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Untitled No. 166: A search for a transparent reality

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Untitled No. 166
A Search for a Transparent Reality

by

Robert Amerman

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

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A Search for a Transparent Reality

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Form oriented autonomous meaning in architecture has been a post-enlightenment paradigm which has generated the tenets of institutionalized architecture. Post-Structuralist thinking has called into question this relationship through the non-constructive infiltration of schema and perception in its hope to reach a new paradigm. The inhabitation of the gap between the object and the way we perceive calls into question the nature of autonomy, archetype, and intrinsic relationships to provide a multi-valent architecture that translates over the flaws of work based on the conquest of reason alone.
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Introduction

The intent of this work goes beyond its written content. It is at once a thesis, an indictment, a proposal, and a prolepsis. This is a work that is as much about what is deliberately not said, as it is about the collage that you are about to inhabit. 'The inhabitation of the gap': the gap between text and suggestion, object and vision; between presence and memory, between building and language, between accident and intention, and between 'meaning' and perception.
The Marginalized Figure -
descriptor of a transparent reality
Islam asserts that on the unappealable day of judgement, every perpetrator of the image of a living creature will be raised from the dead with his works, and he will be commanded to bring them to life, and he will fail, and be cast out with them into the fires of punishment. As a result, I felt that before large mirrors that same horror of a spectral...
duplication or multiplication of reality. Their infallible and continuous functioning, their pursuit of my actions, their cosmic pantomime, were uncanny then; whenever it began to grow dark. One of my persistent prayers to God and my guardian angel was that I not dream about mirrors. I know I watched them with misgivings. Sometimes I feared they

developing an idea has to do with the pursuit of one's own obsessions, with the discovery of one's continuity and plastic rigor. Intuition does not seem to be enough; conceptual discovery has to be pursued according to what le courbusier called 'the patient search', removed from fashions, style-makers, salons, etc."

-Pascal Quintard Hofstein

Can we see the hands of the building? If I can learn how I think (how to see) then the mapping of my hands as instruments of sight (site) yields the extrusion of form through the template of thought. Architecture as residue, as significant by-product; the site (site) becoming a recording device through which a critical ground is established. This act of extrusion then considers not only the material reality of the architectonic residue, it also embraces the constructive nature of the theoretical engagement as a means of 'building' interpretations. Authorship of initial interpretations as an inescapable intrinsic, though not seen as an essential component to understanding the object within the author's singular terms.

-Henri Focillon
might begin to deviate from reality; Other times I was afraid of seeing there my own face disfigured by strange calamities. I have learned that this fear is again monstrously abroad in this world. The story is simple, indeed, and disagreeable.

Around 1927 I met a somber girl, first by telephone (for Julia began as a nameless, faceless

Figure Three

'a few hundred feet from the pyramid, i bent down, scooped a handful of sand and then, let it spill, under my breath i said: i am modifying the sahara, the deed was minimal but the words exact and i considered that i had needed an entire lifetime to say them.”

-Jorge Luis Borges

The building of the Cathedral is no longer our task. The memory theatre, established and subsequently subsumed, we remain lost in its object trance; 'meaning’ as a dangling participle. The role world enveloping our (constructed) existence in rhetoric’s singular quest -the object must mean-. We do not mirror the object through our words; we merely add another object to the world with the pen’s sleep of reason (breathe). Between the objective and the perceptive lies a prescriptive dialectic; the inhabitable gap in which the paradigm presupposes the mere void. A momentary suspension in belief is asked of through intuition’s gap; can language be allowed to exist as an approximation in order to exceed its definitive foundation?

that is the kind of poetry we should be after, poetry worn away as if by acid by the labor of hands, impregnated with sweat and smoke, smelling of lillies and urine, splashed by the variety of what we do legally or illegally.”

- Louis Poirot
voice), and, later, on a

corner toward evening.

She had alarmingly large
eyes, straight blue-black
hair, and an unbending
body. Her grandfather and
great grandfather were
federales, as mine were
unitarios, and that ancient
discord in our blood was
for us a bond, a further
possession of the
fatherland. She lived with
her family in a big old run-

silence has no sense,
sense has no silence.
without being heard,
music slips between both.
(every something is an echo of nothing)"

– Octavio Paz

Has the institutionalization of manifested architecture brought us to collapse?
A false painting defiles the history of art, a retouched photo falsifies history;
what constitutes the false building? (the falsification of reality) A 'learned' system
of meaning falsifies the possibilities of architecture through its marginalization
of man's schema. A perceptual shift towards the valueless building (tabula)
yields an empty sign awaiting our associations to provide its referent.
Architecture is no different from the word signifier 'this'; as an autonomous
entity, it is meaningless... as a preface, it provides an index through which
we perceive. Architecture's a priori begins with embracing the 'meaning'
instilled in perception's multiplicity.

...the poetical content of reality, the a priori of the world, which is the ultimate frame
of reference for any truly meaningful architecture, is hidden beneath a thick layer
of formal explanations."

– Alberto Pérez-Gómez
down house with very high ceilings, in the vapidity and grudges of genteel poverty.

"after such knowledge, what forgiveness?
think now

history has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
and issues, deceives with whispering ambitions
guides us by vanities. think now"

- T.S. Eliot

Have the muses stolen away? Other men's words have become our icons; we
are no longer asked to posit ourselves. Are we no longer the authors of our
perception? The texts exist, for we write them for ourselves alone. The
subjectivity of perception has been cast aside through the subjugation of
emotion. The edification of pretensions has stifled our willingness to search.

We have distilled architecture to its abject (object) trance through stealing its
powers to dream. Our definitive (abjed constructed) reality has denied the
emergence of alternative solution. In creating a condition of 'other', the non
constructive alternative must point to a suggestive reality. An act of expansion
is required in our 'patient search' versus the compression of our dogmatic past.

"student: why architecture?

kahn: 'i think that if you define it,
you would destroy it.
"

-Louis Kahn
sensed in her an intensity that was altogether foreign to the erotic, and I feared it. It is not uncommon to relate to women in an urge for intimacy, true or apochryphal circumstances of one's boyish past. I must have told her once about the mirrors and thus in 1928 I prompted a hallucination that was to flower in 1931. Now, I have just learned

Figure Six

"as a whole this volume resists definitive framing. It is more appropriately seen and understood as a series of windows on an unguided tour. no map is available for this tour, there are, however, landmarks."

-Doug Childers

Do we differentiate between edifice and artifice any longer? We have institutionalized the mystical under the guise of 'architecture'; and with it we have stripped away her desire. Our reification has provided us with a false sense of progress, we have lost the inertia gained through our initial fears. The question remains one of vulnerability; to institutionalize is to control, judge, and therefore marginalize desire. We have killed architecture through the false deities of rhetoric. We have hidden the hand and the tear from which the emotive can stir society. The mystical is no more about institutionalization than the act of engaging a work through the vulnerable embrace of open eyes is about the reification of architecture as an institution.

"writing is never more than a game played with an ungraspable reality."

-Georges Bataille
that she has lost her mind
and that the mirrors in her
room are draped because
she sees in them my
reflection, usurping her
own, and she trembles and
falls silent and says that I
am persecuting her by
magic, what bitter
slavishness, that of my
face, that of one of my
former faces. This odious
fate reserved for my
features must perforce

"between perception and wonder the nomadic survey issues a challenge to begin
(again) the work of making architecture with the hands, with the material around
us, not in an effort to leave behind us all critical perspective, but to work from/with
the relations revealed through inventions and discovery”

- Chris Taylor

We have been taught an opaque reality through the confines of our post-
enlightenment thought. How can we demand the poetics of existence while
mumbling over the conquest of reason? A search for a transparent reality is
the anti-manifesto’s manifesto. The synchronicity of the collage is lost to the
exploitation of reason’s time line. We are told to listen, while forgetting our
hearing; we have been told of seeing, without learning of vision. Perception,
meaning, juxtaposition, analogue, and accident await our break with the
archetypal, the autonomous, and the intrinsic. The template exists, the brain
provides us with the thought capable of thinking itself. To reify meaning and
perception is to feel the comfort of 'so what?’ pass through our teeth, to
question the metaphysics of perception is to feel the whisper of 'what if?'.

"releasing the end to the making may reactivate the object produced."

- Kim Tanzer
Figure Eight

make me odius too, but I
no longer care.

"when one has emerged from the circles of errors and illusions within which actions are performed, taking a position is virtually an impossibility. A minimum of silliness is essential for everything, for affirming and even for denying."

-E.M. Cioran

Who can speak of meaning? The subjective nature of the thought returns us to the erosions of language. If I can embrace the multi-valence within the nature of schema, then I can touch you (listen). If we fear the shift in reality's mirror, we create phobia; if we leap into intuition's labyrinth, we learn the designs of Daedalus.

thesis (ˈθiːsɪs, ˈθiːsɪs). Pl. theses (ˈθiːsɪz). [a. Gr. putting, placing; a proposition, affirmation, etc.]
1. Originally and properly, according to ancient writers, the setting down of the foot or lowering of the hand in beating time, and hence (as marked by this) the stress or ictus; the stressed syllable of a foot in a verse; a stressed note in music.

"... nothing more can be attempted than to establish the beginning and the direction of an infinitely long road. the pretension of any systematic and definitive completeness would be, at least, a self-illusion. perfection can here be obtained by the individual student only in the subjective sense that he communicates everything he has been able to see."

-Georg Simmel
The Edification of Pretension - one interpretation of infinity
The figure that you have just inhabited through its reading is not a means of direct translation into built form, it is a parallel realm; a blurred distinction in which text yields the architectonic. An investigation into the hermetic nature of a perceived body of work through which the reified ‘text’ as institutionalized is asked to generate more conditions than its superficial reading. This experiment comes from the questioning of modernism’s institutionalized manifestos in architecture which speak in terms of autonomous functionalism. Through modernism’s pursuit of the end of history dialectic, its reification of buildings and texts has produced hermetic objects through its fear of consummating its annihilative end game.

In questioning the edicts of autonomous functionalism, this work is interested in the allowance of a certain 'auratic' focus within the experiment. A directed pursuit in which a subtext, a series of signifiers, and a series of responses can inhabit the page to produce a multi-valent composition. The experimental text collage operates through a body of known control work and a body of accidental superposition which
then can inform one another to exceed the limits of its physical presence.

This pursuit exists firmly within the tenets of anti-modernist manifesto in that it is the systematic exploration of a body of work (a history of precedence if you will) in pursuit of the unaccountable object. A shamanic allowance of the imposition of the embrace able unknown, 'le bien inconnu' in dadaist terms, within the rigor of an auto didactic process. A true invocation of dadaism within this work is a misnomer; a parallel lineage of thought in a temporal setting, though an aside that was abandoned by the brand of anti-modernism as seen in this project.

The finite establishment of precedence within this experiment seems an unfit task based on the multiple references and suggestions held within the work. The tenets of classical modernism and the subsequent breaks from these edicts seem to be the primary threads within which this investigation operates. A primary break with tradition in the weaving of these disparate threads may be seen in the early Twentieth Century collage work of Kurt Schwitters. Schwitters' break from the institutionalized manifesto and even his
break from dadaism's compositional accidentalism brought about a body of work in which the object and memory through superposition were allowed to enter a dialogue through the perception and schema of the viewer. Works in which the found object was allowed the multi-personalities of autonomy within the composition (and its subsequent layers of memory generation) as well as the compositional juxtaposition of the memory fragments through their multiple relationships. This loss of compositionally academic construction in the work provides the break from institutionalization that pushed Schwitters towards the paradigm shift of anti modernism. As heard in the words of Georges Bataille: "The great compositions of certain painters express the desire to force the spirit into an official ideal. The disappearance of academic construction in painting is, on the contrary, the opening of the gates to expression (hence even exaltation)."¹ This tentative 'opening of the gates to expression' through Schwitters' work expresses the theories of perception and

¹Hollier, Denis; Against Architecture: the Writings of Georges Bataille; translated by Betsy Wing; MIT Press, Cambridge, 1989, p.51
schema as applied to the consumption of a work, and pushed art and thought towards its project of self knowledge.

In a more developed sense, firmly rooted in the anti-modernist tradition, the triptych juxtaposition work of Joseph Kosuth is a thread within the weaving of the experimental text collage as well. Kosuth calls into question the nature of presentation and representation through the formal juxtapositions of his object series. His triptychs were formatted to provide a multivalence of readings through the conversation generated between multiple forms of representation. A typical Kosuth installation would be composed of an object sited against a wall within a gallery setting (a chair for example), a photograph of the chair in its gallery site hung on the wall to the left of the chair, and a formal dictionary definition of the word 'chair' enlarged and hung on the wall to the right of the object. This spatial / compositional experience provides a presentation of the non-redemptive (meaningless) object questioned through the act of its representation as a text and image. This auratic focus occurs within the specificity of its
previous and current temporal setting, it implicates the notion of time as an active participant in the work. A premeditated force has been initiated to create the installation previous to the viewer's inhabitation of the composition. The photographic (re)presentation of the work within the gallery setting provides the historicity of the work through the pragmatics of its mechanical reproduction.

At the risk of diverging too far from the experimental text collage, the superposition of time within the work of Kosuth brings into the experiment the notions of Hegel's conception of 'aufhebung'. An interpretation from Hegel's *Aesthetics* of his conception of aufhebung could be seen as such²: each moment of time supersedes, it has the ability to simultaneously consume, dismiss, and preserve its antecedents. Though Hegel spoke of aufhebung in terms of reason alone; this premise works within anti-modernist doctrine when applied in a more emotive sense to our perceptual conception of time. The time / memory / perception dialogue within the investigation looks towards the reader

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²ibid, p.5
for the provision of the embrace of the text as well as the subsequent consumption / destruction of the edifice through its inhabitation. This condition of a temporal relevancy in which the work is sited, recalls the work of Joseph Beuys as an operation that is intended to embrace the project of self-knowledge. Beuys as a shamanistic anti modernist provides a referent to Hegel's aufhebung through a body of work that was produced in post World War II Germany which carried the weight of societal memory as well as the imposition of a personal agenda. In a 'weight of history' sense, the experimental text collage provides both an internal and an external referent to the project of modernism and its subsequent failure through the multiple layers of its composition. Its temporal / memory conception provides a body of information which calls into question the overarching body of institutionalized architecture while at the same time looks into the roots of the project of perception through self-knowledge.
This Beuysian loss of an edifice's pretensions through critical evaluation can be seen in the investigation, and in parallel, through the study of the writings of Georges Bataille as related to the notion of Hegelian aufhebung: "In order to loosen the structure that is hierarchical and at the same time creates hierarchy, Bataille will introduce the play of writing. Writing in this sense would be a profoundly anti-architectural gesture, a non-constructive gesture, one that, on the contrary, undermines and destroys everything whose existence depends on edifying pretensions."\(^3\)

It is through the 'non-constructive' nature of Bataille's writings that creates a condition of 'other' within the text paradigm. An alternative, suggestive reality is established versus a definitive, hermetic one. Bataille's marginalization of writing as nothing more than "a game played with an ungraspable reality"\(^4\) becomes the quest within which the experimental text collage searches for a transparent reality.

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\(^3\)Ibid, p.23  
\(^4\)Bataille, Georges; *Le coupable* (Somme Athéologique, vol.2; Gallimard, Paris 1961)
Meditations on cause, effect, and accident

The experimental text collage focuses on the question of interpretation, to explain it in a finite sense is to disallow the imposition of alternative perceptions of the work. The following is a brief outline of observations that moved throughout the project as it was generated:

a. The overall body of the work is subtexted by a short story written by Jorge Luis Borges called 'The Draped Mirrors'. This story provides a critical ground which calls into question the subjectivity of reality through the confrontation of one's own image. The referenced perceptually based phobia within the story is based on the fear of looking into a mirror and having reality shift at any moment (which is a primary incident within the experiment). A vibration exists between the imposition of the reader of the text and the alternative meanings that are generated from it. An act of vulnerability is asked of by the author from the reader.

b. Figure One speaks in terms of meaning and the thinness of dogma as found through the atrocities of autonomous thought in architecture. It also introduces the notions of multi-valence, schema, and perception into the investigation in a pursuit of an alternative reality.

Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the Borges subtext, the signifier quotes as brackets and the main body of text are:

this is the imaginary / perpetrator
Accidental superposition in figure one (continued)

image / beneath the weight of our culture
erosions of language / raised from the dead
life / eroded
I am where I was: / a child
I felt / with my eyes
I hear the voices that I think / large mirrors

c. Figure Two highlights the inhabitable gap between the objective and the perceptive through which words are only an approximation. It is a request for the imposition of a paradigm shift through a questioning of the hermetic nature of writing.

Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

afraid of seeing (as the initial collision)

learned / building

memory / fear

‘meaning’ as a dangling participle / monstrously

in order to exceed its definitive foundation / around 1927
(The same year that Bataille wrote his article “Architecture” which asked for the break with academic construction in composition.)

d. Figure Three links the nature of site and vision through the creation of an architecture of templates. It indicted the residual nature of authorship through a subject's mental constructs.
Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

continuous / obsessions
the hands of the building / pantomime
uncanny / how I think
persistent / extrusion / residue
theoretical / God
I know I watched / the austerity of thought

e. Figure Four introduces Rosalind Krauss' conception of the signifier at work within perception as an empty sign. Translated to architecture, the building as signifier becomes a mere referent to be inhabited by our schema. It is a request for the embrace of perception's multiplicity.

Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

straight / between both
manifestoed architecture / grandfather
the false building / great grandfather
in perception's multiplicity / for us a bond
the poetical content of reality / possession

f. Figure Five speaks in terms of the marginalization of personal perception through the embrace of institutionalized doctrine and the subsequent loss of the emotive in works of architecture. It
requests the critical evaluation of the nature of dogma in the educational system.

Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

knowledge / grudges

Accidental superposition in figure five (continued)

have the muses stolen away / went strolling
we followed / the edification of pretension
the thick wall / has stifled our willingness to think

no love between us / Louis Kahn
(an untrue statement which seems all the more poetic considering the indictment of Kahn's doctrines on the autonomous meaning of materials within the realm of this investigation)

g. Figure Six questions the loss of desire in architecture based on the lack of differentiation between edifice and artifice in our reified sense of progress through rhetoric. A request for a perceptual shamanism in the role of the architect to re-institute the mystical into a dogmatic realm.

Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

institutionalized / intimacy
under the guise of / true / 'architecture`
apocryphal / sense of progress
inertia gained through / circumstances
we have killed architecture / past
an ungraspable reality / hallucination
h. Figure Seven begins to close the slow rotation of the text back upon itself through the conception of the brain as a construct in which thought is capable of thinking itself (the imposition of auto-didactic process within the operation). Accidental superposition to look for within the relationships of the subtext and the main body of text are:

- she trembles / the poetics of existence
- silent / anti-manifesto
- we have been told of seeing / persecuting
- break with the / bitter
- provides us with the / slavishness
- this odious / object produced

i. Figure Eight completes the text rotation back upon itself through the re-imposition of the initial lines of the work at its conclusion. It ties together Borges’ phobia and asks for Beuys’ leap into the unknown of intuition. The body of response closes with the Oxford English Dictionary’s primary definition of ‘thesis’ which interestingly ties the work back towards ancient music composition through the stressed beat of its modulations.
A Synchronous Translation -
site, vision, process, form
Through the process of this investigation, the nature of site and sight (condition and vision) have constantly modulated between the pragmatic and the intangible. This operation has been in hopes of developing a fertile ground referencing the aforementioned multi-valence through the imposition of schema to the site and vision of the site’s inhabitation (sight).

The demonstration site for the implementation of this experiment is the City of Houston Velasco Street Incinerator complex located off of Navigation in the "East End" neighborhood relative to downtown Houston. Constructed in 1947, this structure replaced a 1912 facility on an adjacent site in proximity with the Buffalo Bayou. Abandoned in the late 1970's based on air quality control permitting, this bilaterally symmetrical brick and concrete frame structure has been earmarked by local groups for re inhabitation in a concerted effort to improve this impoverished neighborhood. The client for the project is the Simulacra Press Incorporated who has asked for the creation of not only administrative, production and warehousing facilities; but for the provision of a retailing outlet and reading room for marketing and subsidizing the production effort of the facility.

The synthesis and translation over the gap of a context and an ephemeral vision is seen through a critical analysis of the experimental text collage as related to architecture. The posited link through this analysis came through viewing the experimental text collage as both a machine for reducing memory into a site specific context as well as a machine requiring the subsequent vulnerability of inhabitation through our imposition of memory to the work. Within this memory / architecture dialectic came interpretive clues from the
manifestos of both modernism and anti-modernism which provide for the framework within which the work exists. Corbusier, Frampton, Hugo, Vidler and countless modernist predecessors have expounded on the Cathedral as a proto-modern or modern construct relative to society's collective memory. Autonomy achieved through learned behavior under societal norms, the Cathedral became the theater of memory which bridged the gap between presentation and representation. Though this conception of autonomy remains an institutionalized icon, the theater of memory was to be subsumed by the printing press, thereby losing its hegemony. An analysis was drawn between the subsequent dissolution of autonomy from the Cathedral to the printing press and the imposition of the pragmatics of the incinerator which previously occupied the site. In the same sense that the press vanquished the hegemony of the Cathedral, the public refuse incinerator provides contemporary culture with the consummate memory repository, collector and destroyer relative to an unbiased collective memory. It is a machine for reducing memory in parallel with the experimental text collage as an agent capable of retaining both its pragmatic physical limits and its ephemeral suggestions.

From this analysis came the creation of a multi-stranded weaving of physical investigations aimed at uncovering the memory of the physical building as site. The mapping of the interstitial between the building as built and the building as found became the primary thrust of the investigation; while as-builts, photography, writing, sculpture, and collage became alternative constructs within the investigation. The importance of the perception of time as a material construct and a cohesive memory working within the site generated the tenets
of the investigation. With this in mind, the primary mapping of the building was a process of selecting specific occurrences personifying this condition. The multi-valence of the time as material / memory construct as imposed on the site can be seen through the evolution of the building itself. The excavation of an incomplete copy of the building's original working drawings from the City of Houston Archives began the inception of the building’s translation. These documents are the building's initial map, a transferable mark from a two dimensional investigation into a three dimensional construct (in the same sense as the spatial quality of the experimental text collage). A residual gap exists between the creation of these documents, its subsequent construction, its inhabitation, its abandonment, and its contemporary physical condition. The personification of this phenomena was pursued through a two dimensional mapping process which attempts to bridge these conditions of memory and reality over the course of the building’s forty-six year evolution. Four sub-sites were marked for investigation throughout the building through analyzing the working drawings and the physical conditions of the site. These sites were then overlaid in a drawing process which mapped the condition of the building’s components as intended and thereby shifted and redrawn to reflect the current condition of the component as currently found (figures nine through twelve). This drawing / redrawing investigation provided a map outlining the residual space between the two locations over time as dictated by their overlay. In terms of lineage over the course of hindsight, this investigation was an intuitive attempt to synchronize the experimental text collage’s ability for a two dimensional construct to suggest a spatial implication through an internal juxtaposition.
Figure Nine
Ash pit and ram mount detail residue
Component mapping of building fra. . . .
Figure Ten
Gate and air ram mounting detail residue fragments under the effect of time as a material. Tra...
Figure Eleven
Obstruction lighting detail residue
Tracing the residual gap between document, construct, an...
Figure Twelve
Obstruction lighting detail residue and condition.

d condition.
"Paintings are understood, as shifters, empty signs (like the word ‘this’) that are filled with meaning only when juxtaposed with an external referent."\(^5\)

As the external referent of these exercises was the creation of a site specific cohesive architecture, a globalization was required from this focused investigation into a mapping system which could imbue the overarching nature of the project with that of the memory of its details. A pursuit of the blurring of the distinction between the machine and the architecture through the imposition of templates which could then overlay the site to establish this formal link. Figures thirteen through seventeen are a sampling of the cohesion of the previous experiments (figures 9 -12) into templates which provide an external referent through their specific relationship to the site as well as an internal referent through their inhabitation of the temporal conditions of the changing site.

This establishment of a process in which a machine dictates an equal portion of the generation of the context itself is seen as a construction within itself which invigorates the consummation of the project. The machine's consciousness as revealed through the superposition of one selected collage over another is used as a collaborative method in which ‘controlled accident’ is allowed to indict the process of the template / mapping system. In the same sense as time has acted on the building, the machine's rhythm provides as system of modulated occurrences that can be relied on though, not entirely controlled. As a critical inquiry, this process provides a referent in the same sense as the Borges subtext to the experimental text collage in that it is a map or story which

\(^5\)Krauss, Rosalind E.; The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths; MIT Press, Cambridge, 1990, p.216
questions the subjective nature of our reality and dictates our fear of reality shifting into a transparent vision of overlaid consciousness.
Figure Thirteen
"Their procedures. . . .
Figure Fourteen
were to exacerbate an aspect of the building’s physics...
Figure Fifteen
physical presence, and thereby to embed within it a perishable...
Figure Sixteen
trace of their own." — Rosalind Krauss
residue as

trace of their own." — Rosalind Krauss
Figure Seventeen
a material inquiry
The term 'mapping' is a conscious decision in that the described process is not one of literal translation. Through this residual investigation, information is selectively received and forwarded to the next level of process without the wholesale appropriation of the body of work. In a sense, the memory of the salient points of the investigation is forwarded as is the reading of a map. The totality of information embodied in a map is never consumed at once, the map's information is filtered based on the temporal needs of its use. As a tool alone, a map can provide multiple meanings based on the vulnerabilities of the user; the imposition of schema on the map becoming the program of its use at that time. The intent of these templates is not one of direct translation or extrusion into architectonic form, it is a synthetic exercise in hopes of providing a ground in which the pragmatics of the building can be informed by the poetics of its existence.

From this mapping process came the selection of one template that, through critical interpretation, provided a ground that embodied the compositional requirements of the internal and external referents within the project. Upon reimposing the template on the site, a selective interpretation of this critical ground was established under the pressures of programmatic relationships, architectonic issues, functional juxtapositions, and poetic gestures. The culmination of these pressures yielding the subsequent scheme through multiple iterations.
Aufhebung and Prolepsis -
a conclusion within an open frame
The Jury was held in the Farish Gallery on the 24th of April 1993 at 1:00pm. The critical body of the jury was composed of Stanford Kwinter, Rudolfo Machado, and the committee as directed by Elysabeth McKee and supported by Eduardo Robles and William Sherman. The nervousness and subsequent ineloquence of the presentation is reflected in the opening monologue to the jury as follows:

Mckee: (after introducing the jurors) “this is Robert Amerman”

Amerman: “The title of this work is ‘Untitled No. 166 A Search for a Transparent Reality’. It has been a slow weaving of disparate threads that have come together and that’s why you see lots of lines of thinking slowly coming together. There is a short introduction that I wrote to the written work, this being the written document (pointing to the display). A little preface might get things going, and may settle me down some. ‘The intent of this work goes beyond its written content. It is at once a thesis, an indictment, a proposal, and a prolepsis. This is a work that is as much about what is deliberately not said, as it is about the collage that you are about to inhabit. ‘The inhabitation of the gap’: the gap between text and suggestion, object and vision; between presence and memory, between building and language, between accident and intention, and between ‘meaning’ and perception.’ That slow weaving that I was talking about started with questioning the nature of manifesto, the nature of thesis, and how we’ve been taught about autonomous meaning within architecture. Within that, I started
wondering about the imposition of the person within the work . . . That it's not autonomous for everyone, we come in with our own schema that makes the work ours; not the architect, but the person that moves through the work.

I think the best thing that I can do is show you how I slowly moved through it; and how everybody can move through it in a different way. My site is an existing 1947 trash incineration facility, it's on the east side of downtown in this wasteland area that you can see in these photographs (gesturing). It's by itself in effect in this scrub land by the bayou. My project is the re-inhabitation of this with a publishing press, a bookstore, and a reading room.

With that specific a site, i.e. an existing building, and the hunt for the documents that generated that existing building. That became my site per se, the building itself, and the study of that building through different routes; whether it was photographically, whether it was through the documents, or through the as-builts that I generated of the building (this gets back to the 'inhabitation of the gap' idea that I had referenced earlier). The gap between what's the machine and what's the architecture when you start seeing how specific this thing is to the operations that occurred within it. The gap between the construction documents, the piece as built, the piece as time has imposed on it, the piece as I have found it, and how things have moved throughout that.

From that I started these residual studies of trying to translate that phenomena that I am talking about; that gap through time as things opened up, as things moved. There are parts to the building that you can
see in these smaller photographs that literally have moved; things that have rusted, fallen down. It was a start . . . tentative at best, but it was a direction nonetheless. So what I've got in these are . . . put the mylar down on the existing documents, study it as it was intended, then translate it as it moved, as things have fallen down and to question 'is there a residual gap' between the two conditions.

From those, I've tried to move into a process which then starts to collage those studies. A formal manipulation at best, but at least a template to establish relationships that are based on found conditions within the building and how that could possibly extrude into where the building was headed (where my imposition was headed). Rather than showing you all the layers that it took to get there (that's where these process bundles came from) for the building to be inhabited by the layers of work that got me from where I started to where I am. This being the final collage that was superimposed in the site. All of these things becoming tentative maps, not literal extrusions of 'can you take this thing and then make architecture out of it', but, can you take a map that's based on the conditions within the building and have them suggest things but also have programmatic issues, architectonic issues and even pragmatic issues such as exit egress requirements etc., and throw everything at it and perhaps this slow mapping will suggest an architecture.

A walk through the building seems as far as I can go. As I said before, there is the existing building and its chimneys, I've got the press at the heart of the building over the pits that were relative to the earlier trash dumping operations, the provision of a void that would seem to be the
center of the building. Relative to that is the warehousing / Production facilities that feed it as well as on the other side there is the entry sequence that is both the primary one for the bookstore (which is fully on the second level) and the reading room which is on the third level as well as the secondary sun shading canopy which acts as an alternative sequence and a loading of the administrative aspects of the building which is on the ground floor . . . .

Actually, I'd like to start the discussion now if that's ok."
(The jury begins examining the project separately upon moving from their seats to the display)

Kwinter: "I'm sorry, could you explain the program of the building again."

Amerman: "It's a printing press, a bookstore and a reading room for retailing the produced books." (The programmatic functions of the building are reiterated to the jury upon close inspection of the model)

"The site is next to a major linear element which is a railroad yard which parallels the dead end road which feeds the facility. That is why the scheme operates on both sides of the building; warehousing on the leeward side with the trucks moving behind the building and around it to the loading docks on one side and back out again."

Machado: "In the same way that the incinerator worked in the past . . . ."
(the jurors move back to their seats)
Machado: "I regret wanting to change the composition of the model (an elevated base structure on four low stools as legs) but when one sits down, the building hits us (gesturing to the bridge of his nose). So either we stand up all of the time or we move the model. But particularly the way that it is composed, I don't dare move the model."

Amerman: "I don't mind; we can move it if you like . . . the idea behind it was, if I can elevate it then we can inhabit the architecture instead of inhabiting the diagram."

Machado: "But we don't really inhabit the model; we look at it. This is something that I would like to talk about in terms of the model. The suggestion of the movement of this composition with its elevated base and quadripartite legs, the thesis, the design. I would then pose the assertion that we could talk about legibility versus over aestheticizing the piece / the cause . . . Whatever you get is a clear impression of the building which is a very traditional solution. But for instance, I cannot really follow the plans from my architectural era to understand the movement through it in the sense that a client would have to. You talk about inhabiting, and you put the building at eye level so that we can 'inhabit', but I don't think that is what we do. It is just two different points of view; the point of view from driving around it and the it and the point of view from the air."
What is your ‘why’, what drives these other parts? Why the careful Japanese wrapping (of the books) and the meaning of (the self-portrait box’s) ‘commodity’? I need some clues otherwise I am left alone."

Amerman: “What I tried to do at best was to provide as many threads as I could; not necessarily to have to talk about them, but to show that there are multiple strands in the work and perhaps this is a more internal feeling about architecture and about the process that I’ve been through. The boxes being some self portraits that I was working on relative to perception, that’s the mirrors that we were speaking of earlier. The sort of indictment of you being both placed within the work and being pulled back out through perception. That’s an aside in a way, but these are pieces that were put up hopefully to show that there’s layers of questioning, of indictment, within the work.”

Machado: “Yes, but today, should that obscure the work?”

Amerman: “Do you think that the imposition of the boxes questions the legibility?”

Machado: "No, no, no . . . the drawings, how you have obstructed them. It is obvious that you can draw very beautifully."

Amerman: “Perhaps that’s a reaction to the consumption of the academy in general in a way, that models tend to be the focus and that drawings
tend to be washed away. So I was hoping that the information could be
more literal within the model and that through this collage, this
‘inhabitation of the gap’ that we’re talking about, the detail layers that
obscure in a way can also impose a rationale between the plan and its
referent.”

Machado: “Yeah, they are very illusive.”

Amerman: “For me, that’s where the written part of the process started to
come through because what I tried to provide in the document was the
ability for people to impose themselves within the work. What happens is
. . . if you want to just read the surface you can, if you just want to read
the disparate pieces you can, if you want to read them as compressed
you can; or if you want to look for the accidents within here you can find
incredible juxtapositions which come out of one word having another
word imposed over it, and the tension generated there.
So that is where this elusiveness comes from; trying to provide a broad
exploration of a project to a jury but also trying to say ‘if you want to stand
up here and find the things . . . they’re there. But if you don’t want to . . .
that’s ok too’. We can always impose our personal levels of schema to
the work, in the same way that I feel about the perception of architecture
itself. There is no brass plaque of the narrative that generated the
building on its face and it is you and your mental constructs that inhabit
the space.”
(a long and entirely too uncomfortable pause from the jury)
Kwinter: "We seem embarrassed by the silence, there is a sense that we are trying to see: 'is there a global organization besides the model that the thesis points towards'. I mean, I've read some of your texts to try to figure out the line of thinking. There seems nothing systematic in what you've shown other than the authors are mostly Twentieth Century . . . Octavio Paz, Cioran, Eliot; all this material. One detects something beautiful through all of these anagrams though one can be suspicious when we wonder where you interest lies. I'm really just talking to give us all a break to think, there is an almost oppressive nature of distribution of events."

Amerman: "I must admit, the exploration still remains an open question at the moment; but I think that's good because personally in looking at the work that I have done in the past, the work has been so pointedly specific it stopped . . . in effect it died. In a way this has been a good pursuit to keep the work open, to keep it tumbling and perhaps to embrace something that I could keep pursuing.

Kwinter: "I appreciate that, and I think that your sincerity comes across very clearly. If your solution weren't so classical in many ways, I would say that this really is like contemporary music composition in many ways. You can see elements of Cage, you can see elements of Stockhausen, you can see elements of Legatee and you can say that this is not only about these elements of composition and stasis of distribution of events
but at the same time it all really comes back to a quite strict formal sort of even quasi-symmetry. Except one wonders 'what is the point, what is the counterpoint, where is the wavering line?' I don't think you can leave it suspended because you've given a solution where almost every detail has been accounted for."

Machado: "That is what I like. That through all of this investigation, there is a design, there are tangible comparisons. There has to be . . . and that I find very refreshing. This is in opposition to the way that architecture is taught today. The contribution is that in the end, all of this exploration has given us a building versus giving us something else."

Amerman: "Which seemed like an important synthesis, in that, can the ephemeral 'thing', finally yield something beyond the ephemeral and the unbuildable."

Machado: "As we see in other work."

Amerman: "Absolutely, in fact, that is why the project was pushed to the point that it was in that I am reinhabiting here. I'm not covering the building with Dryvit, I'm not just pushing it aside. The vibration that can be achieved in putting a new material next to the existing material was very important to me, and that's where the details came from. That's why they're up there."
Kwinter: "Your language, to me, is almost rigorously musical. You talk of vibrations and gaps and accidents which become the break from the classical well tempered clavichord. There are things that I really care for in the building, I don't really like the stairs, I think the chimney stacks are enough, but always incidental to the shifting of modes. Here there is this kind of open endedness, what they call an atonic chord . . . here we have a closed chord. Maybe there is a real question held between the two, my question is that it's all very beautiful but there is a different continuum. Are you saying that the accidentalism that you're interested in finds a real home in your building?"

Amerman: "I can see some of the classical things that you are talking about, but there are also subtleties going on through a series of slow rotations." (While explaining the warehouse curb and columnar variations)

Sherman: "Subtle dimensional shifts . . ."

Amerman: "In a way it feels good that there are both. There is rigor and accident and 'can those two exchange?' That is where the photographs (of the model in various compositional forms) are an attempt to show the tension through the new architecture's interaction.

Machado: "Could you sum up your thesis in a very short sentence?"
Amerman: "I'm trying to show that this is a manifesto about anti-manifesto. That the autonomous meaning manifests that I have seen through my career are being called into question. The imposition of our schema within the work and the allowance of accident and intention is where the richness of the architecture can come from versus it having one meaning for a body of society."

Machado: "As a design, as a problem, I have no quarrels with it. I too am comfortable with your sincerity as has already been stated. It seems a reasonable and contemporary way to generate a building but, I cannot check it, I have not seen the 'meaning' of it, I cannot verify that room for the accident to be dictated. Nor can I verify the opposite, that is to say, how much the program, site and thesis reflect in one another. In the case of traditions of modernism, it is a very good building. It is successful and it seems technologically resolved and it provides moments of great poetic interest. I cannot really check it; the accident / the threshold / the curb."

Sherman: "Are there unanticipated moments that this 'accident' encounters in the text where this intersection between what you've done and the original building that for you crystallizes these issues?"

Amerman: "In a detailing sense, I'm afraid that it feels a little too premeditated. At that point, you have to think about what piece of steel is going to do this and how a piece is . . . let's take one juxtaposition for example. The existing loading hoppers that the trash was literally picked
up from the ground floor, lifted to the roof and moved across to be dumped into the incinerators which were on the second level. That’s this blurring which we are talking about . . . which is the machine and which is the architecture? I’m having to remove the machine, I’m taking out the incinerators in order to reinherit it, but, can I reimpose that idea. Not literally, but the idea of the machine against the architecture and back and forth. That is where these details came from, for example the existing loading hopper with a laminated glass floor with a matte scrim between the two sheets of glass so that not only can you exploit that sectional hole through the building, you can also use it as a lighting condition, you can use it as a floor condition, you can use the spatial transparency but not the literal transparency. You can project light through it rather than providing some kind of exploitive fun-house, scary condition.”

Machado: “That is the establishment of the religion of the project. That is very clear.”

Kwinter: “But there are different accidentalisms. Because as you know, accidents were not even considered useful by Western Culture until the beginning of the Nineteenth Century when Charles Darwin established that accidents were the engines that drove differentiation, evolution, and natural selection. But the dynamics of evolution have been shown increasingly to be catastrophic, that is to say after an accident, survival is in part absorbed and returns its thrust to a global environment. Your
building doesn’t, it has a kind of homeostasis where you see slow progressions; some of which even needed to be pointed out and there they are. It’s just not quite the same as real accidentalism, I mean you can’t design like that. Presumably you have a kind of rhythm pattern, there is an establishment of creases within the building. I think that we see a work that is very beautiful within a world system, and you have a very beautiful building. This thing sort of hums in a very regular way with slight modulations, with slight phase shifting which is almost imperceptible. Even Mies’ buildings had shiftings . . . a slightly grated edge; they’re just different modes."

Amerman: “That is why when you first posed the question, I thought that was relative to detailing which is why I had to preface it with ‘well, it’s not accident when you have to do that’.”

Kwinter: “That’s when the aesthetists look for salient features.”

Machado: “To me as we look over the history of architecture, this is the religiosity of modernism. There is already a relationship.

Amerman: “The earlier schemes that I worked with seemed to be chaos for chaos’ sake. They were ‘extrude that (collage) into form; but it just kept leaving me flat.’"
Kwinter: “You’re right because there are control systems and there are chaos systems and it is in their interaction that we find this ‘vibration’. That’s what makes accidents creative, there must be a structure for them to move through. If there is not, they evaporate. You’re onto something, you’re definitely onto something.”

Amerman: “It’s going to take some time.”

Machado: “That is within any career. It’s really very beautiful.”

**A Conclusion of Hindsight**

In an anti-climactic sense, the self-effacing quality of my presentation took away from the ability of the defense to indict the body of work and to incite a cohesive public argument. I feel as though the work itself was stronger than the dialogue that it generated; it became a question of providing so many lines of thinking that several salient trails to the argument were lost. It is my hope that the ‘inhabitation of the gaps’ within this document as the synthetic thesis will provide the multi-valent body of work which will lead us towards the perception of a transparent reality.
Figure Eighteen

site collage one (above)
site collage two (below)
Figure Nineteen

site collage three (above)
site collage detail (below)
Figure Twenty
overall model view
Figure Twenty one

entry sequence model views
Figure Twenty two
production facility model views
Figure Twenty three

entry sequence alternative proposal
(study model)
Figure Twenty four

first floor plan (above)
first floor plan detail (below)
Figure Twenty five
second floor plan (above)
second floor plan detail (below)
Figure Twenty six
third floor plan (above)
third floor plan detail (below)
Figure Twenty seven
first floor detail vignette (above)
second floor detail vignette (below)
Figure Twenty eight
third floor detail vignette
Figure Twenty nine

section sheet (above)
section detail (below)
Figure Thirty

section sheet (above)
section detail (below)
Appendix A

experimental text source documents

**overall subtext:**
Borges, Jorge Luis; 'The Draped Mirrors'; *El Hacedor* (the maker) / *Dreamtigers*; translated by Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland; University of Texas Press, Austin; 1964, p.27

**figure one:**
Octavio Paz; *Selected Poems*; edited by Eliot Weinberger; A New Directions Book, NY, 1984, p.138

Hani Rashid; 'Meditations on Architecture in a Media Field'; *Pratt Journal of Architecture On Making*; Rizzoli, NY 1992, p.203

**figure two:**

Luis Poirot; *Pablo Neruda. Absence and Presence*; W.W. Norton, NY, 1990, p.38

**figure three:**
Pascal Quintard Hofstein; *Symposium - The Mumbler meets the Maker*; Pratt Institute's Higgins Hall April 27, 1989

Henri Focillon; *The Life of Forms in Art*; Zone Books, NY, 1989, p.157

**figure four:**
Octavio Paz; *Selected Poems*; edited by Eliot Weinberger; A New Directions Book, NY, 1984, p.66

Alberto Perez-Gomez; *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*; MIT Press; Cambridge, MA, 1983, p.6

**figure five:**
T.S. Eliot; 'Gerontion'; *Selected Poems the centenary edition*; Harcourt Brace Janovich Publishers; San Diego, CA, 1964, p.32

Lobell, John; *Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*; Random House, Boulder, 1979, p.56

**figure six:**
Georges Bataille; Le coupable (Somme Athéologique, vol.2; Gallimard, Paris 1961) p.59

figure seven:
Chris Taylor; 'The Nomadic Survey'; Sight Work / Site Work Documents; ACSA, University of Waterloo Graphic Services; Waterloo Ontario, Canada, 1992, p.13

Kim Tanzer; 'Releasing the Form to the Making: Womenswork is Never Done'; Pratt Journal of Architecture On Making; Rizzoli, NY 1992, p.39

figure eight:
E.M. Cioran; from Pratt Journal of Architecture On Making; Rizzoli, NY 1992, back coverleaf


Georg Simmel from Carlos Castaneda; The teachings of Don Juan; the Yaqui way of Knowledge, front coverleaf
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Taylor, Chris; 'The Nomadic Survey'; Sight Work / Site Work Documents; ACSA, University of Waterloo Graphic Services; Waterloo Ontario, Canada, 1992