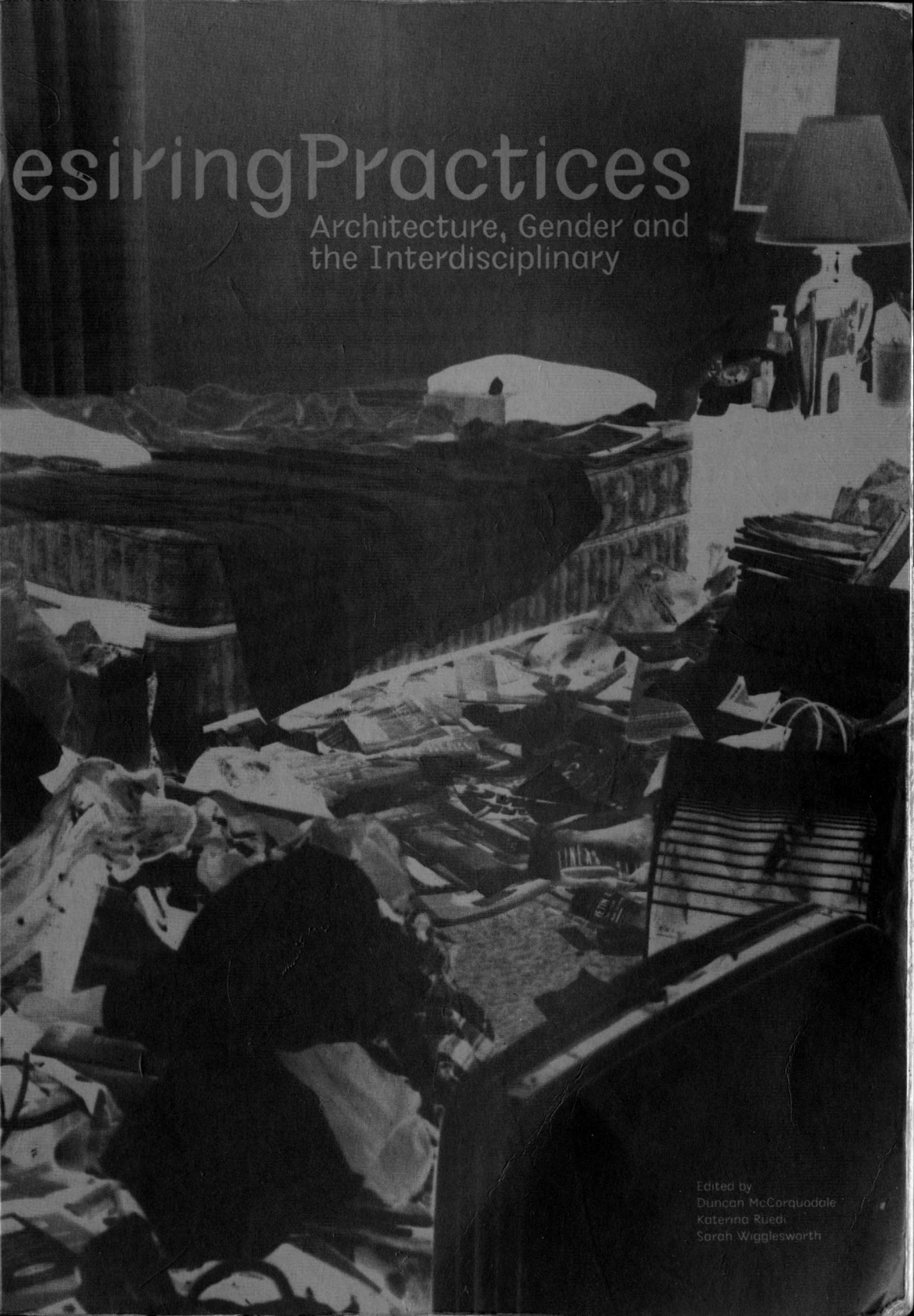
esiringPractices
Architecture, Gender and
the Interdisciplinary
Edited by
Duncan McCorquodale
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Jennifer Bloomer

The Matter of the Cutting Edge

Boys playing.
Photo: Katerina Rüedi

There may be neatness
in carving when there
is richness in feasting;
but I have heard
many a discourse,
and seen many a
church wall, in which
it was all carving
and no meat.

John Ruskin
The Wall Veil[1]

In beginning my paper with these thirty-four words from Ruskin, I have presented a ground, a playing field, if you will, for a certain kind of game. Look at the quote. In one sentence, you will find four interrelated binary pairs, three of them metaphorical: neatness and richness, carving and feasting, discourse and wall, carving and meat. I cannot imagine a ground more appropriate for entering a discussion of the politics of contemporary architectural discourse; even, perhaps of any discourse. For here we have tropes for the structural and ornamental, objective and subjective, making and interpreting, theory and practice, style and substance.

This is old ground on which many games have been played. For much of my writing and making life, I have investigated the question, "What would happen if the slope of this ground shifted?". I have never been so naive as to consider a simple reversal of slope, but have thought more about eccentric and disseminated mutations. In this paper, however, written by a me who is older and therefore believes herself wiser, I suspend disbelief in its immutability, and

accept the ground as given, assembled of multitudes of neat pairs, the units of which may slip and slide, but within each of which is maintained a disequilibrium of value.

The paragraphs that follow rest on particular conventions of difference. I have written them with hands that are beringed, lotioned, perfumed, and polished, with direction from a mind that lives in the body on to which they are attached. It is the kind of body that, in the sets of pairs body-mind, matter-form, and ornament-structure (just to recall a bit of the ground), traditionally relates to the left-hand side. Also the one which stereotypically doesn't know 'which way to move the ball'. But look: the fact that it is playing on the same field does not mean it is playing the same game.

One lovely thing about the experience of raising children as far apart in age as mine is the gift of perspective and the respect for continuity and pattern that it offers. In life so far, I have enjoyed witnessing, at close hand during three separate slices of time, the remarkable games of young children. The amazing play of boys: the ever-in-motion parry and thrust, the smashing, clamorous battles with imaginary swords and guns and airships and bombs, the itchy quest to win, to be first, to be best. Three times lived, three times (almost) the same. The protruding nose-cone and explosive cargo of the bomber drawn in pre-Bic leaky ball-point scrawl on the blue fabric notebook of Billy Joe Mullins (whose name in hearts was featured on mine) are not so different, after all, from Joshua's Mighty-Morphin-super-power-sword, with which he heroically gestures for the local gang of little girls collecting moss to make a canopy for their magic fairy tree house in my garden. And the fabulous play of girls: the mixing of sawdust tea, redolent of its production in the clash of saw and tree; the patient, collective shelling of fallen purple locust pods to obtain a swishy bowlful of seeds; the secreting of milkweed fluff in a battered cookie tin, deep in the caverns of the raspberry bramble. Their always fresh and marvellous, but also familiar, drawings of intricately rainbow-coloured birds, butterflies and fish, often accompanied by groups of small clones—mamas and their babies—mark an intriguing continuity.

Girls playing.
Photo: Gordon Wigglesworth

Temperate Rain Forest, South Island, New Zealand. Photo: Kingston University Slide Collection

My children and their friends often keep me thinking about old and new. They remind me, for example, of how the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns is based on an old, old agreement (or an old, old necessity) to quarrel that transcends the quarrel itself. I am thinking about how the desire to be the superlative is an old, old desire; and consequently, as we live in an era based on an always going forward, or movement out and away from what has come before, how even (and perhaps especially) the legitimation and substantiation of the desire to be New has become so old hat as to form a bizarre paradox sustained by the now rather rickety crutch that is called Progress.

Much of architecture, and architectural discourse, is ever in quest of the so-called leading, or cutting, edge. This edge, this leading line of molecules of the blade that cuts into unknown territory, that whacks through the tangled snaky darkness of the jungle, through the brush and briar of the wilderness, thrust out in front, going where no man has gone before, is a remarkable metaphor indeed.

The persistent metaphor of the cutting edge belongs partially to the heroic narratives of conquest of the unknown, i.e., the New and unexplored. And in the narratives of the exploration of the 'New World', the protruding blade ever inscribing the frontier is the protagonist of a consistent allegory: the sexual conquest of a virginal female body of seductive, material richness.

> ... Sir Walter Raleigh swore that he could not be torn "from the sweet embraces of... Virginia". From the beginning of exploration, then, sailors' reports... became inextricably associated with investors' visions of "a country that hath yet her maydenhead". Encouraging Raleigh to make good on his promise to establish a permanent colony in Virginia, [the investor Richard] Hakluyt prophesied in 1587, "if you preserve only a little longer in your constancy, your bride will shortly bring forth new and most abundant offspring, such as will delight you and yours".
>
> In 1609, one promoter of English immigration to Virginia promised there "valleyes and plaines streaming with sweete Springs, like veynes in a naturall bodie", while just seven years later, Captain John Smith praised New England as yet another untouched garden, "her treasures hauing net neuer beene opened, nor her originalls wasted, consumed, nor abused."... [I]n his 1725 verse history of Connecticut, Roger Wolcott depicted an ardent mariner "press[ing]/upon the virgin stream who had as yet,/Never been violated with a ship".[2]

This body is Nature, always female, with her primal wildness and material bounty. When, years later, the narrative tone shifts from the excitement of sweet maiden promise to the regret of rape and despoliation, the allegorical female, material Nature, and her aggressive male suitor remain.

Here, the bitter and intricate relation of children's games and adult patterns of behaviour is revealed: the fantasy of this cutting edge is not disconnected from the fantasy of the invasive bomber or the power sword. The heroic visions of exploration, discovery, conquest, appropriation, and colonisation that follow its revealing stroke have given rise to the historical realities and the interconnected cultures that architecture and architectural discourse represent.

It is interesting to ponder how, in architecture, the metaphor of the leading edge, which by the twentieth century has become paradigmatic, was and is strangely present and relevant even in the moment of architecture's appropriation of

discourses that have sought to dampen the fires in which such blades are forged. There is something beyond logic and reason at work here; I sense a fantasy, a child's game grown up.

> There's a theory, one I find persuasive, that the quest for knowledge is, at bottom, the search for the answer to the question: "Where was I before I was born?"
>
> In the beginning was... what?
>
> Perhaps, in the beginning, there was a curious room, a room like this one, crammed with wonders; and now the room and all it contains are forbidden you, although it was made just for you, had been prepared for you since time began, and you will spend all your life trying to remember it.[3]

Angela Carter's words pull a ravelling thread from the troubling perplexity of nostalgia (from the Greek, nostos—return home, and algos—pain), the sickness or longing for home, a place made distant in space and/or time. Where were we before we were born? In the beginning for each of us was a wonderful and, once left, inaccessible room: the first home, that dark, warm, saltwatery, pulsing vessel, the matter of mater.

A conjecture: every moment of significant twentieth century architectural discourse has at its generating core the needling itch, the troubling ache, of nostalgia: homesickness, that longing for something that one can never have again. And the period of so-called postmodern architecture, when a certain self-conscious nostalgia was embraced, is the least of it.

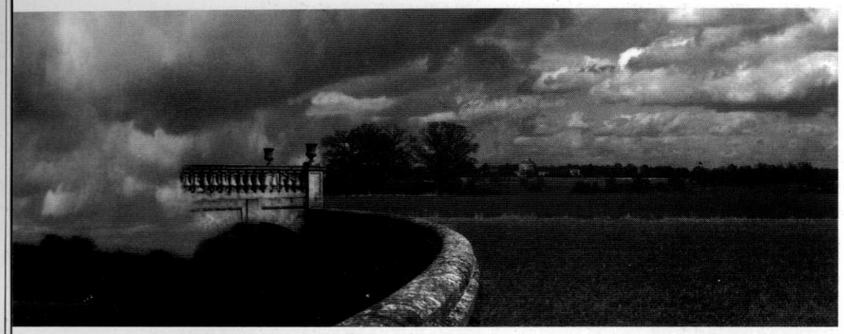
I am interested in teasing out the fibres of nostalgia in relation to the practice and discourse of architecture. In opening this subject, this word tinged with obloquy and often preceded by the qualifier 'mere', I cringe with awareness of the minefield on which I tread. But I am profoundly curious about the polarised response to nostalgia in contemporary architectural discourse. On the one hand, it is placed on a pedestal and made the universal genius of new town planning and architectural style. On the other, the one I am considering in this essay, nostalgia is covered in refusal, like a bad zit or a body odour. In the manner of these analogues, nostalgia happens; and it comes with certain pleasures.

The repression of nostalgia, a nineteenth century disease ever threatening to erupt on the skin of the twentieth, is at the core of the project of modernity; and, I think, it especially has driven, and drives, the movements of the avant-garde. The figure of the avant-garde is another kind of leading edge, another invasive metaphor, also tied to the search for the New. For decades the architectural avant-garde has engaged in a time-honoured activity: the planting of one's flag

upon intellectual territory ostensibly hitherto unexplored by other architects. But a peculiar phenomenon repeatedly occurs: the territory is then colonised under the unquestioned law of the architectural concept. Most recently this endeavour has taken the perplexing and paradoxical form of borrowing the metaphors, especially those that are spatial, of discourses that are deeply critical of this very epistemological tack, and conceptualising them as New Form. The most outstanding examples concern the appropriation of the spatial or spatialisable metaphors of Gilles Deleuze (with and without Félix Guattari)—smooth space, holey space, desiring machines, rhizomes, the fold, etc.—which he has used to tag a complex and slippery theoretical apparatus that works to undermine faith in the substantiality of epistemological structures, that authorises such conceptualisation as that in which the 'avant-garde' architects are engaged. When architectural enterprise is involved with making forms that are generated from such spatialising metaphors, architecture remains lodged in its nostalgia for form that embodies meaning, even if here the reading of that embodiment is that meaning is slippery and illusive (like an object of nostalgia). And matter doesn't particularly matter (as it certainly does to Deleuze and Guattari).

This is demonstrative of how the avant-garde, which endeavours to be new and original, fails to escape the sticky traps of tradition and convention. Furthermore,

Atlantic Wall, France.
Photo: Katerina Rüedi



Untitled. 1995.
Digital Image: Nina Pope

the ceaseless search for the New in architecture, of which making form follow philosophy's metaphors is an example, is a profoundly nostalgic project.

Design is the making of the always-in-progress New, which is always the becoming-old. The lust for the New, that telic carrot on a string, like nostalgia, is a longing for something one cannot have, for as soon as the New is formulated, it ceases to be new. And in order to stay on the cutting edge, the avant-garde architect must move on in search of the next formal frontier. This lust, driven by a necessary neglect of the weight of matter, is, in its persistent repressions, intensely nostalgic.

In its subjugation of matter by form, the modern concept of design is necessarily dominated by a nostalgia for matter, a fetishisation of an imagined absence. At the close of the twentieth century, design is driven by the necessity of the New, and, often in architecture, the Big construed as the mega, the large object that makes gestures toward infinity.

Nowhere is this more marked than in the now New offering of electronic space: the new infinite, eternal design with no bounds, no walls, infinite frontiers, no stopping. This hyperspace is the legitimate heir to the modern project. A nexus of lines, whether drawn, virtual, simulated, or troped, is the mark of a longed-for object. Form sitting on the lid of its other, matter.

Curiously, to enter electronic space is to leave home without leaving home. But in this space there is no matrix of domesticity; the cosy, sensual matter of

home has no place here. There is no room for cyber-domesticity, for electro-sentimentality. Why? Because this apparent nostalgia-free zone is, in fact, nothing if not nostalgic, a repression of 'home-sickness' so extreme that something is not quite being covered up.

The urge to virtual realities of any kind relies on a constant domestic space, whether proximal or distant. The space of domesticity, configured as 'real' space, is still, always already, the spatial envelope of the cyber-venturing subject who explores the public space of the net or the virtual space of simulation. Leaving his body, that hunk of pulsing meat, nestled in its warm, comfortable domestic space, he can project himself anywhere, into anything.

Here, the lines of nerves and the lines of communication form a continuum. Everything is transmission of information. Here is an apparent triumph of form over matter, of the rational over the corporeal. With the ostensible obviation of the body comes the repression of shame, sentiment, and nostalgia. This space replicates in certain ways the space of the infant, or even that of the foetus: interactive intake, no responsibility to any body. A nostalgic and sentimental, if not shameful, project in the extreme: the return to the natal home. That dirty place, the matter of mater. The relentless drive toward the New is a strangely directed attempt to escape from Materia, the old, generative soil, the origin. The New is never dirty; it is always bright, sparkling clean, light, full of promise, devoid of weight.

In the extravagant, blade-wielding gestures of the contemporary architectural avant-garde, there is something touchingly Cervantian, like Don Quixote, driven by serious intentions, but somehow rather endearingly misdirected. Living boldly, but fictionally-within-fiction, in deeply nostalgic visions, existing in a world of matter, but fantasising an escape into the space of imagination, a world of images. Like those little boys at play.

I would like to return for a moment to swords and nose-cones and magic houses of moss by means of one of my favourite peculiar passages of scholarship, from Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*:

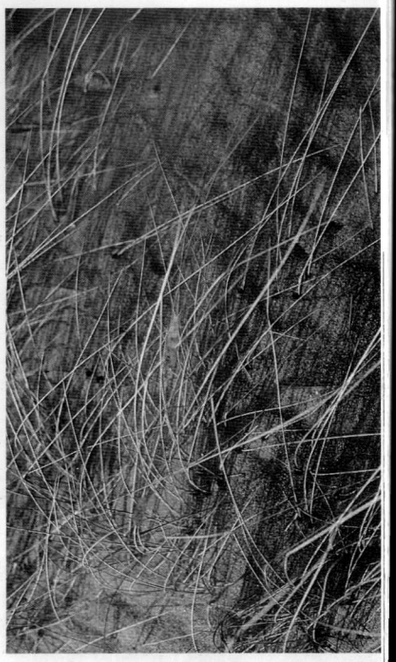
> Construction is a sublime male poetry. When I see a giant crane passing on a flatbed truck, I pause in awe and reverence, as one would for a church procession. What power of conception, what grandiosity: these cranes tie us to ancient Egypt, where monumental architecture was first imagined and achieved. If civilisation had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts. A contemporary woman clapping on a hard hat merely enters a conceptual system invented by men. Capitalism is an art form, an Apollonian fabrication to rival nature.[4]

I am interested in this remark less for what it proposes about the role of women in the construction of civilisation and the pursuit of new form, than for its positioning of the domicile, and its marked materiality, as the measuring stick of the progress of civilisation. Even that the domicile is the place where architecture would have stopped on its line of progression toward the skyscraper, that is to say, the Big and the New. The grass hut stands in for anything undeveloped, unadvanced, not extruding itself along the exalted line of progress. Furthermore, it is not simply a hut, a notation that would imply function, size, and character, but a grass hut: the material of the object delineates its 'mereness'. This picturesque grass hut suggests a notion of the primitive that the primitive hut, with its lofty theoretical accoutrements, does not. The domestic vessel of rotting material, built and rebuilt, is nothing new. It is the old, the original home, the mater, the now useless husk cast off back there at the beginnings, whenever and wherever they might be.

The selective nostalgia in which Paglia indulges so intrigues me: on the one hand, the great, rigid, erect crane angled up against the sky is a tie to a glorious past: ancient Egypt, the site of the big and new, thousands of years ago. In the next sentence, we are assured that the alternative to this sublime masculine expression, civilisation "left in female hands", is unacceptable. Why? The implication is because—*still*—the grass hut has undergone no forward-looking, progressive evolution. So here a tie to the past if evocative of progress is good; a tie to the past hitched to material and formal continuity is the object, and a weapon of, contempt.

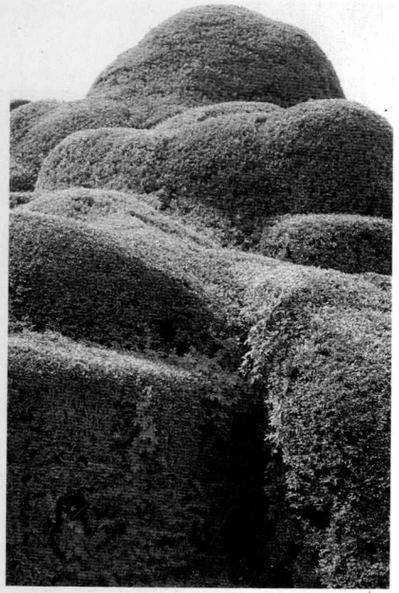
Here we have a scheme: large and protruding and going progressively forward, versus small and enveloping and eschewing progress, masquerading as male and female, and, in the building of Paglia's thesis, Apollonian and Dionysian. But what we are really talking about here is that even more basic, old, old scheme, and of course what the Apollonian and Dionysian represent—form and matter. If we go to the customary western origin of this scheme, and from Aristotle traverse the line-space to Kant, to contemporary architectural design, we can continue to gather a tedious collection of bifolded mantric inscriptions of the formula (a word that I choose carefully here): mind and body, exterior and interior, large and small, hard and soft, sublime and beautiful, abstract and concrete, public and private, objective and subjective, culture and nature…

At this point the reader has surely recognised the simple and familiar pattern of correspondence that structures so much of the tradition of philosophical, social, artistic and literary discourses: the pattern of the gendered pair. In *De generatione animalium*, Aristotle offered an instructive architectural analogy to demonstrate the relation of form and matter in procreation: the timber (material)



Grasses Blowing.
Photo: Patricia Brown

with which the builder constructs is passive and receptive to the form idea that lies in the soul of the builder, and is inscribed in the material by the activity of his tools in the same way that the material of a female body is inscribed by Nature with mammalian form via the active, moving tool of semen.[5] And only male animals possess semen because, being connected to the two higher elements, air and fire, they are warm enough to make the form-giving elixir from their blood and to give it movement. Female animals, being of the lower elements water and earth, do not possess the heat required to produce semen, therefore mere blood trickles passively from their reproductive systems. From Aristotle's influential model of male form and female matter, to Otto Weininger's matching pair in the twentieth century Sex and Character, to the gendered children's games with which I began, the overarching pattern of the valued and devalued term has informed the lineage.[6] And the line is, in fact, a pair of more or less parallel lines defining the territory of epistemologically desirable entities—the rational, exterior, large, hard, sublime, objective, cultural, public, and masculine—by measurement against those on the other side of the tracks. And again, I am less interested here in pointing out the implications of this pairing for the status of women than in raising before it the question of the old and the new, the traditional and the avant-garde. Because things get a bit mixed up here.



Topiary.
Photo: Patricia Brown

To make a radical move, to push the edge, to make something new, one might propose to situate an architectural or philosophical endeavour in the territory of the corporeal, the interior, the small, the concrete, the soft, beautiful, private, subjective, and 'natural', and of course this has been done. But, not new now, it would be 'always already', never new, relying as it must on a move of switching the valued and devalued terms while maintaining the tidy space between.

Were we interested not necessarily in the discovery of new form, but in the invention of an instructive set of relations within a familiar space, we might find ourselves in the vicinity of the garden, the cultural artefact that is grounded in the messy, dark, nurturing decay of its own production. In the garden, we are in the space of nature and culture, form and matter, concrete and abstract, exterior and interior. And, significantly, we are in a space of the feminine and the masculine in which assignments of value oscillate and flicker in locales both esoteric and mundane. I mean, for example, the way in which the femininity associated with flowers is of positive value in the lofty world of eighteenth century philosophers and for the more terrene world of the garden club, but in the same spaces also carries negative value. This flickering of value also attends the problematic role of the matter of the garden in the discovery/exploration/appropriation/colonisation narrative.

In the New World, after the wilderness had been cut and tamed, after the leading edge had moved on to the halting brink, came the lovingly forced

migration of seeds, scions, roots, and corms. Today, on the remains of the vast prairie, where my children and their friends play, are the vestiges of these antidotes to homesickness: fifteen-decade-old elms and oaks, and feral outgrowths of lily-of-the-valley brought west in apron pockets as seeds and pips, as tools for making unfamiliar places homes. Abiding residual documents of the westward expansion, they are, almost literally, roots of American culture. They are evidence that pinafore pockets of moss and locust pod seeds and milkweed fluff become, in time, the bearers of roots: the keeping of holiday celebrations and cultural traditions, the passing on of love and spiritual warmth, the maintenance of human connection. And the making of gardens. Furthermore:

> In the exchange of cuttings, scions, seeds, and overripe fruit (for its seeds) and in the exchange of information about their garden activities, women shared with one another both their right and their capacity to put their personal stamp on landscapes otherwise owned and appropriated by men.[7]

Humans are not only territorial animals that imagine, make forms, and vie for dominance. We are also the animals that till the soil; we are the creatures of nature that invent language, defining culture in terms of digging in the dirt, cultivation. The founding of cities is marked by a boys' game of inscribing the dirt: the Ludus Troiae, or Trojan Game, the labyrinthine marking of criss-crossing horses leaving their hoofprint paths in the soil. Boustrophedon, an ancient method of writing alternate lines right to left then left to right, is named by the pattern of an ox ploughing the earth. Culture is a bunch of animals digging in the dirt, marking their territory, hunkering down, holding on to life. The inscriptions of animals on the caves at Lascaux are necessarily tied to someone's discovering the staining power of ochre as she dug in the dirt. Here, as in the garden, cultivation and culture share a root that is more than etymological.

The garden is no more a natural thing than an electron microscope, or the Taj Mahal. As an intersection of nature and culture, however, it is slightly more complex and involuted than most things we make. Gardens are complex constructions of form and matter in which, unlike in the instrument and in the building, matter—the residing substance of nature—is the present condition, dominant over function and form. Gardens are imaginative inventions with which we try to reconcile our warring animal/child desires—for rule and control, and for the experiences called beautiful and sublime—with what we find all around us in the world: other living creatures, the order of what we call nature. Gardens are about making lovely, controlled constructions that sway and rustle, mutate, give forth exquisite and repulsive odours, and sometimes simply disappear. Gardens always threaten us with their easy potential to go utterly out of control. But this sinister potential is also their virtue.

Vast assemblages of matter, each bit of which has its own peculiarities and tendencies, garden constructions are dependent upon attention to a local and detailed materiality in an always moving balance with conception of form. The garden is "a curious room, crammed with wonders": mutating matter; palpable space-time currents; shifting colour; intimate relations with the sun's light, with the breath of animals, and with the flow of liquid; notions of order; the substantiation of histories and theories. It provides a vehicle for opening up a serious consideration of the mining of nostalgia, the longing for home, that allows the exploration of the possibilities that lie in the conversation of old and new, and matter and form. In the garden, the field and the game are indistinguishable, and the cutting edge is not a metaphor, but a material tool of the imagination.

Mottisfont Abbey Garden, Hampshire.
Photo: Sarah Wigglesworth
and Jeremy Till

To turn to the landscape, or the garden, for thinking about architecture is to make a significant and difficult turn. The landscape in modernity has been figured as supplemental, or an accessorising feature of the design of the building. To look at the potential of this architectural accessory requires a 180 degree about-face on the line of progress to look at the past, and to contemplate the riches of what came before the century of progress, that is the two that, now that we have made our turn, are receding down the line toward the vanishing point in much the same way that the future does when we peek back over our shoulder. In the webby historico-cultural panoply that comes to rest at points upon this line, we can see a number of 'accessories before the fact' of modernism, including the eighteenth century English landscape garden

tradition, with its stunning, visual culture affirming, relation with the landscape painting tradition, and the writings of John Ruskin, the fellow who, in the nineteenth century, was one of those guys who wrote a lot about the interesting relationships he perceived between architecture and culture, but built little. If, in our slight near-sightedness, we look at Ruskin's bulging pod of work way down the line, we see perhaps a quaint, but intriguing and historically important supplement to nineteenth century architecture in all its properly natural materiality and properly natural ornamentation, all set about to make a pretty architectural picture redolent of the kitschiest nostalgia. But, if we look with our handy two-way telescopes, zooming in, getting our noses right up to the matter of the reading material, we can see something quite different, something that, for me, is astonishing.

At the place on the line where Le Corbusier's and Walter Gropius' great-grandmothers and grandfathers are children at play in the garden (1837), a series of articles called "Villa and Cottage Architecture" appeared in *Loudon's Magazine of Architecture*. Here are a few excerpts.[8] In presenting them, I would like to note how nicely they accessorise the forthcoming book by Mark Wigley on the relationship of modernism's white walls and fashion.

> [W]hiteness destroys a great deal of venerable character, and harmonises ill with the melancholy tones of surrounding landscape: and this requires detailed consideration. Paleness of colour destroys the majesty of a building; first, by hinting at a disguised and humble material; and secondly, by taking away all appearance of age.

But, further on, following a note that the appearance of age in a villa is neither desirable nor necessary:

> We find, therefore, that white is not to be blamed in the villa for destroying its antiquity; neither is it reprehensible, as harmonising ill with the surrounding landscape; on the contrary, it adds to its brilliancy, without taking away from its depth of tone.
>
> If the colour is to be white, we can have no ornament, for the shadows would make it far too conspicuous, and we should get only tawdriness.

These seemingly prescient words, so marvellously ornamented with the language of taste, were written by an eighteen year old boy named John Ruskin, who, engaging in the literary game of the nom de plume, wrote under the signature of one Kata Phusin. Aha, you may be thinking, everybody knows about Ruskin and his psycho-sexual problems: about the frustrated love affair at seventeen which "seems to have been the effective cause of a permanent failure to attain emotional maturity" [*Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, "Ruskin"], about

the fact that his mother rented a cottage to be near him when he went to Oxford, about his unwillingness to consummate his marriage, about his ardent love at age forty for a ten year old girl. A child who never grew up, one messed-up dude, is it any wonder the boy assumed that girlish name to mark his fledgling authorship? But look again. While Kata may carry a feminine connotation in its resemblance to Kate, kata is also the Greek word for 'according to'; and phusin is, of course, the word for 'nature', from which comes the English word 'physics'. Kata Phusin, 'According to Nature', an early example of Ruskin's lifelong game-playing with words, is a rather authoritative persona indeed. Here is Mother Nature writing on the relationship of domestic architecture, materiality, ornamental detail, and colour in a manner that seems to make an impetuous leap from the grass hut to the white villa (where colour and form override materiality). And whether we see this author as Mater Natura or John Ruskin, s/he seems an unlikely source for the fathers of the white box who will come along three generations later.

But let me tell you right now that a relation of causality between Ruskin and high modernism is not what I am after here. That is not my game. I am interested in something fleshier than such a simple line as that. Let me emphasise that although here Ruskin speaks to modernism, I do not suggest that, for example, Walter Gropius or Le Corbusier had read the essays in *Loudon's Magazine*. I am making a suggestion, instead, of the possibility of looking at the past in a different way, in a way perhaps similar to the way that we look at the future: as a mineable field for inspired invention.

In Kata Phusin's discourse, the building is not a 'machine in the garden', but a supplemental element of the landscape construed as a picture, a picture composed of hundreds of tiny details, in the mind of the taste-making author/viewer. These articles form the germ of John Ruskin's 1842 paean to J. M. W. Turner, the eighteenth century landscape painter praised by Ruskin for his 'truthful' depiction of nature in all its proliferation of colour and detail.[9]

With these thoughts of architectural theory, the garden, landscape, proliferation, detail, mutating material, that our accessories before the fact give rise to, let us turn, or rather re-turn, to that accessory after the fact, the computer, and what it gives rise to: electronic space. This is again a precipitous, however simple, turn, requiring us to move 180 degrees again on our little pivot point (we are now, of course, five or ten minutes on down the line) and look at a teeny piece of the intricate panoply that now faces us, the tiny little piece that is connected to the construction of these words I speak. We will call this piece 'The Hypertextual Picturesque'. Remember that game I mentioned at the beginning of this paper? Well, this is it.

And Kata Phusin will introduce it:

"That which we foolishly call vastness is, rightly considered, not more wonderful, not more impressive, than that which we insolently call littleness."[10]

The Hypertextual Picturesque rests on the logic of the garden—the commingling of so many gendered games—exercised within electronic space. The materiality

Sands at Spurn.
Photo: Patricia Brown

of electronic space is electronic image; here form and matter have a direct relation; both are reductive versions of our conventional notions of form and matter, a situation that offers the possibility of architectures that, because obeisant to convention, escape it. In this space, the figures 1 and 0 are the codes that stand in simply for dual electronic impulse. In this space, representation and materiality share a direct, virtually unmediated relation; they are nearly in identity.

In the space of information, what is old and past—all the facts, images, and documents of history—merges fluidly with what is new and now: information, images, electronic documents. In the space of information, there is a seamlessness of time and space which mirrors (reversed perhaps) the intensity of seamless time and space that is modernism. The Swiss mercenary soldiers away from home who were the original victims of nostalgia suffered also, of course, a condition in which time and space are connected by a smooth joint.

The relationship between landscape, architecture, painting, the interweave of time and space, old and new, and constructions assembled from plethora upon plethora of detail define the old and much maligned concept of the Picturesque. The Picturesque, a collection of aesthetic theories and ideas that addressed the way we look at and make landscapes, was a phenomenon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Because I do not have the time to digress into a discussion of it, I will simply list some characteristics of the Picturesque:

An emphasis on detail over overall form

An emphasis on image; the manipulation of three-dimensional matter so that it conforms to a two-dimensional image

The controlled use of the distant—geography and chronology

The use of the found object, passive matter; glorification of the ugly and ordinary

A foregrounding of matter and its physical phenomena, i.e., 'Nature'

A challenge to the idea of private property

An emphasis on variety and idiosyncrasy

The object of the tourist as a collector of pictures of places

Situated between the aesthetic characteristics of the Beautiful and the Sublime—unlike either, the Picturesque appeals only to one sense: sight

Perhaps I do not need to mention that all of these characteristics of the Picturesque are also descriptive of the phenomenon of hyperspace. And listen as I read the words of William Gilpin, written in 1794:

> The first source of amusement to the picturesque traveller, is the pursuit of his object—the expectation of new scenes continually opening, and arising to his view. We suppose the country to have been unexplored. Under this circumstance the mind is kept constantly in an agreeable suspense. The love of novelty is the foundation of this pleasure. Every distant horizon promises something new; and with this pleasing expectation we follow nature through all her walks. We pursue her from hill to dale; and hunt after those various beauties with which she every where abounds.[11]

The condition of electronic space may also be described by these words of Raimonda Modiano on the Picturesque:

> [I]n the Picturesque desire remains free and unattached, continuously disconnecting from specific objects in order to return to the self or move on to another object.[12]

Furthermore:

> When desire is thus barred from its object, vision itself becomes appetite. I would like to suggest that the Picturesque traffics heavily in the erotics of denied desire, relegating appetite to the exclusive realm of vision which at once limits and sustains it. The Picturesque abounds in 'wistful gazes toward untouchable objects', and features perpetual brides and bridegrooms who never consummate their 'affair with the landscape'...[13]

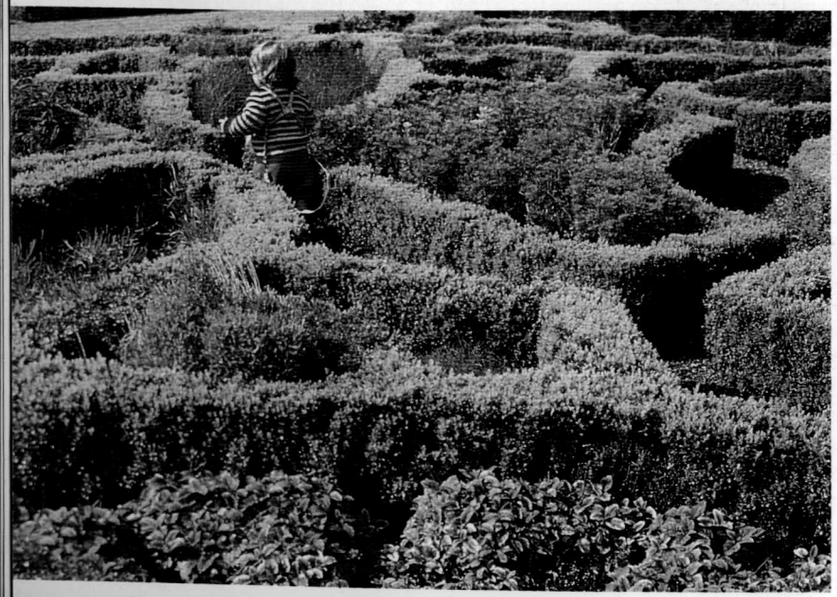
Do you hear this succinct alignment of the space of the Picturesque with the space of the computer, glued together by the metaphor of the land as an object of sexual desire? But this landscape object, unlike that of Sir Walter Raleigh and others, is untouchable. Untouchable because its materiality and its desirability consist in infinite numbers of images.

To theorise a new game played on old ground by theorising an old game played in new space is logically appropriate within the necessary reflexivity of such a game. The constant pivoting and shuttling between old and new, big and small, with its concomitant confusion of good and bad, of masculine and feminine, etc., is the mechanism of the garden and the landscape. (It is also the mechanism that structures this paper.) The garden as I have used it is a metaphor of effect and event, not of formal causality. Everything is potentially on the move, coming and going, repeating patterns, but the effect of the repetition is always a little or a lot different. This construction, like the garden, is a phenomenon of cyclical consumption and production of its own materiality.

The hypertextual picturesque is an architecture of flickering texts and images. It is an aggregation of detail. It is the making of space with/in the computer that does not mime conventional architectural notions of space, but which does mine conventional architectural notions of construction. The materiality of the computer is the materiality of the hypertextual picturesque; it cannot, therefore, be reproduced in three dimensions, although it bears the potential to provide generative, methodological impetus to three dimensional construction. The hypertextual picturesque could not be classified as hyperspace, but it is constructed in hyperspace. It is a flickering hybrid (now you see it, now you don't) of something old and something new, and of the infinitely large and the infinitely small.

The picturesque landscape and the picturesque tour exist in reference to the idea of home. No matter how far one ventures into the geographical or chronological distance, there is at every point or moment the possibility of a loop in the itinerary that returns to the starting point. This home base, this safe domestic space, is an implicit, but necessary condition of the picturesque tour that parallels that of the cyber-venturer, who can always loop back to SHUT DOWN. The play of my children, the games of any children, are also played in reference to home in its material, its formal, and its metaphorical possibilities. When the games stop, the children—sometimes eagerly, sometimes reluctantly—return home, whether it be grass hut, white stucco villa, or no more than the arms of a sheltering parent. And now this little game can stop for a while. You know where to go.

This essay is a section from a book manuscript in progress called *The Matter of Matter: Architecture in the Age of Dematerialization.*



Girl and Maze.
Photo: Patricia Brown

Notes

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