.

We took this recycling micro-industry for granted. There was a strong antipathy to throwing anything away in part from a native thrift but also in a national atmosphere of poverty and need. We stored and valued the waste because it was worth a monetary or material return. In our posh neighbourhood, we were the exception rather than the rule; however, being wealthy was synonymous with the ability to discard with impunity.

Over the years, the glass milk bottles gave way to plastic bags, which were also rinsed and collected, to be sold by weight. We hadn’t many other plastic bags. Bread and eggs were sold at our door and came unpackaged or wrapped in a small square of brown paper, just enough for the vendor to hand over the bread without touching it. Clothes and non-perishable items from larger stores came in thick plastic or cloth bags that my mother would store flat between the bed and the mattress.

RUBBISH MEMORIES

My relationship to both waste and kitchen design is inextricably linked to a childhood spent in Mumbai, a bustling Indian metropolis. In that milieu, the way we viewed waste, while complex, multifarious and problematic, was distinct in context from what I encountered in the United States, the only other country in which I spent a significant quantity of time. There is no single story about waste.
These would emerge in pristine condition when the need for a bag arose. It would have been foolish to go grocery shopping without bags. Most roadside vegetable vendors were subsistence farmers, too poor to offer bags with their products. Everyone carried their own reusable cloth or canvas grocery bags to the market.

I don’t know when the changes occurred but in college I remember preferring the new plastic chip bags because the contents were less likely to be rancid. Glass soft drink bottles gave way to plastic and we all reckoned those were cleaner, safer and more efficient. I couldn’t understand my parents’ inability to throw out old radios and phones; they could not adjust to the unpleasant, ugly chaos-creating aspects of our human existence. Because our associations with waste are unequivocally negative – both with regard to its physical presence as well as the modern implication of being wasteful – it is difficult to devise solutions to waste disposal and management free of the accumulated baggage of guilt, resignation, fear and frustration associated with global pollution and over-population. The framing of actions within these old paradigms will only lead to new versions of older solutions; fraught with the same associations. What is required is a new set of parameters and design considerations that can result in effective synchronous solutions that meet the needs of current and future homes.

Waste is chaos, cleanliness is order. The nature of the home is to be a refuge from the uncertainty and chaos of the world, to be somewhere that is entirely one’s own. Waste threatens the order. If the processes around its management are acknowledged and granted space, that would make visible the unpleasant, ugly chaos-creating aspects of our human existence. Because our associations with waste are unequivocally negative – both with regard to its physical presence as well as the modern implication of being wasteful – it is difficult to devise solutions to waste disposal and management free of the accumulated baggage of guilt, resignation, fear and frustration associated with global pollution and over-population. The framing of actions within these old paradigms will only lead to new versions of older solutions; fraught with the same associations. What is required is a new set of parameters and design considerations that can result in effective synchronous solutions that meet the needs of current and future homes.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF TERMS

We have many words for describing the pervasive by-product of human civilisation: waste, trash, garbage, refuse, rubbish, scrap, discards are some of the commonly used terms around the English-speaking world. To these could be added words with slightly more specific meanings: junk, debris, litter and detritus. The official term for all these forms of waste is solid waste. William Rathje clarifies that while these terms are often used synonymously they have distinct meanings. While garbage is usually made up of ‘wet’ discards such as food remains, yard waste and offal, trash describes paper, cans and ‘dry’ discards. Refuse collectively includes both wet and dry discards and rubbish describes all refuse as well as construction and demolition debris. To this collection I add the term dirt, which refers specifically to soil, or collectively to all things that possess the property ‘dirty’. Filth and its various synonyms are more automatically loaded with negative connotations of offensiveness, uncleanness and impurity.

We want our waste to disappear, easily, like magic. A sanitary worker once said of the public view, ‘People think there’s a garbage fairy. You put your trash on the curb, and then pffft, it’s gone. They don’t have a clue.’ Not only do we not want to know what happens to our waste, its very ability to disappear is the experience we seek.” While creating waste is guilt-ridden and problematic, its materiality is imbued with the issues of hygiene, sanitation and disgust. In Purity And Danger (1978) Mary Douglas asserts that modern society differs from primitive society in two notable ways in its notions of dirt avoidance – for the modern world, dirt avoidance is inseparable from notions of hygiene or aesthetics as opposed to religion or ritual and second, that the re-imagining of dirt in terms of the bacterial transmission of disease since the nineteenth century makes it difficult for modern society to think of it in other terms. However she goes on to say, “If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt is then a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system.”

The many nuances of meaning that waste matter acquired historically were not entirely replaced by the notions of hygiene and pathogenicity. While order is represented by cleanliness and beauty, An etymological study is outside the scope of this paper. While I will be using the word ‘waste’ in most instances, I intend it as a collective term that refers to all solid waste generated. In addition, I use different terms interchangeably to describe waste.

THE CREATION OF A PROBLEM

The modern environmental movement began with protests against rapid industrial expansion and the corresponding pollution. Nature was the passive helpless victim of the forces of industry, defiled by exploitation and greed. Industry and the forces of capitalism were distinct from the people, the true protectors of the earth, Vance Packard’s 1963 classic, The Waste Makers was the first real indictment of consumerism and its contribution to the creation of waste. While mainstream environmentalism was directed at saving nature from industry, Packard focused on the wasteful buying practices of the individual consumer. Although he accused industry of ‘planned obsolescence’ and promoting a ‘throwaway culture’, his work focused attention upon the individual’s responsibility for waste generation. While he helped to create awareness about the negative aspects of disposability, Packard also created a moral stance from which to view waste. Waste became the consequence of the shallow status-seeking habits of consumerism. Not only was it wrong to waste, but the physicality of waste served as a troubling reminder of moral turpitude. Often used in the media to describe doomsday scenarios, images of vast landfills became symbols of a garbage crisis, spurring demonstrations and public protest. Waste thus entered the public space as a problem, but in the private space of the home, it was still invisible.

We want our waste to disappear, easily, like magic. A sanitary worker once said of the public view, ‘People think there’s a garbage fairy. You put your trash on the curb, and then pffft, it’s gone. They don’t have a clue.’ Not only do we not want to know what happens to our waste, its very ability to disappear is the experience we seek. While creating waste is guilt-ridden and problematic, its materiality is imbued with the issues of hygiene, sanitation and disgust. In Purity And Danger (1978) Mary Douglas asserts that modern society differs from primitive society in two notable ways in its notions of dirt avoidance – for the modern world, dirt avoidance is inseparable from notions of hygiene or aesthetics as opposed to religion or ritual and second, that the re-imagining of dirt in terms of the bacterial transmission of disease since the nineteenth century makes it difficult for modern society to think of it in other terms. However she goes on to say, “If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt is then a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system.”

The many nuances of meaning that waste matter acquired historically were not entirely replaced by the notions of hygiene and pathogenicity. When order is represented by cleanliness and beauty,
refuse represents not just the danger of germs and disease, but also the added connotation of impurity, uncleanliness, decay and chaos. The new scientific evidence provided logical justifications for the ‘ordering and classification’ of ingrained cultural systems. Douglas suggests that the existence of dirt discourses order: ‘eliminating it is not a negative movement but a positive effort to organise the environment.’ This corresponds with the systems of waste disposal that support invisibility, whose intention is the creation and maintenance of cleanliness and order rather than the responsible management of waste.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, urban individuals have reconnected to practices of recycling and reuse in the wake of environmental awareness. However these practices are distinct in character from their prior incarnations. Up until the mid-twentieth century, a large quantity of domestic material was recycled and repurposed both within and outside the house, as is still common in many developing countries. The significant low-income population in cities ensured that a large industry also thrived on the salvage, repair and recycling of objects supported by scavengers and rag pickers who were an essential part of the system. However, much of the process of recycling and reuse included the careful maintenance and preservation of objects so that they would retain value in exchange and barter. By being both immutable and forever trash it becomes ‘not just gone. Yet, it has irretrievably lost the ability to provide hygiene. As such no longer remains intact. However there is the troubling fact that there is no change in the physical state of the cup. The polystyrene cup is already and always disposable without any intrinsic value. We cannot comprehend its return to dust because it is forever a consequence of urban society, a disease, the cure for which has not yet been found.

In attacking modern practices without historical perspective we forget that certain disdained concepts, like disposability, were created for a reason. Low mortality and better health were achieved because disposability assured safety from contamination. In addition, the technological advances that we blame for our waste problems were created to solve waste problems of earlier societies so complete is the failure of the modern management of waste that different terms. Instead of the fallout of excess, if waste is the integral and expanding element of modern society and is entitled to as much recognition as other industries. Contemporary society may organise its waste differently from the past, but this cannot lead to the assumption that contemporary citizens are more callous and uncaring of the consequences than their predecessors. In attacking modern practices without historical perspective we forget that certain disdained concepts, like disposability, were created for a reason. Low mortality and better health were achieved because disposability assured safety from contamination. In addition, the technological advances that we blame for our waste problems were created to solve waste problems of earlier societies so complete is the failure of the modern management of waste that different terms. Instead of the fallout of excess, if waste is the integral and expanding element of modern society and is entitled to as much recognition as other industries. Contemporary society may organise its waste differently from the past, but this cannot lead to the assumption that contemporary citizens are more callous and uncaring of the consequences than their predecessors.
Human beings have always generated waste; acknowledging this allows authentic and rational debate about how waste can be socially valued. As O’Brien asserts, all societies, not just the present ‘consumer’ version, are ‘throwaway societies.’ Instead of unfavourable comparisons to the past we can be engaged in developing ways to establish practices that make our waste material useful and eventually, perhaps even beneficial.

THE ROLE OF DESIGN

A study conducted on the characteristics of interior designers who practice environmentally sustainable design, revealed that residential designers were the least likely to consider sustainable interior design important.20 Attributed in part to the small size and budget of residential projects, this trend also reveals that designers seem to consider the environmental impact of homes to be of low priority compared to the corresponding impact of the commercial and industrial sectors. In addition, while environmental standards are regulated by code for commercial and industrial structures, demand for energy efficiency and ‘green’ products in residential design is driven entirely by client awareness and willingness. Those designers who practice sustainable design often lack adequate information regarding the efficacy of their actions and the products they specify, or they are constrained by values of market economy to provide solutions that uphold economy over environmental sustainability. In effect, there is a sustainability gap that exists between the principles of sustainable design and the realities of practice.21

The current scenario indicates that interior designers experience being hampered in environmentally sustainable practice by values oriented to growth and profit and a dearth of knowledge and awareness of environmental needs. Stieg proposes that instead designers should consider redesigning the design process itself to be compatible with natural systems that support regeneration of renewable materials, continual reuse of non-renewable resources and slower rates of consumption.22 The ‘power of design’ can be harnessed to eliminate concepts like ‘waste’ that have problematic baggage creating new processes by which environmental sustainability can be streamlined into existing lifestyles.23 Beyond explicit practical functions, design also has implicit social functions: the production and reinforcement of cultural meanings in everyday life through products and advertising is well known. Designed spaces have the power to create cultural realities, just as products become symbols that people use to communicate with each other. When designers develop an ethic to help them evaluate designs based on whether they empower or disable consumers, they enter the realm of social responsibility.24 Social design then aims to place the design process at the service of the community of users, rather than market forces.

BORROWING FROM RELATED DISCIPLINES

The idea of promoting sustainable user behaviour has been widely discussed in the area of product design. Lilley, Lofthouse and Bhamra identified three strategies to reduce unsustainable behaviour through product design: eco-feedback aims to inform users of the impact of their behaviour, hoping to induce desirable environmentally-responsible behaviours; scripts and behavioural steering make unwanted behaviour difficult while sustainable behaviour is made easy or automatic and force-functionally circumvents users’ decision-making process by transferring the decision-making to the product.25 They noted that attempts to influence behaviour through education and raising awareness had little effect in creating sustained changes in behaviour, while products already subconsciously influence behaviour through persuasive advertising.26 They suggested the integration of disablers and enablers to promote positive patterns of behaviour and reduce negative patterns in the use of the product. The concept of ‘Design with Intent’ (DwI) thinking, where a strategic design is intended to result in certain user behaviour, brings the designer into focus.27 The intent of the design is attributed to the designer and acknowledges the designer’s aim more authentically. In the pursuit of making the user more efficient, the DwI approach uses two conceptual frameworks: the use of affordances, constraints and mistake-proofing developed by Donald Norman and the idea of persuading the user rather than forcing them to conform to the behaviour change intended. ‘Persuasive technology’ was developed by Fogg (2003) in the context of website and software design but has significant potential for application in ecodesign and sustainable engineering.28 Feedback, giving users an indication of the efficiency of their behaviour, is considered a key element of persuasive approaches.

Design approaches to promoting sustainable user behaviour have gained momentum in product design as the flaws in existing systems become more evident. Traditional eco-design is under the direct control of the manufacturer and focuses strongly on the marketability of the product and its supply. The way users interact with the product, however, strongly influences its environmental impact. The persuasive approach considers the life-cycle costs of products and has the potential over time and through reinforcement, to create an environmentally sustainable shift in user habits.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR THROUGH INTERIOR DESIGN

Architecture and urban planning have always been able to promote certain behaviours through physical constraints and guides as well as the use of cultural motifs. Sustainable behaviour can be promoted through designing mixed-use facilities or walkable communities. However, environmentally sustainable behaviour in the field of interior design has traditionally been expressed in the use of materials that are recyclable or have recycled content, specifying appliances that save energy and the appropriate use of fenestration for optimum daylighting and ventilation. It has taken an essentially passive role with regard to promoting behaviours through the design of interior spaces. I suggest that interior design can apply social design frameworks to the design of waste management spaces in urban homes, thereby promoting sustainability through the usage of the space.

Donald Norman provides a context for thinking about the design world and human behaviour: his principles of understandability and usability provide a framework for designing and evaluating the
objects of daily life. Affordances refer to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine how the thing can be used. Norman describes various behaviour-shaping constraints that can prevent some activities while facilitating others in order to shape affordances. There are three types of behavioural constraints—physical, logical and cultural. Norman goes on to differentiate:

Physical constraints make some actions impossible; there is no way to ignore them. Logical and cultural constraints are weaker in the sense that they can be violated or ignored, but they act as valuable aids to navigating the unknowns and complexities of everyday life. As a result, they are powerful tools for the designer. A convention is a cultural constraint; one that has evolved over time. Conventions are not arbitrary: they evolve; they require a community of practice. They are slow to be adopted, and once adopted, slow to go away. So although the word implies voluntary choice, the reality is that they are real constraints upon our behaviour.

Using this principle in the context of waste management, while the need to preserve hygiene and cleanliness are logical constraints and guide the user’s actions, the notions of impurity and class are purely cultural and often lead to unconscious actions. However, as Norman asserts, to ignore the constraints of culture is to ignore very real constraints. A designer must comprehend the user’s desire for separation between clean and dirty, even if it is notional; the need for thresholds that preserve the order and contain the chaos. Finally, in order for a design to be effective it must provide powerful visual clues to its working. Users must be able to form a conceptual model of the design that will allow them to predict the effect of their actions. In a good conceptual model the relationship between the actions the user must perform and the results to be produced are logical. Their subsequent interaction with the designed object will confirm their mental model, thus promoting repeat use.

A CASE FOR HOUSEHOLD WASTE MANAGEMENT

Urban individuals have not been required to manage their own waste for at least a hundred years. It is logical that urban homes lack the designed spaces to perform the range of tasks that constitute waste management. There is a gap between what is demanded of citizens and what they can accomplish and this gap has been maintained in part by legacy notions of waste and the conflicts with hygiene. It has also been maintained by the reliance on public waste collection systems. In order for individuals to have sustainable processes for managing waste they must be physically able to perform these tasks. Studies show that one of the dominant reasons why people either never begin or give up composting and recycling, is convenience. Either there is no space to store recyclables or waste materials, or the pick-up services fluctuate or there is too much sorting required by the city regulations. A 2003 study on the residential implications of consumers’ recycling behaviour concluded that it was essential to provide an environment that supported recycling well-designed spaces have a direct impact on the quantity and accuracy of recycling (Macy and Thompson).

I suggest that kitchen space design is a crucial enabler in orienting individuals towards accepting their own waste and confronting the quantities we generate. Activities in the kitchen are legitimised by the existence of their processes. The provision for stoves, fridges and sinks sanctions the actions of heating, preservation, cooling and washing. The low importance of waste is codified by its essential absence in the kitchen. This contradicts the news about garbage crises and essentially creates a schism between private and public life. Applying the framework of persuasive design requires that the designer create designs that persuade people towards these activities. In addition, this offers opportunities for diverting organic matter and recyclables from the waste stream; individuals are empowered to deal with the global issue at a personal level and experience making an impact through their efforts. In the act of creating a space for waste and making the process visible, the creation of waste is validated, acknowledged and eventually normalised. The design must empower individuals at two levels first, they experience being responsible for the waste they generate in its actual volumes and composition; second, they experience autonomy as citizens in being able to participate in the effective diversion of waste. The design must also acknowledge and address the conflicts inherent in dealing with waste. The notions discussed earlier have a powerful hold on the experience of dealing with waste and fit the framework of cultural constraints. To ignore them is to produce ineffective design.

The diversion of waste from the waste stream uses recycling, reusing, and composting practices. A study on composting behaviour revealed that avid recyclers were more likely to compost. While recycling is a relatively simple process and requires mainly sorting space and the use of a sink for rinsing bottles and cans, composting presents many more challenges and is loaded with a reputation for being dirty, disgusting and smelly. To create a space for composting processes indoors would require that these issues were handled satisfactorily. Attempts to sanitise and make aesthetic the process of composting tend to ignore some important issues: the transformation of organic matter is part of a cyclical process of life, death and renewal. The problems of disposability may be counteracted by evidence of renewal in composting, for many people without backyards or gardens, not only is composting indoors challenging, but the end-product has no logical place in the home and must still be transported elsewhere. I suggest that composting systems require the inclusion of plants in order for individuals to have a place to deposit compost. Participation in the cycle of renewal will have additional benefits if edible plants are included. The transformation of waste from trash to food can contribute to people’s experience of autonomy. Since space is always limited in urban areas, vertical green spaces may provide a solution and in addition, contribute to indoor environmental quality.

There are two sides to this story. Human consumption of natural resources has increased dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. As population increases make the implementation of new policies challenging, both increased consumption and corresponding increases in the quantity of waste generated have occasioned warnings from regulating bodies about the need to change lifestyles in order to preserve the viability of the planet for future generations. Agenda 21 was the
United Nations’ first comprehensive plan of action to combat the global human impact on the environment. This document recommended the implementation of long-term plans to minimise waste, promote reuses and recycling of materials and local or backyard composting of organic matter.  

The other side is that human beings have always generated waste; in order to maintain the boundaries of what constitutes self, we must continue to discard. A fundamental aspect of our relationship to the world around us is our struggle between wanting to belong and needing to differentiate ourselves as unique. The very real concerns of growing and untenable quantities of garbage must be dealt with at a global level. However, making waste segregation at source practical and viable will also make a significant contribution to sustainable change. A vision worth pursuing is one of autonomous citizens who are both able and willing to take responsibility for their waste; who feel empowered in their ability to make a difference in the matter of waste. Appropriate residential design that includes spaces and processes for waste management is a step in that direction.

NOTES
5. Ibid., 35.
6. Ibid., 2.
10. Ibid., 7.
12. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 178.
17. William Rathje and Cullen Murphy, Rubbish! 9.
Biographies

**Edward Hollis** studied Architecture at Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities. For the subsequent six years he practiced as an Architect. He worked first in Sri Lanka, in the practice of Geoffrey Bawa, famous for his garden of follies and ruins at Lunuganga, and then in the practice of Richard Murphy, known for his radical alterations to historic buildings in and around Edinburgh. In 1999, Edward began lecturing in Interior Architecture at Napier University, Edinburgh. In 2004, he moved to Edinburgh College of Art, where he ran the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Interior Design. Now he is the Director of research in the school of Design. Working with follies and ruins in Sri Lanka, with modern interventions to historic buildings in Scotland, and in the slippery discipline of Interiors, has focussed Edward’s research and theoretical thinking on the notion of time, story, and building. Edward Hollis is currently involved with current plans to revive the ruins of Gillespie Kidd and Coia’s seminary at Cardross. His first book, *The Secret Lives of Buildings*: a collection folk tales stories about mythical buildings was published in 2007; and *The Memory Palace*: a book of lost Interiors was published in 2013.

**Heather Peterson** is a designer, artist, and Assistant Professor of Interior Architecture at Woodbury University. She holds a MArch from the Southern California Institute of Architecture and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Since 1998 she has maintained a studio practice in art, architecture, design, and critical writing. Recent work includes proposals for a pair of porcelain cabins, a series of articulated ceilings, a glass confessional, and an imaginative reconstruction of Goya’s Quinta del Sordo. She was recently awarded the juror’s choice in issue 85 of New American Paintings. In 2007 she was selected to join the viewing program at The Drawing Center in New York; and has won a number of awards including a Rhode Island State Council of the Arts fellowship in writing, the European Honors Program fellowship in painting, and a faculty development grant from the Boston Architectural Center. Peterson has taught fine art, design and architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, the Boston Architectural Center, and California State University Long Beach.

**Peter Aeschbacher** is an Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Architecture in the College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State University. His scholarship and practice focuses on public design, public scholarship, and inquiry-based tools and methods for spatial analysis and action. He has worked with Penn State’s Hamer Center for Community Design and the Los Angeles Community Design Center; was a Frederick P. Rose Architectural Fellow, and has served as Penn State’s Scholar-in-Residence for Public Scholarship. He is the recipient of two National Education Honor Awards from the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. Trained as a graphic designer, architect, and urban planner, he holds degrees from the University of California at Los Angeles and is a certified Master Gardener. His current research is on the history of the Community Design Center movement in the United States; he spent 2012-2013 on a research sabbatical at KU Leuven working on this project's ties to the early Modern movement and the historic avant-garde.

**Fátima Pombo** is Guest Professor at Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning at University of Leuven, Belgium and member of ID* Research Institute for Design, Media and Culture at University of Aveiro, Portugal. Her research concentrates on phenomenology, interior architecture/design and aesthetics. Specifically Pombo's research, publications and teaching focus on the tendencies of interior architecture/design from a close relation with history of architecture, architectural theories and practices, proposals, materials and technologies, perception of interior space, dwelling culture. She participates in international research projects and conferences; publishes in anthologies and journals like among others, *Idea Journal*, *Arquitectura Y Diseño*, *Journal of British Society for Phenomenology*. During the sabbatical of 2005/2006 she stayed at Department of Design at University of Barcelona; in 1999/2000 she was an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation postdoctoral fellow in the University of Munich (Germany) to research within Cultural Studies and during 1993/1995 she researched at University of Hèidelberg (Germany) in the framework of her PhD in Phenomenology, Education and Aesthetics.

**Kirsty Volz** began her career as an architectural drafts-person and somewhere between the wall sections and the waterproofing details she discovered an appetite for architectural theory, which turned into unfettered hunger for reading philosophy. After many years of part-time study, Kirsty finally completed her studies in architecture at the Queensland University of Technology in 2010. She is now struggling through a research masters degree in arts, in the field of scenography. Kirsty sometimes turns her attention to set design in contemporary and traditional theatre, but retreats to practice when the need for discipline and structure overwhelms her. She also tutors at QUT, in both architecture and interior design in the design studio, history and theory classes and most often in construction technology.

**Professor Lorella Di Cintio** has been educated in Canada, United States, and Europe in the fields of Interior Design, Architecture, and Philosophy. Her research focuses primarily on design activism and social responsibility and is the founder of Design Change Exchange Initiative. She teaches in the School of Interior Design and is affiliated with the Centre for Studies in Food Security and EDGE lab at Ryerson University. Since 1997, Di Cintio and Ruth’s collaborative work addresses notions of dormancy, anonymity of makers and interior landscapes. Their work has been exhibited in museums, galleries and private collections in US and Canada. http://www.thedetroithouse.com/, http://lorelladicintio.blogspot.ca/
Jonsara Ruth is a designer, artist, educator and founding director of the MFA Interior Design program at Parsons The New School for Design: a progressive graduate program initiated to explore expansive and speculative approaches to Interior Design practices. Concurrently Jonsara initiated Salty Labs: a collaborative design studio experimenting with furniture design and manufacturing, public interiors and installations. Her work originates from sustainable thinking and experiential design approaches. Since 1997, Di Cintio and Ruth’s collaborative work addresses notions of dormancy, anonymity of makers and interior landscapes. Their work has been exhibited in museums, galleries and private collections in US and Canada. http://www.thedetroithouse.com/ http://saltylabs.us/

Susan Hedges is a Senior Lecturer in Spatial Design at AUT University, New Zealand. Her research and publication interests embrace an interest in architectural drawing, notation, dance, film and critical theory in relation to drawing and visual culture. These seemingly divergent fields are connected by an interest in the relationship that exists between the body condition, architectural notation and visual images.

Mark Pimlott (Montreal, 1958) is Assistant professor of Architectural Design/ Interiors at Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. In addition to teaching graduation design studio and lecturing, he conducts research on the public interior; particularly the very large, extensive, or continuous interior. His doctoral thesis concerns the core of Montréal’s ‘ville intérieure’ (1962-1967). Mark Pimlott is the author of In passing: Mark Pimlott photographs (2010); Without and within: essays on territory and the interior (2007); and Studiolo (1996). His essays and articles on art and architecture have appeared in journals, magazines and books since 1980. Mark Pimlott is an artist and designer, whose practice incorporates photography, installation, places and interiors. Notable works include World, London (2013); La scola, Aberystwyth (2003); Red House interiors, London (2001) and Gunqette, Birmingham (2000). He studied architecture at McGill University and the Architectural Association, and fine art at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London.

Remco Roes graduated as an architect in 2007 and since then has continually explored the edges of that discipline as an artist and researcher. He is currently working on a practice-based PhD in interior architecture at the University of Hasselt (Belgium). The main focus of his research is the exploration of the status quo of a site as the basis for the creation of ‘sublime’ space. This challenge is approached from two opposite sides. The first entails a philosophical and historical - but increasingly lateral and personal - reading of the sublime. The other approach consists of the creation of spatial works within the context of an artistic practice. http://www.remcoroes.nl/

Sara Bomans is an artist who works in multiple disciplines. She frequently engages in collaborations with other artists, which has become somewhat of a thread in her recent work. She is initiator of the "PReTT" meetings, in which she invites creatives (artists, musicians, thinkers, ...) to connect and collaborate. www.sarabomans.be

Lisa Zamberlan is a senior lecturer and design studio leader in Interior Architecture at the Faculty of Built Environment, University of New South Wales. She has a Bachelor of Design from the University of South Australia and a Masters of Design (Hons) from the University of New South Wales. From 2009 – 2013, she was Faculty Learning and Teaching Fellow, collaborating on strategic faculty-wide change initiatives to enhance learning and teaching. Lisa has recently published on notions of discipline identity, interdisciplinary learning and teaching in design education, and the future of design practice.

Sing d’Arcy is a lecturer in Interior Architecture at the University of New South Wales, Australia. He coordinates the final-year graduation studio and the interior technologies courses. His primary research area deals with the configuration of interior architectural space in Early Modern Europe, particularly that of Spain. At the core of this field Sing has explored the roles that ritual, emotions, music and ephemerality played and how these factors shaped the conception, realisation and experience of interiors. As a complimentary area of investigation he is also engaged in research into contemporary Australian interiors such as innovative workplace design, spaces for creative practices and hospitality design.

Aleks Catina works as a lecturer at the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design in London. The Problem of Irony, a seminar series he developed for the MA History Theory and Interpretation in Architecture, debates the validity of qualitative assumptions regarding the originality, contemporariness and universality of architectural propositions, built thought and imagined. In his writing he looks at ways of perceiving, talking about and communicating through architecture after the rise of a culture of self-awareness, and uncertainty, in Western Civilization. His current project (folly, objective) traces the debated sense of the past in the adornment of today’s urban realm through facades and interiors. The work with students, from the youngest to the most mature, allows him to witness close up an ever-changing perception of where we want to be.

Agnishikha Choudhuri is a designer and educator, currently heading the Furniture and Spatial Design Program at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, India. She teaches courses in spatial design, design history, exhibition design and occasionally, creative writing. Her interests in urban waste management have led to several interactions with the city as well as collaborative student projects to impact long-term change locally.
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