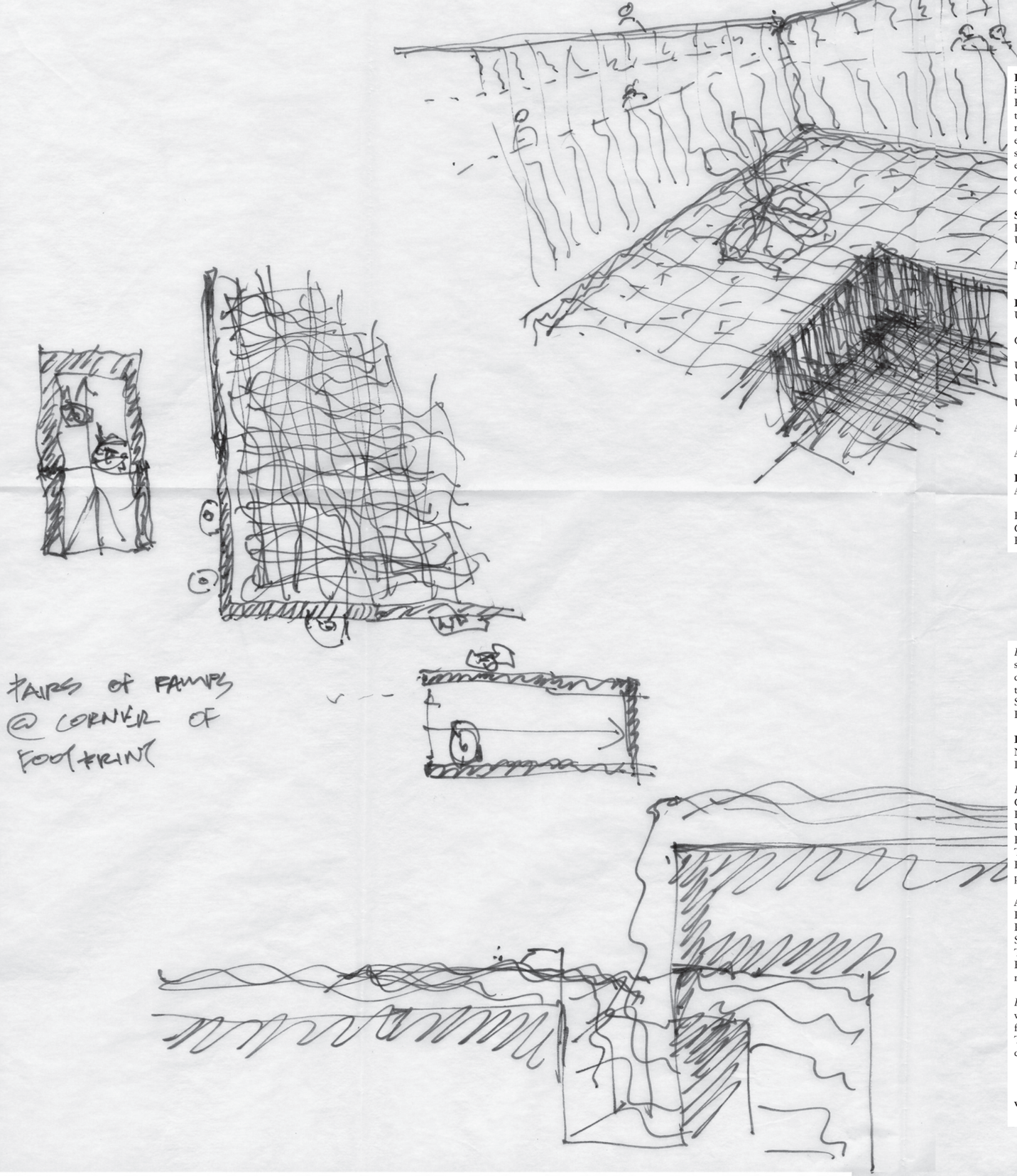


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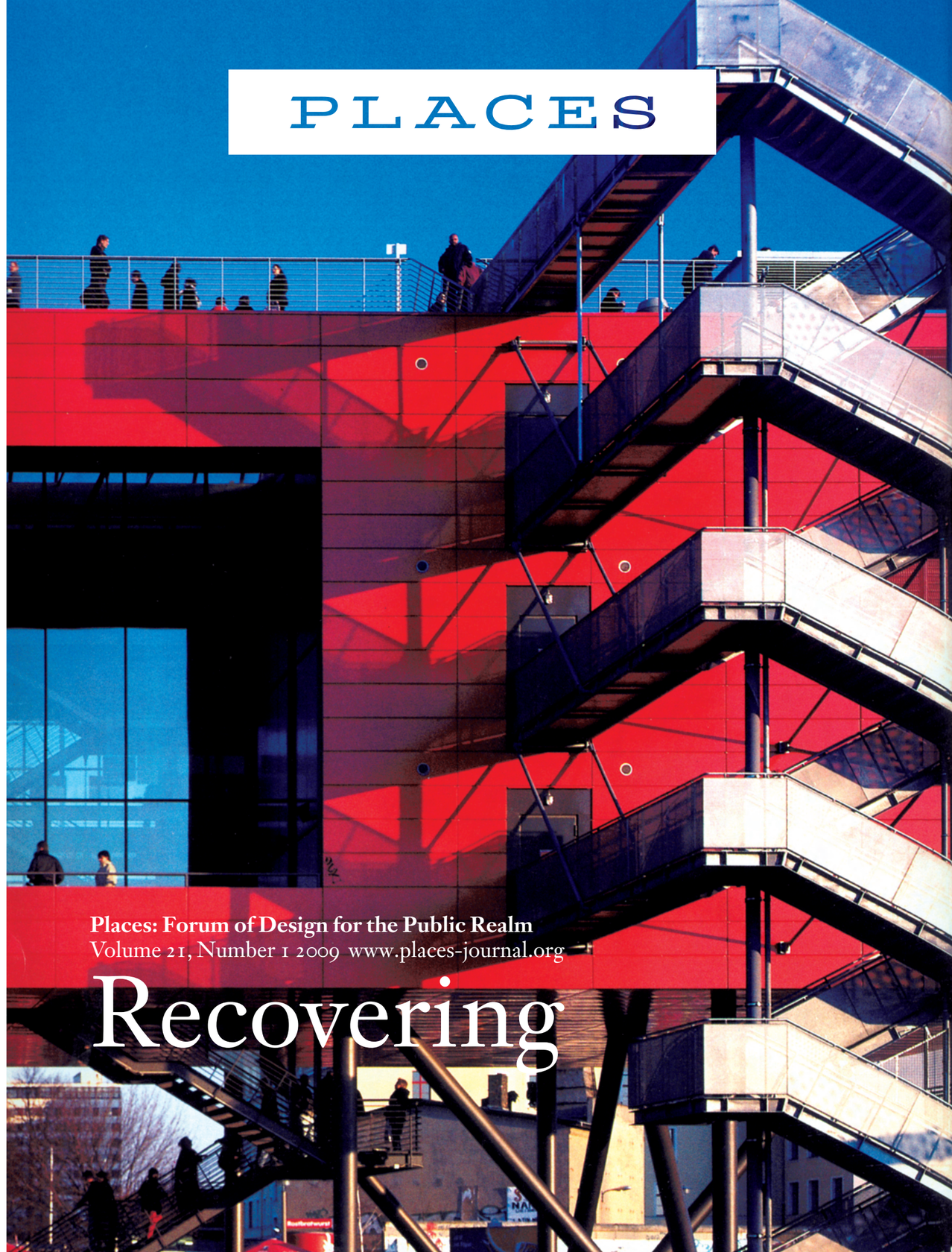
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Guest-edited by Dana Cuff and Harris Dimitropoulos

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From the Editor

This morning I had breakfast with a friend who was frustrated because she couldn't find a place to buy the *New York Times* in our neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona. This evening I attended a dinner sponsored by the design faculty at Arizona State University, where the keynote speaker was Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist, who's as responsible as anyone for why classified ads—the economic backbone of the news business—have gone online, and why my friend couldn't find the newspaper that day, and why sometime soon… but no need to finish the sentence.

I'm writing this editorial, my first as the new editor of *Places*, in April 2009. The information revolution—the accelerating decline of the daily papers, the explosive rise of web-based journalism, the messy confusion of it all—is much in the news. And here at *Places* we are in the midst of our own exciting transition, from a hard-copy journal compiled, edited, printed and distributed three times yearly, to a web-based journal that will be open access, continuously available and updated often. Online, *Places* will continue to publish peer-reviewed scholarship and photographic essays, but we'll also feature topical critique, text and audiovisual interviews, timely reviews of books, exhibitions, and projects, and multimedia formats including slideshows, mapping, animation, film and video. Articles and reviews will be extended and enhanced with hyperlinks, and the site will support—and encourage—interactive discussion. To guide us in this transition, we've engaged the Connecticut-based Winterhouse Studio, whose online experience ranges from scholarly journals for Yale and Harvard to the websites for the *Paris Review*, *Poetry Foundation*, and the *New Yorker*. Our plans are to launch the new site this fall.

Transitions—not to say revolutions—are never easy. Personally and professionally—as a lifelong bibliophile and also as co-founding editor of the print journal *Harvard Design Magazine*—I'm intensely aware of the pleasures of print, of its heft and portability, its permanence and presence. Yet it's clear that the future of periodical literature is online, and it's clear too that we're gaining as much as we're giving up. The economic and environmental arguments for going digital are strong. Just as compelling are the editorial opportunities—opportunities for greater reach and readership, for wider impact for the design professions. Certainly the time is ripe for lively and immediate online debate about the future of buildings and landscapes and cities, as a new administration rolls out plans for what's likely to be an historic investment in built infrastructure, as global crisis spurs design activism and energy. At this pivotal moment I'm delighted to be taking on the editorship of *Places*, at once to extend the admirable legacy of my predecessor Donlyn Lyndon and to work to take full creative advantage of what's quickly become the most powerful communication medium of our day.

— Nancy Levinson

Design after Disaster

Dana Cuff



In the past decade, as architects and planners, we have tackled America's greatest urban catastrophes—in New Orleans and in Lower Manhattan. In spite of our tenacity and creativity, in spite of desperate need, civic engagement, and urgency—we failed. Perhaps a different story will be written with greater hindsight, but it seems doubtful that either of these places, slates wiped violently clean, will be remade in ways that symbolize what everyone sought: triumph over disaster.

Above: Proposal for a New Orleans "Floating House." Marc Kersey of Clark Construction, Thom Mayne and Brandon Welling of Morphosis, and Tom Darden of Make it Right discuss a model at the chassis prefabrication site at UCLA. Photo by Saji Matuk.

Designers involved in these efforts have complained that their hands were tied by politics and economics. But these forces always predominate in postdisaster scenarios. Are we to conclude that design is inherently emasculated just when it could have its greatest impact? Clearly, we must find more productive ways to operate, so that we can side with President Obama's Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, who famously stated, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste."[1]

Lately it seems there is no shortage of crises, but the jury is out about the role architects and urbanists will play. Stemming from a multiyear investigation on the part of cityLAB, a think tank in the Department of Architecture and Urban Design at UCLA, the following seven articles explore ways that design can indeed be part of the postdisaster solution.

Cleaning the Slate

When it comes to urban places, disasters make their mark through destruction. Fires, floods, wars, hurricanes—these catastrophes violently rend the city, opening up territories to the schemes of power-brokers and visionaries alike.

The notion of tabula rasa has always held a certain attraction for architects. It suggests potential, a lack of preconceptions, an ability to start fresh, an opportunity to create a new world. A tabula rasa is conceptually open-ended; its indeterminate constraints and program offer the freedom to think anew. But more than anything, for designers it is a theoretically empty site—empty of structures, context, compromise, politics, regulation.

Sometimes, the desire for tabula rasa is so great that we attempt to empty sites the way we might empty the trash, with little regard for all that is cleansed away. This was the story of urban renewal, when vibrant, poor neighborhoods in American downtowns were demolished to make way for antiseptic corporate highrises. As I discovered in research for *The Provisional City*, destruction was as much a part of the solution as the new urban fabric, but it was not nearly so well planned.[2]

There are many ways besides destruction to start with a clean urban slate. Sometimes new territories are discovered—hinterlands that for some reason become feasible for development, or open spaces that change hands, as when military bases are decommissioned. Sometimes technology makes an uninhabitable place buildable, as when levee construction moved the waters away from New Orleans. But often, violence prevails—natural or manmade—to create a tabula rasa: the Gulf Coast after Katrina, Rotterdam after World War II, Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871, Rome after Nero's conflagration.

The tabula rasa of disaster provides a new starting point. Yet, compared to the true clean slate, disaster sites are profoundly tainted. The violent erasure of history leaves a highly polemic and traumatized place, where politics, memory, economic interest, and opportunity vie for priority in the process of recovery. Moreover, war-torn sites, from Beirut to London, depend not only on exigencies of recovery but narratives of deliverance. In no place has this conflicted history been as palpable as at Ground Zero, where visions for the site's future have been steadily eroded by an ordeal that has afflicted everyone involved, from victims' relatives to city officials.

A catastrophe steals away a future that can never be imagined, and its site becomes a site of injustice. The role cast for architecture in this case is generally to memorialize, looking back rather than forward. But the coupling of nostalgia and a desperate urgency to forget creates a paradox that may paralyze those charged with rebuilding. As with the Chicago fire, it can take decades for the redemptive power of the disaster narrative to take the place of loss, so that effective recovery can proceed.[3] In the case of Chicago, deliverance did finally arrive in the form of innovative architectural departures such as the steel frame and urban visions like that of the skyscraper, and like a phoenix, the city rose to meet the new urban possibilities.

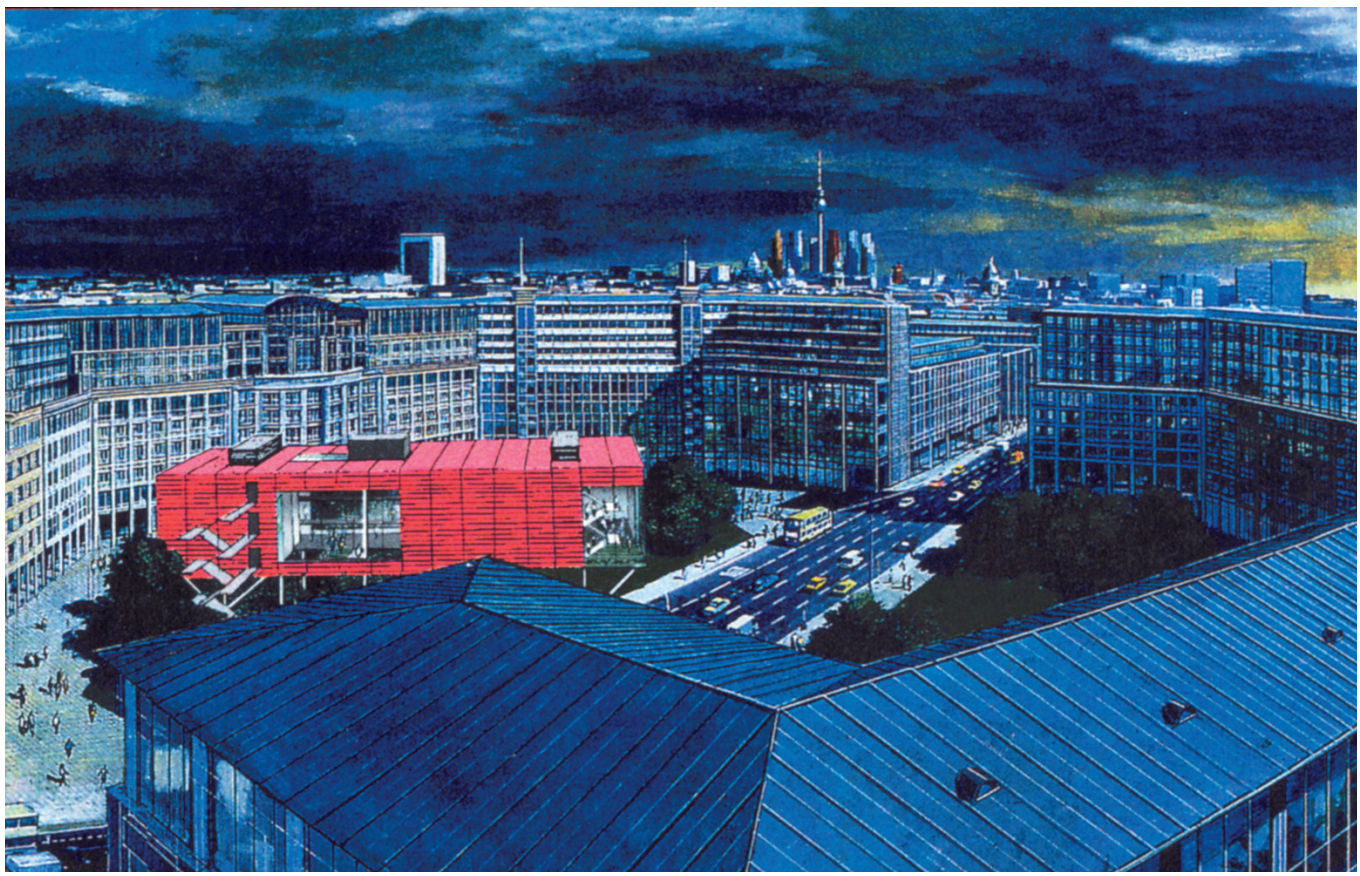
Rocovery from Shock

The case studies described here make clear that design after disaster is not an autonomous project. In other words, disasters destroy more than buildings, and more than buildings need to be reconstructed in their aftermath.

The long historical record of urban and political restructuring after disaster is evident in Brian Sahotsky's article on the aftermath of Rome's great fire of 64 CE. In its wake, Emperor Nero sought to build a private palace in the formerly public center of the city. Nero's failed venture, as well as his successor's pointed rebuke, is an ancient example that speaks to Naomi Klein's contemporary analysis of disaster capitalism, the economic and political opportunism that may emerge when a catastrophe—natural or manmade—produces mass disorientation among a people.[4]

Klein's "shock doctrine" holds lessons pertinent to urban design. When a city is rebuilt, is not only there collective trauma, but also some form of state-scale response that holds the capacity for significant restructuring. Claudia Ziegler's study of a modern Italian catastrophe, postwar Milan, provides an early example of the possibilities of such postcatastrophe reengineering. The city's architecturally striking Pirelli Tower symbolized its place in the new world order as well as its triumph over historical impediments.

Because architects and planners are well aware of the difficulties of redirecting the urban status quo, they may relish the possibility in Klein's shock scenarios to create utopias that would otherwise be impossible. But Klein has illuminated the likelier scenario that oppressive, corporate-state coalitions will dominate recovery in emergency conditions. We see how those same interests prevailed in the case of Lower Manhattan, even though broad community support was expressed for innovative design alternatives at Ground Zero. Instead, the developer, the municipal and state agencies, and the corporate architecture firm SOM maneuvered to exert control. The terrorist threat and the need to rebuild formed the "excuse that was



needed to push through a program that would have been politically impossible under normal circumstances."[5]

What political philosophers consider the state of exception (read: emergency) is an essential part of the rule of law: it is exactly the moment when laws can be suspended.[6] But Berlin's INFO BOX offers an example of how shock scenarios can be productively restrained. The largest construction site in Europe emerged at Potsdamer Platz after the demolition of the Berlin Wall. However, Rebecca Choi argues that the temporary, brilliant red INFO BOX helped visitors both deal with the tragic past and contemplate a future under construction. At this place that once symbolized a severed nation, its success derived from its ability to embody Lebbeus Woods's notion of a scab.

It may be that catastrophe, particularly in our postutopian age, is too grand for the bold actions of visionary designers and planners. We are rightly suspect of master plans. Yet large-scale destruction like the tornado that flattened Greensburg, Kansas, seems to necessitate broad brush strokes—or, as the political scientist James Scott cautioned in his book of the same name, "seeing like a state."[7]

Scott was referring to the abstracted, distant view that reduces on-the-ground complexities to singularities. Linda Samuels's investigation of post-Katrina/Rita highway infrastructure shows how emergency management has perpetuated such a singular, abstract view of this essential feature of the public realm in New Orleans. In that case, recovery has also been postponed by the symbolism of the city's highways as places of life and death during the days following the disaster. Similarly, Sérgio Figueiredo shows that an architectural discourse of "sustainability" may have been a success in branding Greensburg's early recovery. But it will be increasingly less capable of guiding the town's reconstruction if it is not accompanied by visual evidence of architectural innovation.

Above: Rendering by the architects, Schneider + Schumacher, of the INFO BOX surrounded by new buildings. The intent of the design, however, was that it would be a temporary structure that would be taken down once new development around it was complete.

Radical Increments

While Scott learns from our failed attempts to implement utopia, these articles take the opposite approach, by learning from success. As case studies, they demonstrate what we at cityLAB call the power of the radical increment.

If the cataclysm has tended to upbraid the architect, this is not because the problem is too large, but because the solution is excessive. In the face of catastrophe, architects and urbanists might do better to appreciate the logic of accidents. According to the cultural theorist Paul Virilio, the speed that characterizes contemporary civilization inherently breeds the accident.[8] Echoing Aristotle, Virilio suggested that "the accident reveals the substance." This led him to a conclusion that featured large in our thinking about design after disaster: "To invent the train is to invent the rail accident of derailment." Thus, the levee previsions its rupture; the regulation its variance; the security wall its breach; and construction its deterioration. However, when the accident reveals such substance, it also holds the kernel of reinvention. Seen from this vantage point, a crisis offers not a tabula rasa for utopian dreams, but an opportunity to question old rules.

The floating house proposed by Morphosis and a UCLA graduate architecture studio for New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward breaks plenty of rules when it comes to residential construction. But, as Erin Smith recounts, it is a critical piece of a large new idea—that New Orleans could thrive without levees. The proposals for a floating house, or a bent house, are radical increments that can launch minor architectures. Like the minor literatures outlined by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, they hold the power to enunciate political and collective values that are not part of dominant practices.[9] Such design after disaster is capable of countering the homogeneous singularities that both Klein and Scott show to be fundamentally dysfunctional.

We must separate the concept of a radical increment from a simple project, however. A project is singular, with no implications beyond its own boundaries; the radical increment, on the other hand, is a particular response that systemically or prototypically intervenes in a more extensive problem. Like the thoughtful student-built art center in Greensburg, a single building can serve as a point of debate and inspiration for an entire town's reconstruction. In her study of Detroit's ongoing crisis of decay, Whitney Moon likewise shows how small-scale interventions can highlight, appropriate, and transform isolated sites to create a vital new field for the recuperation of a ruined city.

The radical increment, then, is a catalyst for change. From the Roman Colosseum to Milan's Pirelli Tower, the INFO BOX, and the experimental floating house, the examples here demonstrate its importance to design after disaster. By appreciating its power, the architect can become truly instrumental.

Metropolitan Possibility

Seven essays cast a net around the ways that design operates after a crisis. The authors are all graduate students at UCLA who participated in an ongoing advanced seminar on the topic under my direction. Our charge was to remain close to our objects of study, the buildings and infrastructure designed after disasters, so that we might better understand their origins as well as their function in recovery. Operating as ruptures of the norm, disasters can spark fresh thought, and these essays offer *constructive* examples of that potential, in both the literal and projective sense of the term.

The design professions have been accused of adding to the catastrophes in the Gulf Coast and in New York City. But the following stories offer an alternative. There are no grand conclusions. Instead, they open new ways to look at disasters, large and small, as sources of possibility for the next metropolis.

Notes

1. Gerald F. Seib, "In Crisis, Opportunity for Obama," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 21, 2008, p. A2.

2. Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

3. Kevin Rosario, "Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art of Optimism in Modern America," in Lawrence Vale and T. Campanella, eds., *The Resilient City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 27-54; Ross Miller, "Out of the Blue: The Great Chicago Fire of 1871," in Joan Ockman, ed., *Out of Ground Zero: Case Studies in Urban Reinvention* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2002), pp. 46-61.

4. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

5. Ibid., p. 155.

6. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). In this post-9/11 text, Agamben argues that the emergency has become habitual rather than exceptional.

7. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

8. Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Out of Ashes and Rubble: The Pirelli Tower

Claudia J. Ziegler



At the end of World War II, the Italian economy was in ruins and more than 300,000 Italians were dead. Many in the country desired to "erase the compromises and errors of the period," and turned to architectural projects to promote a sense of healing.[1]

While the bombs of the allied forces had helped liberate Italy from Nazi occupation, the events of the war had also inflicted extensive damage on city centers, monuments, infrastructure, and major public buildings. But the destruction also left behind a series of urban voids by which Italy could re-create itself. It was out of such a condition that Milan offered the world the Pirelli Tower. Affectionately called the Pirellone, it would become an exemplar of the Italian response to disaster and a model for innovative Italian architecture.

Above: View of the Pirelli Tower from the Duomo. Photo by Nicholas Ng from Flickr.com.

Realization of the Tower

The success of the Pirelli Tower went against the grain in Italy, where postwar reconstruction was more often overwhelmed with symbolism, politics, and the long history of place.[2] Nowhere was this more evident than in Florence. On August 3, 1944, as the German army retreated, it blew up all the bridges across the Arno except the Ponte Vecchio, which Hitler loved.[3] To prevent allied forces from using this historic structure, however, German forces dynamited more than one hundred adjacent medieval buildings.

After the war, Florentines wanted to rebuild without delay, and they formed a committee of historians, architects, and writers to offer advice. Some believed that all the damaged buildings should be rebuilt *dove erano*, *come erano*, "where they were, as they were"; others wanted to start over to create a living city instead of an illusion for tourists. Despite a competition held to consider a variety of ideas, no decisions were made. Consequently, the city







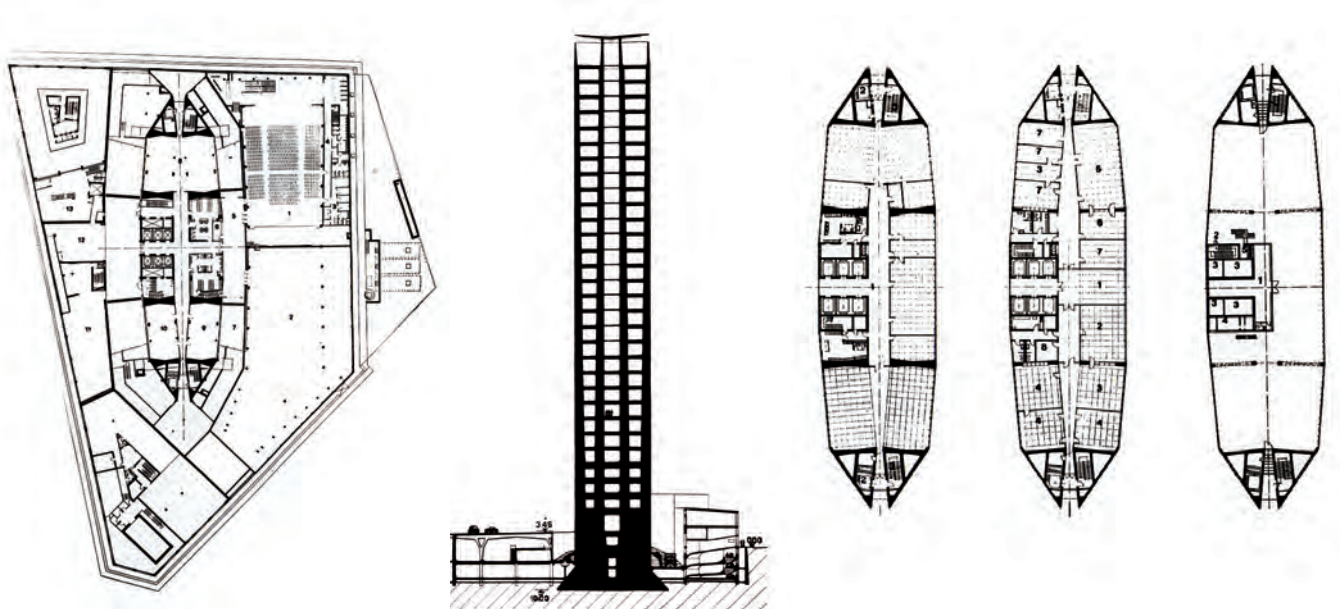
council approved "a series of small, rather bland proposals, parcel by parcel from 1948–1957, essentially rebuilding the city exactly as it was before the war."[4]

Despite the outcome in Florence, Italian architects aspired to repair their cities in a manner that reflected the ideals of a new society, and in Milan, the outcome was different. During the fascist era, industrial companies like the rubber and tire manufacturer Pirelli had flourished there.[5] However, a 1943 bombing campaign had destroyed the Pirelli factories and many others. Soon after the raids, a billboard advertising Pirelli's ladies latex stockings appeared prominently on the site of the ruined factory, across from the main train station. But once the war had ended, Pirelli decided to move its manufacturing facilities to the northern La Bicocca area of the city. At the same time, the company decided to build a skyscraper on the former factory site, adjacent to the historical center and its Duomo.[6]

Much of the credit for the building goes to Alberto Pirelli, who guided his family's company in the postwar era, and who wanted an American-type skyscraper as a corporate symbol. The Milanese had also always dreamed of building tall buildings, and the city plan of 1953 designated the area near the train station for office buildings. When city authorities approved the Pirelli tower's atypical height of 417 feet, they opened the door for the construction of Italy's first skyscraper.[7]

To design the tower, Pirelli hired the architect Gio Ponti, who assembled a team that included the renowned engineer Pier Luigi Nervi. Their collaboration resulted in a 33-story structure, with parking for 800 cars, built of prestressed, reinforced concrete. Its facade was clad with thermopane windows, held in place by anodized aluminum mullions and positioned outside the floor slabs to achieve

Above left: Street-level view of the Pirelli Tower.
Above right (top and bottom): Interior views of the Pirelli Tower.
Photos by Epzibah from Flickr.com.



the effect of an unbroken curtain wall. The roof, supported by a separate structure, seemed to float over the building.

Efficiency was central to the design. For example, the building's columns became thinner as they rose. Efficiency also affected planning for interior circulation: since the office workers needed open, flexible spaces serviced by centrally located elevators and corridors, Ponti decided the width of the building should diminish toward its edges, resulting in a tapered, lens-shaped plan. Moveable partitions also allowed flexibility in the use of each floor—except for below grade where the building included a 600-seat auditorium, a staff cafeteria, conference areas, and parking.[8]

This synthesis of form and structure was a welcome departure from the single-block or tiered skyscrapers that filled Manhattan's grid at the time, and Ponti and Nervi's ideas influenced such later American skyscrapers as the 1958 Pan Am tower.[9] However, the architecture critic Reyner Banham wrote that the design "was not a style-oriented formalism, despite the elegance of his solution, but one that centered around essential functional planning which was typical of the modern movement."[10]

As Italy's tallest building for many years, the Pirellone became a symbol of the country's economic growth and an expression of its industrial power. Banham also noted, however, that "Ponti had managed to make his architecture more effective in corporate image making than any advertising agency's work." The stylized lens-shaped plan became *uno slogan grafico*, which he placed on all of his own printed materials. "[The] clear architectural image promoted the company, and the company's publicity promoted the architect."[11] The tower thus evolved symbolically from being an icon of national recovery to being an advertisement for Pirelli products, the architect, and contemporary Milan.

Above: Plans and section of Pirelli Tower. From R. Aloi, *Nuove Architetture a Milano* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1959).

Opposite: Map of Central Milan. Drawing by author.

Icon for Postwar Milan

The tower was particularly important as a crystallization of Milan's new image as a space for modernity, speed, and chance. One reason was its proximity to the historic center, which allowed it to seem both geographically distant and central to the life of the city.

This altered image of Milan is evident in the urban elements that are included or edited out of films from the early 1930s through the 1960s. Until the 1950s the city's expansive northern areas were almost completely absent from films, most likely because this landscape was filled with factories and housing for workers. But in the 1960s, films like Antonioni's *La Notte* began to present Milan no longer just as its Duomo, but also as its train station, the Valesca tower, the Pirellone, its industries, and its anonymous suburbs.



The Stazione Centrale and the Pirelli tower become particularly recurrent geographic indicators: the station as the gateway to the city, the Pirellone as a symbol of the economic boom in the new Milan. According to a publication by the University of Milano-Bicocca, "Perhaps it is no coincidence that the imposing, slightly oppressive monumentality of the station stands just a few dozen meters from the modern, linear form of the skyscraper, as though in an inevitable clash between the old and new."[12]

Without the 1943 bombing, it would be hard to imagine how the factories near the train station would have been relocated so swiftly to the northern periphery, allowing contemporary architecture to appear in their place. The tragedy of wartime destruction is no guarantee of later architectural innovation; but in this case it led to a progressive architectural symbol as a part of postwar reconstruction.

The tower resulted, in other words, from a historic opportunity. The ambitious visions of Pirelli, Ponti, and Nervi, the Pirelli company's financial resources, popular rejection of the stifling cultural impact of fascism, and Milan's open-mindedness regarding postwar building codes and regulations paved the way for never-before-seen, experimental architecture.[13] The Pirellone brought the city into the twentieth century and illustrated how accommodation to new ideas, especially in postdisaster conditions, can produce architecture that resonates for decades.

Notes

1. Manfredo Tafuri, "The Years of Reconstruction," *History of Italian Architecture, 1944–1985* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), p. 11. Tafuri points out that the alteration of buildings associated with the war was seen as a way to correct the errors of the past. For example, the redesign of the Stazione Termini in Rome was intended to erase the embedded symbolism of fascism. The new Montuori-Vitellozzi station was "universally recognized as a reflection of all the positive elements of the new democratic society, in its flowing functional plan, its lightness and transparency, [and] its lack of any stylistic references."

2. Construction in Italy is rarely a matter of a prescribed procedure. It seems almost anybody can have input, the government is extensively involved, and the image of the city must be considered. See Tobias Jones, *The Dark Heart of Italy* (New York: North Point Press, 2005); and Claudia Ziegler, *A Waste Water Treatment Plant as a Contemporary Public Space in Florence, Italy* (Houston: Rice University, 2007).

3. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, *Italian Days* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 128.

4. This book is one of the few comprehensive resources for the history of twentieth-century architecture in Italy. It was a strong reference for material in this article on both the Pirelli tower and postwar reconstruction in Florence.

6. Elena dell'Agnese, *La Bicocca e Il Suo Territorio* (Milano: Universita Milano-Bicocca, 2005). This text was produced by the University of Milano-Bicocca to help students and faculty understand its urban context and history. It is an excellent source of information regarding the Pirelli Tower because of the company's decision to relocate its manufacturing facilities to La Bicocca after the war. Also see R. Aloi, *Nuove Architetture a Milano* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1959), p. 2. However, these sources do not explain how Pirelli was organized during the war, how its organization changed afterwards, or why the offices were separated from the manufacturing facility. The crisis within the company was severe: in addition to the destruction of its original factory, many employees were deported to work camps.

7. Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy, Volume II*, p. 167.

8. Aloi, *Nuove Architetture a Milano*, pp. 2–5; Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy, Volume II*, pp. 168–69; and Francesco Dal Co, Sergio Polano, and Antonio Martinelli, "Grattacielo Pirelli," *20th Century Architecture and Urbanism: Milano* (Tokyo: Extra Edition, 1991), p. 186.

9. Http://www.aviewoncities.com/nyc/panam.htm (accessed Nov. 11, 2008).

10. Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy, Volume II*, p. 168.

11. Ibid., pp. 166, 170.

12. Dell'Agnese, *La Bicocca e Il Suo Territorio*, p. 14. The above paragraphs contain a summary of ideas located in several areas of dell'Agnese's text.

13. The Pirelli tower was novel, experimental architecture because it was the first skyscraper to be built in Italy; it was an extremely tall building realized next to Milan's *centro storico*; it had image-making capacity; and it was able to function as an advertisement. It is not being argued that there was a discontinuity in architecture between the interwar and postwar periods, or that the tower was a departure from the style or materiality of Ponti or Nervi's earlier work.

Reconstructing Urban Life

Rebecca M. Choi

In 1977, the U.S. National Science Foundation published a study called "Reconstruction Following Disaster," which suggested that almost all postdisaster recovery models follow a predictable, temporal path. Interestingly, three of the four stages in the recovery process imply a functional role for architecture. As outlined in the report, the four stages were "an emergency response, restoration of the restorable, the reconstruction of the destroyed," and a final phase of "commemoration, betterment, and development."[1]

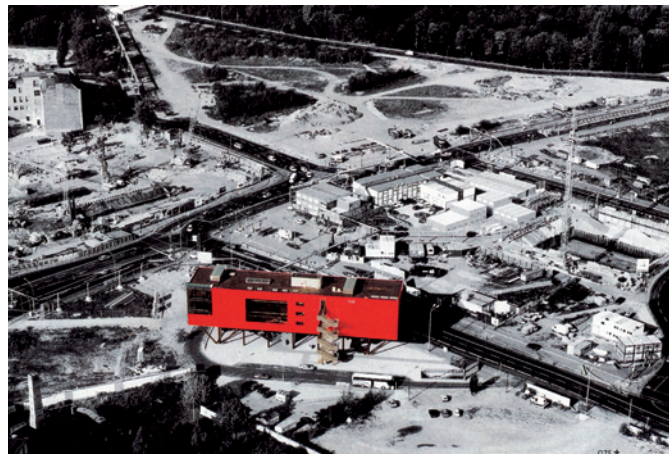
The last stage is generally thought to be the most logical point of entry for architecture. But in the aftermath of catastrophe, architects may also respond in ways that transcend an exclusively restorative and commemorative function. In doing so, they may expand their role beyond utilitarianism, to integrate a program of communication and participatory action.

The temporary structure known as the INFO BOX, built near Potsdamer Platz during its reconstruction following the demolition of the Berlin Wall, aspired to this condition. Although tethered to corporate development, it signified urban rebirth. It was a progressive work of architecture that guided redevelopment and engaged the public in an important healing process.

A Form of Healing

Immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001, debate emerged across America as to how to rebuild the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan. One initiative involved the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development, which assembled a group of architects and planners to examine the redevelopment of Berlin's Potsdamer Platz.[2] The rebuilding challenges there seemed to resonate with New York's dilemma. Most identifiable were the emotional scars both cities carried as they reckoned with the reconstitution of emblematic spaces. But it was also hoped that an investigation of Potsdamer Platz would preempt the possibility that rebuilding at Ground Zero would become a spectacle of large-scale development, as in Berlin.





Above top: Before World War II, Potsdamer Platz was Berlin's transportation hub and a vital core for its economy. It was heralded as the principal crossroads of Europe.

Above bottom: Following the destruction of war and the clearing of a zone of death near the Berlin Wall, the site regained prominence in the reconstruction of the unified city. Initially, however, only the INFO BOX stood amid the chaos of redevelopment.

Opposite: Meeting of Berlin's past and future. Photo by Christian Pohlert.

The architect Lebbeus Woods has written that postdisaster recovery starts with the forming of a "scab." For Woods, the scab is a first layer of reconstruction, which shields an exposed interior space or void and protects a space during its transformation. [3] In Berlin, the discourse of rebuilding began with such an understanding, and unlike Ground Zero, where a sense of emptiness remained as reconstruction efforts lagged, the renewal of Potsdamer Platz was primed by a physical form: the INFO BOX. Critics have rarely recognized the importance of this work, which provided a physical scab and created a responsive, participatory environment that communicated a message of progress and hope.

From Hitler's rise to power in 1933 until the fall of the Wall in 1989, Potsdamer Platz endured multiple cycles of collapse and regeneration. Before World War II it was recognized as the point where "principal east-west and north-south routes in Europe" crossed; but it was



completely destroyed during the war, and on August 13, 1961, the Wall was constructed across it, ending its significance as a transportation hub and economic center.[4]

In one day, the Wall was built "literally and figuratively, atop the ruins of war, terror and division," and for twenty-eight years it rooted division into the land.[5] Years after it was dismantled, an emotional resonance of broken livelihoods and severed connections remained. Then, in early June 1995, the INFO BOX appeared, offering a beacon of hope that long-severed, links would be reconnected and the healing of urban wounds could begin.

The bright red box, designed by the architects Schneider + Schumacher, was intended as a temporary pavilion, with the humble purpose of informing the public as to the city's redevelopment plans.[6] But not everyone shared such a positive view; some regarded it as a marketing tool intended to benefit big new investors in the area such as Daimler-Benz and the Sony Corporation.[7] However, in this case, the INFO BOX served a greater purpose than simply relaying information or standing in as corporate advertising.[8] It embodied the essence of McLuhan's dictum that the medium is the message. Its physical presence, infused with a message of hope, guided public perceptions of the site with dignity and fearlessness as redevelopment progressed.[9]

The sense of optimism was reinforced by the INFO BOX's physical characteristics. With its scaffold-like structure, brilliant red cladding, and around-the-corner glazing, it sat atop seven-meter-high steel columns at Leipziger Platz. From its roof terrace, twenty-three meters above the ground, visitors had an uninterrupted view of rebuilding efforts at the adjacent Potsdamer Platz.[10] It spanned more than sixty meters and straddled the "no-man's land" where the Berlin Wall once stood. The INFO BOX not only filled the void that existed after the Wall had been removed, but also acknowledged the

scar left behind and lifted visitors up from the danger zone in a way that assured them the violence that once attended this "death strip" was securely in the past.[11]

As a work of architecture in its own right, the INFO BOX also aided the recovery process by "celebrating architecture before the event."[12] The box was one of the first structures in the redevelopment area, and the architects chose to use prefabricated elements to expedite its construction and accommodate the possibility of disassembling it for future use elsewhere.[13]

The INFO BOX was dismantled in 2000, but during its five-year stint, it educated the public and created an interactive forum for visitors interested in the changing urban landscape. This interplay was achieved, for example, by means of virtual-reality tours through Renzo Piano's future shopping developments and mixed-use office blocks.[14] However, not even these sophisticated simulations could match the epic narrative provided by the actual view of Potsdamer Platz.

Navigating the INFO BOX created various vistas, enabling visitors to see the progress of development framed within the box and through the box, providing a one-to-one relationship between the user and the construction site. In essence, it provided the sense of a changing real-time model, instructing the viewer as to the ongoing transformation of the site. This personalized connection allowed visitors to translate the overwhelming experience of the development site into memorable, visual stills.

Meanwhile, at ground level, the INFO BOX served as a Lynchian image, helping visitors orient themselves as they approached from a distance. And once that image was contextualized amid the chaotic reconstruction scene, it provided a path into both the past and future.[15]

The Power of Resilence

Potsdamer Platz harbored historic memories that included both glorious and tragic moments. The view from the roof of the INFO BOX revealed the faint remnants of a sophisticated street grid that once pulsated with movement and the rich urban life of Berlin in the early twentieth century. These traces of city fabric lay buried under the rubble until the INFO BOX reactivated a sense of this layered past.

The INFO BOX was a model form that responded to disaster by offering the promise of eventual healing. It stood as a symbol of the ability of architecture to create resilient physical space. A redeeming work, it communicated the narrative of a tragic past, acted as an agent for public reflection, and provided evidence of impending rebirth.

Notes

1. J. Eugene Haas et al., eds., *Reconstruction Following Disaster* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), p. 336.

2. Family members of victim's and community activists were also part of this delegation. Ron Shiffman and Katie Taylor, "New York to Europe Delegation Preliminary Findings and Recommendation," Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development, http://prattcenter.net/pubs/europedelegation.pdf

3. This notion of the scab is only one aspect of Woods's multitiered discussion of recovery from disaster, which includes concepts such as bottom-up planning, creating change "from below, [and] from the people without the sanction of any institutionalized authority," and essentially questioning conformity and private enterprise. For the purposes of this essay, I use the metaphor of the scab to describe a regenerative process that occurs after a disaster. Lebbeus Woods, *Radical Reconstruction* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p. 16.

4. Stephen Kinzer, "Watching Berlin Take Shape," *New York Times*, May 12 1996.

5. Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 17.

6. Collaborators in the INFO BOX project included Daimler-Benz, Deutsche Bahn AG, the Senate Building, Housing and Transport Department, Sony/Tishman Speyer/Kajima, and A + T. Land Berlin and private investors financed the project. *INFO BOX: The Catalogue* (Berlin: Verlag Dirk Nishen Bmbh & Co KG, 1996), p. 15.

7. Thank you to the peer reviewer who brought to my attention an article in *Architectural Review* that argued that the INFO BOX was used to enhance the image of the projects—an economical alternative, "compared to the cost of an international billboard campaign." Layla Dawson, "Box of Tricks," *Architectural Review*, 198 (1995), p. 16.

8. Bernard Tschumi has written that the commodification of architecture can produce a relationship between building and program that can be "either highly sympathetic or contrived and artificial," but which overall can produce a net benefit. See Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 147.

9. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 7.

10. *INFO BOX: The Catalogue*, p. 10.

11. Lebbeus Woods has argued that people have an inherent need to fill empty space before they can begin to break away from the debilitating fear of the unknown. Woods, *Radical Reconstruction*, p. 24.

12. Quote from the former mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen. Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 33.

13. 7 *Projekte Schneider + Schumacher, Architekten* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1997), p. 64.

14. Five teams of architects were commissioned by Daimler-Benz AG and led by Renzo Piano. The roster included Christoph Kohlbecker, Richard Rogers, Jose Rafael Moneo, Arata Isozaki, Hans Kolhoff, Ulrike Lauber and Wolfram Wohr. See *INFO BOX: The Catalogue*, p. 15.

15. The planner Kevin Lynch described imageability as "the quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment." Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Urban Studies, MIT Press, 1960), p. 9.

Adventures in Architectural Symbolism: The Use and Misuse of Rebuilding Programs in Ancient Rome

Brian Sahotsky



> *Nero watched the conflagration from the Tower of Maecenas, enraptured by what he called "the beauty of the flames"; then put on his tragedian's costume and sang* The Sack of Troy *from beginning to end.*
>
> — Suetonius[1]

In mid-July of 64 CE, a fire of epic proportions swept through the imperial capital of Rome. When the nine-day conflagration was finally extinguished, three of the city's fourteen districts had been completely destroyed, and seven more were in shambles.[2] A stunning lack of uniformity among historical accounts makes it unlikely anyone will ever know how the blaze began, but it has long been suspected it was the work of arsonists.[3] The scale of the disaster for ordinary Romans was only magnified when the Emperor Nero opportunistically diverted funds from his own "disaster-relief" programs to construct a private pleasure palace, the sprawling Domus Aurea (Golden House), in the crowded center of the city.

Considering the grandeur and architectural innovation of the Domus Aurea, it is telling that only one of its wings survived through later generations—and even then only as a foundation for a subsequent, immense bathing complex. More significant still was the fact that its most prodigal element, a gigantic artificial lake, was eventually supplanted by a pointedly public symbol, the Colosseum.[4] Never before had the building of such a large-scale amphitheater been attempted in Rome or its provinces. The credit for its construction, however, belonged to the succeeding Flavian dynasty. Nero's downfall was assured by his post-fire rebuilding program, which failed to achieve any truly public end and neglected the greater good of the *plebs urbana*.[5]

Above: Rome's Fire of 64 C.E. The painting depicts the fire as seen from the banks of the Tiber River. Hubert Robert—"Fire of 18 July 64 AD" © Ville du Havre, Musée Malraux. Photo by Florian Kleinefenn.

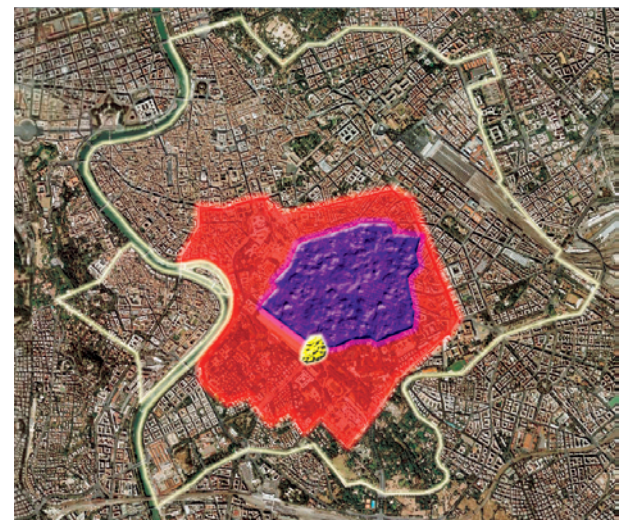
An Epic Fire Brings a Golden House

Nero's standing among the citizens of Rome was not initially so poisoned. Indeed, the first years of his reign were characterized by generally conciliatory dealings with the Roman people, including his reversal of many unpopular dictums and a return to traditional Augustan values.[6] In direct contrast to conceptions of him as a vicious tyrant, his first five years were considered a model chapter in Roman history, and were later dubbed the "Quinquennium Neronis" by the popular emperor Trajan.[7] But the young emperor soon sought freedom from any possible constraint, and was rumored to have orchestrated the murder of his wife and mother and the removal of both of his principal advisors.[8] He also began to exhibit signs of self-indulgent theatricality and megalomania, often playing the lyre or acting on stage in the various guises of Apollo, the god of the sun. Some have posited that the emperor haughtily fancied himself a god on earth. But although Nero's antics created immense unpopularity within the senatorial and patrician classes, they proved entertaining to the masses. He also catered to the *plebs urbana*, remaining extravagantly generous and partaking in many popular activities.[9]

This connection with the Roman *plebs* was tested by the fire of 64. According to modern interpretation, however, his initial architectural and planning responses were surprisingly commendable.[10] After the fire, Nero changed the face of Rome through the rationality and ingenuity of his builders. He also inaugurated a revolution in imperial building design through the work of his architects Severus and Celer.[11] Tacitus and Suetonius speak strikingly of the creation of an *urbs nova*, a new city, under Nero in the wake of the fire.[12]

Nero's progressive solutions devoted equal attention to beautification and to new safety measures. Streets were widened from meandering paths to broad avenues; building heights were restricted; and large open squares were created to hinder the spread of flames. Moreover, a series of new codes ensured that buildings would be erected *sine trabibus* (without timbers). This language may be interpreted either as a prohibition against timber framing in floors, roofs, and walls, or as a call for vaulted concrete structures. The second interpretation seems most in line with known Neronian archaeological remnants; however, both interpretations imply a complete change in the character of Roman buildings.

The ancient sources also make reference to the imperial funding of porticoes for new apartment buildings, implying that either colonnades or arcades were commissioned

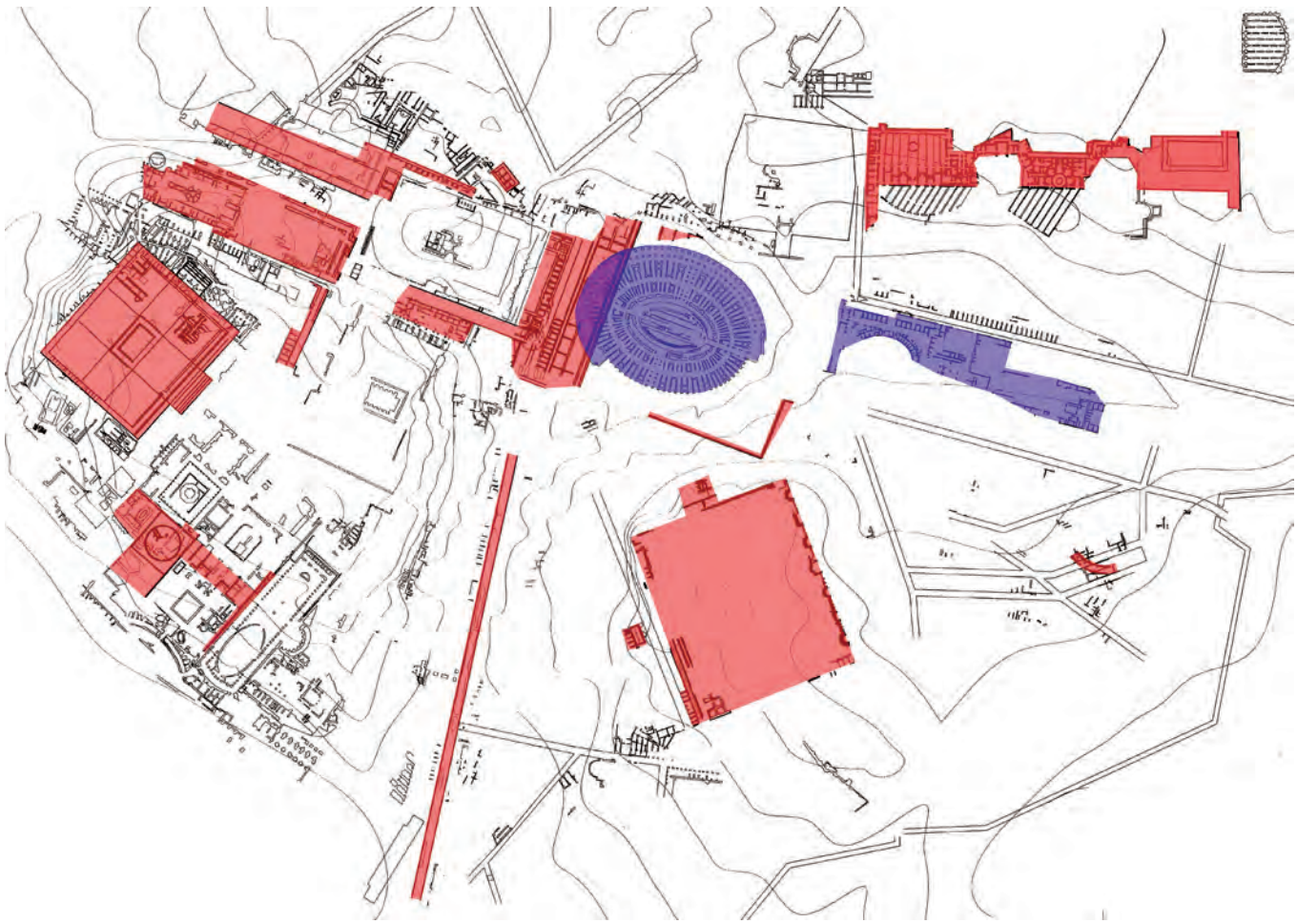


Above: Conjectured total extent of the fire. Ancient city limits outlined; epicenter of fire in yellow; probable extent of the fire in red; grounds of the Domus Aurea in purple. After a modern satellite image taken from GoogleEarth.

to line entire blocks of the new city. Such structures would both beautify the city and allow firefighters easy access to the upper floors of adjoining residential complexes.[13] However, this singular and isolated mention of a pledge of state funding raises important questions regarding the allocation of Nero's official "fire relief fund." This enlisted vast sums of money from the city and its provinces, and by all accounts, Nero diverted much of it to the construction of the Domus Aurea.[14]

In the tabula rasa condition following the catastrophe, the state had the opportunity to activate a program of architectural innovation to rescue the city. But Nero's arrogant financial directives instead stressed development only within the grounds of the Domus Aurea. Nero was already held in growing contempt by the patrician class, but the *plebs urbana* soon also came to resent his rule when they realized his palace and its gardens would eliminate the viability of central Rome as a city.[15] The value of the architectural innovations introduced in the emerging complex by Severus and Celer were thus overshadowed by its encroachments on formerly urban areas.[16]

In place of the tight pre-fire fabric of central Rome, Nero's palace was to be a *rus in urbis*, a villa stretching from the original, sanctioned republican palaces on the Palatine Hill across the valley in each direction and ascending the Velian, Oppian, Caelian, and Esquiline



Hills. A massive artificial lake would serve as the centerpiece for its grounds, which would hold nymphaeums, fountains, and baths fed by devoted aqueducts, as well as scattered pavilions and a monumental vestibule for the infamous Colossus of Nero.[17]

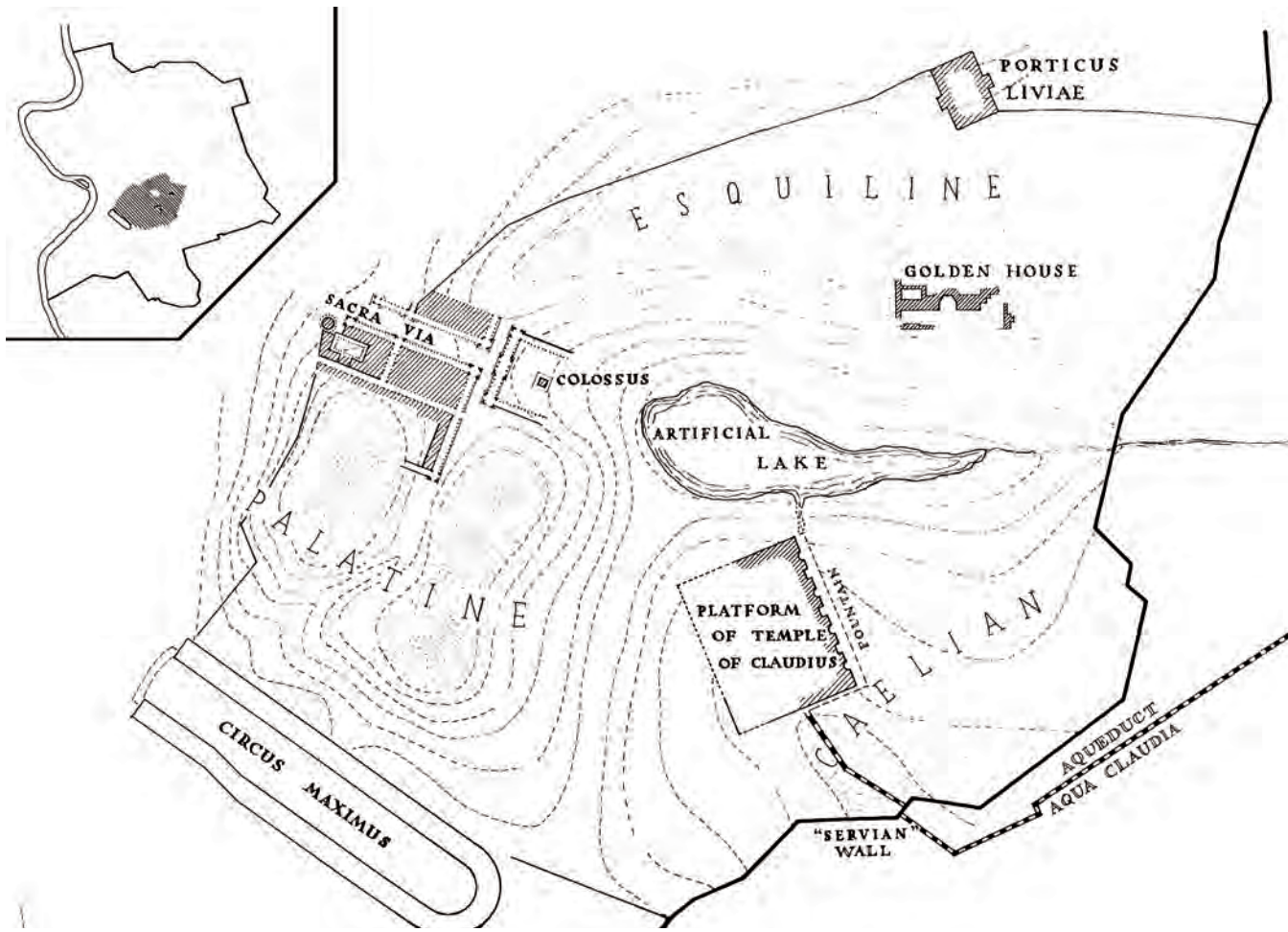
It is no accident that most of these architectural features were demolished in succeeding decades, or that they were replaced by some of the most enduring structures of the imperial city.[18] Indeed, the expansive symbol of the Domus Aurea was an agent in Nero's downfall. And when public dissatisfaction with his tax policies bred insurrection, he took his own life in late 68 CE, and left it unfinished.

Above: The Colosseum Valley. Structures existing within the grounds of Nero's Domus Aurea in red; structures attributed to the Flavian emperors in purple. After Steinby (1995), p. 397, fig. 18, attributed to G. Schingo, C. Panella, and M. Fano.

A New Plan for the Restoration of Rome

Nero's death had left Rome in confusion and disarray, and eventually the vengeance to be enacted upon him would be personified by the soldier-emperor Vespasian and his two sons Titus and Domitian.[19] Vespasian entered Rome in 70 CE, only six years after the fire, to the immense fanfare that accompanied his vanquishing of tyranny after a year-long civil war. He brought a multi-faceted plan to expel all memory of Nero. Its first step was to blame the former emperor for the persistent troubles of post-fire Rome.[20]

It had now been more than a decade since the "Quinquenniam Neronis," and the public—having had their fill of financial instability and private socio-political gain—embraced Flavian propaganda vilifying Nero. It was also increasingly easy to forget the aspirations of the Domus Aurea. Vespasian was understandably averse to



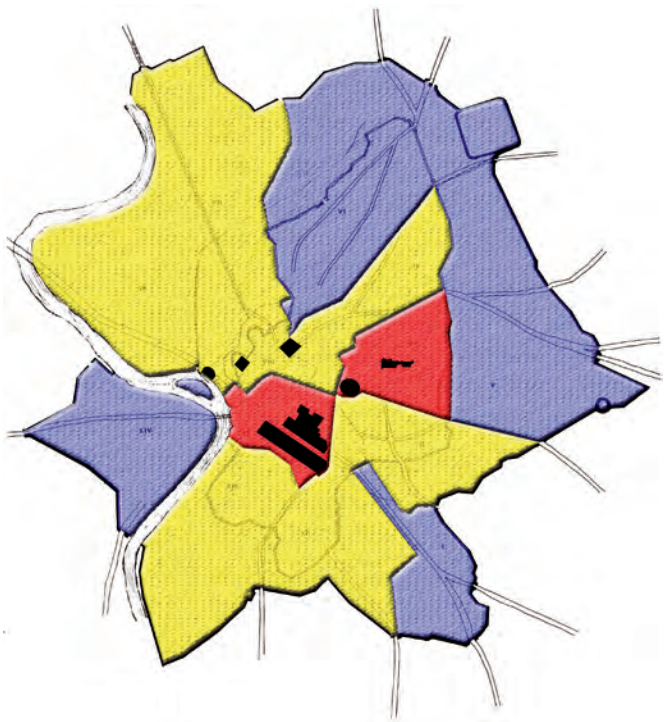
finishing any part of it, and instead began to dismantle it piece by piece. Likewise, Nero's admirable architectural plans for the city soon proved expendable, and his beautification program was sublimated to the construction of blatant symbols of prosperity brought by the Flavians.[21]

Vespasian's strategy of erasure involved both a festival atmosphere, created by triumphal parades and display of spoils from the Jewish wars, and the construction of new public architectural and artistic works. One of his first acts was to restore the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the foremost Roman shrine on the Capitoline Hill, which had been damaged by the fire. He also paid artisans to restore the famous statue the Venus of Cos and to rebuild the stage at the Theater of Marcellus, allowing it to reopen immediately.[22]

Vespasian also took direct aim at Nero's memory. He rechristened the infamous 120-foot-tall bronze Colossus of Nero as a statue of Apollo. And he dispersed the visible parts of the Domus Aurea, and commissioned the new Flavian Amphitheater (the Colosseum) where he had drained Nero's vast artificial lake. For the *plebs urbana*, Nero's lake was a symbol of all the excesses of the Domus Aurea, and of the expansion of the imperial decorative program within the city. The new amphitheater stood in dramatic opposition to Nero's palatial private halls, a deliberate gesture of Rome's return to its citizens.[23]

Martial recounts the extravagant dedication of the Colosseum in this poem from the *Liber Spectaculorum*:

Above: The grounds of Nero's Domus Aurea. The map depicts the main structures of the Domus Aurea: the domestic Esquiline wing, the artificial lake, the platform of the Temple of Claudius, the constructions of the Via Sacra, the vestibule for the Colossus of Nero, and the devoted aqueduct. After Ward-Perkins (1994), p. 60, fig. 26, drawing by Sheila Gibson.



Here, where the starry colossus sees the constellations close at hand and a lofty framework rises in the middle of the road, the hated halls of a cruel king used to gleam and in the whole city there was only one house standing. Here, where the awesome bulk of the amphitheatre soars before our eyes, once lay Nero's pools. Here, where we marvel at the swift blessings of the baths, an arrogant estate had robbed the poor of their dwellings. Where the Claudian portico weaves its spreading shade marks the point at which the palace finally stopped. Rome has been restored to herself, and with you in charge, Caesar, what used to be the pleasure of a master is now the pleasure of the people.[24]

Martial's use of the language of Flavian propaganda reflected the success of Vespasian's goal in erecting the grand public structure. The poem demonizes the Domus Aurea, using "hated halls" and "arrogant estate" to describe their impact on the *plebs*. At the same time it glorifies the Flavian structures of the amphitheater and the baths of Titus as grand public gestures for the citizens of Rome. The epigram clearly indicates a perceived change for the better, and spotlights both the Flavian successes and the Neronian failures.

Interpreting Architectural Symbolism

During the reign of Vespasian, Nero was vilified for his selfish and malicious choices. Instead of following his former populist agenda in the face of public calamity, he abused his power by diverting public relief funds to his own highly visible and luxurious project. As a result, its actual innovations were marginalized, overshadowed by the flagrant symbolism of seeking to transform much of central Rome into a sprawling private estate.

Instead of restoring the urban territory after the fire, Nero created a second major disaster in the heart of the city. The architectural merit of his plans thus proved inconsequential compared to the politics that brought it to fruition. The gross misuse of funds and blatant disregard for public policy made it easy to blame Nero for all the city's misfortunes. It only required a well-placed Flavian propaganda machine to reconcile people to this view.

Historical opinion has judged the Colosseum a highly successful structure, a transcendental symbol of Imperial Rome. But its creation owes much to its original purpose as a gesture of reconciliation. More than anything, these events demonstrate that an excessive private venture in the face of a shared disaster cannot achieve virtuous ends, and cannot be attempted without the willing participation of the public.

Architectural projects are powerful public symbols, and their efficacy often rests on their ability to embody the values that breed them. In the face of an epic catastrophe, architecture's symbolic potency was exaggerated in the eyes of the citizens of Rome, and sealed the fates of both Nero and Vespasian.

Notes

1. Taken from *Nero* 38, in Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 237.

2. The notation here refers to the Augustan districts, first formulated in 7 BCE, and in use at the time of the fire. The fire was centered in the shops at the eastern corner of the Circus Maximus in District XI, and spread in all directions. For discussion of the districts and boundaries, see J. Bert Lott, *The Neighborhoods of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

3. The three historical sources for the fire are Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History VIII: Books LXI–LXX*, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), pp. 111–17; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pp. 236–37; and Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. A.J. Woodman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 322–26. Dio and Suetonius relate that imperial attendants set the fires under order from Nero. Tacitus records these beliefs only as rumors.

4. Construction of a large amphitheater has been identified in modern scholarship as one of the most public gestures a Roman leader could make to his people. The subsequent history of Rome is littered with references to the free spectacles

convened in the Colosseum, including gladiatorial games, mock military battles, and food distribution. See, for example, Filippo Coarelli et al., *The Colosseum*, trans. Mary Becker (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001).

5. The plebeians were the commoners of Roman society. They were located in the socio-political strata below the patrician class, and were divided between the *plebs urbana* (in the city) and the *plebs rustica* (in the country). The quality of life of the *plebs urbana* owed much to the goodwill of the emperor and the consuls, who controlled the city's grain supply, aqueducts, roads, and general upkeep.

6. David Shotter, *Nero* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 22. Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, exemplified a model of urban administration.

7. Jurgen Malitz, *Nero*, trans. Allison Brown (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 17–18; and Shotter, *Nero*, pp. 23–25. During these years, Nero demonstrated sound judicial and financial management, and according to tradition rejected extravagant titles like *pater patriae* and suggestions that his birth month be made the first of the year.

8. Michael Grant, *Nero* (New York: Dorset Press, 1970), p. 115; and Shotter, *Nero*, p. 29.

9. Amanda Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 15.

10. Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 179; Richard Holland, *Nero: The Man Behind the Myth* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), p. 61; and Vasily Rudich, *Political Dissidence Under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 85.

11. Ironically, this was most evident in the Domus Aurea, itself. The architectural revolution under Nero is discussed in William McDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 3, and expanded upon in the following chapter.

12. McDonald notes that planners of the new urban architecture and authors of the building codes were professionals, probably in the employ of the government. Nero's government neither opposed nor obstructed the new planning; instead, it encouraged the changes.

13. Mention found in Tacitus, 15.43.1–2, pp. 324–25; importance summarized in Claridge, *Rome*, pp. 15–16, and McDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, p. 28. The porticoes were the only part of the construction effort that were attributed to imperial funding. Tacitus does not mention any other aspect that had a similar pledge from Nero.

14. Dio, 62.18.5, p. 117; Suetonius, *Nero* 38, p. 236; and Tacitus, 15.43.2 and 15.45.1, pp. 325–26.

15. An anonymous epigram is recorded in Suetonius, *Nero* 39, p. 238: "The Palace is spreading and swallowing Rome! Let us all flee to Veii and make it our home. Yet the Palace is growing so damnably fast, that it threatens to gobble up Veii at last."

16. The innovations are further discussed in Jas Elsner, "Constructing Decadence: The Representation of Nero as Imperial Builder," in *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History, and Representation*, ed. Jas Elsner and Jamie Masters, pp. 112–27 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Elisabetta Segala and Ida Sciortino, *Domus Aurea* (Rome: Electa, 2005); Larry F. Ball, *The Domus Aurea and the Roman Architectural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Axel Boethius, *The Golden House of Nero: Some Aspects of Roman Architecture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960); and Mark P.O. Morford, "The Distortion of the Domus Aurea Tradition," *Eranos* 66 (1968), pp. 158–79.

17. A comprehensive summary of the elements, along with a broad site analysis, is given in J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 59–60. In this summary, the principal arrogance in Nero's plan is accentuated by the fact that when one stands on the terrace of the domestic wing, the buildings of the city of Rome cannot be seen. They are instead replaced with a bucolic landscape stretching as far as the eye can see.

18. Ward-Perkins cites the following structures as examples of replacements of Nero's buildings: Templum Pacis, Temple of Venus and Rome, Colosseum, Baths of Titus, Baths of Trajan, and Flavian Palace. The domestic wing of the Domus Aurea survived long enough to be incorporated into the foundations of the Baths of Trajan, and another section of the *Domus Aurea* survives in the foundations of Domitian's Domus Flavia.

19. Vespasian emerged after the "Year of the Four Emperors," and it would fall on him to rebuild the city and reconcile the abuses of Nero. See B.H. Warmington, *Nero: Reality and Legend* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), p. 130. Suetonius relates in *Vespasian* 8, pp. 287–88, that Vespasian inherited a city still "made unsightly by fires and collapsed buildings."

20. Vespasian's arrival in Rome is documented firsthand in Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackery (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 379–380; Vespasian's policy is covered extensively in Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (London: Routledge, 1999).

21. Suetonius also makes note of the grumblings of the plebeians in response to imposed changes to the previously tight urban fabric in the center of Rome. The subsequent public acceptance of Nero's vilification was exceedingly easy, due in no small part to the Vespasianic damnation of Nero's memory, the *damnatio memoriae*. For a further discussion of the denigration of imperial predecessors, see Edwin S. Ramage, "Denigration of Predecessor Under Claudius, Galba, and Vespasian," *Historia: Zeitschrift fur alte Geschichte* 32, No. 2 (1983), pp. 201–14.

22. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 18, pp. 291–92.

23. Vespasian was indeed deified after his death in 79 CE, something that hadn't been done since Claudius in 54 CE.

24. Martial's Epigram 2, translation taken from Martial, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber Spectaculorum*, trans. and ed. Kathleen M. Coleman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 14.

Opposite: The fire's impact on the districts of Rome. The map depicts the extent to which the fire destroyed the Augustan districts of Rome. Districts completely destroyed are in red (III, X, XI); districts partially destroyed are in yellow (II, IV, VII, VIII, IX, XII, XIII); districts spared are in purple (I, V, VI, XIV). The structures in black, clockwise from upper left, represent the sites of the Theater of Marcellus, the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the Templum Pacis, the Esquiline wing of the Domus Aurea, the Colosseum, the Palatine Palaces, and the Circus Maximus. After Stambaugh (1988), p. 83, fig. 6, drawing by E. H. Riorden.

Branding Catastrophe

Sérgio Miguel Figueiredo



The role of architecture in response to catastrophe has changed significantly in recent times. Besides addressing the physical need for reconstruction, architectural discourse and imagery are now used to raise the visibility of reconstruction efforts through branding. Strategies employed in postdisaster recovery thus contribute to the general shift to an experience economy.[1]

For several decades, it has been recognized that advanced capitalist markets have become so saturated with goods and services that the only way to distinguish them is by means of the experiences they claim to offer. Companies have thus adopted a practice of selling experience by "intentionally [using] services as the stage and goods as props to engage an individual."[2] Branding is pivotal in this economic (and inherently social) paradigm because it engages with consumers, "not just [as] identifiers, [but]…first and foremost [as] providers of experiences."[3]

Similarly, architectural production has increasingly come to be valued not only in terms of form and function but also as a catalyst for experience and symbolic transformation. This role has been thoroughly analyzed in projects like the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, a textbook example of architectural branding.[4] Even though the museum was just one of a number of coordinated renewal and restructuring projects in Bilbao, the propagation of its image through the mass media was the major force in the city's recovery from economic decline. The cultural historian Fredric Jameson, most notably, has argued that such flattening of architecture to image has been a powerful instrument in reducing it to commodity status.[5]

Recently, the disjunction between architectural image and function has achieved new sophistication. At the same time—unlike conventional architectural branding, where high-profile imagery functions as a proxy for urban ambition—the reconstruction of Greensburg, Kansas, and the Make It Right Foundation's effort to build new houses in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward have tried to use architectural discourse to garner visibility and funding.

Greensburg GreenTown

On the night of May 4, 2007, an F5 tornado, of tremendous magnitude, swept through Greensburg, Kansas, obliterating 95 percent of its buildings in a mere twelve minutes. As it passed through Greensburg, the tornado was 1.7 miles wide, and its winds were estimated at 205 miles per hour. In an act of exceptional bravery, this rural community decided to rebuild and reinvent itself as a model sustainable community.

"We're starting from the beginning," Steve Hewitt, Greensburg's city administrator, told the *New York Times* in June 2007. "We're creating a town and building it energy-efficient and building it green."[6] The goal was nothing less than to set the standard for eco-friendly, energy-efficient architecture, to become a laboratory for experiments in environmental sustainability.

In the fall of 2006, Leonardo DiCaprio's production company was already developing a project called "E-topia," a reality-TV series about the eco-friendly reconstruction of a town. As envisioned, it would "follow the construction workers, architects, planners and environmentalists as they spend several months building the burg."[7] The company had begun the project without deciding which town would undergo the makeover. But following the flattening of Greensburg and its decision to reinvent itself, E-topia quickly became Greensburg. A television crew soon began documenting its reconstruction, with the intent of telling this inspiring story as a thirteen-episode series.

The shows first aired in 2008. Yet despite using the inherently visual medium of television, they focused mostly on the human struggle of Greensburg's residents, rather than the town's proclaimed goal of "green" reinvention. This decision could easily be dismissed as a result of the long time it takes to design and build new structures. Simply put, there wasn't much built yet, innovative or not, when the television crew was gathering its footage.

Above: A newly built house in Greensburg, Kansas. Photo by Stacy Barnes, City of Greensburg.



However, the reality of the situation has become clearer as time has passed. The first new buildings just didn't present an image that could convey the rhetoric of green design. Indeed, most new construction in the town is remarkably conventional looking. The town's green agenda has mostly been achieved by using better thermal-isolation materials (like structural insulated panels and insulating concrete forms), by reusing tornado debris, and by building energy-efficient modular homes.[8]

Yet, despite the fact that much of the rebuilt town does not look much different than it did before the tornado, at least one building has not only earned its green credentials but also externalized them in a cogent image.[9] The 5-4-7 Arts Center, which takes its name from the date of the tornado, is the result of a design/build program (Studio 804) at the University of Kansas School of Architecture and Urban Planning. Both its active and passive energy systems receive expression in physical form.[10] Wind turbines are the most visible of its active energy systems. Its passive systems include a double skin that envelops its interior spaces, significantly reducing heating and cooling loads. Its blue tempered glass also combines with yellowish recycled wood to generate an unmistakable green aura.

One major difference in the origins of this building may account for its striking appearance. The 5-4-7 Arts Center was developed in a studio setting through design review and criticism. Not only were its form, function, and efficiency evaluated but so was the way it expressed and communicated those qualities. Since the 5-4-7 was constantly assessed in both performative and communicative terms, its underlying goal of sustainability was not hidden inside its walls. It has thus been able to engage the community and become a catalyst for further transformation.

As an attempt at branding within the larger experience economy, much of Greensburg GreenTown's new architecture may be judged a failure. Despite highly articulated rhetoric about "architecture that is to convey the character of Greensburg through the ideas and technology of sustainable design," and about "innovative solutions…[where] diversity and uniqueness are encouraged," the reality is the town doesn't support this message.[11] In fact, its present appearance seems to undermine that message. How can the town's reconstruction be so revolutionary, a prototype for future green settlements, if it looks just like any other rural Midwest community?

The central fact of Greensburg's media strategy to date has been that the architectural principles of

its reconstruction are more potent than the resulting images. This has led to the suppression of images and a projection of discourse in their place. However, as green discourse morphs into built forms, examples like the 5-4-7 Arts Center will need to become more prominent. The fulfillment of an ambitious green promise is undoubtedly more recognizable in the arts center than in more pedestrian structures. In the end, this is what will sustain Greensburg as a "green epicenter" and a "sustainable model community."



Make It Right

Two years after Hurricane Katrina caused New Orleans' levees to fail, the actor Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation launched a high-profile campaign to build 150 new single-family houses in the particularly hard hit Lower Ninth Ward.[12] The initiative derived from Pitt's desire to be a catalyst for responsible redevelopment in the city.[13] The Make it Right Foundation defined its goal as the construction of sustainable, affordable, safe and healthy homes, with an emphasis on innovation and high-quality design, that preserved the spirit of the community.[14]

In December 2007, Pitt unveiled thirteen prototypical designs developed by different architectural teams, and initiated a national campaign to raise money to build the proposed 150 houses. Determined to boost the visibility of this effort, Pitt appeared in as many media outlets as possible. From the "Today Show" to "Charlie Rose," his image became the instrument of the reconstruction effort and a placeholder for the houses to come.[15]

The designs were presented in the media only as exterior and interior renderings. Plans and sections, drawings that could explain the innovative features of the new houses, were absent. This oversight was apparently due to the kind of appeal being made: to a larger public, not just the architectural community.

Nevertheless, the all-important donation section of Make It Right's Web site relied on the floor plan of a generic house, which visitors could visit to choose items to donate to the reconstruction effort.[16] The branding potential was further diminished by interior renderings of the thirteen architectural prototypes that suggested a general lack of spatial innovation. This was recognized by the architectural critic Aaron Betsky, who labeled most of the designs "too boring to provide any sense of difference."[17]

In the end, only the Dutch firm MVRDV provided designs and images that were not highly generic. MVRDV's "bent house" adapted the typical Gulf Coast "shotgun" typology by raising its two ends off the ground. In so doing, the scheme not only drastically reconsidered the relation of house to ground but also created interior spatial differentiation and raised areas of escape for residents in case of a future flood.[18]

MVRDV's radical pragmatism resulted in immediate controversy.[19] At a public presentation of the prototypes, members of the local community considered the "bent house" offensive because it resembled the aftermath of the storm.[20] Meanwhile, in architectural circles the proposal's explicit political message, pointing out the contradiction of rebuilding in the Lower Ninth Ward when levies still didn't offer protection against future floods, generated heated debate.[21] MVRDV's method of accepting reality and reflecting it back as rational architecture may have been too blunt for the context. But as provocation, the design succeeded in prompting discussion of Make It Right's original intention and whether the design prototypes addressed it. This question proved particularly timely because of the lack of innovation in the designs.

Residents seeking to recover past lives may naturally lean toward convention.[22] Yet, even Anna Klingmann, a critic known for her consumer-centric views, has acknowledged, "if architects were merely to take consumers' desires literally, without any imaginative reinterpretation, their work would undoubtedly be a disastrous perpetuation of the status quo, at worst mixed in with kitsch and nostalgia."[23] Unfortunately, this assessment describes most of the houses slated for construction in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Above: MVRDV's "bent house" proposal for the Lower Ninth Ward. Image by MVRDV Architects, Rotterdam.

Opposite: The 5-4-7 Arts Center in Greensburg, Kansas. Photo courtesy of Studio 804.

Discourse and Images in Architectural Branding

In *Brandscapes*, Klingmann has advocated a more consumer-oriented approach to architecture, by creating an architecture informed by marketing and branding strategies. "Unlike a lot of contemporary architecture that is still driven by notions of fetishized abstraction and critical distance…brands bridge the psychological gap between product and client, forming an interactive consumer experience," she wrote.[24]

In both cases of postdisaster reconstruction described here, however, an effort has been made to employ branding without accompanying architectural imagery. Architectural discourse appears to work well early on, as a way to enhance visibility and attract funding—which seems logical because it takes time to build new structures. But to capitalize on this identity, such efforts need to evolve, in a second phase, into more conventional campaigns, where images become the operative elements.

This condition is particularly relevant when arguments such as innovation, prototyping, and the advancement of architectural practice are concerned. Both Greensburg GreenTown and Make It Right emphasized designs that would be groundbreaking. At some point, distinctive forms must emerge from this effort that are consistent with its rhetorical claims and that express a departure from the norm. As new buildings appear, public attention will inevitably shift from "what we will do" to "what we have done," and at that point the campaigns will falter if they don't have more to offer.

Such a transition from discourse to imagery also allows architecture to directly engage the public, a key criterion for success in the experience economy. Engagement is also needed to "maximize architecture's potential to offer authentic and inventive solutions, to affect a change of public opinion, and to combine economic objectives with cultural and social objectives."[25]

Although these words were written by Klingmann, they are also the stated aims of both Greensburg GreenTown and Make It Right.

Notes

1. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore are credited with the original identification and analysis of this economic trend in *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

2. Ibid., p. 11.

3. Bernd H. Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), p. 30.

4. In his article, "Bilbao 10 Years Later" (*New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2007), Denny Lee wrote "[t]he so-called Bilbao Effect was studied in universities throughout the world as a textbook example of how to repackage cities with 'wow-factor' architecture."

5. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (July-August 1984), pp. 53-92.

6. Kathryn Shattuck, "Playing a Leading Role in the Ruins of a Tornado," *New York Times*, June 10, 2008.

7. Michael Schneider, "Leo's Green Build Skein," *Daily Variety*, Oct. 16, 2006.

8. Projects in Greensburg GreenTown's sustainable building database can be seen at http://greensburg.buildinggreen.com.

9. Other temporary structures, such as those resulting from the design/build program at Kansas State University's College of Architecture and Design, called "Greensburg Cubed," also display an innovative image, which articulates the notion of sustainability.

10. The 5-4-7's active and passive energy systems were also crucial in the building's LEED Platinum certification award, the first in the state of Kansas.

11. Quotes taken from BNIM Architects, "Greensburg Sustainable Comprehensive Master Plan," May 19, 2008.

12. Robin Pogrebin, "Brad Pitt Commissions Designs for New Orleans," *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 2007.

13. One year earlier, in August 2006, Pitt and Global Green USA had cosponsored the first sustainable design competition in the Lower Ninth Ward. It was won by Workshop APD, with its entry "greeNOLA."

14. A history of Make It Right may be found on the foundation website, http://www.makeitrightnola.org/mir_SUB.php?section=mir&page=main (accessed Feb. 21, 2009).

15. In all his appearances during this media blitz, Pitt sported the same distinct cap, creating an image that was as coherent as his message of need.

16. See http://www.makeitrightnola.org/donate.html (last accessed Dec. 3, 2008).

17. Aaron Betsky, "Making It Not Quite Right in New Orleans," *DB*, 142, February 2008, pp. 14-15.

18. MVRDV proposed five housing schemes. Even though each is extremely compelling, only the "bent house" is presented on Make It Right's Web site and featured in media reports.

19. I am particularly privy to the working method and design production of MVRDV, since I worked at the office in 2006.

20. See Andrew Blum, "Letter from New Orleans: Saint Brad," *Metropolis*, March 2008, p. 27.

21. Winy Maas, one of MVRDV's principals, declared that the MVRDV designs were intended to address this wider perspective, and that such provocation was good because it would push people.

22. However, according to Stefan de Koning, project manager at MVRDV, one of the residents is interested in building the "bent house," and construction drawings are expected to be produced soon.

23. Anna Klingmann, *Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 185.

24. Ibid., p. 8.

25. Ibid., p. 187.

Redefining the Edge: Life Without Levees

Erin Smith





In March of 2008, while home for spring break, I received an email telling me that as an architecture student at UCLA I had been accepted to a thirty-week graduate studio course at UCLA with the architect Thom Mayne. Our task would be to design and build a floating house for the residents of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward.[1] We would also participate in development of an urban plan for the New Orleans region proposed by Mayne's office, Morphosis.

Our first weeks were a baptism by fire. We began our research on a flight to the "Big Easy." Then, after reading hundreds of pages on the history of the city and its recent troubles, we stood on vacant ground where flooded neighborhoods had been cleared of debris by FEMA.

It is one thing to consider the issues facing the people of this region abstractly by watching stories on TV or by reading the reports of government agencies. It is another to meet survivors face-to-face. These families desperately wished to return home. We returned to California eager to find solutions.

Preventable Disasters

The New Orleans flood was the kind of disaster we can predict and even prevent. One day, before studio began, Mayne discussed the disaster: "We know a storm will hit the coastal regions of Louisiana just like we know in Southern California there will be fires, mudslides, and earthquakes. The disaster isn't the flood.…It is what happened to the people afterwards."[2]

Storms will continue, and their risk is known. But Mayne argued we can use architecture and infrastructure to minimize the damage. Our studio proposals, both macro and micro, were rooted in this view. In particular, we challenged the conventional use of levees to control the Mississippi River. We sought an alternative in dense urban development on high ground and a new infrastructure of floating houses.

Above: The Lower Ninth Ward in March 2008. **Left:** The signs promise new homes by Make It Right. **Right:** The steps used to lead to a front porch: three years after the storm, a poignant symbol of this devastated neighborhood. Photos by author.

The geographer Peirce Lewis wrote lucidly about this region in 1976. He explained that the location of New Orleans is one of "situation," based on adjacencies, rather than "site," based on characteristics of the physical ground. New Orleans originally occupied a slightly elevated piece of land at the mouth of the Mississippi, a highly trafficked commerce corridor. But it expanded onto sinking delta land between the river and Lake Pontchartrain, two bodies of water that continually threaten to flood it.

In New Orleans the high ground runs along the banks of the river, the shore of the lake, and a former river path that is the I-10 corridor through the city. According to Lewis, it is a classic case of "if a city's situation is good enough, its site will be altered to make do."[3] In the 1920s, as technology allowed, the city began expanding slowly toward the lakefront as levees were installed to protect newly developed areas. A postwar building boom then saw swamp lands drained, and the footprint of what was once a compact European-style city doubled.

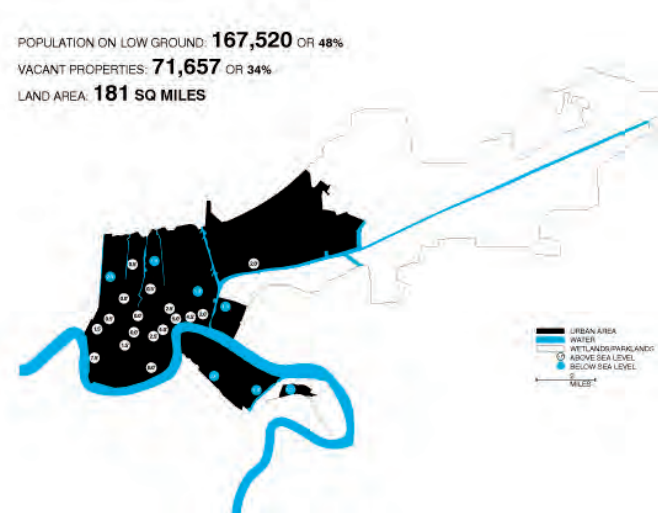
A City on the River

Numerous cities have dealt with risks similar to those of New Orleans. Rome is comparably situated, on the bend of a powerful river, and through history it has experienced repeated flooding. Romans were able to build lasting buildings, but they did they not protect themselves from the Tiber. Why?

The historian Gregory Aldrete has identified five factors contributing to ancient Rome's lack of protective measures like levees.[4] The two most relevant to the case of New Orleans were its topography and the use of materials. In the first case, Rome is topographically varied, so high ground was always nearby. New Orleans also has areas of high ground. But a reliance on seeming protection provided by levees there gave residents a false sense of security. In the second case, much of sprawling postwar New Orleans was built of wood. While the Romans chose to put many important buildings on lower ground, they built them of lasting materials such as stone and marble, which are significantly less vulnerable to flooding.

In Rome, respect for the power of the river forced residents to deal with the results of flooding rather than try to control it. They understood the risks of the site and chose to live with them.

Morphosis's planning proposal for New Orleans conveyed a similar outlook. Its aim was to reconcile site with situation to create a dense urban core and a surrounding protective zone of wetlands.

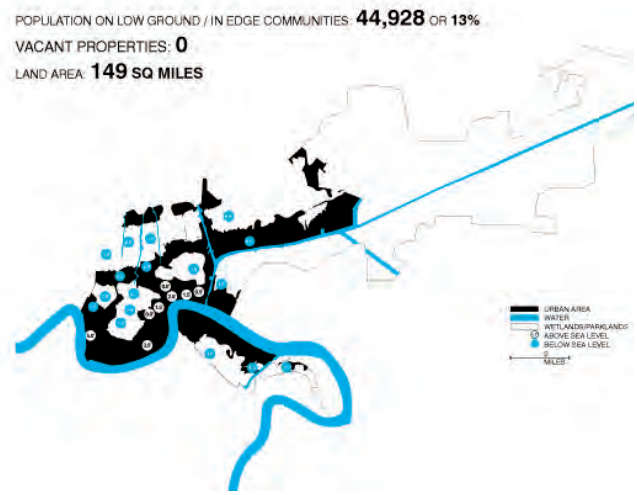


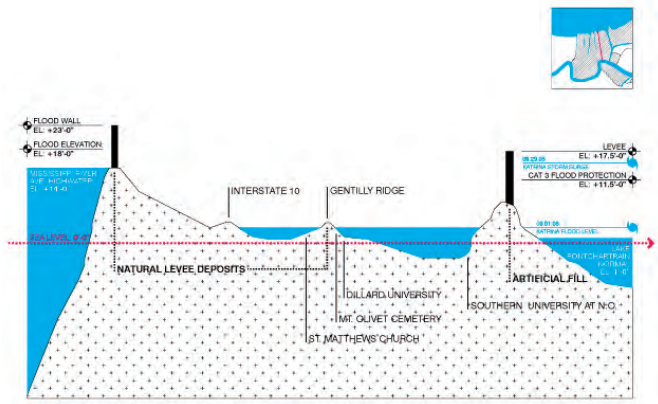
Shrinking City

Morphosis's project manager, Brandon Welling, explained how the urban, or macro, proposal came to life. Morphosis had been invited to participate in an exhibition of building proposals by high-profile design firms.[5] Its organizer, Reed Kroloff, then dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane University, intended it as a way to promote redevelopment of the city. But after studying the issues, Mayne and the office decided to take another path. Welling explained:

> *When we provided our response, we decided not to do a building, but to do a larger urban planning proposal. That is when we started working with Allen Eskew [of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple in New Orleans] and the Rand Corporation and a couple of other entities.…We came to the conclusion…that you shouldn't be rebuilding this area at all, but should instead be looking at ways to rebuild the city in a more dense manner and turn the rest of the areas over to wetlands.*[6]

The macro-plan proposes that the city contract in order to better deal with future storms. Rarely does a city plan to reduce its footprint and give up land—in this case, to return it to wetlands. But New Orleans' population had already begun to contract more than forty years before Katrina struck, in August 2005. It hit its peak population in 1962.[7] Mayne saw this as key. "A contracting city is a very different problem from that of the optimistic modernist's urban proposal for a city that will expand," he said.[8] In essence, the storm had revealed the problem of a shrinking city: How does a city plan for a reduction in population and physical size?





The phased Morphosis proposal suggests that low-lying areas be returned to marsh, and that levees that once protected them be abandoned. The additional wetlands will help protect the city from future storms by absorbing the power of storm surges and reducing the effects of flooding.[9] Meanwhile, remaining and returning populations can take advantage of the many abandoned properties on higher ground to create dense, sustainable housing along the river's edge.[10] Many of these areas were originally settled in the late 1800s, but lost much of their population density when new lands were opened with the draining of nearby swamps.

Mayne's proposal is one of many that have been developed, none of which have been wholly adopted by the city. A hybrid, voter-approved master plan for the city is still in development and could include some ideas central to our proposal.[11]

Floating Houses

Not long after the exhibition had closed, in late 2006, Morphosis was asked to participate in another project to stimulate growth and rebuilding. Brad Pitt and his Make it Right Foundation were requesting proposals for affordable, sustainable housing for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. I asked Welling about Morphosis's response to this request, which came shortly after it had argued against rebuilding this area of the city.

> *We were striving to come up with a way to inhabit these areas without reconstructing the levee system. How could you address the immediate need for housing and still support our larger idea that these areas should eventually be depopulated and turned back to wetlands? Answering this question became the basis of our proposal for an off-the-grid floating house.*[12]

Our studio took the original ideas for the house to residents in December 2007 and developed them into a holistic design. We are now creating a prototype.

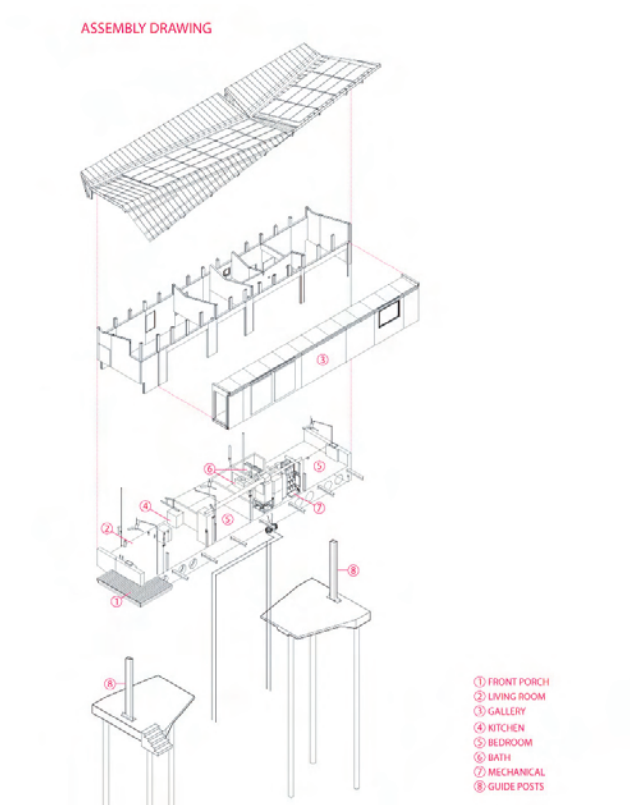
Mayne has compared the design for the house to the high-performance BMW series of automobiles. In developing it, we faced many challenges, including the hot and humid local climate, the need for buoyancy, and ambitious sustainability goals.[13] But each challenge provided a new opportunity for research and design.

Like a BMW, the house has two parts: a chassis and a shell. The chassis is a buoyant, prefabricated foam and concrete base which contains the electrical and plumbing systems. The shell rests on the chassis. It is modeled after the traditional regional shotgun house, adapted to maximize sustainability and energy performance. For instance, the roof is designed to collect rainwater and provide maximum area for solar panels; sliding shutters protect openings in the event of a storm; and large overhangs provide shading to prevent solar heat gain.

Above right: Cross-section showing how much of the city lies below sea level and where the flood waters settled.
Drawings by UCLA students. Images courtesy of Morphosis.
Above left and Opposite: New Orleans in 2008, and in 2050 as a result of Morphosis's proposal for a phased urban restructuring. Low-lying land would be returned to wetlands, and vacant properties on higher ground would be utilized to create a denser urban fabric.







The entire house is able to rise vertically on two steel masts in a flood. A combination of flexible and breakaway connections hooks it to conventional utilities but allows it to float, if necessary.

Mayne has suggested that the chassis be marketed as a product to be paired with any shell, even ones designed by others. He calls the one we have designed "a beautiful piece." But the real significance of the chassis is as infrastructure. It can be deployed to protect a homeowner's investment and provide utility service both on and off the grid. It also allows houses to be constructed in regions of the macro proposal that would no longer be protected by levees.

Above left (top and bottom): Rendering of the floating house by UCLA students.
Above right: Exploded axonometric, showing the foundation, chassis, shell, and roof. Drawing by UCLA students. Images courtesy of Morphosis.
Opposite left: Patrick Dunn-Baker of Morphosis and UCLA student Ryan Whitacre test fit a water tank into the foam of the chassis at the prefabrication site at UCLA. Photo by Linda Fu.
Opposite right: The author and Ryan Whitacre move a foam block into place. Photo by Saji Matuk.

Mayne believes abandoned factories could be converted to production facilities for these sophisticated chassis. "We could mold the whole thing, produce the plumbing as one piece and insert it, prefabricate the electrical system. There could be multiple models; we'd only have to make a hundred or so of each to pay for the mold."[14] This method of deployed infrastructure could be adapted to deal with other types of predictable disaster, such as the frequent wildfires in the canyons of Southern California. Mayne did not elaborate on how the project could be altered to deal with fires, but one might imagine the roofing and siding materials would be fire resistant, the opening could have protections, and collected rainwater could be stored on site for used to fight fires.

Preventing Disaster

Such proposals suggest a new way for architecture to intervene in the wake of disaster. Their aim is to deal with risk, reducing the potential for future destruction. It is not unlike Aldrete's analysis of Romans' view of living with the Tiber. The solutions of ancient Rome were also mitigations of situational risk rather than alterations to the site.





Although the idea to rebuild New Orleans without repairing the levees seems radical, the combination of micro (shrinking city) and macro (housing) proposals provides a solution for a city that teeters on the edge of extinction. A river that is contained by levees cannot ecologically sustain itself. According to Lewis: "The Delta [of the Mississippi] is like a bank account where there are constant withdrawals, but nobody is making deposits anymore."[15] If this process continues, the delta will disappear and the levees that were designed to protect the city will be its ultimate demise. In order to halt this process, action must be taken to restore wetlands and allow the river to deposit sediment along its path. The city must take control of its fate by relinquishing some control over the river.

Preventing another disaster like that which followed Hurricane Katrina requires smart planning and innovative solutions. Our house is one of many innovative ways to deal with the complex set of issues facing this city. Architects cannot afford to wait until after the disaster to design.

Notes

1. The studio spanned the spring and fall of 2008 and included a summer internship; participants worked past the thirty weeks to build the prototype. The students were Linda Fu, Saji Matuk, Ian Ream, Monica Ream, Legier Stahl, Erin Smith, and Ryan Whitacre.

2. Interview by author, Nov. 3, 2008.

3. Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Harrisonburg, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003; originally published, 1976), p. 19.

4. Aldrete argued that residential housing patterns, food storage, and water supply were the other factors contributing to the ancient Romans' decision not to build protective infrastructure. Attempts were made to control flooding with drains, and some efforts were made to raise ground. However, these were not of the scale one might expect from a culture capable of building massive aqueducts or the Colosseum. Gregory Aldrete, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

5. "Newer Orleans—A Shared Space" brought together six Dutch and American firms to present new visions for symbolic and shared spaces in the city. Each firm was asked to create structures or landscapes to illustrate how design could facilitate community, create urban icons, and reconnect the city to the land. The firms were MVRDV, UN Studio, and West 8 from the Netherlands, and Huff + Gooden Architects, Morphosis, and Hargreaves Associates from the U.S.

6. Interview by author, Oct. 13, 2008. Available online at http://hotbuildingscool-texts.wordpress.com/2008/10/14/brandon-welling-of-morphosis-on-katrina-recoveryprojects/.

7. Population data comes from the Unified New Orleans Plan, "District 4, Introduction," p. 13. http://www.unifiedneworleansplan.com/home3/districts/4/plans/ (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).

8. Interview by author, Nov. 3, 2008.

9. Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana, p. 55 http://www.lacoast.gov/Programs/2050/MainReport/report1.pdf (accessed Nov. 26, 2008).

10. The social implications of the plan, although fascinating, are beyond the scope of this article.

11. The November 2008 vote established that the new master plan will have the force of law when it is completed, in late 2009. A team of consultants has been assembled by the city to develop it. The direction of the plan has not been made public, but there is a possibility that it will include a reduced city footprint. Bruce Eggler, "Master Plan Given Force of Law: Zoning Moves Must Conform to Blueprint," *Times Picayune*, Nov. 5, 2008.

12. Interview by author, Oct. 13, 2008.

13. The Morphosis house is seeking a LEED certification for Homes Platinum rating.

14. Interview by author, Nov. 3, 2008.

15. Lewis, *New Orleans*, p. 167.

Infrastructural Optimism

Linda C. Samuels

Infrastructure reconstruction is often the first and most obvious response to catastrophe. Following the 1995 Northridge, California, earthquake, the rebuilding of highways ahead of schedule and under budget not only expedited but also symbolized a return to normal and a restabilization of daily life. The same could be said for the restoration of public transit in Lower Manhattan after the attacks of 9/11, where the near immediate resumption of bus and subway service served as a symbol of resilience.

Throughout American history, large-scale public works have served as symbolic unifiers and representations of collective optimism. The mobility of the populace, in particular, has been a core tenet of cultural identity. Thus, the Interstate highways unify the country not only by stringing it together with concrete but also by elevating speed and mobility to the status of national entitlement. Concurrently, we expect our street networks, the freeway's slower, older brother, to serve us functionally, formally, and symbolically. In addition to providing access, streets establish a sense of order and hierarchy, orient us within urban networks, and, at the neighborhood scale, operate as spaces for social connection. Freeways and streets together bookend our understanding of roads in the production and reproduction of public space.

The restoration of mobility infrastructure can also play a significant role in the wake of catastrophe. It can serve first as part of the recovery narrative, and next as a symbol of restoration and reconnection. More powerfully, it can be an instigator of transformation and reinvention. In this fuller role, infrastructure has the opportunity to link the collective and the individual through built form, becoming a formidable component of urban reimagining.

Interstate 10

In the case of New Orleans, the lack of infrastructure reconstruction since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 has perpetuated the absence of a recovery narrative.[1] A vastly disproportionate share of the destruction and loss caused by the storms was borne by poor, mostly African-American residents, exposing an already divided city. At the time of evacuation this appeared as a line between the mobile and the immobile—those who could leave and those left behind. Those who did evacuate left primarily by private automobile along I-10 West, toward Houston. Of those who did not, an estimated 150,000 were car-less, and thousands more were immobilized by age, illness, or incarceration.[2] For them, New Orleans' damaged mobility infrastructure was at best neutral, regularly an adversary, and in some cases a symbol of hopelessness.

The case of I-10 illustrates the power of infrastructure to symbolize both the promise of recovery and the despair of neglect. For example, I-10's twin-span bridge over Lake Pontchartrain was destroyed by the hurricane's storm surge. But unlike much of the city's still-stagnant public-transit infrastructure, it was repaired so rapidly that the contractors received a $1.1-million bonus.[3] A trucker interviewed by the *New York Times* called the speedy



repairs "between exceptional and heroic."[4] Yet this repair provided little inspiration for city residents. Its location outside New Orleans proper and its mere reconstruction rather than reinvention, did little to create a sense of collective optimism.

In the days following the storm, I-10 became loaded with the symbolism of failure. The collapse of the bridge east not only cut off an evacuation route, but also undermined trust in the national support network. Crowds of people attempted to walk out of town on the highway, only to encounter low-lying stretches in the city center that were submerged and impassable. Meanwhile, outside the Louisiana Superdome, hopeful evacuees waited on the hot, empty highway for buses that took days to arrive.

The images of I-10 that endure from 2005 are not of a rebuilt bridge, but of a highway that offered no avenue of escape for an abandoned population. Worse were images





of hurricane fatalities floating among its support columns or lying covered by tarps on its shoulders. Today, the slow return of public transit keeps those without automobiles immobilized, and I-10 continues as a symbol of urban anxiety, sheltering a growing homeless population beneath its elevated sections and perpetuating the divide between the mobile and the immobile.[5]

In an attempt to promote recovery in the city, various government agencies have proposed plans for new public mobility infrastructure. Among these are general road repairs, increased diversity in transit options, and a new "two-tiered" evacuation plan. More emblematically, perhaps, the Unified New Orleans Plan has proposed removal of the elevated portion of I-10 over Claiborne Avenue.[6]

In conjunction with extensive reconstruction, this partial erasure would allow a reconsideration of modernization, fluidity, and the public realm in the postmillennial city. In America, the inner-city Interstate has long represented the conflict between progress and urban vitality. The widespread destruction in New Orleans provides an opportunity for planners to abandon this deadlocked discourse and seek visionary new models that recognize the power of public infrastructure to spark a sense of postdisaster recovery.

Above Left: New Orleans on August 29, 2005, showing Interstate 10 at West End Boulevard, looking toward Lake Pontchartrain. AP Photo by Kyle Niemi, U.S. Coast Guard.

Above right: Alex Clay, homeless and living under the Claiborne Avenue overpass near Canal Street, lost his Lower Ninth Ward home and all his possessions to Hurricane Katrina. Photo by Chris Granger, *Times-Picayune*.

Opposite: Flood zone and principal sites in New Orleans. Diagram by author from satellite image.

Model Infrastructures

Few models exist of visionary infrastructural thinking at this scale. In the Depression years of the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) recognized the value of mobility to social, psychological, and economic recovery and devoted nearly one-third of its $4.8 trillion in expenditures to highway, road, and street projects.[7] The results were particularly pronounced in New York City, where Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, assisted by his dynamic chief of public works, Robert Moses, managed to spend an impressive one-seventh of the total 1935 and 1936 WPA budget. In those two years alone, Moses directed $113 million to the New York Department of Parks, which reshaped the public realm, adding beaches, playgrounds, swimming pools, bathhouses, and zoos.[8] As Marta Gutman noted:

> *Moses and his colleagues were lauded for putting ordinary people first; for celebrating them with remarkable, technically sophisticated public architecture; for democratizing access to recreation; and for using New Deal dollars to run play schools and day camps and to offer swimming lessons at the pool complexes.…The architectural press also chimed in, suggesting that innovative design and breadth of social vision went hand in hand.*[9]

Moses's true brilliance, however, was in understanding the role of mobility infrastructure in the modern city. The new recreation facilities improved the lives of New Yorkers, but it was the expressways—for good and bad—that transformed the city. Marshall Berman captured this paradox when he noted, "Moses was destroying our world, yet he seemed to be working in the name of values we ourselves embraced." Moses's WPA projects "expressed a vision—or rather a series of visions—of what modern life could and should be."[10]

Originally lionized, and then vilified, Moses and the impact he had on the city have more recently been reconsidered in books and exhibitions. His emphasis on mobility connected the colonial origins of the American road with Corbusier's Radiant City and the obsessions of 1960s collectives such as Ant Farm and Archigram.[11] Contemporary projects like Manhattan's High Line perpetuate this lineage, proving the continued relevance of mobility infrastructure as a symbol for optimism and a catalyst for development.[12]

The commitment to transit infrastructure at the World Trade Center site is a contemporary example that highlights the importance of rebuilt infrastructure to recovery narratives. The City of New York spent $323 million to build a temporary PATH train terminal, merely a down payment on the forthcoming $2 billion transit hub, designed by the Spanish engineer Santiago Calatrava, which will replace the old station beneath the twin towers.[13]

This investment in highly visible, architecturally substantial solutions reinforces the significance of mobility infrastructure to the sense of recovery post-9/11. Unlike the mediocre and functionally incomplete infrastructural response in New Orleans, New York's facilities operate as placeholders of a larger program of reconstruction in Lower Manhattan.[14]

The Street

The Pink Project, initiated by the actor Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation, tried to serve as such a placeholder in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. The assembling of house-shaped steel frames covered in hot pink tarps represented dollars raised toward construction. These structures also served as visible reminders of the commitment to "make it right" for hundreds of families left homeless after the hurricanes. Although the project goals have changed, Pink did serve as a reminder of the commitment to the area.[15]

Now, as the first real houses to come from the Make It Right effort are being built, the street-scale infrastructural trauma of New Orleans is also slowly being addressed. Over the next five years, the federal Submerged Roads and Damaged Roads programs along with the Louisiana Department of Transportation will spend $360 million on road reconstruction.[16] Although hardly a radical reimagining, the work does include small changes that help provide a sense of optimism. For example, city agencies are cooperating to lay utility lines prior to repaving to prevent the destructive and costly practice of digging up newly paved streets. In an effort to promote diverse modes of mobility, many roads will have designated bike lanes—a simple addition, yet one that reflects attention to inclusivity.[17]

Such small-scale initiatives are critical in a place where street life is integral to the local culture. At a civic scale, parades and funerary processions are an important manifestation of cultural affiliation in New Orleans. And at a neighborhood scale, the relation between street and stoop or porch allows cross-generational, neighborhood interaction. Streets in some of the more densely populated areas of New Orleans are not unlike those of Greenwich Village, which Jane Jacobs described in the early 1960s, and where ease of surveillance built communal ties and a sense of public ownership. The intermediate space of the

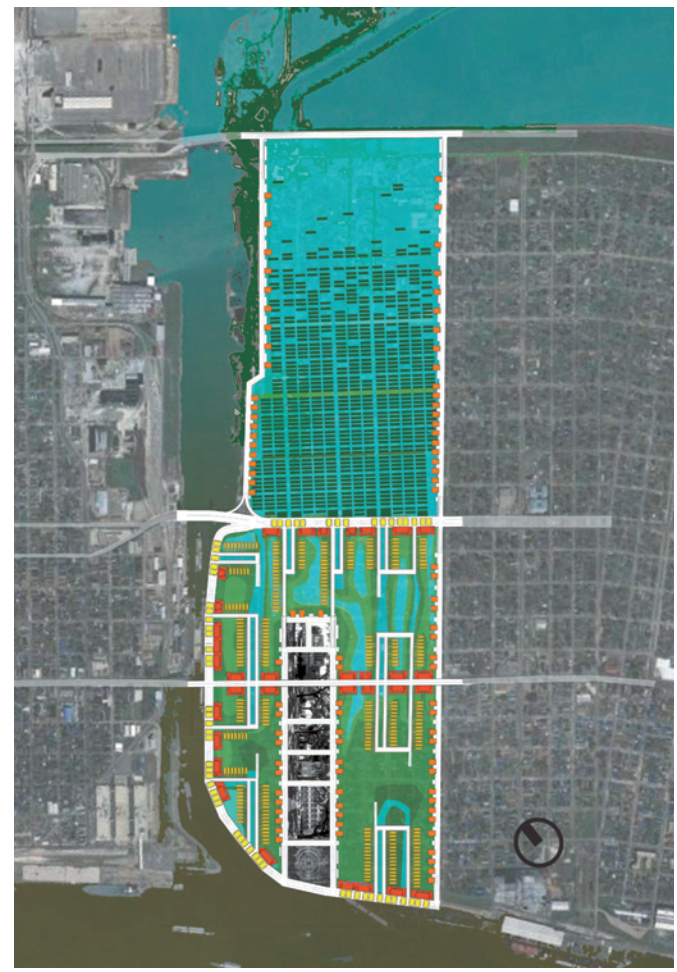
stoop promotes community relations without sacrificing personal privacy. Casual surveillance by neighbors then creates an "intricate, almost unconscious network of voluntary controls and standards" which promotes a self-regulated, yet flexible environment.[18]

This theory of "eyes on the street" relies on a neighborhood that is well-populated, pedestrian oriented, and mixed in terms of use. But it also relies on structures that allow direct view and mediated verbal, visual, and physical contact between semi-protected private space and the public sidewalk and street. The slightly elevated position of the traditional New Orleans porch provided such a space, and a narrow front setback from the street established a socially accepted line beyond which the lot and house were considered private.

Post-Katrina planning and new building codes have, however, altered the relationship between the house and the ground, forcing a renegotiation of spatial relationships between porch, yard, and sidewalk/road. In the Make It Right prototype houses, the five-foot suggested elevation above the ground plane has frequently been increased to eight feet to create a crawl space under the house usable for parking, mechanical systems, or storage.[19] The side effect, though, is disruption of earlier patterns of neighbor-to-neighbor and neighbor-to-stranger interaction. The edges of the informal social network are thus fractured. The porch becomes a platform segregated from the ground plane, causing the edge of the road—the line between public and semi-public—to become blurred. Furthermore, the driveway is no longer in view by residents above as it slips beneath the house, also breaching the privacy of the back yard.

Some of the designs for Make It Right houses articulate the front stair as an extended sequence between ground and porch. But the overall effect is still a disintegration of the contiguous relationships that once defined the shared public social space of the road. Among the Make It Right prototypes, the proposal by Eskew+Dumez+Ripple is notable in that it provides a multitiered street front to better contain the public zone and rethicken the semi-public zone. More successful design solutions would more aggressively take into account the significance of the road/stair/porch composite as a collective and semi-collective space.

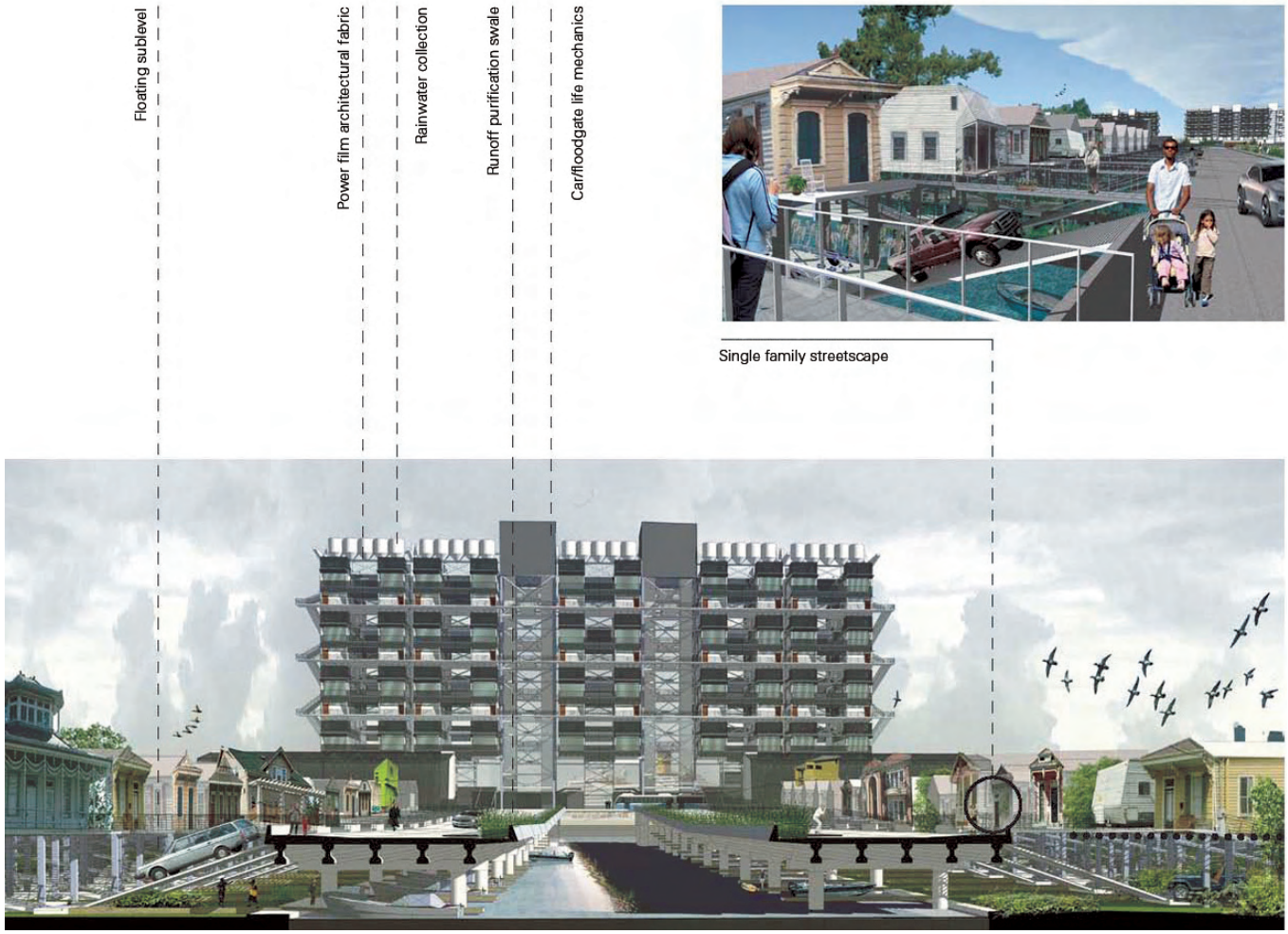
The NOkat proposal by *emery*mcclure architecture recognizes the problem of segregating houses from the ground plane and the value of reimagining their relationship to street infrastructure.[20] Drawing on nearly a decade of work studying the qualities of the local "terra viscus," their proposal creates a secondary, elevated ground plane



to maintain the sectional relationship between road, sidewalk, porch, and house, while depressing a semi-sacrificial layer of parking, courtyards, and garden.

According to *emery*mcclure: "The terra viscus is a super-saturated soil, one that is never completely solid or liquid, one that is never in stasis, but in a continuous state of being made and being removed. This ground consists of geological, cultural, ecological, and tectonic conditions that interweave and overlap to create a non-repetitive, patterned identity of multiple and hierarchically understood variables."[21] Their premise is that the successful inhabitation of southern Louisiana requires respect for its hybrid solid/liquid landscape rather than costly and futile technological resistance. They propose to "reconceive

Above: NOkat proposal by *emery*mcclure architects. Site plan.



the infrastructure to work with the natural systems."[22] A new infrastructure—combining elevated ground planes, a range of mobility modes, and water mediation rather than control—could encourage symbiotic existence between the landscape and its inhabitants.

Three integrated layers of roadspace appear in the *emery*mcclure plan. The causeway becomes a containing northern edge to new, denser development, and also provides access to a lower level of water-based transit. The low-speed road grid that organizes the interior neighborhoods and connects to the sidewalk and porch maintains the street as a space for social interaction. Last, car storage is accommodated in the depressed areas of the single-family and low-scale, mixed-use zones, and on elevated platforms in the higher density towers.

At the base of the towers, *emery*mcclure further proposes a high-speed rail line, which, combined with new links to water transit, would increase mobility options and access. This multitiered system sees both high-speed and low-speed movement as important to a reimagined public sphere.

Above: NOkat proposal by *emery*mcclure architects. Infrastructure section and perspective.

A New Era for Infrastructure

In terms of functionality, efficiency, and safety, the American Society of Engineers has rated the quality of America's infrastructure at C and D levels.[23] But what about the contribution infrastructure might make to the design environment? And what of its potential for collective postdisaster recovery?

Typically, infrastructure is intended only to facilitate the invisible, equitable, and timeless distribution of public resources. Yet, unlike water pipes and sewer lines, roads are public spaces. In the past, the lack of design engagement with mobility infrastructure has limited its potential as an artful and meaningful element of the public realm.

To combat the dire state of infrastructural quality in the U.S., President Barack Obama has created the National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank, which will enhance previous commitments to infrastructure by an additional $60 billion over the next ten years.[24] This allocation is linked, among other programs, to a new stimulus package, which may become a twenty-first-century version of the WPA. This large-scale program of infrastructure investment would be well-served by consideration of the lessons of New Orleans. While preventing the next disaster is obviously a vital concern, the new

programs should extend beyond the functional and should emphasize a vision for infrastructure that supports its value as civic investment. Reimagining road space at the national and local levels means envisioning a new mobility network that incorporates social, political, and economic goals, and that brings innovative new architectural attention to the public sphere.

Notes

1. The concept of the recovery narrative comes from Lawrence Vale and Thomas Campanella, *The Resilient City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2. Eliza Johnston and Brendan Nee, "A Methodology for Modeling Evacuation in New Orleans," unpublished paper, University of California, Berkeley, Department of City and Regional Planning, 2006. Available for download at www.bnee.com.

3. Public transit, more frequently used by the less affluent, is still slow to recover. The Regional Transit Authority lost two out of three of its maintenance facilities, 30 of 66 streetcars, and 197 out of 372 buses. More than two and a half years later, the city has restored only 48 percent of public transit routes and the operation of 19 percent of its buses. For recovery statistics, see Amy Liu and Allison Plyer, "A Review of Key Indicators of Recovery Two Years After Katrina," The New Orleans Index (The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2007).

4. Jonathan Schwartz, "I-10, Another Victim of the Storm, Enjoys a Quick Rebirth," *New York Times*, January 3, 2006.

5. Shaila Dewan, "Resources Scarce, Homelessness Persists in New Orleans," *New York Times*, May 28, 2008.

6. In precedents like Boston's Big Dig, the logistical nightmare of building new transportation infrastructure in a crowded urban core has only partially resulted in functional successes, and still struggles with a symbolism of corruption, over-expenditure, and faulty workmanship. In New Orleans, however, the recent hurricanes intensified a trend of population loss that has existed since the 1960s. This provides good cause to examine the removal of existing transportation infrastructure in the interest of a more diversely mobile population.

7. Works Progress Administration, Report on the Works Program, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 13, 17. This is equal to about $76 trillion today.

8. Marta Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm," in *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), p. 73.

9. Ibid, p. 81.

10. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 294-95.

11. Archer Butler Hubert in *Historic Highways of America*, vols. 1-15. (Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1902-1905) wrote that the colonial-era Cumberland Road was "our first and only great national road…a thoroughfare which should, in one generation, bind distant and half-acquainted states together in bonds of common interest, sympathy, and ambition."

12. Adam Sternberg, "The High Line, It Brings Good Things to Life," *New York Times*, April 29, 2007.

13. "Calatrava's WTC Transportation Hub Soars," January 22, 2004, on Lower Manhattan.info site, http://www.lowermanhattan.info/news/calatrava_s_wtc_transportation_29863.aspx; and "World Trade Center (Path Station)" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center_(PATH_station).

14. See "Review Roundtable: Is New Orleans a Resilient City?" *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (2006), pp. 245-57. This article also contains a disturbing comparison between reconstruction at the WTC site and in New Orleans, which questions whether New Orleans inhabitants are seen as "undeserving" or too "unsophisticated" to qualify for a response equal to that at Ground Zero.

15. Initially, the scattered forms were to be assembled over a six-week period as a direct representation of funding raised for the 150 houses. This goal ended up being rather unrealistic, and as of November, 2008—long after the installation was removed—funding for 85 of the 150 homes is now in place. The timeline has since been adjusted, as have fundraising strategies. The project now serves primarily as branding and public relations device, rather than a strict representation of funds raised.

16. Jaime Guillet, "City Road Construction Moving Into Overdrive," *New Orleans City Business*, Jan. 7, 2008.

17. Emilie Bahr, "$220m in Road Repairs to Include Bike Lanes," *New Orleans City Business*, Sept. 10, 2007.

18. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 29-74.

19. These five- and eight-foot heights are those mentioned by Alejandra Lillo, a partner in the design firm GRAFT, as being the ones they used in their particular Make It Right house design (interview by author, Oct. 11, 2008). The new Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE) varies in actual dimension but is defined, according to FEMA, as "the height at which there is a 1 percent chance or greater of flooding in a given year."

20. NOkat = No Katrina, No Catastrophe, No Category. The NOkat project was originally commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture for their November 2007 symposium, "counterMEASURES." Unlike the Make It Right houses, NOkat was intended to be speculative and visionary at the urban scale. More on the symposium can be found at http://soa.utexas.edu/events/counterMEASURES/. More on emerymcclure architects can be found at http://www.emerymcclure.com/.

21. See "Terra Viscus: Hybrid Tectonic Nature," *emery*mcclure architecture, research report.

22. "Terra Viscus…Terra Accommodo: Writing and Building in the Hybrid Tectonic Nature," *emery*mcclure architecture, research report.

23. 2005 Report Card For America's Infrastructure, http://www.asce.org/reportcard/2005/index2005.cfm?pic=3 (accessed Nov. 22, 2008).

24. "Barack Obama and Joe Biden, Strengthening America's Transportation Infrastructure" http://www.barackobama.com/issues/additional/#transportation (accessed Nov. 22, 2008).

Reclaiming the Ruin: Detroit's Second Coming?

Whitney Moon





But there has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity for ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape.

— J.B. Jackson[1]

Detroit may be littered with ruins and abandoned lots, but it is not empty. In response to architectural neglect and decay, individual acts of appropriation suggest that the remedy for postindustrial ruin begins with ad hoc, underground, and unsanctioned practices. By calling attention to derelict and downtrodden conditions, Detroit residents are, in a variety of ways, initiating an urban revival. Resuscitating Detroit will require a multilayered strategy, one that is currently bringing signs of revitalization, but whose future is uncertain.[2]

In a city where demolition far outpaces construction, one must ask what role architecture may play in a program of revival. Indeed, in Detroit, architecture is typically seen as the problem rather than a solution; rather than employing creativity to address its crises, the city has adopted a policy of eradication. But while bulldozers and wrecking balls may serve as proactive measures to counteract apathy and abandonment, the negative consequences are obvious. In Detroit, erasure has given birth to a new crisis of emptiness.

Above: DDD Project, 2005. Images courtesy of Object Orange.

This essay explores the implications of covert action as a catalyst to reverse apathy and address conditions of abandonment and decay. It then proposes that the evolution from unsanctioned individual effort to sanctioned institutional action can be traced through three stages: highlighting, appropriation, and transformation.

The solution to Detroit's urban crisis does not lie in grand architectural gestures. Opting for raw over refined, Detroit in recuperating must employ limited economic resources to achieve maximum effect. Toward this end, the loose, bottom-up, and ad-hoc transformation of abandoned spaces brings immediate results, employs fewer resources, and minimizes the crisis of erasure. If Detroit has an urban future, it will begin as a network of such spaces.

Stages of Reclamation

Creation or collapse, the accident is an unconscious oeuvre, an invention in the sense of uncovering what was hidden, just waiting to happen.

— Paul Virilio[3]

In *The Original Accident*, Paul Virilio argued for the inevitability of the industrial accident, suggesting that catastrophes are "the fruit of Progress and of the labour of mankind." Rather than approaching the accident exclusively from a vantage of prevention, he suggested the need to "uncover what was hidden, just waiting to happen."[4]

Virilio's approach is not nihilistic, nor is it a glorification of catastrophe: he postulates that it is precisely in the accident that the substance of progress and invention is revealed. Because progress invariably wreaks havoc,

disaster is intrinsic to growth. Hence, it could be said that the architectural ruin is not a sign of Detroit's failure, only evidence of its potential for rebirth.

Detroit possesses a rich history of optimism when confronted with disaster. It was destroyed by fire in 1805, and its residents were determined to rebuild. The city's official seal, adopted in 1826, reads: "We Shall Rise Again from the Ashes / We Hope for Better Things."[5] Featuring two female figures—one representing Detroit's recent loss and the other its promising future—the seal reflects the city's dialectical relationship with renewal. In the background, the city is illustrated in flames; in the foreground, a new city is born. Thus, while symbolizing resilience, the seal likewise exposes the paradox of rebirth: loss is necessary for something new to be gained.

The case studies here show how the reclamation of Detroit needs to follow three stages: 1) Highlight, 2) Appropriate, and 3) Transform. Varying in scale and ranging from the anti-institutional to the institutional, they present emergent strategies for architectural reform. Analysis of their pros and cons implies a projective fourth phase, in which "the city full of holes" is seen as a raw network of architectural potential.[6]

This view suggests that "Detroit's Second Coming" is a myth misplaced. In other words, the reclamation of Detroit does not reside in the romantic notion of renaissance, where one grand architectural gesture will save the city. Rather, the promise of rebirth resides in stitching together and building upon an existing set of operations to generate a fertile network of reclaimed sites.

Highlight

> *Pick up a roller. Pick up a brush. Apply orange. The dialogue is going. Our goal is to make everyone look at not only these houses, but all the buildings rooted in decay and corrosion. If we can get people to look for our orange while driving through the city, then they will at the same time, be looking at all the decaying buildings they come across. This brings awareness. And as we have already seen, awareness brings action.*
>
> — DDD project[7]

The first stage of ruin reclamation may not only be anti-institutional, anonymous, and ephemeral—it may also be illegal. Flying under the radar, unsanctioned acts are early signs of life in the aftermath. Quick to be seen, heard, and felt, their immediacy not only attracts but also refocuses attention. In Detroit, such interventions may call attention to architecture's demise as sublime catastrophe. Derelict buildings may be suspended in a state of ruin, where entropy is assaulted, suspended, celebrated, or accelerated. The result is a new relationship between art and architecture, where art utilizes architecture's public facade as a canvas for announcing failure through constructive practice.

To expose the city's crisis of abandonment, a anonymous group of four artists, calling themselves Object Orange, carried out such an act of ruin reclamation in 2006, entitled Detroit Demolition Disneyland (DDD). Armed with Tiggeriffic Orange paint (a cheerfully vibrant color from Disney's "Mickey Mouse" series), they transformed a collection of abandoned structures marked for demolition. By highlighting Detroit's ruins, Object Orange sought to build awareness of neglect and encourage Detroit residents to participate in direct physical discourse with the ruins around them. By encouraging them to look closely at the effect of transformation, and to take up their own brushes, Object Orange operated as a catalyst for collective critique.

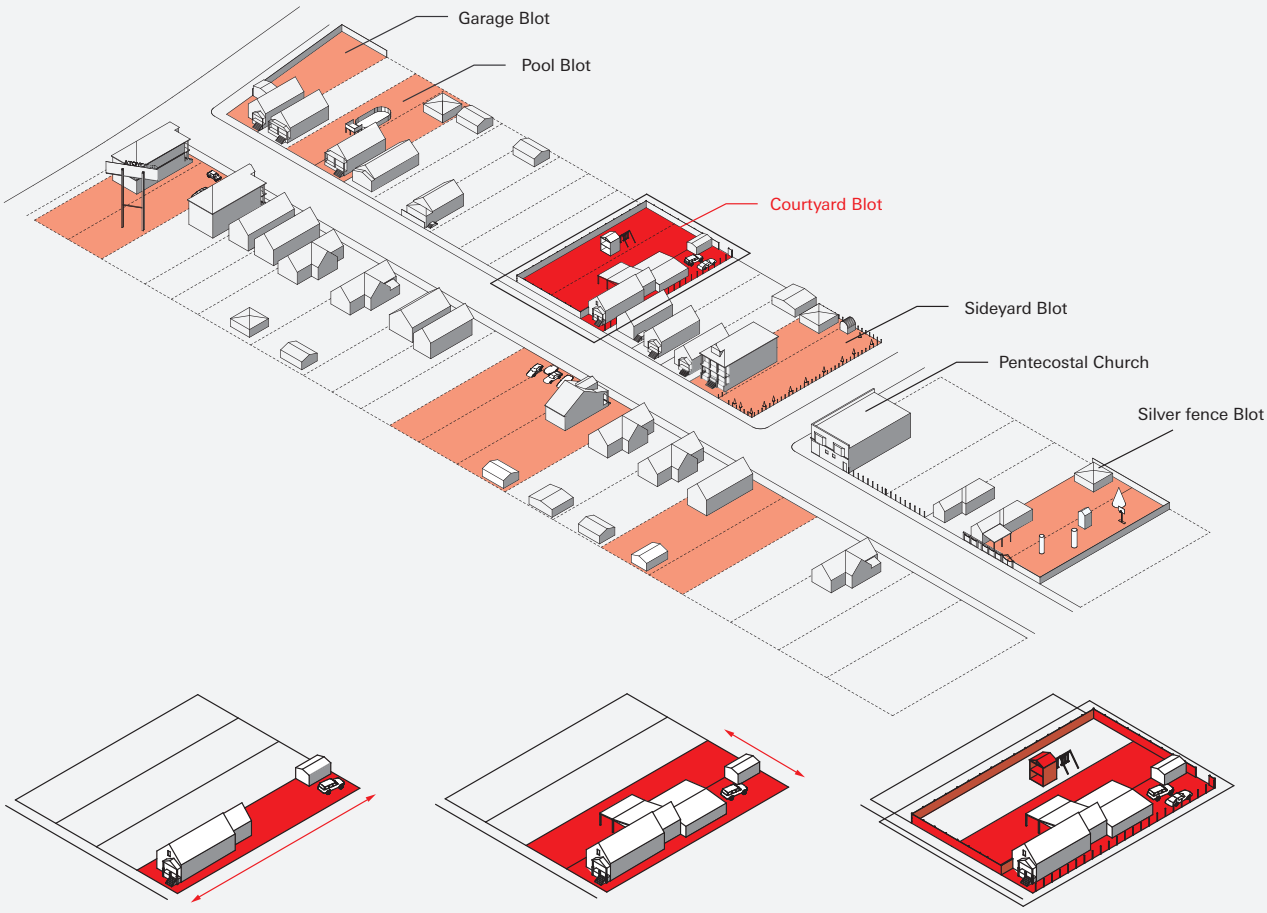
Such covert interventions are clearly not a solution. Indeed, as a result of DDD, four of the eleven painted houses were immediately demolished.[8] But as a provocation, Operation Orange questioned the city's lack of effort to devise a solution. Why create such voids without plans for recuperation? "If the city doesn't rebuild, will it be better to have nothing there rather than an abandoned house?"[9]

Appropriate

> *Here we ask: might the best way forward for Detroit be a phenomenon that is being acted out every day by thousands of self-interested homeowners who are merely making do? If so, might we as planners and policy makers learn how to better learn from what people are already doing?*
>
> —Interboro Partners[10]

The second stage of ruin reclamation may initially be invisible, but ultimately it seeks institutional sanction and acknowledgement. It operates by means of bottom-up, self-initiated, everyday urbanism.

Embracing the gradual and organic appropriation of abandoned sites by Detroit's remaining residents, the architects and planners at Interboro Partners have identified a practice of lot expansion, or "blots." They see this as an indicator and an example of a "New Suburbanism." Defined as "the process through which entrepreneurial homeowners take, borrow, or buy adjacent vacant lots," its "cumulative effect will be a gradual rewriting of the City's genetic code."[11]



Ten years ago, Victor Toral owned one house which was, like most Detroit houses, oriented front to back.

Victor later bought the vacant lot next to his property and erected two additions, reorienting the house in a direction parallel to the street.

Later again he built a fence around his land as well as the city owned lot next door, turning his property into a courtyard house.

By identifying and documenting these practices, Interboro hopes to facilitate the informal, uncoordinated practice of staking claim to Detroit's abandoned sites. Rather than creating voids or highlighting ruins, New Suburbanism seeks to return these now city-owned properties to responsible private hands. It also builds on an already thriving practice of "urban husbandry," where residents lay claim to abandoned sites to plant community gardens.[12] A loose new infrastructure could one day sanction such activity and allow growth.

Despite the expansive nature of lot appropriation, however, the weakness of Interboro's New Suburbanism is that it remains wedded to a vision of Detroit's ultimate demise. Although blots may prevent the decay and demolition of some structures, they do little to address the primary problem of shrinkage—that "[u]nbuilding has surpassed building as the city's major architectural activity."[13]

The problematic nature of Interboro's analysis resides in its acceptance of Detroit's return to suburban densities. Rather than positing an inventive new urban vision for Detroit, New Suburbanism settles for the effects of entropy, regularized through the expansion of property lines.

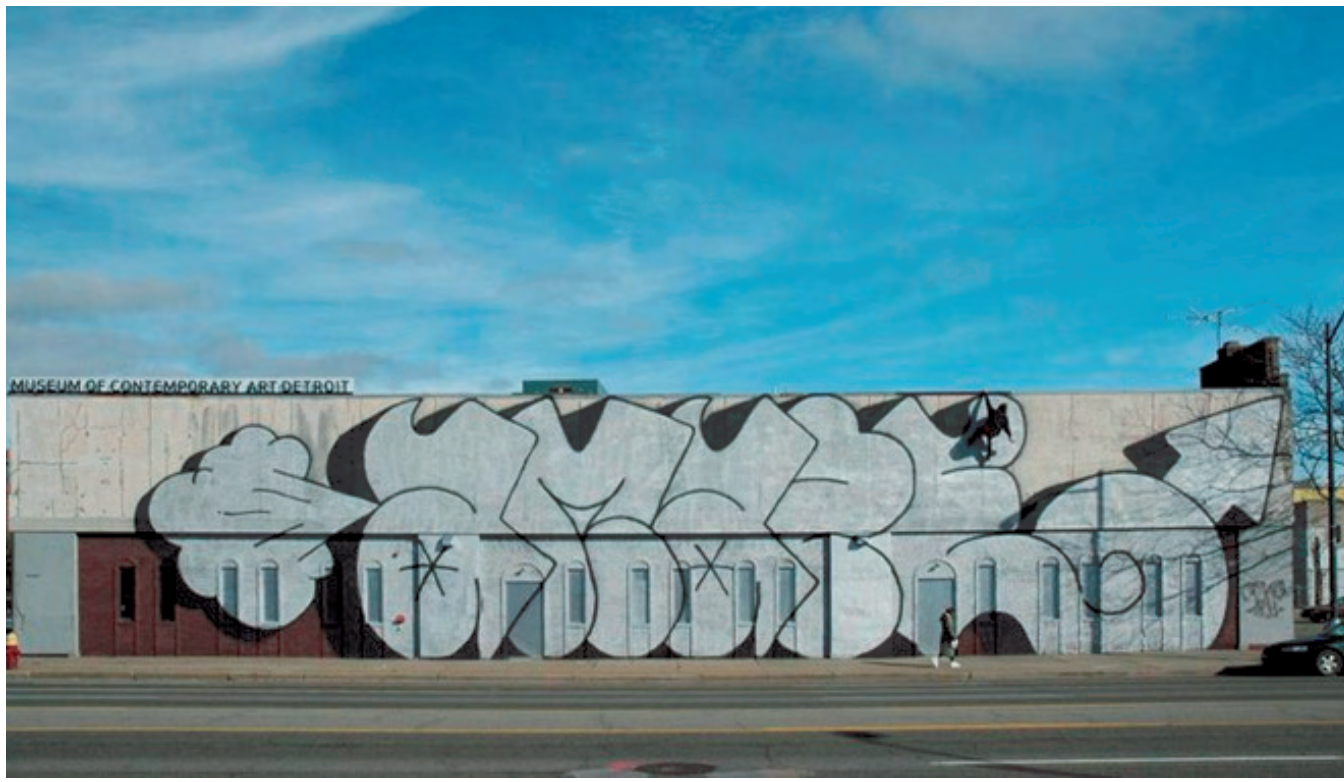
Transform

I didn't want to romanticize it…but the city had a depth of character, a real substance and integrity. And while you want to do away with the problems, you don't want to lose that quality.

—Andrew Zago[14]

The third stage of ruin reclamation is formal, sanctioned, and semi-institutional. It incorporates the first two stages—highlight and appropriate—but goes further to transform abandoned buildings and vacant lots into vibrant new sites. Advocating conservation rather than demolition, transformation preserves traces of the past while turning attention to the future.

Archite cts may be active agents in facilitating such visions of incremental progress, utilizing the ruin as a frame for creative reclamation. Often conceived in phases, transformation necessitates both immediate and long-term actions. And since limited financial resources often prohibit realization of elaborate visions, the resultant strategy must balance pragmatism and desire.



Opened in 2006, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD), designed by the architect Andrew Zago, is one such project. It highlights and appropriates an urban ruin, but it also transforms it into a vibrant cultural center. By occupying a former car dealership abandoned in the 1970s at a time of white flight, the 22,000-square-foot museum echoes a time when Detroit was a thriving center of automotive production. Yet, amidst the slow revival of a derelict downtown, architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff called MOCAD "an act of guerilla architecture, one that accepts decay as fact rather than attempts to create a false vision of urban density."[15]

Zago, a Detroit native, viewed the project as a chance to contribute to downtown renewal, but in a manner that would draw inspiration from its current state.[16] Taking cues from "squatter's houses, performance spaces, local bars and grass-roots art projects," Zago sought to take advantage of the transgressive potential of the ruin.[17] He employed the vernacular of urban blight as an operative strategy, celebrating the city's underbelly. By injecting a new but familiar form of vibrancy into an otherwise vacant neighborhood, he transformed adversity into opportunity.

Zago had initially designed a far more significant intervention for MOCAD. But the museum's limited financial resources and its desire to open immediately necessitated scaling back to a quick-and-dirty Phase 1 that involved more pragmatic maneuvers such as installing lighting, plumbing, and a parking lot.[18] Zago's adaptation celebrates the raw aesthetic of the ruin: walls showcase their layers of peeling paint, and a patchwork of interrupted floor surfaces suggests a long history of interior alterations.

Such scars not only contribute to the visual appeal of the building but also tell a story of endurance, adaptability, and survival. In turn, the museum has inspired a form of ad hoc engagement from exhibiting artists, where the architecture itself serves as a site for creative reclamation.[19] As Ouroussoff explained, "[i]t takes us back to a time when making art and architecture could be an act of dissent."[20]

For Phase 2 of MOCAD, Zago has proposed a more

Above: MOCAD (Phase 1). Woodward Avenue facade with mural by graffiti artist Barry McGee. Photo courtesy of Zago Architecture.

Opposite top: Courtyard blot. In context, with blots shown in pink; and below, the evolution of the blot and its reorientation over time. Illustrations by Interboro Partners.



extensive renovation, introducing a high degree of refinement: sculptural skylights, storefront windows, mechanical upgrades, a sculpture garden, a cafe with outdoor seating, and a bookstore. Although this additional program of alterations would maintain the present allure of the industrial ruin, it is guided more by aesthetic than operative urgency.

The critical need to stake a claim on Detroit's ruins, paired with an economic recession, suggests that these architectural refinements are currently unnecessary if not inappropriate. The urgency of MOCAD resides in its state of raw transformation. It functions as an index to future strategies of reclamation in Detroit, and shows how limited interventions can have great transformative effect.

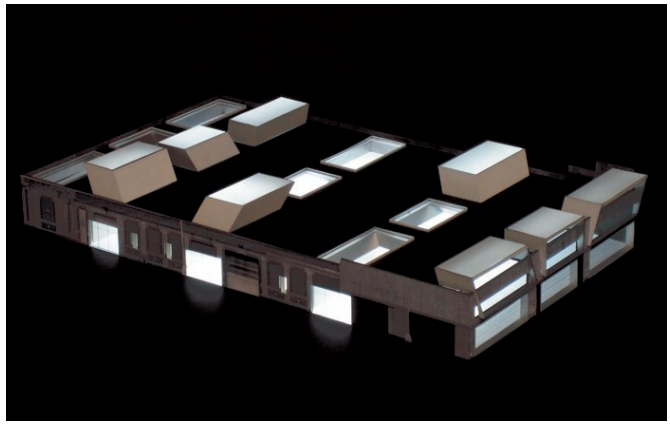
Reclamation: A "Second Coming"?

> *Perhaps the prime problem for the immediate future is the indicating of 'no-present-use' for a place, but nevertheless signaling that the city centre is not dead, only resting; that it is becoming available, a place for the nature of change to make itself manifest, a place of change for the better in a climate of hope.*
>
> —Alison Smithson[21]

Turning our attention toward the ruin is not only an initial stage in reclamation; it must serve as a conscious, operative strategy in the subsequent stages of architectural appropriation and transformation. In recent years, the problems of Detroit have garnered extensive public attention. Whether through the highlighting by DDD, the appropriation of blots, or transformations like MOCAD's, much of the resolution of Detroit's crisis will reside in such relatively loose and informal practices. Furthermore, each stage—Highlight, Appropriate, and Transform—lays the groundwork for a subsequent mode of renewal: raw urbanism.

Raw urbanism is a form of recuperation in which the city is improved through a sequence of individual operations. It posits a larger infrastructural framework that accepts the city as a unified yet heterogeneous fabric. In this vision, abandoned lots are no longer considered isolated and singular but rather part of a greater whole. The result is an urban fabric composed of surface interruptions, whose discontinuities must be understood as integral ecologies and whose potential is essential to the survival of the whole.

Raw urbanism implicates architecture as an active agent in the recuperation of Detroit, rejecting grand



gestures that offer false hope for salvation. As fortresses, autonomous and ideological islands of entertainment and commerce (i.e., casinos, ballparks, and corporate headquarters) have not only failed to resuscitate the city, but stand out as monuments to disappointment. What the city needs is hope—hope that a solution to current crises will emerge and that it will transcend the myth of salvation (of "Detroit's Second Coming").

Detroit needs a strategy whose aim is not merely to preserve or suspend the city but to launch it into an uncertain future where it can "make itself manifest."[22] Rather than making promises, raw urbanism constructs a network of possibility, where the "city full of holes" is understood as a city of untapped potential. As the essayist Rebecca Solnit has explained, "Detroit will never be built as it was." Rather, "it will be the first of many cities forced to become altogether something else."[23]

Notes

1. J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 102.
2. For more on Detroit specifically, see Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim, and Jason Young, eds., *Stalking Detroit* (Barcelona: Actar, 2001); and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). For more on Detroit's crisis in comparison to other cities, see Philipp Oswalt, ed., *Shrinking Cities: Volume 1, International Research* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005); and Mario Ballesteros, Albert Ferre, and Irene Hwang, eds., *Verb: Crisis* (Barcelona: Actar, 2008).
3. Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 3rd ed.), p. 9.
4. Ibid.
5. Detroit Historical Museum, "Current Exhibits: Detroit's Official Symbols," http://www.detroithistorical.org/main/dhn/current_exhibits_details.aspx?ID=16 (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).
6. Alison Smithson, "The Center City Full of Holes," in *Architectural Association Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2/3 (1977), pp. 3-23.
7. "Detroit. Demolition. Disneyland.: A Project," *The Detroiter*, http://www.thedetroiter.com/nov05/disneydemolition.php (accessed Aug. 18, 2008).
8. "GOOD Magazine Presents: Object Orange," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQwKkK1bggY (accessed Nov. 22, 2008).
9. Ibid.
10. In their essay "Improve Your Lot!" Interboro outlines four distinct examples of blots: "The Garden Blot," "The Billboard Blot," "The Courtyard Blot," and "Blot for Two Sisters." See http://www.interboropartners.net/2008/improve-your-lot/ (accessed Oct. 16, 2008).
11. Interboro, "Improve Your Lot!"
12. Rebecca Solnit, "Detroit Arcadia: Exploring the Post-American Landscape," *Harper's Magazine*, July 2007, p. 72.
13. Dan Hoffman, "Erasing Detroit," in Daskalakis, Waldheim, and Young, eds., *Stalking Detroit*, p. 101.
14. Andrew Zago, as quoted by Nicolai Ouroussoff in "Seeing the Seediness, and Celebrating It," *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 2006.
15. Ouroussoff, "Seeing the Seediness, and Celebrating It."
16. It is fitting that the opening exhibition in the newly transformed warehouse was entitled "Meditations in an Emergency." Klaus Kertess, its curator, described the show: "None of these artists provide us with answers but rather seduce us with questions, alarm us into beauty and hold up a mirror to our consciousness." The second exhibition was "Shrinking Cities," a traveling show whose aim was to investigate the phenomenon of urban shrinkage in four cities: Detroit (U.S.A.), Manchester/Liverpool (Britain), Ivanovo (Russia), and Halle/Leipzig (Germany). Featuring contributions by a collection of commissioned artists, architects, filmmakers, journalists, culture experts, and sociologists, it examined the causes and effects of urban decline. http://www.mocadetroit.org/exhibitions/MIAE.html (accessed Nov. 25, 2008).
17. Ouroussoff, "Seeing the Seediness, and Celebrating It."
18. Andrew Zago explained to the author June 9, 2008, that what is now called Phase 2 of MOCAD was the initial design for the museum. Zago produced the Phase 1 design only so the museum could to cheaply and quickly occupy the space.
19. In addition to Zago's minimal interference in Phase 1, two artists were invited to alter its exterior facade on Woodward Avenue. For the opening show, the San Francisco graffiti artist Barry McGee created a mural intended to reflect Detroit's gritty, blighted character. Martin Creed has since added to McGee's mural with a neon sign reading "Everything is going to be alright."
20. Ouroussoff, "Seeing the Seediness, and Celebrating It."
21. Smithson, "The Center City Full of Holes," p. 13.
22. Ibid.
23. Solnit, "Detroit Arcadia," p. 70.

Above: MOCAD (Phase 2), model.
Opposite: MOCAD (Phase 2, unbuilt), rendering. View along Woodward Avenue. Images by Zago Architecture.

Reflecting Absence

Michael Arad

We begin the second half of this theme section with a narrative by Michael Arad concerning his winning design for the World Trade Center Memorial. Our intent is to provide a record, a memory, of the origins of this project.

The notion of "project" certainly applies here. From its inception, this memorial was intended to serve as an object of multiple cultural, emotional, and societal valences, which would exist in our present as well as in the "here and now" of many, unimaginable, futures. A project is launched with the understanding that it will follow a vector, a path, that is mostly unforeseen. The invention is controlled, but the final form and its eventual meaning can never, even under the best of circumstances, be fully mapped or anticipated. A project is made of ideas, forms, and intentions that are literally projected from the architect to the plurality of recipients in the present as well as in the future.

The World Trade Center Memorial described here is under construction. However, when it is complete, it will not be as the architect originally envisioned. External forces have already exerted their pull; budgets, different contingencies of interested and affected parties, security issues, etc., have contributed to significant changes. The underground galleries described here have been eliminated; other material qualities have been altered; changes have been made to the program; and the boundaries of the memorial itself have been renegotiated as a result of the complex process of recovering the WTC site.

But in Arad's own words we are offered a rare glimpse of the designer's original concept. The story presents a fascinating record of how a complex process began—how a design vision was born, and how it germinated in personal reflections about the meaning of tragedy and the requirements for its memorialization. The story further indicates how initial personal ideas were developed in collaboration with a team of specialists, and how they were finally accepted as the official representation of a larger culture through a public process.

The life of this memorial will continue its unpredictable course. When it opens to the public and becomes part of world consciousness, its interpretation will follow a trajectory reflecting many processes: the limitations of its production, its dissemination through the media, its place in national consciousness, its use for future events, its upkeep—the list is almost endless. And, for a project dedicated to memory, the irony will be that much of its original formulation will be lost.

—Harris Dimitropoulos

I would like to begin by evoking the image of a window in the pastry shop beneath my apartment building. The cake they put there after September 11, with a depiction, in frosting, of the twin towers surrounded by the words "We Will Never Forget 9-11-01," was sweeter and more ephemeral than most memorials. When I first saw it I thought it was in poor taste, but walking by it day after day, I came to think about it differently. So many people in New York were trying to define meaning. I started to see this as an attempt to relate to the events and create a memorial.

A year later I found myself trying to create a memorial in the same vein. The first idea I had was to carve two huge voids in the middle of the Hudson River, with water flowing into them yet never filling them up. You would be able to stand on the shore and see these inexplicable voids, but you would not be able to go up to them. The idea was to create a constant sense of absence, an inexplicable sense.

I thought about this idea for a few months and sketched it through, and eventually decided to build a model. I had plenty of time, because with the slowdown of the economy, I was unable to go back to work. So I went to a model shop I had used often when I was at Kohn Pedersen Fox, and asked the owner, Jimmy Awad, if I could borrow their laser cutter for about half an hour. I ended up staying two days, and they helped me put it together.

Essentially, the model was a small fountain. To work, it had to be precisely crafted. Although it looks simple, it consisted of three tanks, and there was a small pump that we took out of a desktop fountain, the type you might find at Bed Bath & Beyond. It was a magical moment when we first poured some water in and turned it on. You could hear the water welling up and flowing over into these voids. I had thought about how it might look for a long time, but actually seeing it and hearing it took it out of my head. I thought, okay, I have it: this is how I imagined it, with the city reflected in the voids in the river. But I really did not know what to do with it, and so I set it aside.

Opposite above: The author's earliest model viewed on a New York rooftop. Photo by author.

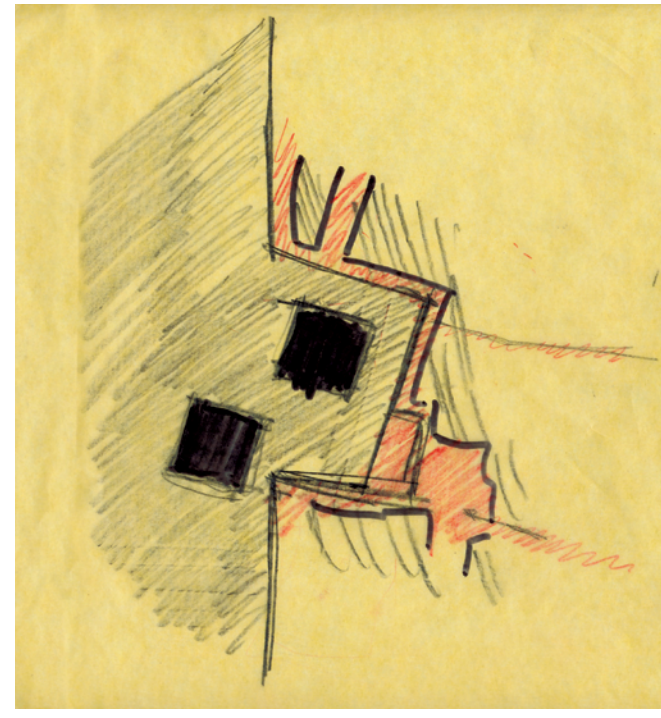
Opposite below: Initial concept sketch, showing two voids adrift in the Hudson River. Drawing by author.



The Initial Concept

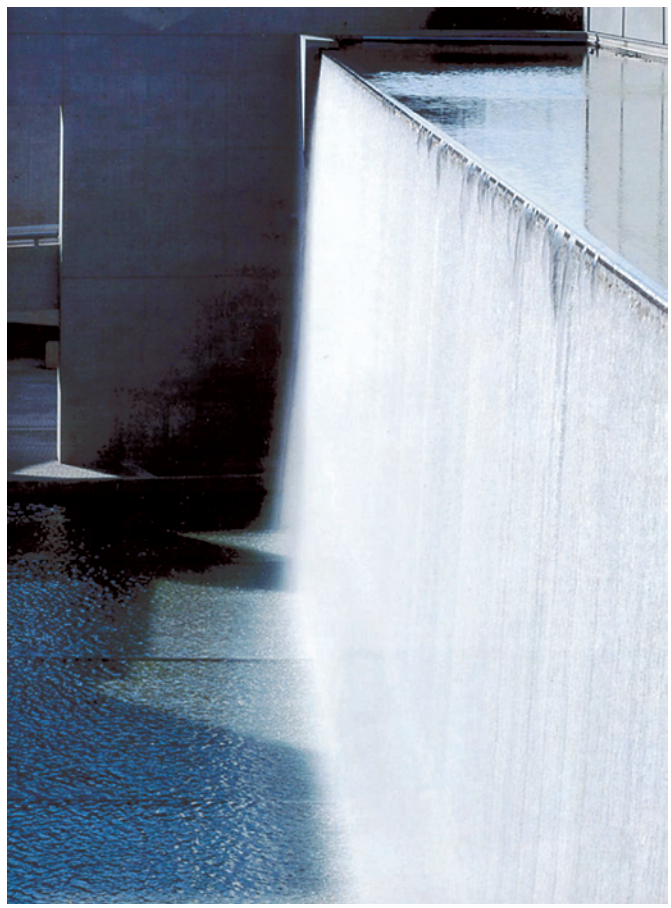
About a year later, the design by Daniel Libeskind was selected as the master plan for the site. It subdivided the sixteen acres into four unequal quadrants, and set the largest aside for the memorial. It also reintegrated the site into the city by bringing Greenwich Street back through, running north to south, and Fulton Street going east to west. Like many other New Yorkers, I found this concept of great interest, with many positive qualities. But I also thought that it created an overwhelmingly large space for the memorial.

In a sense, I drew from my own experiences in New York in thinking about the memorial space. I remember walking around New York after September 11, going to places like Washington Square Park at two or three o'clock in the morning. I would stand there in silent contemplation with a small group, about a dozen people. What was special was the ability to come together to share a moment but also have it be one of intimate isolation. When I looked at the images from the master plan, I thought, "How will we have the ability to do that?" I also realized the plan severed the site from the city, despite the reintegration of Greenwich and Fulton Streets.









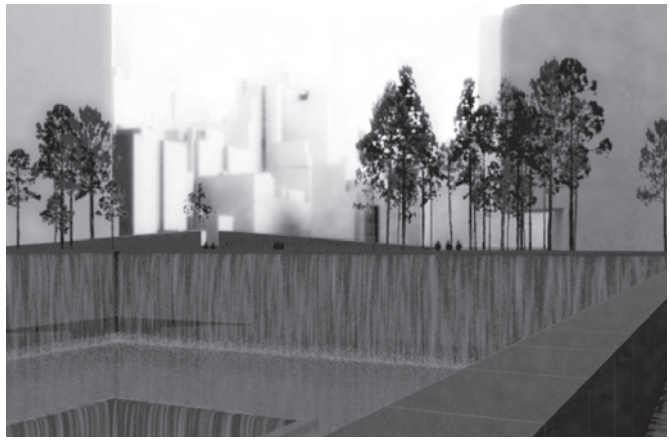
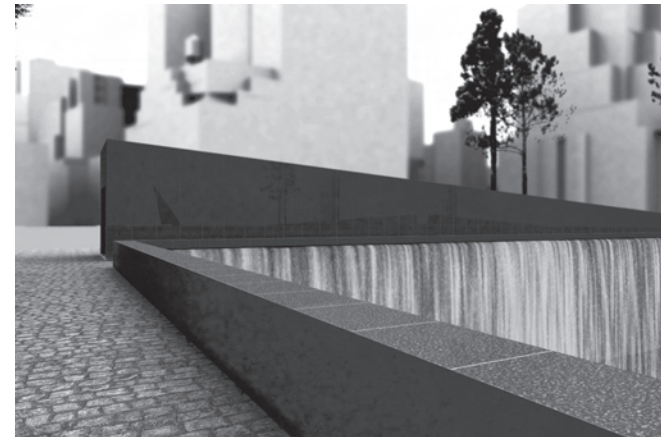
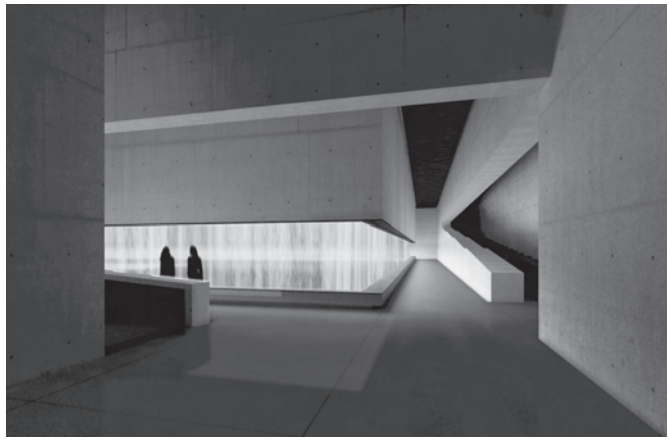
When I decided to enter the memorial competition I was aware the idea I had developed the year before would have to be very different if it were to be placed on the memorial site. But I still thought about the site as the plane of the river, a surface which would be punctured by two large voids marking the footprints. Each would be ringed with water, which would cascade into a pool at the bottom.

My idea was that you would be able to stand on the plaza above, and look down into the north and south pools. I thought the edge of this void would be where you would come to understand the enormity of the event, and of the destruction. You could then go underground, to a more enclosed and intimate space, and look through a curtain of water, and this would be where the names would be inscribed.

The idea of marking a voyage was important. But other images were also evocative for me as I was developing my scheme. The quarry demonstrates the presence of what is absent. There was a small one I came across near South Orange, New Jersey, whose precise geometry expressed the idea of ruin and rebirth, present in the rubble, the water, and the trees.

In the design entry I sent in, you can see the development of what I have been talking about: bringing the site up to grade and tying it directly into the city, and then carving these two enormous voids. That was the primary move, marking the presence of absence. Then coming underground into a space that would be more intimate. I linked the elevation of the memorial gallery to the height of the water in the pool. As you walk down, I imagined your very first experience would be to walk up to the edge of the pool. Having seen it from above, all of a sudden you would be behind the falling water looking up. That is where the names of the victims would be, inscribed around each pool.

There were architectural influences too. I have admired the way Louis Kahn used light and simple materials to delineate space. Tadao Ando also uses light and rhythm


to create a space with simple materials. Ada Karmi, from Israel, has also set up space through repetition, through the use of light, through the use of shadow.

The sense of heavy excavation was also important. Peter Zumthor's work has used the juxtaposition of excavated elements with a tracery of light up top. Finally, there was a project by Tadao Ando that used water almost as an architectural element, as a wall. You see it forming an end wall that defines a space, but when you are standing behind it, you have clear views out. When I saw this, I thought, "this has already been done, and it is great."

On the issues of materiality and scale I remember being fascinated as a student by the monumental nature of the highway structures in Atlanta, the way they create spaces that are uninhabited, but could be. I was always struck by their evocative and beautiful nature, and I tried to integrate some of that feeling into the design.

Materiality is not only the material itself but also its history. Daniel Libeskind spoke eloquently about the slurry wall, essentially a big retaining wall that defines the perimeter of the site. Despite Rafael Vignoli's criticism that "it is nothing more than a wailing wall," I think when you actually stand next to it, all the rhetoric disappears, and the experience is incredible. Part of the subterranean space surrounding the memorial will include the slurry wall.

When I first went on a visit the site as one of eight finalists another one of the things I remember were these cut-off columns, which used to lead to the towers' foundations. The perimeter of each tower is actually inscribed on the site. When they finished the cleanup operations, they torched off the columns and left this tracery behind, which will also be incorporated into the memorial center.

Above: Computer renderings developed as part of the author's initial proposal. Images by sQuared Design Lab.

Opposite: Precedents for the initial design. Left: A quarry in New Jersey and a freeway overpass in Atlanta. Photos by author. A wall of water designed by Tadao Ando.

Refinement

What I have described until now is essentially the development of the idea. I sent it in a form that complied with the competition requirements, and promptly forgot about it.

A few months later there was an email waiting in my inbox from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation that was cryptic, stating that a question had come up about my submission. Of course, I only found it around two o'clock on a Saturday morning. I had the whole weekend to think, "I wonder what I did wrong?"

It turned out it was part of being told I was one of the finalists. I didn't know at the time there were eight. They told me I would have two months and a budget to develop the design from one board to a complete presentation to the jury. I also had to answer questions from the jury and from the LMDC. One concerned the integration of cultural facilities, which I had not put into the plan, thinking the entire site should be dedicated to the memorial.

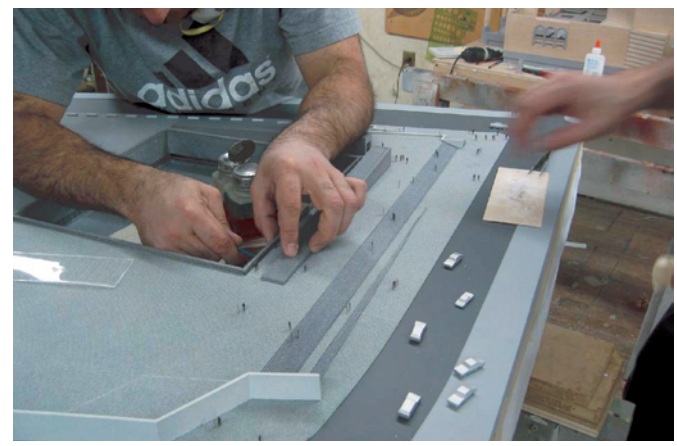
Our anonymity as finalists needed to be maintained so our projects would be judged and not us. I thought at the beginning there would be no way they could keep the competitors' names secret. But everybody who was part of the competition respected the need for anonymity, and I think that is a credit of all the finalists.

I went back to Jimmy Awad's model shop, this time as a paying customer. The models came together over a few short days. Jimmy is from Syria, and the people who work at the shop are from everywhere…China, Ecuador, Egypt. I am from Israel, so I was somewhat nervous, because I had never worked on a project that had so much publicity, and I wasn't sure what Jimmy's reaction was going to be. I was wrong to worry. Among the greatest rewards of this process for me were my friendships with Jimmy and his crew. I worked there literally night and day. They were extremely dedicated, and much of the design's development came through testing it as we built the models there.

If I were able to return to that stage of the project, I would be happy. But the process takes you to other places, too. The model we put together for presentation to the jury included a cultural building that created a large mass on the edge of the site. We were trying to keep the site as open as possible and to define an edge.

I was also working with a couple of graduate students at MIT to develop the animation and renderings. Our collaboration was both a pleasure and a curse, because I had to convince them of every move I was making. Throughout this process I was helped by many people. At times that help can be difficult to accept, and at others it pushes the project in the right direction.

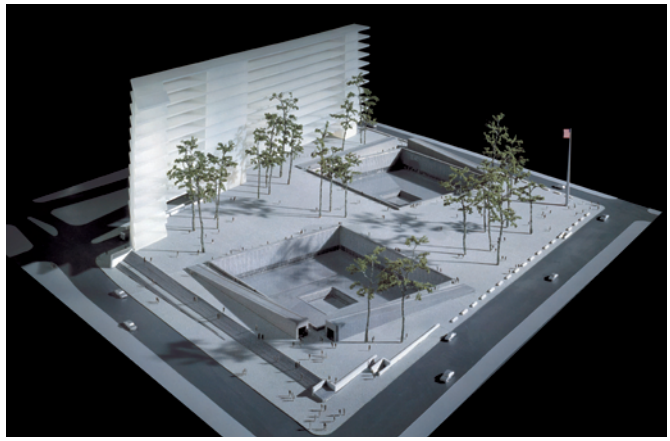


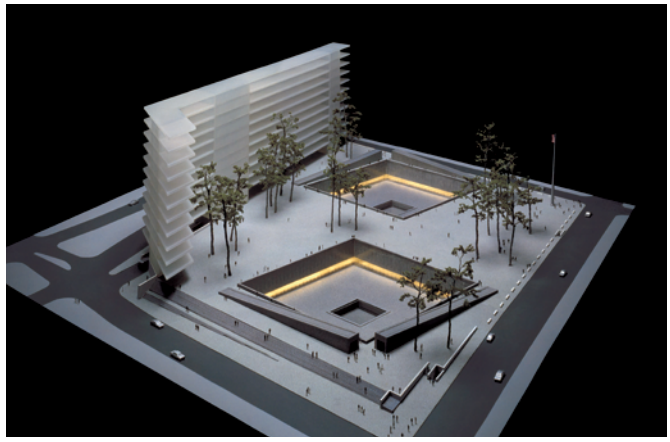


In the final materials I presented to the jury I further developed the idea of a curtain of water falling into the pool and a structure flanking the pool and leading you underground to a gallery space. There was a connection between the two pools, the would lead up to the edge where the names would be inscribed. In the development of the plaza and the below-ground spaces, there were some elements which were important for me to preserve; the most important was retaining a strong sense of the two voids.

I was hesitant about landscaping on the plaza. I remember my mother-in-law, who was at our house over the summer after our son Nathaniel was born, said, "put benches and trees"—which was good advice. But I had a hard time finding the right pattern.

One of the other models we built was of a slice through the project. It showed people standing at the plaza level, the descent ramps, the memorial gallery, the pool, and then the void at the center. The void was cut in such a way







that when you stood at the plaza level, or at the galleries, all you would see was a sheet of water running out in front of you and then disappearing into an inexplicable abyss that never fills up.

When this model was put on display at the Winter Garden with work by the other finalists, the exhibition curator did not like it. He said they did not want anything with running water. I insisted that it was really important for transmitting the idea. But I didn't realize that the model was going to be under hot lamps. And so every week the water would just evaporate out of the pools completely. I had to come in with gallon jugs and get permission from the security guards to open the vitrine, walk behind the glass, and refill the models.

There would be tourists there all the time. The first time I filled it up, I was self-conscious, as if it were an act of performance art. They were all taking pictures of me, and I felt like an animal on display. But soon it became routine.

Responding to Comments

One issue which came up during final jury deliberations was their concern that the plaza was too stark and austere and that it was overly dedicated to memorial uses. I can understand where that criticism came from, because in bringing the plaza up to grade, tying it into the city, I had always intended to make it part of the city. This would be a place where you could go not just because there was a memorial but also because, for example, you happened to work across the street or lived nearby. I wanted to strike a balance between the needs of the memorial and of the city at large, and to try and heal this site, something that was important to me.

Above: Initial models developed at Awad Architectural Models. Photos by Jock Pottle.

Opposite: Preparing a model in Jimmy Awad's shop. Photos by author.







When I got that feedback from the jury, I knew I needed to find the right way to deal with it. But I also did not want to create a pattern on the plaza that would distract from or diminish the two voids. I was influenced by a project by Roberto Burle Marx that also had an unexpected void in it, and I was also drawn to its strong figural patterns.

In thinking about landscaping, I found myself talking a lot to my former professor Doug Allen. One of the most cryptic comments he made was, "Why don't you start thinking of the plaza as a tablecloth?" And I was, like, "Okay, I'm not going to say anything." But two days later, I started to understand his meaning. An image in a book by James Corner was influential, because it showed two systems of information on top of each other: a glacial landscape which streaks diagonally and a Jeffersonian landscape with roads intersecting at right angles. In between you have unexpected configurations where the two meet, or don't meet, or both change.

When I had to deal with the request from the jury to address how the plaza looked, two approaches crystallized: one was a surface scatter-shot approach…just throw more trees on there and see what happens. I am sure that could work, but I didn't think it was the appropriate response. In contemplating Doug's comment about a tablecloth, I started to consider a series of bands, which would run across the site. These would pick up significant edges—the edge of the pool and the surround—and would allow bands of trees to be arranged in perfect alignment, almost like beads on an

Above: Precedents for the plaza design. Top: Trees in a forest plantation. Photo © Alan Ward. From *American Designed Landscapes* (Berkeley, CA: Spacemaker Press, 1998). Bottom left: Garden design. From Marta Iris Montero, *Roberto Burle Marx: The Lyrical Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Bottom right: Layered landscape. Photo by Alex MacLean. From James Corner, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
Opposite: The eventual plaza design. Renderings by Peter Walker and Partners Landscape Architecture.

abacus. But as you turned and faced this same arrangement from 90 degrees, the order would completely disappear, and it would resemble a forest. There was an intrinsic order underlying it, but it would not always be apparent. It seemed that was the way to bring landscaping to the project in a much lower register and a softer key that would not compete with the first move, to create the two voids.

The idea of bringing in trees while preserving openness at eye level was also important. This picture captures that. The tree trunks would partially screen the view, but for the most part it would be open so you could appreciate the entirety of the plaza.

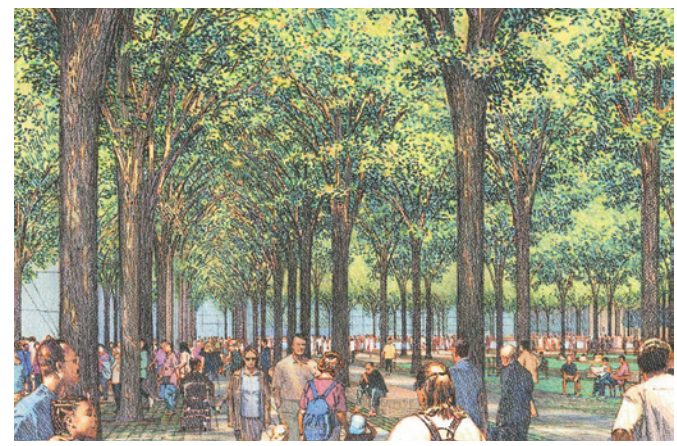
I came back to the jury with these quick interim renderings showing the development of the idea. It is remarkable how similar these were to the model that actually came out of the landscape architect Peter Walker's office one year later. At the time I showed the jury this material I had the opportunity to put together another model, because I felt the earlier one was too disembodied. It just bound the site with four streets, without a sense of the urban context in which the memorial was going to sit.

I went back to Jimmy with some chipboard (instead of Plexiglas) under my arm, and I was lucky—he wasn't busy that week. They generously built another model for me, this time with the entire site, including the World Financial Center and the five towers of the Libeskind master plan. This effort gave me the opportunity to develop the more inclusive idea within a larger model and to show it to the jury. You see here an attempt to make the cultural building shorter, wider, and more useful for exhibition purposes, and still keep it on the periphery.

There was another element of this nerve-wracking two- to three-month process. When it began, I told my employers at the New York City Housing Authority I was going on paternity leave, which raised an eyebrow. I had only been there for six months…there are benefits to being a government employee. But the real reason was to go into hiding to work on the Memorial project. I thought it would be for just two months, and that would be it. But it turned out to be a much longer process because of the jury deliberations.

The way it would work was, I would get emailed questions from the jury and LMDC at the same time—at times contradictory—which tried to tease out what part of the design was inviolable and what could be changed, how it could be improved. While I was addressing these comments I was following what was going on at Ground Zero more closely. I became aware of how important bedrock was, and still is, to family members. Reaching it marked the end of the cleanup and excavation process; it was the last place where unidentified remains were found; and it is a significant touchstone for family members.





It is called bedrock, although it is not literally bedrock. It is the top of the last slab of the lowest basement of the World Trade Center, and it is where family members go every year to commemorate 9/11. Up to that point, the design had ended essentially at the central void. Now, I thought, what if you were to remove the bottom of that pool and create a room below it that was open to the sky and that would sit on bedrock? The room to me was associated with unidentified remains, with a place for family members.

Several projects by the installation artist James Turrell influenced me in developing the idea for this room, a symbolic mausoleum at the center that would be open to the sky. The water cascading into the central void would be captured by a channel that would surround this oculus. As much as possible, in developing this idea, we were hoping to keep the cracked and broken foundation slab that is down there.







Final Presentation

With the selection of the design, there followed an insane week of trying to take all the work and bring it up to speed for final public presentation at Federal Hall in New York. I had flown out to Berkeley to see Peter and to work with him on development of the materials. We flew back and we were meeting with Daniel Libeskind, and the culture buildings came up again.

Originally, there were to be about 400,000 square feet devoted to cultural uses in a building with two wings. In talking with Daniel, we found a way to reduce that to about 250,000, which helped shrink its bulk and allow it to be moved to the northeast corner of the site.

Above: Final presentation of the design. Bird's-eye view, showing the relocated cultural buildings. Ground-level view. Underground view.

Opposite: The proposed mausoleum room at bedrock with its central oculus. Renderings by dbox.

I went back to Jimmy again, for the second time as a paying customer, and we put together a more formal version of the chipboard model that we had built for the jury. It showed the increasing development of the scheme.

In the following two years we had to push the design further, understanding all the constraints the site imposed. Some elements from the original design were lost for a variety of reasons, and that has been hard. But today the memorial is being constructed.

Recently I found a schematic diagram of the site in the *New York Times* that captured the complexity of the recovery effort. It is not just a memorial, it is also the museum center, it is a train station, it is a shopping concourse, it is office towers. All of these have to work together, and they are all being run by different project teams, jockeying for real estate.

Throughout this process the primary principle I have tried to hold on to has been marking with absence, creating a significant and clear void, finding a place for people to gather and contemplate.



The Character of Contemporary Memorials

Harris Dimitropoulos

A key element of recovering place is frequently the construction of a memorial. But memorial design is vastly different now than fifty years ago. Gone are figural qualities and allegorical content, replaced by minimalism and calculated abstraction. Yet the desire to produce memorials has not abated. It may be stronger than ever.[1]

A memorial is a representational work that stands as testimony to the collective importance of an event, person, or circumstance. In its most successful form, it has continuing value, linking the past to the present and future. I will not attempt to unpack all the complexities of this difficult representational exercise, but I would like to explore how contemporary works of art—memorials, in particular—relate to the subject and to the collective.

In 2003, the *New York Times* published a series of articles commenting on the design competition for a World Trade Center Memorial. On November 22, the Arts and Design section included one by Julie Iovine, "Are Memorial Designs Too Complex to Last?" She wrote: "No one was surprised, given the ages of the finalists, that minimalism was the universal vocabulary of the submissions." She then argued that because of cultural diversity, we can no longer resort to figurative or symbolic monuments. Memorials can no longer be referential.

Although these statements sound true, I think the age of the participants was of secondary importance. The appropriate explanation is that minimalism both eschews referentiality and provides a perfect surface for the projection of our egos and desires. It functions in a specular manner, mirroring us to ourselves, thus providing an effective strategy for contemporary memorials..

The Subject and the Mirror

Our contemporary moment is one in which the subject reigns supreme. As Mark Augé has written: "In Western Societies at least, the individual wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to himself and by himself."[2]

Critics have also long pointed out that memorials address their intended audience by accommodating a projection of the individual on their semantic matrix. As a subject, to be drawn to a memorial, I have to find a part of me in it. This act of projection is immediately transformed into what psychoanalysts call "mirroring": I am engaged because I see me (or one of my traits) in the memorial.

In psychoanalytical terms, mirroring provokes a comparison between this specular image and the person I would like to be. In other words, is the reflection flattering? The part of the superego that performs this function, that is the keeper of the best possible persons we can be, was for Freud the "ego-ideal," and for Lacan the "ideal ego."[3] From the inception of psychoanalysis, the ego-ideal has been identified as a trait of both subject and collective. For Freud, in particular, it connected the individual with the group. He wrote that "Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego-ideal upon the most various models."[4]

A memorial thus has to address the positive aspects of who we think we are, whether as individuals or as a nation. It has to act as if we coincided with our best possible self-fantasy. Memorials cannot tell us that we are weak, made mistakes, lost opportunities, or were wrong. If they do, they violate our primal narcissistic impulse, and we experience injury or insult.

In a seminal essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," Lacan described how mirroring allows a subject to form a unified, albeit erroneous, sense of identity—of self.[5] It makes sense, therefore, that the mirroring of a subject, or a collectivity, in a memorial, will be similarly important. In fact, the identity derived therefrom is inscribed in temporality, in a series of moves that inscribe the subject in history. For the Lacanian scholar Jane Gallop, the mirror stage can be understood as "a turning point that 'projects' the individual into 'history,' that is in the future perfect."[6] The "moral" conveyed by the memorial thus depends on the temporality implied by this future perfect: the subject identifies what it will have done in order to avert a similar disaster, prepare for a similar victory, etc.

In a 1977 essay "Notes on the Index, Part 1," the art critic Rosalind Krauss introduced three notions important to understanding this mechanism: the mirror, the index, and the "shifter."[7] The notion of mirror comes from Lacan; that of index comes from the philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce (who remains nameless in her text); and that of "shifter" comes from the linguist Roman Jakobson.

It is the mirror, the notion of a subject confronting his or her reflection as same and "other," that structures the relationship between these three notions. The mirror is the device by which the child can encounter himself/herself, and through it form a notion of identity. At the same time, to Lacan, this self-recognition is always fraught with misunderstanding and misrecognition. Caught in a cat's cradle of specularity, a subject uses imagination to fill the gaps. The mirror introduces the notion of the imaginary.

Mirroring may take many forms. Caregivers mirror back at the infant its sounds and facial expressions,

establishing a rapport. This also affirms to the infant that it exists. Later in life mirroring becomes, metaphorically, the structuring principle of many encounters and situations. Significant relationships with lovers and friends frequently originate from mirroring.

The index and the shifter are each related to the notion of mirroring and then to each other in a semantic triangulation. The shifter has to do with what traditional semiotics would call a sliding signifier, one to which a series of signifieds can be attached. However, Krauss's use of the term implies a carefully constructed placeholder. Within any representation the shifter is an open spot, around which the context remains the same. The subject, as reader or viewer, is invited to fill it in, and in so doing, finds itself in the midst of the representation. This is the mechanism by which a representation is appropriated by a subject to then be used for the subject's own purposes. Imagine a huge mural, and every time a person stands in front of it, he or she is reflected seamlessly in a piece of it. Such is the notion of mirroring coupled with the shifter.

Finally, there is the index. According to Peirce, a sign performs an indexical function when it stands in as an effect of the referent it represents.[8] A shadow is an index of a thing, smoke is an index of fire, etc. A reflection in the mirror is an index pointing at the actual person or object being reflected.

Imagine the mural again. Huge in size, it depicts a scene, and every time people stand in front of it, they are assimilated into it and reflected back seamlessly as if they belonged there. In the case of a memorial, the representation has the additional power of being an index of the events it represents. This is because memorials usually refer to "true history." This is our collective and consensual sense of the past as a series of facts—not individual narrations or, possibly, interpretations.

The literary and cultural critic Andreas Huyssen has also noted that we live in an era that privileges the subject, one that promotes the "I" instead of the "we."[9] For us to find meaning in a work of art or architecture, the work has to include at least a part, a component, that addresses us as separate individuals. This is, of course, a total impossibility. The only way to achieve this effect is by including a void, a nonreferential but essential component, which the subject can be enticed to appropriate. This component is the shifter—the sliding signifier. It is a formless form; but every time it is viewed, it morphs into something and attains a form that refers to specific content. As soon as this "shifter" is identified, the subject will, more often than not, project his or her ego on it, rendering it relevant and important. Since the projection is that of one's desire, or ego, the shifter automatically functions as a mirror. This is how the subject finds/projects him- or herself in the work.

The Ego-Ideal

This motivation to see ourselves in the work of art—and in memorials in particular—is governed by a narcissistic impulse. In the case of the artwork that actually allows us to mirror, the process is so much more captivating because the work performs its mirroring actively, actually inviting us to do so.

Our everyday understanding of narcissism is inadequate here, however. It explains the process of mirroring as a simple act where we encounter our virtual other in a relationship of isomorphic correspondence. In fact, this process is fraught with all kinds of distortions and misrecognitions. It is entangled with our desires, our aspirations, our misunderstandings about ourselves—and, most important, our ego-ideal.[10]

Psychoanalytical discourse defines the ego-ideal as a mostly fictional construct representing who we would like to be. Freud saw it as a function of the super-ego; it is part of our consciousness, our psychic editing mechanism. In many ways it is related to the idealized image of our parents that resides in us before we actually encounter and deal with their humanity and fallibility. To use the relevant jargon, it is the "introjected, idealized parental imago." The corresponding term for Lacan was ideal-ego, a concept he tied to the realm of the imaginary, rather than the symbolic. For Lacan, after the mirror stage, the infant has to relate to the world in linguistic terms and use a symbolic structure. This is the structure of laws and interdictions.[11]

It stands to reason that every encounter with our reflection that tells us that we are not who we would like to be is cause for discomfort and distress. As adults, we might take this as an opportunity for self-reflection and growth. Ideally, a memorial that presented a discrepancy between ourselves as a collectivity and our ego-ideal might have a similarly edifying nature. By structuring-in the appropriate mirroring, it could teach us something about ourselves without having to be didactic. Unfortunately, our collective attitude to such memorials will be negative, dismissive, and potentially hostile. Our primary narcissism will cause us to feel injured rather than instructed.[12] As individuals and also as members of a collectivity, we like to pretend we have attained a state of equilibrium. We like to see ourselves as innocent, brave—whatever it takes to preserve the master narratives that purport to describe who we are and why we are that way.

It is one thing to know something, quite another to memorialize it. In a memorial, things take on broader significance and distinct gravity. The memorial is there to preserve memory, and when it comes to something of which a culture is not proud, that culture would rather de-memorialize it—commit it to forgetfulness. Thus, one of the exigencies of the shifter, of the mirror, is that it must also produce a reflection that appeases rather than confronts. The mirror must lie for us to preserve our pride. It must become a false index, as it reveals the illusion produced by fictional distortion.

A reflective component structured into a memorial also tends to secure its diachronic significance. The memorial commemorates an event of the past. The shifter is there to secure its relevance at any historical period, so it may be meaningful not only to its contemporaries but to future users. When it comes to a memorial, the promise of diachronic significance guarantees it will remain significant without guaranteeing the nature of this significance.

This structuring of a gap into the work, the invitation to the subject to see him- or herself in the memorial, is what distinguishes a classical monument from a contemporary one. A classical work leads the viewer to a definite conclusion and a moral. Such is the case of the Parthenon. In its pediments it tells the story of the birth of Athena and the birth of Athens. In the frieze it tells the story of the Panathenaic procession. Contemporary cultural practices, on the other hand, allow for a gap, one that receives the hermeneutic of plural subjects. A perfect example is Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. The project is structured around void spaces that allude to the lack of closure resulting from the trauma of Holocaust.

What I have in mind here is quite close to the way Michel Foucault identifies the mirror as the locus of a heterotopia. Mirrors have the ability to project us in the midst of a situation in which we physically do not belong. They make possible the phenomenal joining of disparate spaces and modalities of being. According to Foucault:

> *Starting from the gaze, this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.*[13]

This commentary really has to do with how the recipient of the memorial, the intended addressee, is conjured by the designer. In a classical sense, the subject is a member of a collectivity and grows up knowing the rules, myths, and conventions of that entity. This inscription into what Lacan called the "symbolic order" is a product of acculturation, and comes after the mirror stage, which involves maternal care and empathy. He identified this realm of representations and language with authority and patriarchy, with the "name of the father."[14]

As I mentioned before, the notion of ego-ideal for Freud and his followers was also part of this patriarchal realm. The contemporary subject, on the other hand, is first and foremost an individual with desires that have to be addressed and satisfied. Contemporary memorials are asked to play the double and contradicting role of addressing both a loosely defined collectivity and the needs and desires of diverse individuals at the same time. Thus, in a "mirror" monument, the edifying function can appear only in oblique ways.

To function at all these levels the memorial must structure the void in such a way that it guides the subject to place its reflection, to see itself in a context that is, in fact, the point of the commemoration. If the memorial's aim is bravery, a hero, or a loss, the subject is guided unconsciously to see itself in relation to that event. The seemingly infinite possibilities of the "shifter" are harnessed for a purpose. They produce a range instead of an infinite number of signifieds. The promise of a reflection lures the subject into participating, and structures its relationship to the thing remembered.

The Positive Void

To this point I have described the relation between a representation and a void around which it is structured. The void is non-narrative. But most, if not all, representations have a narrative dimension. They tell a story; and because of that, they are biased, principled, and construct a mythology.

Once we introduce specularity as a necessity for the success of a memorial, questions of truth and accuracy become increasingly complex. Ultimately, one must ask whether a memorial can tell the truth at the risk of offending. My own experience tells me there is a limit to the truth-function of a memorial.[15] The subject as an individual and the collective as a plurality of subjects cannot confront negativity. The easiest way to confront something negative is to ignore it or to relegate it to the past. I would hazard that a memorial has no chance of success,

of rooting itself in people's consciousness, if it dwells on negative aspects or on things that have not yet been assimilated or dulled through the passage of time.

What pertains to the individual pertains to the collective. The collective has to maintain its cohesion, its identity in the ideal realm; the myths it shares have to be unchallenged; the causes it shares have to be noble and justified. In short, it has to see itself in a state of narcissistic plenitude and omnipotence. It is at that point that the ego-ideal assumes an editing mechanism, making sure that unflattering representations are kept hidden and forgotten.

The ancient Greeks used the word *heroon* for a memorial devoted to a hero or a collection of heroes, and they used the word *mnemeion* as we use the word memorial today. The *heroon*, a monumental tomb, was devoted to the noblest of the noble, the ones who had attained the standards of their time, who could stand as personifications of that society's ego-ideal. In that capacity they addressed the youth of that culture; they inculcated the desire for the young to grow up into heroes, to exemplars for others. Their function was not only narrative but also instructive. They held up the standard for all to see.

This function is a lot more difficult to fulfill today. Late capitalism and globalization have undermined the notion of the national subject. Today we have to perform as both subjects of a nation and subjects without one. For a memorial to fulfill its role it has to sacrifice specificity of narration in favor of opening up to, addressing, a larger group of individuals.

The collectivity sees itself as an extension of the past. Its members are the progeny of another generation, and historical continuity has to be preserved for the identity of the group to be preserved. Negative acts perpetrated in the past have to be repressed. The editing function of the ego-ideal is motivated through an initial identification. The subject today identifies with its ancestors in order to maintain a historical lineage. Through this identification, the mistakes of the ancestors become the mistakes of the subject and, as such, render its self-image painful and problematic. Thus the negativity has to be omitted.

I have tried to illustrate the specular function of memorials and their relationship to a culture's ego ideal. Simply put, people tend to "see" themselves in a memorial in a process that begins with identification and proceeds rapidly into mirroring.

As the art historian Alois Riegl put it, "Thus modern man sees a bit of himself in a monument, and he will react to every intervention as he would to one on himself."[16]

A memorial functions in many complex ways, and to issue guidelines on memorial design is impossible. It performs a curative role; it connects the present to the past and to the future; it provides closure; at times it even provides forgetfulness. The semantic mechanisms involved cover the arsenal of representation. Memorials by their very nature are structurally positioned to address our psyche, from our narcissism to our idealized self-image.

Notes

1. See Andreas Huysssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2–3. The notion of memory and the role it plays in contemporary culture is central to the book.
2. Marc Auge, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 37.
3. I use the term "ego ideal" here to signify the Freudian notion as well as the Lacanian notion of "ideal ego."
4. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, with a biographical introduction by Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), p. 78.
5. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977, pp. 1–7.
6. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 83.
7. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, October Books, 1986), pp. 196–99.
8. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 115–17.
9. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 22. Of particular interest here is his reference to a contemporary tendency toward "musealization."
10. A simple, concise, and accurate distinction between the terms "ideal ego," "ego-ideal," and "superego" is to be found in Zizek Slavoj, "How to Read Lacan: 6. Ego Ideal and Superego," http://www.lacan.com/zizraphael.htm.
11. Ibid.
12. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 3. In this instance Freud finds that the separation between individual psychology and group psychology is very small.
13. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in *Diacritics*, Spring 1986, p. 24.
14. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 67.
15. In 1989 I worked on a project for the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution at La Villette. The project was a commemoration of the events that led to the Revolution as well as the entrepreneurial exploitation of the same events. Even though the events cited were historically accurate, officials and public alike wanted to resist and forget all aspects that would be considered "negative."
16. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments, its Character and its Origin," in *Oppositions Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 632.

Memory and Place: Two Case Studies

Douglas Allen

Fictions abound in the creation of memorials. Every memorial, every monument is a kind of re-creation—of a person, a deed, or an event—that seeks to bind future generations to a moral lesson, if not an actual truth.

In the case of heroic events, no matter how difficult, this would seem straightforward: resurrect the memory and convert it to architectural form that appropriately dignifies it. "Remember this," the memorial would seem to say. "This was important—others sacrificed something of themselves here for you."

In such cases, fiction may be present only as hyperbolic aggrandizement necessary to secure moral obligation. But when the need arises to commemorate events associated primarily with senseless tragedy, the path toward remembrance is often less clear. In the case of the Oklahoma City Federal Building, a field of empty chairs was used to mark where ordinary people fell victim to an attack on a government whose connection to them was merely as an employer.

In other circumstances, a tragedy may be so painful as to require the complete erasure of its memory. In this case, later generations may resurrect what their forebears needed to forget. In the light of time, they may be able to give those events proper place at the table of memory. This may even take the form of a warning: "Remember this. Your forebears were shameful. Don't be like them."

In yet other instances, however, the event may be so painful that, like the victim of some terrible abuse, the culture may need to protect itself by burying it altogether. In such circumstances, the act of memorialization may substitute whole-cloth fiction for the recall of actual events.

Often, some aspect of all three modes of representation exists in a memorial site. To explore these processes, two cases are presented here. The first embodies a classic case of fictional aggrandizement. In the second, the memory of significant events and suffering remains suppressed, and a new memory, aimed at future aspirations, has been installed in its place. In both cases, fiction has been used to reveal a greater truth, from which a lesson is forged for generations to come.

Opposite: The Lincoln Memorial, designed by Henry Bacon, at the terminus of the Capitol mall, provides a touchstone for the nation's conscience. It presents a much different view of Lincoln from that which prevailed at the time of his death. Photos by Carol M. Highsmith.

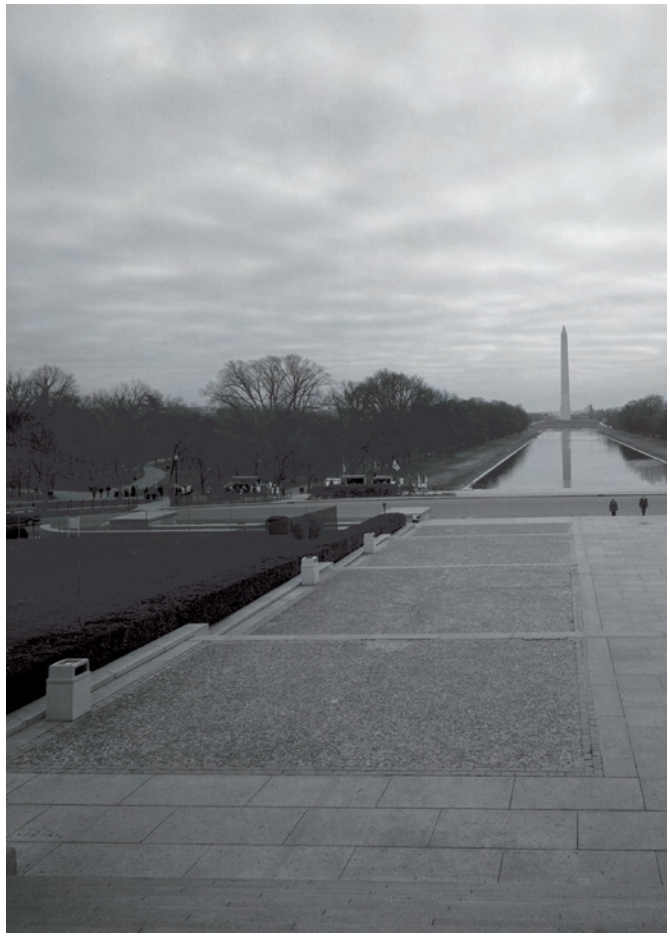
The Creation of Place: The Lincoln Memorial

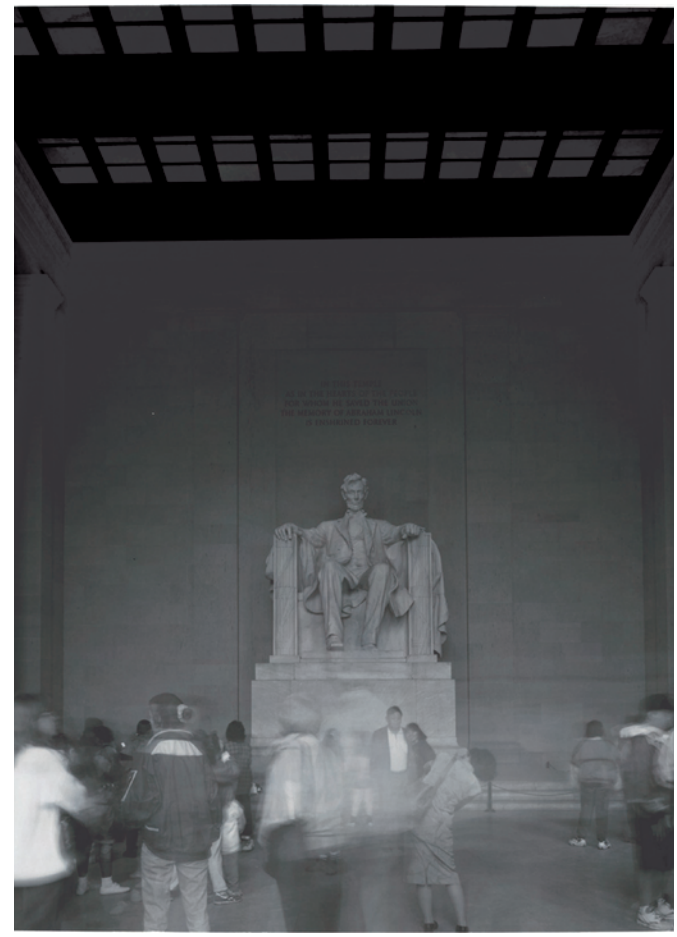
According to the art historianAlois Riegl, "a monument in its oldest and most original sense is a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations."[1] To be forgotten, to leave no trace of our existence, is a difficult thought to bear. As time moves us inexorably to a kind of disappearance, we want to believe we mattered in more than our material presence. We build, we write, have children, and construct wills. We leave an inheritance, we give a portion of our wealth to have buildings named after us—all to be remembered, and so to keep our lives important even after our last breath has been drawn.

The ancient Mediterranean world believed that without burial within native soil and without proper rites, the soul wandered eternally. Fustel de Coulanges wrote that in that world the very security of the community depended upon the correct observation of burial rites, upon which the welfare of the family of the departed depended.[2] As the family grew to a tribe and the tribe to a state, such concepts were extended. Creon's failure to properly honor Polynieces, for example, brought disaster upon his house, and by extension to Thebes.[3]

By extension, the contemporary monument asks that we remember something important to the well-being of the whole. But in collective remembrance we form a bond not only with the present community but also with communities. This projection of memory forces awareness not only of the presence of others and also the presence of time, locating an eternal present between the past and the future. Every community must contain an element of social order that reminds members of their obligations to others, both past and future. At its core, the monument is not intended to convey of pleasant memories, or even heroic deeds. Instead obligates future generations to hold to the lessons we leave for them. Remember this, we say. This is important.

The transfer of collective memory from individual memory, from subjectively held experience to collective representation, is a complex task. But for a monument to perform it, its message must be as clear to those in the future as it is to us. Traditionally, the language of the classical monument spoke openly to this end. Commemorative sculpture in public space is at least five thousand years old, and for half that period its formal language, derived from the Mediterranean world, served as the basis for almost all monuments and memorials. Substitute anyone or anything for Abraham Lincoln in





Henry Bacon's temple at the end of the National Mall, and most of us will assume it is important.

Because of this immediate and general accessibility, inscriptions are needed to explain the specific lessons those who constructed it intended for us. As he sits in his chair, facing the U.S. Capitol, Lincoln is accompanied by three such inscriptions. Directly above is a dedication: "In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever." Flanking are two inscriptions from his own speeches: on the north, his second inaugural address; and on the south, the Gettysburg Address. The words of the latter capture, perhaps as well as any since the funeral oration of Pericles, the concise notion of the classical monument.

The Gettysburg Address was delivered on Cemetery Hill on November 19, 1863, only four months after the bloodiest battle in the American Civil War. Its occasion was the dedication of a small memorial where Union defenses had withstood the disastrous charge of General Pickett, and where some of the Union dead had been interred. The ceremonies that day included a two-hour oration by Edward Everett, former president of Harvard and the most famous speaker of his generation. It began, "Standing beneath this serene sky with the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering." It ended with a quote from Pericles's funeral oration: "'The whole earth is the sepulcher of illustrious men'. Down to the latest period of recorded time, in the glorious annals of our common country there will be no brighter page than that which relates the battles at Gettysburg."

Certainly, Gettysburg would have seemed a likely candidate for the fulfillment of Pericles's statement wrapped in Everett's rhetorical dress. In three days, beginning July 1, 1863, 23,000 Union and 20,000 Confederate soldiers had lost their lives. Double that number had been wounded. America had never before, nor has it ever since,

experienced such a loss. When Everett returned to his seat, Lincoln rose and addressed the crowd for exactly two minutes. A condensed passage of his short speech is worth quoting here:

> *We are met to dedicate a portion of that great battlefield as the final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.… It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far, so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us….*

Here in a few words the purpose of the monument is sealed. On a specific occasion a contract was entered into, a covenant was made. Future generations will remember "not what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

The speech was so short that the photographer assigned to document it did not get his equipment set up in time to take a picture. And the contrast between Everett's rhetorical might and Lincoln's sparse words left the audience more than disappointed. The following day, the *Chicago Times* wrote, "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dishwater utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States."

Although Congress formed the Lincoln Memorial Association in 1867, just three years after Lincoln was slain, it was not until 1914 that Henry Bacon's design was approved and construction began. But when the structure was dedicated May 30, 1922, it contained the majestic, nineteen-foot-high figure of a seated Lincoln by Daniel Chester French. Carved from 28 blocks of white Georgia marble, the statue presented a Lincoln very different from the one who delivered the two-minute speech so criticized in 1863. French's Lincoln was the healer of the nation, the wise forefather who endured the greatest crisis in the young nation's history; the emancipator of the slaves, whose words, now carved in stone, would hold the nation to its obligation to justice. No American monument thus far created in our capital or anywhere else holds such authority.

More than a part of that authority is derived from its site as the terminus of the landfill that extended L'Enfant's great axis from the Capitol outward. French's Lincoln faces the Capitol, reflecting to the present the covenant of the past. Here, on the platform of the memorial steps, one hundred years after Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address, Martin Luther King, Jr. stood and held a mirror to the nation. No other place could possibly have served as the touchstone of a nation's conscience as he spoke these words:

> *Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.*

Here was the covenant. Here was what Lincoln could not possibly have imagined, but what his words at Gettysburg hoped for: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us…." The contract entered into at Gettysburg was made manifest in the stones of the Lincoln Memorial—an architectural stage set for the transformation of the Republic through its own concept of justice. Make good on your covenant, he told the nation. Make your actions as real as your words:

> *When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

The recasting of Lincoln and the resurrection of his two-minute address at Gettysburg became the symbol of a nation's promise of justice. The ability of a place to create such powerful symbols allows them to act as a mirror. The mirror reflects not only a national consciousness, but its very conscience as well. As such, a thread between past and future is revealed, uniting the present with the past, pointing to a hopeful future. This power was not lost on President Obama as he stood facing Lincoln and the site of King's national dream on January 20 and said:

> *And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.*

Opposite: View of the Luxor Obelisk from the Tuileries, on axis with the Champs Élysées. Photograph by author, 1980.



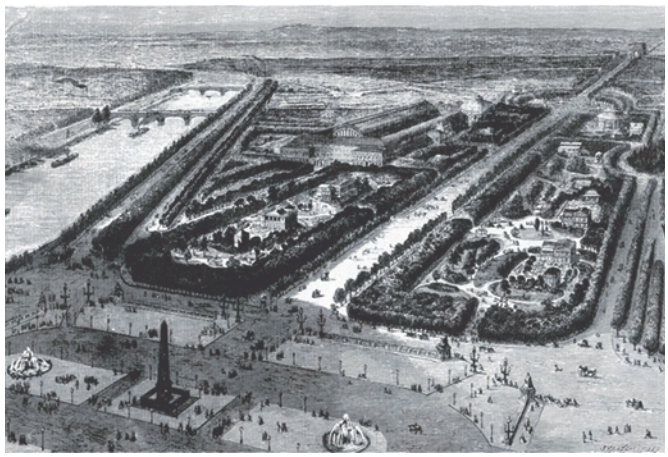
The Re-Covering of Place: Place de la Concorde

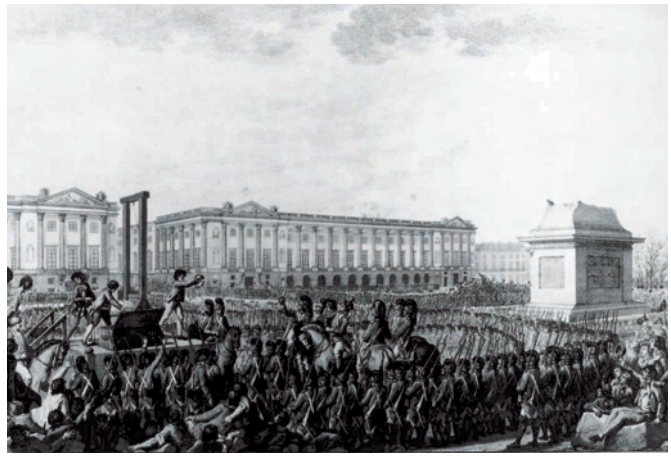
Like a spouse making amends for a grievous act, there are places where the original event has been so camouflaged that it presents an entirely new, fictional, memory. Just to the west of the Jardin des Tuileries, in what is now known as the Place de la Concorde in Paris, an obelisk was erected in 1836. Originally carved from Egyptian granite three millennia before, it had once stood guard along with its twin at a temple entrance built by Ramses II at Luxor. It had been dug out of the sand in 1831 by a French naval engineer named Jean Baptiste Apollinaire Lebas, who subsequently secured permission from the ruler of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, to have it donated to the "people of France."

The obelisk stood 75 feet tall and weighed in at 227 tons. It took two months to get it on board the ship *Luxor*, and another three years before Lebas successfully re-erected it in Paris. On its present base is an inscription describing this heroic feat. The dates 1831–1836 are also significant because they coincide with the establishment of the constitutional monarchy under Louis-Phillipe, which followed the failure of the "July monarchy" of Charles X to secure equilibrium between the fragments of Napoleonic France, the *ancien regime*, and the Jacobin desire for republican government.

This was neither the first nor the only monument to be erected on this Place, and it was not the first time it had been renamed Place de la Concorde.[4] In its most famous incarnation, it had been known as the Place de la Révolution, and had held the guillotine that beheaded more than 1,300 people between 1793 and 1795. Among those publicly executed were King Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, Danton, Robespierre, and even Lavoisier, the father of modern chemistry. The Committee of Public Safety was nothing if not thorough in compiling its list of enemies of the state. Its rate of executions was astonishing: almost two people, every day, for two years. It was said that the smell of blood was so strong that a herd of cattle refused to cross the Place.

The execution of the king came early in this Reign of Terror. On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI, King of France, was strapped face down to a board and beheaded. One eyewitness reported that it took two tries, and that the executioner, Charles Henri Sanson, had ordered a drum roll on the second attempt to muffle the painful cry of the deposed king after the first blade failed to cut clean through.[5] The huge crowd, gathered as collective eye-witness to the end of monarchy, pressed forward as the second blade fell, many with handkerchiefs outstretched to retrieve the last sample of French royal blood.[6]





The origin and later history of this Place is worth knowing. Originally the site of a canal, it had been leveled and the canal partially filled under the direction of André LeNotre, in 1667. The goal then was to extend the central axis of the Jardin des Tuileries to the horizon line at the crest of Butte Chaillot. By 1740, Louis XV had also ordered trees planted along the avenues extending up this slope, creating the Champs Élysées. To commemorate this act of public improvement, an equestrian statue of the king was erected at the center of the new Place.

The statue, however, clearly needed a more dignified home than the existing ill-defined crossroads between the Tuileries and the Champs Élysées. A competition for a design to to enclose the Place was held in 1755. Won by Jacques-Ange Gabriel, the new Place de Louis XV came into form between 1755 and 1774. The memory of the old canal was retained by means of a rectangular boundary channel, chamfered at the corners and breached by six bridges. The equestrian statue became the focus of the Place, situated in its center at the main cross axis at the intersection of the Avenue des Champs Élysées and a new street, the Rue Royal.[7]

Above left: Bird's-eye view, Place de la Concorde, c. 1901.

Above right: Execution of Louis XVI, January 21, 1793. The empty podium on the right had previously supported an equestrian statue of Louis XV. It would have been the last thing the king witnessed before his death. The Hotel Crillon is in the background on the left; its twin in the right background housed the Naval Ministry. Engraving by Berthault, presented to the National Convention 1793. Source: Museum of the French Revolution, Paris, 83.319.

Opposite: Place de la Concorde, Paris. View to the Madeleine. Hotel Crillon is on the left. Photograph by Eric Pouhier, December 2005.

It was ironic, if not proper, that Louis XV's son would meet his fate on a platform erected just to the east of the place where this commemorative statue had once been installed (at the time, it had been removed and only its pedestal remained). But after the revolution, attempts were made to erase these memories. The Place de la Révolution suffered a series of transformations and several changes of name: Place de la Concorde, Place Louis XV again, Place Louis XVI, Place de la Chartres, and finally Place de la Concorde once more—with the obelisk to symbolize the end of a troubled era. The architect Jacques Hittorf completed the last redesign by flanking the obelisk with fountains and adding statues at each of its eight corners to represent other large French cities: Lille, Strasbourg, Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Brest, and Rouen. Thus, the Place de la Concorde was established as the center of a new, unified France.

Given the events that occurred on this site, it is unclear why an obelisk would have seemed appropriate. What was its significance for France or for Louis Phillipe? Did the hieroglyphs that no one could read contain information important to a clearer understanding of the concept of constitutional monarchy? Did Louis Phillipe imagine descent not from the House of Bourbon but from Egyptian pharaohs? Was there hope that in a new secularized France conditioned by Rousseau and Voltaire's Enlightenment an ancient Egyptian sun god, Ra, long in exile, would look favorably upon the beleaguered nation?

The answer to all is, of course, no. The obelisk was selected precisely because it represented nothing specific beyond its palpable antiquity and its similitude to objects arranged forcefully in Rome by the Counter Reformation Pope Sixtus V. If the positioning of obelisks of great



antiquity could represent the triumph of the Roman Church over the pagan world, why could not the erection of an obelisk in Paris represent a New France? Long emptied of its original symbolic value, the obelisk, in its authentic lack of authenticity, represented the fiction that France, and especially this Place, could overcome the memory of horror. Its placement and the renaming of the space represented no event, no person, no deed. Rather, in this erasure, the Place was situated in its immediate present, pointing to a hopeful future.

Nowhere in the Place de la Concorde today does the memory of its earlier incarnation reside. No sign points to its variegated past. It is, in short, not a monument to the recovery of place, but to the covering over of events that the France of Louis Phillipe would rather we forget.

Places of Recovery

In the recovery of place, a specific memory must be projected. Such memories themselves do not of necessity make a place; nor do they reside entirely latent within it. The monument must take its place within a public framework that securely threads its course between past and future.

What point is there in simply looking backwards? The memory of a person, or a deed, or an event that we believe important must be projected forward. The monument or memorial is thus always a projection that seeks to obligate the future to a specific lesson. To do otherwise is to lock the future into an eternal present within which nothing is to be learned.

Notes

1. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," Kurt Forster and Diane Ghirardo, trans., *Oppositions*, 25 (Fall 1982).
2. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 15–17.
3. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, trans., *Sophocles*, Vol. II, "Antigone" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1994).
4. Napoleon had made an earlier attempt to rename it. But without its complete refounding, without a complete purge of its former self, it could not be fully reborn as a symbol of a new beginning.
5. Henry Sanson, ed., *Memoirs of the Sansons*, Vol. II, (London: 1876).
6. David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, year), p. 147.
7. The composition was completed after a new church, the Madeleine was commissioned in 1764 to terminate the Rue Royal in axial dialogue with the statue of the king. At the north end, flanking the Rue Royal, two magnificent identical stone buildings were also constructed to reinforce the strength of its north side and isolate the statue in double dialogue with the Avenue des Champs Élysées and the Madeleine.

On Memory, Trauma, Public Space, Monuments, and Memorials

Julian Bonder



Society is the miracle of moving out of oneself.
—Emmanuel Levinas[1]

As events and circumstances unveil in the present, a memorial's destiny is to recall the past and provide conditions for new responses in the future. As our psycho-political and ethical companions, memorials should help us consider trauma and rethink and reactualize the past. They should encourage critical consciousness, committed memory-work, and the possibility of engaging with the world through transformative practices.

The word "memorial" corresponds to "commemoration"—"something that serves to preserve memory or knowledge of an individual or event"; but it also corresponds to "memento"—"something that serves to warn or remind with regard to conduct or future events." Is it possible to conceive of memorials that focus on that warning as the key element of concern connecting the past and the future? Can we build memorials that, while addressing events and honoring victims and survivors, contribute to acts of remembrance, demand proactive engagement, and envision a better world?

Cultures of Memory

Since the 1980s, Western societies have developed a fascination with memory. In its many forms, memory has become a marker of global culture: in historiography, psychoanalysis, visual and performing arts, and media—and particularly in urban studies, public art, landscape design, and architecture. The pursuit of memory is evident in the way real and mythic pasts are re-presented, remembered, or forgotten, marking contemporary politics and global culture.

Perhaps, as the literary critic Andreas Huyssen has suggested, "the obsessive pursuit of memory may be an indication that our thinking and living temporality are undergoing a significant shift, as modernity [has] brought about a real compression of time and space yet also expanded horizons of time and space beyond the local."[2]

In a not so distant past, the discourse of history guaranteed the relative stability of past events. Built space (museums, monuments, palaces, etc.) represented material traces of this historical past, and history was the background of modernity. But, according to Huyssen: "today





we think of the past as memory without borders rather than national history within borders; today memory is understood as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging to the present."[3]

An important aspect of this culture of memory is the way the struggle for justice and human rights and the remembrance of traumatic events—with the Holocaust as a paradigmatic example—have been coupled, as nations seek to create democratic societies in the wake of mass exterminations, apartheids, segregation, military dictatorships, and totalitarianism.[4]

The construction of memorials and museums and the ever-increasing growth of memorial acts across the globe is significant in their sheer number, as well as the significance they hold for affected communities. Examples include the creation of official and community-based memorials and museums, the emergence of spontaneous memorials in places of recent tragedy, pilgrimages to sites of memory, and other commemorative practices.

Though the culture of memory has spread around the globe and the political uses of memory are varied, at its core the use and abuse of memory remain tied to official histories of specific communities, nations, and states. Yet, while residues of mythical meta-narratives, histories of victors, and self-aggrandizing monuments, which served in the nineteenth century to legitimize nation-states, may still be present, the cultures to which they speak have become infiltrated by repressed local or group memories; they have been subverted by forgotten micro-histories, by the appearance of vanquished others, by those who bear witness to personal and historic traumas, and by the transformation of official monuments into monuments other.

Tomb and Monument

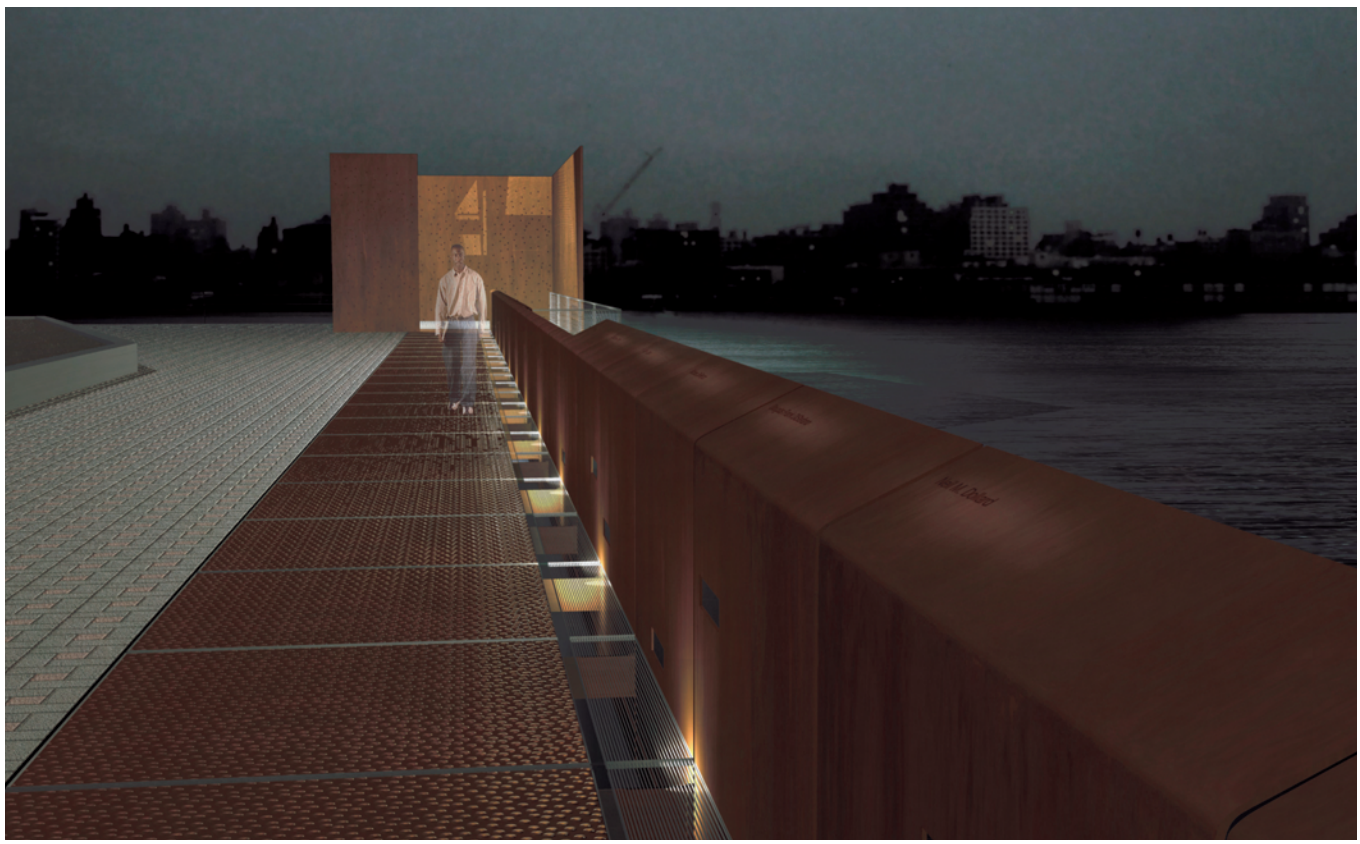
When we find a mound in the woods, six feet by three feet, raised to a pyramidal form by means of a spade, we become serious and something in us says, someone was buried here…That's architecture.

—Adolf Loos[5]

The Viennese architect Adolf Loos claimed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that only a small part of architecture belongs to art—the sepulcher and the monument. What Loos meant, according to Massimo Cacciari, was that art takes place in the idea of the sepulcher and monument, the idea of a place of exception that life has led up to, but that transcends or reopens life's function.[6] More important to Loos was the ethical function: that a confrontation with death prevents us from going on with the usual business of life, that it carries us to another place, a place, usually submerged, within the self. What matters is not who lies buried there, but that a human being lies buried there.

The art historian Alois Riegl has observed, "A monument in its oldest and most original sense is a human

Above and opposite: The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University, Worcester, MA: Julian Bonder, architect. On a pivotal site between the university's main campus and the historic Woodland Street Neighborhood, the project combined extensive renovation of an 1899 Colonial Revival residence and construction of a new library/reading room and memorial garden. The project did not seek to represent the Holocaust, but to make room for echoes of the past in an environment of humane reflection, study, and dialogue. Through architecture, it presents a mode of being in sharp contrast with the story at its core. Photos by Tom Lingner.



creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events…alive in the mind of future generations."[7] Instead of a form, a shape, or an image, monumentality may well be a quality: the quality that some places or objects have to make us recall, evoke, think, and perceive something beyond themselves. As a place of memory-work and common remembrance, a monument or memorial is produced to be historically referential.[8] Yet, as embodiments of art in the public realm, their value is not just derived from the artwork, but from their ability to direct attention to larger issues. Their significance lies in the public dimension and the "dialogic character of memorial space," as Holocaust scholar James Young has aptly noted—the space between the stories told, or the events remembered, and the act of remembrance (memory-work) they help frame.

with Loos, it could be argued that memorial spaces that deal with public trauma may present a difficult yet interesting challenge, for they are places of exception, which life, or the destruction of life, has led up to. These places of exception/memorials can also function as mourning sites, as when the traces of catastrophe are present, or when tombstones are absent. Time is the matter. A monument's ethical function arises from its capacity for establishing dialogues with, and presenting questions about, the past (and the future).

These places of exception often become surrogate environments upon which political, ethical, and artistic concerns are projected (and fought over). In addition, the ways artists and architects frame their positions vis-à-vis "monuments" and "monumentality," the memories and audiences they encounter, and the actual sites of memory

Above: Hoboken, New Jersey, September 11 Memorial: Wodiczko + Bonder. One of four finalists in the competition for the Memorial at Pier A Park on the Hudson River, the design proposed alterations to the pier's southern edge, which was directly exposed to the trauma of the Trade Center towers' collapse. This edge would be remade to bear and reveal traces of this memory, establishing a relation, across the water, between the site and Lower Manhattan, and emphasizing the flow of attention, on that day and every day—and of memory and healing. A key element was a path, linking spaces for commemoration, contemplation, awareness, and silence.

encompass specific approaches to design and public space.[9] To work on these sites of memory raises issues and questions that are not merely architectural but also moral, ethical, and philosophical. Among them are the way history, memory, and trauma will be "appropriated," "re-presented," and "inhabited."

Roles/Attitudes/Positions

How do we convey the critical significance of design in conceiving and creating democratic public spaces and democratic memorial spaces? How can we elaborate on the ethical implications of Hannah Arendt's description of the public sphere as "the space of appearance"? How do we position ourselves as architects, artists, teachers, and students when working on such projects?

The architectural historian Alberto Pérez-Gómez has suggested that the architect's historic role has been to create a theater for memory capable of embodying truths that make it possible to affirm life and contemplate a better future.[10] Our work often lies in unveiling—uncovering as well as anchoring—histories and memories. It is in the face of catastrophes, historic traumas, and human injustices that the architect's and the artist's roles become increasingly complex, problematic—and necessary.

Yet we need to be wary of instant metaphors and artificial meanings, because often (and especially in the wake of catastrophe) a redemptive aesthetic emerges in affected communities alongside public acts of commemoration aimed at creating regenerative spaces. The risk is that this kind of aesthetic asks us to consider art as a correction of life, that art may repair inherently damaged or valueless experience. As Leo Bersani has written, "The catastrophes of history [appear to] matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art."[11]

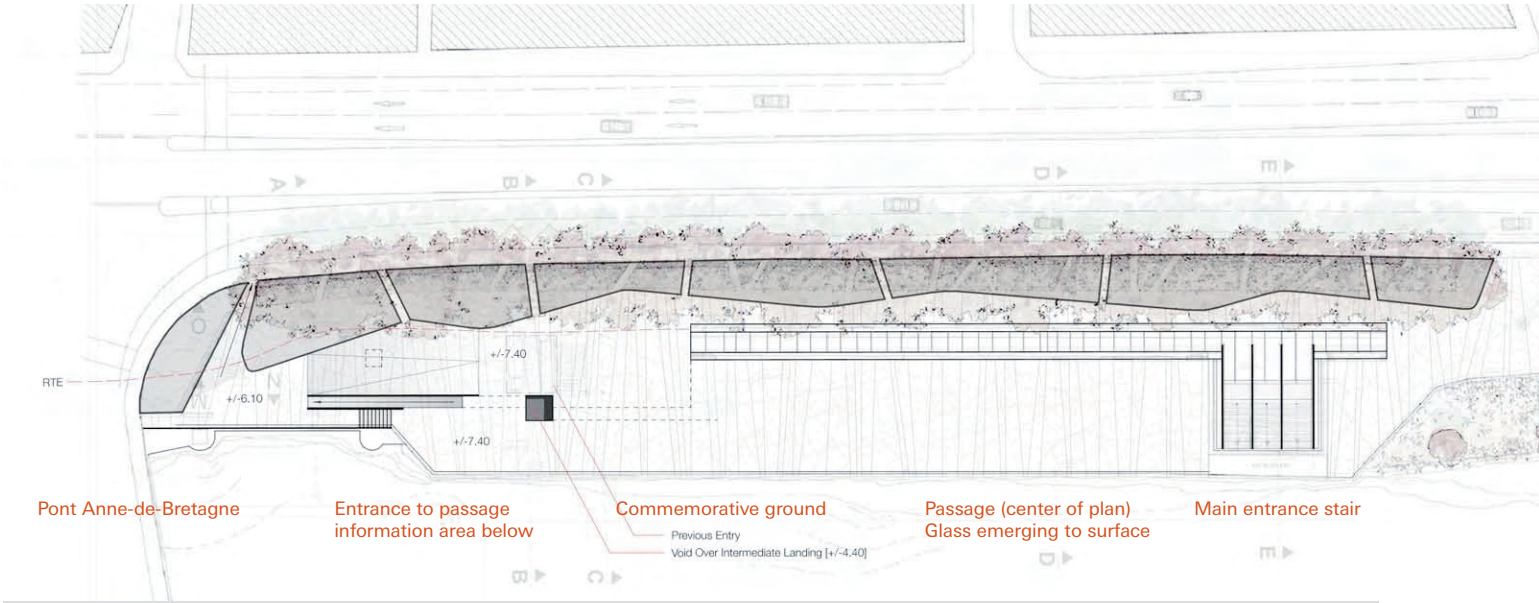
Neither art nor architecture can compensate for public trauma or mass murder. What artistic and architectural practices can do is establish a dialogical relation with those events and help frame the process toward understanding. Hence, it seems important to conceive of these projects as roadmaps, as spatial topographies, condensing voices, opening spaces for study, re-presentation, and dialogue with a measure of spatial clarity and architectural depth. To do so, it is crucial to inhabit the uninhabitable distance between ourselves and those events. These projects need to be understood as questions—which put us in question, in the sense offered by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas—while offering the prospect that the chronological limbo, the no-man's land, the space between the tomb of memory and the womb of history, may be traversed and illuminated with generational piety, intellectual honesty, and ethical respect.

After an enormous eruption of art, museums, and memorials based on both figural and abstract representations of death, despair, destruction, pain, and horror, new attitudes may now be possible. Wary of the expectation that meaning can be generated instantaneously, these will acknowledge the limitations of our practices and the impossibility of representing traumatic experiences. And while recognizing our inability to propose meaningful answers, they may sustain the dilemmas of representation, the necessity for more questions, and a resistance to closure. Such projects require a persistent attempt to work within (and to transform) the public sphere; they involve establishing clear critical-ethical frameworks in which to position ourselves as engaged witnesses; and they demand precise, dialogic, and committed attitudes toward design, toward techniques and materials, toward sites of memory, history, and the voices of others. As Levinas has suggested, those others, who are not an object of comprehension but an enigma, need to be present in our democratic public spaces.[12]

Philosophers like Giorgio Agamben have theorized the position of the witness as the basis of ethico-political relations insofar as the witness answers to the suffering of others without usurping their place.[13] Witnessing is a way of seeing and listening that requires an acceptance of vulnerability. It requires a renunciation of the will to mastery, because, as the trauma theorist Cathy Caruth has argued, to bear witness to suffering is to bear witness to incomprehensibility.[14] Since by definition the event that caused psychic trauma—a wound inflicted on the mind—was so overwhelming that it could not be fully known or experienced at the time, the victim suffers from incomprehension. For the witness to claim to know the experience is to betray the victim. This poses a problem for representations that want to respond to the suffering of others. Traumatic suffering creates a need for a new kind of witnessing—what Caruth called the witnessing of impossibility, the impossibility of comprehending the trauma.[15]

These views raise important questions for design. How can we make room for the voices of those others to "appear" in public without attempting to speak for them? What about those who can speak—those who can bear witness, and those who cannot—or those who don't have the possibility to appear, or who we painfully know will not re-appear? How can we welcome those others who address us from the deep wells of history and from the present memories of our democratic societies?[16]

Such questions call for a conscious and humble

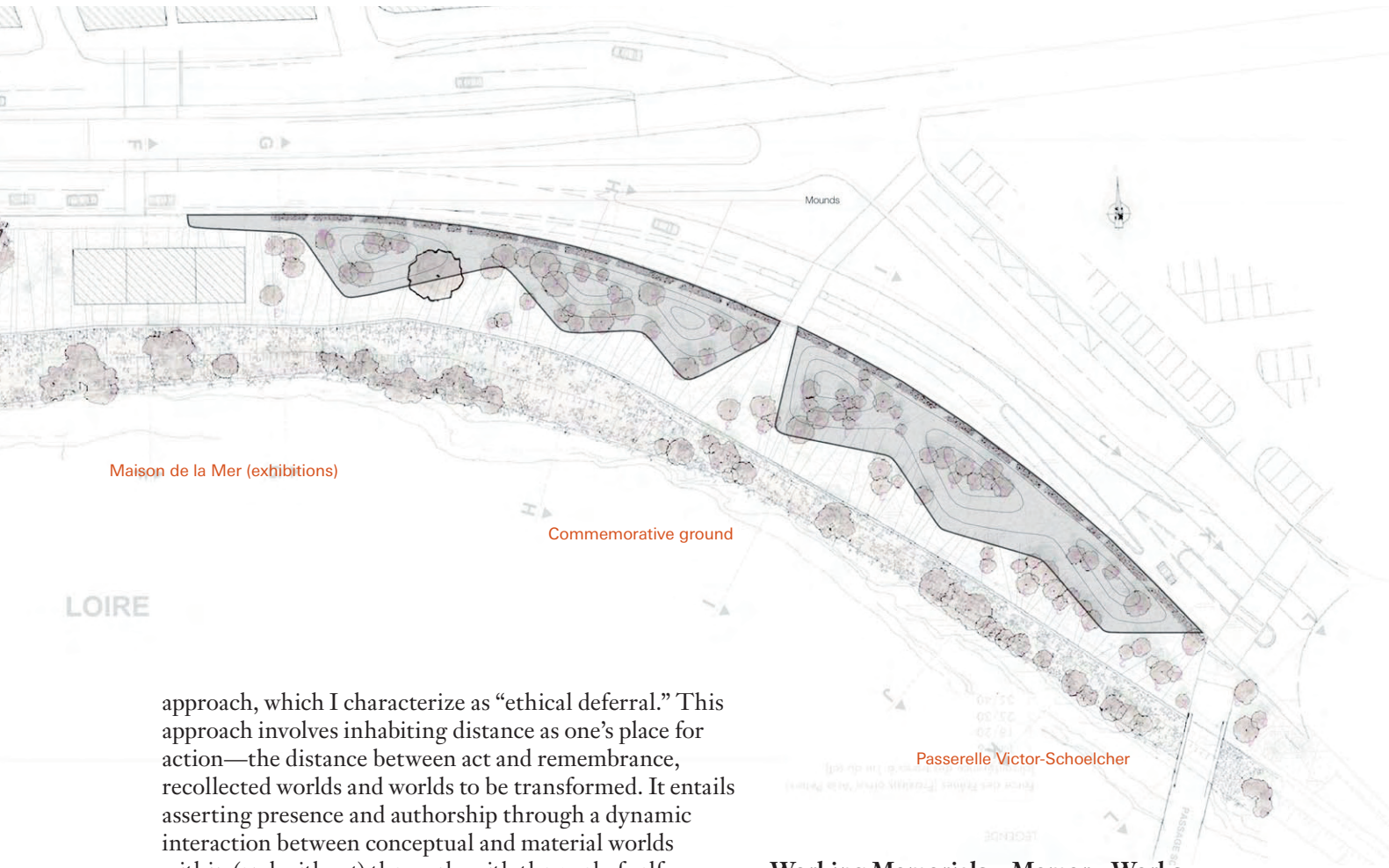


Mémorial à l'abolition de l'esclavage (Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery), Nantes, France

Located along the Loire riverfront, this project by the author and Krzysztof Wodiczko will constitute a memory of slavery and the slave trade for new generations who may have difficulty fathoming their historical reality. As a working memorial, it will provide space for remembering slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity, commemorating all forms of resistance to slavery, celebrating the historic act of abolition, and evoking present-day struggles against new forms of slavery. Commissioned after an invited competition by the City of Nantes and its mayor, Jean-Marc Ayrault, it will transform elements of the existing Quai de la Fosse, where French slave ships once docked. Through its spatial and symbolic link to the Palais de Justice, it will emphasize Nantes' commitment to human rights.

Visitors to the memorial will descend to a long underground passage between the nineteenth-century embankment and the twentieth-century concrete structures that replaced it. These found and transformed spaces, which suggest the confinement of maritime transport and provide an uncanny proximity to the water, will convey the emotional force of housing and transporting slaves. Like a great spade, a slanted glass plate, representing the rupture of abolition, will slice down into this space, uncovering and exposing its volumes and shapes and bringing out the hull-like foundations of the river embankment. Selected texts of the abolitionist movement—by Victor Schoelcher, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the Abbé Grégoire, among others—will be inscribed along its length, alternating with areas of plate that will be sandblasted, mirrored, and altered with other processes. The passage will be accessed at both ends: on the west through a narrow stair, and on the east through a monumental opening where the text of the 1848 Act of Abolition will be inscribed.

The magnitude of the slave trade and the memory of slave-ship dockings will be further commemorated above ground. Between Pont Anne de Bretagne and Passarelle Victor Schoelcher plaques will be set into excavated portions of the Quai, listing the names of the 3,829 French slave-ship expeditions (of which 1,745—nearly half—sailed from Nantes). The plaques will note the dates of their departures and the numbers of captives they took (along with the number lost in transport), as recorded in the archives of the city. The memorial will include an information area where visitors may orient themselves to its elements, including a concise presentation of slavery, the slave trade, and its abolition. Along the passage, a space acting like a "situation room" will document present-day struggles against slavery and the slave trade — a feature reinforced by a responsively programmed system of illumination over the Loire. Beyond these instructive and symbolic aspects, the memorial will also provide space for testimony and for special meetings during the biannual Nantes human rights forum.



approach, which I characterize as "ethical deferral." This approach involves inhabiting distance as one's place for action—the distance between act and remembrance, recollected worlds and worlds to be transformed. It entails asserting presence and authorship through a dynamic interaction between conceptual and material worlds within (and without) the work, with the goal of self-effacement. It means attempting to frame and illuminate presences through materials beyond materiality, through language beyond representation, through art beyond art, through space beyond space.

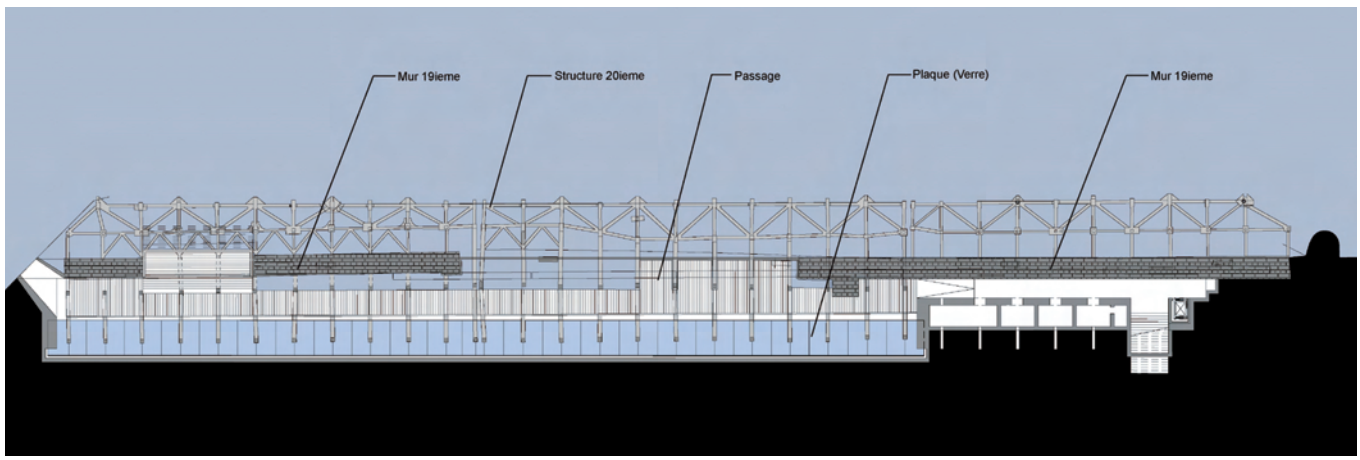
This is the attitude I have tried to bring to my memorial projects, and to collaborative work with the artist and MIT visual-arts professor Krzysztof Wodiczko. Images of several of these projects accompany this article. The approach involves understanding art, architecture, and landscape as nonrepresentational mediums—yet mediums capable of shedding light on a limited set of truths in a space between the questions, the publics, and the instruments of our practices.[17] It involves contributing to the construction of a democratic and agonistic society, as authors, designers, architects, and sentient subjects, through an ethics of deference to the "other"—that is, "moving out of ourselves," following Levinas—when proposing transformative actions in the public sphere.

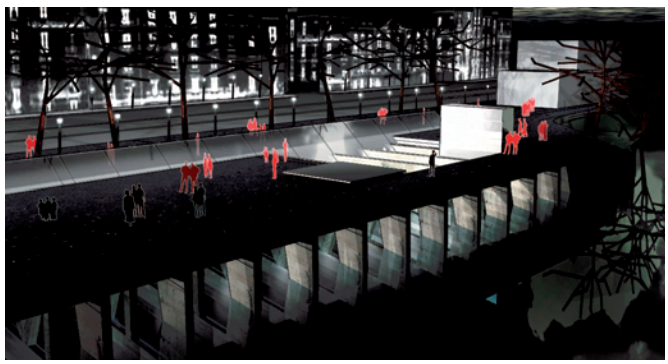
Working Memorials—Memory-Works

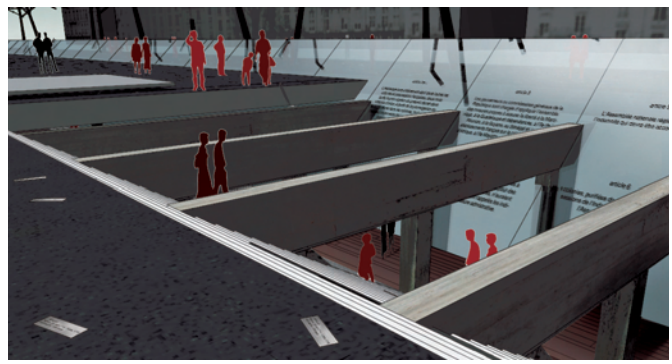
Memorial, memento, monument, like "monitor," or a guide, suggest not only commemoration, but also to be aware, to mind and remind, to warn, advise, and call for action. We think of these as "working memorials" that invite collective engagement. They are not projects for silent and symbolic sites of memory but agents for active dialogue. Their premise is that a memorial that truly speaks to traumatic memories—not only of the past, but of today—should come to exist through a process of engagement with the communities who share a vital interest in it.

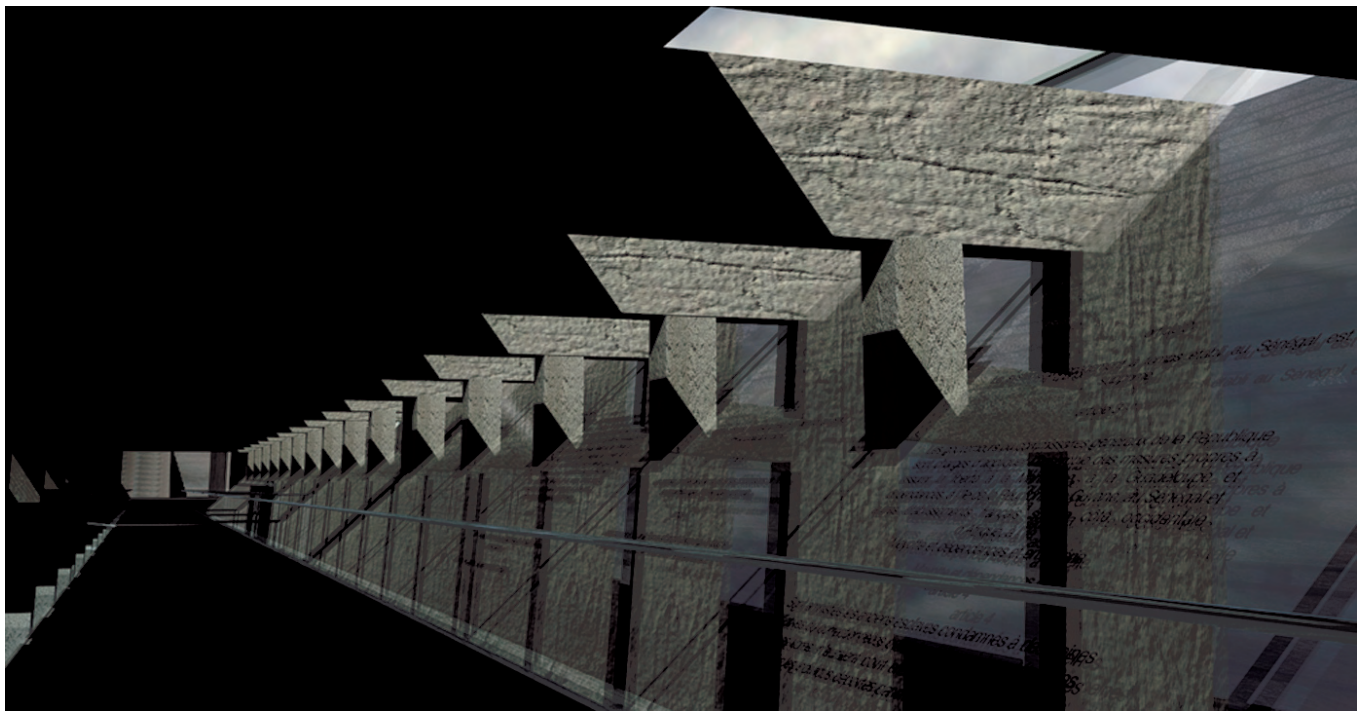
While addressing a plurality of publics and generations, memorials should become site-specific vessels for thought,

Above: Plan of the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery, Nantes, France: Wodiczko + Bonder. The site is across from the Palace of Justice designed by Jean Nouvel. Construction is scheduled to begin by the end of 2009, with a targeted completion in 2011.


Mur 19ieme
Structure 20ieme
Passage
Plaque (Verre)
Mur 19ieme







for transformative working-through, for healing, and for pedagogic discourses. They should articulate "response-ability" vis-à-vis the past and the future. Even when built without such a conscious intention, they should be perceived as having this monitory and critical function.

Yet most memorials are inactive and incapacitated. To quote Krzysztof Wodiczko: "Monuments and memorials, in their speechlessness and stillness, look strangely human, while traumatized humans, in their motionlessness and silence, may appear strangely monumental. Speechless survivors living in their shadows face the blank facades and blind eyes of our public buildings and memorials, those speechless witnesses to present-day injustices."[18]



Notes

1, Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and Spirit," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 9.

2. Andreas Huyssen, "Introduction," in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

3. Huyssen suggests that national memory debates are always shot through with the effects of global media and their focus on themes such as genocide and ethnic cleansing, migration and minority rights, victimization and accountability. However different and site-specific these causes may be, this does suggest that globalization and the strong reassessment of the respective national, regional, or local past will have to be thought together. Huyssen, "Introduction," in *Present Pasts*, p. 4.

4. See Theodor Adorno's 1963 speech, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" Translated and reprinted in Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

5. Adolf Loos, "Architecture," in *Speaking into the Void: Collected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

6. Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), chapter 19, pp. 195–98.

7. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin," Kurt Foster and Diane Ghirardo, trans., in *Oppositions*, 25; quoted in Tony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 177.

8. Namely, their material presence is meant to turn invisible, transparent, bridging the individual memory-work and the events or people they recall. James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 12.

9. Maya Lin called her Vietnam Memorial an "antimonument"; James Young, when describing the practices of Horst Hohiesel and Jochen Gerz, presents their work as "countermonuments"; Krzysztof Wodiczko talks about "fearless memorials," operations that contribute to healing through "fearless speech-acts" in the public sphere. I would like to think of these memorial projects as site-specific dialogues on memory: "ethical-monuments."

10. See the essay by Alberto Pérez-Gómez in Richard Henriquez, *Memory Theatre*, edited by Howard Shubert (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1993; distributed by MIT Press).

11. See Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Jewish Modern Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) p. 144.

12. Levinas, "Ethics and Spirit."

13. See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

14. Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," in Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

15. Ibid., p. 10.

16. As an enigma of a face that resists possession and cannot be fully known. See Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), p. 83.

17. Significant examples include Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial and George Henri Pingusson's Memorial to the Martyrs of the Deportation in Paris. We can also mention our attempts to contribute to this discussion via our proposal for the Hoboken September 11 Memorial, in which the ground responds to events in the world that bear the stamp of terror; for the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, France, in which the site becomes radically transformed and includes spaces which serve to discuss and debate present-day slavery; and in my design work on Holocaust memorials, which attempt to investigate these questions by constructing responsive sites of memory.

18. From conversations with Krzysztof Wodiczko during our work for the Hoboken September 11 Memorial, the Memorial for the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, France, and Babi Yar Park in Denver, Colorado.

Above: Present condition of the Quai de la Fosse showing the space between the nineteenth-century embankment and the twentieth-century concrete structure. This found space will be transformed to contain the below-round portions of the memorial. Photo by Arcadis.

Opposite: Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery, Nantes, France: Wodiczko + Bonder. Top: below-ground plan. Middle left: rendered night view from Pont Anne de Bretagne. Middle right: rendered view at main entry. Bottom: rendered view along the below-ground gallery.

Showing Us the Way It Was

Photographs by Curtis Hamilton

American landscape photographs taken in the middle of the last century might show us pristine subjects without, say, parking lots and visitor centers (think Ansel Adams): pure nature or something like that. Some decades later we might be shown nature marred by tire tracks. Criticism of those who were responsible for taking care of the land did not seem to be the purpose of the later pictures. Scale and images of the way things really looked seemed to be the goal.

The photographs reproduced here, taken last fall in northern Alberta, Canada, by the New York photographer Curtis Hamilton, clearly offer reality: this is the way the places he saw looked. His subjects are fields of "oil sands," and two interesting remarks can be made about them. One is that the U.S. can get more oil from this place in Canada than it does from any other place in the world—more oil than comes from the Persian Gulf for instance. So the news is good? On the other hand, Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, a senior attorney with the National Resources Defense Council in Washington, D.C., says of this source of oil, "It's one of the most destructive projects on earth."[1]

So what do the photographs reproduced here say? One of them may be worth a thousand words, but a picture's message is always somewhat different from that of the words. We can give more careful attention to good photographs whose meanings are not explained by texts and read good texts with much more care when they are not decorated with photographs. (And yet here you are being told about the photographs you're going to see; perhaps an introduction is acceptable but explanatory captions are to be avoided.) The bad news about these fields gave Curtis his motivation to travel to Alberta and gives his remarkable work the energy it clearly has. The photographs are "telling" but what precisely are they, or other photographs of place unpropped up by texts, actually saying besides "this is the way it really was"?

— *Cervin Robinson*

Note

1. Ian Austen, "The Costly Compromises of Oil From Sand," NYTimes.com, January 6, 2009.





























ReTooling

Daniel Solomon



History granted to the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt a clear and unambiguous sense of national purpose, first to recover from the Depression, then to win World War II. Some of us remember our mothers and grandmothers receiving the same simple explanation for the abrupt actions of train conductors, gas station attendants, dry cleaners, grocers, and many others, "Lady, there is a war on."

In the early months of the Obama administration, the conversation about a new sense of national purpose has begun, and there is much in it that starts to define a similarly clear and unambiguous mission. Two articles in the *New York Times* at the end of 2008 (David Brooks's December 9 op-ed piece, "This Old House," and Michael Pollan's October 12 magazine essay, "Farmer in Chief") reinforce one another, and we would like to add to their arguments. From different perspectives, their articles point toward a single idea that can shape policies in fields from agriculture to housing to transportation to science policy to banking and education.

The idea that is emerging from many sources in different forms is to retool America—its cities, its industry, its infrastructure, and its landscape—so it can flourish in the post-oil economy of the mid-twenty-first century. The new economy will bring changes as profound for this century as those brought by the railroad in the nineteenth or the automobile in the twentieth. Addressing them will require a ringing sense of purpose that simultaneously addresses global warming, public health, economic recovery, and our quality of life. It will give new meaning to many forms of work—not least to architecture, town planning, and the design of landscapes.

New Deal Precedents

The stunning successes and the equally stunning failures of New Deal programs during an earlier time of crisis provide many lessons for the present. The National Parks, libraries, bridges, dams, and schools executed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration represent some of the most enduring and

cherished public works ever conceived in America. The success of these programs was measured by the number of jobs created and by the skill, quality of effort, and use of talent marshaled in creating works of lasting value. WPA architecture evolved from and made use of the finest achievements and best talent of the 1920s. It was new and bold, but not a rupture with our history or our communities, and it was judged not by how much or how little was accomplished but by how good, how beautiful, and how lasting it was. If sustainability is our contemporary measure of success, then these great works succeed on our terms as well as those of the 1930s.

All that said, our firm (WRT/Solomon E.T.C.) has spent years working to correct the long-term failure of another ambitious New Deal program, the Public Housing Act of 1937. In President Obama's years as a community organizer in Chicago he had a vivid, firsthand experience of the nightmare that resulted from that legislation. Like the great public works of CCC and WPA, the public housing movement was motivated by the noblest and most progressive ideals of the New Deal. But public housing was conceived in a different spirit from the works of those agencies. It was the victim of a lethal combination of hubris and parsimony—radical ideas, mimicking European utopianism, executed on the cheap so that masses of America's poor could be concentrated in projects whose form and character were sharply different from their former communities, and which were doomed to fall apart. The identification of people by race, class, and unfamiliar building type was a policy disaster, and created a social scar from which our cities are still recovering.

Fortunately, housing authorities and a generation of housing providers and architects have learned from this blunder. To a large degree, HUD's HOPE VI program is based upon an understanding of what went wrong and how to redress it. Unfortunately, HOPE VI has been underfunded throughout its fifteen-year life, and its buildings are still too cheap and frail. Nevertheless, the relative success of this policy is a major achievement.

American housing now faces new challenges, deeply entwined with the energy crisis and economic health. Most Americans and most American workers cannot afford housing in the great urban centers that are served by public transportation and that should be the locus of economic activity. The auto-dependent suburban sprawl created through postwar economic policy is now the default position for planning our city regions. There are no policy tools to address the growing disparity between the costs of producing housing, particularly housing that does not depend upon automobiles, and what middle-class people can afford.

Providers of housing are trapped in a miasma of local, state and federal regulations accreted over visionless decades. Rules about fire safety, handicapped access, energy use, parking, traffic generation, historic preservation, income and age restrictions, social equity, and a dozen other worthy causes create a strangling labyrinth of contradictions, the product of which is a paralysis that makes urban middle-class housing in the service of the post-oil metropolis all but impossible. The many arms of government have become obstacles to change, not the instruments of its realization. This is the very inverse of the New Deal. We do not argue for deregulation, but for a rational and purposeful framework for regulation. It is not hard to imagine how every well-intended, single-focus public policy could be better served within an integrated vision, free of contradictions, articulated by our new leadership. The complications, cross purposes, delays, administrative costs, and inefficacy that infect so many sectors of our economy represent here, too, the lack of a powerfully articulated, all-embracing national purpose.

New Deal for the Twenty-First Century

Creating the post-oil economy and the post-oil culture in America is an imperative as stark as the need to win World War II. It is a need that should inform everything: the size and location of schools, the kinds of crops grown near cities, land use and density controls, assistance for urban workforce housing, and transportation in all its manifestations, to name a few.

For the presidency of Barack Obama to realize its great promise he will need to deliver us from the age of the specialist, the one-dimensional technocrat, and the single-issue lobbyist. The institutional structures of governance and policy that he must surmount are analogous to medical curricula, which churn out specialists in knees or the pancreas but do not address the full complexity of human health.

It has been said that the tide of battle turned during 1942 because Winston Churchill unleashed the full fury of the English language on the Axis powers. How different the policy landscape might be if the eloquence of our new President could give purpose to the work of this generation of Americans.

Opposite: A portion of the WPA mural *City Life*, by Victor Arnautoff, inside San Francisco's Coit Tower.

A Tale of Two Points

Ian Baldwin



In 2004, New York's bid for the 2012 Olympics put an unlikely spotlight on two coarse-grained patches of Queens. Hunters Point, facing midtown Manhattan across the East River, was to be the Olympic Village. The Olympic Stadium, hastily relocated from Manhattan's West Side, found a proposed new site next to Shea Stadium in Willets Point.

Both Hunters and Willets Points are low-slung industrial landscapes marked by cycles of use and abandonment, bordered by rails, asphalt, and ragged shorelines. Both host New York's back-of-house economy: auto repair, light industry, warehousing, parking for fleets of trucks and buses. Both are a quick trip from Manhattan via the main highways to Long Island or the number seven subway line. And both typify the urban potential lying fallow in the outer boroughs.

These two massive redevelopments, Mayor Michael Bloomberg declared in 2004, would come to Queens whether or not the Olympics did. Five years later, in the wake of the unsuccessful Olympic bid, in greatly reconfigured form they have reemerged.

"The Valley of Ashes"

Willets Point lies at the northern end of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. It is the site of the legendary ash dumps described in *The Great Gatsby*. It was also home to World's Fairs in 1939 and 1964. A memory of those events is still present in the elevated subway station at Willets Point Boulevard that was expanded to serve them, and in the vast parking lots and wide boardwalk ramps that still handle crowds destined for baseball games or the U.S. Open tennis championships. Just to the west is LaGuardia Airport. Every few minutes a jet passes overhead, low enough for spectators at the



baseball and tennis stadia to count the tires on its landing gear. Just to the northeast is the bustling Asian-dominated center of Flushing.

In the early 1960s, the Whitestone Expressway absorbed the bridge carrying Willets Point Boulevard over the Flushing River, truncating the boulevard after seven blocks and creating a cul-de-sac neighborhood. Subway maps began to show the name of the elevated stop only as Willets Point. But a more evocative name for the area is the Iron Triangle, a reference to the neighborhood's businesses—block after block of auto body and repair shops, junkyards and parts suppliers. On the eastern half of the point, just beyond the tall reeds that grow on the banks of the river, are an iron works, a gravel yard, and a few large wholesalers.

The 225 to 260 businesses here employ at least 1,300 people. Willets Point Boulevard teems with cars, moving slowly to navigate the scrum of pedestrians, vehicles parked every which way, and enormous potholes full of dark oily water. Shop signs are everywhere, a riot of fonts and colors above gaping dark interiors. On a typical day, men in caps, hooded sweatshirts, and work boots sit, stand, talk, and work in the open. The smell of paint thinner and oil is everywhere, and particularly dirty jobs such as spray-painting may take place in the middle of the street.

When I visited the area last winter, Shea stadium, for 44 seasons the home of the Mets, was being dismantled. A modified excavator jabbed at it with a giant yellow arm, coaxing off chunks of concrete, which fell with a slow rumble and a roll of dust. Next to this, workers put finishing touches

Above: On Willets Point Boulevard, an auto shop is fashioned from shipping containers.

Opposite: Map of Queens, showing the locations of Hunters Point South and Willets Point.





on a the new Mets stadium (currently called CitiField). It is a touchstone for the city's development plans, but even the most optimistic schedule will see at least a year of coexistence with the old Willets Point. On opening day in April, Mets fans shuffled up 126th Street from the elevated station. On their left was the grand staircase entry to the neotraditional, brick-clad stadium; on their right was a continuous line of low garages behind broken-down cars and steel shutters.

Above right: The Long Island Rail Road's Long Island City Yards. Once the LIRR's main terminus, it now holds a few deisel trains during the day and provides limited passenger service.
Above left: CitiField, the new home of the Mets, rises above the Willets Point streetscape.

To the River's Edge

On its way from Willets Point to Manhattan, the number seven subway skims over the dense, multiethnic neighborhoods of Queens—Corona, Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Sunnyside, Woodside—before reaching Long Island City. Here, the elevated line slips underground, stopping at Vernon Boulevard before continuing through the Steinway Tunnels to Grand Central Station and Times Square.

Emerging at Vernon and walking due west, brand new luxury condos peek out above older row houses, apartments, and workshops. At the water's edge, a lush park built around the gantries that once put railcars onto barges offers piers to stroll on and a stunning view of the United Nations, Chrysler, and Empire State Buildings. The raisons d'etre of this spectacular public space are six apartment towers built here from 1997 to the present. Five more are on the way as part of the state-sponsored Queens West development.

Current plans for Hunters Point South would extend this pattern of



development south a few blocks to Newtown Creek, a wide industrial inlet that forms the border between Queens and Brooklyn. Just inland sits the entry plaza for the Queens-Midtown Tunnel. The area is also bordered by a train yard for the Long Island Rail Road. This was once the main terminus of the railroad, where passengers would transfer to waiting ferries, and the yard occupies an area larger than two square blocks. With the creek and the river, it hems Hunters Point South into an isolated triangle of anonymous warehouses and parking lots that unceremoniously mark the end of Long Island.

"New York's Next Great Neighborhood"

In November, the New York City Council voted to approve zoning changes allowing redevelopment of Willets Point and Hunters Point South. Both plans call for about 5,000 apartments, 35 and 60 percent of them, respectively, classified as "affordable."[1] Most press accounts configured the debate leading up to the vote as proxy fights over the amount of middle- and lower-income housing and the use of eminent domain.[2] Persistent battlegrounds between the forces of "development" and "community." This not only oversimplified the issues at stake, but it obscured the fact that the nature and condition of the sites themselves present major obstacles.

As currently planned, at Hunters Point South it will cost the city $222 million to buy land from the Port Authority and upgrade infrastructure. This is in addition to $128 million in housing subsidies.

The corresponding costs for Willets Point are unknown, mainly because the city does not know how

Above: A future site of the Hunter's Point South development sits directly across the East River from the Empire State Building.



badly contaminated the area is. Given the intense quasi-industrial use over the past several decades, the cost of cleaning it up will be significant. Furthermore, Willets Point's streets and sidewalks will have to be rebuilt six feet above current levels to prevent flooding, and a new network of sewers will need to be installed (waste currently goes into cesspools).

If the city does end up using eminent domain against holdout landowners, there will be an additional irony in condemning as blighted an area that was never given basic infrastructural support in the first place. Both Willets Point and Hunters Point South are also overly reliant on the number seven subway line. Always crowded already, it is frequently shut on weekends for maintenance.

New York's explosive growth over the past decade favors the assumption that any area within a reasonable commute of Manhattan will provide fertile ground for profitable development. The assumption is acceptable at Hunters Point South, which despite all its challenges, boasts unmatched views and connects to an existing, successful development. But it seems premature at Willets Point. Bounded by busy highways, vast parking lots, and a polluted river, directly beneath the LaGuardia flight path, with decades of toxic and sewage waste in the ground, it is not well positioned to become a high-value residential neighborhood—even before factoring in a daily influx of tens of thousands of cars and subway riders two weeks out of every month during baseball season. It is much easier to imagine the new stadium coexisting with the convention center, open space, and retail and entertainment uses called for in the city's development proposal.

The Safe Strategy

Underdevelopment is a legitimate urban technique, and the back rooms of a city have the same right to ownership of place as do showpiece residential and business neighborhoods. It would, of course, be disingenuous to suggest that Hunters Point South and Willets Point should not evolve. However, this does not mean that the developer-driven, unapologetically generic strategies of apartment towers-cum-park and mixed-use "town center" are the only way to accomplish that evolution. In a city that has always grown according to an emergent, at times chaotic, spatial logic, there is less need for such top-down all-at-once placemaking; far less disruptive and artificial strategies could be allowed to emerge from a less rigid framework.

The world cities New York competes with—London, Los Angeles, and Tokyo, most prominently—are polycentric. By contrast, the unipolarity of Manhattan is undisputed. This burdens New York with massive physical challenges. But it also offers an opportunity in a relatively open field like Queens, where highly specialized urban programs (such as ethnic enclaves, large parks, stadia, and airports) can easily disperse along common lines of movement.

The entire city, outside the core, can thus be seen as a template of mixed use, with the boroughs offering urban experiences compelling enough to compete with the increasingly staid and commercial orientation of Manhattan. This process is already under way, if the knots of European tourists on the streets of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, are any indication.

Both Willets Point and Hunters Point South will eventually grow, organically or otherwise, into something quite different from what they are today. But they will still, by dint of location and history, function as pivot points between adjoining areas, between movement systems, between spaces of leisure and infrastructure.

This idea was brilliantly articulated by the architectural firm Morphosis in its winning 2004 proposal for the 2012 Olympic Village, at Hunters Point South. Turning and warping the traditional skyscraper, Morphosis envisioned horizontal ribbons of structure curving sinuously in three dimensions, touching down and lifting up to allow walk-through access to the waterfront. Holding the neighborhood edge with buildings and leaving much of the site open, the design relished its location at the junction of two waterways recovering from decades of pollution.

The current proposal foresees a narrow strip of park and eight standard-issue towers, standing across the river from the world's most iconic island of towers. The city's pack-em-in development brief leaves little design leeway to do otherwise. Where there might have been an image, vital and fresh, of a newly confident outer-borough urbanism, there will only be the mediocre reflection of a city we know too well.

Notes

1. Within this designation are set-asides for several income tiers between $23,000 and $158,000.
2. These were brought to the fore by the Atlantic Yards project in Brooklyn. See, for example, Norman Oder, "Atlantic Yards: Penn Station for a New Generation?" *Places*, Vol. 20, No.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 79–83.

All images are by the author.

Opposite: A sailboat anchors on the Queens shore of Newtown Creek. The Pulaski Bridge connects Long Island City, Queens, to Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

Interrogating Tradition

David Moffat

For twenty years the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE) has provided a point of contact for scholars interested in the broader social and political forces shaping the built environment. Since it was formed at an international symposium at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1988, its purpose has been to pull together the many strands of inquiry about architecture and settlement form that have escaped the privileged lens of Western art-historical scholarship.

The association has relied on the notion of "tradition" to unify this diverse project. Early on, this effort implied examining the rich informal and vernacular practices of non-Western or preindustrial cultures. But in the last ten years the scope has expanded to include critical engagement with the idea of tradition itself and the way it is commonly deployed, even in modern contexts, to value certain modes of building over others.

In its work, IASTE has been greatly aided by its cross-cultural stance. The view of one culture from another can be of great use in uncovering hidden and often unquestioned attitudes toward building.. The interdisciplinary nature of the organization has also helped members deemphasize proprietary jargon and present their research in more accessible forms.

A central focus of IASTE has been its biennial conferences. Three of the first five were held in Berkeley, where the association is headquartered. But beginning in 1998, they have been staged in locations (Bangkok, Dubai, Hong Kong, Trani (Italy), and Cairo) where attendees have been invited to visit local and regional heritage sites and new developments which demonstrate the influence of tradition.[1]

The 2008 conference, from December 12 to 15 in Oxford, England, was no exception. Hosted by Oxford Brookes University, it featured some 140 presentations, several impressive keynote panels, bus tours of the London King's Cross redevelopment and the towns and landscapes of the Cotswold region, and walking tours of classic and modern university buildings in Oxford itself.[2]

The eleventh IASTE conference also marked something of a transition within the organization. Its principal co-founder and director, Nezar AlSayyad, a professor of architecture and city and regional planning at Berkeley, will be stepping down at the end of 2009 in favor of an executive panel headed by Mark Gillem, a professor of architecture at the University of Oregon.[3]

For years, AlSayyad has been a driving force behind IASTE, and the themes of its conferences have been inspired by his desire to push investigations beyond the simple dichotomy of "traditional" and "modern" design. The theme for 2008, "Interrogating Tradition: Epistemologies, Fundamentalisms, Regeneration and Practices," reflected his desire to move discussion in a deliberately political direction.[4]

And of the conference subthemes, the most provocative concerned an emerging link between traditionalism and various forms of market and religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalist epistemologies frequently attempt to codify ordinarily fluid processes of tradition to bolster economic self-interest, militant ideologies, or threatened cultural identities.

A Diversity of Views and Approaches

As usual at IASTE conferences, the statement of theme yielded a range of responses—some answering the call to question the motives behind discourses of tradition, others tied to older concerns within the association. This range was evident in the five papers chosen as finalists for the Jeffrey Cook award, given in honor of the late University of Arizona professor and founding IASTE member.[5]

"The Future Tradition of Nature," by Amy Murphy of the University of Southern California, investigated the relation between Japanese anime films and various discourses on ecology.

"The Legend of Brigadoon: Architecture, Identity and Choice in the Scottish Highlands," by Daniel Maudlin of the University of Plymouth, examined the mismatch between image and reality in the stereotyping of highland house types.

"Bruce Grove Transferred: The Role of Diverse Traditions in Historic Conservation," by Kate Jordan of the University of Portsmouth, documented the difficulties of heritage-redevelopment strategies in a culturally mixed area of London.

Opposite: An award-winning paper by Daniel Maudlin examined the complex mismatch between romantic image and historic reality in Highland Scottish house design. He presented the work of the Isle of Skye-based Dualchas Building Design (DBD) as an alternative. The house designed in 1998 for Dr. Alastair Barden, a Scottish Nationalist Party activist, combined concrete-block construction with a dry-stone outer wall to emulate the environmental qualities of a traditional, sod-roofed blackhouse. Its regional folkloric associations, however, are complicated by the close association today between Highland tradition and the imported forms of eighteenth-century British Classicism—the "improved" farmhouse and cottage. Among Scottish Gaels, the blackhouse is associated with backwardness and poverty. Photo courtesy of Dualchas Building Design.



"From Sleeping Porch to Sleeping Machine: Inverting Traditions of Fresh Air in North America," by Charlie Hailey of the University of Florida, traced changing notions of healthy sleeping in American domestic architecture.

"Stealth Gentrification: Camouflage and Commerce on the Lower East Side," by Lara Belkind of Harvard University, probed the deliberately obscure, hip-cultural transformation of a formerly low-income area of New York City.

Two plenary panels also gave a good sense of the range of interests within the association. "Fundamentalisms and Tradition" sought to demonstrate how larger social and political currents affect built environments. Derek Gregory, of the University of British Columbia, first argued that tropes of terror, tradition, and tribalism, related to a "reenchantment" with warfare in the West, have altered views of the built environment. In sites of conflict like Iraq and Afghanistan this may lead to the emergence of a "counter-city," a place of stark ethnic, religious, and political division. Brigitte Piquard, from Oxford Brookes, then examined various ways that traditionalism has reemerged in urban contexts worldwide as a popular strategy for coping with the effects of natural disaster, social conflict, warfare, bad governance, or acts of terror.

The second panel, featuring Howard Davis and Kingston Heath, both of the University of Oregon, concentrated on the "regeneration" of vernacular building processes, a long-standing preoccupation of many in the association, reflecting their concern for the value of cultural self-determination. Davis argued that architects need to rediscover tradition as a mode of practice rather than a source of building style. He pointed to new technologies such as global positioning systems and computer fabrication that offer ways to increase local control over building production. Heath argued that regional distinctiveness, rather than defined formal or historical characteristics, is the key attribute of vernacular design, and that this distinctiveness emerges from adaptation to local climatic and cultural factors.

An Open-Ended Mission

As an interdisciplinary organization, IASTE has long engaged in soul-searching as to its mission. It was founded on the view that the built



environment is sufficiently complex that it cannot be fully understood from any one perspective. Several conference participants noted they were attracted to the association because it embraced an "uncanon" of architectural scholarship; others commented that IASTE has tried to make room for the quirky and improvident as well as the normative and well-to-do. But the open-ended nature of its discussions has also caused members to periodically revisit its purpose.

Above: Another DBD house design, Druim Ba, reflects other aspects of the complex material and social history of Highland Scottish design. A white, single-story, timber-frame box, its south wall opens with full-height glass doors to a steel and oak verandah. According to Maudlin, "the design, takes full advantage of the formal similarities between eighteenth-century everyday Classicism and Modernism to produce a synthesis of the Highland improved cottage and a twentieth-century design aesthetic." Photo courtesy of Dualchas Building Design.

One of IASTE's original points of departure was that the handing down of traditions from one generation to the next was central to the development of a rich kaleidoscope of built forms, cultural symbols, and the skills needed to craft them. This continuity was interrupted by modernism, which proposed uniform standards of design that could be developed and deployed across cultures.

As several speakers noted, however, tradition only emerged as an alternative value system when modernity's failures started to become evident in the early 1960s. In the years since, as the understanding of modernity has changed and adapted, splintered and reformed, and as the dynamics of tradition have been reexamined, this original sense of opposition has become more complex and nuanced.

The formation of a built territory remains central to every culture. And even in modern cultures this may involve forces and practices that purport to be beyond question. But, as many 2008 conference presentations sought to show, such narratives of "the way things have always been done" are usually created to maintain the predominance of certain social or perceptual constructs. In some vernacular settings, this can be seen as relatively benign social process, a response to a basic need to create value and meaning through a common sense of artistry. But it can also be interpreted through a more political prism as a way to reinforce the interests of certain groups over others.

Within IASTE, recognition of the latter condition has led to many studies of the ways design practice has been used to dominate and reorganize the territory of non-Western peoples. Papers at past conferences have dealt with the formation of cities as instruments of European colonial domination. Others have explored "native" traditions that become integral to the ways of the colonizers. Still others have examined the struggle of postcolonial societies to reckon with their mixed heritages.

In this regard, IASTE research has shown that (nativist and essentialist claims to the contrary) all cultures are to some extent hybrid. And it has revealed how traditions migrate and change over time and distance, as societies adapt building elements from one another, deal with shifting economies and environmental crises, and endure conflict and restructuring.

The most recent evidence of these processes has been the rise of an integrated, worldwide consumer economy. "Traditional" design elements from hundreds of cultures are now freely deployed to add value and appeal to the developments of a global real estate industry. The way these meanings are constituted offers a rich vein of scholarship, exposing how "hyper" traditions now employ elements

whose value as displaced signs may far exceed their original function or cultural significance. Likewise, IASTE has become increasingly concerned with the dislocation of heritage value, exposing how invocations of traditional building practices may sometimes be used to displace the very people who created them.

Looking Ahead

In a final plenary session at the 2008 conference, Greig Crysler of the University of California, Berkeley, Dianne Harris of the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, and Mark Jarzombek of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were assigned to reflect on some of these issues, summarize the content of four days of presentations, and speculate on the future of the association.

Crysler noted that IASTE's focus on the value of tradition has migrated from what James Clifford called the "ethnographic pastoral" to critical engagement with the commodification of heritage assets that has emerged as a byproduct of globalization. Nevertheless, he said, benign and emancipatory traditional epistemologies are still "conjugated in terms of community," and resist branded notions of cultural authenticity. Harris argued that what really makes the work of IASTE significant is its fine-grained analysis of the built environment and its reflections on how the environment can be used to assert many different forms of identity. Jarzombek pointed out that tradition can no longer be deployed as a mode of resistance against the evils of commodification because it, too, has been subsumed within the modern world. But this just means scholars have to interrogate themselves at the same time they interrogate traditions.

The theme of self-awareness came up repeatedly in subsequent comments from the floor and by panel members. Indeed, a refrain over the entire four days was that researchers and designers must be vigilant as to whose heritage they privilege, for what purpose, and to whose benefit.

At the final plenary session, this theme briefly led some to question the continued usefulness of tradition as an organizing concept for the association. But others quickly pointed out that while tradition may serve some chiefly as a lever to gain moral or commercial advantage, it also provides a powerful critical tool of common understanding.

Marcel Vellinga, the local conference director, also argued that there is a pronounced lack of direction in the shaping of contemporary built environments. While understanding of contemporary processes of tradition includes an awareness of commodification, many populations remain profoundly disconnected from the worlds in which they live. A regeneration of traditional building practices might also help address such immediate problems as climate change.

It was left to Dell Upton of UCLA to challenge such relatively sanguine views. As a discussant in the first plenary session he had noted that formulations of tradition may be highly sophisticated but culturally naïve. Following Paul Bourdieu, he suggested it is perhaps better to understand culture as a set of constantly changing principles. Academic debate tends to reify this diffuse and heterogeneous reality. This may be one reason for the continuing disappointment of those who view tradition as a form of enduring cultural capital that can be used to resist or assist economic development and political change.

What remained was AlSayyad's flexible definition: "Tradition is a dynamic project for the interpretation of a past in the service of a particular position in the present and for the purposes of a specific imagined future."

Notes

1. Three edited books have emerged from IASTE conferences. They are Nezar AlSayyad and Jean-Paul Bourdier, eds., *Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); Nezar AlSayyad, ed., *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Nezar AlSayyad, ed., *The End of Tradition?* (London: Routledge, 2004).
2. The International Vernacular Architecture Unit at Oxford Brookes played a major role in coordinating work on the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, edited by professor Paul Oliver of Oxford Brookes. Its complementary volume, *The Atlas of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, by Oliver, IVAU director Marcel Vellinga, and cartographer Alexander Bridge, was published by Routledge in 2007.
3. The executive committee will consist of Gillem and Mina Rajagopalan of New York University, Ipek Tureli of Brown University, Heba Farouk Ahmed of Cairo University, Montira Unakul of UNESCO Bangkok, Duanfang Lu of the University of Sydney, and Hesham Abdelfattah of Cairo University. All have been students of AlSayyad and are longtime IASTE members.
4. The call for papers invoked a need to question "rationalities of tradition in relation to their construction and their implications for practice." It went on to argue: "Such avenues of inquiry provide ways to examine how traditional knowledge is formulated and deployed in the political sphere, including the post-conflict reconstruction of society and space, the use of tradition by the 'state' as a means of co-optation or governance, or the manner in which fundamentalism is 'framed' and used by different interest and social groups."
5. The prize is given to the two best papers submitted in advance to the conference. This year's winners were Amy Murphy and Daniel Maudlin. All five papers will be published in upcoming issues of the organization's journal, *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*.

Decentering Urban Theory

Hector Fernando Burga



In the last thirty years modernist planning techniques based on abstract knowledge and ideal representations have been challenged by more practical emphases on place, context, and precedent. However, placemaking as a development strategy has entered a new, unstable phase, as design professionals search for solutions to the global economic crisis.

Previously accepted urban design tools and programs are being reevaluated as their working assumptions become obsolete and questions surface about the sustainability of building technologies and the viability of longstanding sources of construction materials disappear. These changes have opened the door to a reimagining of social goals and expectations.

In this contemporary crisis the gap between theory and practice remains a source of tension in architecture, urban design, and planning. This discrepancy is normally evident between glorious visions on paper and the practical limits of building materials and between the speculative space of the classroom and the expediency of the project office. But now practitioners and the general public must also ponder the value of theory in a time of crisis.

The answer may very well be found in the metropolises of the global South. In cities such as São Paulo, Mumbai, and Kinshasa, new modes of professional practice are being constituted locally, provisionally, and with an in-depth reconsideration of material needs and social goals. Design interventions in these places,

Above: *Pixação* on a tower in São Paulo, Brazil. Since the 1980s *pixação* has become widespread on architectural facades, signalling the disenfranchisement of youth living on the city's periphery. Photo by Teresa Caldeira.





once considered the testing ground for top-down visions such as Brasilia and Chandigarh, are refocusing the theory and practice of urbanism.

The conference "Peripheries: Decentering Urban Theory" recently sought to explore this dislocation by presenting case studies of how the experience of cities of the South can be applied to urbanism in the North. Held at the University of California at Berkeley from February 5 to 7, it brought together urban theorists,practicing architects, development experts, and social activists from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. In presenting perspectives from cities like São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Beirut, and Mumbai it also sought to provoke a South–South conversation that might one day lead to a decentered urban theory and professional practice.

Top: Graffiti on a gate in the periphery of São Paulo. The city's periphery has become a site of autoconstruction, providing the basis for citizenship rights. Photo by Teresa Caldeira.

Bottom: A corner building in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico. Incremental construction can be used to develop an adaptive multiuse building. Photo by Jose Castillo.

Practices in the Peripheries

In cultural terms, the word "peripheries" immediately brings to mind marginal locations, inconsequential to events and circumstances at the center. However, conference organizers chose to emphasize commonalities and differences across multiple sites, rather than a set of core principles. They also chose not to unify these views under a homogenous notion of periphery, but to encourage the formation of diverse expressions and possibilities.

The conference was divided into sessions titled "Peripheral Visions," "New Urbanities and Mobilities," "Neocenterings," "States, Citizens and Metropolitan Fringes," "Citizenship In-Formations," and "Peripheral Recognitions." Within these several panelists focused on alternative placemaking practices and their synergies with professional design and planning.

Professor Teresa Caldeira of the Department of City and Regional Planning at UC Berkeley outlined the practice of "auto-construction" in São Paulo, Brazil. She described this as "a mode of producing the urban [environment] in which residents build, by themselves, in a long process of continued improvements." Frequently, it even includes the construction of sewage and electricity infrastructure and paved streets. To facilitate these practices Caldeira said urban planners have worked with residents to improve democratic decision-making.

Jose Castillo, from the Universidad Iberoamericana, referred to the peripheries of Mexico City as

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"emerging urbanities." He focused on Neza, an informal city on the outskirts of the megalopolis, which he said offers valuable lessons for designers and planners in relation to household size, program, building type, and adaptive reuse. He argued that Neza's urban development is an "urbanism of the informal" which stands as a paradigm for diversity, plurality, innovation, and procedural inclusion.

Nasser Abourahme, from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Jerusalem, continued the theme of new urbanities by describing the adaptive spatial practices of Palestinian refugees. In severely prescribed circumstances, they must improve the physical conditions of their camps, expand them beyond determined borders, and link their own infrastructural improvements to a political goal of self-representation. As a humanitarian worker, Abourahme said he recognized the value of alternative placemaking practices based on the political recognition of community identity.

In the "Neocenterings" panel, Neera Adarkar, an architect, researcher, and activist in Mumbai, explored the process of gentrification as a struggle between different populations. In her work, she said, she must assume multiple roles. But she has found that architecture can be a complement to activism. Her particular efforts have included focusing on labor politics to mobilize negotiations between different groups making claims to space in the city.

Finally, the UC Berkeley anthropology professor James Holston called for the establishment of urban citizenship as a basis for legal rights. For Holston, access to space in the city is contingent upon such a reevaluation. This can occur when residents claim urban space by constructing it themselves and then legalize their claim. Holston analyzed the qualities of urban citizenship, and argued for an alternative mode of placemaking involving the formation of a political community which identifies itself with the city.

Making Place for the Periphery

The peripheries conference, co-organized by professors Caldeira and Holston, was sponsored by a network of research institutions at UC Berkeley, including the Global Metropolitan Studies institute, the Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona, the Center for Latin American Studies, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Department of Anthropology, the Department of City and Regional Planning, and the Townsend Center for the Humanities.[1]

Its sessions provided evidence that professional practices may be reconstituted locally to help residents make territorial claims, acquire resources, and gain political representation. While cities in the global South endure acute problems of resource depletion, governance, overpopulation, sustainability, and social equity, they also demonstrate a wide range of innovative interventions by designers, social-justice activists, and development planners. These may occur in a range of areas: encampments, war reconstruction, and border zones.

While these spaces exist on the margins of urban theory and design practice, they reveal another dimension of placemaking, one which is not necessarily driven by professional codes, design standards, or aesthetics. Rather, it is driven by creativity and adaptation to resolve everyday problems of sheer necessity. In a time of crisis, these practices may help outline new paths of action in both North and South.

Note

1. Other speakers included Richard Walker, Ananya Roy, Nezar AlSayyad, and You-Tien Zhang of UC Berkeley; AbdouMaliq Simone from Goldsmith College; Mona Harb from University of Beirut; Oren Yiftachel from Ben Gurion University; Adrian Gorelik from Universidad de Quilmes Argentina; Judit Carrera and Josep Ramoneda from the Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona; Martina Rieker from the American University in Cairo; James Ferguson from Stanford University; Li Zhang of UC Davis; and Edgar Pieterse of the University of Cape Town.

The Heart of the City: A Conversation about *The Wire*

Kelly Quinn



The Wire was a television series that ran for five seasons (2002–2008) on the premium cable channel Home Box Office (HBO).[1] Its name referred to the surveillance devices that police enlist in monitoring and infiltrating criminal activity. Using the access these devices provide, viewers traced a series of tangled plots through West Baltimore, Maryland, crisscrossing police precincts, hustling down alleys, swaggering across courtyards, and scrambling over parapets. The show pursued the wire through metal detectors at the courthouse and city hall; in boxing rings and shooting galleries; in classrooms and corner stores; in bars, backrooms, and beige cubicles; in conference suites, funeral parlors, jail cells, and parish halls; in cargo containers and abandoned rowhouses; and in public parks and cemeteries.

Formstone and takeaway lake trout convey the particularities of Baltimore, but the setting is also Everycity, standing for post-Fordist rustbelt Detroit, Cleveland, or Oakland. Each season addressed an institution of the contemporary city. Season one introduced criminal justice; season two explored labor issues at the Port of Baltimore; season three scrutinized the political machine of municipal government; season four tackled public education; and season five investigated journalism and print media.

Ostensibly a cop show, the series rejected the well-worn conventions of the genre. This cityscape was not one of fancy editing and jump-cut grittiness. Viewers could linger in overlooked places and learn about the lives of longshoremen, schoolteachers and administrators, political candidates and advisors, police, and dealers.

The show was also grounded in ancient traditions of storytelling. David Simon, its creator, executive producer, and writer, repeatedly referenced Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles in interviews. To tell the tales of postmodern, postindustrial Baltimore, he explained, "We stole from the Greeks and we made the gods into institutions."[2]

Above: In season five, as the series scrutinized the media, the actor/director Clark Johnson (far left) played Gus Haynes, the city-desk editor for the "*Baltimore Sun*." *The Wire* decried the decline of investigative reporting and public-service journalism, indicting newspapers as accomplices in the decline and dysfunction of contemporary urban institutions. From left to right: Clark Johnson, Brandon Young, Michelle Paress, and Tom McCarthy. Photo by Paul Schiraldi, courtesy of Home Box Office.

The Series

Simon and his partner, Ed Burns, developed *The Wire* after both had had careers in public service. Simon had worked as a police reporter at the *Baltimore Sun*; Burns had been a police officer and schoolteacher. Previously, Simon had authored *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, a nonfiction novel that served as the basis for NBC's television series *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–1999). Simon and Burns had also partnered to write an account of life in an open-air drug market in West Baltimore, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*, which resulted in a six-hour miniseries for HBO, *The Corner* (2000).

The Wire, like *The Corner*, was the brainchild of these two roundish white men who, clutching clipboards, hung out on street corners in West Baltimore listening, watching, soaking up the city. They were astute observers, passionately devoted to probing the everyday experiences of America's inner cities.

Their city was not one of glitzy waterfront redevelopment, corporate stadia, or luxury lofts. And their work repudiated this convivial city in large part because of their disdain for practices they believed have imperiled contemporary urbanism. For Burns and Simon, public policies like

the "War on Drugs" and "No Child Left Behind" have thwarted human experience.

In a lecture at the University of Southern California, Simon once answered a question about the meaning of *The Wire* with the following comments:

> *It is a political tract masquerading as a cop show.*
> *It is an argument that our nation state is becoming less viable and will continue to become less viable.*
> *I think that it is one of the most affectionate and funny stories about the end of empire that you could compose.*
> *And, I am proud that it is basically an argument that every day human beings matter less.*[3]



Above: Even as viewers were invited behind the yellow tape, *The Wire* rejected stylized, formulaic depictions of crime scenes and urban policing. From left to right: Clarke Peters, Sonja Sohn, Dominic West, and Wendell Pierce. Photo by Nicole Rivelli, courtesy of Home Box Office.

The Conference

During its five-year run, the series developed a small, devoted following who continue to debate its meanings in on-line discussions, and who remake its scenes, posting vignettes, "lost" episodes, and spoofs on Youtube.com. Scholars have also begun to share their private viewing pleasure, and have launched formal examinations of the series in classrooms and conferences.

It was out of this climate of interest that the Black Humanities Collective and the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan decided to host a symposium about *The Wire* January 29 and 30 in Ann Arbor. Paul M. Farber and Grace L.B. Sander, its graduate-student organizers, wanted "to pay proper critical attention to a television series that from its start was too big for Prime Time." They continued: "Whether you think of *The Wire* as a work of paramount dramatic achievement, a tactile sampling of urban reality, or as something between those two ideals, this symposium marks an important moment for scholars and thinkers to congregate…to explore the possibilities for hope and skepticism forged at once through this influential series."

The first academic conference devoted to *The Wire*, the meeting drew fans and critics from many fields. More than 250 people assembled to debate the show's significance and legacy, including students, staff, faculty, and members of the public. Robin Means-Coleman, a professor of communications and Afroamerican and African studies, moderated the keynote conversation between the actress Sonja Sohn and the actor and director Clark Johnson. Sohn and Johnson swapped memories of audition tapes and moments on the set, discussed popular opinion of the show in Baltimore, and shared their views on the crafts of acting and directing. Sohn also reflected on her relationship to Baltimore, the segregated city and her adopted home during several seasons on the show. And Johnson described how Simon's early career as a journalist and his ear for dialogue influenced his work, and how the conceit of surveillance was able to offer an intimate view of the city.

The panels that followed included "Teaching on *The Wire*"; "Race, Labor, and Affect in the Neoliberal City"; "Sex and Sexuality in the City"; "Reading *The Wire*: The Politics of Authenticity in Season Five"; "Do Right Woman, Do Right Man"; and "Hermeneutics of Strategy and Surveillance." The conference concluded with a roundtable about the meanings of *The Wire* in an Obama America. Facilitated by Michigan professor Jonathan Metzl, participants included the music critic and Vassar

College literature professor Hua Hsu, the cultural commentator and Duke University professor Mark Anthony Neal, the hip-hop scholar and Bucknell University professor James Peterson, and the University of Pennsylvania professor and contributor to the theroot.com Salamishah Tillet.

While many presenters approached the show as appreciative fans, they also enlisted a variety of disciplinary methods to analyze and critique it. A few relied on close analysis of the series and its characters to consider issues such as public education, gender and sexuality. For example, Paul Anderson, an associate professor of American cultures and Afroamerican and African studies at Michigan, mapped the anomie of deindustrialized Baltimore. Chris Love, a Ph.D. candidate in comparative literature at Michigan, evaluated its elements of Greek tragedy, highlighting the use of epigraphs, dialogic echoes, and staging. She argued that "true modern tragedy can be found in Baltimore in the [characters of] Barksdale, Bell and Bunny." And Leigh Claire LaBerge, an assistant professor of humanities at the University of Chicago, discussed the fictitious serial killer storyline in season five as a strategy that challenged viewers to question depictions of reality.[4]

Other presenters considered the implications and possibilities of the series as a reflection of contemporary urban issues. Shavon Holcomb, a sociology student, and Paul Draus, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, explained how they used the series in an education program at Ryan Correctional Facility on the east side of Detroit. Rob Choflet, a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland, College Park, used the opening scene of season three, the ceremonial implosion of Franklin Terrace's highrise towers, to contemplate David Harvey's writings on of "creative destruction." He reviewed the decision of the Baltimore Housing Authority to eliminate 5,600 of its "severely distressed" units, and examined homeownership in West Baltimore's Heritage Crossing, a project of semi-detached, low-rise units that is part of larger initiatives to remake public space in the neighborhoods featured in *The Wire*.

A Mirror for Urban Places

While several presentations considered housing policy and urban issues, architects, planners and urban designers were conspicuously absent, despite the organizers' efforts to solicit papers from those working and practicing in those fields. It is a pity, because *The Wire* offers many insights about urban places. Analysis of the series can advance our understanding of the death and life of great American cities.

The Wire rewarded viewers, in part, because it was excellent television. Its palimpsestic narrative respected the audience's intelligence, instilled empathy and inspired action. Above all, its sixty episodes insisted that viewers engage the city on its own terms, not those of Hollywood fantasy.

As Simon asserted, the series was also a lament for the lost urbanism of the first half of the twentieth century. On the street corners of *The Wire's* West Baltimore, the sidewalk ballet extolled by Jane Jacobs became a pas-de-deux performed by dealers and junkies, a result of failed public policies and frayed social contracts.

The Wire continues to challenge urbanists to focus on postindustrial public spaces. It insists that we consider abandoned rowhouses and forsaken factories as more than textured containers for adaptive reuse. It is a call to link social justice and urban design to a larger critique of life in the United States.

As we contemplate how to engage the city in this moment of late capitalism, we often rely on theorists, geographers, and sociologists such as David Harvey, Jane Jacobs, Saskia Sassen, Michel Foucault, Neil Smith, Robin D.G. Kelley, Clyde Woods, Sudhir Venkatesh, Iris Marion Young, Michel De Certeau, and Henri Lefebvre. Perhaps it is also time to turn our attention to David Simon. Study *The Wire*.[5]

Notes

1. Although the show no longer airs on television, it is widely available on DVD.

2. David Simon, "Journalism and the Public Square," March 20, 2008, University of Southern California, Gould School of Law and Annenberg School for Communication, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8E8xBXFLKE&feature=channel_page. Simon discussed this at greater length in Margaret Talbot, "Stealing Life: The Crusader behind 'The Wire,'" *New Yorker*, October 22, 2007, pp. 150-63.

3. Ibid.

4. Robert LeVertis Bell and Paul Farber have edited a special edition of *Criticism* devoted to *The Wire;* many of the conference papers will be featured in the forthcoming Summer 2009 volume.

5. More on the conference can be found at http://sitemaker.umich.edu/heart_of_the_city/heart_of_the_city.

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Recovering

The theme section of this issue embraces a topic that has been of concern to the *Places* editorial advisory board for several years: recovery in the wake of natural and manmade disasters. Whether local, regional, or national, these moments of social and psychological rupture call for a special kind of awareness. Planners and designers may be called on to provide healing and commemorative visions, but they also may face profound opportunities, in rebuilding, to reevaluate past forms and practices.

The present collection of articles derives from two streams of thought: research into the potential of design after disaster directed by Dana Cuff of UCLA, and a reworking and formalization of several of the presentations to a 2005 "Memory and Architecture" conference at Georgia Institute of Technology organized by Harris Dimitropoulos. Authors from both groups were asked to consider the following question. How do you "recover" place after patterns of inhabitation have been destroyed through acts of war or by natural calamities? This involves both practical new visions and a need for symbolic memorialization and reconsecration of the ground. What are the characteristics of these processes? And how can designers and planners engage more honestly, creatively, and effectively with them?

On the Covers

Front Cover: The INFO BOX provided a "scab" with which to begin the recovery of Potsdamer Platz following years of war and division by the Berlin Wall. Visitors could climb from its exhibition spaces to its roof to view the surrounding reconstruction. Photo by Jorg Hempel, Aachen.
Inside Front Cover: Portion of sketch for the World Trade Center Memorial by Michael Arad.
Back cover: On Willets Point Boulevard, an auto shop is fashioned from shipping containers. Photo by Ian Baldwin.