



CLOUD ATLAS

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{ function. purpose. product: CONSUME : THE SYSTEM : WHOLE
 ++++++
 doing. being. process: CIVIC : THE HUMAN : PART }

Through the design of a multiple public scenarios such as a washroom, car wash, bus stop, and park, this thesis seeks to engage citizens in the experience of contradiction - of being in public but yet being in private; of being unsure about who the "public" really is and who can claim a stake on that space. This thesis seeks to appropriate public land for public services. By providing a program that is common to all, the project hopes to engage and reach the public and help realize a truly public architecture.

Using the commonplace and everyday as a springboard to truly bring about change, perhaps it is possible to achieve the ideas of social justice via the creation of a truly public space. By providing a public service, it is possible to then allow for the integration of all people, homeless people included, without forcing the issue or trivializing a response.

A good understanding of the "parts" will allow for the reconfiguration and alteration of those parts into new tendencies and relationships that lead to new understandings of experience and of space. The unique nature of individual parts and the combination of them to form a whole involves resistance, reaction and conflict - and it is within this working relationship of conflict and challenge that invites possibility for resolution and collaboration.

Each individual is a single part: a member - that makes up a larger whole: society. However, the power in society is not shared by all individuals that make up the society. This can result in conflicts where the over arching whole of society does not serve the interests or meet the needs of the individual members that make up that whole. The changing dynamic of the city and the ever-emerging global influence can impose policies and forces that leave some individuals in society displaced. Displaced individuals seek to make use of whatever resources are available to live their lives. By examining the ways which displaced members of society attempt to make use of available public resources and the potential loss of one's habitat, this thesis seeks to create potential by claiming unused public space and confront public policies that prevent their use by all citizens.

The circumstance surrounding the claiming of unused or void public spaces brings about conflict especially with the government that owns it. Displaced people will ultimately find a way to shelter themselves, but how does the government (and the society it serves and represents) respond to such actions by its own people?

Instead of tackling these issues head on (which would probably lead to an insufficient, trivialized, institutional responses) it might be more useful to understand Tschumi's approach to architecture as a paradox and work with existing, relevant concerns - using the commonplace and everyday as a springboard to truly bring about change. Perhaps it is possible to achieve the ideas of social justice via the creation of a truly public space. By providing a public service, it is possible to then allow for the integration of all people, homeless people included, without forcing the issue or trivializing a response.

Through the design of a public washroom, this thesis seeks to engage citizens in the experience of contradiction - of being in public but yet being in private; of acknowledging people but ignoring them simultaneously. This thesis seeks to appropriate public land for public services. By providing a program that is common to all, the project hopes to engage and reach the public and help realize a truly public architecture.

Conceptually, the project must understand the basic working relationships between the individual parts which make up the larger whole. This inter-related networking is prevalent in all of life's relationships and should be present in the design of the project. The project must also understand change and be able to accommodate a complex and disjointed societal framework. The issues of displacement, movement, and change need to be addressed with an "architectural language that can be deterministic and ambiguous simultaneously" - allowing for a level of basic structure to work from, but without a definite regulation leaving no room for adaptation and change. Adaptation to change must utilize the current framework of available resources in creative ways, otherwise it remains radical only in an ideological or conceptual state. A good understanding of the "parts" will allow for the reconfiguration and alteration of those parts into new tendencies and relationships that lead to new understandings of experience and of space. The unique nature of individual parts and the combination of them to form a whole involves resistance, reaction and conflict - and it is within this working relationship of conflict and challenge that invites possibility for resolution and collaboration.

public space is twofold:

- * democracy - humans have right to space, right to basic services
- * capital exchange - activity predicated on commerce, sports, bars, festivals

The creation of public space is a conflicted and contested struggle for ownership and identity. The projects attempt to question who owns it, who uses it, who takes care of it, and who belongs or doesn't belong in the space.

CLOUD ATLAS

Down by the Detroit River, a man has been living on abandoned property. His name is Victor Manuel and he is from Honduras. He was a construction worker working on a nearby Jefferson Ave. overpass when he began squatting on the current site of his home. His home is composed of scraps of wood, bricks, plastic and metal that he finds, collects and carts back to the site using a shopping cart. He then takes the materials and with his construction background, uses them to build his shelter, his home, his dwelling on this abandoned site. The building itself is quite complex and even includes electrical conduits ready to hook up to a power source. Victor Manuel is an individual living among a society that cares less about his existence. Victor Manuel has little or no money. He has no documents. He has no insurance, no car, no property, no "valuable" belongings or possessions, just the protractor he wears around his neck. Victor Manuel is probably sick and mentally ill. But Victor Manuel exists and survives within his environment of the city of Detroit. Victor Manuel is a pioneer. Instead of building from logs that he cut down, he uses scraps gathered from the surrounding landscape. The Detroit landscape is one that allows for such individuality. Not that that individuality is officially sanctioned, but it is the broken nature of organization and prolonged effects of urban decay that allows for cracks within the social framework that allows for individuals such as Victor Manuel to take over a site and build his house there. In other cities, a site similar to his would have been well taken care of – at least fenced off for future development by the owners. The shanty he built would have long been bulldozed and Victor Manuel would have been forced to find somewhere else to settle. In Detroit, his shelter remains. "Progress" is slow, but soon one day, the whole Riverfront will be transformed with parks, condos, restaurants, chic boutiques. One day Victor Manuel will no longer live on the Riverfront. But for now, Victor Manuel is a pioneer – a settler surviving in a strange land, among strange people, living one day at a time.

Victor Manuel is the starting point of this thesis investigation. The issues that face Victor Manuel are those that are actually quite similar to those facing many people in the city – in fact, everybody. The human experience and the question of place and belonging within a public framework of society is the basis of this thesis investigation which affects every citizen.

The quest for discovery is the critical driving force in trying to understand the human experience. Theories of quantum physics have led to an idea that provides a common base of realization. If all objects we perceive as reality are composed of atoms – electrons and neutrons, then everything is essentially the same. It is a science of possibilities in realizing that individual entities are not separate, but are relationships and connections that provide a structure for mass and identity. It is a summation of parts governed by an organizational structure that further identifies its own existence. Society and its architecture can also be regarded in this manner. Everything is made up of smaller units, which when compiled in a certain order make up the whole.

Society is made up of individuals, but as a whole in terms of power structure, it can operate solely within a few number of individuals, but without the mass, it ceases to exist. Patterns are also summation of certain elements, that through repetition and/or translation combine to produce a distinct body.

Each individual is a single part: a member – that makes up a larger whole: society. However, the power in society is not shared by all individuals that make up the

society. A 2002 Gallup Poll found that 60% of the global public believes that their government is not governed by the will of the people. This can result in conflicts where the over-arching whole of society does not serve the interests or meet the needs of the individual members that make up that whole. The changing dynamic of the city and the ever-emerging global influence can impose policies and forces that leave some individuals in society displaced. Displaced individuals seek to make use of whatever resources are available to live their lives. By examining the ways which displaced members of society attempt to make use of available public resources and the potential loss of one's habitat, this thesis seeks to create potential by claiming unused public space and confront public policies that prevent their use by all citizens.

The circumstance surrounding the claiming of unused or void public spaces brings about conflict especially with the government that owns it. Displaced people will ultimately find a way to shelter themselves, but how does the government (and the society it serves and represents) respond to such actions by its own people?

The parts of the whole are important, but more so are the relationships and functions that give structure to form. Quantum physics would assert that governing laws such as gravity and motion are not so much laws, but rather tendencies and habitual processes. If you are able to reconfigure and alter habits, you can create new tendencies and relationships that lead to new understandings of experience. Architecture, I believe, operates in this realm of research and discovery.

Habits, however, are not easy to alter and reconfigure. And if they are altered, the ensuing change stirs cause and effect. The inherent resistance between tendencies and change brings about conflict. Some may see this conflict behaving as a check to protect structure and order. However, I would like to examine the role of conflict in the possibility of forming new relationships (between the parts) as a part of solutions (the whole).

Science has involved the study both of parts (matter) and of the whole (behaviours). Much of our understanding of the physical world has been made available by the work of scientific research. However, the study of behaviours is constantly under revision. The complexity and unpredictability of the human experience on earth is still very mysterious and curious. The attempt to process and understand the "whole" as relationships between the "parts" is what I would consider art. And architecture certainly has its roots based in human existence and experience.

Bernard Tschumi explores the same ideas of conflict and change in his book *Architecture and Disjunction*. In response to the student protests of 1968 in Paris, Tschumi postulates a possibility for architecture to be political and how it might change society. "How could architects avoid seeing architecture and planning as the faithful product of dominant society, viewing their craft, on the contrary, as a catalyst for change? Could architects reverse the proposition and, instead of serving a conservative society that acted upon our cities, have the city itself act upon society?" He realizes the difficulty of this imperative and says "None of these environmental tactics leads directly to a new social structure,"... "Architecture and its spaces do not change society, but through architecture and the understanding of its effect, we can accelerate processes of change under way."... "I was starting to realize that the old revolutionary concept of 'taking advantage of the internal contradictions of society' was applicable to architecture and, in turn, could one day influence society. The internal contradictions of architecture had been there all along; they were part of its very nature: architecture was about two mutually

exclusive terms – space and its use or, in a more theoretical sense, the concept of space and the experience of space.” [1]

“The definition of architecture as simultaneously space and event brings us back to political concerns, or more precisely, to the question of space as related to social practice. If architecture is neither pure form nor solely determined by socioeconomic or functional constraints, the search for its definition must always expand to an urban dimension. The complex social, economic, and political mechanisms that govern the expansion and contraction of the contemporary city are not without effect on architecture and its societal use. Space always marks the territory, the milieu of social practice. Would we ever wish it to do so, our society could not get out of its space. Even though it produces space, society is always its prisoner. Because space is the common framework for all activities, it is often used politically in order to give an appearance of coherence through the concealment of its social contradictions. This conjoined/dis-joined condition characterizes our cities, our architecture. The contemporary world is a dislocated space of constraints that may find few common denominators. Yet we should remember that there is no social or political change without the movements and programs that transgress supposedly stable institutionality, architectural or otherwise; that there is no architecture without everyday life, movement, and action; and that it is the most dynamic aspects of their disjunctions that suggest a new definition of architecture.” [2]

Tschumi proposes that architecture is a paradox: that it is impossible to question the nature of space and at the same time make or experience a real space. “Was architecture really made of two terms that were interdependent but mutually exclusive? Did architecture constitute the reality of subjective experience while this reality got in the way of the overall concept? Or did architecture constitute the abstract language of absolute truth while this very language got in the way of feeling?”[3] In order to explore the paradox, Tschumi offers the point of junction between ideal space and real space as a place of understanding and working between the two interrelated but mutually exclusive elements. “Each society expects architecture to reflect its ideals and domesticate its deeper fears.” [4] “Life was seen as a negation of death – it condemned death and even excluded it – a negation that went beyond the idea of death itself and extended to the rot of the putrefying flesh. The anguish about death, however, only related to the phase of decomposition, for white bones did not possess the intolerable aspect of corrupted flesh. Architecture reflected these deep feelings: putrefying buildings were seen as unacceptable, but dry white ruins afforded decency and respectability.” “Society scares easily at those aspects of sensuality that it qualifies as obscene. ‘Inter faeces et urinam nascimus’ (we are born between excrement and urine), wrote St. Augustine....Georges Bataille, Le Corbusier’s contemporary, pointed out that the fundamental prohibitions of mankind were centered on two radically opposed domains: death, and its obverse, sexual reproduction.”

“The moment of architecture is that moment when architecture is life and death at the same time, when the experience of space becomes its own concept. In the paradox of architecture, the contradiction between architectural concept and sensual experience of space resolves itself at one point of tangency: the rotten point, the very point that taboos and culture have always rejected. This metaphorical rot is where architecture lies. Rot bridges sensory pleasure and reason.” [5]

The essence of the project seeks to find that delicate balance where architecture is understood as an idea and experienced as a space. It is at this point where

architecture is poignant and potent enough to truly impact society and challenge the limits established by institution in a meaningful way. The revolutionary movements of the 60s were in the end unsuccessful in any long-term or on-going sense as they failed to respond to certain harsh realities of life. They were successful as ideas and concepts, but failed to translate into lasting experience and found existence quite different from the concept. In the end, their slogans are now used in advertising campaigns. Architecture, then, must be careful to walk the tight line of contradiction and paradox to produce relevant and meaningful spaces and experiences.

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Is the displaced person homeless? Is Victor Manuel homeless, though he has built his own house out of scraps? How does society respond to people in an ambiguous situation? Does society need to or should it even try to welcome displaced people to participate in society? The challenges of displacement are often associated with those of homelessness, poverty, mental illness, race, class and on and on. These are society's most complex and misunderstood problems. Instead of tackling these issues head on (which would probably lead to an insufficient, trivialized, institutional responses) it might be more useful to understand Tschumi's approach to architecture as a paradox and work with existing, relevant concerns - using the commonplace and everyday as a springboard to truly bring about change. Perhaps it is possible to achieve the ideas of social justice via the creation of a truly public space. By providing a public service, it is possible to then allow for the integration of all people, homeless people included, without forcing the issue or trivializing a response.

Through the design of a public washroom, this thesis seeks to engage citizens in the experience of contradiction - of being in public but yet being in private; of acknowledging people but ignoring them simultaneously. This thesis seeks to appropriate public land for public services. By providing a program that is common to all, the project hopes to engage and reach the public and help realize a truly public architecture.

A public washroom is an interesting problem facing urban cities. On the one hand, it meets a very real need that often arises and that everyone can identify with. On the other hand, it presents problems of maintenance and management. No one wants to clean up another person's mess.

Public washrooms are a human right. To deny the use of a washroom is inhumane. If having to go is a natural human condition and there are no public washrooms to meet that need, and it is illegal to go in public anywhere other than a washroom, the problem cycles back on itself.

A civilized society will address this need in some way. The problem of a permanent toilet is the issues of maintenance, security, vandalism, etc. The public washroom houses a true public need that all of society experiences. How can the public washroom properly address all the people using the facility? A true public washroom is open to the public. Therefore, a wide range of people will end up interacting with each other on some sort of level. The public washroom seeks to be a very public place, however, the events and actions occur at a very private level. The relationship between the "inside" and the "outside" will be explored to try to understand the distinction and limits between the two. What is public? What is private? A public toilet is a very private thing, which raises security concerns, maintenance and upkeep.

The site is synonymous with program. The steam pipe network in downtown Detroit will provide the existing infrastructure that the project will take advantage of. It is an opportunity to take an ambiguous situation and turn it for a purpose. The exhaust piping of the network is a necessary function of the steam system, but the locations are in quite awkward positions (middle of the street, middle of a sidewalk, etc.). By exploiting this condition, and turning waste into use, the public washroom project hopes to provide not only the conceptual workings of a public space, but also the implementation and realization of that experience.

Although the initial program will consist of a public washroom, there is room for change and adaptation to address other uses beyond the public washroom. Other democratic and public uses include access to food, education, health, etc. and these can all be considered in the same way the public washroom. (The final project will include a car wash that utilizes the steam pipe network as a method of appropriating a wasted resource; a bus stop that better serves people waiting for the bus; and a pod parasite that hangs off of the people mover in an under utilized park.) The basis for the thesis investigation is the meeting of human need through the experience and creation of a public space, but also coupling it with programs that fit into the context of "acceptable" urban uses.

The notion of "public space" however, is questionable at best. The reality is that the city doesn't really consist of any true democratic and public space in the sense that every citizen has an inherent right to that space and that it belongs to the people and the freedom of use of the people rather than a restrictive governing body. It is telling that the newest and most central "public space": Campus Martius, a hub for every major downtown Detroit event, is owned and operated by the Compuware Building management and technically is not even a public place. The reality is that downtown Detroit operates critically on an economic level. Money is the bottom line and without it, there is no "life" to downtown. Culture therefore, revolves around the notion of capital. All social events are organized as a way to make more money. The joy of celebration is secondary to the joy of making money. There is no party when there is no money. The masses are not regarded as citizens, but rather as consumers, and their worth is evaluated on the level of consumption.

It is now quite trendy for companies to uphold a level of morality and "corporate responsibility". In 2003, "77% of a group of large companies surveyed by World

Economic Forum report on corporate citizenship issues on their website." "Annually, more than one-fifth of global consumers reward or punish companies based on perceived social performance." Don't be fooled by the apparent social awareness offered by corporations. These are really marketing efforts to get more sales. The key word is "perceived" social performance, as more and more all that is left is appearances and images only. On one hand, there is faith and hope in the human ability to rise above the meaningless surface of money, but on the other, there is the reality of the power of money and the harsh consequences of living without any. Which one does architecture follow?

The spirit of a public space still remains in the spirit of democracy. Beyond the crass commercialism of even a shopping mall, there is still a spirit of unity in purpose – or more accurately the abstraction of that experience. Andy Warhol, in his diary, said: "What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too..When Queen Elizabeth came here and President Eisenhower bought her a hot dog I'm sure that not for a dollar, not for ten dollars, not for a hundred thousand dollars could she get a better hot dog. She could get one for twenty cents and so could anybody else." [6] Although this illustration may give the impression that consumption is democratic and gives everyone a chance, it must also remember the global nature of today's economy. The same spirit of consumption leads to the cheaper production of goods by people with lower standards of living. The local community is thus dissolved and is lost in hyperspace. Space and time are no longer standards of measurement, but are dynamic and always changing based on the driving force of commerce. In an instant a deal is made, a transaction occurs, without there ever being a meeting of individuals.

Public space then is abstracted. In a conceptual understanding, it is a place available to all citizens for the cultivation of culture; for activities to take place, for people to meet, for people to relax and be free in the spirit of democracy. Yet, another understanding reveals that the citizen is relegated to the role of the consumer, and that their value in the public arena is based upon their contribution to society.

Henri Lefebvre wrote about abstract space as: "a space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a a merchandised space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable; a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge towards an elimination of all differences." [7]

"Public space is increasingly commodified but is always in a process of being shaped, reshaped, and challenged by the spatial practices of various groups and individuals whose identities and actions undermine the homogeneity of contemporary cities." [8]

"Public space is the product of competing ideas about what constitutes that space – order and control or free, and perhaps dangerous, interaction – and who constitutes "the public". These are not merely questions of ideology, of course. They are rather questions about the very spaces that make political activities possible." [9]

The downtown city centre may be the site of public interaction and activity, however the actual amount of "public space" is minimal compared to privately owned

space. The sidewalk and the street most closely approach a "public space" – where all citizens are allowed. The problem is that there is no active program in these spaces to enhance the human experience of public life. This thesis seeks to examine overlooked spaces as an opportunity to incorporate and involve human activity. The only true public spaces left are those not already taken over by commercial tendencies. These are the "residual" spaces of the city: the cracks in the logistics and system that allow for people like Victor Manuel to inhabit it. The street, the alley, these are some of the spaces in the city that have little or no commercial value to them – they are the public spaces. "The street is the most democratic of places...its vitality is a measure of our priorities and values." [10]

Public space is found within a dialogue between consumption and between democratic civility. In downtown Detroit, the population swings dramatically through the day as the majority of the people are commuters working or fans of sports and entertainment. There is also the casino gambling economy in place as well. This is the framework that public space is trying to coexist in. The problem is that despite the mass number of people to enter and exit the city for events, very little is done to accommodate a mass public. The people come specifically for a purpose and leave once that purpose has been fulfilled. Therefore, there is no apparent need for public services, as downtown is simply a destination point for specific functions. Any public space is then not really being used by the masses, but rather people in the city – street people. Therefore funding for any public space is not really needed as it doesn't serve the majority of the mass public.

Thus the challenge of creating a meaningful public space is quite daunting and often meaningless (from a business point of view). If for a moment, the human element could be valued for its priceless qualities, then one could see the worth of a public space as a crucial component to a civic center. Public space is two-fold. It is found somewhere between where a person is a citizen and a consumer. On the consumption side, one answers to the roles imposed on them – roles of function, purpose, and production. These are contrasted by the understanding of the nature of humans – a nature of doing, being and processing. Public space is found somewhere the human ends and the system begins...somewhere in the relationship of recognizing the part and when it becomes the whole.

"There is nothing more dangerous than to build a society, with a large segment of people in that society, who feel that they have no stake in it; who feel that they have nothing to lose. People who have a stake in their society, protect that society, but when they don't have it, they unconsciously want to destroy it." – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Today, the world is changing at such a rapid rate, that it is hard to adapt. More and more, the factors affecting the lives of citizen consumers are further and less tangible from them. The sense of alienation and helplessness in the face of imminent changes leaves society more and more disconnected and disjointed. The thesis investigation considers all of these issues, but has no prescription to these complex concerns. The projects rather suggest possibilities and explore the ranges of ideas relevant the concerns of public space in the context of the citizen consumer dialogue. In the same way a cloud atlas tries to document and understand fleeting dynamics of the in-between states of water and gas, this thesis tries to understand that unstable point of contradiction of the public and the private, the parts and the whole, the citizen and the consumer.

ENDNOTES :

- 1 Tschumi, Bernard. Architecture and disjunction. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1994. pp. 7, 15
- 2 Ibid, pp. 22-23
- 3 Ibid, pg. 69
- 4 Ibid, pg. 72
- 5 Ibid, pp. 75-6
- 6 Warhol, Andy. The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B and back again. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1975, pp. 100-1
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- 9 Mitchell, Don. The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 85, No. 1. March 1995, pg. 115
- 10 Kelbaugh, Douglas (Ed.) with Janice Harvey, Roy Strickland. Downtown Detroit 2002. University of Michigan Taubman College Design Charrette. The Regents of the University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, MI. 2002.