

ON NIGHTMARES

Katie Colford, *M.Arch I 2022*, YSoA

There is no verb “to nightmare.” English compromises instead with “to have a nightmare.” But the implication that the subject may have possession of the nightmare belies the way in which nightmares have us. This “jettisoning” of the object, as Julia Kristeva puts it, draws the subject toward “the place where meaning collapses”—that is, the abject.

Architectural education inflects our experience of the abject through nightmares. We dream about reviews, about Rhino, about missing a deadline—they are an extension of daily life turned sinister. There is but the thinnest boundary between a nightmare and reality: we are jolted awake by the realization of a deadline; we arduously construct a digital model, only to awaken to its distortions in another viewport. In re-telling our nightmares, we note that there is a collective dream-state to YSoA within a constant flickering between the real and the abject.

Below is a catalog of anonymous student, faculty, and staff nightmares which suggest a principle fear of loss of control: that of our individual work product, that of our digitally constructed worlds, and that of an extrapolated institutional bureaucracy. We are afraid of becoming the object in our own narrative, of ceding possession of our very subjecthood to the nightmare.

“Neither subject nor object”

You who read me—are you certain you understand my language?¹

“It was the day of the review. I couldn’t find the printers. When I finally did, what came out was a t-shirt with a project on it I didn’t recognize. I wore the t-shirt, but I had missed the review. The jury pulled me aside and told me I wasn’t cut out for this.”

“I go up to present. The project on the wall is not mine. But I like it better than mine. So I take credit for it but I don’t know how to explain it. The jury sees through me.”

“...outside, outside there is no end to it; and when it rises out there, it fills up inside you as well...in the capillaries, sucked as if up a tube into the furthestmost branches of your infinitely ramified being.”²

“I was the cursor, just whipped around from here to there.”

“I was a point stuck in ScaleID, bumping against the screen trying to extend.”

“There’s a murderer inside my studio project. I’m hiding in all the smallest spaces, trying to escape. Finally, I kill her by turning a void into a solid. She is spliced by the extrusion into half human, half code.”

“That’s what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that’s what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness...”³

Scale change

“I forgot to turn on Osnaps. I’m inside the screen, and everywhere I turn there is a missed intersection, lines extending from corners like spears above my head and gaping holes where they should have met as wide as a city street.”

“I finished my project, but I forgot to anchor it to the wall. It falls down and starts decapitating people. I am arrested and convicted of murder.”

“In each one of you I paint. / I find. / A buried site of radioactive material. / you think 8 miles down is enough? / 15 miles? / 140 miles?”⁴

Hallucinations at Yale

“I shopped a class and forgot I had signed up for it. Now it’s the final and I need to take the exam for a class I never went to. I spend all night studying, I think I can pass. I fall asleep. When I wake up, it’s the next afternoon. I missed the exam.”

“I woke up in a house designed by a first year student.”

*Let us admit... the hallucinatory character of the world... We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false.*⁵

[1] Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel” in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 118.

[2] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Penguin, 2009), 48.

[3] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, qtd. in Leslie Hill, “The Name, the Body, The Unnamable” in *Oxford Literary Review* 6, no. 1 (1983), 57.

[4] Anne Carson, *Plainwater* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 101.

[5] Jorge Luis Borges, “Avatars of the Tortoise” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writing* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 208.

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AILS OF ATTRIBUTION

Sarah Weiss, *M.Arch I, 2021*, YSoA

On Tuesday, October 8th, Phil Bernstein (with the help of Peter de Bretteville) delivered a workshop about attribution in design in order to raise awareness about issues surrounding intellectual property in the field. The meeting explored meaningful ways to engage with the topic of attribution in architecture school, framing the issue not only within ethical parameters, but also aspirational ones. Phil suggested, “it’s a skill, you have to practice it.” As a skill rather than just a habit, or responsibility, attribution is imbued with a sense of value and pride that it does not presently hold in the design world. Whereas proper citations are intrinsic to good writing, the skills necessary to attribute our influences as designers are not nearly as developed or foregrounded in architectural education.

It is obvious that part of this reluctance to make attribution training prominent is our lack of certainty about what is wrong and right, and the massive grey area that exists in between these two poles of conduct. Not only was this sentiment expressed by the faculty, it was echoed by students in response to the meeting, some suggesting that the issue is most navigable via self monitoring and emotional instincts rather than rule based enforcement. Dan Whitcombe (M.Arch I, 2020) says, “don’t have malicious intent, don’t copy things. You know when you’re doing something bad, you know when you’re trying to pass something off,” proposing that this is a cultural issue rather than an administrative one. And so, if the onus is on us, are we doing enough as a community to cultivate these instincts?

Brian Orser (M.Arch I, 2022) recommends that this cultural shift be catalyzed by a tangible change in procedure. He offers, “we would write an analysis of our own work before each final review, specifically identifying influences where they appear, and placing our design within contemporary, historical and intellectual developments.” Though he acknowledges this extra step might feel burdensome, he sees it as an opportunity for intellectual clarity and intentionality, the kind that might even “give our critics a better idea of how to guide us.”

Other students worried that design attribution’s history of inaction had set precedent for a sense of lawlessness among designers. Natalie Broton (M.Arch I, 2021) laments, “so there is no hope for us if someone steals our work because [they] can just cite it and it is theirs? I wanted to ask, when [is] it actually plagiarism, when can someone actually get in trouble for it?”

Parallel to, or maybe within, this larger issue of proper attribution are questions about receiving and giving help in architecture school. Some students walked away from the session feeling a bit apprehensive about what is and is not fair in the studio. Claire Hicks (M.Arch I, 2022) wondered “about giving critiques to fellow students...To me that’s a really important part of school, and when that doesn’t happen I struggle, and I feel like it’s part of studio culture that’s really important... I’ve never thought about that being regulated before. Or if they were suggesting it should be regulated?” Seth Thompson (M.Arch 1, 2020) adds some tone to this grey area, pointing to some contradictions within the school, remarking, “working with significant others... maybe clear, but then, can you pay someone in the chair class to paint your chair, (which is usually allowed)?”

The town hall may have produced more questions than given answers, but the argument was clear: we need to problematize the way we think about design attribution as a way to begin to redefine and bring higher resolution to what is fair, right, and eventually required. We are far from clarity.

ON THE GROUND

October 21-25: Mid-review

Members of Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman studio, free from a midterm review, are found present at every other studio’s reviews, listening with particular interest and looking a bit smug, really.

Hojae Lee, of Francis Kéré’s studio, builds a 1:1 detail of a window using CMU blocks in the 6th floor pit. Richard’s worst nightmare.

A juror on the Gissen review asks students to be more gloomy and strange. Several jurors use the word ‘spooky’ at the Zenghelis review. Halloween looms.

First year students furiously draw the Villa Giulia while watching third year reviews. There is no rest for the Eisenmanians.

Wednesday, October 23

YSoA receives an email that the annual Halloween party at the Sculpture school has been put “on hold” as it begins the transition from secret to sanctioned event.

Friday, October 25

A follow-up email confirms: Halloween is cancelled. Spooks.

Saturday, October 26

Like zombies, the restless costumed masses of the two YSoAs seek a new host for their halloween hunger... will they be satiated by Gryphon’s pub? Partners? The various cramped apartments of our fellows?

Sunday, October 27

Update: lines at Gryphon’s snake around the corner all night. Apartments across New Haven fill up with witches, black cats and Ali Wong.

The final game of the season for FC YSoA is cancelled due to torrential rains. The team finishes in 5th, missing out on the playoffs. Undeclared in our hearts.

Monday, October 28

Round 3 of the annual Rudolph Hall Badminton Tournament is set. Sweet Sixteen matches are as follows: Tall People vs. My Wei or the Highway, Matt Schmid in Heaven vs. Canonical Dads, Frank you Gehry much vs. Team GUDIDI, Sheriffs in town vs. THE Whack attack, Taco Bao vs. Smash [the Rhino command - not to be confused with the badminton term], Ka-Ching! vs. GiS, A Guud Song vs. Paul Rudolph’s High Pile Polyester Bedspread, The Fate of Tafurious vs. Yak Babies

Tuesday, October 29

Phil Bernstein explains project delivery to his Professional Practice class: “pay close attention because I’m about to confuse you.”

Rudolph Hall Stress Level Alert: Board-formed Concrete Gray (placid) moving toward Bush Hammered Concrete (on edge)

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In the days leading up to Halloween 2012, Hurricane Sandy rattled through the streets of New Haven—haunting houses and (literally) raising the dead. The mighty and historic “Lincoln Oak” on the Green toppled in the force of the storm, uprooting a tangle of skeletal remains from the unmarked graveyard below. As folklore has it, many people passed the exhumed bones that week without sensing that anything was out of the ordinary. Only when a local woman finally leaned in for a closer look did the horror reveal itself. Halloween has this effect on us. It makes space for the spooky, the creepy and the gross. We can assume our tackiest personas in a veil of darkness. Moldy drywall and stains on the paprika carpet, if just for a moment, stand in as festive decor. Skeletons are allowed, nay invited, to dangle in tree roots.

This issue takes inspiration from the real-life Instagram filter of the Halloween season and speculates on the greater role of all things yuck in the built environment. We draw inspiration from Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror, where the abject is defined as something that disrupts a system of order and causes a reassessment of the frameworks that seek to repress it. In the following articles you will see a variety of perspectives on this theme, constructing a yucky nebula of material to draw from when considering the actioning of the abject in architecture.

Angela Lufkin, Adam Thibodeaux, and Max Wirsing

REAL ROADKILL

Sarah Weiss, *M.Arch I 2021*, YSoA

“The index asserts nothing; it only says “There!” It takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops.”¹

Certain trips have more than others: furry bodies lying in disarray, mounted to interstate asphalt, shoved out of lanes and onto shoulders. I’m not sure which is worse—the visually unscathed deer whose stillness is the only indication of their misfortune, or the one whose species is difficult to identify. Surely both are gross.

In the mid-20th century, the designers of the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways drew a way grid across America, bisecting state lines, gripping the contours of the Great Lakes, stopping only for oceans. These mega thoroughfares created a field condition endemic to post-war America. They have reshaped the way we live, commute and travel. Whereas cities were once dominant figures dotting the American landscape, the interstate grid superseded them. Since then, this icon of industrial progress has continued to give prominence to proto-urban conditions strung along its lines.

This grid of publicly funded highways enjoys an aesthetic impartialness; driving on one of its segments is an experience in sterility. Architecturally, interstates embody nothingness: concrete planes on which we slip past, through, over, and below places both very near and very far from our cars.

The Federal Highway Administration’s FAQ page admits that the interstate system was “proposed as a public project that would greatly improve the lives of the American people...” Congress added “and Defense” to the name in recognition of the fact that the Interstate System would benefit the military, too.² Dressed up as pure public interest, this system had a leg up on public transit: the ability to be co-opted by the military. In order to construct these highways in certain landscapes, contractors used explosives. By “drilling and blasting” topography, making space for flat concrete causeways happened instantaneously.³ This removal of earth was coupled with the displacement of people: predominantly lower-income urban families evacuated in preparation for the new roadways.⁴

Architecture is a broken signifier in that it does not necessarily bear the marks of its making. Though always loaded with political intents and circumstances, there is a disconnect between the formal and material expression of the built environment and its origins. Not only is a highway—or a park or a building, for that matter—not beholden to its own history of manifestation, it is incredibly capable of taking on the qualities of others. Architecture can shape-shift, forging false relationships of signification as the designer desires. In this way the highway obscures the gouged earth, demolished neighborhoods, and military influence that made it possible and takes on formal and material qualities of drab grey emptiness. Its architecture is washable: unfailingly clean of the abject. All squeaky, it signifies nothing.

Perhaps roadkill is a more staying index for the highway’s brutality, for it is inseparable from its circumstances and morphologically distressing. While the formal qualities of the Interstate do not elicit horror, roadkill does—a network of wormholes into the highway’s hidden horror. Maybe the formal disconnect between the embodied history of this system—and our experience of it—is only repaired by the appearance of its most helpless victims. Even if it wanted to, the architecture of the American highway system would struggle to form a relationship of signification with militarism, explosives and displacement on its own. Roadkill, however, is much harder to wipe off than a dark past.

[1] *On the Algebra of Logic*, Charles Sanders Peirce, pg. 181.

[2] <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/faq.cfm#question2>

[3] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/cis/ctip/context_sensitive_rock_slope_design/ch_3_2.aspx

[4] <https://www.vox.com/2015/5/14/8605917/highways-interstate-cities-history>

TRASHCAN MANIFESTO, REDACTED¹

Adam Thibodeaux, *M.Arch II 2020*, YSoA

*To each ego its object, to each superego its abject.*²

If Kristeva’s abjection is displaced by laughter, the trashcan likely chuckles; if at all, on a slight exhale, with the smirk of an object waiting to become a thing. That is to say, it succeeds as an object. It anchors the symbolic by encouraging desire and suppressing the Real. It promises order. It provides space for the body, but hides its failures. If purity is the breast of Lacan’s mother, the trashcan is the bottle, facilitating the shift from demand to desire by fueling the ego and concealing lack. It remains in the subconscious on this promise. But if the trashcan typifies order, it also threatens disorder. If it exists as an object within the symbolic, it has potential to erupt as a subject of the Real. This potential is latent, but its latency suggests potential.

And yet, design is crippled by a need for action. The abject is well worn by the artist, but too heavy for the architect. It is best to keep bodies within boundaries, because when they begin to spill, or become severed from the whole, their otherness becomes Kristeva’s *Horror*. Detached reminders of the body within architecture are abject because they force a renegotiation of inside and outside, of the occupant and its occupancy. But Kristeva gives *Power to Horror*. She suggests its ability to confront the institutions that seek control through its repression. Are the stakes as high in architecture? If so, the question remains: how can the dissolution of frameworks be actioned within a system that relies on them? How can the architect harness this dissolution when their role is to suppress it? When we welcome the Real, how do we greet it at the door?

In response, perhaps a story: a lecture finishes at Rudolph Hall and the crowd regroups in the second-floor gallery for cocktails. The current exhibit features a display of the contemporary architectural zeitgeist by young practices, Triple-0 at play through flashy, post-digital representation. The lecturer discards a half-eaten fold of salami into the trash. I observe: the three of us, the lecturer, the trashcan and myself, are all dressed in black. We are surrounded by a mass of people also dressed in black. The colorful models on display provide sharper contrast to the mob that surrounds them than the mob does to itself. I move next to the trashcan and consider our place in the room. How are we like these people? How are we different? I stand next to it. We blend; we’re waiting. I chuckle quietly on a slight exhale.

[1] In a longer state, this text finds example in a case of thingness, but here, it is framed as a manifesto in recognition that it does not propose a solution as much as it petitions one. It is not a discussion of queering space, but of queering the underlying assumptions we make about space. Attempt to wrestle less with the argument, and more with its agitations. Consider what’s at stake. How can we give thoughts agency through action? This should remain the weight that anchors the provocation.

[2] Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. Kbh.: Nota, 2017.

THOUGHTS ON THE GROSS

Adam Thibodeaux, M.Arch II 2020, YSOA

When architecture is a product of function, disgust is a product of its dysfunction. The gross is an architecture of failure. It is a leaking pipe and stains on the paprika carpet. It is uncanny, but it is familiar. It is architectural abjection.

Successful architecture functions first as Heidegger's hammer, existing most often as ready-to-hand. Here, it functions within expectation as a hammer that can successfully accomplish the task of driving a nail. In the ready-to-hand state, the hammer operates within the subconscious, conforming to the subject-object relationship of most tools and their users. When the hammer stops functioning, it becomes present-at-hand, which forces the user to acknowledge its presence. It is at this moment that an object becomes a thing, and the user becomes concerned with the bare facts of its thingness, allowing then for it to be fully considered.¹

Successful architecture is an architecture of the subconscious. It is ready, not present. But what, then, can be learned from an architecture of failure? If we don't consider a pipe until it leaks, what does that say about our relationship to the pipe? Are we still the subjects, or are we its objects?

[1] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. United States: Stellar Books, 2013.

PLASTIC'S A BEACH

Rachel Mulder, M.Arch I 2021, YSOA

"Plastic is wholly swallowed up in the fact of being used: ultimately, objects will be invented for the sole pleasure of using them."¹

-Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

"Plastic engages in brief and sometimes quite spectacular transformations at the beginning of its life cycle but then is discarded, left with a molecular structure that holds onto its stability at all costs."²

-Heather Davis, "Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and Other Queer Futures"

In July of 2019, Thing Thing was invited to participate as artists in residence on the Big Island of Hawaii. We came armed with luggage full of tools and a vague knowledge of ocean plastic and its burden on beaches around the globe. This was our first visit to Hawaii; the residency was an opportunity to gather knowledge from a new place, to listen, and to physically experience/discover the reality of a global industrial waste crisis.

The currents around the Hawaiian archipelago have always deposited items from across the world along the southern coast of the Big Island. This coast was once known as a place to salvage large driftwood from the pacific northwest or find rare coveted stray glass lures from far away Japanese fishing boats. Now these same currents connect the island to the Pacific Gyre and the Great Pacific Garbage patch, depositing hundreds of tons of waste plastic on shores of Kamilo Beach.

Curiosity brought us to this place, colloquially known as "plastic beach." Tragedy and horror met us there. The coastline presented a devastating toxic landscape mediating miles of lava rock fields and open ocean. The amount of waste here is insurmountable. It is estimated that 90% of the beach is now plastic—some large pieces, but most have been broken down. A handful of Kamilo sand is a technicolor index of consumer waste, fragments scoured and polished by ocean waters.

For us, the ocean provided a way to reimagine and engage in this place—to conceive of the beach as an opportunity, providing an unending amount of raw materials to be collected. Materials symbolizing both the ingenuity of humanity and our incredible irresponsibility. Into our hats, dispersed along the coast, we picked handfuls of plastic. We filled buckets—each piece observed and chosen.

Next, we sorted. Starting from a single pile of beach rubbish, a slow and painstaking spectrum began to emerge. We became intimate with our collection. Every piece touched, picked up and tossed into its right place until only a rainbow color wheel of plastic bits remained.

Hawaiian lore boasts of the power of lava rock, and warns visitors to leave the rocks undisturbed. Inspired by rocks belonging to the island, we set out to make pressings of the spectacular lava formations with heavy aluminum foil. These would be the molds for the object we make from the plastic collected on the beach—a nonnative newcomer.

Using fire oven techniques, we melted plastic into open molds, creating two-sided objects: one face formed in the likeness and texture of lava stone, one face revealing traces of its origins.

"So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible."¹

More than just infinite transformation, plastic is of infinite scale and time. The problem of waste is huge and incomprehensible. It is at the human scale, sitting on a beach staring at handful of plastic sand, that these scales converge. We can understand something tactile in the infinite; something beautiful in the yuck.

Thing Thing are the Detroit-based experimental designers, Rachel Mulder, Simon Anton, Eiji Jimbo and Thom Moran, specializing in research in waste material and industrial processes, specifically focused on plastics. *Plastic's A Beach* is a part of *Kindred Spirits*, an Exhibition of Temple Children Residency. Opening Nov 1st.

[1] Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*: Roland Barthes. 1972. New York: The Noonday Press. 97-99

[2] Davis, Heather. "Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and Other Queer Futures." *philoSOPHIA* 5, no. 2 (2016): 231-250

DO ARCHITECTS DREAM OF FUGLY SHEEP

Charles Weak, M.Arch I 2018, University of Michigan

The principles of beauty and ugliness are nebulous, especially as they relate to bodies. Beauty in architecture has classically been determined through adherence to things like the Vitruvian triad, Proportio, Symmetria, Eurythmia and/or platonic models for forms. Caroline O'Donnell points out that recently these models have lost power, and opened Architecture up to new objectives.¹ In her article, "Fugly", in *Log 22*, O'Donnell uses Greg Lynn's reflection on William Bateson's mutation of the human hand to talk about the space between principles of beauty and our collective image of beauty. Lynn points out that the addition of a thumb on the opposite side of a hand makes the human hand more symmetrical, however this second thumb would be seen to make the hand uglier, rather than more beautiful.² Lynn's work is connected to both biology and technology. The intersection of these two systems hypothesizes how new media creates new power structures around different architectural identities.

Additional appendages, growths, and physical abnormalities conjure up images of the works of the Horror Sub-genre, Body Horror. Body Horror explores graphic and disturbing images of the body to thrill or shock viewers. A particular tradition of the Body Horror Genre focuses thematically on the intersection of the human body and technology. David Cronenberg's 1983 movie, *Videodrome*, centers around our dependence on forms of entertainment, programming, and how mediums reshape our idea of what is real. The main protagonist, Max, discovers a television show that causes what initially seem to be hallucinations, like Max seeing his body developing orifices, for which technological objects can be inserted. The film also portrays technology morphing to take the form of the human body, VHS tapes become fleshy and act like organs. The film ends with Max committing suicide, so that he might ascend to a new level. *Videodrome* ends with the line, "long live the new flesh".

The film *Ghost in the Shell* takes on similar thematic elements to *Videodrome*, by exploring the ways that technology might further alter the human body. However, *Ghost in the Shell* takes a more optimistic stance on the intermingling of bodies and technology. The protagonist, The Major (a cyborg), spends the film chasing down The Puppetmaster (a program that has reached singularity), culminating in a final confrontation between the two. The confrontation between The Major and The Puppetmaster ends not with a victor, but with a synthesis of the consciousness of those two main characters, human and digital.

In her article, "Body" for "Critical Terms for Media Studies," Bernadette Wegenstein points to the dual quality of the human body to be both the physical body (physically having a body) and embodied experience (culturally emmeshed in a context)³. *Videodrome* does very little to examine aspects of embodiment, tending towards grafting aspects of machines and bodies onto one another, heightening the space between the two rather than exploring their intersection. *Ghost in the Shell* plays out the conflict, resolution, and then synthesis between human and digital entities. Wegenstein points out the role that architecture plays in this new system through Diller Scofidio + Renfro's Blur pavilion, which harnessed fog to create a climatic zone that moves architecture outside the realm of the body and into embodiment. This leads Wegenstein to speculate: "In the wake of new media, architecture need no longer concern itself solely with erecting separate, exterior structures to house bodies but can position itself as an exteriorization of embodiment, which is to say, as a design practice fundamentally continuous with the body's own status as medium."⁴

Ugliness, beauty, cuteness, elegance, grossness are all contextual effects that communicate through our bodies and through architecture, which act as the medium for these affects⁵. Integrating the human body with digital systems makes our bodies more open to reinterpretation, which is then also true for architecture by proxy. Architecture no longer must relate itself to the human body but can reflect on the nature of embodiment. Ugliness and the grotesque no longer exist in contrast to beauty, but as separate generic conditions that orbit around both the body and architecture. Moving past Cronenberg's cautionary tale, there is a possible future where digital media interfaces with architecture and the body which has the potential to create new power structures for the historically abject. Embodiment of these new generic identities would create a new playing field for a host of invigorated identities—boring, confusing, ugly, comforting, cute—to find agency.

[1] Caroline O'Donnell, "Fugly", in *Log 22* (Spring/Summer 2011), 95.

[2] *Ibid.*, 96.

[3] Wegenstein, Bernadette, "Body" in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, 19-34. (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25.

[4] *Ibid.*, 30.

[5] Caroline O'Donnell, "Fugly" 100.

HEAVENLY CRUST

Nick Shekerjian, M.Arch I 2017, Arizona State University

1. Sticky Veritable Crust.

In 2014, Rem Koolhaas provided a history of architectural elements at the Venice Biennale with his exhibition "Elements of Architecture". In this carefully considered exhibition (research and production took four years to produce as opposed to the usual two), Koolhaas and his team defined, through history, specific architectural elements as a means of being the first to "modernise architectural thinking"¹. With this, he supposes that these elements, such as the ceiling and the escalator, have never been incorporated into the theory of architecture and that his hope is that the exhibition would do so and therefore (in very concise terms) honestly integrate architecture practice with theory. In the ceiling exhibition space, a flat and thin surface cuts the air just above head level and is caked by a vast enclave of air conditioning machinery, lighting, and emergency accoutrement which is further eclipsed by a decorative dome of painted imagery. This display clarified the history of the ceiling into two contradictory artifacts: the ceiling as an architectural element which was "a symbolic plane where there is room for beauty and meaning" and, with almost no transition, "a thick volume charged with machinery of which the architect has little to say"². Noting this vast change in use, the exhibition proposes that, of the elements, the ceiling is no longer controlled by architects. It is now controlled by other professions whose job is to cover the unsavory of the building with their own nastiness. It has become a sticky, veritable architectural crust so thick with the excrement of building systems and desiccated human skin that it competes with the architecture itself.

2. The Lamella.

"The lamella is an entity of pure surface... an infinitely plastic object that can not only incessantly change its form, but can even transpose itself from one to another medium: imagine a 'something' that is first heard as a shrilling sound, and then pops up as a monstrously distorted Body."³

The element of the ceiling is well represented by Lacan's concept of the lamella. In speaking about it in his Lecture XI, Lacan uncharacteristically suggests an idea of a drive or force of life, which he called the lamella. This is in contrast to his usual writing as it does not deal with only the symbolic or modern idea of "desire", but also of the "real" intangible force, the "organ without a body"⁴. By presenting this concept of lamella, Lacan creates a distinction between "desire" as a "reality observed", and the postmodern "real" of the same force as the "libido". Lamella's are systems which moderate the coexistence between "reality observed" and the "real" in the same way the term is used to describe cellular walls and other surfaces which mediate conditions between observed void space and the hidden reality of what's really, frighteningly, disgustingly contained beyond. Paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites (as postmodern predecessors par excellence) best position "reality observed" and "the real" in one setting⁵. Through highly saturated, familiar yet unerving situations they contain both the kitsch and the avant-garde in one seemingly flat perspective; they are visual lamellas in high definition. Their images are entrancing and simultaneously revolting, placing both an "observed" human nature and the grotesquely detailed "real" hierarchically in the same space; Sir John Ophelia drowns, eyes a highly articulated, vibrant river bed, while delicately positioning her gowned body in waters which more so seem to take possession of her than kill her.

In her article, "Body" for "Critical Terms for Media Studies," Bernadette Wegenstein points to the dual quality of the human body to be both the physical body (physically having a body) and embodied experience (culturally emmeshed in a context)³. *Videodrome* does very little to examine aspects of embodiment, tending towards grafting aspects of machines and bodies onto one another, heightening the space between the two rather than exploring their intersection. *Ghost in the Shell* plays out the conflict, resolution, and then synthesis between human and digital entities. Wegenstein points out the role that architecture plays in this new system through Diller Scofidio + Renfro's Blur pavilion, which harnessed fog to create a climatic zone that moves architecture outside the realm of the body and into embodiment. This leads Wegenstein to speculate: "In the wake of new media, architecture need no longer concern itself solely with erecting separate, exterior structures to house bodies but can position itself as an exteriorization of embodiment, which is to say, as a design practice fundamentally continuous with the body's own status as medium."⁴

3. Loos' Carpets.

In "The Principle of Cladding", Adolf Loos begins his essay by describing carpets as a metaphorical surface from which to build architecture. Loos elucidates a clear step-by-step process by which architects should work: first the architect should carefully consider the way in which people live, provide them warmth, then lay down five carpets, one for the floor and four for the walls (since carpets are also warm), then build structure to support those carpets⁶. Loos considers that the carpet is the material by which human activity is comforted according to the nature of the activity not the structure. In a bedroom designed for his younger wife, Lina Loos, Adolf Loos designs a bed that floats above a continuous surface of cloudy, textured, whiteness which the architect has created by carpeting the floor, bed, walls, and nightstands together in white fur and transparent cotton. Carpets are the largest traps for dust mites, cockroach and insect feces, mold spores, pesticides, dirt, dust, volatile organic compounds (VOC's), are vulnerable to soaking in new air pollutants, and, when newly installed, cause

respiratory issues in newborns.⁷ This idea of the "carpet" proposed by Loos perhaps diminishes Koolhaas' claims for being the first to modernise architectural thinking through an element, but possesses a different interpretation of "carpeting" and therefore solution "Elements of Architecture" was seeking all along: to consider building architecture from the element and it's machinations, not to construct human encrusted shields for presumed architectural structure.

4. Massive Attack's "Protection."

Michel Gondry directed, designed, and produced Massive Attack's music video for their song "Protection" featuring musician Tracey Thorn in 1994. In the video, a slightly shaking camera scans across the elevation of, presumably, an English apartment building where we the viewers see brightly colored, and patterned vignettes of the life contained within. As the camera zooms past the various windows and enters the rooms inside, the perception of ground and gravity is completely thwarted. At times, characters appear to float, people seem to be pressed against vertical back walls, a basketball flies horizontally but doesn't fall to the ground, foliage collects on the elevation of the apartment building, characters' coat jackets seem to stiffen upwards against gravity all while Tracey Thorn speaks of sheltering a loved one with her body. In planning the sequence of filming, Michel Gondry first planned the numerous vignettes of living in the building's interior and then constructed those situations as a slanted floor where the camera could then, in one continuous shot, scan the floor-as-an-elevation in a way that allowed him and the crew to incite otherworldly occurrences in their mundane lives⁸.

It seems Gondry constructed a real lived-in, saturated, Pre-Raphaelite surface. The video for "Protection" suggests a lamella as a new typology of ceiling that, through real construction and IRL applied digital technologies, becomes not a ceiling for the thick architectural crust or heavenly, symbolic imagery, the "real" and "observed reality", but hybridizes them in a transitioning and transposing surface. In our contemporary age where temporary, heightened experiences triumph over space, can architects reclaim space through this kind of spectacular surface? "Protection" harkens from the past with a responsive surface which, like most popular film and media experiences today, suggests to the viewer that they have control over all four dimensions of the story that they are being told. Perhaps the architectural element with the most potential in this contemporary age of experience over space is the ceiling, where Heaven communicates with Earth and the substance of the sluggish ground oscillates with the high frequency trill of the air.

[1] Wainwright, Oliver. "Rem Koolhaas Blows the Ceiling off the Venice Architecture Biennale." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, June 5, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/jun/05/rem-koolhaas-architecture-biennale-venice-fundamentals>.

[2] Dezen. "Rem Koolhaas' Elements of Architecture Exhibition Aims to 'Modernise Architectural Thinking.'" *Vimeo*, June 6, 2014. <https://vimeo.com/97503112>.

[3] Žizek, Slavoj. "Troubles with the Real: Lacan as a Viewer of 'Alien.'" *How to Read Lacan RSS*, May 6, 2009. <https://www.lacan.com/essays/?p=180&targetText=The lamella is an entity,as a monstrously distorted body>.

[4] Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. New York: Norton, 1978.

[5] Žizek, Slavoj. "On David Lynch." *Žizek.uk*, November 19, 2016. <https://zizek.uk/on-david-lynch/>.

[6] Loos, Adolf. *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900*. Cambridge, MA: Published for the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago, Ill., and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, N.Y., by MIT Press, 1989.

[7] "Carpets." *American Lung Association*. American Lung Association Scientific and Medical Editorial Review Panel, June 27, 2019. <https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/indoor/indoor-air-pollutants/carpets.html>.

[8] Gondry, Michel. "Massive Attack - Protection." *YouTube*. com. UMG Publishing, March 6, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epg6ixX6Wv0>.

CONVERSATION ON CASTLE WALL

The following is a fragment of a dialogue between Curtis Welteroth (Artist) and Lustré O. Westrich (Writer, Filmmaker) conducted on October 4th, 2019 on a walk from Curtis' studio.

L.O.W.: Traffic's a bit shit today.

C.W.: Yeah really. Nobody here knows how to drive.

L.O.W.: I would say so. We didn't get to talk about it much in your studio, but while I still have the recorder going can you talk a little about the Wall piece you're working on?

C.W.: Oh, the Wall. I conceived it more as a Castle Wall piece, not just as a Wall. Something more specific to the style of European Gothic and Romanticism.

L.O.W.: Right, right. We talked about the Gothic for a good bit.

C.W.: We did. Again, before I moved here I wanted to mine the origins of the horror genre, just from my personal affinity for anything horror related since I was [a] kid. So in my research I started in European Gothic Horror with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, what a lot of scholars believe was the first Gothic Horror text. [To me] It was this perfect combination of melodrama, humor, and, of course, horror in under a hundred pages; the mystical antagonist/savior in the work being a giant haunted suit of armor. Only after doing more research on



"Castle Wall", By Curtis Welteroth, MFA 2021

Walpole did I learn he also designed his own castle to live in: the Strawberry Hill House. It certainly doesn't look as haunted as people would expect it to be today, or at least as I thought it to be for something considered related to Gothic, but it ushered in this fetishistic, aesthetic appeal for failed riches, the supernatural, the sublime, this wide variety of movements across all the arts. So to me, that castle, the one Walpole designed and lived in and where he wrote *Otranto*, is one of the core origins for so many other horror tropes and icons we recognize today, from *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, to *The Blair Witch* and *Midsommar*.

L.O.W.: So you're interested in tracing these thematic lineages back. How do you see that history being articulated in *Castle Wall* then?

C.W.: Well to start, the design of the bricks and their more worn rendering speaks to something older, not of cinder blocks or an industrial style more recognizable today, to take it at face value. Not to mention the repeated blood drips between the bricks is such a cliché B-Movie horror trope to the point of being laughable, along with that almost blinding and confrontational chartreuse you're hit with when seeing it. It's that exaggerated emotion and improbable circumstance/fiction that encapsulates so much of gothic horror to me. It runs that fine line between fear and humor; I'm thinking of the hysterical in a Freudian sense to meet in the middle. Not to mention how I'll want the actual *Castle Wall* piece to be draped, rather than just hung. It needs to be subdued and failed as a wall further. Not to be taut or sturdy, but something trying to billow with more airiness. Failure also being a core theme to Horror, with movie monsters, but also with corruption and a sense of societal rejection, *Frankenstein's* Monster as a good example. I don't want to make props pulled from literature or films, but to exaggerate their already exaggerated ideas, potentials and origins; to queer them further.

L.O.W.: So you're interested in tracing these thematic lineages back. How do you see that history being articulated in *Castle Wall* then?

C.W.: Well to start, the design of the bricks and their more worn rendering speaks to something older, not of cinder blocks or an industrial style more recognizable today, to take it at face value. Not to mention the repeated blood drips between the bricks is such a cliché B-Movie horror trope to the point of being laughable, along with that almost blinding and confrontational chartreuse you're hit with when seeing it. It's that exaggerated emotion and improbable circumstance/fiction that encapsulates so much of gothic horror to me. It runs that fine line between fear and humor; I'm thinking of the hysterical in a Freudian sense to meet in the middle. Not to mention how I'll want the actual *Castle Wall* piece to be draped, rather than just hung. It needs to be subdued and failed as a wall further. Not to be taut or sturdy, but something trying to billow with more airiness. Failure also being a core theme to Horror, with movie monsters, but also with corruption and a sense of societal rejection, *Frankenstein's* Monster as a good example. I don't want to make props pulled from literature or films, but to exaggerate their already exaggerated ideas, potentials and origins; to queer them further.

L.O.W.: So then would you say all those contradictions in *Castle Wall* are what make something queer to you?

C.W.: Of course. Queerness to me is finding a different kind of success through failure, or rather, knowing that failure to be its own reward...

L.O.W.: And queerness is inherently tied to horror for you.

C.W.: Absolutely.

L.O.W.: So then why a Wall specifically?

C.W.: I thought the Wall, this Castle Wall, to be a good jumping point into that theatricality of horror. To provide more a setting for its future installation and dialogue with other pieces, as a backdrop in a way. The farther along it's been coming, the more contradictions I realize it can pose to the viewer: Is it a hand-made work of art, or a ready-made Halloween decoration? Is it solid, or flowing? Is it man-made, or made of man? Is it a space to explore, or an object to own? Are we inside the setting of the wall, or the outside? Is it yellow, or is it green? It became (and is becoming) a more abjected wall in that sense. Well maybe not the Wall being the abject, but this iteration of the wall being realized by the viewer from a separate abject experience and it producing those abjectual disorient-ing effects.

L.O.W.: So then would you say all those contradictions in *Castle Wall* are what make something queer to you?

C.W.: Of course. Queerness to me is finding a different kind of success through failure, or rather, knowing that failure to be its own reward...

[End of interview fragment.]