

BROKEN KILOMETER: EXPOSING THE SEED BED THROUGH ERASURE

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Design is often an additive process. Too often we forget the power of erasure as a subtractive operation. The act of erasure is violent, destructive, aggressive, and counterintuitive, but it can also be a powerful method for developing space, and in the case of landscape architecture, developing greater biodiversity. When you get to delve into the geology of a site, you often enter the past and allow for an informed future – like a palimpsest. The field is no longer a flat plane, but a space that extends toward the horizon and down into the earth. Within these horizontal layers are a series of fields that hold within them a history. That history includes past plant life as well as dormant seeds that lie in wait, each anticipating a time when they might be exposed through erosion or some other physical act, allowing them to germinate and create new life.

In the past few years, my work has leveraged the power of exposing those latent horizontal fields in the landscape through simple interventions of erasure that exploit the potential of the section as a temporal, transitory phenomenon, and as a catalyst for advantageous ecosystem change.

Broken Kilometer, a kilometer-long cut in the earth near Härjosa, Sweden, completed in conjunction with the EU project Sandlife and managed by the Swedish Fortifications Agency, is an example of strategically using erasure as a design tool.

The freshly exposed sandbanks of the *Broken Kilometer* reach back into the past, exposing the seedbed. The project fosters the growth of rare plant species, which correspondingly brings about an influx of rare insects at the margins of these disturbances.

In a seemingly incompatible operation, the removal of the topsoil creates a more diverse ecosystem. In honor of the land's military past and the use of the land to conduct military maneuvers, the erasure is the width of a Swedish tank. It acts simultaneously as a piece of land art, and as a catalyst for increased biodiversity. The piece is temporal and will dissipate over time as the exposed soil becomes occupied with fresh herbaceous material, highlighting its palimpsestic nature. As the seasons pass, the vegetation will slowly revert to grassland, and *Broken Kilometer* will eventually disappear. The initial act of erasure will only exist as a trace of the original act of manipulating the land.

Monday, September 14: Rafael Monsoi in conversation with Sarah Whiting advises students to travel and experience architecture. It is ironic that this comment was made on Zoom to a conglomerate of virtual heads that no longer have "travel week."

THE RIGHT TO RIKERS JACOB KUHN, BSLA '18, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Long ago, the question of whether to *seed* or *not* to seed when it comes to new development in New York City was answered *yes, always to seed*. Where there is an opportunity to build, there will be a race among developers and investors scrambling to infuse their capital and make a profit, as evidenced by private-public partnerships for Brooklyn Bridge Park, Governor's Island, and Hudson Yards.¹ The city's neoliberal land-use economy runs on deregulating financial transactions, speculation, and real estate markets; the unshackled elite own and profit from the spaces overwhelmingly occupied by the working class, the poor, and the homeless. The feedback loop of investment and profiteering makes investing in projects irresistible to the donor class, and it forms the subsoil of how a surprising number of projects in New York City become seeded.

No plot of land goes fallow. As soon as one becomes available for development, it is subjected to the conventional real estate economy with virtually no input from those who need the space and infrastructure. Public spaces are commodified and reduced to their market value, do little to alleviate the compounding issues of the city's poor and working-class residents: dilapidated and scarce public housing, wage stagnation and rising costs of living, rapid gentrification of the outer boroughs, over-policing of Black and Brown neighborhoods, and destructive coastal climatic events.²

Unfortunately, New York City is consistently starved for land to implement projects that meaningfully address these issues. However, the closing of Rikers Island by 2026 – a plan approved by the New York City Council in October 2019 – offers a significant opportunity to change that.³ Since the early 1900s, Rikers has been home to one of the largest and most abusive jail complexes globally, currently managing a daily population of over 9,000 inmates, and processing tens of thousands of inmates a year.⁴ As of 2019,

7. A garden can exist for decades, and then be gone in a year. The role of the architect ends with her buildings; the role of the architect ends once the building is built.

recruited firefighters are incarcerated people, employed at rates as low as \$2 a day for 72-hour shifts.⁵ One must ask: what are we protecting and at the expense of exploiting whom? Without fire to clear forest debris on a regular basis, we witness the wild infernos that unrelentingly ravage our landscapes from bulldozers. The latent destruction of unmet underbrush will only grow as the climate gets hotter and drier.⁶ We cannot expect wildfires to go away, nor can we deny that designers are complicit in the spread of their devastation.

Still, fire need not be just a force of obliteration – it can also be understood as an instigator for new life. Plants such as eucalyptus and certain species of pines rely on fire to propagate their seeds. Our collective amnesia will have us wanting to avoid destruction, but what if we moved forward knowing that some things need to burn so seeds can be sown into new fields? What if fire was welcomed when used for the earth's renewal, as an important phenomenon used to make space for systems and structures to better suit our habitation?

Fire is not good or bad, it just *is*. It is the impetus for renewal that Indigenous communities have long revered. Fire is a symbol of the necessary change called for in the present erupting all across the country.

We must understand fire if we are not to be completely consumed by it.⁸

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