The Turtle : An American School of Architecture : A Radical Mediocracy

by Luis Rafael Berríos Negrón

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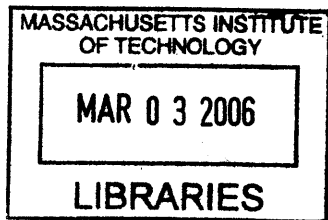
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ABSTRACT

This thesis evolves as a curatorial exercise with three phases: revisiting the practical and aesthetic position of the architecture thesis, structuring a design environment within MIT for fellow thesis candidates, leading to the development of a 1:1 test case - the Turtle.

The Turtle will transport past student theses while also serving as a remote "pin-up" review space. The unit travels through and out of campus, in order to place greater publicity on the output of MIT both within and beyond the Institute. This provides theses candidates with a prop for their respective presentations allowing for more informed contributions to the MIT School of Architecture.

The Turtle ultimately aims to serve as cultural equipment towards informing a broader sphere of knowledge that becomes more accessible to the contemporary architecture student, their critics/consultants, and their respective audiences.

Considering MIT's digital thesis search engine, D-Space, these additional terms are addressed: a new type of specialist, authorship, collaboration, collective imagination, communication, digital, Venturi's duck, education, endless, fact, faction, fear, fiction, Gehry's fish, hegemony, human, infinite, interference, knowledge, lack of knowledge, learning, material, mode of production, movement, myth, need, open source, optimism, party, political imagination as risk society, practice, propaganda, property, public programs, Goulthorpe's rabbit, relations, research, reticulation, rhinoceros, scale, simulation, spiritual, student tools, students as medium, teaching, technological, truth, turtle, variation.

PROFILE

Luis Rafael Berríos Negrón (5.15.1971) was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. After a six-year hiatus from academia, he fulfilled his bachelor of fine arts at Parsons School of Design. He then went to MIT where he is a candidate for a master of architecture degree. During his time at MIT, he worked as teaching assistant to both Krzysztof Wodiczko and Joan Jonas, head of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies and head of MIT's Visual Arts Program from 2003 to 2005, respectively. He also collaborated with the Media Lab's Smart Cities Group and SENSEable Cities Laboratory. In the Smart City Group, headed by Bill Mitchell, he worked as designer on the Frank Gehry/General Motors Car Design studio for two semesters and Tod Machover's Miami Performing Arts Center Workshop. While with Carlo Ratti, who heads the SENSEable City Laboratory, he worked as a designer and researcher for the Tsunami Safe(r) House project. He received The Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize in the Visual Arts and he sat as elected student representative in Dean Santos' committee to appoint the new Chair of the Department of Architecture, now Yung Ho Chang. Previously, as he worked on obtaining his BFA in New York, he was awarded the Michael Kalil Award for Smart Design while he assisted and collaborated with Larry Clark, Silvia Kolbowski and Jean Gardner from 1998 to 2002. His work attempts to identify and construct culturally polemic intersections between technology, geopolitics and art, with the aim of having an affirmative impact upon both the natural and built environments.

This thesis is nothing more than an alibi aimed to define my position as I step onto the complex field of architecture. As a general statement, it is difficult to identify its value as a resource. This difficulty is made palpable by the amplification of specialized skills emerging from design technologies, a demand vis a vis the expanding market economy. Essentially, my purpose at MIT was not to exploit its resources for specific research or skill, but the opposite: broadening and contributing any knowledge that traces the languages within MIT's School of Architecture as a result of the Institute's world-renowned laboratory culture.

My undergraduate work at Parsons School of Design focused on the intersections between technological, cultural and natural constructs; meaning that MIT felt as the optimal site for understanding these relations. I did not intend to change anything in or outside of MIT. I just wanted to force myself to understand the cultural advancement of technology in the American center of innovation. MIT is certainly an amazing bank of unparalleled talents and resources, but it is also evidence of the social and practical dysfunction that comes attached with the intensity of such environment.

Because of my struggle at MIT I have embraced greater commitment to creating architecture in the broadest sense of the word. This esperience has pushed me into understading how architecture considers the impact of digital media and patriarchal power, all to deliver work that nurtures our discipline's greatest virtue as a social art. Ultimately, this thesis hopes to implant a networked set of arguments that take effect in the ever radicalizing, homogenizing cultural field. The Turtle emerges as a small object of this countercultural hope. The following charts a view into the creation of the Turtle, the last event of an academic journey that began in 1989.

CONTENTS

The Turtle : An American School of Architecture : A Radical Mediocracy

"I believe this book to be profoundly optimistic because Oliviera, despite his rough antagonistic (broncoso) character, like we Argentineans say, his angst, his mental mediocrity, his inability to go beyond certain limits, he is a man that slams his head against the wall, the wall of love, the wall of everyday life, against the wall of philosophical systems, against the wall of politics. He slams his head against all these things because he, deep down, is an optimist, because he believes that one day, not for himself but for others, someday that wall will fall and on the other side there will be the kibbutz of desire, the millenary reign, there is the real man, that human project that he imagines that will not be realized until that moment. The search is not born out of the conscience of plenitude, but from the yearning for that which is missing, the mutilation. The poets have expressed: la vraie vie est absente... je suis autre (True life is absent... I am an other | La verdadera vida está ausente... yo soy otro.)" - Julio Cortazar, Hopscotch (1)

"Many Natives refer to North America as Turtle Island, because their legends say that when the earth was covered with water, Turtle dove to the bottom of the oceans bringing up earth on its back so that the people could have a safe and dry home. Turtle is at home anywhere because it carries its home on its back. It does not become attached to places, for it is free to search for new opportunities wherever they may be found. When they sense danger, or are in uncomfortable and insecure settings, they withdraw into their shell, and are protected. If you have Turtle medicine, you value both the power of the earth, the waters of the earth, and the magic of the heavens, for Turtle symbolizes both the grounding quality of earth energy, and the magic of the mystical. Using Turtle energy can help you achieve real balance in your life and your spirit so that you don't get "stuck in the mud". Turtle's medicine includes a connection with the center, navigation skills, patience, self-boundaries, associated with the feminine, power to heal female diseases, respecting the boundaries of others, developing new ideas, psychically protecting oneself, self-reliance, tenacity, non-violent defense." (2)

*"Thought to originate from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the 19th Century, 'charrette',
French for 'cart', refers to the cart pushed around by professors to collect the final artwork
by art and architecture students who were often in a frantic rush to finish their work.
Charrette was also historically used to describe the cart used to push the condemned to
the guillotine."* (3)

"Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it." - Guy Debord (4)

The Turtle unloaded at the site of its debut, Lobby 13 or the Bush Lobby at MIT.

The Turtle, as **affirmative equipment** for MIT's cultural infrastructure, has three objectives:

1. To preserve and disseminate the institutional memory, past, present and future of the School of Architecture.

2. To support us, the students, in the positioning our theses.

3. To become a mobile site for academic and social interface in and out of the MIT campus.

㉛
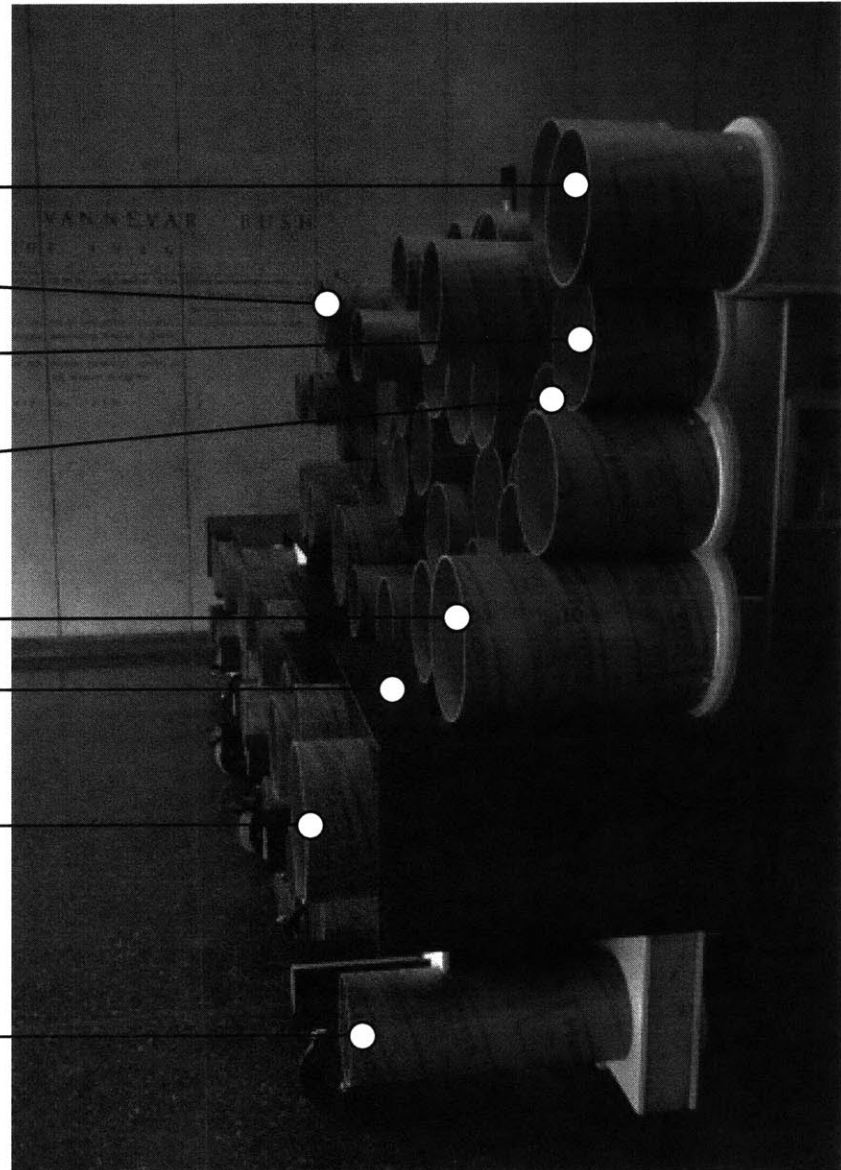
8.5x11 landscape format theses ●

drawings ●

8.5x11 portrait format theses ●

motion picture & digital format theses ●

11x17 theses landscape format (only) ●

reading surface ●

media equipment (audio, video, digital) ●

drawings ●

camera & microphone
mounts

pinup/projection
surface

jury monitor for
self-awareness

large pedestal/chair

medium pedestal

small pedestal

bidirectional book
and drawing con-
tainers

work/bar/service pre-
sentation surface with
online terminal
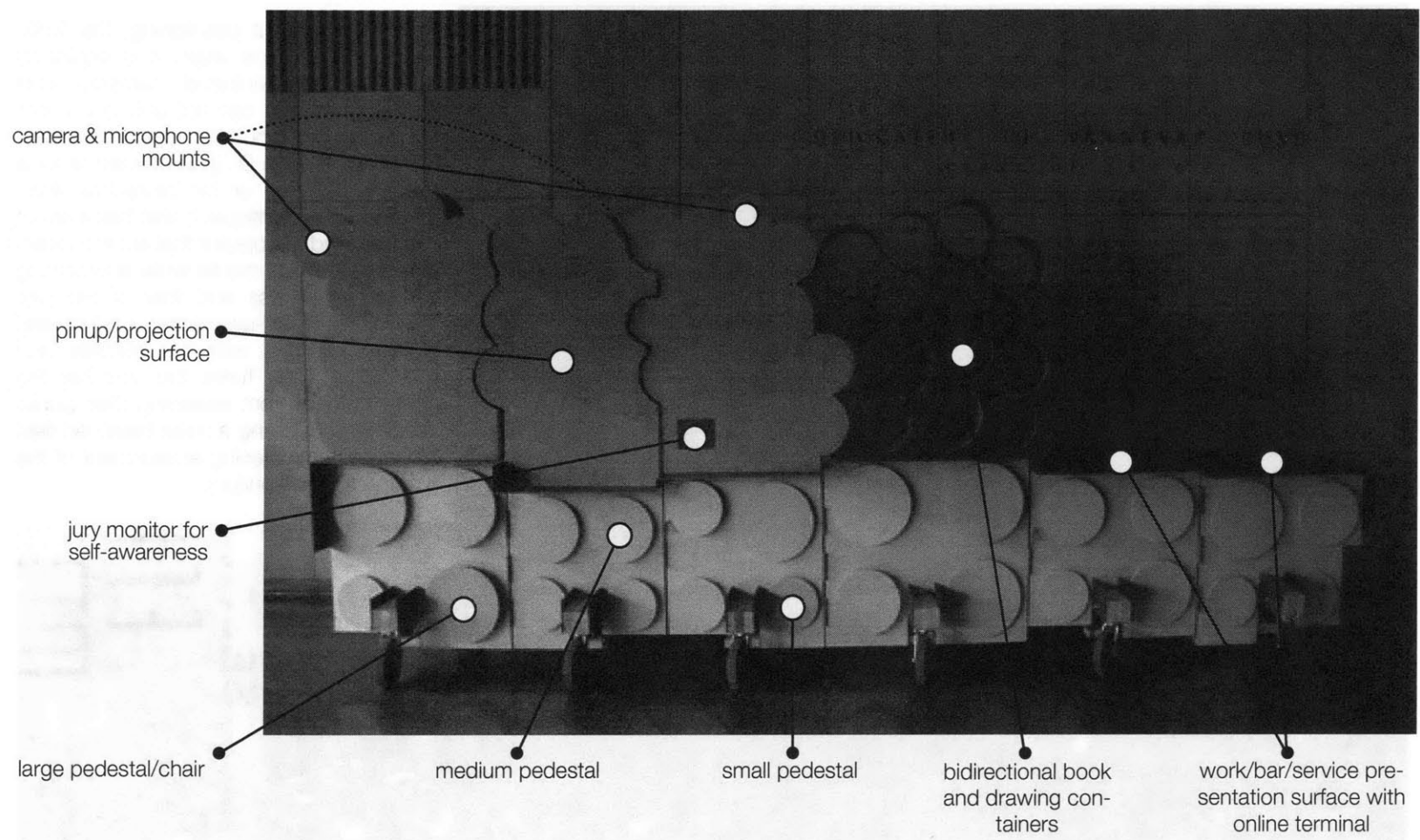
Regarding **institutional memory**, the Turtle, as receptacle, offers us, its users the ability to load it with past theses that may serve as reference to the work being presented through it. For example, students can place a variety of reference theses (whether print, drawings, CDs, etc.) in the receptacle array so that their jury and colleagues can have a broader view of their design intent. This not only creates a project-specific environment that departs from the current alphabetical order used to catalogue theses, but it also creates an ever-evolving set of **classifications and relations** between past theses and their correlation to the future. Also, since the Turtle is ideally equipped with a digital terminal, it can also offer up-to-date information of the current work being generated by MIT graduates in their respective practices. Ideally, this digital terminal is an annex to D-Space, MIT's digital thesis depository.
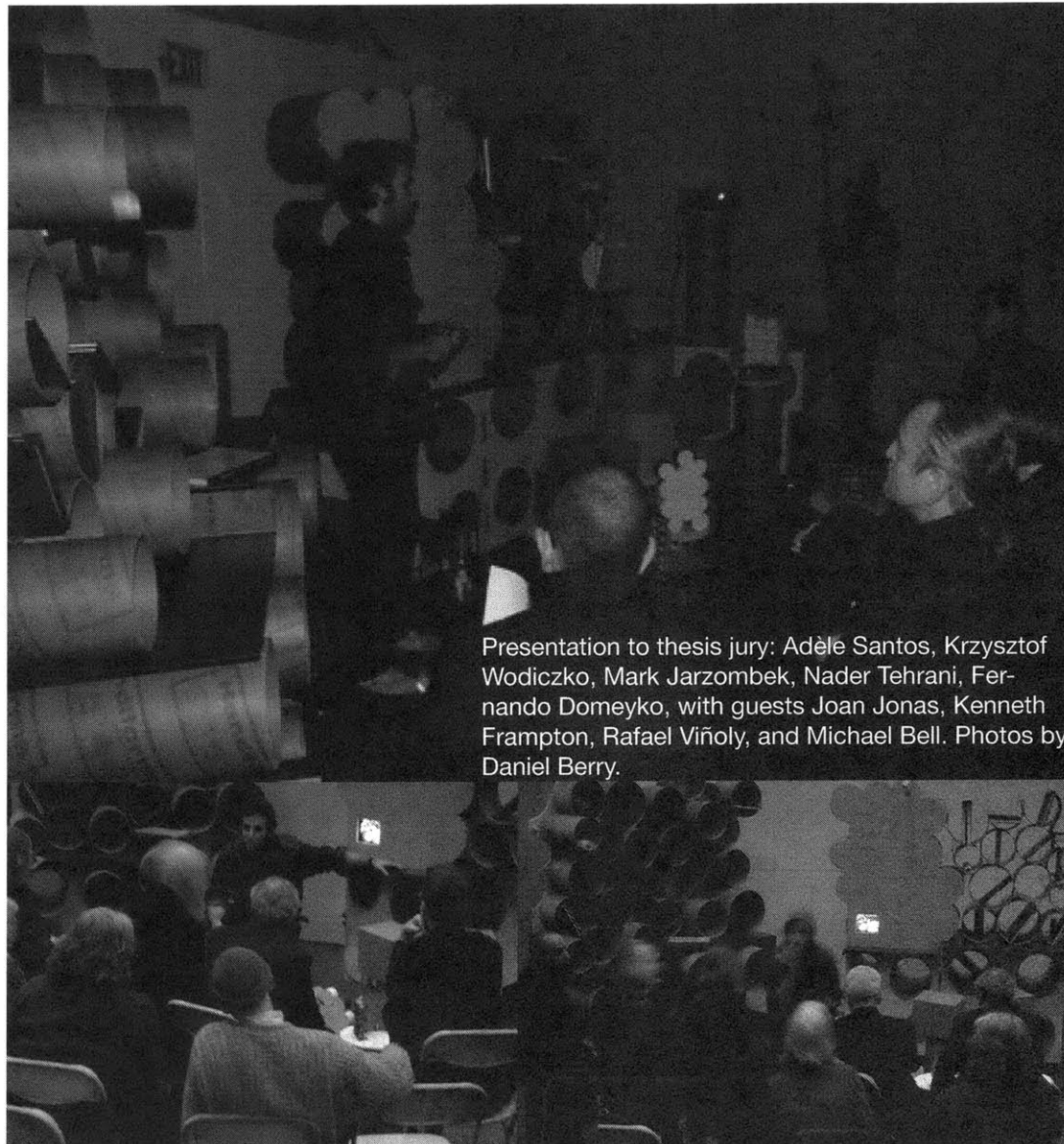
Presentation to thesis jury: Adèle Santos, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Mark Jarzombek, Nader Tehrani, Fernando Domeyko, with guests Joan Jonas, Kenneth Frampton, Rafael Viñoly, and Michael Bell. Photos by Daniel Berry.

Regarding **student positioning**, the Turtle helps us in various ways. It is equipped with four video/infrared cameras and microphones that can not only document our presentations but also, ideally, broadcast the signal through D-Space's website for a passive audience or for interactive video link and remote critique. It also has a set of monitors and a projector that aid in matters of video or digital media while augmenting our self-awareness and that of the jury. This matter of self-awareness is addressed so that, coupled with the flexibility and modularity of the Turtle, the user has the ability to learn from reviewing their public image while creating a more balanced field in the often-threatening environment of the pin-up/presentation/jury.
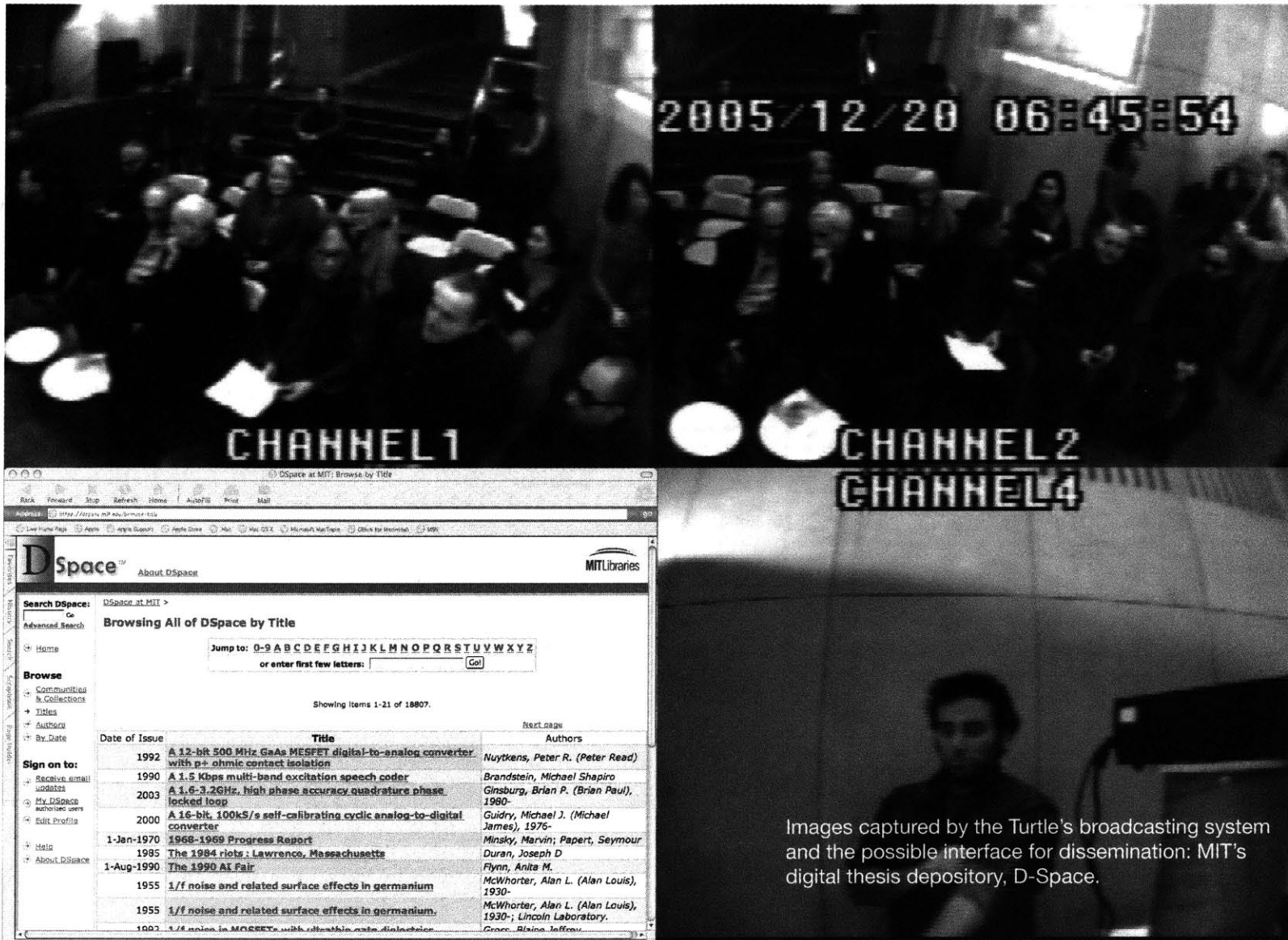
Images captured by the Turtle's broadcasting system and the possible interface for dissemination: MIT's digital thesis depository, D-Space.
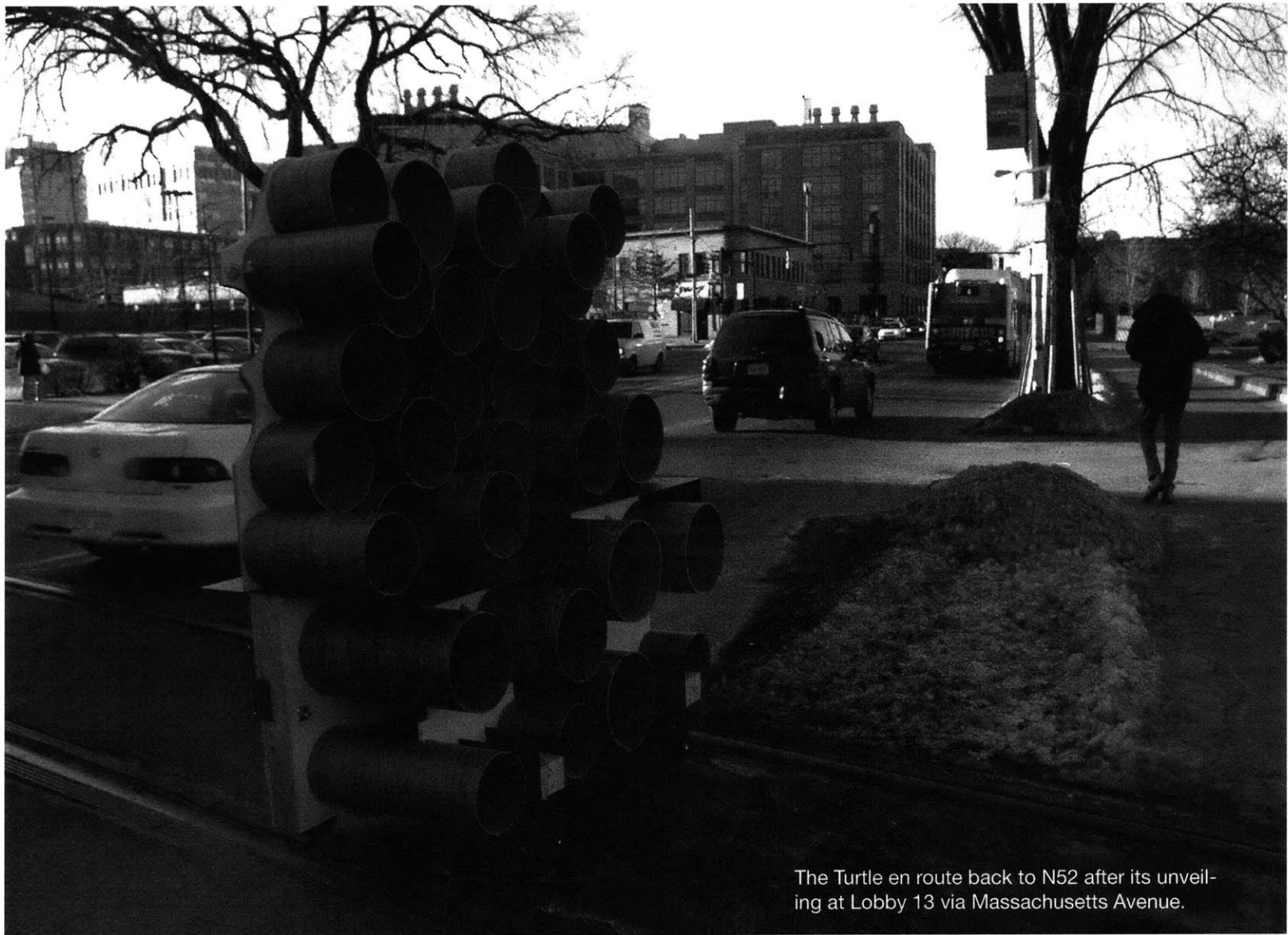
The Turtle en route back to N52 after its unveiling at Lobby 13 via Massachusetts Avenue.

Regarding **mobility**, the Turtle is equipped with another array of containers that can be used as chairs, pedestals, or tables. It is designed so that its dimensions (when unlocked into three cells) comply with most points of access, egress, and vertical circulation throughout MIT, and it is geared with a set of rugged caster wheels allowing it to roam freely in and out of campus. These features hope to allow the Turtle, not unlike a *charette*, to carry out remote presentations through campus, in and around building 5 or 7, DUSP, Visual Arts or the Media Lab. Perhaps in its Native American sense, it aspires to generously serve outside locations like community centers where projects may be developed or galleries, ie. Harvard's GSD, the Boston Architectural Center, or SpaceOther Gallery, where the student work may be featured.

Ultimately, the Turtle is a modular system that can be adapted to create new Turtles for every thesis class. It creates a new cataloguing system for the thesis environment, and it is a singular object that can be used again and again.

School of Architecture sites and beyond...

International Relations & Regional Planning

DUSP

Stata Center

Media Lab

N52 (or Siberia) Visual Arts Program, CAVS, MIT Museum, Wood & Metal Shops

Studio 5 & 7, Steam Cafe, Pla(z)mas, AVT

Simmons Hall Gallery and Auditorium

Image provided by MIT online aerial map.
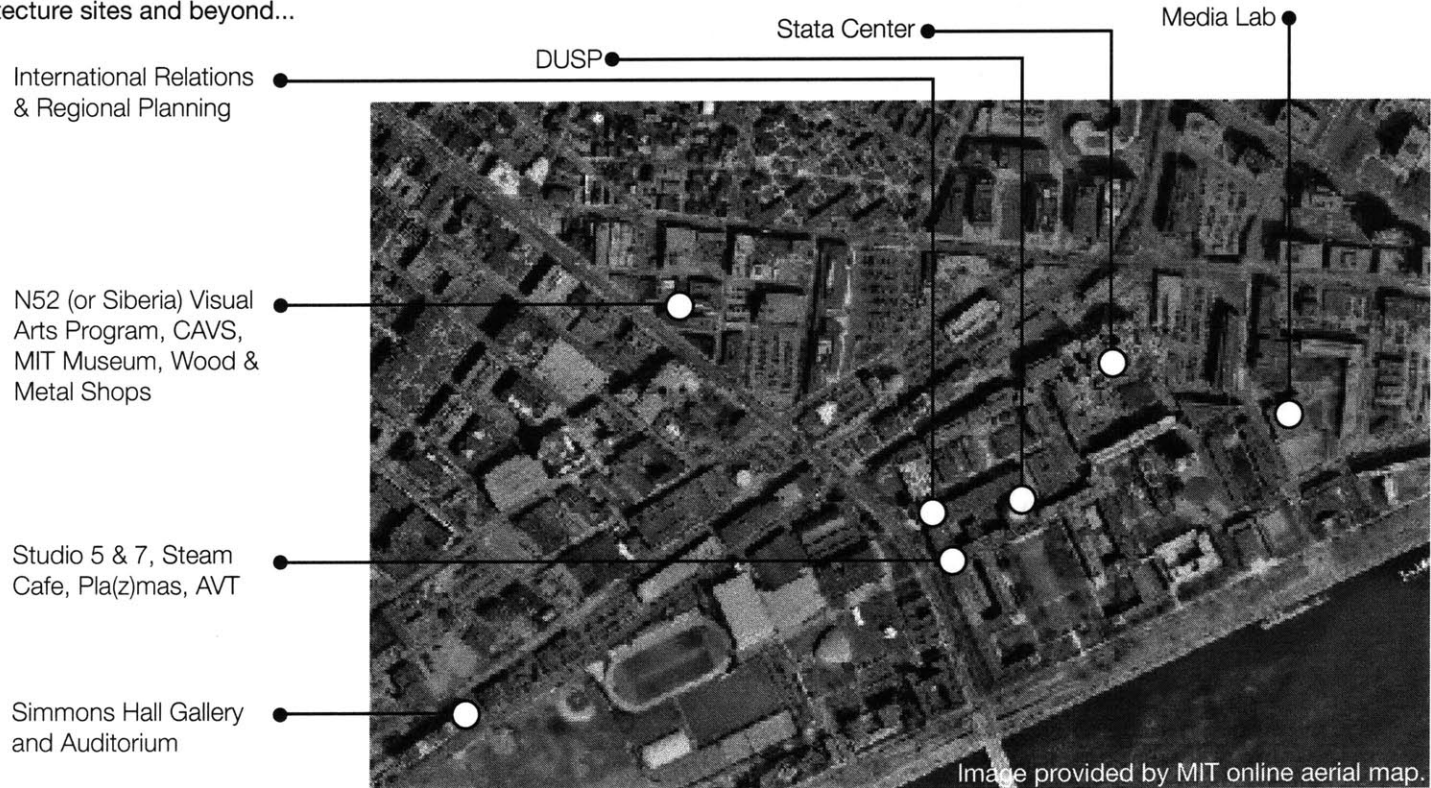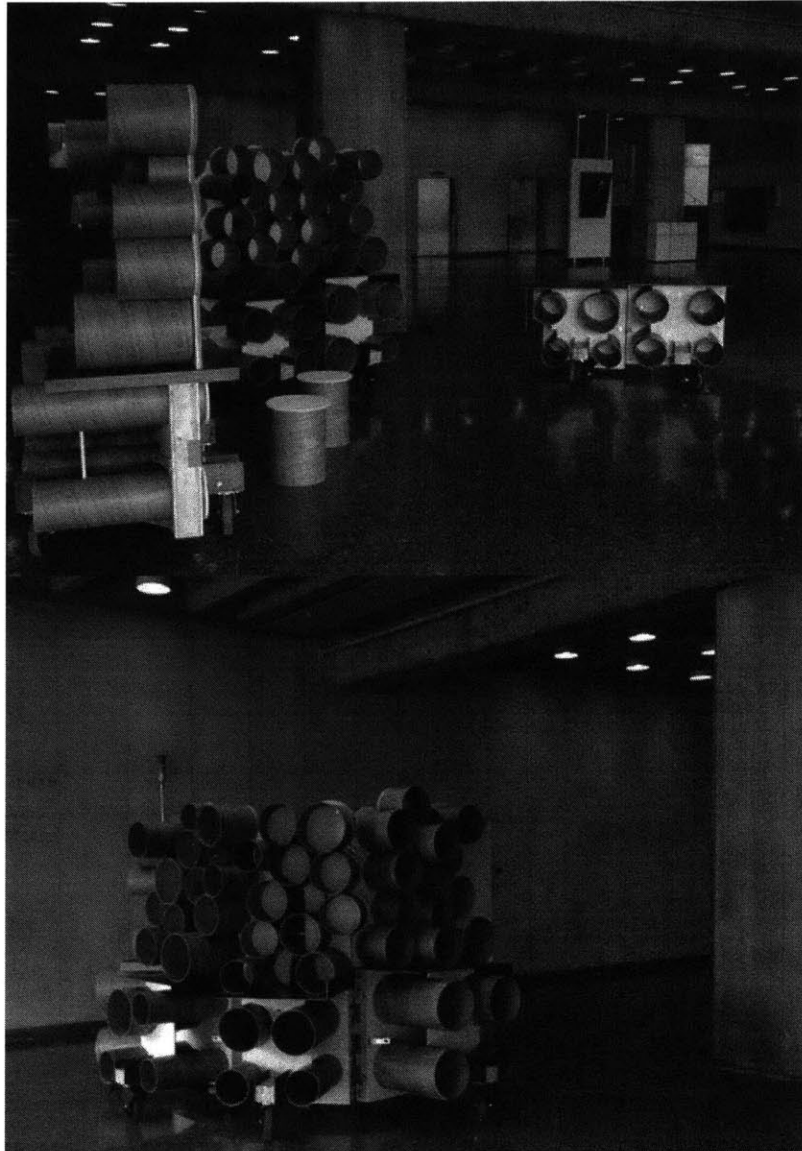
Modularity

The Turtle has various capabilities:

a. As furniture for students to convene socially around it for serving refreshments during events.

b. As a passive receptacle for visitng audiences to leisurely review contained and projected material within it.

c. As moving shelf space within MIT's Library system to profile theses from various disciplines and departments outside the School of Architecture.

d. As a device to compliment the cafes around campus, serving-both students and its public.

e. And, of course, as a prop for one, two, or three pin-ups/presentations.

setting a ●————————

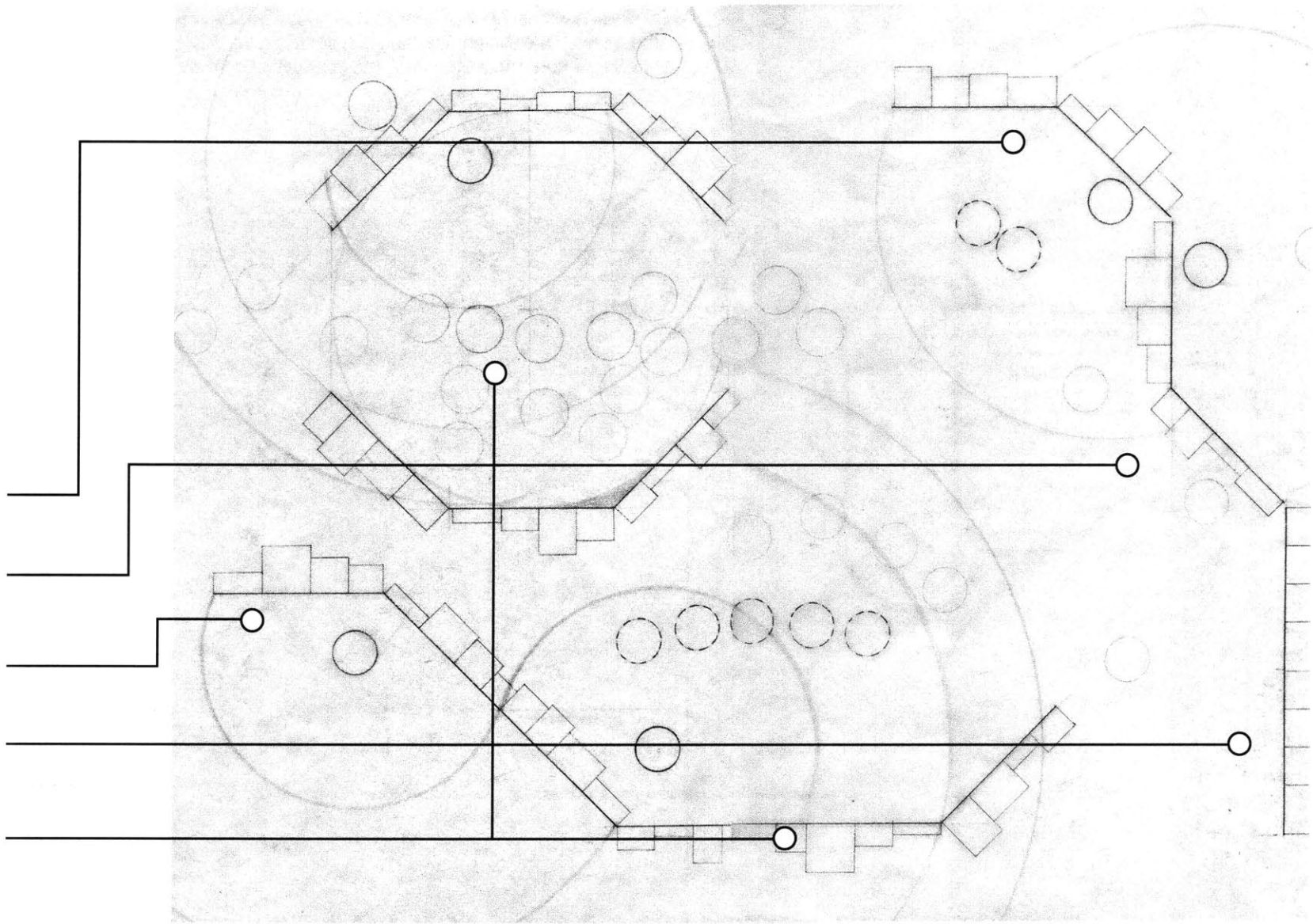setting b ●————————

setting c ●————————

setting d ●————————
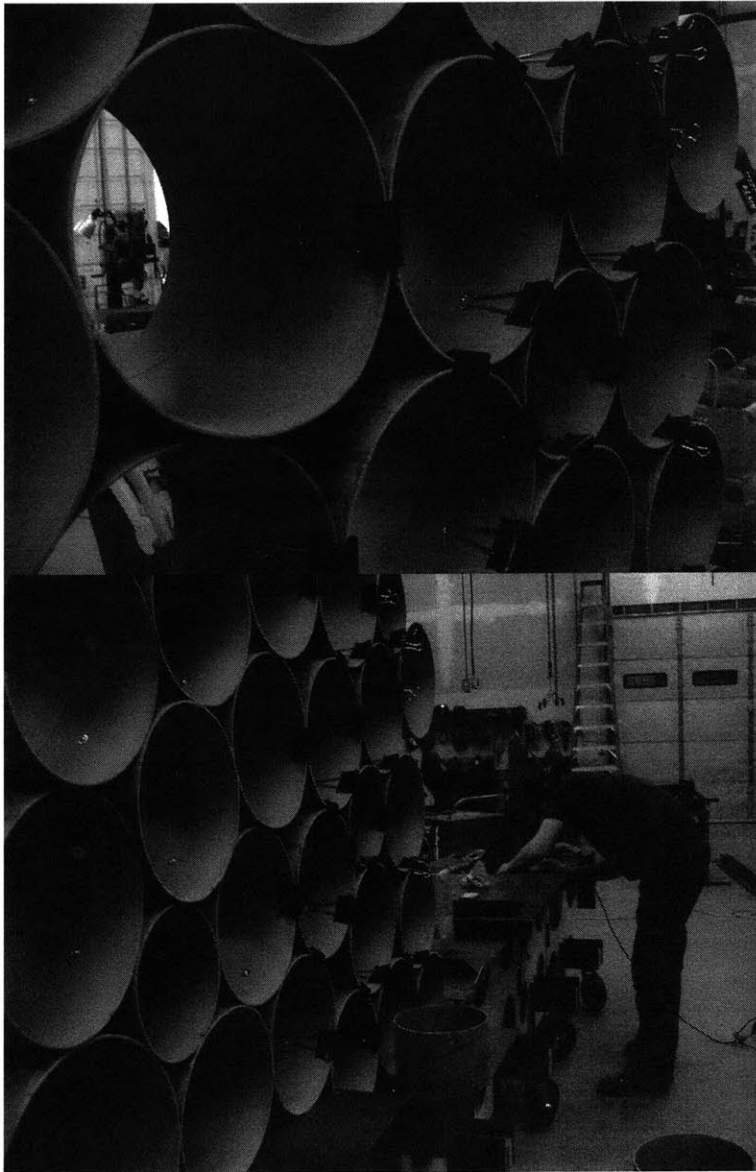
setting e ●————————

Sonotubes worked well as a system to house books, drawings and other media. The system was first laid out using file clips and then bolted as a network of structural and conceptual connections.
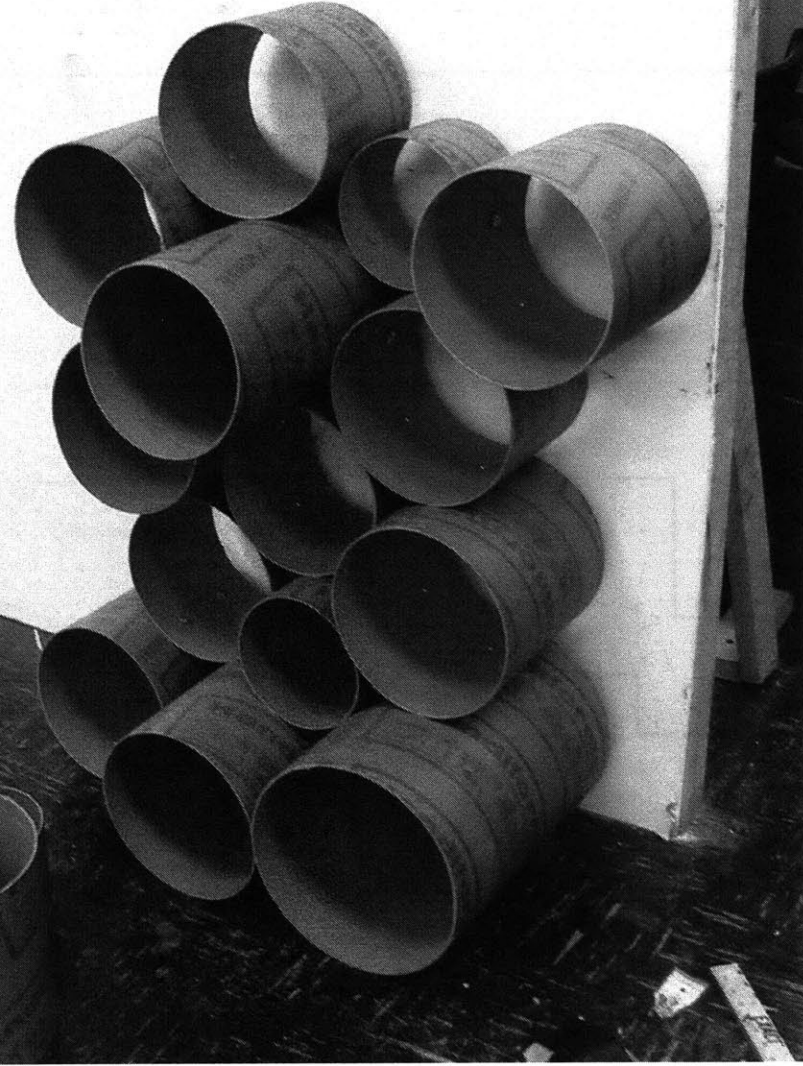
Materiality

The Turtle was a daunting logistic and financial challenge. But, building it was the best way to offer a project faithfully (and somewhat blindly) influenced by the pedagogies of the Bauhaus, **Royal Danish Academy (1)**, and more recently, Mockbee's Rural Studio, Wodiczko's Interrogative Design Group, Goulthorpe's Sinthome Sculpture Workshop and Wheelwright's Design Workshop at my alma mater Parsons. Unfortunately, design-build studios are not offered at MIT and I was unsuccessful at finding sufficient resources (despite the Council for the Arts and SpaceOther Gallery's oh-so generous support) to deliver the Turtle to its fruition. Only a handful of students, like Scott Francisco, Joe Dahmen, Michael Ramage and Marco Marraccini, have taken the initiative of successfully portraying their tactile interests in practice by way of practical/material endeavors at MIT.

I felt, just like my fellow classmates mentioned above, conceptually and practically, that using or appropriating efficient materials is today a matter of survival. MIT Professors Ochsendorf and Norford, and in no small part, Parsons Professor Wheelwright explained and instilled the importance of these practices. Therefore, I considered materials of lower CO_2 emissions and lesser impact to the natural environment, or of a lower embodied energy, in order to produce the Turtle. These were:

Sonotubes (possible donations from construction sites) ●

Homasot (recycled pulp) ●

Hot rolled steel (including hinges) ●

Construction grade lumber 2x4 ●

Baltic Birch plywood ●

(20)
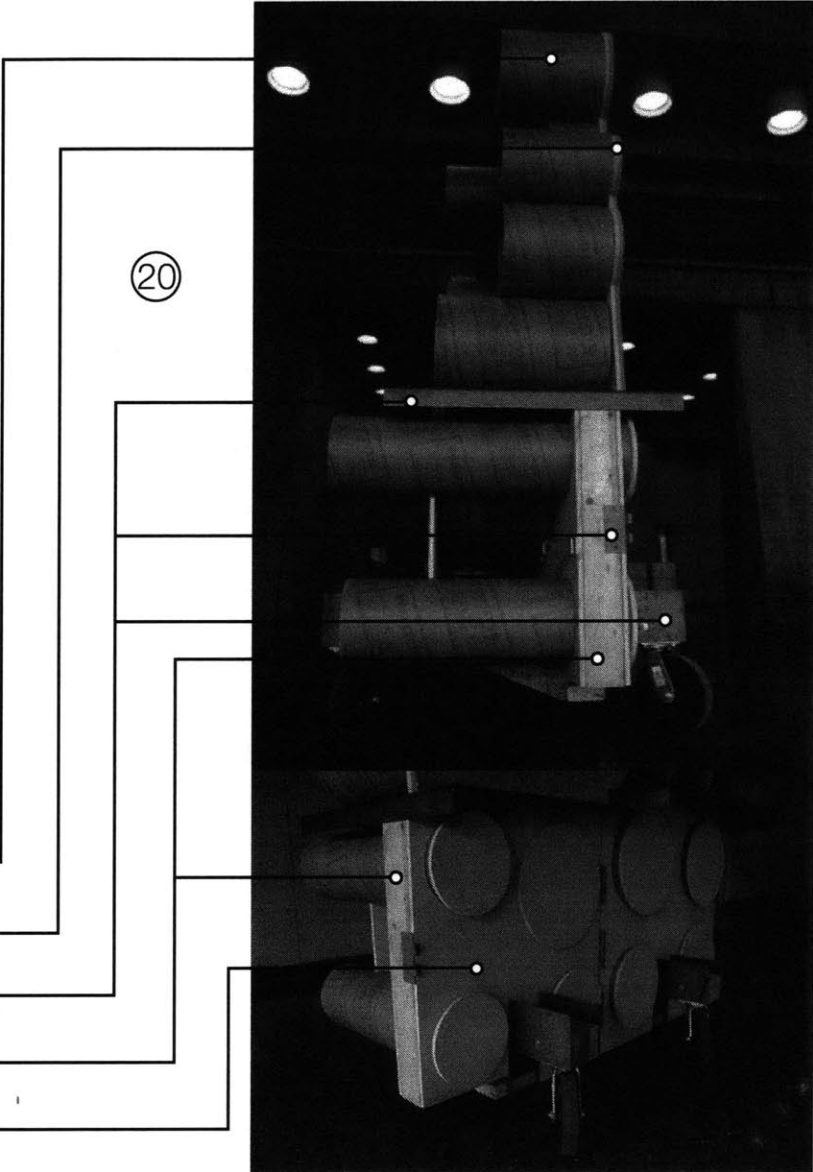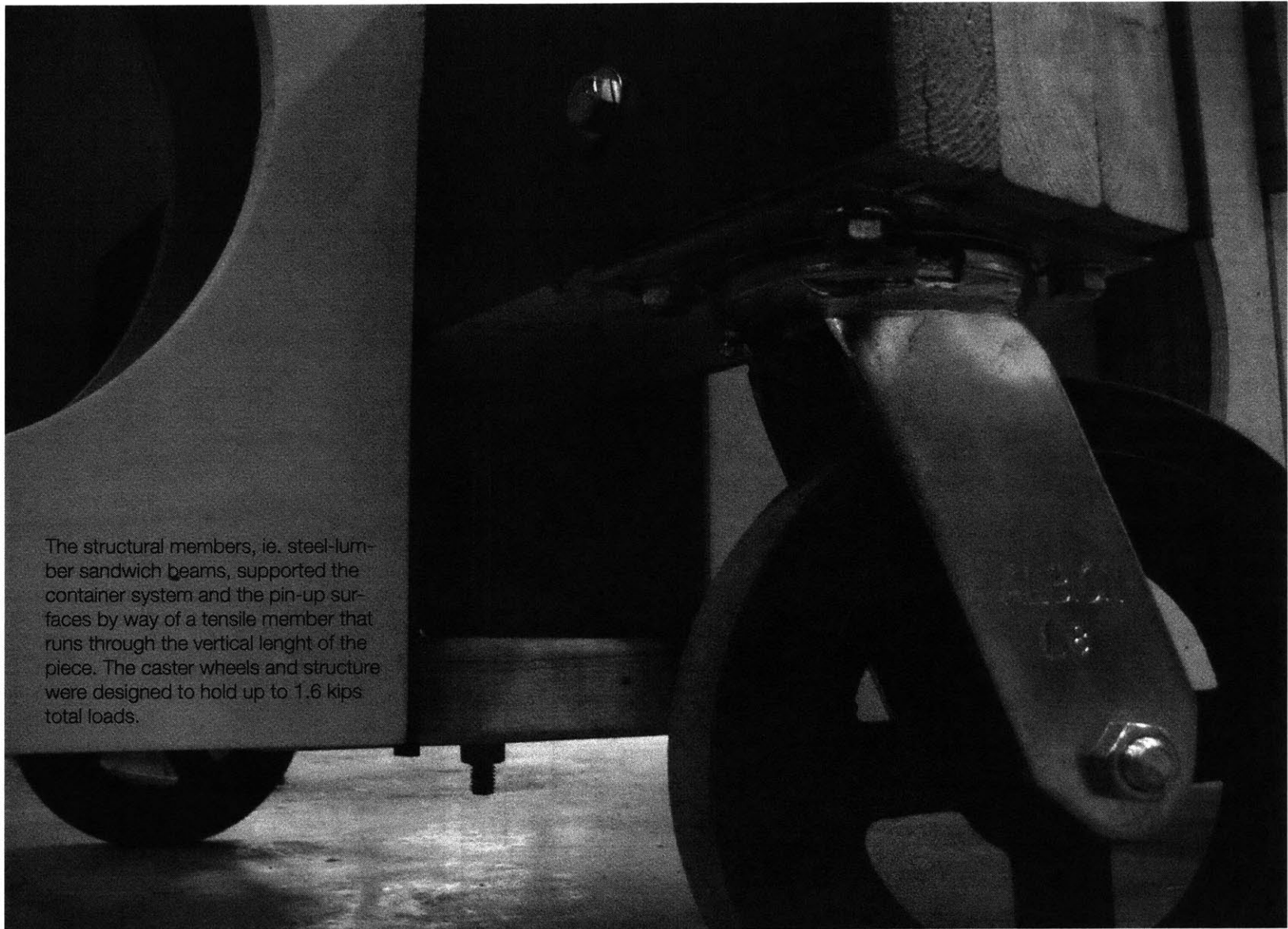
The structural members, ie. steel-lumber sandwich beams, supported the container system and the pin-up surfaces by way of a tensile member that runs through the vertical lenght of the piece. The caster wheels and structure were designed to hold up to 1.6 kips total loads.

Fabrication
Steel sheets were cut in the Media Lab's H^{2}O jet cutter (for fins and base caster structure) and at the Steel Shop at N52.

The plywood tube structure was milled with the 2.5 axis CADCAM router at the N52 Wood Shop.

2 UNITS

500 BOOKS

3 UNITS

750 BOOKS

4 UNITS

1000 BOOKS

12 UNITS

3000 BOOKS
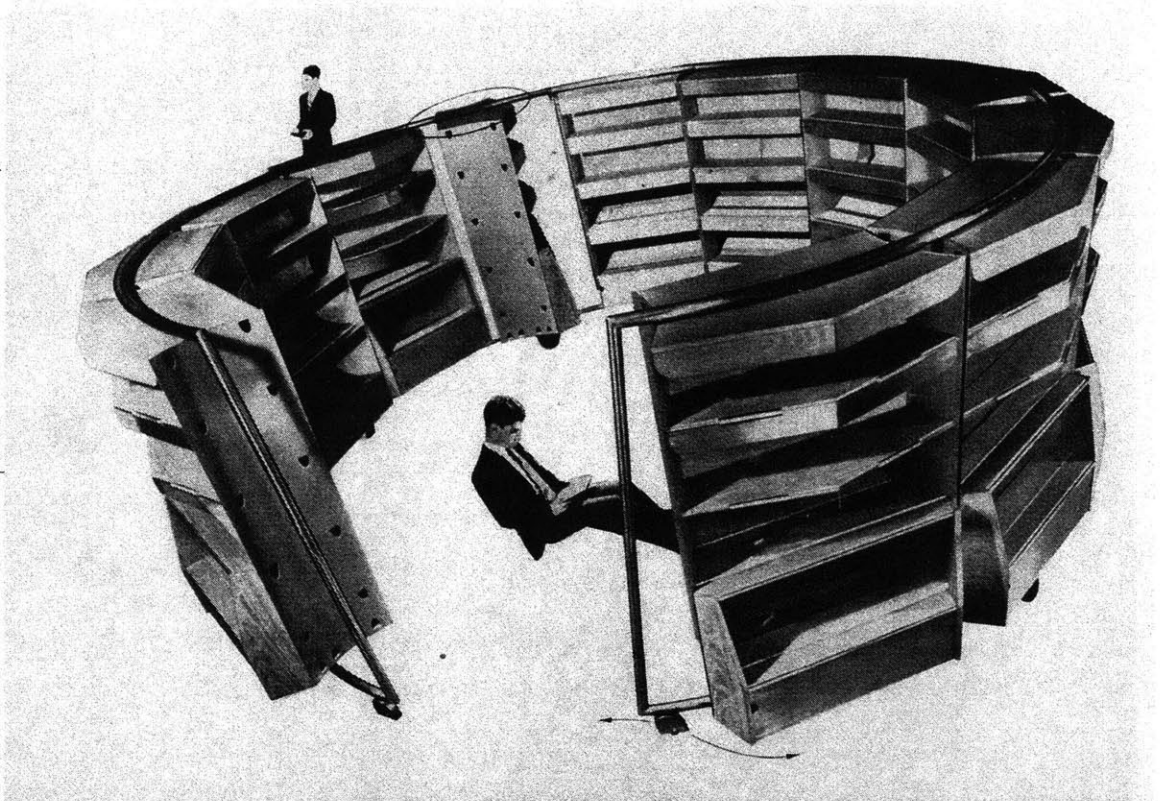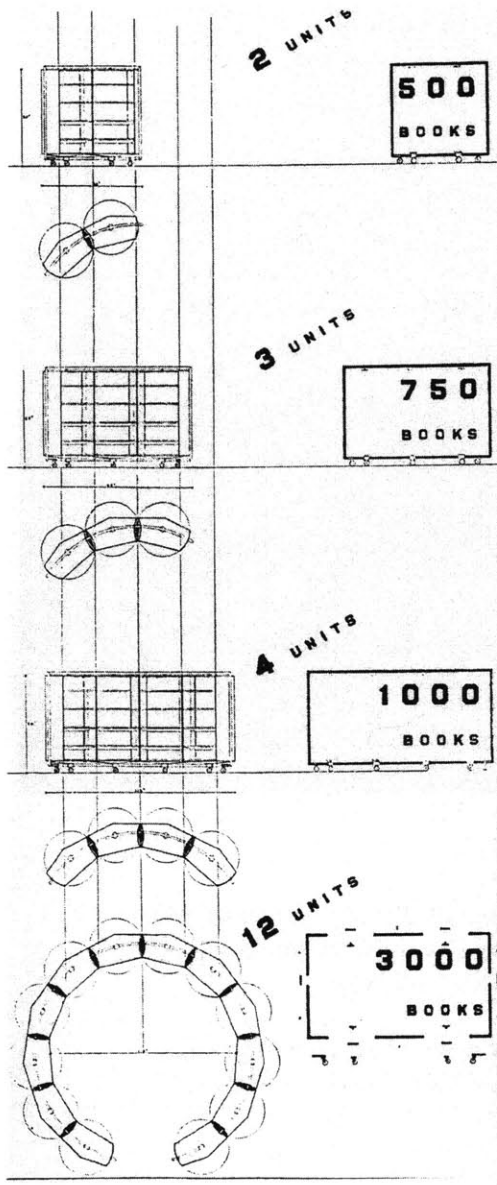
Design Precedents

(on this page)
The Traveling Library by Frederick Kiesler for Columbia University's School of Architecture.

(on opposite page)
The Crit Cube by Marlon Blackwell for the University of Arkansas School of Architecture.

MEASUREMENT
BOOKCASE

84"
71"–84"
49"–71"
27"–49"
1"–27"

25°
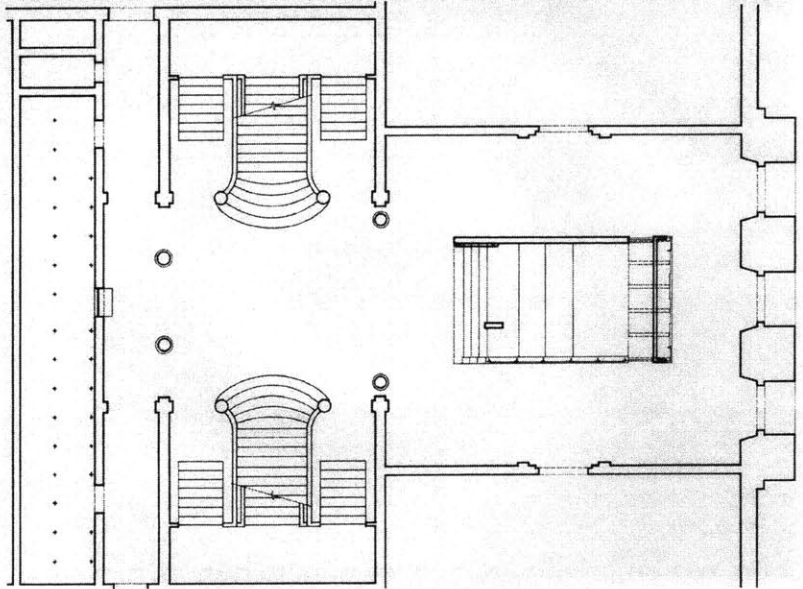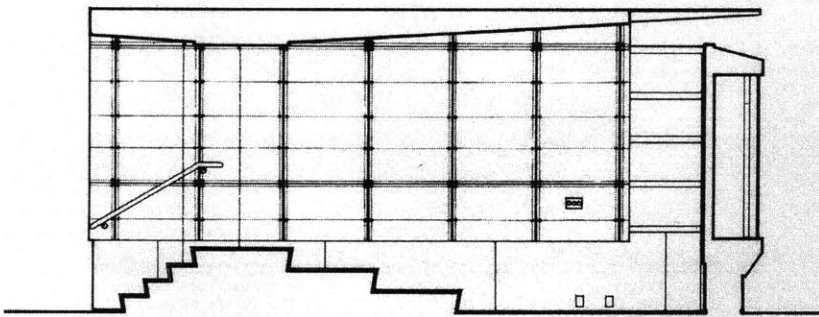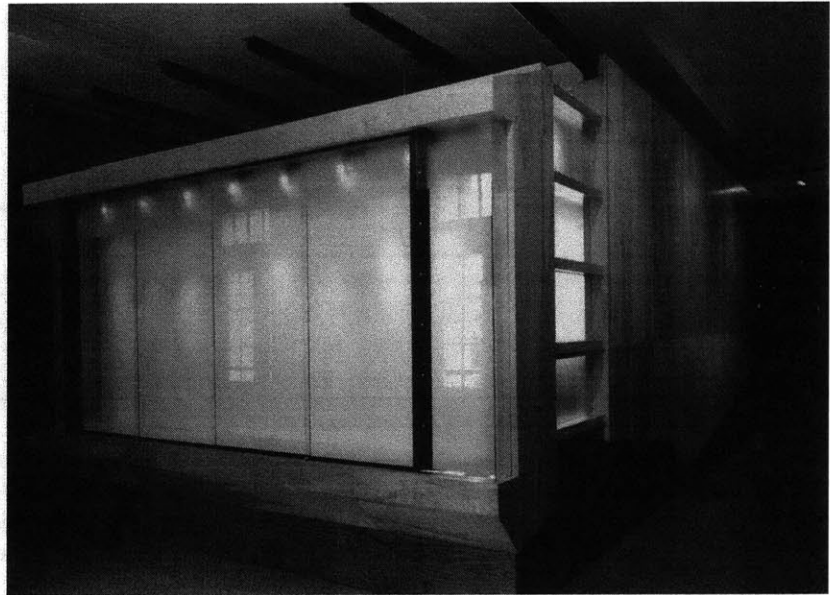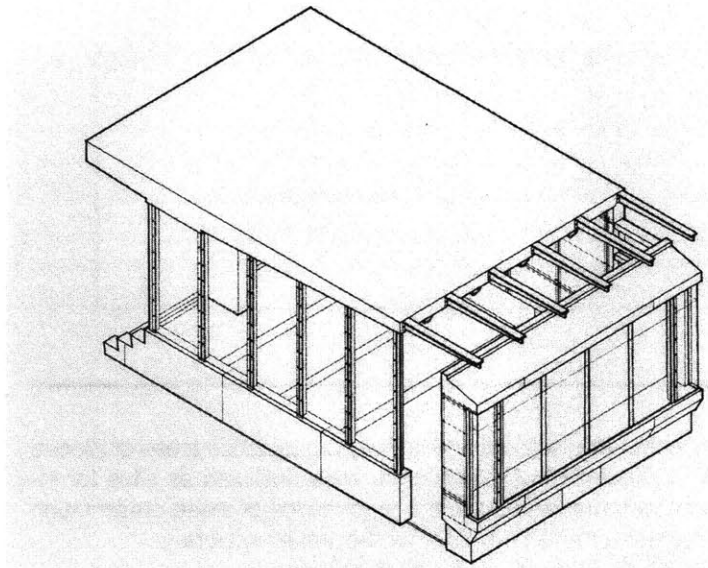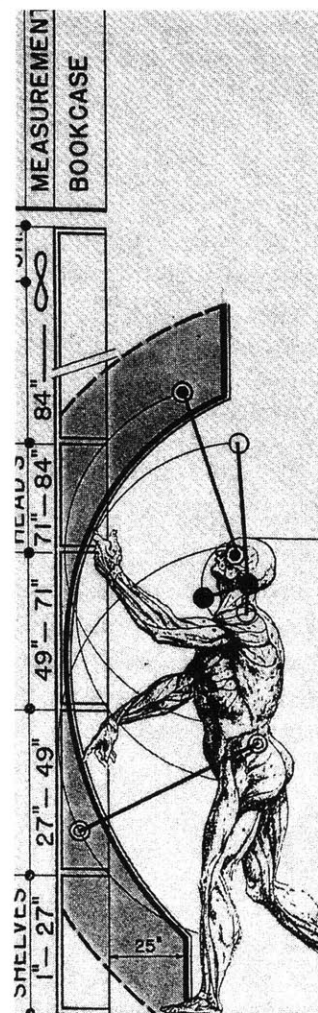
access by the eye
access by the hand
access by the torso
access by head-pivot
ideal access resultant

S

M

L

XL
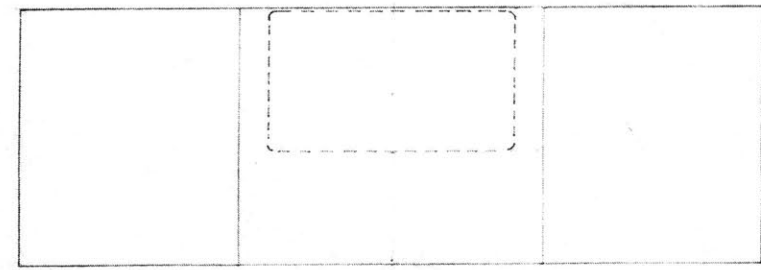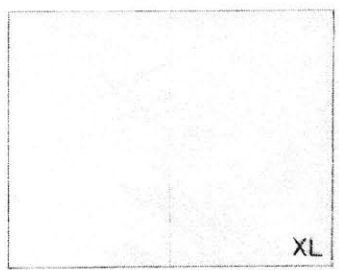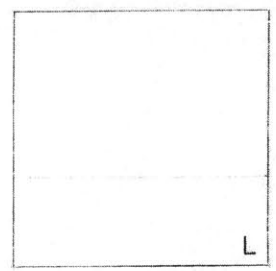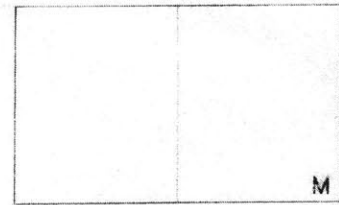
Site

The mobile pin-up panels, the Pla(z)ma and hallway presentation areas displaced throughout the MIT Department of Architecture were analyzed as sites for intervention. The Turtle was modeled upon the ergonomics of these presentation nonspaces and the studies made by Kiesler for the Traveling Library.
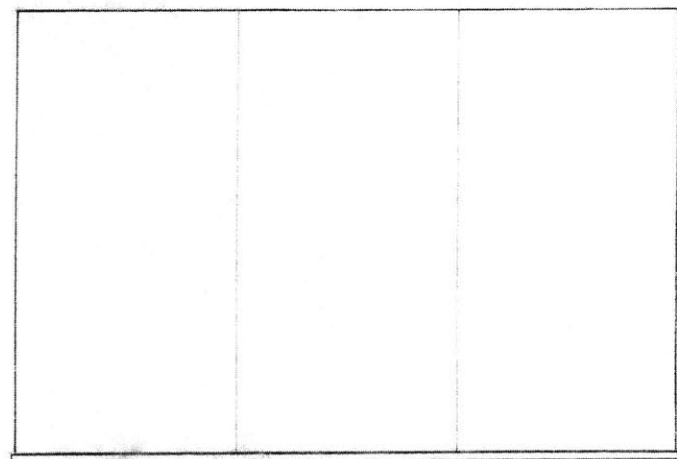
System

The thesis became a modular system for the Turtle. The required thesis format by the Department of Architecture at MIT is 8.5"x11" on either portrait or landscape orientations. These dimensions and format were studied by way of a series of volumetric studies. These variations, ie. 8.5"x11"x11" or 11"x8.5"x11", and so on, informed the possibility for a greater network of structural programmatic functions.
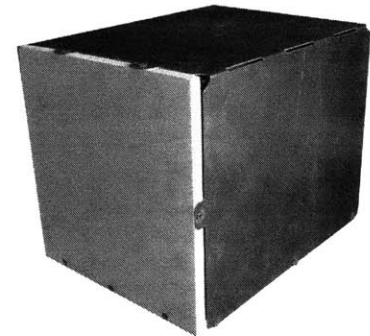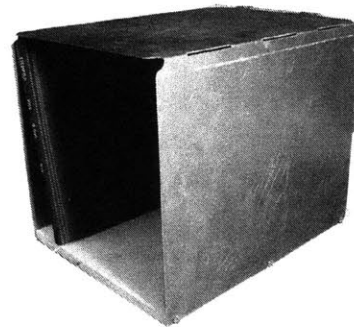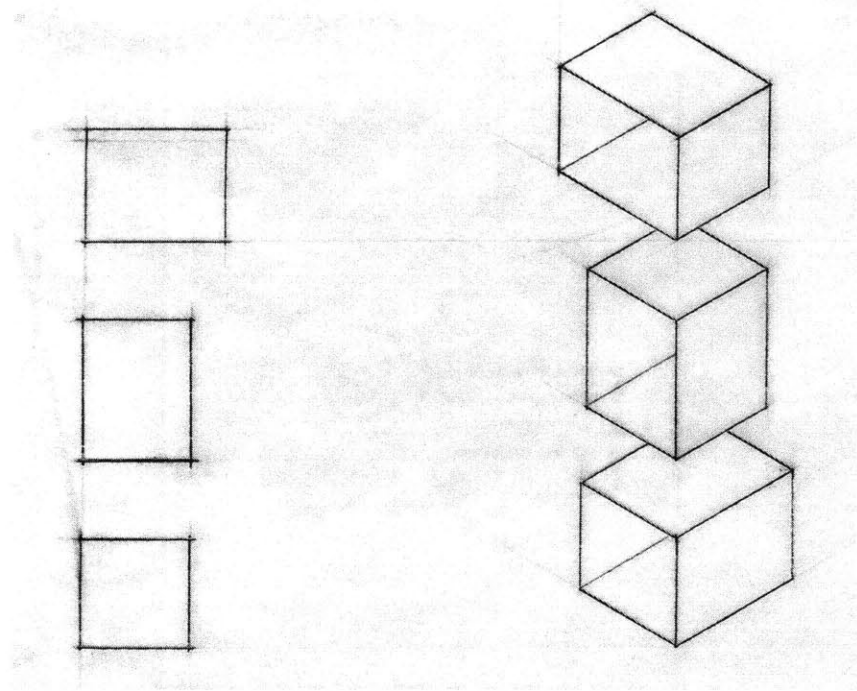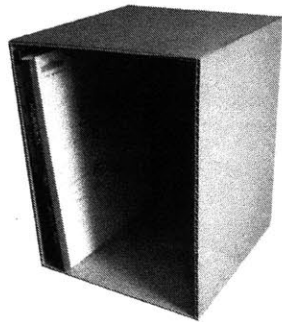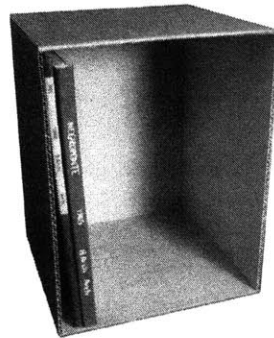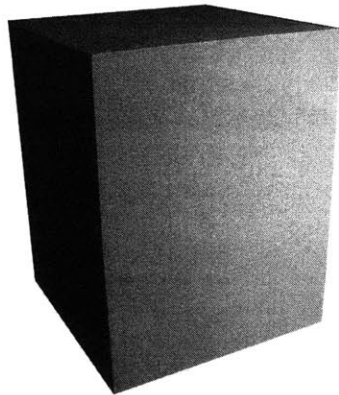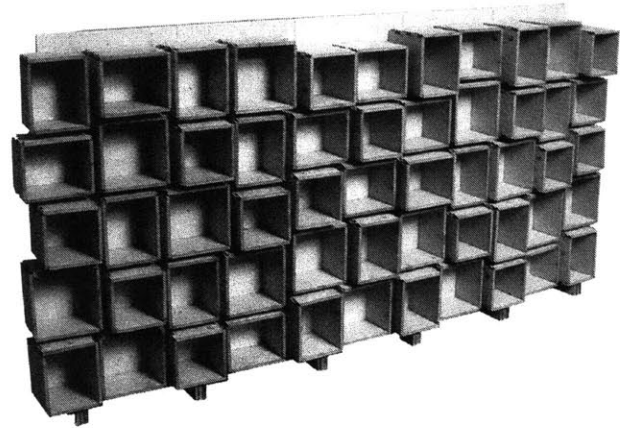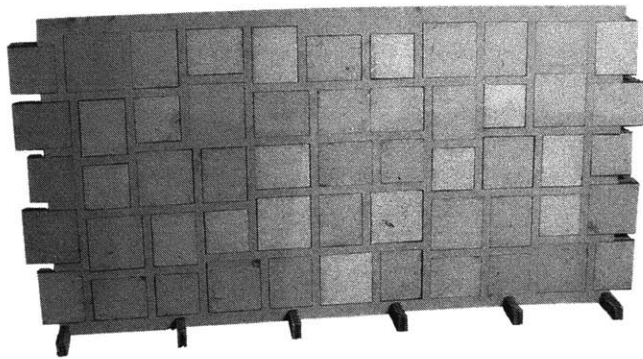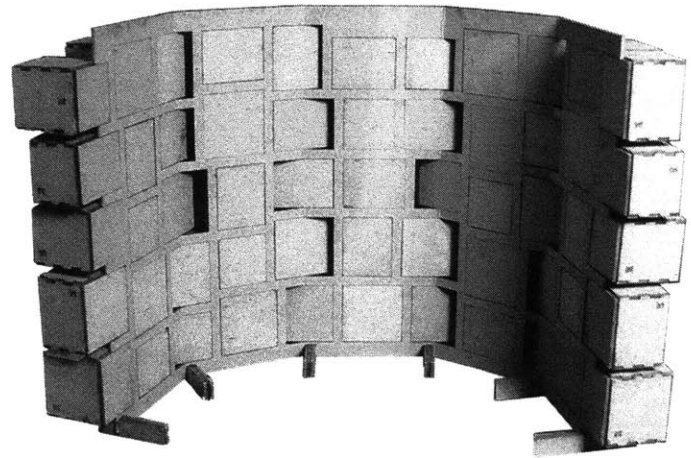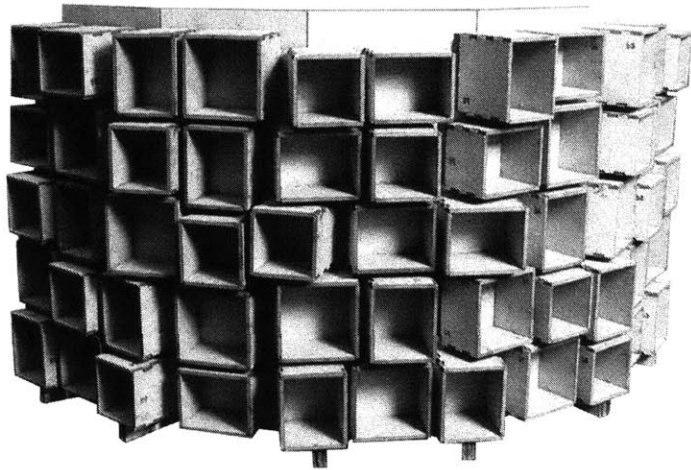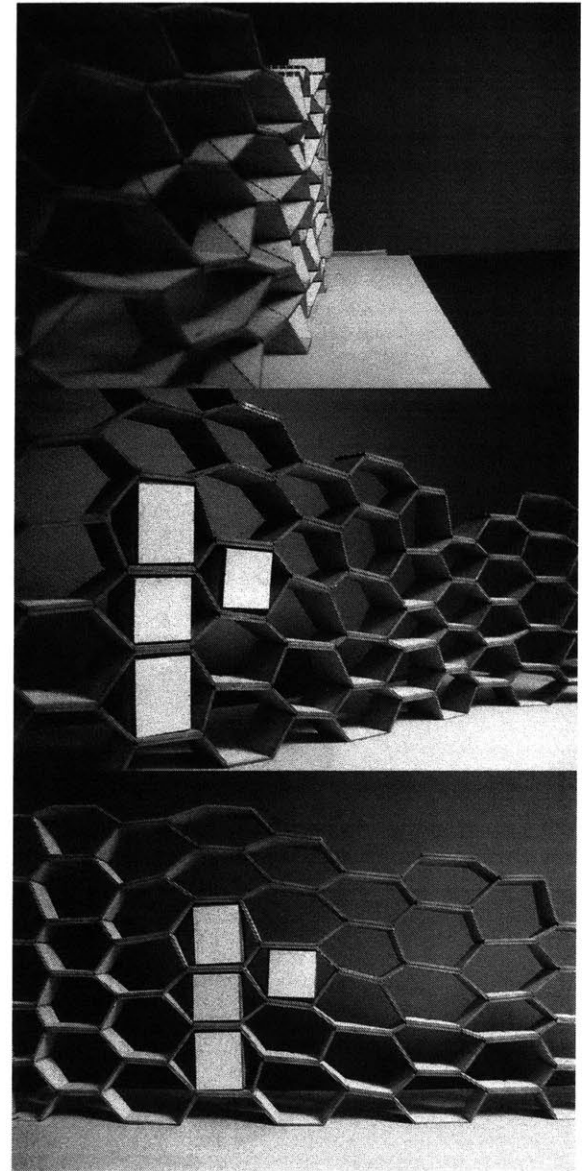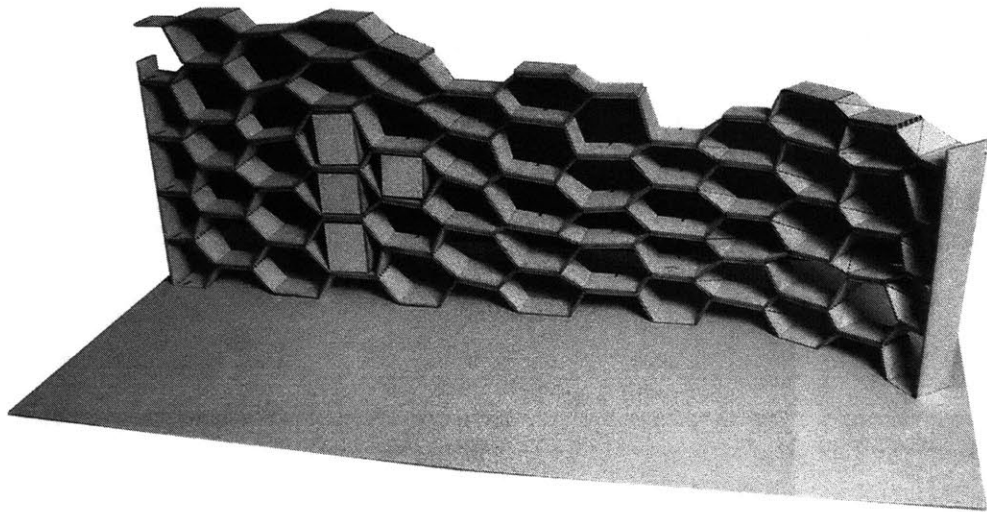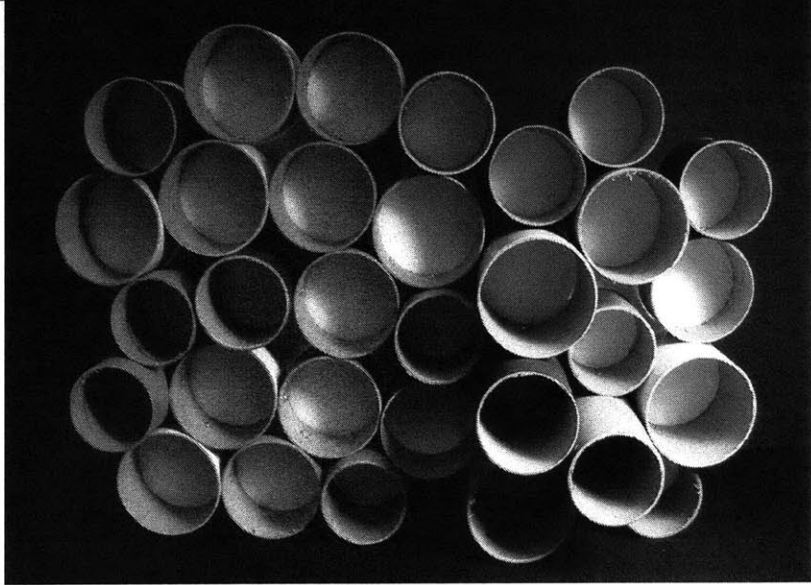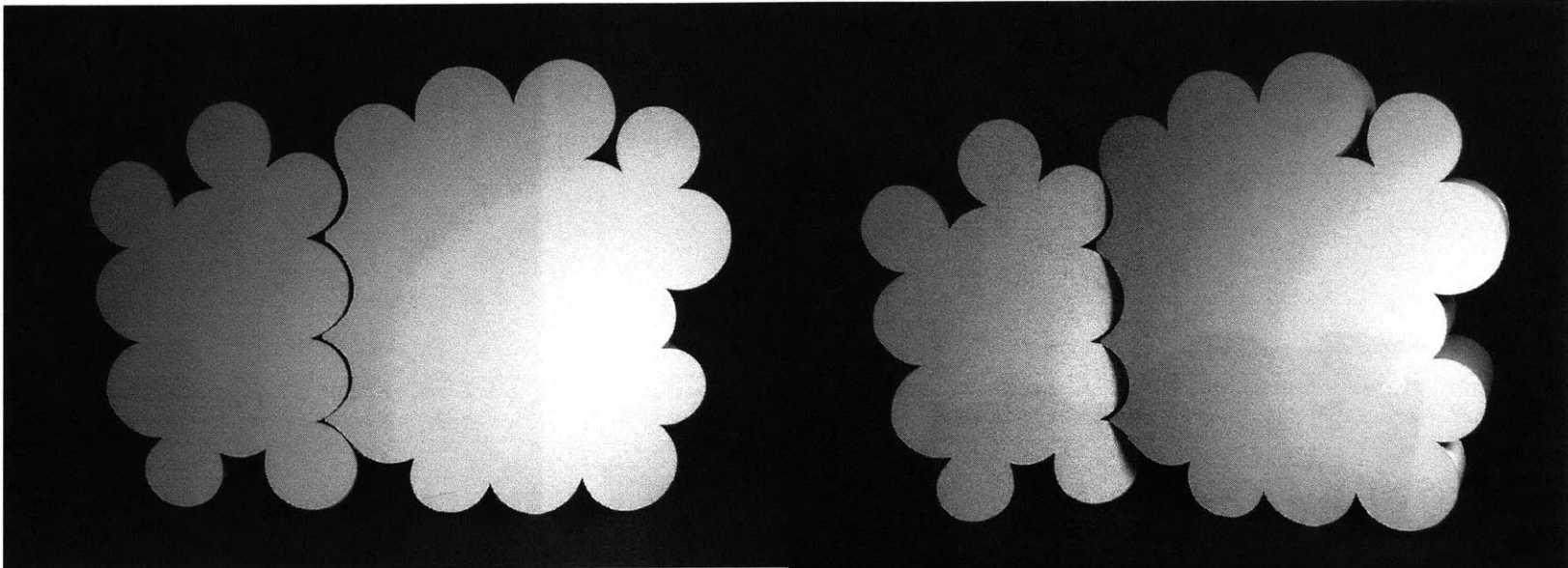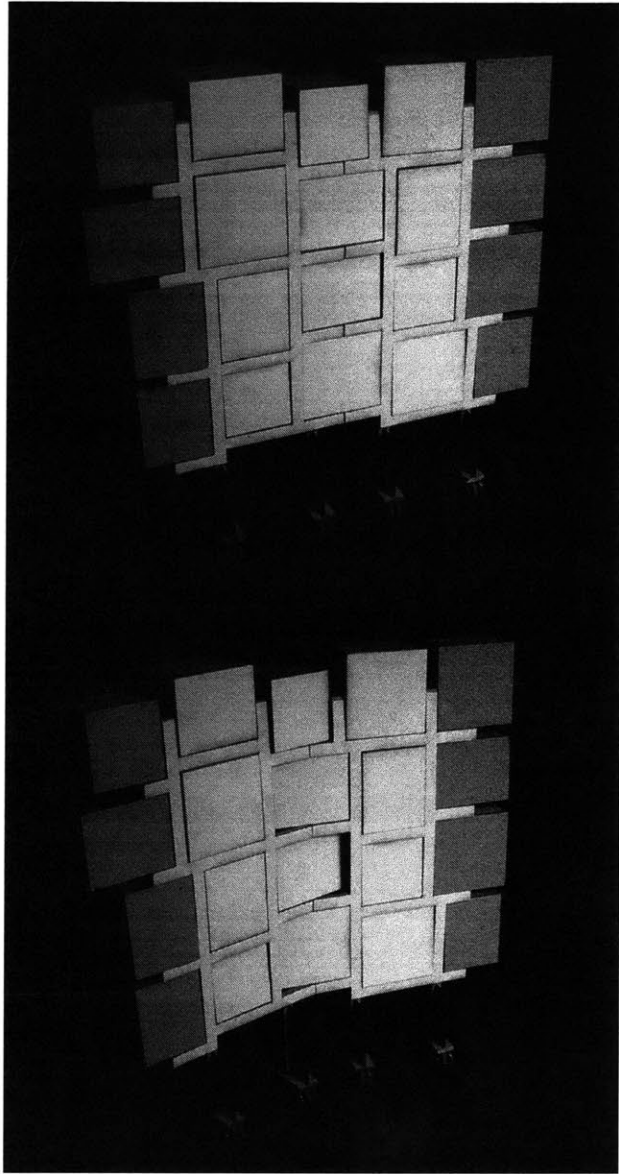
Scene from Tout Va Bien, directed by Jean Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin, 1972. (*)

Marie Law
Detroit
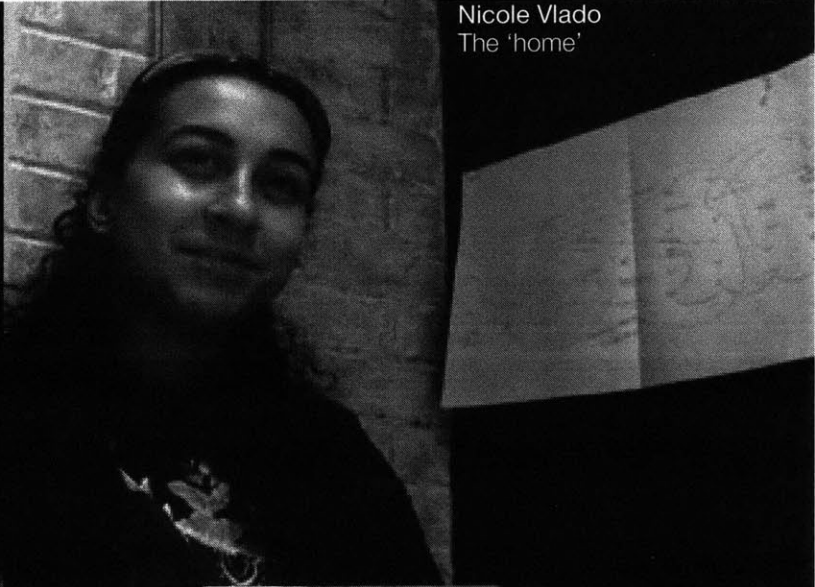
Nicole Vlado
The 'home'
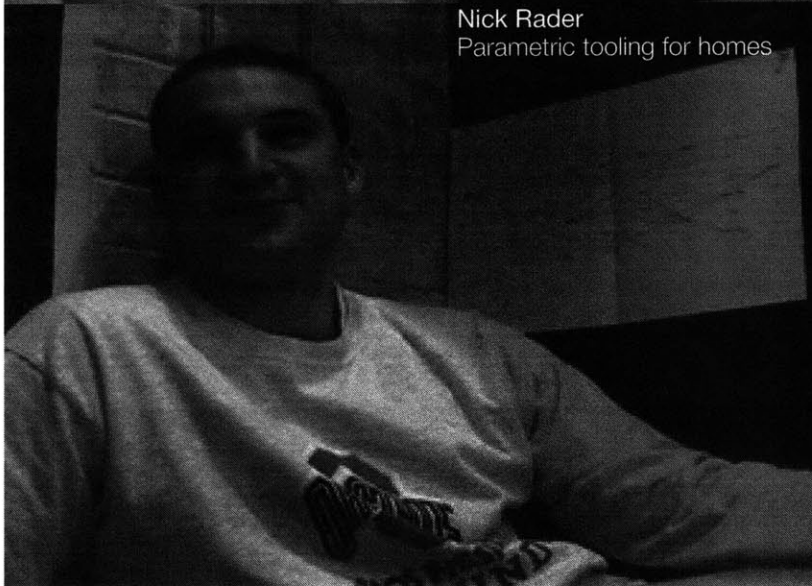
Nick Rader
Parametric tooling for homes

Mike Powell
The Apple Store

Relations

Page 46 is a still from the film **Tout Va Bien** by Jean Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin (*). In the interest of designing the Turtle as cultural equipment, I became interested in the notion of removing myself as a matter of letting the Turtle acquire an aesthetic. Godard experiments with **relational aesthetics** in this film. (2) This section building cut through the 'corporation' inspired a desire to deliver a relational section of my colleagues' structures that formed their theses.

Early this semester, I felt that working with four peers would inform a set of parameters for the design of the Turtle. As Nick, Marie, Mike and Nicole went about developing their respective projects, I conferred with them and provided them the matrix of terms below. They intervened with the matrix in a way that would perhaps offer an 'x-ray snapshot' (comment by Mark Jarzombek when presented with the matrices) of their architectural design practices. Documenting these interventions and our presentations permitted a way of reviewing our own performances and having greater awareness of our presence during pin-ups and critiques. We also intended to establish a common language that would allow for a comparative view of our respective thesis methodologies.

As **affirmative cultural equipment (3)** designed for architecture students, the Turtle aspired to specifically serve these four peers as a curatorial tool, as a prop to their performances, as an aid to their respective **position-takings (4)**. The top diagram across pages 50-51 is an interpretation of the conceptual relations between the colleagues. The set of diagrams below are the constellations created through Kaustuv De Biswas' script when the matrices are applied to it. Both of these studies, rooted in Lombardi's drawings, further inspired the use of the sonotubes as discursive material.

(27)
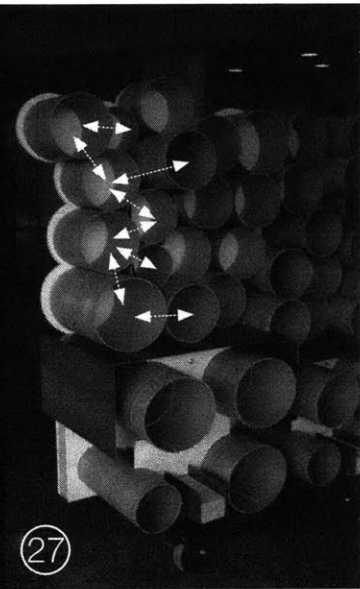
human	education	hegemony	technological	simulation	optimism	collaboration	fear	property
digital	rhinoceros	collective imagination	natural	variation	political imagination as risk society	authorship	need	open source
learning	a war machine	communication	venturi's duck	fiction	reticulation	truth	interference	relations
practice	turtle	propaganda	student tools	fact	human scale	myth	mode of production	faction
test cases	research	goulthorpe's rabbit	global	students as medium of knowledge	party	material	knowledge	endless
public programs	teaching	gehry's fish	local	a new type of specialist	movement	spiritual	lack of knowledge	infinite

/ node names

1 "human"
2 "digital"
3 "learning"
4 "practice"
5 "test cases"
6 "public programs"
7 "education"
8 "rhinoceros"
9 "a war machine"
10 "turtle"
11 "research"
12 "teaching"
13 "hegemony"
14 "collective imagination"
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23 "global"
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25 "simulation"
26 "variation"
27 "fiction"
28 "fact"
29 "students as medium of knowledge"
30 "a new type of specialist"
31 "optimism"
32 "political imagination as risk society"
33 "reticulation"
34 "human scale"
35 "party"
36 "movement"
37 "collaboration"
38 "authorship"
39 "truth"
40 "myth"
41 "material"
42 "spiritual"
43 "fear"
44 "need"
45 "interference"
46 "mode of production"

47 "knowledge"
48 "lack of knowledge"
49 "property"
50 "open source"
51 "relations"
52 "faction"
53 "endless"
54 "infinite"
55 "assumption"
56 "narrative"
57 "body"
58 "sharing"

*EDGES
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6 public programs   20 natural   27 fiction   39 34

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58 50

Marie Law

Nicole Vlado

(31) optimism   (43) fear   (49) property

Nick Rader
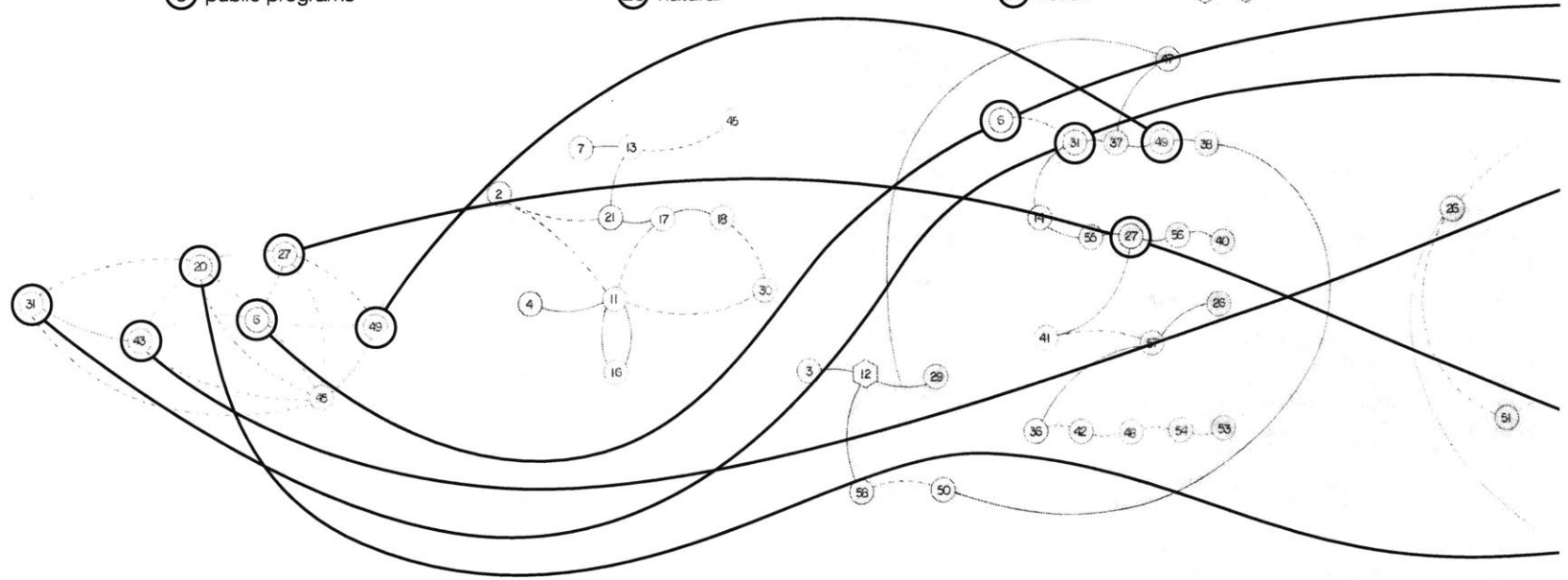
Mike Powell

Nick Rader

Marie Law
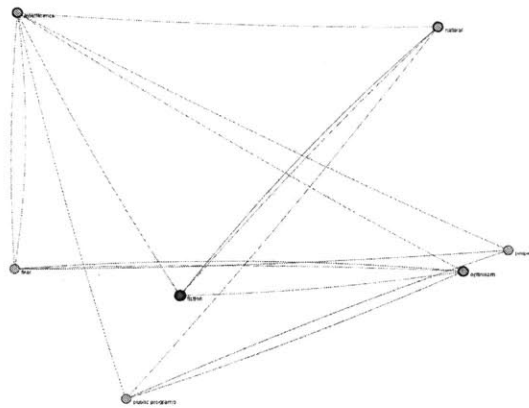
Mike Powell

Nicole Vlado
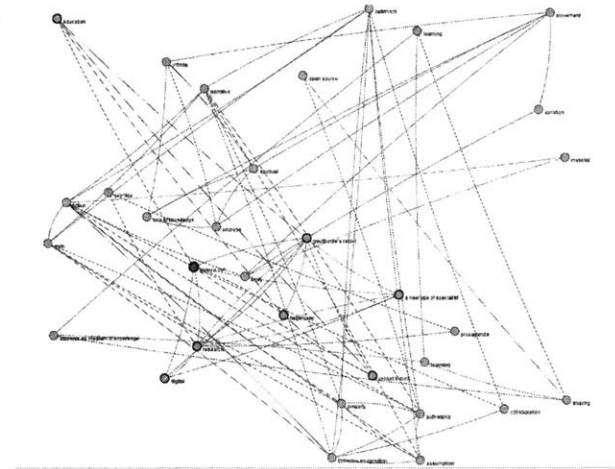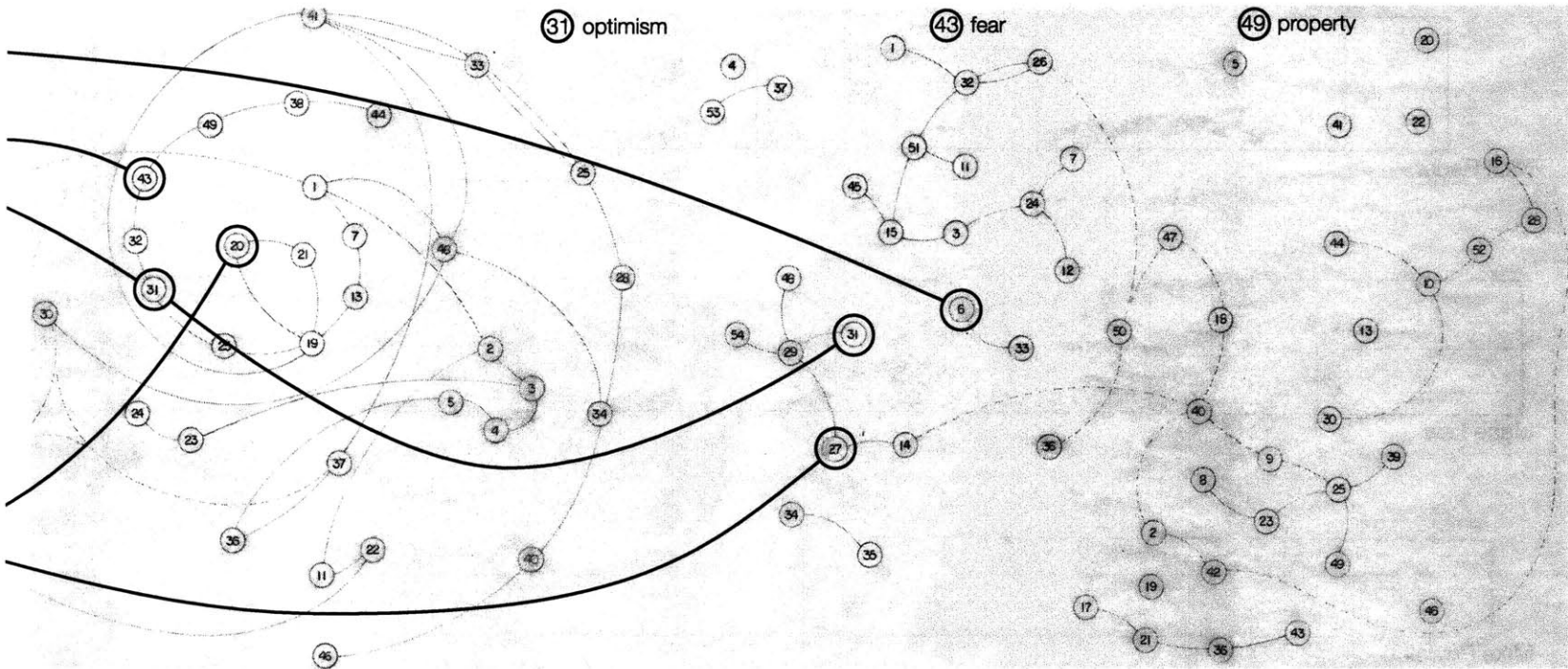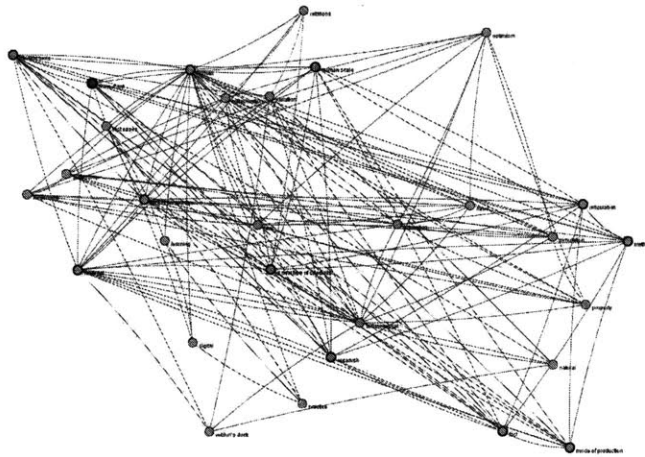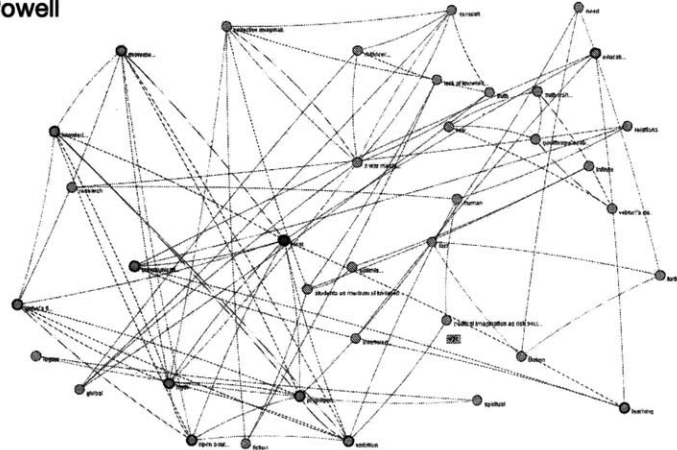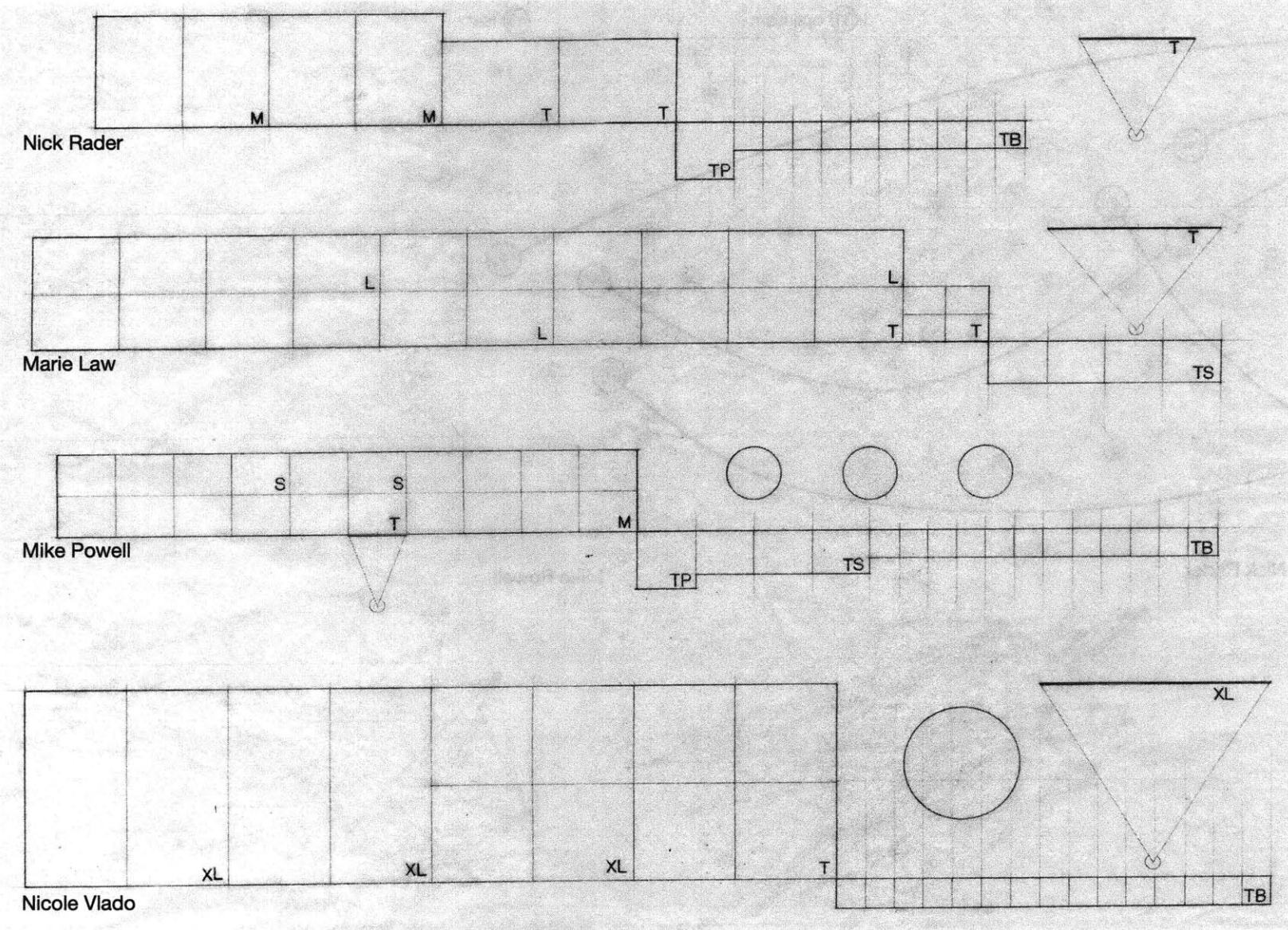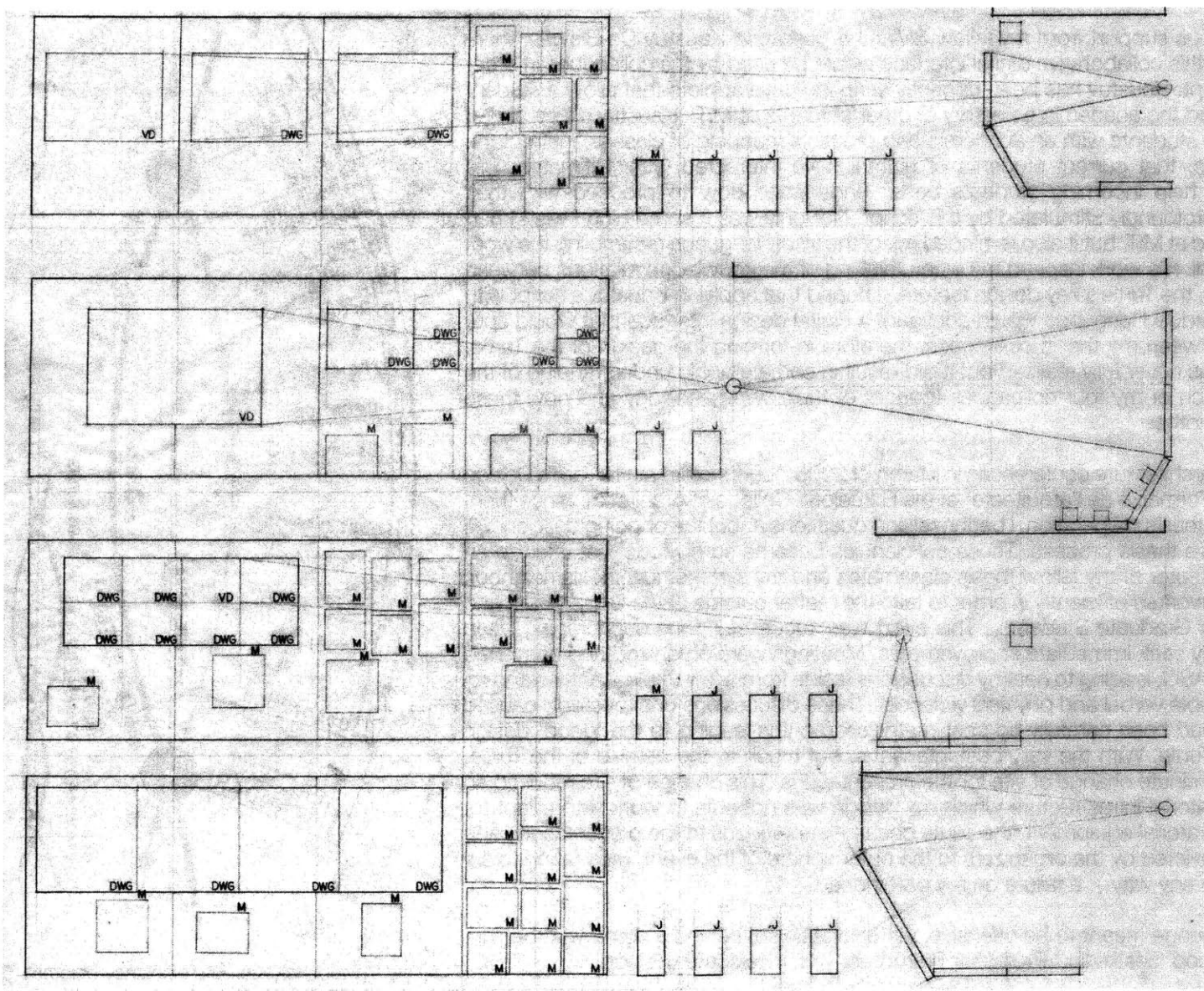
The Turtle, as presented on December 19, was an intuitive representation of the information gathered through diagrams-drawings, the De Biswas script, and of the thesis work the colleagues projected.

Disclaimers

*With the generous support from my fellow SMarchS colleague Kaustuv De Biswas, there was a hope that this collaborative digital interface would be used by the colleagues in order to develop a script. Kaustuv has been diligently scripting Java applets that allow a student to graphically read the academic trajectory of other students at MIT. Kaustuv's idea aimed at providing new students with an academic and practical mapping of classes, instructors, technologies, etc. that current students or alumni have interacted with. Ultimately, this mapping would help incoming students better understand how to proceed with their pursuits. I was profoundly stimulated by this script. Not only was it something I wish I had when I first arrived at MIT, but it also reminded me of the visual language resembling the work of Mark Lombardi. His work inspired me when thinking of the knowledge relations between media and users, the Turtle's key design feature. I hoped that applying Kaustuv's script with Lombardi's embedded language would configure a digital design interface that would spur collaboration between my thesis colleagues, therefore in-forming the design of the Turtle. This research was never fully realized but it did result in some graphic understanding of the way in which each of my four colleagues thought of their own pedagogy and how these related to one another.

*I attended two architecture conferences in March of 2005: "Loopholes" at Harvard's Design School and "La Formació de l'arquitecte" at the Barcelona College of Architects. Since then, as part of the prethesis preparation, I began raising questions about the ongoing deficiencies of the architecture thesis process. These deficiencies became so obvious that it led to an uprising from a sector of my fellow thesis classmates and my symmetrical thesis neighbor, Elliot Felix. Elliot worked efficiently in order to take the matter outside of the Department and into the Office of Graduate Students. This effort was successful, thus encouraging Dean Santos to actively seek immediate improvements. Meetings were organized and convened by Elliot and the ASC, leading to healthy discussions (aside from a few unpleasantries and an act of unacceptable verbal and physical violence). These discussions unexpectedly caused changes that I had been carefully addressing for six months leading to the 'good' design and use of the Turtle. With the very best intentions, but much to the demise of the Turtle, there was a last minute change of site for the presentations. This change of site required an entirely new curatorial infrastructure which my design was not able to work with/adapt to. Ultimately, as curatorial equipment, the Turtle became superfluous to the presentations and was thereon convicted by the organizers to the outer sphere of the event, thus failing to aid my colleagues in any way… a failure on my part indeed.

*"The visual language meant to be offensive, yet discretely so, behind a somewhat benign yet subversive 'pop' aesthetic." Professor Frampton, yes, I welcome the pop.
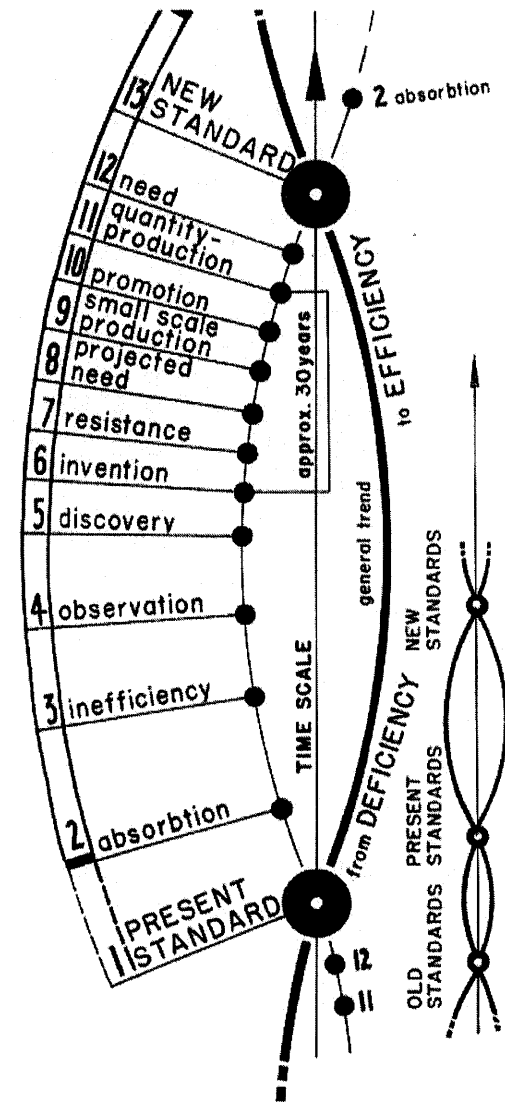
Frederick Kiesler's efficiency diagram (5).
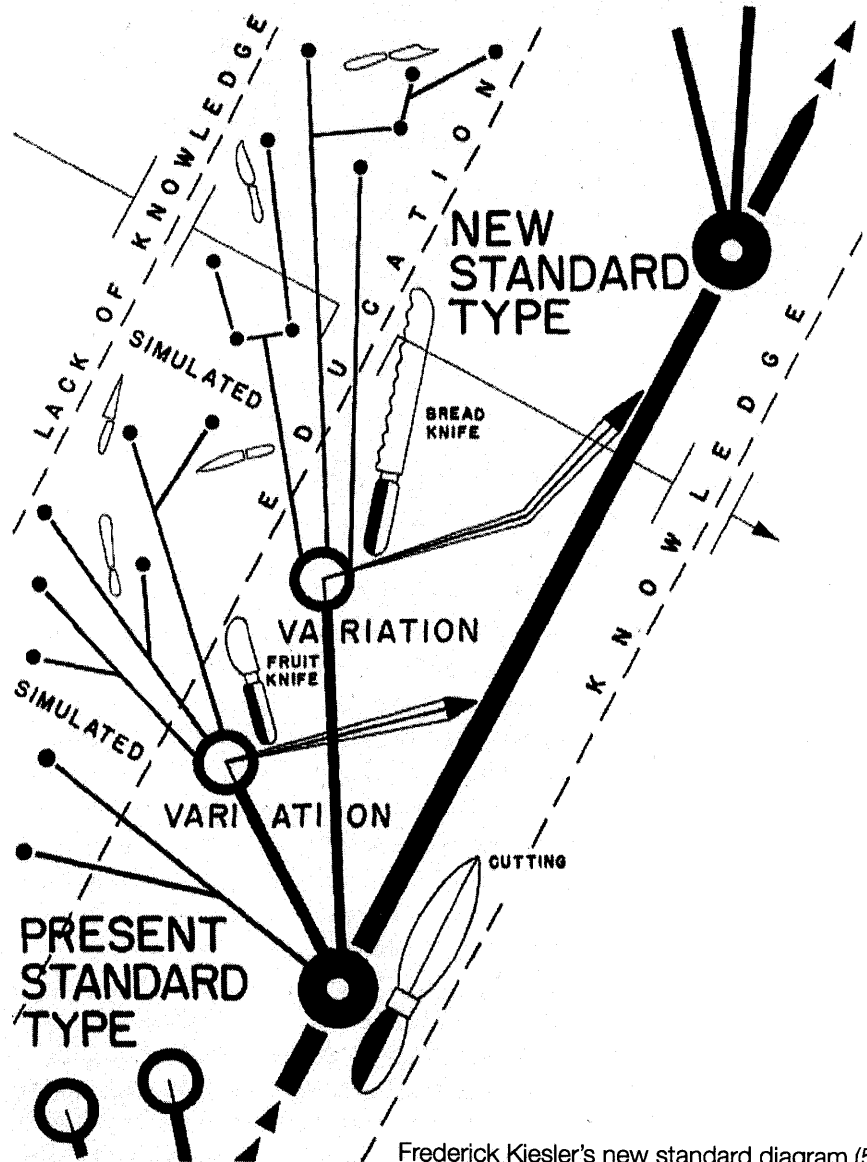
Frederick Kiesler's new standard diagram (5).

Why an affirmative practice?

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the schools of architecture

MIT's embodied energy

Reticulation and the Human Scale

Case studies

The war machine

Rogers' Tech, Ware's 1st School Architecture, Bosworth's New Tech, Chomsky's 5th Track, Negroponte's Media Lab, Porter's Studio as Research, Mitchell's Evolving Campus, **Scott Francisco's Culture Lab**... Santos and Hockfiled?

Schools
Cranbrook, Sci-Arch, Chicago IIT, Harvard's Design School, Ciudad Abierta, Chile, Kyoto Zoke, Waseda, ETSAM, Berlage Institute

BARCELONA LETTERS
(La Formació de l'arquitecte)

Specialist vs. generalist

New techniques in production

Global processes vs local singularities

Volume = ARCHIS AMO CLAB (Columbia) Architecture has reached three of its most respected limits: its definition as the art of making buildings its discourse through scripted printed media and static exhibitions its training as a matter of master and apprentice.

LOOPHOLES (GSD)

Geometries

Imaging

Geography

Effects

James Corner and Field Operations landscaping

gobal horizontality? Loosely deployed structures that grow with time

Architect as Film or Creative Director, as synthetizer of multidisciplinary field

Agricultural interventions in order to colonize
Tufte laconic representation

Technical language of biology as a life of emergence

Open-ended systems

Argument against master planner

VENTURI'S DUCK

Ordinary as extraordinary

Julia Scher's surveilance

Optimism!
Political imagination, risk society as a way of regulating local vs. global

A new type of specialist that does not allow to escape the detail of being a generalist

Architecture as Social Art

Colin Rowe = architect as mediocratic

Joan Jonas' Snake Dance prop at Dia

GEHRY'S FISH

length of studios
accreditation - Avoid self-regulation = society should
economic disparities education UKvs.USA
12k vs 32k
separate research for grads from undergrads?
Mostafavi - Deleuze and Bacon mediation between idea and concept
figure as building production of sensation mediation between the visual and the haptic...

teaching as a continuity of practice
A priori ~ search for ignorance as absence
Wigley...Industrisal city of the architectural education

School must be pourous - Architecture must go beyond itself

is it that the architrect does not want to live...? - Society is
skeptical of architects, morals and values?

Open source model for transnational architecture - architect as
forigner - colonialism

The relationship between reality and and fiction = Star System -
Biodiversity of students but more so of faculty

Ross Cisneros' Evil

Kiesler <-transdisciplinary-> Ron Jones

SOM reconfiguration of design space in the 60s
Schools in the city vs. schools in the rural setting
Gropius plan for Bauhaus = teaching anything BUT
architecture - > Schlemmer
Black Mountain College - utopia vs pragmatism?

Publicity of Habermas - lectures, studios, weblogs, library, magazines, books, webcasts,
trading posts, border stations, distributed intelligence
William Ware - STUDENTS ARE THE MEDIUM OF KNOWLEDGE
Studio as the space of DOUBT
System of storage and deployment of architectural knowledge – thesis journal and fluid
library? la imposibilidad de arquitecto es el enseñar arquitectura - Advisor program

AAD[R]L - neovanguardist as scientist
Deleuze comits suicide the week of SMLXL release
Scientific design | design science | science of design
Architectural knowledge with its own system of knowledge?
Anonymity vs. Authorship
Architecture needs to be inherently reflexive, object over subject
Reflexive vs. determinate judgement (Kant)

GOULTHORPE'S RABBIT

Brett Steele
global tools vs. local networks
Goulthorpe|Ochsendorf|Kilian and Bentley
Developing the tools as a higher order of craftsmanship
between digital & material
Developing self generative tools - scripting

Larry Sass and Gehry Technologies... visits
to big offices... the big office transgressing
academia

digital morphogenesis and nonlinear process in
pedagogy as a field of production

beyond form moving onto the idea of performance

Indeterminacy as an atmosphere

Bourdieu's position takings - Fraser

Relational thinking – ANOTHER EUREKA
MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURE

The architect

I know I am an architect. As far as I can remember, that has been the datum, the coordinate system. So, in order to qualify for this Master of Architecture thesis, I am compelled to begin with the question: what does it mean to be an architect today?

I feel this primitive question or preoccupation is once again brought about by the tragic spectacle of 9.11. If we look at some of the vanguard writings of architecture of the past 3 years we can observe a pronounced preoccupation with the role/relevance of the architect as professional/civic figure in contemporary life. Let's take a brief look at the architect's involvement in Ground Zero. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's Board (entity initially in charge of commissioning the reconstruction of the World Trade Center site) had somewhere between eight to ten members representing various spheres of both the public and the private sector. No architects were invited. (1)

The rationales behind this alarming yet somehow unsurprisingly American decision ranged from:
…assuming that since David Childs (of SOM) was already under retainer by Larry Silverstein, then there was no need to have anyone but Silverstein have a voice in matters of design and planning;

...or, well, you know, whenever it's time to decide the tint of the reflective glass or the color of the rugs, we'll give 'em a call;

...and even that **architects** are not really that knowledgeable in dealing with matters of such technical, political and/or social magnitude, arguably because this mess might have in fact been a result of the WTC design insensitivity in the first place (6).

Pardon the loose language but if you witnessed the tragic events and were in New York City in the ensuing months after September 11, 2001, you too would have felt this disdain.

This attitude puts the practicing architectural elite and its institutions (both professional and academic) in a sort of post-specialization *terrain vague*. This marginalization by our civic peers finally made public the illness that for years had been in a fluid, not so subtle diagnosis through Lefebvre's contempt(2) and Vattimo's obituary(3), there absorbed by Koolhaas' hedonistic diatribe(4) and Verilio's disastrous account(5), just to name a few.

This has triggered an exciting challenge against the quorum of architecture not seen since the 1970's: a robust discussion about the place and object of the architect in
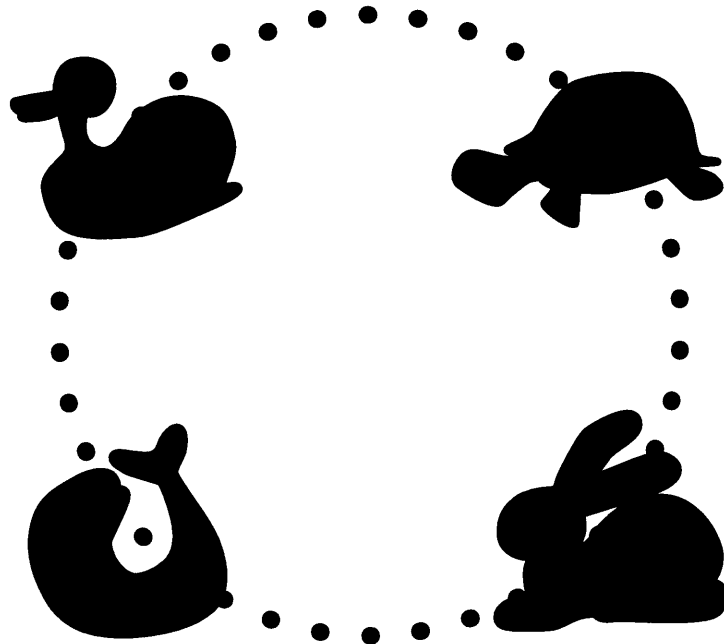
contemporary life. Questions such as: Why is the public in the United States uninterested in the input of the architect? Are the current pedagogies of higher education perhaps yielding young professionals whom are superfluous appendages to the socially and environmentally toxic development/construction industry? Was Yamsaki insensitive by using the Great Mosque of Makkah as a design precedent for the world symbol of capitalism? (6)

These questions were ultimately intended to evidence the dire need for an architect in the process of rebuilding Lower Manhattan. You had the Architectural League, AIA, New York Arts Foundation, New York New Visions, and the Civic Alliance joined in an unprecedented/unified effort to assemble a body of evidence in order to demand that an architect have a seat in the LMDC. The effort was successful and a seat was granted to Billie Tsien. (1)

In the early days thereafter, the LMDC and its "Listening to the City" events showed some signs of considering and implementing public input and scrutiny. Unfortunately, these initiatives, inasmuch as Daniel "Danny" Libeskind, have been marginalized by the voracity of Larry Silverstein and his alter ego David "Mister" Childs. This prompted the resignation of Tsien and a more precise retrospection into the purpose of the architect thereafter.

Innovating the architect
In early 2003, a conversation moderated by Peter Wheelwright between Stan Allen, Toshiko Mori, George Ranalli, Karen Van Lengen, and Anthony Vidler (Dean's of Architecture at Parsons, Princeton, GSD, City College CUNY, Virginia, and Cooper Union, respectively) addressed the contemporary role of the architect. One of the views expressed by Anthony Vidler was - *"... the contemporary profession, as I would see it, is at the front end of innovation, and truly responsible design is concerned with redefining the entire programmatic understanding of what architecture is about in relationship to society and its technological manifestation in relationship to form."* (7) Around the same time period, Alejandro Zaera Polo and his Berlage minions asked one hundred and nine subjects five simple, hard questions. When they asked Iain Borden – **"What is an architect in today's society?"** Borden answered – *"Every time we consider a building in a different way, move through space in a new trajectory, remember a place in relation to some long-forgotten memory trace – that is being an architect. Of course, this kind of architectural production is distinct from that which one enters into by the architect as designer and co-coordinator of the construction project.*

63

These "other" architects might be better thought of as architectural reproducers – those who experience architecture according to their own lives, interests and activities, and who consequently reproduce it to their own measure."(8) Then Zaera Polo asked - 'define **"innovative architect."'** Borden responded – *"To be truly radical or innovative is not the same as simply being new. It means making a difference not only in quantity but also in the concept, essence, and quality of architecture and the city. Those who take up this challenge are not those who set themselves apart from society, but those who are knowingly within it, working not in a wholly oppositional way but ironically irritatingly against the dominant systems of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and their constitutive agents. They are those who voice not only a negative critique but also a proposition – a suggestion a to what might be done next. Their purpose is not to enact a total, all-or-nothing revolution, but to make a radical difference. This automatically implies a purposeful sense of direction for otherwise how are we to make a choice between, for example, radical rightism and radical community-orientation? And a choice must indeed be made, lest we fall into the trap of inept pluralism. To be innovative is to seek, perceive, and make a difference of a deliberate kind – an unashamedly utopian*

position that knowingly considers not only where we are going and where we want to be going (these are not necessarily the same destination), but for what reasons and with what procedures. To be innovative is then to be emancipatory, idealistic, and transformative, as well as ephemeral, provisional, questioning and transgressive." (9)

Despite these rather eloquent expressions of self-awareness and purpose within the architecture circles, I felt compelled to go outside the practice and look at other opinions. When I asked Noam Chomsky – **"What is an architect in today's society?"** he answred: *"Coming into the Stata Center* [by Frank Gehry] *constantly leaves me feeling there is some element missing in this architecture and that is the lives of the people who live inside it. Somehow they don't enter it into the planning of the building, as if it's a sculpture, sometimes an interesting sculpture, but you don't want to live in a sculpture, you want to live in place that fits your concerns and needs, and at times they work but in this case they don't. That's the impression I constantly discover when you come into the building."* (10) I also asked him - **"What is an innovative architect?"** He responded – *"An innovative architect ought to combine aesthetic values with human values and also have a conception of what life is going to be like in the future."* (11)

I later encountered Richard Serra telling Charlie Rose in PBS interview - *"What architects have always done is that they used the most progressive art of the time for their own ends. Most of what you see in architecture are watered-down ideas of sculptors who came before them [...] Architects are not artists, for sure. What, are you going to tell me, that buildings are works of art? Oh, so are people then [...] Art is purposefully useless! There are aspects in buildings that deal with the overlay of painting or deal with the providence of sculpture, but don't start telling me that buildings are works of art because I don't buy it. Oh, the architect as artist, oooohhhh the mad artist, HOGWASH! Don't believe it, don't buy it... and don't think society should buy it either."* (12)

Most recently, I encountered an interview with Deyan Sudjic upon the release of his new book **The Edifice Complex**. He argues that, despite having a Master of Architecture degree, he sees his choice not to practice architecture as **"patriotic duty."** When asked about his depiction of Albert Speer, Phillip Johnson, Mies van der Rohe as desperate, even despicable individuals, he goes on further in saying - *"I just wanted to explain the*

circumstances that architects operate in. If you listen to architects, the client appears as an idea, an abstraction; but the unsanitized reality is dirtier. The truth is that clients are influenced by motives like wanting to elevate themselves and put down other people, while architects will do anything to be able to build. With someone like Phillip Johnson, you can read the work as a way of satirizing the clients he flattered to their faces and abused behind their backs [...] I've tried to rescue architecture from those people who hijack it and talk about it as a secret priesthood, in terms nobody can understand. Architecture now is far more visible, conspicuous and talked about, but I'm not sure it is understood on a nonaesthetic level. There should be more awareness of its psychological dimensions. A building has a mission to change the world – every building [...] Today's architects tend to see their work as neutral or autonomous, apolitical in other words; but the political dimension is always there, whether we like it or not. Architecture is always about power." In other words, Sudjic *"examines the role of buildings as propaganda – and instead of merely celebrating architecture, we should spend more time deconstructing the architecture of power."* (13)

These opinions presented here attempt to set a series of parameters that reason why I am compelled to ask this primitive question. Reluctantly, these varying opinions further exacerbate doubt upon how I carry out that role once I identify it. Was the motivation for wanting to become an architect the desire to organize cultural trauma within my identity, or lack there of? May it be that these are symptoms of colonialism? Is this confusion a byproduct of globalization? Is my culture a window into the homogenization of societies? I feel compelled to absorb all these perceptions as a cross-section of my belief system towards a position in the practice. This is what this thesis is designed to do: structure a tautology that endlessly redefines what my career aims to acheive.

Before moving onto structuring the rest of this *position-taking*, and before you feel this is going to turn into yet another Colin Rowe, Bob Venturi, Denise Scott Brown rant about the "**ordinary**", lets review where Bruce Mau stands:

Architectural Record: When you collaborate with Rem, for example, what exactly is your role? I assume that it may be different on each project, but why does he need another designer with him early on?

Bruce Mau: Well, Rem typically has a lot of designers with him on projects, but the methods that we've evolved have to do with rigorous analysis and structure of content—a method that could be applied to almost anything. It's this method that is really critical. The first sort of significant work has to do with conceptualizing the project in the world. Then [with this method] we can produce a park, a book, an institution, a business, or whatever.

AR: You've suggested that industrial designers are, in some ways, the model of the future and that architects are going to be following the way industrial designers do things. How so?

BM: Well, I would suggest that it's going to be a kind of hybridization [of designers], and the sooner we can get to the advantages that that offers, the more fun we're going to have. The way it works now is that an engineer often does structure, an architect does skin, a space planner does interiors, and an industrial designer does product. It's a nasty mess. The quality of life that it produces is also a nasty mess, and we all suffer. The problems are where those things rub up against one another.

AR: There's lots of talk these days about architects and designers collaborating, but they're not always good at it.

BM: The reason that I got interested in architecture is that I saw it as a field of synthesis—basically a place where you bring into play all these different things. And I think that's Rem's real genius—his ability to pull talent into play on projects and let things evolve. (14)

An American School of Architecture

Saint Michael, patron saint
of colonialism.(15)

"[for American pedagogy] (6) to be critical, architecture must be at distance from itself and yet within its own boundaries. It must dislocate institutions and to that end it must dislocate its own institutions." - Peter Eisenman(*)

Lets briefly revisit the difficult matter of ethics and aesthetics in today's architecture.

The matter of practice, judgment and modernity
Vitruvius is believed to have served in the Roman army in Spain and Gaul under Julius Caesar. Like Da Vinci and Michelangelo, he was probably an army engineer, constructing weapons or 'war machines' for battle. Written in the 1st century BC, his book, De Architectura, delineates a set of principles requiring built structures to possess the three qualities of **firmitas, utilitas, venustas** - firm, useful, and beautiful. According to Vitruvius, architecture is an imitation of nature as birds built their nests, so humans construct housing from natural materials, providing shelter against the elements. He was less an original thinker or creative intellect than a codifier of architectural practice at the time. It should also be noted, that Vitruvius had a much wider scope than modern architects. It is commonly known that architects in antiquity practiced a wide variety of disciplines; if thought in modern terms, they could be described as being engineers, architects, landscape architects, artists, and craftsmen combined.

As a prechristian set of documents, the Vitruvius' "Ten Books" disappeared from the radar screen of architectural history. It was not until 1414 that the books were re-discovered, then consecrated as the dogma of practice and its vanished images "re-illustrated". Leon Battista Alberti is perhaps most responsible for this veneration as he made Vitruvius' work widely known in his seminal treatise on architecture De Re Aedificatoria written in 1450. Although being the cornerstone of the western understanding of architectural practice, in reality, the Ten Books' sanctity barely lasted one hundred years considering that some of the key players of the Late Renaissance almost immediately began to challenge the very traditions being stated by Vitruvius via Alberti. (1)

Many considered that Mannerism exploited the calculated breaking of rules, the taking of sophisticated liberties with classical architectural vocabulary. It was an intellectually fervent switch of both practice and judgment where a subtle, yet arduous departure from the "Ten Books" was enacted. Two very different buildings of the 1520s were responsible for initiating this taste: Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence and the Palazzo del Te by Giulio Romano in Mantua. Michelangelo's composition relies upon a novel reassembly

of classical motifs for plastically expressive purposes, while Giulio's distortion of classical forms is of a more consciously bizarre and entertaining kind. The various exterior aspects of the Palazzo del Te provide a succession of changing moods where the illusionistic decoration of the interior runs the full gamut from heavy (if self-parodying) tragedy to pretty delicacy. Giulio also created a series of contrived vistas, through arches and doors, much like those later projected by Michelangelo for the Palazzo Farnese in Rome. Such management of scenic effects later became one of the hallmarks of Mannerist architecture. This embracing of illusion was no accident of course. It came as a byproduct of the perspective. Somewhat ironically, the perspective, although first constructed by Brunelleschi is also credited to its actual public recognition to Alberti. (2) It is hard to argue against it being the most powerful visual tool of the last millennium as it deeply influenced, among other things, the way space has been designed ever since. It prompted the sense that the perspective, as a mathematical system exercising the two-dimensional illusion of depth and surface, implied an ability to better articulate the complexity of space. In considering this, and despite Palazzo del Te's excesses demonstrating a sense of detachment from the classical practices,

it was the Laurentian Library that was far more experimental, expressly because of its subtle release and activation of surface upon structure as matters of ornament and effect, but even moreso of challenging the traditions to play with structural truth and plastic freedom in building. It was here that the Baroque was born. (3)

"Given representations in a judgment can be empirical (consequently, aesthetical); but the judgement which is formed by means of the logical, provided they are referred in the judgment to the object. Conversely, if the given representations are rational, but are referred in a judgment simply to the subject (to its feeling), the judgment is so far always aesthetical." (4)

Kant's critical project brought the object of beauty and purpose to form the bridge between the sublime and the intelligible. Our sensations do have causes, thing-in-themselves which he calls 'noumena'. What appears to us in perception, which he calls a "phenomenon" consists of two parts: the object (sensation) and our subjective apparatus (the form of the phenomenon). The latter is not itself sensation and therefore not dependent upon the accident of environment. It is always the same, we carry it around with us, and it is a priori in that it is not dependent upon experience.

A pure form of sensibility is called a 'pure intuition' (Anschauung) and there are two such forms, space and time, one for the outer sense, one for the inner. When an architect studies architecture, his/her architecture, an artist her/his art, they study their own creation of form based on both of these interiorities and exteriorities. But, the outward expression of aesthetic ideas Kant identifies in the passages of his Critique of Judgment with the beauty he had earlier defined in terms of purposiveness are without a purpose. Thereon, outward expression of aesthetic ideas is therefore a form – whether musical, architectural, poetic, etc. – which is the proper object of a judgment of taste. That said, any artist creating form outside of the marketplace would naturally come to a fork in the road of thinking, mainly when the materials being dealt with stop being material and start being form: new form, **adequate** form. (5)

"What I call true formalism refers to any method that diagrams the proliferation of fundamental resonances and that demosnstarte how these accumulate in the figure of form and order." (6)

On the other hand, once we become aware of the "perspectival character of our cognitive situation" we see why we must accept the existence of things in themselves and why such an acceptance does not condemn us to a world of illusion (such condemnation constituting just cause for abandoning Kant's system), but a world of appearance that is the same for all human subjects qua knowing human subjects. (7)

In my mind, this enlightenment instigated by Michelangelo and his dissentful contemporaries, structured a Cartesian field for Kant's critical project. This agency formed the social oppositions of the machine age. Obviously, this stage was in no small part structured by the French Revolution. The practice of architecture as an emblem of power structures became a datum of aggressive critique. This is especially crystallized in the style of Marx's Manifesto. The crime of ornament was prescribed.

43

"Ornament and Crime" was an essay written by the Austrian architect Adolf Loos in 1908. It was translated into English in 1913, under this challenging title. "The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects" (5) Loos proclaimed, linking the optimistic sense of the linear and upward progress of cultures and egalitarian mobility with the contemporary trend of applying structural sincerity as an evolutionary datum to cultural contexts. This was the interstice where artifact and instrument/equipment, science and art was aggressively challenged… the conscious articulation of technology and culture as they differed yet infecting one another. Simultaneously, and perhaps not so elegantly, it set a datum for cleanliness and purity (arguably, even later, leading to a minimalist sense) as a virtue of morality. This lead to the misappropriation of modern design practices for segregational purposes, perhaps just as Speer and Hitler misappropriated neoclassicism as emblems for the Germania of the Third Reich.

"… then in a sudden move it hits them in the solar plexus winning the cheers of the proletarian public… Do we want to abolish property? Of course not. But property relations have always been subject to change: did not the French Revolution abolish feudal property in favor of bourgeois property? Do we want to abolish private property? What a crazy idea; there is no chance of that, because it is the property of a tenth of the population, which works against the other nine tenths. Are you reproaching us for wanting to abolish your property? Well, yes, that is exactly what we want to do." (8)

This was most evident in Loos' "passion for smooth and precious surfaces" as it informed his radically expressed philosophy that ornamentation caused objects to go

out of style and thus become obsolete. It struck him that it was a crime to waste the effort needed to add ornamentation, when the ornamentation would cause the object to soon go out of style. Loos introduced a sense of the "immorality" of ornament, describing it as "degenerate" and its suppression necessary for regulating modern society. He took as one of his examples the tattooing of the "Papuan" and the intense surface decorations of the objects about him. Therefore, Loos considered the Papuan not to have evolved to the moral and civilized circumstances of modern man, who, should he tattoo himself, would either be considered a criminal or a degenerate. (9)

The formal loads imposed on such interpretation by way of this rigid separation of use and ornament was then contrasted by the emotional loads suggested by expressionism. One can witness the challenges posed by the Cèzanne in the early impressionists and later through the cubism of Picasso in painting and sculpture, where the figure gains greater subjective load.

John Dewey, in his pragmatist argument against modernity, offered that "expression, like construction, signifies both an action and its result." He continued to argue the meaning of representation in art after the advent of the camera. The camera clarifies and augments the nature of the

"Gone is the positive expectation that modernization once inspired and with it the privileged role of the laboring class." (12)

representation as it may not only signify the artwork in question as a direct mediation of the subject but that it also tells something to those who enjoy the object about the nature of their own experience of the world – "that it presents the world in a new experience which they undergo… the conception implied in the treatment of aesthetic experience is, indeed, that the work of art has a unique quality, but that it is of clarifying and concentrating meanings contained in scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences." (10)

This matter of experience asserts followed argument of use, context and figure. In considering that Martin Heidegger clearly sites architecture within the field of art, he affirms that equipment is **half-thing** because it is something more than, yet at the same time it is **half-artwork** and still something less, because it lacks the self-sufficiency of the work of art. He articulates that equipment has a greater degree of productive clarity because "man himself, as maker, participates in the way in which the piece of equipment comes into being. Because equipment takes an intermediate place between mere thing and work, the suggestion is that nonequipmental beings – things and works, and ultimately everything that is – are to be comprehended with the help of the being of equipment (the matter-form structure)." In this delineation of equipment we begin to smell the real question that Heiddegger wants to **deconceal**: "It is precisely in great art that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge. Well, then, the works themselves are, or are they not rather here in themselves as the works they themselves are, or are they not rather here as objects of the art industry? Works are made available for public and private art appreciation. Connoisseurs and critics busy themselves with them. Art dealers supply the market. Art-historical study makes the works the objects of science. Yet in all this busy activity, do we encounter the work itself?" This is where Heidegger subverts form as mandate of judgment and loads the figure as a greater constellation that constitutes the work. The strife that is brought into the rift, setback into the earth, and thus fixed in place is **figure, shape, Gestalt**. Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes and submits itself. This composed rift is the fitting or joining of the shining of truth. What is here called figure, Gestalt, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (Stellen) and framing or framework (Ge-stell) as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth." (11)

The identification and loading thereof of the figure or Gestalt by Heidegger was certainly presupposed in two works of art at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th. Degas perhaps best crystallizes the Gestalt when he considers the materiality of his 'Dancer' sculpture. Instead of applying the continuity of bronze to the entire sculpture, he applies wood as the material for its base. The choice of material, of course references the actual site, the place of the dancer in the studio or on stage. Conversely, Duchamp aims to aggressively displace the very Gestalt by demanding absolute license for the artist to establish what in fact is the work and its site. His ready-made Fountain completely transposes the matter-form structure of how the work is art, most aggressively pronounced by the very nature of the Fountain, the urinal as equipment for the everyday. This informs the appropriation of architecture by the Modern practitioners as a vehicle for the questioning of power structures. LeCorbusier's, CIAM's, et al, machines for living are surely the verbalization of this pseudo appropriation where the house becomes a sort of ready-made for the transpositions and challenges of social structures. The purist aesthetic languages promote, or rather impose by Loos and thereon by the Bauhaus as a departure of the Beaux Arts traditions, become evident in what we well know now
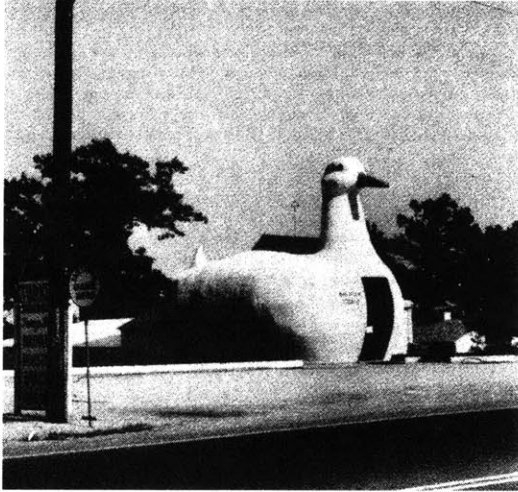
The duck shed, image in Learning from Las Vegas (13).

to be modern architecture. But let's not spend time on the works & failures of modern architecture; we know them all too well. We have learned from our mistakes and successes, and are ready to try something new.

The vectors of logical tact

Lets now admit: architecture follows slowly behind major social movements, either unable to produce a physical form quickly to express our discipline or simply unable to establish an avant-garde beyond our own culture; discourse has filled the gap in the past. This perhaps was most pronounced in the 70's and 80's (aside from aggressive and influential work of Sontag, Jonas, Smithson, Matta-Clark, Acconci) where deconstructivism and poststructuralism, as discursive, and in seldom instances, as practical matters of postmodernism, offered solace from Rowe's bland and ordinary plagues of Venturian American sheds or **ducks (13)**.

Peter Eisenman, Koolhaas and Tschumi, aside from some exhaustive, **baroque** accounts, aimed to distill Derridian aphorisms as architectural matter. More specifically, the solicitations of **difference** to the built environment. "There are two English words 'affect' and 'effect' that sound alike but mean quite different things. Effect is something produced by an agent or cause. In architecture it is the relationship between some object and its function or meaning; it is an idea that has dominated Western architecture for the last 200 years. Since the French Revolution, architecture, in its political, social and economic sense, has dealt with effect. If it's good it's effective: if it's good it serves more people. The clearest example of effect is the utilitarian creed of modern architecture: form follows function. This argued that a socially viable program, properly elaborated, would provide good architecture. Affect on the other hand, has nothing necessarily to do with good. **Affect** is the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes. Affect in architecture is simply the sensate response to a physical environment." (14) This return to the nature of being as opposed to the effect of a production as a matter of singularity is a declaration of a concern with metaphysics, and therefore judgment, that postmodernism so urgently demanded. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Michel de Certeau revisits Kant's **stroke of genius** when in the road from taste to judgment he encounters a "**logical tact** as the parameter of a practical knowledge exceeding knowledge and an aesthetic form. Inscribed in the orbit of aesthetics,

the art of operating is placed under the sign of the faculty of judgment, the 'alogical' condition of thought." (15) Are the affects of these singularities and operations in fact entwined in the production of a cultural field rather than on the resistance of the critical project?

As mentioned, after a brief hiatus, 9.11 has architecture in the cultural limelight. The general public has gone from vaguely recalling one or two architects to being able to heatedly discuss the World Trade Center competitions as well as Frank Gehry's recent projects around the globe. Where does Frank Gehry, the current monopolizer of architectural "buzz" fit in to this "political economy of design?" We know that he's new, different, and he uses advanced computer software for... something. His work is a spectacle that succeeds well in our "culture of communication," where we have the collective attention span of a music video. It makes sense that his work is now the most recognized by the masses, replacing Frank Lloyd Wright as the token American dinner table architect. This new awareness, along with an increasing trend towards total design in our culture, has led us up to, as Hal Foster terms it, a "political economy of design." Simply put, design has permeated all aspects of our lives, without us even realizing it. This topic is discussed
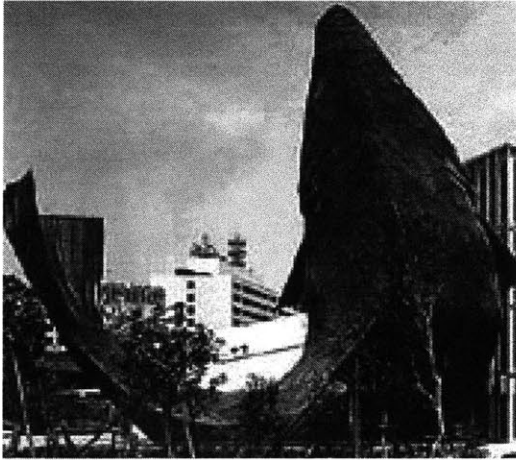
Fish Café, Kobe, Japan, Frank Gehry and Tadao Ando, built by the Takenaka Corporation

in detail in Foster's book **Design and Crime**, a spoof-off on Loos' **Ornament and Crime**. In a subtle contrast, Foster argues that the total design of anything is oppressive and limiting, arguing that such completeness is comparable to "living with one's own corpse," (Loos). While Loos' polemic was directed towards Art Nouveau at the turn of the last century, Foster concerns himself with the contemporary market culture of design of everything from "your sagging face (designer surgery), your lagging personality (designer drugs), your historical memory (designer museums), or your DNA future (designer children)" (16). Similarly, he argues that architecture has become a marketing concept; a definer of corporate branding and identity. Gehry follows this trend quite well, as his buildings have become a brand in themselves; a symbol for urban renewal and cultural engagement, mostly underscored by not only the music videos and car commercials filmed on and around the Guggenheim Bilbao, but by the economic transformation the building has had on the entire Basque region where even international flight patterns have been altered (17).

"Foster presents a polemic against the reified and almost seamless social totality that comprises our post-Fordist economy. While taking aim at the insidious conflation of production and consumption that flourishes in western culture, Foster attempts to transcend this desirable, though limited subject of critique, to succinctly outline a much broader and more profound indictment of contemporary culture. In the aftermath of the horrors of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including the destruction of the World Trade Center and the invasion of Iraq, Foster argues a clarion call for critical thought and critical culture. Like Adorno, Benjamin, and Trotsky, Foster diagnosis of both the artistic and cultural crisis is, like theirs, fundamentally correct. However, in the face of a tidal wave of global calamity and destruction, one can hope for greater critical success on behalf of this argument while sensing that Foster's critique may meet a fate similar to that of its critical forebears" (18).

May it be this *economy* the reason why Richard Serra and Matthew Barney pretend to inter-play dual roles as critics yet participants of the archetypal Gehry-esque universe, arguing for formal or aesthetic prowess by infiltrating and animating power structures? Serra, on one hand, in his **Torqued Ellipses** (and the related body of work thereafter), inspired by Borromini's San Carlo in Rome, explores the purity of "shape" through industrial technologies for ship manufacture. His purpose of achieving a size-scale of sculpture affecting the viewers

experience within, through and around the piece and its space is expressed as – "what interests me is the opportunity for all of us to become something different from what we are, by constructing spaces that contribute something to the experience of who we are." (19) On the other hand, Serra has been known to argue that his sculptures' six-million-dollar-scale is part of a plot to exercise his muscle in the vast, private financial resources associated with institutional art for the sake of a public experience or his "we". Likewise, Matthew Barney, more specifically in his **Creamaster Cycle** saga, represents conditions of post-Fordist power structures by way of concocting mythico-masochistic environments through the design of a highly ornate set of props utilized throughout his films and performances. He, *with* Serra has also positioned himself on a domain where vast, private financial resources are provided in order to realize these grand productions (if thought of in art terms, not Hollywood, of course), most notably his solo exhibit/performance/film at the Guggenheim in New York.

These high-priced maneuvers perhaps do belong to the same universe to that of Gehry; but for very different reasons. For example, Serra's work does inhabit a museum. But the gloabally exclusive,

Andrea Fraser and her performance at the Guggenheim Bilbao, *LittleFrank and his Carp* (19)

When we look at
the word structure
we should see
it as the site
of a struggle,
a problem,
a discursive
production an effect
structure rather
than a cause(22).

flaccid naves of Bilbao hardly pretend to be in the public domain. Plus, his shows in New York at the Gagosian gallery (not a public venue by any stretch of imagination) were free to the *informed* public. Yes, these are institutions well-ingrained in the upper stratum of the high browed, but let's not forget the early days of his minimal, performative practice in SoHo during the 60's and 70's and his 'kangaroo court' battles with the federal government for the publicly funded and *democratically* destroyed **Tilted Arc** (1981). Likewise, Barney also creates questions regarding a possible subversive positioning when it comes to the financing and content of his work, especially his very latest pieces, **De Lama Lamina** and **Drawing Restraint #9**. Both of these pieces, different from the **Creamaster** work, were significantly funded by public resources. But in contrast to the self-referential, uber-American content of **Creamaster**, both **De Lama Lamina** and **DR#9** are explicitly engaging cultural/political polemics of the site of the work, the deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon and the local struggles provoked by sanctions on the whaling industries of north-central Japan, respectively. Is Barney actually creating his conscience after all? Again, these two artists, whom may very well be the most recognized and highest paid figures in the institutional art circles, argue to critically deal with greater ethical questions about the public impact that their work may have through the capital mechanics, like a De Certeau *wig*(14); but in the end I think they all are like Gehry: they just want to play with their **carp** (20). Let's not forget, that not even Warhol, but Duchamp knew this, and Michelangelo before them all; it's a matter of public relations. And, these are relations that can strengthen or weaken an entire market force and the culture that has constructed it. Chin-tau Wu calls this the **enterprise culture**: the unfettered privatization of all public life and services.

Enterprise culture is a force that has come to dominate both the US and UK and is linked with the conservative governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. According' to Wu, it has also produced significant effects within the cultural realm. She writes, "Contemporary art, especially in its avant-garde manifestations, is generally assumed to be in rebellion against the system, [but] it actually acquires a seductive commercial appeal within it." She further validates her argument when she accurately captures John Murphy, former Executive Vice-President of Philip Morris Corporation, stating: "There is a key element in this 'new art' which has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation – without which it would be impossible for progress to be made in any segment of society" (21). Is the chart of lack of knowledge to knowledge the site for innovation where we can superimpose Kant's road from taste to judgment as **logical tact**?

Three Projects
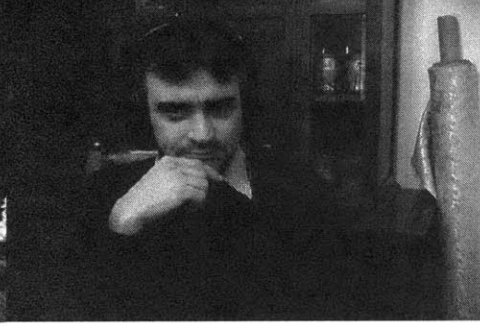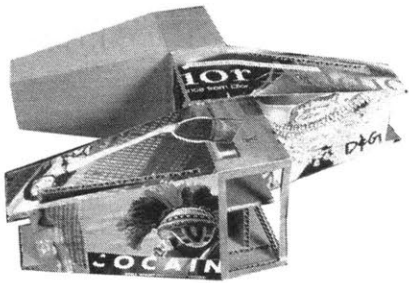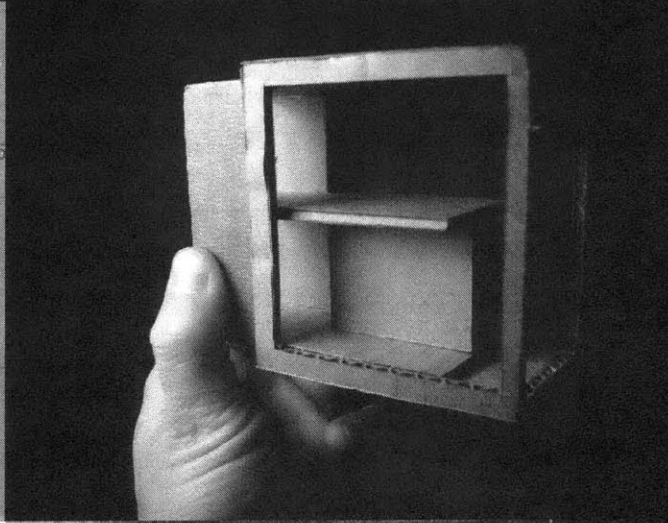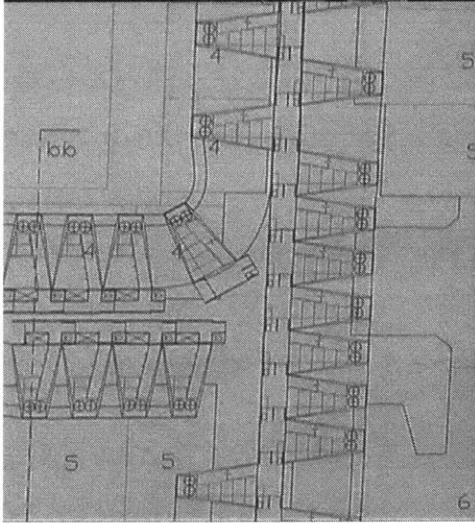
People's Republic of Zpod, Diesel Denim Gallery, Green St. New York, 2003
Performance / video / design – "MEAT-o-C(r)ITY, products for compliance™, has been developing a transportable housing module made of recycled aluminum and dismantled fashion billboards. Our thesis is, inspired by the zipper as a modular system, to utilize the enclave boundaries (the more subtle unseen thresholds between neighborhoods such as El Barrio and Park Avenue North or Chelsea and the West Village) of New York City as sites for the installation of these temporary, androgynous devices. The system is suspended in/between the alleyways of buildings running through entire city blocks. The site I have been currently working on is the block between Mott and Mulberry/ Grand and Hester, i.e. between Little Italy and Chinatown. The ultimate intention is to provide low-cost, yet comfortable and community oriented housing for newly-arrived aspiring supermodels and sweatshop workers. The name of the device is the Z-pod and its program and structure are based in the need for a laterally united cultural field, not unlike the zipper. I strongly believe that the content and audience of my presentation/product/performance fits within Diesel's place in our culture not necessarily as an icon of fashion but even more so because of its 'critical' public campaigns." - excerpt from video

featuring Eric Adamsons. Collaborators – Jose Flores, Mariana Hardy, Yuna Yagi, Ken Ikeda, Daisuke Nishimura, Nobuhiro Awata, Kyoko Oshima, Lealani Ranch, Ruth Chadwick, Ming Chow.
Special Appearance by Lot-ek.

Higienópolis, on the grounds of Parliamentary Complex, Brasilia, Brasil, 2003. Video Performance depicting subject shaving on the ideal modern grounds of Brasilia, a model of cultural rejection of colonial heritage through purist, eugenic form later being catalogued as a greater aspect of racial and social segregation resulting in a complete reversal of the intended modern, socialist-communist agenda of Costa and Niemeyer.

camera Ross Adams

"In such a concentrated city (Sao Paulo in the early 1900's), which had grown and changed so fast, concerns with discriminating, classifying, and controlling the population were strong. As was typical in cities during early industrialization, one of the main idioms which expressed these concerns was that of health and sanitation, always associated with morality. Paulista elites expressed their diagnosis of the city's social disorder mainly in terms of disease, dirtiness, and promiscuity, all ideas soon associated with crime. They expressed their preoccupation with sanitation and controlling workers in at least two modes of creating social separation. Since they were especially afraid of epidemics – as they are of crime today – they started to move out of the condensed center. One of the areas they went to was a new neighborhood that they were building in an isolated area of town and hoping to keep only for themselves: Higienópolis – literally hygiene city. At the same time, they were also planning to clean and open the center of the city, send workers out, and settle them in single family houses in order to improve their moral standards. They identified the concentration of workers and the unsanitary conditions associated with them as an evil to be eliminated from city life. They imagined dispersion, isolation, openness, and cleanliness as solutions for the urban environment and the social tension of its chaotic state." (pre)text by Teresa P.R. Caldeira

Collar de Vainilla, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2004 was an installation (documented through digital photographs) devised to be part of a temporary gallery organized and commissioned by Absolut on March through April 2004 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. As part of a selected group of local artists, Collar de Vainilla was a response to the conditions set by Absolut in regards to the motif of the exhibit: the Absolut Vanilia bottle.

Collar de Vainilla facetiously represented the image and "flavor" of the product. The piece strived towards making an association between the pearl-like seductive translucencies and reflections found in/on/through the product's bottle; elements ubiquitous in the field of marketing and consumerism. These reflexive qualities became synonymous to the blurings found in the colonial status of Puerto Rico, a society that profusely spends and consumes, operating on the nature of seduction and material possession.

By using languages found in Choreomania by Richard Serra and Joan Jonas and Public Space/Two Audiences by Dan Graham, Collar de Vainilla steals these performative aspects found in/on/through the bottle for self-serving purposes.

A 9'x12' two-way mirror system is placed in the main nave of the gallery, disproportionately bisecting the space into a larger, easily accessible contemplation space and a smaller, hardly accessible concealed space. The bisection identifies the narcissist and the voyeur. But, not unlike the emotional, consumerist blurings so pervasively found in the Island, el Collar's lighting system alters the comfort zones of the audiences by briefly and sporadically alternating the reflection with the translucency, confusing the object relation of the narcissist with the fascinating perversion of the voyeur.

featuring Cecile Molina, co-funded by Jeff Berezdivin and Carlos Trapaga Fonalledas, development by Jorge Ramirez, AIA and Hans Moll, AIA, lighting by Raul Rosado

George H.W. Bush
pres US 1989-93
Vp US 1981-9

$100K

Amer. Sil. -Calif-

Bass Bros Ents -FW-

Bush Energy -Texas-

Republican Nat Comm.

Robert Bass

Sid R. Bass

Bath Bentsen Intl. -Houston-

George W. Bush Jr. gov TX 1996-

Agha Hasan Abedi

Sh Ki

JBI Assocs. -Houston-

James R. Bath

Ghaith Pharaon

Skyway Aircraft -Texas-

Sheik Salim bin Laden

Main Bank -Houston-

Saudi Bank -Paris-

BCCI S.A. -Lux-

Farhad Azima

SWAPS -Houston-

Saudi Arab Hldgs -Houston-

Nat Nat -A

'82

'84

Osama bin Laden

John B. Connally
gov TX 1962-8
Sec US Treas 1971-2

Beirut Riyadh Bank

sheik Abdullah Taha Bakhsh

William Dewitt

'82

'83

'84

'86

Talat Othman

Mercer Reynolds

Phillip Uzielli

Harvard Endowmt & Mass-

Theodore Brunn

E-Z Serve -Houston-

UBME -Dubai-

Harken Energy Corp -Dallas-

'84

'85

'86

dinand rcos Philippines 5-86

Intl Mins & Resources

Hawaii real estate

Anton Rupert

Cartier Intl

Saudi Arab Finance

Wayne Quasha

No. Amer. Resources -Bush-

Richmond Group -S.Afr-

Rembrandt Group -S.Afr-

William Quasha esq.

Richmond Group -S.Afr-

Frontier Oil -Denver-

Mont Blanc Co.

Rothmans Intl

Mikel Faulkner

Alan Quasha

Mark Lombardi, Global Networks, Drawing Papers 40, Drawing Center, 2004

"It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time is neutral.
It can be used either destructively or constructively."
– Martin Luther King, Jr. Letter from Birmingham Jail.(1)

(6)

Mediation & Mediocrity

Innovation –1: n. the process of making changes, 2: n. a new device or process created by study and experimentation. (2)

"I'm more concerned with doing applied research… I'd like to develop an institution that will have a transformative impact both on the built environment and contemporary culture. In order to make speculative practice converge with realistic performance, it is crucial to identify concrete domains of operation – geographical zones, media, formats, or subjects. I am not interested at all in visionary projects, or in individual authors. The work produced at the Institute (Berlage) should be conceived to be immediately operative, be it in the form of a polemical exhibition, a planning application, a project to be built, or a book to be published." - Alejandro Zaera-Polo (3)

It is fair to say that the m.o. of MIT is innovation. What an opportunity! But, has our discipline been able to adequately define what innovation in architecture means today? This question hopes to embolden the current dialogue in our own immediate environment here at MIT Architecture in order to confront the seeming irrelevance of our practice in our *enterprise culture*. That said, I believe the current transitional environments of MIT's School of Architecture, both pedagogical and operative, offer a unique opportunity to explore the possibilities of reconfiguring a school of design in order to fulfill its 'embodied energy': the negotiation between social responsibility and technological entrepreneurship. This potency seems properly realized, not by formalizing, but through reticulating moments of intersection within the existing outfit. By embracing the fragmentation of the School by way of reticulating a set of cultural nodes, we can mediate more debate between the dynamics of public space, collaboration and the precision of new technologies.

Peter Wheelwright also discuses the term innovation and the architecture school as laboratory with the group of architectural pedagogues. During the conversation, Anthony Vidler later states – "MIT has developed an extraordinary set of [vertical research] 'centers' in the school of architecture… The real problem is that each of those centers of knowledge is part of architecture but, and this is recognized more and more by the school, it is difficult having them relate to each other in order to provide a general education for the attending architect." (4)

I agree with Professor Vidler. In addition, I feel that MIT has suffered from its behind-closed-doors laboratory culture and its weapons development programs. And perhaps this implies that MIT's *transdisciplinary* propaganda might in fact be a long-standing hoax. Bosworth and Freeman (the architect and engineer of MIT's New Tech, circa 1914) collapsed in "between the lines of modernity", into a synthesis between the unwaveringly American Beaux Arts romanticism and its pragmatist

compulsion for efficiency (5). This synthesis, combined with the culture of research has of course been enormously successful as far as the scientific achievements of the Institute. But, perhaps this unparalleled success has come at the expense of culture and identity: mediocre intersubjectivity.

There are many projects within MIT that already tackle the cultural and art practices as a site for innovation, the Media Lab being the obvious facilitator. In Architecture, despite important material experimentations, it would be most relevant to look at the work Mark Goulthorpe and his Sinthome Sculpture Workshop. This workshop evolved as a relentless collaborative environment layered with computer scientists and designers where sculpture is the site of experimentation: "a sustained attempt to both express the current condition of architecture - its now digital imagination - and to offer a vision of how such imagination will influence architectural praxis as such digital prescience takes hold" (6). This workshop comes alive through a script generated by Barbara Cutler from MIT's CSAIL. It allows the workshop's shapes to be filtered through this script, generating an algorithmic structural framework based on Voronoi's optimized geometries. The filtered output facilitates a structurally efficient network of cells that can then be fabricated using a CADCAM 5-axis router. The experiment results in a sculpture mediated through a collaborative, digital environment.

Ironically, considering Venturi's duck and Gehry's fish, Barbara Cutler and her computer science colleagues use the shape of the **bunny rabbit** as the test-case for their scripts. This accidental, intuitive discovery of meanings, entwined with the figure of the bunny, strongly suggests a new school of architecture finally coming to terms with the power of computation and fabrication... as a whole methodology that finally allows to customize the *imagination of architecture* in a matter of a few minutes: the deconstructive dream of poststructuralist architects.

"Unremittingly, science enriches itself and life with newly discovered useful materials and natural powers that work miracles, with new methods and techniques, with new tools and machines. It is already evident that inventions no longer are as they had been in earlier times means for warding off and for helping consumption; instead want and consumption are means to market inventions. The order of things has been reversed."- Gottfried Semper (7)

But, the bunny faces the postmodern question. During the Loopholes conference, Sarah Whiting asked Mark Goulthorpe - "*so, how long do you run the scripts, until [the bunny] is cute?*" The playful nature of the question is profound when reconsidering the polemic between art and architecture. The matter of judgment again surfaces in the road to innovation. And, perhaps this is why the architect has recently been again embraced as a curator, as designer of receptacles for positioning art. The scale of such experiments become economically ideal, but places the work within the private confines of contemporary publicity, a questionable site for architecture and the working/middle class.

"In this enterprise, special-interest groups have far-reaching political power at their disposal not in

(6)
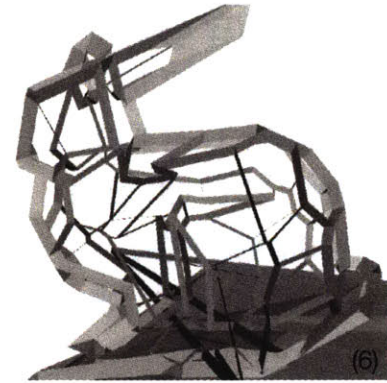
In Tout Va Bien, Jane Fonda broadcasts news from France to an American audience. Strolling throught the supermarket, she comments :

"A big social theater. Everyone is shouting here except for the public. They pay and pretend to be silent. So far no one is addressing. A factory outside the factory. So far no one talks to anyone. They are all waiting for new actors."(14)

spite of but on account of their private character; especially they can manipulate 'public opinion' without themselves being controlled by it. For this is the result of exercising social power, on the one hand, and of claiming legitimation before the traditional standards of a disintegrating public sphere on the other." - Jurgen Habermas (8)

This may be the reason why Krzysztof Wodiczko expresses a visionary contempt against the curatorial being at risk of becoming a "bureaucratic aesthetic" (9). But, has MIT, as the American center of innovation and supplier of technology world-wide, become an experimental site for tackling the curatorial route in order to deliver a critical practice that may enrich this global role? Perhaps it is time for new animal farms, and Wodiczko's Center for Advanced Visual Studies has been such a farm for over 3 decades now. Nato Thompson best describes the role of such artists, many the designers of these new curatorial practices, as - "They do not preach. They do not advocate. As opposed to providing a literal political message, these artists provide tools for the viewer/participant to develop their own politics. In this sense, the political content is found in a project's use. They supply possibilities as opposed to solutions" (10).

Therefore, through this thesis I project my belief that as an architect, I must, once again, understand and then transcend the swell of technology. In times of such cultural transition, as thinkers, as political agents, as artists, as designers, architects must take greater responsibility, greater license in affecting the powers of the society we inhabit. MIT's School of Architecture will hopefully cease to promote the patriarchal fraud of transdisciplinarity and invest more into facilitating natural, monumental sites of conversion.

"The contemporary urban landscape is paradigmatic stage set for the workings of patriarchy." - Leslie Kanes Weisman (11)

These sites should aim at challenging the Institute's pragmatist economy of anesthecized, landscapes that are littered with high-tech gas-chambers in order to augment true disciplinary intersubjectivity. This practice has greater promise of inspiring the student body to actively pursue a much-needed reaffirmation of the human project. With that in mind, offering the Turtle to MIT as a *war machine* is my contribution towards **configuring** more opportunities for cultural **micropractices** (12) where the affect may be **socially transformative** innovation (13). The Turtle hopes to serve as an unfinished emblem, as a reminder for amplifying our field's mediation, for the sake of intersection, of radical mediocracy, between all its citizens, local and global, and its discipline groups.

"Once more I would like to say something formal and empty in the form of a paradox. I think it's probably urgent and imperative that things remain incomplete." - Jaques Derrida (15)

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12. Power operates through bodies, as bio-power. Dreyfus and Rabinow write, "Foucault's aim is to isolate, identify, and analyze the web of unequal relationships set up by political technologies which underlies and undercuts the theoretical equality posited by the law and political philosophers. Bio-power escapes from the representation of power as law and advances under its protection. . . . To understand power in its materiality, its day to day operation, we must go to the level of the micropractices, the political technologies in which our practices are formed" (185). Bio-power is a specific form of power the emerges in the modern period (post-18th century) as a part of the larger "technology" of modern

societies. Bio-power is a dispersed form of power; rather than coming "from above" and organizing people through restriction and prohibition, bio-power gets us to regulate ourselves. Think of bio-power this way: once medicine gets a handle on how to cure disease (which really only happens in the 20th century, with the development of antibiotics, chemotherapies, the understanding of hormones and the ability to synthesize them, etc.), there is a shift in emphasis from death to life in medicine. There is a tremendous focus in culture now on "health"; we are told everyday how to eat, sleep, exercise, and basically live our lives in order to extend them or avoid illness. From a traditional perspective, this is a positive development; medicine works to enhance people's lives. From Foucault's perspective, this development represents the enhancement of bio-power, as our daily practices must now include myriad micropractices aimed at illness-prevention. The flow of medical information about health is a regulatory discourse and a method of dividing people based on their health practices and outcomes. Unhealthy people become easy to blame for their illnesses within this paradigm, and the state is able to avoid its responsibility to clean up the environment, curb industrial pollution, insure a safe food supply, etc., since the primary emphasis of illness prevention is understood to be personal, in one's own control. Personal regulation knits us all ever more firmly to the ideal of "progress" that modern society stands for; we stake our claim to be modern subjects in part through the specific practices we engage. "Exercise," then, is a regulatory regime that keeps us focused on our bodies; the forms of bio-power in operation today not only work through our bodies, but keep us focused on our bodies as a locus of the truth of the person.

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