

# PAPRIKA!

OCTOBER 2, 2015 / FOLD VIII



Scattered throughout this issue are **QR CODES** that, upon being scanned by a mobile device, will bring you to the videos and websites discussed by our writers.

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How are buildings shot, time-lapsed or surveyed? What is the architect to the set designer—nemesis or bedfellow? Is the moving image of the city better?

We begin this issue with such provocations to investigate architecture through the video camera lens. Questions regarding the mechanics of filmic representation, digital alter-ego, and malleable realities become increasingly relevant as artists and architects seek alternative methods to explore their work and surroundings.

In YSOA's recent history, debate over video as a representative medium has been ignited by studios that asked for either entirely video-based presentations, or the incorporation of video elements.

The YSOA has consistently demonstrated a readiness to go beyond tradition and embrace forays into the alternative.

Of course, video also has a literal presence in architecture. From surveillance and playback devices integrated within buildings, to digital ornamentation in hotel lobbies, to developer commercials ranging from the nostalgic to the bizarre, film in the service of the built environment cannot be neglected.

This issue envisions video as a generative tool and explores cinema's enduring dialogue with architecture. It proposes that video be brought away from the fringes and placed center stage.

## ON THE GROUND



9/17

"Wear appropriate hoofs," reminded **TURNER BROOKS**, since the senior undergraduate studio would be traversing rocky terrain on their site visit to Stony Creek Quarry in Branford, CT. A detour provided a prime opportunity for students to catch up on their Bachelard after the immensity of their bus could not overcome the intimacy of an overpass.

"It is always a museum that is going to fix everything," said **KATHLEEN JAMES-CHAKRABORTY** in regard to the role of the gallery in contemporary Germany while answering questions after her lecture, "The Architecture of Modern Memory: Building Identity in Democratic Germany." One piece of architecture that is not going to solve anything, in the view of **KURT FORSTER**, is the 600 million Euro reconstruction of the Prussian Palace, "an example of where the restoration of something is its most effective suppression."

9/18

"I don't want you to see my emails—I may end up in a broadsheet!" exclaimed **BRYAN FUERMANN** after computer trouble disrupted a lecture on Pompeii to his "History of Western Landscape Architecture" seminar.

**ALLYN HUGHES** MFA '16 and **JODY JOYNER** MFA '16 have curated *Video Mixer*, a group exhibition featuring over forty video works from current Yale MFA students and recent alums. *Video Mixer* aims to be a cross-disciplinary platform for exchange and conversation surrounding the versatile medium in this moment. The show is on view in Green Hall Gallery until October 8.

9/21

**MATT ZUCKERMAN** M.Arch '17 and **SAM KING** M.Arch '17 introduced OutHouses, a social advocacy group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allied students in the YSOA community. OutHouses aspires to be a support system, discussion group, and social network. It will be a dedicated forum for the exploration of LGBT issues within the YSOA community, Yale University at large, and future professional settings. To learn more about OutHouses, please contact Matt Zuckerman at [matthew.zuckerman@yale.edu](mailto:matthew.zuckerman@yale.edu).

"As the leaders of these firms have demonstrated, people live a hell of a long time," observed **PHIL BERNSTEIN** in his Architectural Practice seminar, referring specifically to Newman Architects and Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects in a discussion of succession planning.

At the Four Seasons, "don't order a beer, order a martini," advised **CARTER WISEMAN** to his Architectural Criticism seminar, as he expressed hope that new management would keep the space's classy ambiance intact.

9/23

"These models are either like geological samples or spaghetti," remarked **TIM ALTENHOF**, simultaneously delighting and mystifying the junior undergraduate studio during their first review.

Pure joy erupts among students when **TURNER BROOKS** presents Il Risorgimento (fig. 1).

"It is very difficult to make a sphere—probably why there are not so many spheres in architecture," said **BIMAL MENDIS** regarding the fabrication of the centerpiece of their exhibit, *City of 7 Billion*.

9/25

President Salovey announces the appointment of **DEBORAH BERKE** as Dean of the YSOA, effective July 1, 2016. See the special supplement inside for student reactions and an interview with none other than Berke herself.

9/27

"We can skip all of Mario Botta's buildings," recommended **ELIA ZENGHELIS** regarding sights to see during the studio's limited time in Athens, Greece this week. Continued Zenghelis, "I told Mario once, you are such a brilliant critic, why can't you apply it to your own buildings?"

9/28

**DEAN STERN** gave a lecture, titled "The Local and the Global: Modernity and the New Tradition" to an assembly room at the Yale Beijing Center packed with students, architects, Yale alumni, and even US Embassy staff. Reflecting upon what it means to be culturally rooted in an increasingly globalized world, Stern cited Vincent Scully, Paul Rudolph, and James Stirling as three professors who profoundly influenced his approach to architecture, and

introduced five sprawling RAMSA-designed residential developments in China. At the Q&A, YSOA graduates **MA YANSONG** and **WEI NA** paid homage to their time at Yale, with Ma wondering if he would rather live in a Stern residential complex, or one from his own firm, MAD Architects.

9/29

"Buildings are never sincere, but builders can be," advised **DEMETRI PORPHYRIOS** from the niche of Diocletian's mausoleum in Split, stop number two in a tour up the Dalmatian coast focused on tectonics, typology, and the virtues of constructability.

9/30

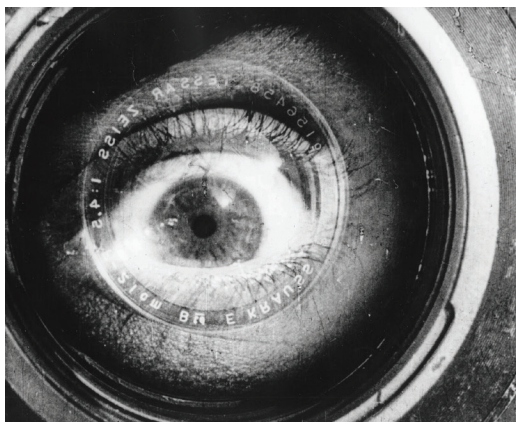
During a tea ceremony at the Beijing Bell Tower with his advanced studio, **ALAN PLATTUS** remarked on the quality of the Oolong tea, to which the ceremony host replied, "You have the taste of an emperor."

10/1

"Are you calling us humanists?" accused **BIMAL MENDIS** in response to **SURRY SCHLABS'** question during the Q&A section of the opening lecture to "A Constructed World", the J. Irwin Miller Symposium. Mendis and partner **JOYCE HSIANG** later made it clear that they weren't trying to build a literal city for 7 billion—quipped Dean **ROBERT STERN**: "I tried to get the commission."

The views expressed in *Paprika!* do not represent those of the Yale School of Architecture. Please send all comments and corrections to [paprika.ysoa@gmail.com](mailto:paprika.ysoa@gmail.com).





## LIFE FILMED

### VERTOV'S MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

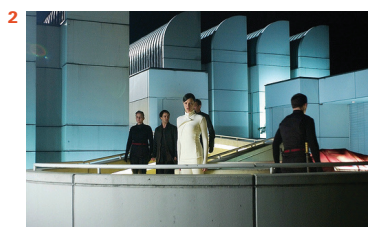
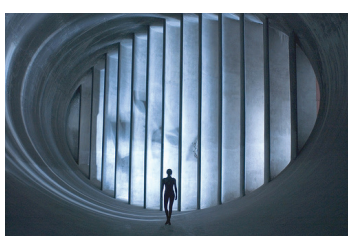
BY KATIE COLFORD YC '16

DZIGA VERTOV'S final note on the score for his famed *Man with a Movie Camera* calls for the "loudest sound you have ever heard," as John McKay described at the recent Whitney Humanities Center screening of the classic 1929 film. At the screening, the three members of the Alloy Orchestra, who had written and performed the live score, apologized for not meeting that request.

To say that the experience was loud is an understatement, but the intensity of its score remarkably disappeared against the whirring kaleidoscope of its cinematography. We think of films like *The Matrix* and *Inception* as original experiments in alterations of physical reality, but such manipulations were already well underway in *Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov takes full advantage of the filmic medium to convey a sense of malleable urban space that is intoxicating to the architecturally inclined viewer. Vertov at one point cuts a city street in half and folds it in on itself in a proto-*Inception* moment. A woman's blinking eyelids are intercut with opening and closing window blinds so rapidly that it seems as though the one cannot operate without the other. The man with the movie camera (Vertov's brother, Mikhail Kaufman) is shown in a double exposure as an ethereal giant floating over a swarm of people, tracking their slow movement, while he himself is being filmed by an unseen man with a second camera (Vertov himself). Bringing the cinematographic process full circle—this time, with a proto-*Matrix* touch—Vertov's wife, Elizaveta Svilova, is shown slicing film strips and arranging the very clips we will later see in the movie.

Within this imaginary city, Vertov presents some of the most tender, exciting, and, occasionally, saddening, moments of quotidian life: the rhythmic revolutions of machinery, the visual harmony of a truss bridge, the sensuality of a woman dressing, the humor of a child surprised by magic. All of this joyous energy is framed by architectural space—public, private, and their interstitial connections. It is "the invisible space that man can live in... and which surrounds him with countless presences,"<sup>1</sup> as the German poet Rilke phrases it. Indeed, Vertov's dynamic world is incessantly, relentlessly, powerfully present. For 80 minutes, we are transported to a Moscow transformed and spliced into pure phantasmagoric display, suggesting that the city does not in fact need its structural reality to come to life in the eyes of the viewer.

<sup>1</sup> qtd. in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 203.



# WASTELAND BAROQUE AND THE MOBILE METROPOLIS

BY CRISTIAN ONCESCU M1 '14

IN MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

ON THE tabula rasa of the post-apocalyptic wasteland, director George Miller invents a constantly mobile version of civilization comprised of the detritus of our own world. Author Justin McGuirk identifies the vast emptiness of the Namibian desert in *Mad Max: Fury Road* as home to neither infrastructure nor architecture in the traditional sense.<sup>1</sup> The built environment that exists in such a void is the agglomeration of vehicles pursuing one another. As the camera changes its relative position and speed, the war party fluctuates between an amorphous, shifting mass of vehicles and a tightly composed arrangement of stationary elements, which the antagonistic War Boys easily traverse. Each automobile plays a unique role in the larger ensemble, such as the doctor's car, the fuel truck, the harpoon car, and the pole car. If the smaller vehicles are buildings, Furiosa's War Rig is a city with infrastructure, containing McKenzie Wark's "four flows" of gasoline, milk, water, and blood—the fluids necessary for the protagonists' survival at various points in the narrative.<sup>2</sup>

Immortan Joe's totalitarian society crafts its vehicles and tools with an abundance of iconography and a heavy reliance on Baroque aesthetic sensibilities. By drawing visual connections to the Baroque, albeit in a retro-futuristic fashion, *Mad Max: Fury Road* echoes the period's aesthetic opulence and political excess. As production designer Colin Gibson explains, the *Mad Max* films have "always [been] about cars," as automobiles, much like architecture, are repeatedly used as "a metaphor for power."<sup>3</sup> The production designers



Siracusa Cathedral in Sicily, Italy

never explicitly mention a Baroque influence in interviews, but when Gibson describes the recycled elements as being "recognizable" yet "jarring," and possessing "a new freshness" by being "out of context," he may as well be characterizing Baroque architecture from the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> During the Counter-Reformation,



the architectural vocabulary of the Renaissance was used in a new, theatrical fashion under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church sought to make its architecture more emotive, more accessible to the public, and demonstrative of its wealth and power. As the High Baroque language employs fragmentation of previously indivisible elements, vertical stacking of façade layers, and opulent ornamentation, so too, the vehicles of *Fury Road* rely on an almost identical architectural language. Like the once-unitary pediment of the Greek Parthenon, broken up and sheared in transition to the plastic Baroque façade, the Cadillac Coupe de Ville chassis and transmission on Immortan Joe's Gigahorse vehicle are cut up and stretched, distending the proportions of the once-iconic form. Furthermore, Baroque architects turned to previously incompatible combinations of elements

to add drama to single façades. Several bands of columns are stacked for greater verticality, the unifying cornices are themselves composed of many strata, and new flavors of pediments are nested inside older ones. Likewise, vertical repetitions and combinations are immediately apparent in the dual Coupe de Ville chassis of the Gigahorse, the multiple grills on the front of the People Eater's fuel truck, and the multitude of speakers and amplifiers on the Doof Wagon.

The new architectural efforts of the Baroque were paralleled by a proliferation of ornament and figural iconography. Architecture and ornament are integrated to such a degree that it becomes impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. In a similar way, the War Boys are so integrated with their mobile environment that they literally spit fuel to over-charge their engines. Their bodily appearance, pale and stone-like, harkens

back to idealized Greek sculpture, which sheds any infirmities to portray only youth, strength, and health. The War Boys become living sculptures, memorializing their own martyrdom while riding across the desert wasteland. Like the architecture of the Baroque period, *Mad Max: Fury Road* re-contextualizes the elements and imagery of an earlier era to create a fresh, but vulgar milieu. In this boundless, barren world, people are untethered and almost continually on the move, yet humanity as a whole has not advanced.

<sup>1</sup> Justin McGuirk, "Mad Max Cornered the Market in a Particular Vision of the Post-Apocalyptic Future," *Dezeen*, last modified May 23, 2015, <http://www.dezeen.com/2015/05/23/mad-max-cornered-the-market-in-a-particular-vision-of-the-post-apocalyptic-future/>.

<sup>2</sup> McKenzie Wark, "Fury Road," *Public Seminar*, last modified May 22, 2015, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/05/fury-road/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Mad Max: Fury on Four Wheels* featurette, directed by George Miller (2015; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015), DVD.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

# A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FORGETTING

ON THE USES AND ABUSES OF ARCHITECTURE IN AEON FLUX

BY SURRY SCHLABS

SET IN the year 2415, director Karyn Kusama's *Aeon Flux* takes place in the last human city of Bregna, a perfect society, where the machinations of a natural world run amok are kept permanently at bay. In this distant utopia, a small population of human survivors has been made infertile by a long-past epidemic, the so-called "industrial disease." Yet no one in Bregna ever truly dies, reproduction made possible through an advanced cloning process, the very existence of which remains the state's most closely guarded secret. The film's title character, Aeon, exists outside this cyclical process as a sort of involuntary memory, a string of human DNA long thought lost, and now made manifest at a time of cultural and historical stasis, as the city of Bregna finally achieves perfection.

Released in 2005 to little critical or popular acclaim, *Aeon Flux* was filmed in and around Berlin and utilized, where possible, fragments of that city's architectural and urban fabric as a backdrop for the depiction of this dystopian future. The movie itself is a creative adaptation of an early '90s cartoon, a series of animated shorts both self-consciously fragmentary in their apparent disregard for narrative, and willfully confusing in their suggestive assimilation of stylistic and aesthetic conventions typically associated with Japanese anime culture. As such, *Aeon Flux* may seem an unlikely (and, perhaps, unwilling) participant in the ongoing conversation surrounding the reconstruction of Berlin's city center since the fall of the Wall in 1989. But in its peculiar approach to urban representation—wherein the city is understood as an assemblage of

discrete fragments, or remnants—I believe the film provides us with an alternate reading of Berlin, affective in its simultaneous historicization and fictionalization of the contemporary city as a site for the recognition of otherwise "unregistered pasts," of narratives illegible within the post-unification discourses of historical progress and western capitalist triumph.<sup>1</sup>

This suggests a reading of *Aeon Flux*, of Bregna, and of Bregna's relationship to our own Berlin as essentially allegorical in nature. More specifically, it suggests a reading in terms of Walter Benjamin's defense of allegory which, in its sympathetic account of the "fragmentary and enigmatic" qualities of experience, presents a promising framework for interpreting the film. In Benjamin's view, "allegory is, pre-eminently, a kind of experience," a disorienting sense that the world, as we know it, "is not conclusion." Beyond the *Zweideutigkeit* inherent in its tendency to re-present meaning through proxy, allegory operates, in part, through the expression of "sudden intuition," the representation of some unknowable other, a transformation of the physical, or actual, into an "aggregation of signs."<sup>2</sup> Not only, then, may *Aeon Flux* serve as an allegory of Berlin—incorporating actual buildings, spaces, and landmarks into a deeply symbolic, if wholly fictive, utopian landscape (fig. 1 and 2)—but Aeon herself experiences this landscape allegorically; that is, through a process of fragmentary reconstruction, intuitive projection, and historical recovery.

While Aeon appears to engage in the sort of "critical wandering"<sup>3</sup> we might associate with Benjamin's flâneur, however, the process of historical recovery she undergoes eventually fails to bring about the change she seeks. Indeed,

even while the people of Bregna are kept blind to their own history, that history is memorialized—and monumentalized—in the Relical, the sole cache of all remaining human DNA, an ever-present reminder of the city's triumph over nature, and its refusal to forget—even if no one knows what, exactly, is left to remember. If we take forgetting, as such, to be "a conscious side-stepping of history in order to experience 'the vigor of the present,'"<sup>4</sup> then Aeon's final heroic act—the iconoclastic destruction of the Relical, of humanity's only remaining link to its past—is not a reclamation, or revelation, of history; it involves no preservation or reconstruction, imaginative or otherwise. It is, rather, a total and final erasure of that past in favor of a creative present, newly projected into the future; a monumental act of historic expression.

Perhaps, in the end, the sterile eclecticism of Bregna should be read as a warning, a critique of contemporary architecture and urbanism unmoored from tradition, without bearing in the past and, therefore, lacking the appropriate means of projecting a viable course into the future. Or perhaps not. In re-presenting Berlin in this context—as a fragmentary assemblage of urban, architectural, and spatial vignettes—*Aeon Flux* insists on a much broader, more generous, ultimately pluralistic, democratic, and indeed more modern view of the city than the dominant discourse surrounding Berlin's shifting urban identity since 1990.

<sup>1</sup> Philip Broadbent, "Phenomenology of Absence," *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 32 no. 3 (Spring 2009), 111.

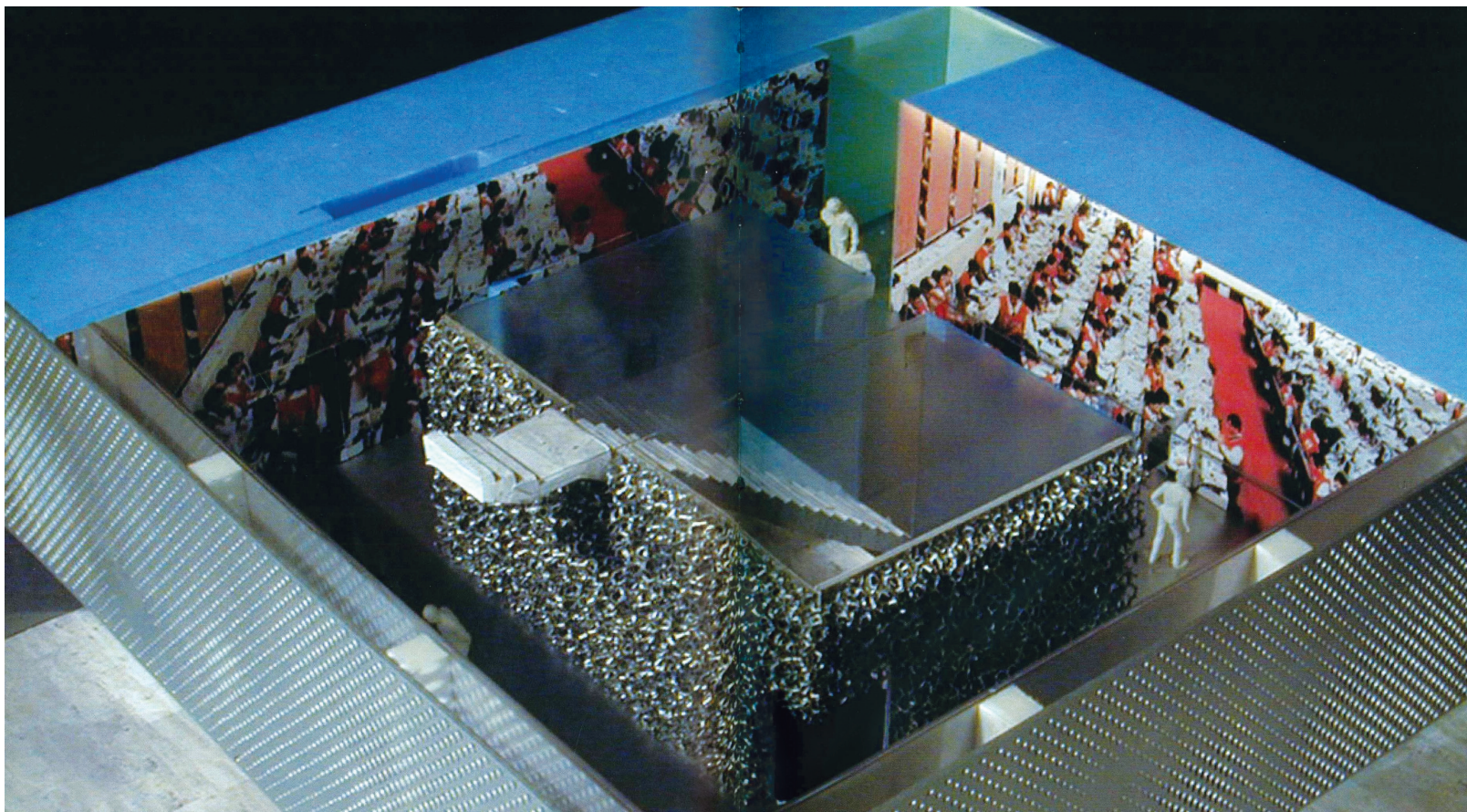
<sup>2</sup> Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique*, no. 22 (Winter 1981), 110.

<sup>3</sup> Broadbent 102.

<sup>4</sup> Broadbent 115.



## VIRTUAL & PHYSICAL INTERFACES



# MIRROR, MIRROR

BY PREETI TALWAI MED '16

**SCREENS** large and small, overflowing with moving digital images, are ubiquitous in our built environment. From airport terminals to smartphones, they are integral to our everyday physical and social infrastructures. Cultural theorists have developed various nomenclatures for these omnipresent interfaces, including MediaSpace, everywhere, and the ambient.

Over the past decade, screens have rapidly infiltrated another spatial domain—retail. These retail screens—central to “phygital” consumer environments that blend online and brick-and-mortar shopping—are architectural elements built for personalized consumer interaction. Unlike other avatars, retail screens are explicitly tied to desire, ownership, and identity. When we shop, we incorporate external objects into our self-concept. Thus, this subject-screen relationship is characterized by reciprocity between the retailer’s use of the screen to manipulate desire, and the consumer’s engagement with the screen to create and affirm identity.

An early deployment of moving digital imagery on retail mirrors was in Rem Koolhaas’ Prada “epicenter” stores (2000–2004). The “Media Stage,” where “all of Prada [could] be browsed—real and virtual”—was one concept that unified various locations. Fourteen projectors created a panorama of images whose content ranged from videos of larger-than-life runway models to simulated interiors of global epicenter stores (fig. 1).

The Media Stage was more than a portal to objects of desire; it was simultaneously the architecture and the object of desire. As Koolhaas proclaimed, “the projection acts as an architectural material,” constituting both structure and experience-as-commodity.<sup>1</sup>

Enclosed onstage shoppers with constructed images, the screens functioned to position consumer-subjects as voyeurs, who were seemingly granted exclusive access to footage from Prada productions, fashion shows and even store security videos. Yet ultimately, these highly-curated quasi-cinematic experiences trapped the body within Prada’s brandscape. Self-image and identity had meaning only relationally to the brand’s scale-less, decontextualized, and ephemeral images, and the human body was at once implicated and dematerialized. As Koolhaas claimed, one could (must) “commune with the Prada aura in an intimate and immersive manner.”<sup>2</sup>

If the Media Stage conceptually conflated shopper-voyeur and brand, Koolhaas’ Mirror Wall in San Francisco did so literally and physically. The wall displayed “semi-transparent daylight projections” where “mirror images blurred with projections.”<sup>3</sup> These projections included content shared with the Los Angeles Media Stage, but also

consisted of various representations of bodies: line drawings, naked forms, and translucent “ghost” images (fig. 2). Within a soup of networked images removed from their geographic references, consumers encountered anonymized objects, while also being forced to continually confront themselves. The subject’s body was externalized as the object, intimately familiar, yet alienated through the screen’s manipulation.

The Prada dressing rooms continued this trope, where “magic mirrors” were created through a camera, linked to an embedded plasma screen (fig. 3). The mirrors were “governed by the movement of the person” such that small movements prompted “real-time display” while larger movements (like turning around) caused “a time delay that allowed the person to see the movement being replayed.”<sup>4</sup> The temporally separated transformation of the subject’s image into video further accentuated the objectification of the subject, inviting upon oneself the gaze that would be cast on another.

The Prada mirror-screen prototype, dormant for nearly a decade, has recently resurfaced, even more technologically virile. One example is Rebecca Minkoff’s New York “connected” store (in partnership with eBay, 2014), where consumers virtually browse store inventory on large mirror-screens before trying on merchandise in screen-equipped “smart” fitting rooms. While Prada’s mirrors objectified the subject through cinematic juxtaposition, Rebecca Minkoff’s mirrors gaze back. They feature “Kinect sensors that record the customer’s motions...and a sophisticated tracking system which identifies the customer and remembers what they bring into the dressing room and don’t purchase.”<sup>5</sup> Shoppers are positioned beside runway models (embodiments of the brand) while being seen in the most intimate of spaces (fig. 4). The physical juxtaposition highlights the imperfect reality of one’s own body, simultaneously immersing shoppers into, and separating them from, the brand.

The retailer-designer capitalizes on this malleable self-image:

When the Minkoffs did testing on the first version of their interactive mirror... they brought in a few employees to try it out in the context. “They walked out screaming, ‘I’d never ever use this!’” says Uri [Minkoff]. “I was like, ‘Why?’ They said, ‘Those are fat mirrors—they make us look fat!’” The Minkoffs took the eBay team... to track down the most figure-friendly mirrors they could find... and incorporated the technology into them. “Now [customers will] sit in front of those mirrors all day because they look skinny.”<sup>6</sup>

The rather alarming implication here, that body image can be replaced and re-incorporated just as easily as a mirror and its circuitry, is a powerful demonstration of the extent to which these screens are endowed with personal meaning beyond their optical qualities.

The retail screen transcends both traditional metaphors for screens as windows/portals/frames/filters and traditional modes of spectatorship. The screen becomes a coveted architectural and representational object in itself, while the consumer-subject becomes an object of display, gazing at oneself while being literally gazed back at by the screen. The new rituals of shopping tied to these screen technologies, not inherently sinister and perhaps inevitable, nonetheless construct new identities. Designers must critically engage with, not simply exploit, the knowledge that the shaping of the screen is in fact the refashioning of the body itself.



<sup>1</sup> Rem Koolhaas and Bertelli Patrizio, “Media Stage: Concept” and “Media Stage: Content,” in *Projects for Prada: Part 1* (Fondazione Prada, 2001), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> Koolhaas, “Triptych: Concept,” *Projects for Prada*, n.p.

<sup>3</sup> Koolhaas, “Mirror Wall,” *Projects for Prada*, n.p.

<sup>4</sup> Koolhaas, “Introduction,” *Projects for Prada*, n.p.

<sup>5</sup> Neal Ungerlied, “Why Rebecca Minkoff and Ebay Are Betting on Smart Dressing Rooms,” *FastCompany*, last modified November 12, 2014, <http://www.fastcompany.com/3035229/the-smart-dressing-room-experiment-how-ifl-shopping-is-getting-less-private-but-more-persona>.

<sup>6</sup> Danielle Sacks, “How Rebecca and Uri Minkoff are Shaking up Retail,” *FastCompany Create*, last modified February 9, 2015, <http://www.fastcreate.com/3041516/master-class/mirror-mirror>.

# AUGMENTED BODIES

BY DIONYSUS CHO M1 '15

Each of us today possesses two bodies: the primitive body that a human being always possessed and the virtual body that has come into being with the spread of the media. The former seeks the beautiful light and fresh breeze found in nature. The other body which responds to the electronic environment, might be called a media-like body in search of information. The relationship between these two bodies is constantly shifting.

—Toyo Ito

**TODAY**, we are increasingly invested—both with time and money—in the virtual world. Studies have found that today’s youth spend over seven hours in front of a computer, console, or television every day. Across the planet, people spend 3 billion hours a week playing video games alone. One’s waking existence is spent between the physical and virtual worlds.

These numbers are backed by the rapid release of digital “prosthetics.” AR/VR technologies have received a torrent of interest from both the developer community and an eagerly awaiting consumer audience. Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg posted this statement after his purchase of Oculus VR:

This is just the start. After games, we’re going to make Oculus a platform for many other experiences. Imagine enjoying a courtside seat at a game, studying in a classroom of students and teachers all over the world or consulting with a doctor face-to-face—just by putting on goggles in your home.

This is really a new communication platform. By feeling truly present, you can share unbounded spaces and experiences with the people in your life.

But is this truly new? Hugo Gernsback, American inventor, writer, and editor, promoted the advancement of television as early as 1909, although it would not be realized until a decade or so later. An electronics entrepreneur, Gernsback was interested in speculative technology, leading him to publish America’s first science fiction

magazine and earning him the title of the “Father of Science Fiction.” It is from these fictions, before even many of his actual inventions came to fruition, that much can be drawn about his desires for virtual experience. Two of these concepts illustrate distinct paradigms which last to this day.

While the cover of *Radio News* depicts Gernsback with a comedically oversized contraption sporting a disproportionately minuscule screen—the television receiver—his idea for “Television Eyeglasses” (1936) skips past then-existing technological constraints to become the forefather of the digital virtual prosthetics (fig. 1).

This first contraption simultaneously illustrates the need to be completely immersed and removed from one’s environment and the desire to enjoy this environment while remaining mobile.

Gernsback’s Television Glasses reflect a rather optimistic desire akin to that behind the Oculus Rift developed decades later: a virtual reality prosthetic which one can move with, but, ironically, also tethers.

The second concept is decidedly comedic and not without a degree of tongue-in-cheek. The Isolator (1926) is a device that, instead of conjuring a new reality, attempted to remove all sensorial distraction to focus the wearer on his or her existing reality (fig. 2).

Not only does The Isolator function as an acoustical barrier, it also limits the scope of vision to what is immediately at the foreground and counters undesired olfactory stimulation through an attached oxygen tank.

It is interesting to note that this invention accompanies the birth of the television



and was developed before the significant distractions from media devices we face today. Despite this, Gernsback still realized the necessity to insulate oneself from social and physical connections and operating in any environment, virtual or not.

Gernsback’s pair of inventions poignantly illustrate the schism in our modern view of reality: the Television Glasses’ desire for limitless connectivity and digital immersion, alongside The Isolator’s desire for alienation and insulation. Both of these desires will be embraced, reiterated, and contested by generations to come.

How do we design at once for both the primitive and the virtual body? While Ito claims that there are two bodies which must be sated, Stelarc’s take is much more blunt: “Information is the prosthesis that props up the obsolete body.”

Perhaps it is not merely an appetite we must understand and satisfy, but another entirely new (and more important) existence we must embrace for the sake of survival. The augmentation of the digital is an extra limb, neither foreign nor a nuisance, but a crucial addition to oneself.







CHO



MEZZA



MILLER + RAAB



Co7b



CHEN



DE SILVA



BOOTH

# HERNAN DIAZ-ALONSO STUDIO

BY MICHAEL MILLER M1'15

Imagine a Piranesi etching; its drama, its contrasts, its tiny silhouettes, its spatial layering, overlapping bridges, hanging chains, and puffs of steam from an impenetrable beyond. Form and spatial narrative are the essence of these drawings; the architecture is formed around and because of these ideas.

**THE INVENTION** of the camera and the moving image did not introduce something the world had never seen before. Rather, it established a self-reflective medium that brought us back from the abstraction of conventional representation. It seemed to remind us that we had eyes and that our eyes had mechanical parameters of sensing: it reminded us to see. The degree that architecture intertwines with film is a subject of optical-spatial relationship that has always existed, but with several degrees of time and complexity.

The first degree is the most basic relationship. Buildings like the Villa Rotonda or the Villa Savoye can be understood as optical devices framing a landscape: they act as physical cameras, stationary and composed, and not in relationship beyond windows or doors.

The Greek Theater or the Panopticon is of the second degree—the architecture

takes a form that is the geometric result of a multitude of viewpoints. The parameters of these many cameras generate architectural form and the object of storyteller and camera are joined into space, form, and hierarchy.

What the theater and the prison lack, however, is movement through space. Time is isolated to the narrative on stage and not to that of the architecture. The Diaz-Alonso studio investigated the third degree of this relation—how images and time create form. The project that my partner and I produced spatially and formally prioritized local axes, promenades, variations on language, and compositions of platonic forms, all interwoven by stepped platforms—a psychotic acropolis promenade squished into a mass. This third degree of media investigation seemed comfortable in its urbanity.

The shift of environment over time, the vertical pan shot, or the moving section now have equal say in the architecture's design. In the same way that vision has shaped historical precedents, the projects of the studio utilized narrative techniques to influence form beyond the capabilities of the eye. Like Piranesi's Carceri, space is molded from the perspective of its representational technique, a purposeful bending of conventions.

Representation itself already has a difficult relationship with architecture. No matter how drawing is used, it can only be an orthogonally portable suggestion of a full-scale, three-dimensional reality. In this sense, it is hardly possible to legitimize one method of compression over another. What truth does a drawing possess that an animation cannot? There is nothing in architecture that begs to be "compressed" into two dimensions. In the FAT studio, we used collage to great effect but produced work with undeniable similarities. While the same critique could apply to the Diaz-Alonso studio, it could also describe projects rendered with graphite, painted with oil, or carved in marble. To dismiss what we did in the Diaz-Alonso studio as being driven by the limitations and biases of software is to miss the point.

I am not arguing for a devaluation of drawing in architecture. Rather, I am pushing for the equal valuation of a multitude of representational modes. Animation became a useful design tool for us because it added the dimension of time to our projects. It offered an opportunity to confront a fundamental reality: our existence is neither static nor two dimensional—why do we need to represent it as such?

BY HANK MEZZA M1'15

**LAST YEAR** I took two unconventional advanced studios: in the fall, FAT—the late, radical, London-based firm emphasized design heavily rooted in reference that used the symbols of culture to subvert culture itself; in the spring—Hernan Diaz-Alonso's studio focused on butchery and animation as generative tools. Ultimately, both studios fell on the same side of the divide: they pushed representation as the impetus for creating building, instead of the other way around.

I find it interesting that between the two studios, students were significantly more excited about working with FAT. Some might attribute this to a recent reevaluation, led in part by the firm itself, of postmodernist goals and aesthetics. Others might point to a perceived lack of substance in the Diaz-Alonso studio's objectives. However, I see a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of representation in architecture: FAT was more popular because it was more familiar, approachable, and, in a strange way, less radical in its use of representation. The work we produced in the FAT studio could be mistaken for drawing and subsequently, gained a (false) sense of legitimacy and rigor.

## J. IRWIN MILLER SYMPOSIUM: "A CONSTRUCTED WORLD"

**YANBO LI YC '16** discusses the symposium—which takes place October 1–3 in Hastings Hall—with its organizers, Bimal Mendis and Joyce Hsiang of the YSOA.

**YL** In your mind, how do the exhibition and symposium relate to one another?

**JH** It always started as a conversation. It was an exhibition where you looked at the idea of the world as a city through architectural methods and techniques while the symposium was always meant to be the component that went beyond architecture, where architecture could frame a discussion in a larger sense to engage many other fields of expertise.

**YL** As architects and intellectuals, why is it important for us to think of the world, urbanization, and design in this way? In other words, what is at stake?

**JH** Everybody—not just architects—says that this is beyond us, it's not our issue. When everybody takes on that attitude is when you have a problem. And it's not to say by any means that we or any

single entity is an ultimate solution, but to say, what is it that we could offer to make sense of these issues that are very urgent and pressing.

**BM** We want to ground architecture in a broader humanist context: that we have a broader purview and scope of what we can do. That's why the symposium comes in and makes architecture able to converse across all these disciplines at a scale that many people might not think is relevant, but we think is absolutely relevant.

**YL** Can you guide me through some of your thought processes in choosing the speakers and splitting the themes in the way that you did?

**JH** Some of it was "I wonder if this person knows about this other person's work." It started off with the work that these people were doing and the kinds of ideas they

had that we wanted to see in dialogue with others.

**BM** There's something nice about having a cartographer, an astronaut, and an economist—it sounds like the beginning of a joke.

**JH** Part of this is also establishing common themes using terms of construction, which have both philosophical and literal implications. Something like "excavation" has Mark Williams, a geologist, literally digging in sites around the world, versus Mark Wigley, for whom excavation is something that is more a historical or cultural excavation.

**YL** Who are your intended audiences?

**BM** Strangely enough, it might not be as seemingly relevant to the average architect, and that's the irony, because it should be. It resonates, if anything, outside of the school more so than it does inside, and that's one reason we want to bring it to the school. It's unfortunate that this happened when an important constituent—students that are going to graduate, visiting faculty, colleagues—who we want to comment, aren't coming [Travel Week for advanced studios runs from 9/26 to 10/4].

**JH** In the end, it also is for the School of Architecture. We feel very strongly that this is something that should be part of the discourse, and to have one third of the school be gone sends a terrible message.

**YL** What do you hope that your audience takes away from the symposium, and how might we apply its ideas to study and practice?

**JH** We see the exhibition, our work, as the first of many of these kinds of conversations. This is a way for us to identify the beginnings of a movement or to solidify certain interests and alliances that maybe people didn't know existed.

**BM** When twenty people speak, and if you want to go to all of them—and I recommend that you do—at least one or two will resonate in some ways or make you see things in a way you haven't before. If it makes you ask questions about what you're doing and how you could do things in a certain way that responds to those issues, there might not be an answer today, but those kinds of questions are what become incredibly fulfilling later.

# KELLER EASTERLING STUDIO

BY LILA CHEN M1'16

**THE PREMISE** of the Spring 2015 urban studio led by Keller Easterling was rather broad: resiliency in Bridgeport. While specific site, client, and program were not named, a unique collaborative effort generated a clear set of goals for implementation and offered a chance to shed some of the infamy associated with the "urban studio." From the earliest stage, our interest lay in a bottom-up approach, starting with small, tactical interventions that could grow through incremental phased improvements. This perspective was a reaction to the urban studio's usual propensity for authoritative, quixotic, mega proposals that seem overly interested in expressing idiosyncratic whims. We agreed upon video, coupled with social media, as the best vehicle for disseminating our concepts for Bridgeport's improvement.

Each project pair created a two- to five- minute video communicating the essence of their intervention. The videos had to reflect the great amounts of research that went into their creation, being academically rigorous, yet remaining accessible to the general public. This format was appropriate, as one of the main factors in mobilizing different agents and setting policy agendas was garnering public support through social engagement. Staying true to how urban projects

are conceived and implemented in reality, each team produced a video with a different target audience in mind (e.g. industry leaders, students, tourists, or residents), which resulted in widely divergent products—from a corporate pitch video, to a full-fledged animated short. In addition to the videos, the studio also experimented with alternative deliverables, including faux Disney-style theme park maps, pocket guides, newspaper spreads, 3D visualization glasses, etc. The final presentation was a highly orchestrated performance, in which the room layout was carefully curated to present the studio's work as an engaging and coherent whole. The faculty and guests were delighted by the change of format—they all lauded the coordination and effort put into the means of communication.

Questions of budget, project funding, and the utilization of existing conditions in Bridgeport were fundamental in the negotiations that each team carried out with one another. "Working with what's there" became our emblematic introduction. We communicated through an unconventional means of representation—no physical model was ever made, nor was a site plan ever produced—that led us to examine alternative ways of planting the seed of an idea in the public conscience to raise awareness, illustrate possibilities, and trigger future action in an unconventional way.



Hernan Diaz-Alonso Studio