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For an architecture of resistance

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FOR AN ARCHITECTURE OF RESISTANCE

by

CAROL A. LAUFER

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

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ABSTRACT
FOR AN ARCHITECTURE OF RESISTANCE

BY

CAROL A. LAUFER

This thesis investigates the relationship between power structures and architecture. There are two considerations: how powerful institutions use architecture to articulate their images and how publishing, a powerful medium of architectural ideas, is manipulated. The investigation suggests that the tendencies to objectify people and commodify architecture reinforce each other, explaining, in part, a lack in architecture. The objectification continues through architecture precisely because an economy of architectural resistance has barely developed.

The tools used to examine this issue include feminist critiques of science, and the analysis of literature and architectural journals. Although most of the document is written, a portion is a photographic and textual montage. This encourages interaction between the document and the audience thereby resisting passive commodification of the ideas presented.

While the written document outlines some recent attempts at resistance, the design portion physically manifests resistance.
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INTRODUCTION

Feminist theories have informed nontraditional understandings of architecture. Some work grows from Cultural Feminism's valorization of traits traditionally associated with women. Biology is a primary concern in their arguments: traits of women are considered positive, while traits of men are considered negative. Traditionally, Cultural Feminists develop their arguments by analyzing historical trends of patriarchal oppression of women. Using this method, Cultural Feminists have been responsible for important criticism of these structures. Other feminist theorists criticize the Cultural Feminist approach regarding their valorization of female traits. Often, their opposition argues, these traits reaffirm the gender dichotomies defined by the patriarchal structure the Cultural Feminists wish to critique.

This valorization of female characteristics tends to be labeled "feminist architecture." "Feminist architecture" usually implies either architectural programs specific to women, work instigated and/or performed by women, or specific formal conditions associated with women.1 Again, this supports traditional gender derived dichotomies. All imply normative conditions resulting in inclusion or

exclusion from a specific category, "Feminist Architecture." This type of categorization frequently forces women to closely define their work and their lives, obscuring important aspects of their work.

Architecture developing from a point of view concerned with broader issues of some feminist theory does not describe feminine or feminist form. It is not concerned with creating architecture for women and finally, it does not force women to assign "feminist" or "non-feminist" labels to their work. Rather, various projects informed by feminist theory try to develop alternatives to/within the existing fabric of architecture and architectural discourse through both form and content. The intention of the work is not to be definitive, pejorative, or normative. This is an important distinction.

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OBJECTIFICATION

The act of reducing an individual to an object is objectification. As objects, people can serve as objects of desire, commodity or exchange:

3This paper has been conceived as a bank of sorts, a bank of information. In that regard, the text is like the branch bank where the depositor has an account, the footnotes are like the Automated Teller Machine (ATM), and the audience of the paper is like the depositor. (Note the absence of the Bank Headquartes.) The more an individual deposits into her account, the more she will be able to get from the ATM. The depositor can choose to completely ignore the ATM and rely solely on her branch bank for her transactions, limited hours and crowded lobbies notwithstanding. But, if she chooses to interface with the ATM, she avails herself of a far reaching resource and connects herself to an enormous network.

4The mechanisms that construct sexual excitement rest most fundamentally on fetishization and on the dehumanization and objectification of the sexual object. And these are associated with debasement of the object and the construction of mystery, risk, illusion, and a search for revenge. The sexual object is to be stripped of its humanity; the focus is on breasts, buttocks, legs and penises, not on faces. Or on inanimate objects, an animal or a partial aspect of a human such as a breast or penis is given the personality taken from the object.* Nancy Heartsox, Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983) 157.

5in the US...married women were economic chattel through most of the 19th century. Married women were allowed to own property - which meant that they themselves were considered persons, not property - toward the end of the 19th century, but that right was made effectual only in the first decades of the 20th century. In some states in the U.S., married women still cannot engage in some economic transactions without the consent or participation of their husbands." Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1979) 109.

6"The Bourgeoisie...has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless, chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct brutal exploitation.* Karl Marx and Frederick Engel, The Communist Manifesto (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967) 82.
The inevitable and intrinsic cruelty involved in turning a person into an object should be apparent, but since this constricting, this undermining, this devaluing, is normative, no particular cruelty is recognized in it. Instead, there is only normal and natural cruelty.\textsuperscript{7}

Since context informs objectification, many disciplines have developed theories of objectification. In each discipline, this objectification allows for and inevitably leads to exploitation.

Like a human being reduced to an object, architecture is often reduced to a commodity. These two ideas are not simply analogous, they are mutually supportive. The inclination to view human beings as objects allows human(e) concerns to be ignored. Thus, many architects have become primarily concerned with either formal issues of object making or financial issues and the bottom line.

BANK ARCHITECTURE

Reflection of a desired image is one use of architecture. This is clear through an overview of bank architecture. Prior to the 1840's, Americans were wary of banks:

Financial intermediaries were slow to appear in the United States because of a profound antipathy toward them; many Americans were opposed to banks on moral grounds. Agriculture was regarded as

\textsuperscript{7}Dworkin, 102.
the mother of the country, as the mother of man, 'our nursing mother, the breasts from which the state derives support and nourishment'\textsuperscript{8}, as the principal source of wealth, and as the guardian of physical and moral health...\textsuperscript{9}

The initial mistrust of banks is not surprising since prior to the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) bank failures wiped out depositors' savings. To instill confidence in a skeptical public, Greek temple and Roman basilica forms were appropriated in early bank architecture in the United States.\textsuperscript{10} By the use of formal gesture, the architects presented banks as sacred yet secular. They attempted to evoke a sense of stability and security in the public.

A change in Bank building form suggests a new outlook on banking either in the public eye, the institution's eye, or both. By the middle of this century the Modern bank attempts to create a more relaxed, welcoming atmosphere:

This saucy new bank invites the world to assume the role of the voyeur, peering

\textsuperscript{8}Mother as a metaphor for land is a typical example used by feminist theorists to illustrate that certain elements in Western culture are conceptually gendered. Imbedded in this metaphor is the dichotomous relationship between agriculture (feminine) and finance (masculine). This example illustrates the contention of feminist theorists that language indicates, through unclear layers of meaning, society's gendered concepts of the world. This suggests the limits of a "Liberal" feminist's attempts to work simply within the systems (i.e. legislation) to garner equality for women.


\textsuperscript{10}Severini, 82.
through the great sheets of glass at whatever activities may be taking place inside.¹¹

Despite the "invitation" to empowerment suggested by the "great sheets of glass," the architecture of the Modern bank continues the same image-making tradition of grandeur and power. An individual's experience is impressed by the same sense of awe as in the earlier banks. Consider the bank illustrated in the series of montages of figures 1 through 6 (Bank of London and South America.) Although the architecture allows for a pedestrian to look inside, as the voyeur, the experience of that individual is hardly one of power. As bank architecture serves the image of the banking institution, its tradition of power continues.

Banks are no longer strong institutions (if they ever were). The recent "S & L Crisis" and the impending commercial bank crisis is testimony to the weakening state of these institutions. Ironically, the stylistically Postmodern bank typically offers flimsy visual hype while referring back to the earliest image of a bank.

By recognizing the voice of the early, symbolic and later, formal architecture, architecture's power to speak is clear. As this power has become a handmaid to a powerful institution that is being questioned culture-wide, the

symbolic and formal approaches do not reflect the public's impression or experience of banking.

POWER, OBJECTIVITY AND ARCHITECTURAL PUBLICATIONS

The Western dialectic of self and other informs the reduction of both humans and architecture to mere commodity:

...a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object 'it' or 'you', who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic come the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized master pieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its deepest sense of national self identity.\textsuperscript{12}

Object Relations Theory (a "branch of psychoanalytic theory concerned with the development of the self in relation to others")\textsuperscript{13} offers an explanation of this "othering."

Literature offers an example of it:

[Selden] had preserved a certain social detachment, a happy air of viewing the show objectively...That was the secret of readjusting her vision....Lily found herself scanning her little world through his retina.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14}Edith Wharton, \textit{House of Mirth} (New York: New American Literary, 1964) 141.
Selden watches Lily with a detached, "objective" eye in 1905: the phenomena recognized critically by Edith Wharton, long before feminist rhetoric embraced it.

As Selden watches Lily throughout *House of Mirth*, he continues to embrace illusions about her. His "objective" distance reinforces these illusions. When he is in a position to help her, he cannot recognize her problems; Lily dies as a result of Selden's "blindness." This is an example of how the illusion of an accurate and objective eye leads to objectification.

Despite the limits of objective accuracy, recognizably "situated" objectivity can provide a means of resistance to objectification. Both the limits and the power of objectivity are part of this project. The limitations of objectivity become an important component when looking at architectural publications.

Like Lily's literary death, the mutability of printed information illustrates the limits of objectivity. Architectural publications necessarily rely on visual imagery to share and explain ideas. While the visual information they provide is clear, its bias is not apparent. These images are controlled and ordered to express specific information.

Architectural publications rely on photographic reproductions to express ideas. Consider that photography
often presumes "objectivity." Photographs are (mis)represented as facts:

...Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates. Starting with their use by the Paris police in the murderous roundup of Communards in June 1871, photographs became a useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations.\textsuperscript{15}

Photography allows us to "hold the whole world in our heads-an anthology of images."\textsuperscript{16} Information provided by a photograph obfuscates photography's mutability. Photographic reproductions discourage further investigation of the world because they seem to provide 'an anthology of images.' While photography is a subjective medium, it appears to be objective.

A photograph records a real event; fixed in time it appears unbiased. Historically, photographs record "facts." "Facts" are easily and frequently manipulated. Recognizing the photographer as agent in the production of the photograph calls into question the objectivity of the photographic image. The photographer holds the camera, chooses the subject and frames the image. If she prints the photograph, she has further opportunity to manipulate the


\textsuperscript{16}Sontag, 3.
image. Therefore, photography is a subjective endeavor and does not display objective truth. Magazine editing involves similar decisions.

Yet, photographing provides the distance often associated with objectivity. An image is still and clear, completely passive to the viewer. By simply looking, the photograph's audience becomes passive; they do not "need" to interact. The Viewer sees what she knows or wants to see. Ultimately the viewer relies on her knowledge of the image based on this reproduction.

The following montage (figures 1 through 5) attempts to instigate a "conversation" between the audience and a set of photographs of a building.\(^1\) The objectivity of photography is challenged, and the representation of architecture is at issue as well.

\(^1\)In this appropriation of deconstructionist discourse, the author of the text is implicitly and explicitly undermining the objectivity of images while supporting the power of the text. Yet, the power of the architectural images overshadows any i(a)llusion of "absence" referred to in the text. By evoking contemporary rhetoric and overlaying it onto photographic reproductions of a bank built 25 years earlier, the author attempts to conflate the meaning of the image with that of the text and therefore reconceptualize the bank. This example shows, on the one hand, the author's recognition of the power of publishing to influence architects and architecture, and its potential for manipulation, and, on the other hand, it shows the need for active audience critiques of what is published. My response to this publication is purposely subverted (as much as it can be within the context of this document) to allow for the readers interaction and interpretation.
Included in the montage is some text. Both the text and the images reference the same project, a bank in Argentina built between 1959 and 1966. The text, written in 1984, is printed at the front of the journal containing the images. This segment is included to make several points: about the power of bank architecture; about the power of representation in and of architecture (written and photographed); and about the power of a critical eye, especially when regarding architectural publications.
The Bank of London and South America was one of the leading international banks. Its high reputation - based on its integrity, efficiency and the confidence inspired by the way it does its business - had to be conveyed in the building through a clear and concise architectural statement.

Moreover, the competing architects were not permitted to treat the exterior of the new building with past styles or contemporary clichés which, while valid for a particular moment in time, became obsolete soon after they are formalized (in other words, fashionable architecture was prohibited).

Bank of London and South America  fig. 1
Through his design, Venturi expressed the idea that in this space man can be developed in harmony with his fellow men. This was not a design principle as such. Rather, it represented points of departure which are perceived in the final built form.

Bank of London and South America  

fig. 2
When one walks through the buildings, the walls that limit it disappear. One sees — as a boundary — the frontages of the buildings situated across the street. In other words, the building suggests a covered square because it involves a space limited by the urban framework. As there is no division between interior and exterior, the frontage of the bank does not have an imposing presence.

Bank of London and South America

fig. 3
Only photographs or perspectives from specific real points of view enable the qualities of the building to be expressed. Even the earliest sketches for the design suggested the idea of the building as a void, as an absence, and not as an object.
The fact that the structure of the work enables the surrounding buildings to be observed from the inside, so that the internal space is enlarged and extended to the frontages, and the fact that the glass wall creates an illusion of inclusiveness or perimetal extension are simply the outcome of a creative process consciously prefigured by Christos Terra.
In formal terms, the building has not merely been a creative architectural statement in every sense of the term, but, unlike much fashionable design, has kept a relevance which, in our view, will last for many years to come.
The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems\textsuperscript{18} by Martha Rosler, inspired the preceding montage. This project is relevant to this thesis on two levels. On one hand, Rosler's subject matter is skid row residents, yet she denies the viewer the ability to objectify them; she avoiding objectification of these individuals. On the other hand, her juxtaposition of text and photographs indicates, as the title of the project does, the inadequacy of these two "systems." Both the preceding montage and the Rosler project illustrate the mutability of one system by its juxtaposition with the other.

Of course, the "Inadequate Systems" refer literally to photography and writing. Yet the larger systems of a capitalist economy are also called into question by Rosler's use of a bank as the instigating image. An analogous criticism of the institution of architecture is pursued in this thesis.

RESISTANCE THROUGH PUBLISHING

The limits of objectivity having been established, it is necessary to return and reclaim objectivity as a tool.

We unmasked the doctrines of objectivity because they threatened our budding sense of collective historical subjectivity and agency and our 'embodied' accounts of the truth, and we ended up with one more excuse for not learning any post-Newtonian physics and one more reason to drop the old feminist self-help practices of repairing our own cars. They're just the texts anyway, so let the boys have them back.19

While it is important to acknowledge "other ways of knowing," it is also necessary to maintain some of the "doctrines of objectivity." Architectural publications can be considered a forum for architectural resistance. Objectifying and/or commodifying representation can be used to illuminate this tendency. Reframing architectural conventions to challenge those same conventions is a method of undermining them. This form of architectural critique could go a long way to re-institute human(e) issues in architecture.

The architectural publication serves the professional, building, architectural community. Architects are, of course, the audience of these journals. Thus most

professional journals pander to the architects. Criticism of the published materials is typically found in the "Letters to the Editor" section. In other words, a private individual is openly critical while the editors, the decision makers behind the publications, are not.

Rather than being directly critical, the architectural publications simply do not publish projects that challenge the status quo. By omitting challenging work, the publications wield the power both to expand circulation and knowledge of chosen work, and to silence other work. Unfortunately, as academics interested in revising architectural history frequently illustrate, publications do not necessarily feature work based on merit. The politics behind publication decisions are not apparent.

Despite the limits enforced by these publications some actual criticism seems to surface in the pages of the magazines. For example, following a typical review of the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago, by Hammond, Beeby and Babka, is a critique of the same project by

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Catherine Ingraham. Ingraham's article "Tom, Dick, (Jane), and Harry", is an example of an Architecture of Resistance. It works inside a powerful, mainstream institution responsible for spreading "acceptable" ideas about architecture. Ironically, the article is listed in the Art Index as if it were part of the larger review of the building, suggesting a mutual point of view that does not exist. In fact, it is embedded within a traditional review of the building in the February 1992 issue of *Progressive Architecture*, positioning it to potentially influence thousands of readers. Ingraham's discussion is overtly political in a manner rare for these mass publications.

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RESISTANCE THROUGH DESIGN

The design portion, five automatic teller machines located in a community garden, attempts to create an engaging space for Houston relying on experience rather than appearance alone.

Juxtaposition, as developed in Martha Rosler's project and explored in the montage, is a tool used by many artists that encourages participants to rethink ideas. Juxtaposition encouraged the development of the program for the space designed.

Some ideas suggested by the juxtaposition of the two programs are of interest. The instant gratification of a money machine is quite different from the sometimes long and arduous task of tending a produce garden. Additionally, while most ATM's give little, urbanistically speaking, back to the public, the Community Garden seemed a perfect way to reinvest in an Urban community.

The sight on the corner of Richmond and Mandell, just north of highway 59 and south of the Menil, is located within the Castle Court Neighborhood Association. While Mandell is principally a residential street, Richmond is typical of the hodge-podge of Houston. Within five blocks of the site there are many of residences, bars, dry cleaners, restaurants, adult book stores, cellular phone towers and a fire station.
By trying to move beyond the mere fact of an intriguing juxtaposition, certain urban issues began to stand out as relevant to both the ATM and the garden. Security is a primary concern of the ATM. Similarly security issues surfaced often in the neighborhood association Community Garden meetings. Despite the requirement to share one half of all the produce with low income households, the neighborhood association constantly expressed concern that the produce be secured from non-neighborhood association individuals.

The insistence of this point underscores an idea that only appropriate individuals have access to the garden. This is similar to the access available to those appropriate individuals at an ATM via a bank account. Similarly, the security of each is designed to keep the unwanted away.

Rather than finding the two programs at odds with each other, they grew closer together. Early versions of this project refer to the typical condition of a fence as a boundary and examines it. Apparently security from the "inappropriate" is not only the realm of the large, imposing anonymous institution, in this case the bank that backs the ATM, but individuals with a limited idea of community as well.

The early versions required that those entering the garden pass through or beneath several fences. The easement divided the site between the commercial/corporate realm (the
northern half of the site) and the private realm of the neighborhood association. Yet these schemes all lacked ample experience of this division. That is, the easement remained an abstract mark for those crossing it; it was not articulated three dimensionally. Similarly, the fences or boundaries remained two dimensional and not especially tactile. Finally, the car was not well integrated on the site.

Working with the ideas of the easement manifested physically, the tactile juxtapositions of materials and elements, and the integration of the car on the site, helped develop the project. The latest iteration attempts to clearly and physically delineate between the corporate realm of the ATM and the private realm of the community while simultaneously expressing their similar concerns with boundaries.
Northeast View of ATM's and Compost Bins

fig. 7
Northwest View of ATM's and Compost Bins
Site Plan

fig. 11
West Elevation
fig. 12 (top)

Retaining Wall, Plan Detail
fig. 13 (bottom)
Pedestrian Bridge, Section fig. 14 (top)

Pedestrian Bridge, Detail fig. 15 (bottom)
Automobile Bridge, Section fig. 16 (top)

Automobile Bridge, Detail fig. 17 (bottom)
Resistance is expressed several different ways in this project. The program is one example. The intention is that through the proximity of the compost bins, fruit trees and produce beds with the ATM machines, a user will be startled into seeing each in a different way. Another example is the use of building conventions to make a feasible project that challenges the status quo. This is done through yielding to the actual requirements of drive-through and walk-up ATM machines, retaining walls, drainage, turning radius', fence construction and urban tree planting.

An additional act of resistance developed through the public nature of the project. By challenging the issue of security so important to the neighborhood association, a position is staked out for the larger, non-home owning community.

The proximity of the "corporate" garden with the community garden creates a tension that the jurors could recognize. The jury seemed intrigued by the project. One juror in particular, Michael Bell, was convinced that not only did it seem feasible in its use of conventions to challenge them, but also as a suggestion for developing the decentralized city.

Fares El-Dahdah was most interested in the attempts made to undermine the security of the neighborhood association members. Although the fences on the southern half of the garden sloped to between 2' - 6" and 4' - 0", he was
not satisfied that the lowered fence was challenge enough. He was correct in commenting that it seemed that the concern with undermining security had become less important in the later design decisions. I considered the crossing of the easement as an analogy for the lines crossed in the earlier schemes. I may have missed an opportunity to be more literal and therefore more direct in a challenge to security. Additionally, he commented that the drawings and models did not reflect an experiential expression of my ideas.

Lars Lerup was concerned with the suburban/corporate appearance of the northern edge of the site. The other jurors seemed to recognize the necessity of that clarity next to the "agrarian" garden. Dean Lerup wanted more confusion across the easement, between the two types of gardens. For example, he suggested the compost bins and the drive through ATM's should look the same. Reinvention of either existing standardized piece does not seem appropriate.

I believe Lars does not recognize the clarity required in this type of Urban Landscape. I did not understand this until Martha Schwartz spoke with me.

The issue of aestheticization arose following my comment regarding Martha Rosler's primarily conceptual photographic renderings. I continue to feel that the aesthetic that was criticized remains appropriate in
developing the corporate nature of the northern edge of the site. The formal games of the ground plane developed only on that side of the easement. The suggestion that working with lot lines or a true north axis seems like architectural "post-rationalism" to me; no more or less valid than using any other line, unless it is simply an aesthetic response.

Overall, the review went well. The jurors accepted my premises and discussed relevant issues.
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