Benedict Clouette

Notes from an Occupation

The events that started with the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York City on 17 September, 2011 have shown that America could emerge from its assumed foreclosure and once again imagine a politics.

In the encampments forming and being destroyed across the country, it is a common space, not a single political cause, that defines each of the scenes of the movement. Unlike a protest, the coherence of an occupation depends not on a unified message, but on the often difficult sharing of a space, and the first public act of an occupation is the taking of that space, or in the parlance of the occupiers, 'liberating spaces' for a more vigorous exercise of 'real democracy.'

The oft-noted hesitance of the occupiers to make demands points to how an occupation differs from a traditional protest; with no single *tort* whose redressing would effectively end an occupation, the emphasis has been on convening an open conversation, and creating the structures, both discursive and physical, that can allow it to continue. Occupy Wall Street has reframed the question of contemporary politics in America as one of creating a process by which the inadequacies of the political system itself—its deficit of democracy and control by financial interests—can be redressed, to allow for new institutions to emerge and new constituencies to make decisions.

Experiments in participatory decision-making, horizontal organization, and open assemblies are features that link the Occupy movement to other camps of the past year, in particular Madrid, where the consensus model used by the Wall Street occupiers was tested last spring. And like other camps, from Cairo to Athens, Occupy Wall Street attempts to create a platform by which 'real democracy' can be reasserted and be immediately put into practice. The premise is that maximizing inclusion and participation in decision-making is itself a radical act in the context of a political system that has been incapacitated by the influence of a few. If nothing else, the slogan 'we are the 99%' has entered the lexicon as an expression of a simple fact of current political economy: that the poor are many, almost everyone, and cannot be excluded from political life.

For two months, Zuccotti Park became the physical corollary of extreme inclusion, a cacophony of voices, bodies, banners, activities, drums, tarps, and tents. Gifts of all kinds of supplies—food, sleeping bags, shoes, coats, tents—poured in from across the country, as did people, many of whom gave up precarious work and unaffordable housing to live in a park and work for the movement. New infrastructure arrived unannounced, each piece brought by someone who thought (often correctly) that it might be useful: a grey-water filtration system, composters, bike-powered electrical generators, truck-mounted solar arrays, a grease-powered school bus, mobile phone charging stations, and large military tents. Many of these inventions were measures to counteract services that the quasi-public park's private owner, Brookfield Properties, had cut off, like electricity, water, and garbage collection. Perhaps the most important of the park's donated infrastructures was the creation of a wi-fi network, provided through a three meter antenna ironically named the Freedom Tower, to allow for the occupation to broadcast its own media, using social media websites like Twitter and the live video service Livestream.

The park thus became a condensation of a vast network that supported the circulation of messages, images, supplies, and people. The political gesture of inclusion at the heart of Occupy Wall Street was not simply a question introducing more subjects into the debate, not only a matter of lowering the threshold of participation, but one of intervening in the way that spaces, images, messages and resources were shared and distributed.

At the same time, that emphasis on political inclusion was accompanied by an influx of enormous physical quantities—people, their things, and more and more, the other things left behind by other people—a mass that overwhelmed the small park. Zuccotti in the last days of the occupation was easy to enter, but difficult to be in or act upon, as the space itself became ossified, both internally, through the buildup of more permanent physical configurations (first tents, then a second story of housing built atop platforms), and at its borders, through increasingly tight control of the perimeter by police and their barriers. To the extent that a new social order had been created at Zuccotti, the work of the camp quickly became policing that order, and the question of borders—between activists and the ordinary homeless, or those that participated in the deliberations versus those who were occupying—acquired a physical form, with distinct spaces for different groups: the open space reserved for the general assembly, the 'ghetto' of the drum circle, the increasing percentage of ground given to individual tents. With density, the park became territorialized, and with it came questions of who counted in the ordering of that territory: Who eats, the junkies or the working groups? What to do about people who repeatedly disrupt the open assemblies?

Many of these questions were made irrelevant by the 16 November police eviction. It was the second time that the city had tried to clear the camp. The first time, the police approached directly, announcing the time of the eviction and arriving at the existing barricades. But owing to the advance notice, thousands of people poured into the park and thousands more called the mayor. The first attempt failed because it took for granted the limited location of the park, a tiny piece of real estate, rather than the global network of physical and political support to that space as the embodiment of an idea. It was met by scores of cameras and thousands of tightly packed bodies, and the city backed down.

Though the spaces of occupation are recognized by their singular location, they are supported and sustained by their intense mobility, and a flexible infrastructure that is harder to locate. To clean the park the police had to disrupt this network so that could the space at the center could be eliminated.

Unannounced, at 1 a.m. on 15 November, the police erected new barriers three or four blocks from the park.

People, cameras, and goods were all prevented from entering the camp, an effort to starve the strength of the space by blocking its most vital resource—movement. The airspace was closed to news helicopters, the streets cordoned to the public and to journalists, and then, layer by layer, the park was dismantled: first the bodies at the edges, the lightest fabric of the tents, then cutting ropes, snapping wooden platforms and tossing the structures into the compactors of the Sanitation Department, the police moved closer to the center of Zuccotti, where a group of activists had chained their necks together with bicycle locks, which the police removed with metal grinders. The radiating density of the park took a full night to break through.

From a certain perspective, the police raid could be considered a final step in a passage that began with the start of the occupation, and its focus on holding the space of the park, which led to administering the park as though it was a fixed piece of liberated space, clearly defined by its perimeter, and finally to the reconquest of that territory by the police. Zuccotti became a symbol of a vital public sphere, which perhaps prevented the recognition that the public sphere is everywhere. It is difficult to say when the occupation moved from holding a space and being held there, but the police could not have so successfully disrupted the network without the park at the center.

Since the eviction, there is a new set of checkpoints and private security officers at Zuccotti. New rules have been posted, and bags are checked to ensure that no one carries in more food or books than one person could consume. At sunrise on the day of the eviction, the occupation became fully mobile. Its new infrastructure is fugitive and unpredictable, moving into and through the communities and spaces that once supported the occupation of Zuccotti. The library now goes on marches, the kitchen has been serving on a beach. Perhaps the eviction, far from being the end, is really the fulfillment of one of the movement's popular slogans: Occupy everywhere.

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DAMn°*23*

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Thomas Demand
HANS HOLLEIN
Jasper Morisson
Nick Cave
ZHANG HUAN
Moritz Waldemeyer
JDS meets Lars Von Trier
PAUL SMITH

Freedom and Constraint

When architecture meets cinema

'AGENDA: Can We Sustain Our Ability to Crisis?' is a new architecture book by JDS Architects that occupies the territory between a monograph, a diary, and a collection of essays, interviews, conversations and contributions by the likes of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Bruce Sterling and engagement with everyone & thing from Jay-Z to the Brussels landmark Manneken Pis. Documenting the work and thinking of JDS Architects over a specific year marked by crisis, beginning on 15 September 2008, the day that Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, one of the conversations that the architects had was with award-winning filmmaker Lars Von Trier. Here, edited extracts make the connection between the work of a director and architect, both grappling with issues of constraint and freedom.

Interview Julien De Smedt (JDS), Benedict Clouette (BC), Jesse Seegers (JS) and Lars Von Trier (LVT).
images JDS

BC: In JDS's work, every project is a process of iteration and combination. It seems very similar to how a director works, using the best moments from one take and splicing them together with the best from another version of the same scene.

LVT: Yes, but I don't think that many directors work that way. It's how I work, but I'm not sure it's that common. The idea was just that rather than having a smooth, gradual progression within a scene, you might create this more immediate, faster movement by trying very different versions and then cutting between the takes.

JDS: In our practice, we're also constantly producing more versions of an idea and using repeated variations in order to evolve a design. In your films, you use similar thematic material again and again, almost like you tell the same story, but tell it differently each time.

LVT: Yes, it's clear that in some sense it's always the same story. I think of a film as a series of layers, which are almost like givens. You might change something or do something different in one of them, but if you

change all of them, it's very difficult for people to enter into. I prefer to work with just one or two variables, not changing everything at once. It's like entering a forest: you need something familiar, some friend to guide you through the forest. Making the same story over and over is a bit like that. And also, I'm very interested in the technical side of filmmaking and taking those aspects as givens. If I were an architect, I think I would like to just work with one kind of brick, and see what I could make with it.

JDS: In many ways, that's what all architects do: they don't actually make a building themselves, but rather specify options from an existing catalogue of possibilities. We tried to make a film using that idea. In 2001 Bjarke [Ingels, now of BIG] and I started collaborating under the label PLOT and our first project and the reason for our moving to Copenhagen was a movie. It was an idea of making a no-production movie, a movie that's only created in post-production. A sample movie. We observed that 100 years of moving images had produced so much material that you could actually dive in and create your story out of existing footage. You could even star Jack Nicholson, because he had

The book 'AGENDA' by JDS

Julien De Smedt and Lars Von Trier at the Zentropa offices in Copenhagen, Denmark
(facing page)
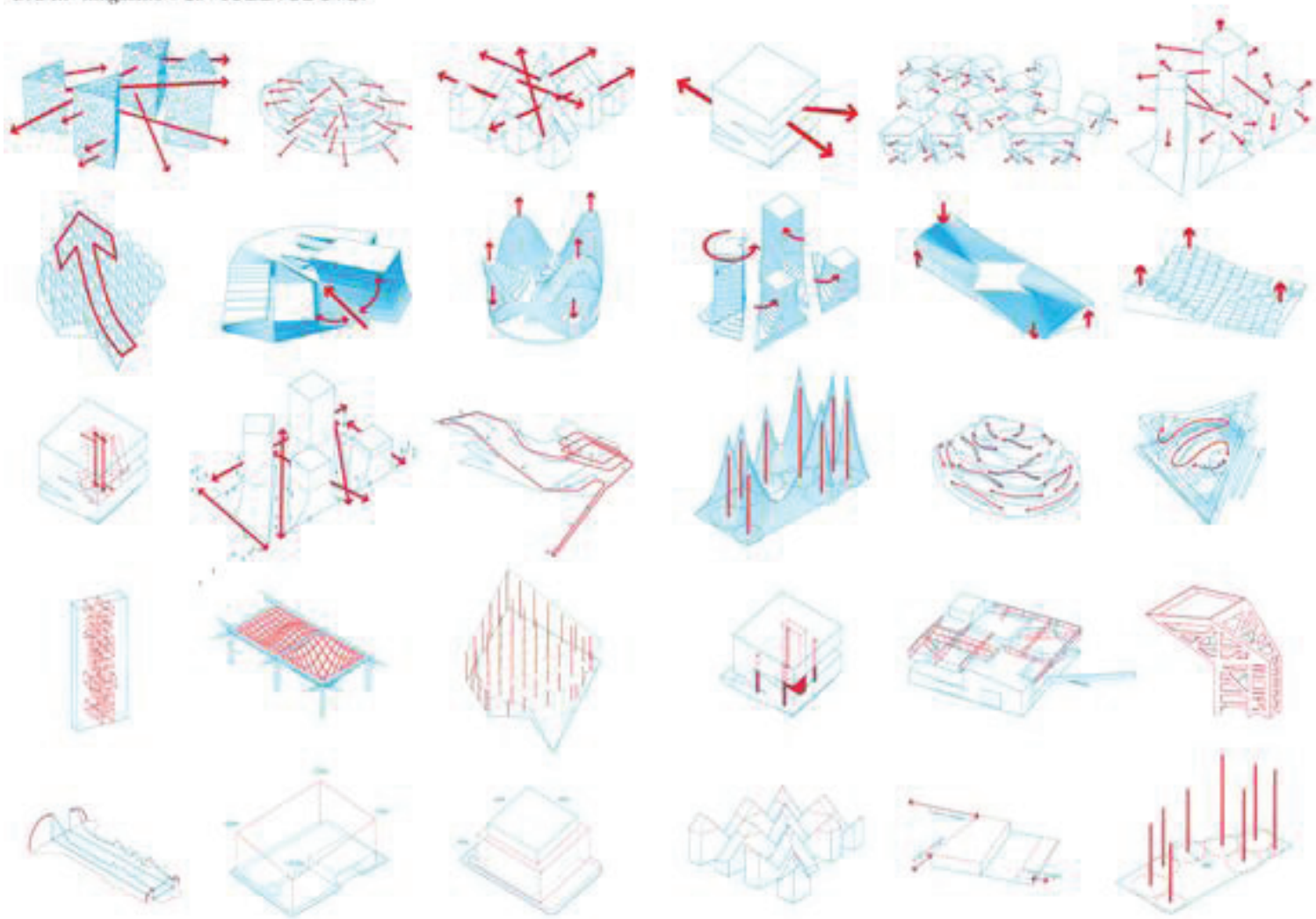
Diagrams showing architectural responses to various constraints - views, sun angles, circulation, gravity, etc. - in a selection of projects by JDS Architects.

made so many films already that you could just re-cut them into something else. Back then we discussed to produce this project with no other company than your own, Zentropa.

LVT: We also got a little bit into that. My company was called Element Film, because the idea was that you had these standard elements that you could recombine. But your idea is probably pretty hard to sell.

JDS: It's not like your films are super easy to sell either!

BC: You mentioned that when you were making 'Anti-Christ', you watched and admired Japanese horror films.

LVT: For the first time, I decided to watch some films, horror films, which is something I normally don't do. I saw 15 or something. I liked 'The Ring' [the original by Hideo Nakata from 1998] very much, mostly because you had a feeling that it was just from a different culture, the images were not from Western ideas. I have a theory that when I was young and started studying films, I saw a lot of films, three or four a day, and then I made a library in my head and started from there. The

problem is that if you go over stuff that has been made previously, you somehow lose concentration, because you have a tendency to say, "that's very good, I want to make something like that." Whereas, I have this idea that I am on an unknown island and I have chosen to go south. Then it's important for me to stay going south, even if south is difficult to define in this sense, because if I saw a lot of things that were suddenly interesting, then I might go east, or I might go west if that seemed like more fun. So I have this feeling that I should keep on going south and keep trying to stay on the course.

JDS: But at the same time, the course is totally undefined.

LVT: Yes, it's just a feeling that I'm going south, though at the moment, I have no idea where south is!

JDS: No, but you're definitely exploring. Every movie has a new perspective.

BC: But that sense of newness often comes from how you manipulate the givens. The voluntary use of givens, constraints, rules, and obstructions is a vital part of your filmmaking, whether the various techniques for-

bidden by the Dogme code or the rules that you set for Jørgen Leth in 'The Five Obstructions'. Architects often work under external constraints – a client's preferences, building codes, budgets. Filmmakers do as well, but the constraints you employ are often voluntary. Is it important that constraints are self-imposed, or can external constraints be used as effectively? Do constraints require a certain context against which they are working (for instance, the normative conventions of filmmaking), or can arbitrary constraints be equally effective?

LVT: Arbitrary is a difficult word. But, no, I don't think the rules need to be self-imposed or determined in relation to a specific context. They could really be anything. Albert Speer, an architect whom I find very interesting, once designed a room for Hitler that was dimensioned to the size of the largest rug that could be produced at the time. I find it fascinating. I don't know if it's an arbitrary constraint or not.

BC: In architecture, the expectation is that you justify every move. You're expected to have an explanation for how a project develops. But often there are leaps that can't be explained. Is that another form of constraint, when you can say, I know it has to be that, but how do I get there?

LVT: It's difficult to say. There are very often things that can't be explained, and that's accepted. With 'Anti-Christ', we did it so quickly that we didn't question every decision or idea. If I had a year, I might have gone back and forth, like, maybe the fox should talk, maybe he shouldn't.

JDS: We all thought the fox should talk more.

LVT: I had a phone call with Udo Kier, the German actor. He said, why couldn't I do the fox? I said, that might have been a little too much with a German accent!

BC: With regard to the rules that you make for yourself when you're making a film, what appeals to me about Japanese horror films is that they don't have these rules like in American horror. In American horror, there are always formulas by which the evil can be undone, so that it is always contained within a rationalist universe. Vampires are killed by the sun, or with a stake through their heart, or repelled by a cross or garlic. Japanese horror doesn't use rules in that way, which is what makes it more terrifying.

LVT: It is of course really a joy to see something mystical, something inexplicable. You've seen so many American

Julien De Smedt and Benedict Clouette discuss the work of JDS Architects with Lars Von Trier

films that are so flat. You know that this scene came
before this scene and explains it so that you understand
everything. I'm also fighting against that logic and ra-
tionality. I have a struggle with the guy who's making
the rules. One part of me is the guy that's making the
rules; the other part wants to throw them away.

I often think about these rules in an almost religious
way. I've seen television programmes about cathedral
domes, and this idea that there should be some fine il-
lustration or beautiful painting in the areas where there
was no light. I find that very powerful, and I actually
think about that when I film, something that is mystical
but very poetic, that you do where it can't be seen.

JS: In our work, we often attempt (and probably rarely
succeed) in doing something new. Do you think that
doing something new has to be retroactively justified,
or somehow violent?

BC: Like with Jørgen Leth in 'The Five Obstructions',
there's a kind of aggressiveness in the rules that you set
up to break his film. Is it necessary to break something
to have something new?

JDS: I think that's a really important point. One of
the things that is compelling in your work is the re-
lationship that you've set up between constraints and
freedoms. What you're saying is that constraints are
the basis of another kind of freedom that you establish
for yourself, but that there is also an obligation in that
freedom.

LVT: Yes, I would say I take it very seriously. I feel I
have to try something because I'm in a situation where
I can try something. I feel that that's a responsibility,
maybe not to society, but to other people.

JDS: But is it part of the idea that the challenge you are
making is to make people reflect on things, that you
don't just give your cards out and say, this is the point.

LVT: Yes, actually, I do something that might be inspir-
ing to you, which is that I take a point of view that
is not my own and I defend it in a film. When I look
back, that's a technique that I use very much, for in-
stance, revenge or melodrama. To take something that
I would never touch before and say that this is an area
that we have to investigate, like the use of melodrama
in 'Breaking the Waves'. All my childhood, I thought
that melodrama was terrible and worthless, and so I
said, let's try to move around it and see what you can
do if you just try to protect it, instead of just condemn-
ing it. I've done that in several films, and I'm sure you
could do that in buildings also.

JDS: Yes, you have to.

LVT: You could take a specific form of a building that
you really dislike and say, okay, but what are the good
things about this? What could be the qualities that I
can't see because I have a lot of predetermined emo-
tions about it, because I really hate it, and try to see it
from another perspective, to turn it around so that it
suddenly becomes fantastic.

Documenting the Informal
-Benedict Clouette

Urban China has a disorienting effect. Etymologically, "disorientation" is literally the loss of the East, the idea of China we had rehearsed so well. Not only does *Urban China* complicate the narratives of hyperbolic growth, systemic disorder, and limitless economic expansion that have emerged as increasingly predictable leitmotifs in discussions on Chinese urbanism, but it also offers a multivalent and continuously shifting image of contemporary Chinese cities. The magazine is a wildly energetic attempt to both document and reimagine existing and possible urbanisms. Foregoing the certainty of a single, unified concept of "the Chinese city," *Urban China* proposes a profusion of concepts and interpretations. The disorienting effect is not a breakdown of the magazine's agenda—it is the agenda, an attempt to shake off the complacency of the known.

China, once regarded in this hemisphere as irreducibly foreign, has become familiarized and domesticated through demographic and economic statistics and widely reproduced images of skyscrapers emerging from rice fields. In comparison, editor Jiang Jun and his colleagues offer a richer set of information, an archeology of Chinese urbanism: diagrams, photographs, and texts, as well as a growing archive of artifacts and images they have assembled and charged with significance. Despite Jiang's optimism about China's future, this documentation has an undercurrent of melancholy; it is capturing, at a precise moment, the material evidence of an urbanism that will be lost, inevitably and almost immediately, in China's next great leap. Jiang's archive catalogues these details of everyday life, revealing the seemingly spontaneous and chaotic intelligence that is the counterforce to China's official order; the improvisations, usually small and temporary and always unsanctioned, allow the inhabitants degrees of play and flexibility and often the minimum conditions for existence within the planned economy of the city. Jiang terms this other urbanism, the subject of his exhibition at the New Museum, "Informal Cities."

What is informality? It is a set of practices that operates outside the sphere of central planning and legal recognition, but is not the same as criminality because it isn't necessarily illegal. Informality is often a response to the failures of city planning, an attempt to find opportunities that are neither approved nor effectively prohibited by the official order. The objects gathered under the theme of "Informal China" are examples of the ingenuity and agility required for survival in China's rapid modernization: an umbrella that becomes a pavilion when bound to a telephone pole, street vendors' canopies sewn out of plastic tarps from a construction site, or a curtain made from crushed soda cans. Unlike the official economy, whose activity is writ large in Beijing's towers and stadiums, informality leaves few monuments. Jiang's archive makes these practices visible, offering physical evidence of the ephemeral. The archive's objects stand in for relationships, disparities, and conflicts, often demarcating the line between the State and its citizens. In *Urban China*'s "Informal China" issue, Jiang includes an image entitled Labor-Insurance-Gloves Coat, depicting a pair of thick wool work gloves and beside them a child's coat knit from the same material [1]. The caption explains that housewives use wool from the work gloves that the government provides in excess of demand, to knit coats and trousers, thereby correcting discrepancies between private needs and the official supply. The systematic presentation of these innovations reveals that they are not unique or spontaneous, but are part of a pattern of responses to the disparity caused by the formal economy. Jiang does not make informal practices seem exotic, nor does he romanticize the vitality and intelligence that emerge from desperate poverty. In cataloging, diagramming, collecting, and systematizing, he presents the informal as a mirror image to the official order; operating in relation to the planned economy, the informal is acting according to its own protocols within a larger context of control.

Urban China's diagrams are provisional attempts to recover, amongst the dazzling spectacle of competing billboards, street markets, tent cities, and architectural non-sequiturs, forms of organization, at once robust and fragile, immanent in the informal. The diagrams map out layers of informal activities and occupancy (laundry drying on telephone wires, an open-air barbershop in a vacant lot), de-particularizing individual buildings and spaces to create a generic type defined by a set of shared functions. A model of a typical apartment block looks as though it could be any block in any Chinese city, and buildings in photographs are whited out, replaced with line drawings and annotations, a technique that removes them from their real context and redefines them as instances in a pattern of urbanization.

These techniques suggest that the seemingly spontaneous appropriations of space are in fact systematic and widespread, and interplay with the planned, official protocols of urbanization. As Jiang writes, a discussion of "informal China" cannot be limited to the informal, but should consider the interaction between "control" and the "out of control" in Chinese society [2]. Throughout the city, despite the appearance of disorder, one finds layers of organization, both informal and formal, in an extremely interdependent relationship. Informal occupancy utilizes spaces left out of official zoning, rendering them productive, as shown in *Urban China*'s diagrams of shops operating in the space under pedestrian bridges or children's forts erected in abandoned construction sites. Informal labor creates bootleg products that enter the official channels of distribution or are bought on the street by those employed in the formal economy. While informality may seem an anomalous and atavistic intrusion of an older pre-modern practice, it is an indissociable part of Chinese modernization. By diagramming informal organizations, Jiang shows that these apparent improvisations follow a logic that cannot be separated from the official order.

Jiang's approach is one of analysis and documentation; he doesn't prescribe architectural or urban planning remedies. But while his diagrams are not meant to be used as building plans, neither are they an indictment of the planned and the formalized. It is possible that future architecture or urban planning could apply Jiang's research on informal China to the making of the next Chinese cities. Jiang's work suggests that what is needed most is an expanded definition of what constitutes a city—one that includes a wider range of systems and modes of inhabitation, both formal and informal, and that preserves moments of the unplanned, even the out of control.

Benedict Clouette is a writer and editor for the architecture and urbanism magazine Volume, and a degree candidate at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.

NOTES
1 See Urban China 9 (2006): 43.
2 Jiang Jun. "Controlled by Chaos." Volume 8 (2006): 20-31.

Documenting the Informal

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Volume

C-LAB CERTIFIED
ISSUE

Agitation!
See What Architecture is Shaking

What If, Why Not?
Philippe Parreno
Interviewed by
Benedict Clouette

Philippe Parreno's artistic practice embraces conversation as a way of affiliating different narratives or realities. His work is an open exploration of various protocols of interaction, from copyright law, to exhibitions, to football games. His film *Zidane, un portrait du 21e siècle*, made with Douglas Gordon follows recently retired football star Zinédine Zidane, capturing his gestures with seventeen synchronized cameras trained on him for the duration of a single match. *Volume* recently spoke with Parreno about fictional realities, conversation, and *Zidane*.

BC: You often work between reality and fiction, or with fiction as another reality. We spoke recently with your sometime collaborator François Roche about the use of fiction in his architecture. How does fiction function in your work?

PP: François's work reverses the plan by entering into the project through fiction, and allowing fiction to become a little bit alienated by everything else, by the social complexities of the situation and by his own rigor.
 For me, the distinction would be that you can produce a fiction, while surely you cannot always argue that reality itself produces a fiction. I am talking about fiction, not illusion. My work always starts with a 'ritournelle', not a scenario. The Zidane portrait is about What If / Why Not following one protagonist moving through a story. A character begins to be built through the relation you start to engage with him just by spending time looking at him. The stories you start to tell are your stories, and you begin to produce your variations. It's like drifting, I guess.

BC: How does that happen in the process of creating the film, in how you approached it, the technique and how you made it?

PP: The *Zidane* film started with a conversation between Douglas Gordon and myself, about ten years ago. And then somehow in the intervening time, the discussion became more of a record, to the point where the ideas of the film convinced us, I think. So then about five years ago, we approached Zidane, and I approached at the same time the director of photography Darius Khondji. There were many practicalities we had to consider in order to concentrate on

trying to produce the contours that would lead Zidane to make the film with us. We finally met him, and we figure he must have liked the ideas and our approach.
 I knew what I wanted to achieve, but how – that was challenging. How to engage with a fiction without total understanding? How to commit as a viewer to an experience? There was no fascination for reality. We wanted to focus more on the affective particularities of the character, and out of the observations people have of Zidane, as a TV star, to develop a kind of empathy. Cinema is a fantastic machine to incarnate. We talked with Zinedine about this approach, about portraiture.

BC: Does empathy relate to the part of your practice that is constantly involved in different kinds of collaboration?

PP: I never make drawings for my projects, I always talk or write. That's how I function. I call up someone, I talk about an idea, and that's how it starts. It always starts with a conversation.
 And if you don't have anyone with whom to speak, you do what the poets in Greek mythology did and create muses or water nymphs in order to talk to someone, to address the work to someone. There is always a kind of narrative dialogue that an author engages.

BC: I've heard you talk about this before as a kind of polyphony or a musical score. Why do you find the need to create these protocols for relationships in your work?

PP: I grew up with art centers or cultural centers. For me, art was something produced in art centers, in a space dedicated to exhibition making. A space without a collection and therefore a space where you could not only question the object-making but produce an exhibition.
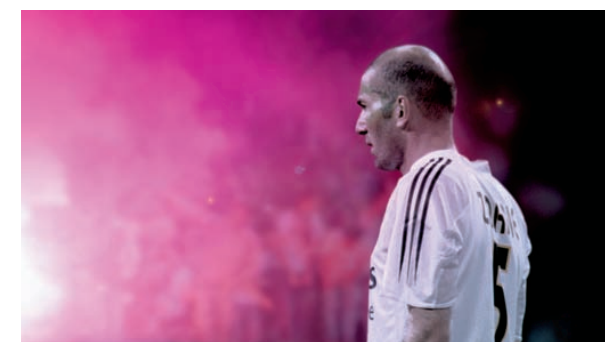 Pierre Boulez remarked that anybody could buy his scores, but in order to play them, you need to have something that he defined as *the score of the score*. And I think that could be true for exhibitions as well. The exhibition involves a series of relationships. So you can imagine how that connects with the object the protocol of that connection. Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist, talks about 'phenotropics', or 'phenotropic computing'. Essentially, he questioned the idea of 'protocol adherence' in software development. I like to imagine that exhibition is working on protocol adherence.
 That's how I function, always starting with this kind of game.

BC: First you write something, and it starts from this single motif, question, or issue. What would be an example from a particular project?

PP: For *Zidane*, the question was: What If / Why Not following one protagonist going through a story.
 For the *Boy From Mars* with François Roche, it was: could we imagine architecture producing a film and film producing an architecture and its reality?

1. *Anywhere Out of This World*, 3D animation movie transferred to digital video disc, 2000
2. *The Boy From Mars*, 35 mm transferred to High Definition video, 2003

1. *Fade to Black (...)*, silkscreens on paper with phosphorescent ink, 2003
2. Philippe Parreno and Douglas Gordon, *Zidane, un portrait du 21e siècle*, still from a color video, 2006

With Annlee, it was: could we take a sign that does not mean anything anymore and come to see that sign as defining a community?

And so on…It could be a fun game to keep going like that for all the projects. Fun, and a little bit boring.

BC: The loophole seems like an appealing figure for you, as a case of exception in a protocol, like in copyright for example. How do loopholes create an opportunity for you to work?

PP: I think we have read the notion of copyright in a straightforward way through 'Annlee', but also in a way inspired by one of the first statements of the *nouveau roman*, when Alain Robbe-Grillet asked how you could create the condition by which you never stop telling the story. I think that's one of the drives for this project, to say we have this sign, or whatever you want to call it, and then the question is how we can project the desire for the sign to never stop producing meanings. So of course, in the first film I did with Annlee, the character was introducing itself, which is a kind of political role. But even as an introduction it was a way of building up the ideas and inputs that would allow her to take on her own life as a sign.

BC: When you allow the stories to continue to keep telling themselves, you produce the possibility of an afterlife of the work, and afterlife of Annlee, or the afterlife of the image in *Fade to Black (…)*.

PP: A never-ending story. With *Fade to Black (…)*, I first created a series of real events or situations. Those events become a series of images. I printed these with photosensitive ink and applied a photochemical removing mix so that the image would slowly become less visible and the memory of it would start to be more and more blurred and affected. So the more the work is shown, the less visible it becomes.

And I like this notion that we know how the project starts, but not how it ends? With movies you always wait for the ending and somehow art has always avoided that question. In a way, through *Fade to Black (…)*, we tried to produce the possibility of an ending. A happy ending.

BC: It opens up onto the possibilities of invisibility. I've read you studied math, which is sometimes considered a form of knowledge that uniquely bypasses visibility. How is invisibility at play in your work and do you think your art practice relates to your studying math?

PP: The relation to math is that I'm always seeing structures. Whether I look at a visual art work, or a movie, or a novel, or an essay, my interest is always in reactive structures and cool ideas.

Invisibility relates to the moment in the discussion, not only in collaborations but when you're trying to produce anything, when you can see that something starts to *be there*, which means I can close my eyes and still see it, still imagine it. In that sense, it's a definition of reality, because it remains even if I'm not there

to look at it. And somehow, when you produce work that way, the moment when you start to know that relation, you begin to see a sort of quasi-reality. The quasi-reality of a quasi-object, if you accept one definition of reality as what stays when you are not there to look at it.

In art, you learn from your practice. Before the *Zidane* film, I had never addressed the idea of portraiture, because I thought it was a remnant from the past, along with other genres of painting like landscape and with Velazquez. I had to make the film to understand the notion of portraiture. Because I made the film, I was able to look back at the paintings and they began to have new meanings for me, when before most of them were just chocolate box covers.

BC: In the *Zidane* film, his figure seems to become a particular point in a reactive structure, that all of these relationships pass through him. It is a very particular idea of portraiture, but do you think these structures are shared by other forms of portraiture?

PP: Have you noticed that when you go in a museum all these eyes of dead people are still following you? Spooky. Anyway, yeah, portraiture creates a set of very specific relations. When you look at an image, even in tabloids, of somebody really focusing on doing something other than being aware of being seen by you, you necessarily start to have some empathy with that person.

In the *Zidane* film, it is not only two pairs of eyes, but also the co-director Douglas Gordon's eyes. After two years working with somebody looking at the face of somebody else, you start to look at the other as if it's you.

BC: In *Zidane*, it seems like you're presenting an environment in which media imagery and physical space capture each other in an intense involvement. What are the implications of that kind of space for architecture now?

PP: I think architecture is dealing now with questions that might also involve the issue of time, the relation where, if you're not able to find the time-code, you're not able to operate in your life.

For example, a museum has restaurants, offices, elevators, theaters, exhibition rooms with exhibition programs. All those spaces operate in different time sequences. There should also be expiration dates on projects.

I worked as a night watchman in a central post office when I was a student. Since then I look at architecture and space in a slightly different way. I would like to see a building which is a central post office during the day and a haunted house theme park at night. ✕

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Event # 14
Taichung, Fall 2007
Dialogue

Most architecture today must be impressive, outstanding, even peculiar, or receiving other tributes of difference – architecture as a claim to fame. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world…

There is a pressing need for better dialogue, the basic component of any culture. The question in Taichung will be: how can design impact on one of the most urgent questions of our time: how to provide a public domain for free speech and casual encounters?

If you're interested in being a part of this event, please reply to this page by e-mailing your response to rsvp@archis.org (stating 'Taichung' as subject), suggesting your idea along with your name, profession, and number of reservations before September 1st, 2007.

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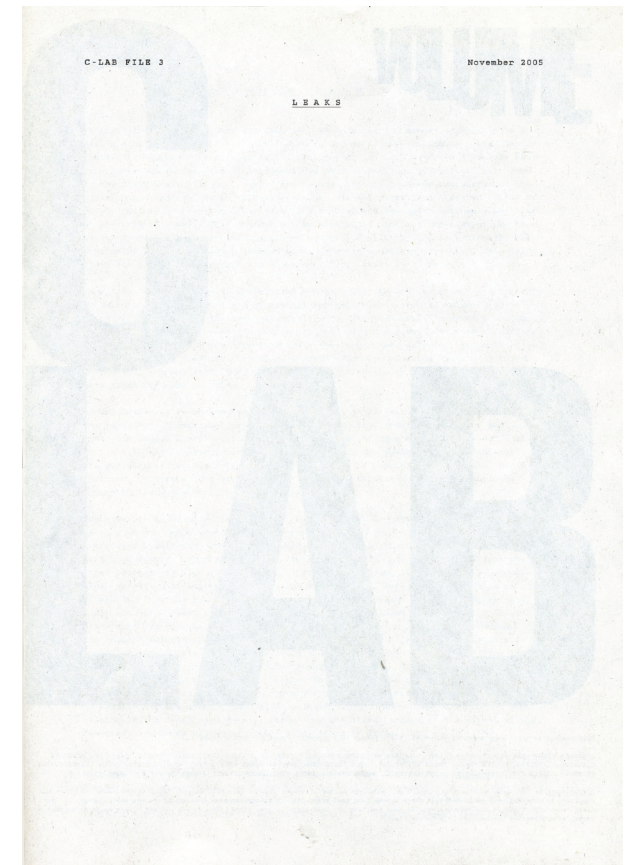
C-LAB FILE 3   November 2005

LEAKS

M U S E U M   O F   L E A K S

The cracks are showing in the world's largest museum complex. In a recent audit of the Smithsonian Institution prepared by the Government Accountability Office, analysts reported "chronic leaks" and "structural deterioration," resulting in closed buildings and damage to some collections. According to Lawrence Small, Secretary of the Institution, 'half of the Smithsonian's 400 buildings are in trouble.' With 18 museums, 10 research facilities, and a zoological park, a total of 7.5 million square feet, the Smithsonian's facilities budget has been stretched thin by an expansive and aging infrastructure. To make do, the Institution's staff has introduced stop-gap measures to counter the leaks: draping plastic sheets over flying machines and artifacts, and wiping up with mops, towels, and buckets.

The Smithsonian was founded by a bequest from James Smithson, a minor English mineralogist who left his fortune to the United States for the creation of an institution 'for the increase & diffusion of Knowledge among men.' He died in 1829, but the U.S. government was not informed of the bequest until 1835. Congress was divided about whether it should accept money from an English donor for a national institution, and so it was not until 1846 that the Smithsonian was established by law.

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

Due in part to this delay, very little is known about James Smithson or why he willed his estate to the young nation, despite efforts by the Smithsonian to seek out information about its founder. Smithson never visited America, nor did he correspond with any American contemporaries. Speculating on the motives behind the bequest, John Quincy Adams recorded that the American chargé d'affaires in London 'intimates...that the man was supposed to be insane.' The Institution acquired Smithson's personal effects and papers, but before they could be reviewed for any clues they might yield, they were consumed in a fire at the Smithsonian Castle in 1865. Even Smithson's bodily remains were nearly lost when an Italian quarry, which owned the mineral rights to the cliffs beneath the English cemetery in Genoa where he was buried, emptied the other residents into the Mediterranean. Fortunately, Alexander Graham Bell was sent to exhume the body and transport it to the Smithsonian archive, rescuing the Institution's original relic for its collection.

The archive is thus founded on an act of preservation, saving a precious object from the brink of disaster by removing it from the chance outcomes of the material world. The history of the Smithsonian collection and its benefactor is a history of encoun-

FIGURE 1 Alexander Graham Bell examines Smithson's remains. Photograph by Mabel Bell, courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
FIGURE 2 The fire at the Smithsonian Castle in 1865. Retouched photograph by Alexander Gardner, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

ters with the potential for loss, and an intimate awareness of the precarious relationship between material artifacts and knowledge. The archive recognizes the entropy that charges all objects and attempts to fix them against this instability, which is at once an admission of its real force. Architecture is called upon in service of the archive, as an image of permanence and security: the Smithsonian Castle, designed by James Renwick, combines an architecture of security and impermeability with one of rationality and knowledge, at once a physical defense for the objects inside and an ideological defense for the uncertainties surrounding the founder of the Institution, and the nation that accepted his gift.

From the beginning, the Castle leaked. Built on a flood plain, it was consistently damp, and when the tides rose on the Potomac, the vapors from the sewer that ran beneath the building would seep through the brickwork, permeating the Castle with a strong odor. The atmospheric conditions inside the Castle were notoriously cold and wet and its poor construction made for constant repairs. The fire that destroyed James Smithson's papers was started when repairmen working in the freezing building installed a wood stove for their comfort, venting it into a hole between two windows that they incorrectly assumed was connected to the main chimney. The hole allowed the fire to leak into the wider building, while buckets of water, placed throughout the building in case of fire, were frozen solid. After the fire, no one could explain where the hole had come from. It is the special fate of these archives to be subjected to greater excesses of cold, damp, and heat than they ever would be outside the building.
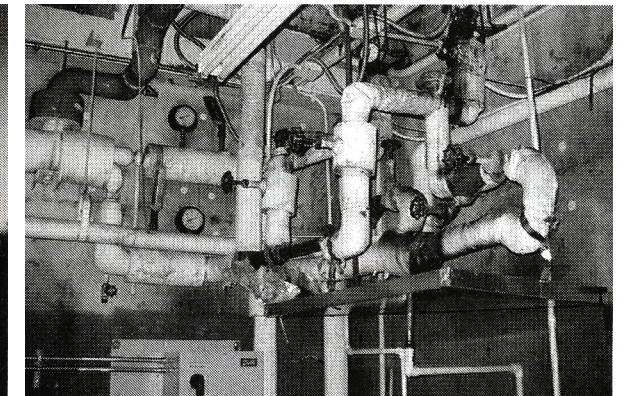

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

Today, the Institution is facing what the recent audit called a 'broad decline in the Smithsonian's aging facilities and systems that poses a serious long-term threat' to their collection of artifacts. Having grown to over 7.5 million square feet, housing roughly 144 million objects and specimens and 166 million archived documents and photographs, the funding available for the maintenance of the facilities and their collections has not kept pace with the Institution's growth. Smithsonian officials have estimated that the renovations to the complex will take $2.3 billion over the next nine years. Following the audit, the Institution's facilities management was reorganized under retired Major General Clair F. Gill, who in his previous career as the Army's top engineer, oversaw numerous large-scale projects, including two flood control systems. Slowly, some projects are reaching completion, like the replacement of skylights at the National Air and Space Museum, where leaks in the glass ceiling had caused rusting on the first airplane to hit Mach 2 and water stains on the wing of the Lilienthal glider that inspired the Wright Brothers' design. The Patent Office building, home of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, has been closed since 2000 for roof repairs and the replacement of its antiquated heating and cooling system. The Arts and Industries Building was closed in January 2004 because leaks were causing metal

FIGURE 3 Plastic sheets protect artifacts from leaks in the ceiling of a storage room at the Natural History Museum. Photograph courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.
FIGURE 4 The deteriorating heating and cooling system at the Patent Office Building. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.
FIGURE 5 A stain marks the Lilienthal glider at the Air and Space Museum.

panels to fall from its decaying ceiling. The National Museum of African Art has leaks over its galleries from holes in the roof and clogged pipes, and the Renwick Gallery has weeps in the wall plaster from leaking steam pipes. At the Sackler Gallery, a construction team has dug an eight-foot-deep trench in the lawn that covers the underground building in an effort to seal expansion joints that have spouted leaks in the gallery below. In the past three years, archivists have dealt with 19 'water emergencies,' including bursting pipes and leaks directly over collections, as well as a drain backup at the archives that destroyed records pertaining to the Institution's history. The Castle will be closed for three years of repairs starting in 2006.

The evolution of the Smithsonian and other modern institutions as repositories of material culture — libraries, museums, archives, and shopping centers — was aided by technological innovations that made possible an increasing mastery of the environmental conditions inside their buildings, producing a consistent interior climate by perfecting its separation from the contingencies of the outside. There is the greatest need for such separation in the archive, given that the criteria for an object's inclusion are its physical uniqueness and its significance in the realm of culture.

But contingency also necessarily affects the selection of an archive's contents by the fact that, left to chance, some objects should have been lost, like the bones of James Smithson. Contingency has always already leaked into the archive, in that all of its

FIGURE 5

contents enter through some degree of chance. There will always be leaks, because the archive is a product of its architecture, an architecture that is conditioned by the same instabilities as the artifacts it houses, touched by the same ambiguity between its significance as material and as idea.

The well-rehearsed narrative of modernity as a catalyst for rapid transformation, uprooting traditional patterns of sociality and dissolving their material evidence, provides only a partial description of the situation. Modernity has also produced the technological means to preserve the isolated object in an almost magical stasis, theoretically sealed off from time in a climate-controlled, acid-free box. The archive might be considered as characteristic of the desire for the rational dominion over the environment, a desire which effects the preservation of singular objects even as it dissolves the contexts and milieus that produced them, a desire that works at many scales, from the preservation of the artifact, to the preservation of the building that houses it, to the preservation of entire cities as archives of architecture.

It is easy to imagine another approach for the archive, whereby leaks would no longer conceived as imperfections in the separation between inside and outside, but as a positive tactic of permeability, creating conditions for the movement of knowledge more than its consolidation. In the language of the Smithsonian's founder, if increase is a matter of preservation, diffusion could be a process of leaks.