

3-2010

Place Setting: Making Writing

Peter P. Goché

Iowa State University, goche@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf



Part of the [Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goché, Peter P., "Place Setting: Making Writing" (2010). *Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations*. 2.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf/2

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Place Setting: Making Writing

Abstract

Architecture is about constructing the event as much as it is about providing the shelter for its associated rituals. Our disciplinary chore, as it relates to the Arts and Humanities, is to mine the gap that exists between the logic of objects and that of its figure; between a people and their anticipated surroundings. Our obligation as disciplinarians is to reestablish our methods of production in effort to construct artifacts that elevate the importance of a dynamic experience over theoretical ideals.

Disciplines

Architecture

MADE:

**Design Education
& the Art
of Making**

26th National Conference on the Beginning Design Student

College of Arts + Architecture
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

18–21 March 2010

PROCEEDINGS
2010

26

MADE:

Design Education & the Art of Making

MADE: Design Education & the Art of Making examined the role of making past, present & future, both in teaching design and in the design of teaching. The conference addressed theories & practices addressing fabrication & craft in all studio disciplines, and to take measure of their value in pedagogies of beginning design.

Paper presentations delivered a set of eight themes derived from the overall focus on Making. The team of moderators drove the agenda for these themes, and arranged paper presentations into specific sessions indicated by the schedule. Abstracts were reviewed in a blind peer-review process.

Conference co-chairs:

Jeffrey Balmer & Chris Beorkrem

Keynote speakers:

Simon Unwin
David Leatherbarrow

Offered through the Research Office for Novice Design Education, LSU, College of Art and Design, School of Architecture

Copyright ©2110 School of Architecture, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Session Topics

Making Real

Moderator: Greg Snyder

Making Virtual

Moderators: Nick Ault, David Hill

Making Writing

Moderators: Nora Wendl, Anne Sobiech-Munson

Making Drawings

Moderators: Thomas Forget, Kristi Dykema

Making Pedagogy

Moderator: Michael Swisher

Making Connections

Moderator: Janet Williams, Patrick Lucas

Making Masters

Moderators: José Gamez, Peter Wong

Making the Survey

Moderators: Emily Makas, Rachel Rossner

Open Session

Moderators: Jennifer Shields, Bryan Shields

Paper abstract reviewers

- Silvia Ajemian · Nicholas Ault · Jonathan Bell · Julia Bernert
- Gail Peter Borden · Stoel Burrowes · Kristi Dykema
- Thomas Forget · Jose Gamez · Laura Garafalo
- Mohammad Gharipour · David Hill · Tom Leslie
- Patrick Lucas · Emily Makas · Igor Marjanovic · Andrew McLellan
- Mikesch Muecke · Gregory Palermo · Jorge Prado · Kiel Moe
- Marek Ranis · Rachel Rossner · Bryan Shields · Jen Shields
- Greg Snyder · Ann Sobiech- Munson
- Michael Swisher · Sean Vance · Nora Wendl
- Catherine Wetzell · Janet Williams · Peter Wong · Natalie Yates

PLACE SETTING: MAKING WRITING *Making Writing*

PETER P. GOCHÉ, LECTURE
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Architecture is about constructing the event as much as it is about providing the shelter for its associated rituals. Our disciplinary chore, as it relates to the Arts and Humanities, is to mine the gap that exists between the logic of objects and that of its figure; between a *people* and their anticipated surroundings. Our obligation as disciplinarians is to reestablish our methods of production in effort to construct artifacts that elevate the importance of a dynamic experience over theoretical ideals.

When thinking about design, one is confronted with a fundamental paradox: it simultaneously encourages and resists making specific to a *people*. The characteristic is pervasive. It is a quality found in individual inquiry as well as in the collective oeuvre of our discipline. While design promotes innovation and adores ideas of bodily engagement, it has become reliant (almost exclusively) on various means of production which privilege standardized information with regard to human criteria over that which is particular and sincere. It is a product of the deducible context of contemporary culture and building. This paradox is, in a sense, the essence of my work.

The following paper will consider the role of writing in an interdisciplinary pedagogy that seeks to comprehend the experiential nature of lived space. My perspective is anthropological with specific interest in material culture and ritual. I will discuss ethnographic writing as part of a whole research methodology to which I refer as "place setting." This process of inquiry consists of two other basic precepts: making memoir and phenomenological staging. Each of these systems of thought work to inform the other and cumulatively serves to help define the criteria for making ethno-specific propositions.

Making Memoir: Constructing a Personal Account

Because meaning and significance constitute our existence as human beings, we deepen our diurnal quest to unearth that to which our makeup belongs. From this excavation into our state of being universal emerges a binding affair between self and its evolution. To know our experience, and that of a people, is to embrace our own origins, evolution and eccentricities.

Ethnographic Writing: Making Scientific Analysis

Anthropology is the science that studies peoples past and present, their cultures, and their histories as groups. When anthropologists undertake a study of an unfamiliar culture, they typically write ethnography. Ethnographic studies look at the patterns of interpretation that members of a cultural group invoke as they go about their daily lives. An ethnography is a highly descriptive overview of a group's knowledge, its beliefs, its social organization, how it reproduces itself, and the material world in which it exists.

In short, ethnography is a process referred to by Clifford Geertz as "Writing Culture". Its implementation is dependant on writing field notes; an essential occasion in which the researcher creates jottings (brief texts) based on firsthand (lived) experience while amongst the study group. The purpose of making an ethnographic field report is not only to describe and explain, but also to unfold a view of the world in which cultural alternatives can be measured against one another and used, here, as a guide for the design process.

Phenomenological Staging: Synthesizing the Human Contribution

Continuity of meaning and value is the essence of cultural identity. Their recognition as agents

in the sustainability of a particular group is developed through experience. Every experience is constituted by interaction between "subject" and "object," between self and its world. In an experience, things and events belonging to the world are transformed through the human context of that world. We, who are external to this world, are changed and developed through intercourse with its material culture.

The following inquiries are the pedagogical manifestation of a desire to comprehend the experiential nature of lived space. The act of producing such a material survey serves as an agent for anticipating its architectural potential. Like ethnographic studies, their purpose is to unfold a cultural view of the world. As such, each effort is the embodiment of a performance agenda that has to do with authenticating our comprehension of the corresponding items of experience through memory, anecdote and ritual.

Case Study One

In the spring of 2007 I conducted an undergraduate level studio that lead to individually developed architectural design projects that explored the relationships between identities and urban housing. The housing project required that each student consider the way people live together - both within an individual dwelling and in the larger community. There is a broad range of scales that this community of residents must address; from a group living space in an apartment, to the public circulation on a floor, to the shared functions and services within the building, to the way the residents of this building interact with the site and neighborhood, to the shared space of the street, to the character of the neighborhood and the type of people who live here, to the history and culture of this locality, and to the experience of living in New York. In preparation for the generative sequence, each student was asked to engage in the precepts for "place setting" as previously outlined. All of the scales of community were to be addressed individually to create an integrated urban project rather than just an apartment building. One student's criterion for "place setting" was developed based on the following memoir, ethnography and phenomenological staging.

Memoir: Cleanliness by Blake Fisher

He never understood cleanliness. It was always in anticipation of someone that rarely arrived. Anticipation of an opportunity to show off security, to shout to someone that we've made it. In a family that is completely normal; maybe there are strange things about them, but they have too secure a lifestyle to allow them to emerge, even to each other, at least directly. Cleanliness is the measure of that security within the most private room of their home. Without cleanliness, guests and relatives may lose faith in their affluence and responsibility.

On top of the toilet are other items to hide the bathroom's otherwise foul stench. There are lemon-scented Lysol wipes inside a blue tin bucket in the corner next to it. Mother has an affinity for blue things and how they pop against stark white. The home we live in is a blue Dutch Colonial circa 1978. The toilet is the last thing to be cleaned.¹

Ethnography: To Mark by Blake Fisher

The word "tattoo" was derived from the Tahitian word "tatau" meaning to mark or strike twice. The first syllable, meaning hand, is repeated twice as a description of the action of tattooing while the "u" signifies the addition of color. There is a unique way with which individuals apply markings or meaning to their own rituals or habits, whether it be intentional or not. For these people, and I suspect for most people, meaning is applied out of necessity. In this specific case, breakfast was the only routine occasion in which all members of this family participated. They all realized this, being sure to note that breakfast was the only mealtime in which they spent significant time together. The interesting thing about this breakfast time and the importance and meaning applied to it by this family was its looseness. There was no hesitation to allow me into their home during this most sacred of times. Perhaps the most important time for Harv; Letitia and Hugh's only son.

The marking in this case could be the actual decision-making process. Actually choosing to make something an important moment in one's day is equally ritualistic as the act of

¹ Blake Fisher, Cleanliness.

breakfast itself. Similarly, the act of Hugh's tattooing served an important meaning or marking that had bearing for both Let and Hugh. In Let's case, it was an act she could live through, a creative means with which to identify. For Hugh, the act of making the tattoo was more important than the particular applied meaning. For him, the tattoo was merely a body graphic that the bearer should be proud of, not for its meaning, but for its quality.²

Phenomenological Staging: Assemblage by Blake Fisher

The assemblage was basically a continuation of the drawing/volume analysis we had done of the toilet. I chose to pursue another type of seat (the rocking chair) as the object of analysis for my assemblage. Through deconstruction and, reciprocally, reconstruction, the metal structure of the rocking chair's seat became the primary armature for further iteration. The original canvas fabric, that had been patched, re-patched, and torn, was draped over the armature. The various iterations employed minor modifications that dealt with the various holes in the reconstructed seat. Being that the assemblage was also occurring during the time Fisher was conducting his ethnographic fieldwork, some of those holes started to get covered with additional fabric onto which photographs of his informants had been transferred. Eventually the addition of a hand thrown ceramic bowl by Letitia was placed on the protruding rocker rail.

The Nook by Blake Fisher

Being that breakfast was the primary meal during which the family was together, a nook seemed an appropriate articulation for the general mealtime space. The lower stair landing and a U-shaped bench bound the space of the nook. Within these spaces Fisher sought to shape a new sequence of areas associated with the occupants routine domestic practices and, thereby, create conditions that cultivate a way of life that is spatially individuated. This spatial intercourse signifies a distribution of ritualized modes regarding hygiene and recreation that are interrelated.

Additionally, the hard barrier/threshold of the bathroom door is questioned by placing

² Blake Fisher, To Mark.

an additional sink just outside the bathroom, adjacent to the living room. This sink serves the purpose of providing an intermediary zone outside the cleansing chamber where one can wash their hands and face while being connected to the social space of the apartment. In the ethnography, he recorded an incident during which Harvey (the son) runs to the bathroom (where his mother is showering) and takes her lipstick. He then returns to the living area and proceeds to put the lipstick on, after which, Hugh leads Harvey back to the bathroom to clean the marks off his face.

Case Study Two

In the fall of 2008 I conducted a graduate level studio that lead to individually developed architectural design projects that explored the relationships between architecture, cultural landscapes and biological issues based on the previous research. With emphasis placed on regional sites in Iowa, our studio concentration focused on the one-mile gap between two towns, Slater and Sheldahl. Special focus was placed on local food production and distribution – namely: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In preparation for the generative sequence, each student was asked to engage in the precepts for “place setting” as previously outlined. The assignment required the participants to develop a contemporary program based on their own research and site analysis in effort to develop a plausible land use plan and facility design strategy that would support the practices of an existing CSA while imagining the gap between the two towns as a locally sustainable place. One student's criterion for “place setting” was developed based on the following memoir, ethnography and phenomenological staging.

Memoir: RR2 Box 73 by Lauren Strang

From Trumm's to Heim's; a fence line behind the machine shed, to beyond a crest in the field across the road. This was Dad's workplace. This was my playground. The farm was one hundred eighty acres, split by an asphalt strip; Highway 136. To its east, pig pasture and soybeans, to its west, a cornfield. Within the seasonal green frame of crops, up to 1,000 head of hogs and sows grunted, pushing their stouts

into feeders, the steel lids bouncing almost rhythmically upon withdrawal. Perched atop a long hill, just off the center of the property, sat (and still sits) our farmhouse and buildings. Here in the house yard and road ditch, Mom cultivated her own crop of flowers, vegetables, tomatoes and strawberries. Her garden persevered through the winter on shelves in the basement cupboards; jarred beans, tomatoes, sweet pickles, dill pickles, applesauce, jelly and jam. None of this was novel. To me the farm was home, just as a farm was home to most of my community. The experiential richness of my upbringing was unknown to me, as it had to be.³

Ethnography: Mutualistic Production by Lauren Strang

Neither Curt nor Connie Bronnberg envisioned a future in beekeeping, but for the past twenty-one years, they have owned and operated Spring Valley Honey Farms. The couple currently lives on an eleven-acre farm near Perry, Iowa, where they extract, process, and package honey collected from their 2,000 honeybee colonies. Aided by two employees, Curt distributes hives early spring and in mid-July begins collecting honey-filled combs. From then, the honey extraction process takes place on the Bronnberg farm twice a week, 8 hours a day with all four assisting. Depending on the yield, this process can continue up to three months. Early November the colonies are sent to California to pollinate almond trees. In Iowa, the Bronnbergs spend the winter repairing and repainting hives. The majority of the Bronnberg's honey crop is sold wholesale in 50-gallon drums, and a small percentage is bottled in 4 oz. to 1 gallon jugs to be sold resale at local grocery stores and farmers markets. Connie also uses the beeswax to produce hand lotions, lip balms, and hand lotion bars.⁴

Phenomenological staging: Brood Chamber by Lauren Strang

The Bronnberg's ethnography takes form in a brood chamber of a beehive (fig. 3), obtained from their farm. Within the chamber are ten frames. Encased by an empty brood comb on one end, and empty super (honey) comb on

the other, the remaining eight frames hold photographs with corresponding captions. Printed as transparencies, the photographs maintain an ambiguity of perspective and direction of reading. The organization of the frames, reflecting the aspects of work and family, places activity in the center (activity of the users of space whether bees or humans), from which spatial conditions are formulated (the house, place of work, combs).

Honeybee Farm by Lauren Strang

The design of the 13.5-acre farm incorporates the reintroduction of a variety of native Iowa plant species, which were selected based off growing conditions, existing soil types, and the plant's dependency on the honeybee for pollination. Furthermore, consideration was given to the timing of blooms, so as to extend the period of availability of nectar. The residence (fig. 4) was designed with effort to allow the activities occurring within spaces to articulate the formal nature of the envelope. Attention to daily rituals and temporally shifting routines informed the interior organization of spaces within the home. Special emphasis was placed on the design of the kitchen. Contained as freestanding element, the kitchen reflects the circulation of produce through the home.

Strang's experience with the Bronnberg family lead her to design, on multiple scales, a farm based on the evolutionary spatial efficiency of a honeybee colony: from the soil conditions influencing vegetation; the buildings arrangement on the site; the orientation and interior layout of the residence; down to the organization of the kitchen and its corresponding equipment. By allowing the activities occurring in the 'space between' to inform the constructed forms, an acknowledgment is made to the numerous small elements that ultimately defined a larger form and ultimately our comprehension specific to the development of honeybee colonies.

Conclusion

The transference of cultural studies to an architectural proposition is a difficult task. The effort to do so was given over to students in the second year of study. Our intent in doing so was to attenuate the research through a case study that allowed for varying perspectives by stu-

³ Lauren Strang, RR2 Box 73.

⁴ Lauren Strang, Mutualistic Production.

dents from a diverse array of educational and geographic backgrounds to apply and question the knowledge and resources particular to the work at hand. The case study served a number of functions, but we suspect its most important may well have been to provide structured trajectory by which to engage material culture and the space of domestic practices.

To this end, the act of producing such inquiries of space serves as agent in the cultivation of a specific architectural way of thinking. Like ethnographic studies, the purpose of constructing "place settings" is to unfold a more acute view of the world. This process of inquiry is the embodiment of an interdisciplinary agenda that has to do with engaging in new perspectives such as asserting self as scribe, anthropologist and artist in an effort to substantiate the architectural essence of lived space and define the criteria for making ethno-specific propositions.

This series of inquiries into architecture and culture are genuine recognitions, for both the authors and their audience, of inscribed spaces; the fundamental relationship between humans and the environments they occupy. In making written records of these relationships, the students not only document the narratives of those with whom they engage, but increasingly consider their own positions in that work. As such, each effort is the manifestation of a performance agenda that has to do with authenticating our comprehension of the corresponding items of experience through memory, anecdote and ritual.

Works Cited

- Cuff, Dana. *The Story of Practice*. The MIT Press, 1995.
- Peirce, Charles. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Dover Publications Inc., 1955.
- Krauss, Rosalind. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modern Myths*. The MIT Press, 1986.
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 1980.
- Turner, Victor and Bruner, Edward. *The Anthropology of Experience*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986.
- Burke, Edmund. *The Sublime and Beautiful*. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909.

Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. New York: Harper & Rom, 1959.