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Place setting: architect as cultural inclusionist

Peter P. Goché

Iowa State University, goche@iastate.edu

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Place setting: Architect as cultural inclusionist



by Peter P. Goché

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Major: Architecture

Program of Study Committee:
Karen Bermann (Major Professor)
Ann Jones
Clare Cardinal-Pett
Mitchell Squire

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2005

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Program: Mean It	2
Doctrine: Question It	3
Index: Trace It	5
Ethnography: Making Scientific Description	6
Of Gentry: Maintenance Rituals of the Table	7
Cultural Perception: Through Another's Eyes	17
Ann Hamilton: Indexical Chambers	18
Phenomena: Authenticate It	25
Abstract Recognitions: The Human Contribution	26
Of Course	27
Personal Account: Evidence and Ancestry	30
Table (tǔng)	31
Conclusion	38
Works Cited	39

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I attribute the basis of this inquiry to my parents, Dolores and Raymond Goche. This work has provided me an intense comprehension of the customs and values instilled in me as one of fourteen children. I will hold our mealtime ritual out in the landscape forever sacred.

With sincere appreciation, I want to thank my sister, Jeanette, and her husband, Paul, for their support and continued encouragement. Equally, I want to thank my sister, Monica, and her husband, Cameron, for their unwavering friendship and financial support throughout this effort.

I am indebted to our good friends, Lisa and David Burns, for allowing me to pry into their lives. The outcome of this research was crucial to the following thesis. My family and I will always cherish the tabletop we now eat from.

Finally, to each member of my research committee, I want to extend an open invitation to our home to sit at our table. The intense scrutiny and guidance each of you have offered over the last two years has helped me to recognize the significance of my creative works. In my effort to further the development of this thesis and its execution in practice, I hope to return to each of you for additional intellectual guidance in the future.

ABSTRACT

This thesis assesses the traditional mealtime rituals of *a people*. Our engagement of such constructed environments within a particular material culture is affected by the physical items associated with defining its setting. The purpose of this method of inquiry is to develop a fuller comprehension of 'place setting' as customary observance (rite) and interlude (ritornello). Our engagement of such constructed environments within a particular material culture is affected by the physical items associated with defining its setting. This work will demonstrate the role of place setting as agent in our perception and conception of reality, including the relationship between mind and matter, substance and attribute, fact and value as it relates to the human experience of the mealtime ritual.

In the field of architecture, 'building use' is referred to as *program*. In this sense, the work of an architect is the orchestration of prescribed activities within an anticipated building. Using the house for example, it is assumed that the residential building type will in some way offer certain provisions relative to shelter.

In this thesis, I will examine the programmatic phase of making and evaluating architecture. I will: (1) consider current notions of *program* within the discipline in order to establish its meaning; (2) demonstrate a method of research that is based on conceptual considerations (what is known), as well as, perceptual observations (what is sensed); (3) propose the development of a more comprehensive use of human behavior/material culture specific to a particular occupant set (*a people*).

(Keywords: mealtime ritual, etiquette, place setting, inclusion, program, ethnography, indices, and phenomena)

INTRODUCTION

The cultural constitution of an individual is a site of operation for the designer. The customs and values of an individual establish that person's specific identity within a particular culture and geographic region. The identification of such idiosyncrasies offers the potential for an architecture that is more meaningful, more lasting and more cohesive than the mortar that joins two bricks an architecture that neighbors the distance between human spirits.

That the making of "site specific" architecture would be based solely on the topographic and typographic nature of its surrounds seems to completely miss its point. As pointed out by Russell Ellis and Dana Cuff in *Architect's People*, "We must be more conscious of context – not only of the heritage of physical artifacts, but of the life inscribed there."¹ Equally, the notion that the criteria for understanding a client's needs would lie flat on the floor and be measured in terms of utility requirements demonstrates negligence within the architectural discipline. These manners of practice are suspect given the architect's actual role as design coordinator as described by Dana Cuff:

The term design can refer to a valued quality of architecture and to the activity of planning environments. It is this second sense of the term, referring to the activity, that I would like to consider. Temporarily suspend the common definition, and imagine instead that every individual with a voice in the design process is a kind of designer – the client, the engineer, the contractor, the inhabitants, the college president, the fundraiser, and so on. The architect-designer, among those individuals, has the added responsibilities of coordinating all contributions and giving them some spatial expression. Design, then, is taking place whenever any of these actors makes plans about the future environment. While these actors may not sketch their concepts into architectural form, their input will frame design solutions.²

The designer, in order to frame a human situation, must draw on multiple sources of reference in effort to expand the criteria for a more comprehensive solution. The direction of this research, then, is to establish the basis for a method of interpreting the human criterion; to develop a more inclusive foundation from which to create architecture.

The following scholarship is an extension of my personal aspiration to practice; to make a fuller inquiry. It is an examination of the distance that exists between that which we design for (*a people*) and that which we design (the offering). My perception of this distance is based on 12 years of practice, 5 years of teaching design studios and a series of concentrated courses outside the field of architecture. Although I have great respect for my colleagues in practice as well as academics, my attitude, and perhaps mandate, is that as disciplinarians we ought to temporarily suspend our personal image of self as authors in effort that we elevate the identities of those who have entrusted us as architects. Not discounting intuitive genius, the importance of our profession lies in our ability to develop an architecture based on meaningful research. We must tend, as Bernard Tschumi suggest, toward expanding rather than reducing that which we allow to inform our processes of making.

If we are to observe, today, an epistemological break with what is generally called modernism, then it must also question its own formal contingency. By no means does this imply a return to notions of function versus form, to cause-and-effect relationships between program and type, to utopian visions, or to the varied positivist or mechanistic ideologies of the past. On the contrary, it means going beyond reductive interpretations of architecture. The usual exclusion of the body and its experience from all discourse on the logic of form in a case in point.³

To this end, I seek to conduct a fuller analysis within the programmatic phase of architecture that will assist in the identification, qualification and communication of the needs of *a people*.

NOTE

A people is a term I've elected to use as a matter of practice. It is a substitutions for the more professional terms, client and occupant. This departure in terminology is significant to me as it connotes a human relationship that is potentially more intimate than a professional relationship.

¹ Russell Ellis and Dana Cuff, "Through the Looking Glass: Seven New York Architects and Their People," p. 4 (*Architect's People*)

² Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, (The MIT Press, 1995) p. 61.

³ Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, (MIT Press, 1996) p. 117.

PROGRAM: MEAN IT

Architecture is best suited to its client, and our culture, when the designer becomes fully vested in its intent. In so doing, knowledge particular to the customs and values of *a people* must be secured, evaluated and re-presented through text and drawing. Historically, information (of the empirical sort) has been, and continues to be, collected during the preliminary phase of design and is referred to as programming. The resultant accumulation or tabulation of data is referred to as a program, a [theoretical] guide for the design procedure. The methods prescribed for this aspect of work by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) will be addressed later in this discussion.

‘To make’ is what architects do. To communicate what is to be done, then, is the basis of any architectural practice. Typically carried out in drawings and texts, this method of pursuing the solution is our base of operation. In *Architecture and Disjunction*, Bernard Tschumi notes:

A change is evident in architecture’s status, in its relationship to its language, its composing materials, and its individuals or societies. The question is how these three terms are articulated and how they relate to each other within the field of contemporary practice.⁴

Tschumi goes on to suggest that “events, drawings, texts expand the boundaries of socially justifiable constructions.”⁵ However, if we regard drawings and texts as sacred testimonials and do not make them program specific, then we must hold ourselves accountable for any social inadequacies.

A contemporary definition of program can be found in the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary. It reads as follows:

A statement of an architectural problem and of the requirements to be met in offering a solution.

For the sake of this discussion, I’d like to contrast this discipline specific meaning with the following definition in an effort to derive a fuller meaning as it relates to the architectural discipline:

Program: a descriptive notice, issued beforehand, of any formal series of proceedings, as a festive celebration, a course of study etc. (...), a list of the items or “numbers” of a concert etc., in the order of performance; hence the items themselves collectively, the performance as a whole....⁶

The latter definition speaks to items, sequence and intention relative to an event or “the performance”. In contrast, the former definition serves to identify the requirements specific to a particular architectural problem and makes no mention of the human or social elements present in any architectural endeavor. The latter is particularly about people. Social relevance is emphasized with the use of words or phrases such as “collectively” and “as a whole”. In lieu of the former definition, I submit the use of the following statement of meaning:

pro gram: a design guide developed in the preliminary phases of architectural design. It is the resultant data collected and interpreted by means of a comprehensive method of analysis/synthesis in effort to: (1) associate or affiliate (oneself) closely with *a people*; (2) describe by enumerating the characteristics or qualities of *a people*; (3) convey information about *a people* with respect to the phenomenological make-up of their customs and values.

This description of program acknowledges, and thus communicates the relevance of *a people* in the production of space. It makes explicit that the dialectic between the self and the other, the maker and the audience, the maker and the made, the architect and the client are intrinsically wed one to the other.⁷ Our recognition of the architect’s role as being interconnected to that of *a people* is critical. My personal anecdote for this has been to re-establish myself as a cultural inclusionist; a title that, by definition, embraces the humanities.

⁴ Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, (MIT Press, 1996) p. 112.

⁵ Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, (MIT Press, 1996) p. 112.

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary

⁷ Dana Cuff, “Through the Looking Glass: Seven New York Architects and Their People,” p. 100 (*Architect’s People*)

DOCTRINE: QUESTION IT

Founded in 1857, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) remains the primary professional society for architects. This organization issues a range of documents, including standard contracts for professional service, which establish guidelines and expectations for the conduct of its members. This organization represents approximately 60 percent of those eligible for membership. In addition to contracts, newsletters and membership status reports, the AIA publishes an annual update titled “The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice.” The doctrines established by the AIA should not be taken as explicit instructions by individual practitioners; rather, their pronouncements need be understood as generalized proclamations for the conduct of “architects” and, as such should be questioned.

Update 2004 (The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice) includes a topic titled Researching Client Needs prepared by Peggy Lawless and Wendy Pound. This report outlines various techniques for ‘evaluating’ client needs. These include business intelligence, in-depth interviews, surveys, behavior observation and mapping, guided walk-throughs, envisioning, and facility performance evaluation. These methods of data collection are prefaced by the following introduction:

A thorough understanding of clients and stakeholders can differentiate a firm from competitors and make the firm’s architecture more responsive to client needs...Although not trained as researchers, architects ask questions and evaluate data, particularly during predesign and programming. This experience gives them the skills to carry out research. There is a science to client and user research, however. Developing their researching skills and expanding their repertoire of research methods can give architects the information they need to design effectively.⁸

The balance of this report consists of a point-by-point set of guidelines for executing the various methods of data collection.

The intent of each method is stated at its beginning and is as follows:

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

The more architects know about their prospects, the more successful their proposals and presentations will be. Look beyond the information a prospect provides. Dig deeper to better understand the decision makers, their organization, the industry, and any unique challenges the potential client faces. Insight into a prospect’s background helps an architect stand out in an interview.⁹

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Architects need to know how building users go about their jobs, how they work, and how they meet their customer’s needs. Interviews are the best way to gather enough data to paint a complete picture of the physical, social, and psychological needs of a building’s users.¹⁰

SURVEY DESIGN

Surveys are an excellent way to gather information from a large cross section of building users. The survey method is particularly economical for reaching users who have easy access to e-mail or the internet. Written or telephone surveys are more appropriate for assessing the needs and perceptions of less accessible users.¹¹

BEHAVIOR OBSERVATION

Usability is the measure of the quality of a user’s experience when interacting with a system or a product, such as a Web site or a power tool. Observing people’s behavior in and around a building is one way to evaluate the usability of a facility. The goal of behavior observation is to learn how occupants interact with a building. Being as unobtrusive as possible, the observer watches for where and what behaviors occur, listens to the sounds that occupants hear, and aims to feel the experience of the occupants.¹²

⁸ Peggy Lawless and Wendy Pound, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey, 2004), p. 57.

⁹ Lawless and Pound, 57.

¹⁰ Lawless and Pound, 60.

¹¹ Lawless and Pound, 62.

¹² Lawless and Pound, 65.

GUIDED WALK-THROUGHS

A guided walk-through is a walking interview. Users of a facility lead the architect through the spaces they regularly use, making comments as they go. The surroundings and activities stimulate the guides to describe how they use the space and what works or doesn't work. Walk-throughs conducted during predesign and programming give the architect insight into how people use the building they currently inhabit. They help the architect see the space through the eyes of managers, employees, and customers.¹³

ENVISIONING

Focus group sessions with the stakeholders of an organization, facilitated by an architect or researcher, can elicit a vision for the ideal built environment. The purpose is not to ask the users to design the building, but to ask them to describe the factors that help them achieve their goals. The value of envisioning is twofold – the process gives the architect a deeper layer of knowledge about users before programming begins, and it stimulates support and enthusiasm for the project among the users.¹⁴

FACILITY PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

A facility performance evaluation (FPE), also known as a postoccupancy evaluation, measures how well a building meets the needs of the people who use it and identifies ways to improve a building's performance and fitness for purpose. An FPE blends quantitative data, such as occupancy rate and revenue generated per employee, with qualitative data, such as "I have to leave my office to concentrate" and "The new meeting rooms are much better for client presentations."¹⁵

Each method or technique is accompanied by sample forms for tabulating the various kinds of data collected. Other types of summary, such as composite mapping (relative to behavior observation) and photography (relative to guided walk-throughs), are recommended. In conclusion, Lawless and Pound offer the following:

From business intelligence to facility performance evaluation, this topic presents a toolbox of research techniques and methods to help architects identify and understand building use issues that can be addressed in a responsive design... Client research can help engage stakeholders, generate cooperation and enthusiasm for a project, and reinforce the credibility of the architect. Most important, client research results in places and spaces that fulfill both the expressed and unexpressed needs of the client and building users.¹⁶

Peggy Lawless is a social scientist and director of the Lawless Institute, a Minneapolis-based firm that helps architects get and keep clients by conducting research into the needs of users. Wendy Pound, also with the Lawless Institute, is a psychologist and experienced researcher.¹⁷

"Researching Client Needs" is an introduction to a set of conventional methods for data collection and tabulation rather than a guideline for conducting a complete evaluation of *a people's* needs. The breadth of knowledge it seeks is, for the most part, quantitative. Although this sort of empirical data is invaluable to the design process in terms of utility, it does not aid in the construction of an environment specific to *its people's* identity and their relationship to the utilitarian attributes that constitute their world. However, the very activity implicates the architect as scholar; it suggests that that which is gathered will, in some way, be interpreted and qualified. It is our duty as architects (or 'scholars', if you will, which suggests that we study) to develop such methods of evaluation, in order that its relevance be comprehended, communicated and implemented as a means for establishing a more inclusive architectural solution.

The dissemination of "Researching Client Needs" as a model for research and, by misinterpretation, *programming* is perpetuated by instruction in our academic institutions. Common to most studio environments within the architectural curriculum is a project statement (assignment) accompanied by a laundry list of utilitarian requirements. This list is a student's only reference to *program*. Fundamentally problematic, its interpretation is rarely given instruction. The following excerpts of this thesis are offered as examples by which one could simultaneously qualify and communicate the findings of *a people*.

¹³ Lawless and Pound, 66.

¹⁴ Lawless and Pound, 67.

¹⁵ Lawless and Pound, 68.

¹⁶ Lawless and Pound, 69-70.

¹⁷ Lawless and Pound, 70.

INDEX: TRACE IT

Architecture is an ethno-specific art. Its unique role among the arts is to produce forms and spaces based on human purpose. Its utility is prescribed by the values and customs of a *people*, those whom fund its commission. This prescription is neither easily distinguished nor static. It has been forged over time and is thus cloaked in the mineral of its surrounds – our cultural context. It is an indelible mark, and as such, bears the basis for a timeless architecture.

These marks embody complex, multi-layered references and, thus make up silent inventories of a *people*. Only through intense examination of its rituals, artifacts and members, will their meanings and reasons for being be revealed. The referent nature of such matter is, as defined by Charles S. Peirce, indexical.

[An index is] a sign, or representation, which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand.

Indices may be distinguished from other signs, or representations, by three characteristic marks: first, that they have no significant resemblance to their objects; second, that they refer to individuals, single units, single collections of units, or single continua; third, that they direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion.¹⁸

Knowing the human index necessitates a genuine understanding of the dynamic between an object (artifact or ritual) and its referent (*a people*). This comprehensive scouring must go below the surface evidence in effort to avoid mere symbolization. Indices are different from symbols as summarized by Rosalind E. Krauss below:

As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters. Cast shadows could also serve as the indexical signs of objects.¹⁹

Grasping the significance of a *people's* distinction is dependent on one's ability to identify or catalog the nature of its index; that which has given it cause.

Architects place a majority of their efforts on the act of creating form and construction. These exertions are generally founded mainly in an attempt to produce an image rather than a record, package rather than facility, structure rather than support for a *people*. While images, packages and structures certainly yield a formal prescription, the end result is an objectification that is little more than symbolic of its intended role. However, if the charge were led from a genuinely subjective point of view, the consequence could become a support assembly that would, in addition to facilitating people and their artifacts, house the rituals and meanings attributing to its cultural conception. The subjective point of view to which I refer holds a *people* (the subject) as its focus over the architect's personal agenda to create a signature building.

Architecture has the potential to house the indexical mark of its people. 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. Tod Williams and Billie Tsien offer the following interpretation of this thought:

While important theories are written about architecture, architecture is itself about the experience of the physical artifact. It is not about the experience of an idea.²⁰

Architecture, the artifact and its experience, holds eternal value when made in a genuine effort to contain the indices of its people. In the end, architecture is the re-representation of the indexical mark of a *people* and its continuum; a heritage forged by the ancestry of our state. The following research excerpts demonstrate two methods of pursuing and recording the indexical trace of a *people*.

¹⁸Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1955. p. 107.

¹⁹Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modern Myths*, (The MIT Press, 1986), p. 198.

²⁰Tod Williams and Billie Tsien: *The 1998 Charles & Ray Eames Lecture*, (Michigan Architecture Papers Map 5, University of Michigan, 1998), p. 13.

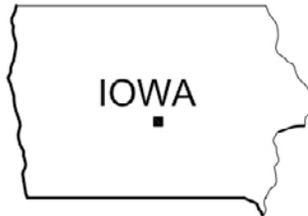
ETHNOGRAPHY: MAKING SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION

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 an 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.²¹

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 following research excerpt, Of Gentry: Maintenance Rituals of the Table, is an attempt to achieve a more subjective understanding of a people and their rituals regarding food production, food preservation/preparation and eating. The purpose of this 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 as a guide for the design process.

²¹ Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, (see Clifford Geertz in *Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973) p. 5.

OF GENTRY
Maintenance Rituals of the Table
Script for a People



Quadrangle Location

Our engagement of constructed environments within a particular material culture is affected by the physical items associated with defining its setting. In an effort to narrow this experiential field of study, this case study assesses the traditional midwestern mealtime situation. The customary development of this social construct will be studied within the context of a farmstead, owned by IñRes and his wife, one mile south of Prairie City, Iowa (population: 1,365). In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the significance of the various customs related to the preparatory aspects of food production, place setting and eating.

Site	8522 W 109 S Prairie City, Iowa
Coordinates	93°15' longitude, 41°37'30" latitude
Iñformant Res	A caucasian man specializing in the production of field corn (a tall, annual cereal plant having a jointed, solid stem and bearing the grain, seeds or kernels on large ears) and alfalfa (a European leguminous plant, having bluish-purple flowers, grown for forage in the U.S.) as a matter of sustaining his herd of black angus cattle. [English speaking]
Iñformant Can	A caucasian women specializing in private client banking. Related to IñRes by marriage. [English speaking]

Site History

This farm operation is located on the east side of a gravel road identified as 109 S. The farmstead currently consists of a house, a machine shed, a granary, a livestock processing unit, a cattle barn and two grain bins. The house was constructed in the 1920's by a potato farmer and his wife (the local schoolteacher). The property, including 40 acres of farmland, was purchased in the early 1930's by IñRes' mother (the daughter of a merchant) and father. Together, they farmed the land and established the balance of out buildings. IñRes' widowed father retired from the farm in 1974. Later that year, IñRes and his wife (a mortgage loan administrator) took over the land and started a family. IñRes and his wife continue to live on the farmstead and work 280 acres of ground four miles to the north. Their two daughters have grown up and have left the farm to pursue their own careers.

Life History

IñRes is an Iowa native. He was born in 1946 with a chronic illness that could not be diagnosed. This illness caused him to tire easily and consequently, he was unable to attend school full time. At the age 14, he had an emergency appendectomy. As a result, the illness completely subsided leading the doctors to believe he had been burdened with some sort of bug in his appendix.

As a matter of growing up on the farm, IñRes had been groomed to work the farm by his father. IñRes wasn't aware that he could do anything other than farm. He'd be 50 years old before he'd realize he could have done anything. IñRes attributes this phenomenon to his "dysfunctional family." His mother, who passed away when he was seventeen years old, was a drug addict and his father was an alcoholic. He and his only sister didn't have what he deemed a happy childhood given the lack of "loving," and "caring."

In 1952, his father loaded up the last team of workhorses, trading it all in for the machine age. IñRes remembers recalls this as one of the saddest days of his childhood. With the new machinery, his father would farm the 200 acres passed onto him by his parents.

Upon graduating from high school, IñRes decided to rent a couple hundred acres from his uncle and farmed this with his father's equipment. A couple years later, he established a partnership with a local pathologist. This arrangement was established in order to serve each individual's interests. The enterprise was comprised of 280 acres of land (just 4 miles north of the land IñRes had grown up on) owned by the doctor and operated by IñRes. The two men split the annual shares. This arrangement has been in place for 40 years and continues.

IñRes notes his relationship with his father was stressed as a matter of differences and that he sought "wholeness through separateness." Over time an arrangement regarding his father's property was arrived at; his father would rent out the land to other individuals and continue to collect shares that would be split with his sister. When he passes away, the land will go back to IñRes.

Traditionally, land was handed down to the siblings and the shares split with the parents. IñRes notes this difference and cites the issue of wholeness as the only reasonable solution. He also expresses, with a self-assured tone, that he is deemed by his community to be an "unworthy son" as a result. As a result, he and his family have been given less respect and consideration by his community. However, he tells me he'd be willing to bet he's the smartest man in the community and quotes a verse from the Bible, "woe, to him who hath knowledge." He clarifies this with its principle; "understanding." He cross-references this with the legal term 'point of understanding.'

Throughout his life, he has been burdened by a feeling of inadequacy. IñRes notes living with this feeling until he turned 50 years old. It was at this point when he became able to see the spiritual side of it. He exclaims, index finger pointed up, "It's in the blood." "It's a matter of vocabulary." He goes on, "A feeling of grace." And, "It's a spiritual responsibility." Followed by, "The land, it has to be preserved in order to pass it on to the survivors." Suddenly his tone shifts as he quietly acknowledges his role in life: the caretaker of this land.

IñRes, sitting a chair in the living room, points to a framed embroidery of his family crest and says "my ancestors migrated here from Scotland because there was no opportunity for peace and land holdings while the Protestant/Catholic war persisted." In 1720, his ancestors migrated to Milford, New Hampshire. The family was heavily involved in the revolution/civil wars. IñRes cites papers in his possession that document their signatures stating their willingness to pledge their life, liberty, property and sacred honor. He points once again at the crest and concludes, "I come from a fighting breed, my ancestors served the King of Scotland, and we are students of history."

After a period of silence, which I use to hurriedly scribble down these quotations, I ask him to identify the major events of his life to date. Without hesitation, he pointed out his mother's unexpected death. "I've heard you can cut the grieving in half if you have the opportunity to say goodbye." This statement is delivered with a look of affirmation directly into my eyes. I stop dead in my tracks and look onto my son, Jude, who is now peaking out a cardboard box at me. IñCan had placed the box in the living room for my sons to play with. IñRes commands my attention once again as he attributes her death to "the end of the table." Pointing toward the dining room now, he says, "We didn't have another family meal together until I met my wife. She brought my family and me back to the table. She kept it all wired together. Like your thesis, the table is hers!"

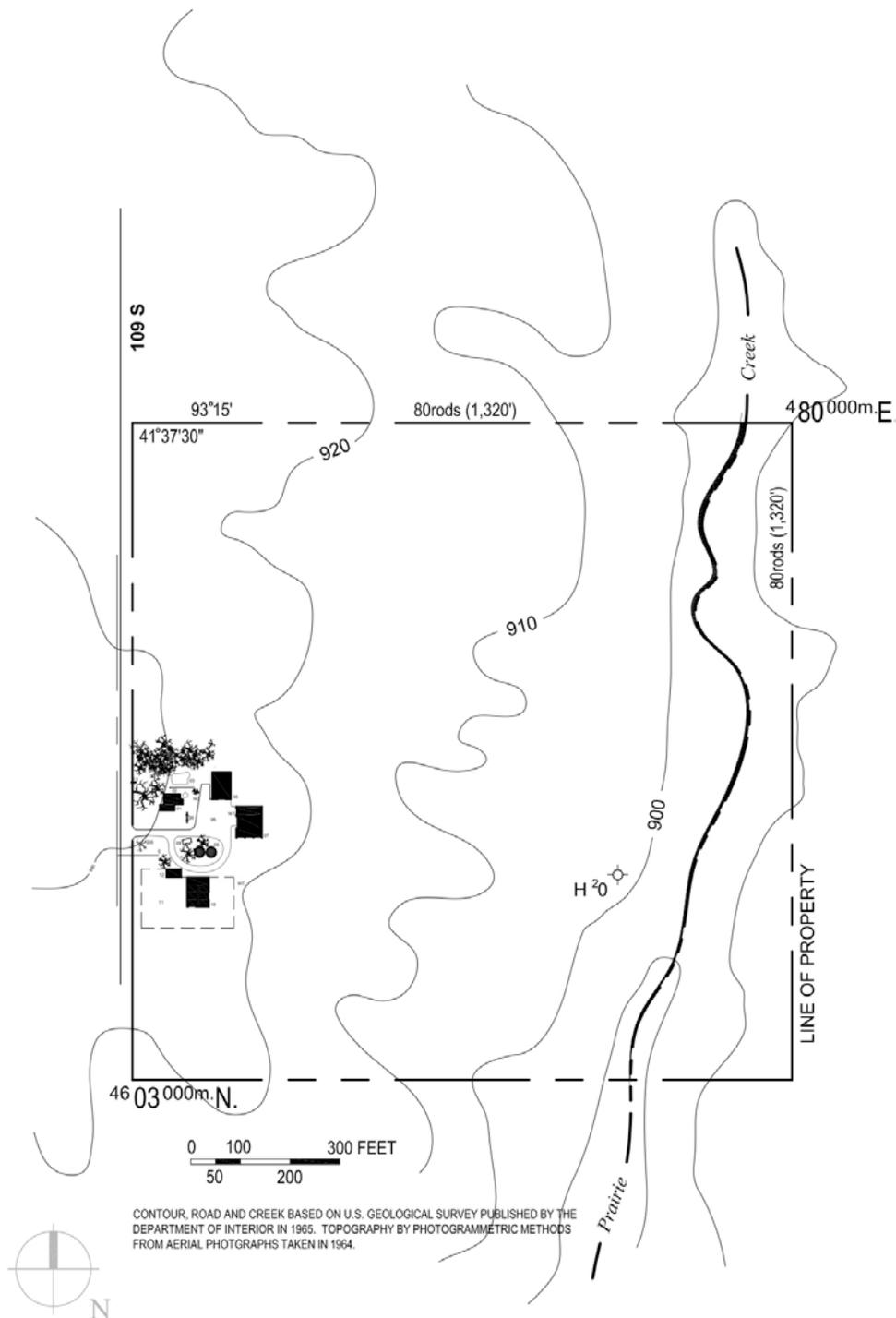
Site Development

According to IñRes, there are two aspects of this location that make it an ideal operation; access to natural water and land slope allowing natural sewer discharge.

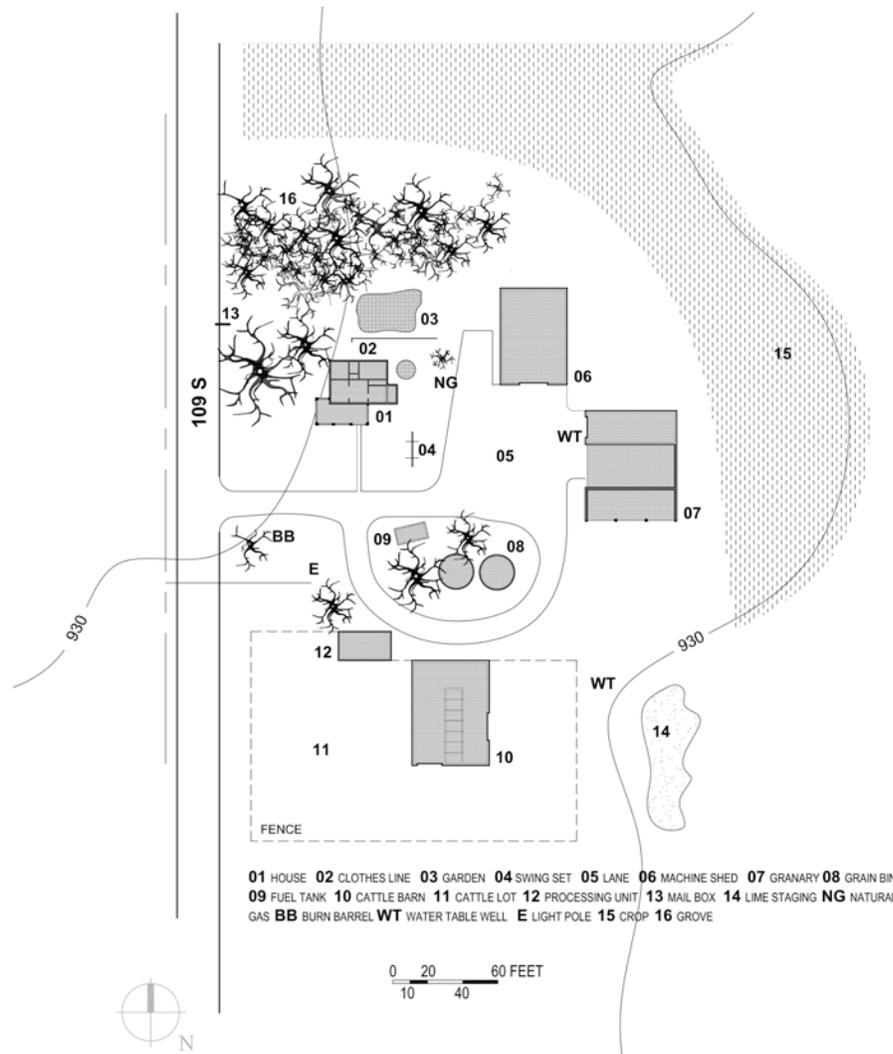
The property, bordered on the west by 109 S and on the east by Prairie Creek, is 80 by 80 rods. There is a constant slope toward the creek with a total grade change of 30 feet over 1,320 feet. Although sewer retention requirements and strategies have changed, this passive system continues to be an adequate method of runoff management.

Water is available on site via two well types; two ground water wells and a shallow well fed by a vein in the bedrock 17 feet beneath grade. The ground water wells (see Facility Layout) were established in the 1920's and remain as a secondary source of water today. These wells operate on the principle of sink capacity.

The shallow well (see H²O note on the following Land Ownership Map) is located 1,000 feet due east of the center of the barn along a line that parallels the north wall of the livestock processing unit. This well was established in the mid 1950's due to the drought. Its discovery was based on the memories of the older men in the community who had operated thrashing machines around the turn of the century. Large volumes of water were essential to the thrashing operation. Given the area at grade near the deep well was a seep hole, multiple thrashing operations drew from this surface water source. During the dust bowl era, IñRes' father consulted the local 'gray beards' and determined the general area of this seep hole. He manually excavated a hole in the earth and discovered a fissure 17 feet below grade. With a tremendous blast of water, the excavated area filled up with water and has maintained a water level of 12 feet ever since.



Another contributing factor to the arrangement of the site facilities is wind. The farmstead is protected from the prevailing winter winds out of the northwest by a dense grove of deciduous and evergreen trees (see the following Farmstead Map). The garden is nested between the house and grove giving it protection from summer windstorms. The cattle barn and lot are located at the southern most edge of the site proper. This is seasonally down wind and helps prevent the characteristic odor of cattle manure from drifting toward the house.



These field maps demonstrate the inherent sophistication of a farming method based on its relationship to specific geological and environmental conditions. As IñRes states, “you have to think these systems through in their complete cycle from establishment to feed.” Facility arrangement in a food production based industry is critical to yield outcomes and hence, affect the manner in which its host family experiences the occupation of the earth’s surface.

Chicken Killin’

Below the bleak sky I pull my car into the driveway of the farmstead once again and approach the house. I embrace IñCan just outside the back door and then follow her through the back porch and into the kitchen. On the stove top to my left is a tall stainless steel canister (an old dairy canister). The aperture of this vessel was roughly 12 inches and overall height about 30 inches. Its base diameter is more on the order of 18 inches. This canister contains six gallons of water and is being heated over two gas burners.

IñCan offers me a cup of coffee while we wait for the water temperature to rise. While waiting, IñRes stands in the doorway to the dining room and discusses the recent gloomy weather and the various equipment failures that have occurred over the last months related to the corn harvest. Meanwhile, IñCan kept check on the pot of water. After a period of 20 minutes or so, the two discuss the slow progress of the water temperature and decided to add about one-quarter cup of salt to reduce the boiling point of the water. Over the next ten minutes and some more talk, the water reaches the necessary point. This is determined by IñRes quickly running his right index finger

through the water. As the water continues steaming, we put on our shoes, coats and hats and proceed out the back door.

As we cross the lawn and driveway to the processing unit, IñRes notes he had never had help with this task prior to this occasion. We enter the livestock processing unit through a cattle shoot and swinging door. Upon entry, the chickens start to scamper and cackle. IñRes notes the task at hand would have occurred earlier in the month had his harvest gone more smoothly. The chickens were ready to butcher early in the month given the temperature drop. Chicken stop producing eggs when the temperature of their environment drops consistently below 50°fahrenheit.

I take the task of guarding the door as IñRes chases the chickens down with a 42 inch long wire hook. In a high-pitched, cunning tone, IñRes says, “Come on girls.” This is followed by an elder laugh and the exclamation that “they’re the best damned chickens I’ve ever had!” Followed by a quick and assertive qualifying statement; “They laid more eggs than the best laying hens I’d ever find.” He chuckles while noting to himself he couldn’t believe it. As he closes in on the group of chickens (13 in total) congregating in the corner, he speaks to them; “Oh, I know you suspect something.” Shifting his talk toward me he notes in a rather solemn tone, “they can feel it (the end).” As soon as I comprehend the message he has snatched up one of the hens by its right foot. He hands it to me and asks me to hold it while he gets three more. With three pairs of chicken feet in my hands and a chicken in his arms, we leave the processing unit and close the door behind us.

While walking across the yard toward the machine shed, IñRes caresses back of the chicken he holds and speaks softly into its ear; “Don’t worry, you are just going to the other side. You are just going back into the system.” I follow behind as he notes he likes to talk to chickens a bit prior to dressing them. I look ahead and noticed the hatchet and chopping block that had been set up on the backside of the machine shed. It sat adjacent to a bed of tall grass at the edge of the empty cornfield.

As we come to a stop, he turns to me and notes that the trick to dressing chickens is having plenty of cold water on hand in order to get the body heat out of the chicken once dressed. With that, he lays the chicken on its back with its feet in his left hand and picks up the hatchet with his right hand. The chicken does not struggle. The hatchet is quickly delivered through the chicken’s neck, not quite severing its head entirely. He buries the hatchet back in the wood block and lowers the chicken to the ground. IñRes then conceals the head with his boot and pulls the body free. The chicken, headless, is laid to pasture to bleed. It jumps and pumps for 20-30 seconds before coming to a rest. Immediately, IñRes grabs another from my hands. As this process is repeated, I learn to anticipate and hand the chickens off one at a time.

IñRes asks me to hold a knife he had brought with him while he walked to the house to get the hot water. Returning with weighted bucket of steam, he asked me to take the lid off another plastic pail that was sitting on the ground beside a round cast iron drum. As I do this, he grabs two birds from the grass by the feet and proceeds to dip them one at a time into the vat of hot water. While submerging the bird to just above its leg joint, he stirs the water. After five to ten seconds, he removes the chicken in a cloud of steam and tells me that it is important to not scald the bird to long or the skin will peel off. He shakes the bird and dips it once more. The heat loosens the feathers by contracting the skin. The bird is then laid on the cast iron drum and I am told to begin removing its feathers. I start in and notice it is quite an easy chore and to some extent pleasurable given the warmth on my now cold hands. He prepares the other bird and joins me at the drum. We pull feathers together as he notes it is easier to pull the feathers with feathers.



He finishes quickly as I continue to nit pick. He notes he does the rough dressing and that his wife will do the fine work inside. Meanwhile, he has taken the bird he had feathered and dips it in the hot water one last time before moving to another board sitting close by on a 50-gallon metal drum. He picks up the knife and makes a cut

at each of the chicken's leg joints. He then bends the leg backwards and breaks the lower portion away. I continue to pick as he throws the legs in the plastic pale that now contains the feathers as well. He now cuts the belly of the bird and sinks his hand deep into its chest cavity. A suction sound trails off. With the removal of his hands comes a mass of guts (heart, gizzard, liver, lungs and intestines). This material is laid aside. He quickly directs his attention to the other end of the bird.

With a short cut to remove the neck skin only, he proceeds to reveal the chicken's craw. This muscle, containing grit and grain, is methodically separated from the neck area by hand. Care is taken in order to contain its contents. The craw and all other interior matter is scraped off and dropped into the bucket of feet and feathers.

After this procedure, the carcass is lowered into another 5-gallon bucket filled with cold water. With that done he grabs the bird from my hands and asks me to grab the other two in the grass. I do so, and go ahead and prepare each of them by scalding and removing their feathers. We've now established an assembly line. Upon completion, all four birds are placed in the bucket of cold water. IñRes grabs the hose and asks me to raise the handle of the spigot. He tips the bucket of cold water while holding the chickens back. He then rinses each chicken inside and out with the cold water from the hose in effort to rid it of any remaining body heat and makes a remark about ecoli resulting from the body heat not being removed quickly enough. He then puts the chicken back in the bucket and fills it a final time with cold water. The hose is then used to rinse the knife, the canister and all work surfaces. The hatchet remains buried against the horizon.

We proceed with chickens and empty canister toward the house. Once inside the canister is refilled and set to heat on the stove. IñCan begins the fine work immediately while discussing the process with my wife, Monica. My son, Jude, sits nearby on the counter top. She thoroughly cleans the interior cavity of the chicken and cuts the tail away. She then removes any remaining quills and passes the bird over the fire to rid it of any pinfeathers and places it into a freezer bag. IñRes and I drink coffee and look on. As she places the last bird in a large plastic Ziploc bag, she looks out the window above the kitchen sink and with a longing sigh notes, "there's color out there today."

The Transition

IñCan was born and raised in the suburbs of New Jersey. As the daughter of Danish Lutheran parents, she attended Grand View Collage in Des Moines, Iowa. While studying liberal arts, IñCan met IñRes, the son of a Jasper County farmer. In 1972 the two married and settled in a farmhouse across the road from the land that he had grown up on.

Over the next six years, IñCan developed a sincere interest in gardening. Having little knowledge relative to vegetable growth and processing, she sought out the company and wisdom of other (older) women in the area. Through these relationships, she learned the various aspects of gardening such as earth preparation, planting, tending, harvesting and processing. Typically, this information is handed down through the parents. However, her husband's mother had passed away in 1964.

In 1975, IñCan gave birth to their first daughter. In 1978, while pregnant with their second daughter, the family farm operation was given over to her husband. Thus they moved onto the farmstead late in the summer of 1978. That winter they dismantled the house they had lived in across the road and stored it components in the supply shed on his childhood farmstead.

After the birth of their second daughter, IñCan began tending an area of earth on the north side of the house. Over the next couple of years this area became a lush garden measuring 30 by 50 feet. This garden would produce enough vegetables to last throughout the winter months. A variety of vegetables were grown in the bed including green beans, tomatoes, spinach, sweet corn, potatoes, onions, cucumbers, carrots and radishes.

IñCan has also developed a small herb garden just outside the door to the basement and kitchen. This very small garden is host to parsley, garlic, dill, and thyme. The yield from this parcel is harvested on an as-needed basis while preparing meals or during the food preservation process.

Food Preservation

"It is a long awaited moment," IñCan notes regarding the harvest. Typically starting in mid-August, the green beans are separated from their host vine. Several weeks later, the tomatoes, too, are collected. And so on with the remainder. Although some of these items are prepared to eat the same day as harvest, a majority of the yield is preserved for distribution throughout the winter months.

The method of preservation presently used is pressure canning. IñCan recalls learning the principles of this method of food preservation through what was referred to as 'hot bath canning.' This method was less safe and twice as time consuming as the pressure method. It required the water bath boil for a full hour. The pressure

canning method is relatively safe given the system for heating was fully contained in a pressure cooker. This cooker only requires twenty minutes for full development.



Prior to canning, the vegetables are scrubbed and broken down into smaller pieces; green beans are snapped into approximately one-inch lengths and tomatoes are diced. This activity typically takes place on the porch over conversation. The food material is then placed in one quart canning jars. Each jar is filled with a particular vegetable or a vegetable purée. Vegetables with little naturally occurring juice such as green beans have water added in order to completely fill the jar. Each of the jars is then enclosed with a gasketed screw-top lid.

The following sequence of events outlines the actual method of preservation.

- Put two jars of water in pressure cooker
- Place seven one-quart jars with vegetables in canner
- Cover canner with pressure lid
- Set level on the automatic pressure control and place on valve
(Level varies depending on food type)
- Turn on heat and let pressure (steam) build
- The desired level has been reached when control jiggles
- Let control jiggle for ten minutes and remove heat
- Let sit as pressure dissipates
- Remove pressure control to check for steam
(If no steam escapes, it is safe to remove lid)
- Remove jars and set aside on a cooling rack
- Wait and listen for the jars lids to pop
(The pop sound indicates the jar has been thoroughly sealed)
- Let jars cool completely
- Store in dark cool place for future use

Upon completion of this sequence, the jars are allowed to cool and then stored in a dark cool place (generally the basement). The average shelf life of vegetables is a couple of years.

Other food items that are preserved in this manner are fruits and meats. IñCan typically cans peaches, pears, strawberries and apples bought from the market. As well, IñCan cans boiled chicken. Her husband butchers these chickens when the air turns cold in the fall and they no longer lay eggs.

The process of growing and preserving food is territorial for IñCan. “It is the time of year,” as she states proudly, “when the kitchen is all mine.” What matters for IñCan, having left the suburbs to live on the farm, is that she harvest that which she has tended on her own land. With a smirk, she concludes that the garden is naturally territorial to women emphasizing “there isn’t enough crisis in the garden for a man.”

A post-script is directed at me as she lays her hand over my notes to keep them from blowing away in the autumn breeze. She remarks, “We never sell our vegetables. If there is extra, we give it away. Food produced by one’s own hands should be shared.”

At the table

Supper is typically served around 7:00 PM. It generally lasts anywhere from 30-45 minutes. This affair is held in the dining room of the house, just off the kitchen. The room measures 12 by 16 feet and houses a table, side board and china hutch. The china hutch sits against the north wall. The side board is centered on the east wall between the door to the kitchen and the door to the upstairs attic. The south wall is composed of a window that looks out onto the front yard and the front door which opens out onto the porch. Three chairs that match the others at the table sit against a portion of the west wall beside the large opening to the living room. At the center of this room is

a 60 inch diameter table that has a 14 inch leaf inserted at its center running east/west. The table is surrounded by four matching wood chairs with woven wicker seats. Above, centered over the table, is a keyless socket and standard 60 watt A-lamp.

The table is made of dark stained oak and is supported by four hand carved legs. The top of the table is covered by two separate textiles. The bottom cloth is made of a densely woven cotton with frayed edges. This cloth is rectangular and serves simply as padding. The top cloth is tailored cotton and has a floral texture embedded within its gold thread work. It is round and is made of various pieces of textile. There are two other top cloths that belong to this household which are stored for special occasions. These are both used equally in lieu of the other. One was given to IñCan for her birthday by one of her daughters and is much more colorful than the other two. The other was handed down from IñCan's mother along with matching napkins. It is embroidered white on white linen. Typical cleaning methods employed for each of these cloths is to hand wash them in the sink and line dry them out back by the garden.

The table is prepared for supper by setting the salt and pepper shaker at the center along with a bowl of butter and loaf of bread on a cutting board. The bread is cut into one inch slices. These items are typically accompanied by a center piece; candle, flower, or other table decorations. Surrounding these items are the various condiments appropriate to the meal being served. In this case, a canister of shredded Parmesan cheese had been set out.

Each place setting consisted of a gold colored ceramic plate, a fork, a butter knife, a cloth napkin and a glass. The customary placement of each item, as specified by IñCan, is to have the fork setting to the left of the plate and the knife to the fork's left. As well, the napkin is placed beside the knife. The glass is placed directly above the plate. If a spoon is to be used, it is placed on the right side of the plate. This arrangement was established by IñCan's mother and its reasoning not known.

The food is then typically brought to the table and set toward the center of the table in various ceramic vessels. For this occasion, we were asked to grab a plate from the table and proceed to the kitchen stove and serve our selves. We each had spaghetti with a vegetable sauce containing tomatoes, onions, parsely, and peppers with fried ground beef. Each person returned to the table with a full plate of food.

Drink orders are taken by IñCan. Water, milk or coffee are brought to the table. Everyone is expected to serve their own libation prior to grace. IñRes will always sit on the east side of the table facing west while IñCan typically sits on the south side facing north. When the children were still at home, IñCan sat directly across IñRes while the two daughters sat between them on the north and south sides of the table.

With everyone present at the table, IñCan says grace. All others bow their heads and reflect. The prayer goes as follows:

Thank you Lord for this food, for life, and health and every good. Amen.

Once grace is complete, the food, if sitting on the table, is distributed by passing it around to each other to take a portion. In this case, the main course was already on each person's plate. The bread and butter is passed to the right as everyone begins to eat.

Each person at the table was expected to sit upright and be courteous toward all others present. No disgusting conversations were to be had while at the table. All persons were expected to have washed their hands prior to the meal. Any request during the meal were to be prefaced by the word 'please.'

Salt, pepper and Parmesan cheese were added to the meal at each persons individual discretion. As the eating began the sound of metal clanging and scraping ceramic was heard. The music of Van Morrison, which had been playing during the preparation of the meal, was left to play throughout the course of supper. Mealttime started with the lyric, '*here comes the night.*'

Present at the table on this occasion, were IñCan, IñRes, Monica Gillen (my wife), my two sons, Oliver and Jude and myself. My wife fed Jude while I watched over Oliver. We ate and began discussing grace. The following discussion ensued.

IñCan: *I had a friend I met at work and when we'd go out for lunch she would always bow her head for a couple minutes and didn't explain it or anything – I loved it.*

Pete: *This gets my attention; silent prayer in public places is louder than spoken.*

IñRes: *I just always respected them. You don't want to interrupt them. Nobody should. In fact I had a friend who used to say "I am quicker than a moment of silence." Chuckle.*

Silence falls over...cutlery continues to clang and tinker.

IñRes: *Boy it's been a couple of gloomy days hasn't it?*

IñCan: *Yes*

Monica: *I thought the sun was going to come out today*

IñCan: *It did a couple times! I talked to David yesterday and said it couldn't get any gloomier could it?*

Pete: *The weight of this air makes me a bit depressed*

IñCan: *I know!*

IñRes: *Some people with blood sugar actually eat a big meal and then don't get tired – Me, I don't get tired, I just pass out.*

Laughter is heard around the table...my son, Jude, looks on.

IñCan: *I'm serious, I'm going down.*

Just as soon as a pause develops, it is punctuated with a loud thud. With his spoon, Jude has called order in the court. My wife removes the spoon from his hand and offers him a sip of milk.

IñRes: *In Iceland where my daughter is stationed, this is typical weather. I was telling IñCan about that show called "The Amazing Race" – did you see that?*

Monica: *Yes – I thought about you guys and your trip.*

IñRes: *Did you really see that – that was our trip – water fall and everything.*

Monica: *Yab.*

IñCan: *I've never watched it!*

Monica: *That particular episode is going to be replayed tonight at 7:00.*

IñCan: *Really?*

Monica: *Yes.*

IñCan: *Do they always replay those?*

Monica: *I don't think so; I just saw it in the TV guide.*

IñCan brings dessert cookies to the table to share – we pass them around.

IñRes: *What is it?*

IñCan: *Sugar pecans with a Dutch chocolate center.*

Oliver: *Mmmmm – I'll have one.*

IñCan starts to sing along with Janice Joplin who is now playing in the background.

IñRes: Turning to my son Jude, who seems to be eating better now, *Cookies make it all different, don't it?*

IñCan continues singing.

Getting up from the table, IñRes asks IñCan if she is keeping up with the chicken dressing?

IñCan: *Oh yab.*

IñRes: *Are you ready for four more?*

IñCan: *Sure! I'll make coffee and you can have it later.*

IñRes' departure from the table signifies the end of the meal. IñCan begins scraping plates.

Summary

The continuity of cultural conditions specific to this particular group of people is dependant on ritual. These rituals have been handed down through ancestry and neighbor. They are based in and furthered by necessity and adversity. Their repetition can be easily misread as simply routine. As pointed out in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade writes:

This conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology. The crude product of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act.¹

The seasonal chores of chicken dressing and vegetable canning are preparatory aspects for sustaining the lives of those involved. As such, they are ritualistic affairs of labor.

The product and stories associated with these chores are brought to the table; to the culminating ritual referred to, by these people, as "supper." As caretakers of the land, IñCan and IñRes view themselves equally as guardians of the table. Their aspiration is to maintain the sacred mealtime and consequently continue the family from which they've come as well as that which they've born.

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) : 5.

NOTES

1. For IñRes and his wife, the word table is synonymous with family. It is symbolically more precious to them than the building that houses it.
2. I spent a total of three months making various visits to this farmstead as a scholar, a family friend and a boy returning to his own heritage.
3. Over these months, I became more and more accepted. I now am a student of theirs and am quite comfortable sitting with them on the porch, among those who know things and now freely share their wisdom. On my most recent visit, IñRes offered me a piece of paper bearing the definition of humility. [Perpetual quietness of heart. It is to have no trouble. It is never to be fretted or vexed, irritable or sore; to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised, it is to have a blessed home in myself where I can go in and shut the door and be at peace, as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and about is seeming trouble.] I accepted.

CULTURAL PERCEPTION: THROUGH ANOTHER'S EYES

If we attempt to consider *a people* through the eyes of another, to thereby accustom ourselves to a faction of our own cultural makeup, we tend to form a notion or idea different from our preconception. The possibility of comprehending the meanings established by a particular group of people within a larger civilization necessitates a means for suspending ones self. Properly distanced (in itself a process of evaluation), stereotypical conventions give way to a dialogical relationship between the self and *a people*.

Observation from a point of view other than ours offers new perspective. To peer through, and consider, the framed view of another enables us to trivialize our own, likely generalized, impression of the subject. This second generation look, in order that it reveals a novel instance, is dependant on our ability to weigh the orientation that engendered the originators insight.

The development of an alternate perception is made possible by reading constructed perspectives by others. The following research excerpt, *Ann Hamilton: Indexical Chambers*, is my reading of Ann Hamilton's cultural perspective based on multiple art installations she has assembled. As cultural attendant, Hamilton allows her viewers to find their own narrative in the story of others.

ANN HAMILTON: INDEXICAL CHAMBERS

How do we pay attention? How can the act of attention become a sound, a material, a thing, a space? How is silence also voice? ... How do we understand what we know but cannot name? ... How is an invisible made present? How do we make present what is absent? How is absence not emptiness? How is emptiness also fullness? ... How is language material? ... How do we inhabit what is lost? How is art a form of remembering or reminding? ... What is necessary?

– Ann Hamilton

Ann Hamilton began conducting an inquiry into self-identity through the amplification of silence amidst the North American “Me too” plague of the 1980’s. Her work began in 1984 with a photographic series titled *body object*. As subject of these images, Hamilton depicts herself with mundane objects. This series is indicative of an apparent preoccupation with the perception of the body.

Each of the studies within this series presents an awkward arrangement of the body and the object. In #5 *bushhead*, Hamilton stands faceless to the camera in simple dress with her head wrapped with a large thatch of coarse grass. In #3 *shoemouth*, the artist is photographed in profile with the rear portion of a shoe projecting from her mouth, as if the shoe had been inserted toe-first into her mouth. In *toothpick suit*, Hamilton portrays herself wearing a conventional men’s suit that was modified by the attachment of a thick pelt of black toothpicks. This series denotes the relationship of the body to its immediate context, a preface to her installation work that would follow.²

With the creation of an indefinite series of indexical chambers, Hamilton allows the public to participate in her personal preoccupation with the identification of self. Contributing aspects to the provocation of viewer engagement into the artist’s inquiry are material accumulations that offer evidence of rigor and daily ritual, the historical correlation and physical juxtaposition of referent materials to a specific site, and the presence of a material attendant. As witnesses to this work, we are implicated by the accumulation of artifacts and hence, acquiesce to our innate desire to comprehend the nature of being.

The research for this paper is a consideration of Hamilton’s installation art in terms of reader response. This exposition is a chronological analysis of four separate installations, only one of which was personally experienced. However, it is not comprehensive nor does it address Hamilton’s current work.

In the engagement of a specific environment, our experience as occupants begins with an impulse to scrutinize everything.²² This is particularly evident when the host space suggests a different kind of use or activity than is implied by its building enclosure. In the field of architecture, ‘building use’ is referred to as *program*. In this sense, the creative act of an architect is subject to prescribed activities for the building. Using the house for example, it is assumed that this building type will in some way offer certain programmatic provisions relative to shelter. Within this basic necessity are spaces for secondary needs such as food preparation, bathing, sleeping and entertainment.

In the case of installation art, program might be understood as a specific type of experience. As described by Joan Simon:

The term *installation* implies a theatrical arena, indoors or out, in which the audience is invited to be actively present, a charged environment that offers immersion in its visual and perceptual challenges.²

Building on Simon’s description, installation art typically presents a situation that is based on a set of needs as prescribed by the artist, not the audience (viewer).

When considering the work of Ann Hamilton, program tends to be site generated. The installation is developed based on intuitive notions conceived during or as a result of initial site visits. In an interview with Mary Katherine Coffey, Hamilton states:

My site visits have an enormous influence on the work. When you cross a threshold and your body is registering a zillion things, the temperature, and the smell. There is a plentitude of atmospheric information that has an enormous amount to do with how we feel and how we perceive what is going on there, how we register the words spoken, or the sounds heard. That is the stuff that goes into making a work.¹

¹ Ann Hamilton, *Ann Hamilton: Indexical Chambers*; interview by Peter Goché, 15 September 2003.

² Patricia P. Phillips, *Ann Hamilton: Present-Past 1984-1997*, Ineffable Dimensions: Passages of Syntax and scale, (Milan, Italy: Skira Editore S.p.A., 1998): 123.

²² John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Penquin Putnam., 1980), 58.

³ Joan Simon, *Ann Hamilton*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002): 12.

¹ Mary Katherine Coffey, “Histories that Haunt: A Conversation with Ann Hamilton,” *Art Journal*, (Fall 2001): 16.

These ideas then, become the subject of research and development. In the end, the material evidence of this conceptual endeavor is brought back to site for placement. The buildup of this often-mundane matter (tables, chairs, books, wax tapers, thread, charred timbers, handwritten notes, etc.) within the room's enclosure produces what Simon calls a socio-graph², a support system for the metaphysical occupation of its environment.

The ordinary quality of this type of material surround yields a deeply reflective engagement. The cultural references of the substance and its container result in an experience that is nostalgic by association. Although most of Hamilton's works may seem more like vigils that assist the viewer in maintaining a certain wakefulness, in the end they are what Victor Turner refers to as quiet celebrations of ordinary experience.³ These environments embody complex, multi-layered references and, thus are silent inventories of culture.

With an almost obsessive amount of produced material and collected substances, Hamilton exercises her "need for craft...of daily practice."⁴ Through this sort of rigorous abundance, the viewer is confronted with the ponderous burden of dealing with its significance. As John Dewey suggests, we are to comprehend its expression based on the relationship between direct sensuous matter and that which is incorporated with it because of our prior experiences.⁵ The material, its arrangement and associated ritual create situations that, to some extent, cause the viewer to consider their own daily needs. Simultaneously, each installation serves as a cultivator of calmness and stillness for the audience inasmuch as it does for the artist.

In 1989, Ann Hamilton collaborated with Kathryn Clark (an acquaintance from the University of California, Santa Barbara) on an installation for a group exhibition titled "Strange Attractors: Signs of Chaos" at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Participating artists were invited to explore visual structures and their relationships to chaos theory, the mathematical and scientific framework for understanding irregular or erratic fluctuations in the behaviors of natural systems. Hamilton and Clark chose to explore memory as such a system.¹

Their work, *palimpsest*, occupied a room measuring 12 by 22 by 14 feet. Its walls were completely covered with more than a thousand palimpsests, what the artists described as "palsized"² pieces of faded newsprint bearing the written memories of friends and acquaintances who were also asked to write transcriptions of excerpts from memoirs they or the artists had selected. The artists themselves participated in this material development. The room also contained a glass display case (at its center) containing two heads of cabbage along with a colony of snails. An oscillating fan was mounted in the upper corner just above the entryway. The floor was tiled with beeswax tablets similar in size to the pieces of newsprint on the walls. Prior to entering the room, visitors were asked to remove their shoes.

Upon entry, you immersed yourself into an almost familiar environment that was surprisingly tactile. The sensations included the smell of beeswax, the sounds of the oscillating fan and fluttering pieces of newsprint and the tackiness of the flooring on the bottoms of your feet. While the viewer read the palimpsest, the colony of snails nourished themselves with cabbage, presumably as a representation of the viewer digesting the memories of others. Although the 'signs of chaos' were not visibly evident in this work, perhaps they existed as a matter of the profoundly silent exchange between reader and writer. In this chamber, we are insulated from the world by the preoccupation of finding our story within the stories of others. It is a sanctuary that lends assistance to the manifestation of our own - yet to be written - memoirs.

In 1990, Ann Hamilton was invited to Charleston, South Carolina to participate in "Places with a Past," a citywide exhibition curated by Mary Jane Jacob. Conceived as part of the Spoleto Festival USA, eighteen artists were given the opportunity to identify a location within the city as their site of concentration. Their charge was to make temporary projects that would speak to the history of their host city.¹

During Hamilton's initial site survey, a six-week stay, she noted the selective memory process typical of a city's marketing strategy within the tourist industry. The following excerpt from her field notes defines her concern:

A history that is based more in the somatic experience of the body than in the accounting of events and facts, this piece was formed by the experience of living for six weeks in Charleston and by more than a year of readings in American labor history.²

² Simon, 15.

³ Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*, (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986): 34.

⁴ Coffey, 16.

⁵ Dewey, 99.

¹ Simon, 77.

² Simon, 81.

¹ Simon, 105.

² Simon, 105.

Specific to this point of interest, she cited indigo (plant and dye) given its role in the city's early plantation economy as the basis for the work.

In May of 1991, Hamilton returned to Charleston and had 14,000 pounds of used blue work clothes delivered to a warehouse at 45 Pinckney Street, named for Eliza Lucas Pinckney, who ran her father's plantation, and, in 1774, introduced indigo to the American colonies. As a secondary material for this project, Hamilton began researching books with blue covers at Charleston's second hand bookstores. She chose a series of military manuals – regulatory requirements for the establishment of legal boundaries between land and water.³

The installation, *indigo blue*, was centered in the warehouse space and consisted of a steel and wood platform measuring 17 by 24 feet. The work clothes were folded and loaded onto this stage. In the end, the accumulation stood 18 feet high.⁴ Just beyond this centerpiece was an attendant dressed in a pressed white shirt seated at a long market table. This figure's task was to remove all the text from the books by erasure using his or her saliva and a Pink Pearl eraser. In a loft space overlooking the mound of work clothes, Hamilton covered the entire back wall with sixty burlap sacks filled with soybeans – a more contemporary crop in the world economy.

In this case, the socio-graph might well be the audience given we occupy that space between the actual material itself and its architectural enclosure. As held by Susan Stewart, the distance between the artwork, the artist, and the audience is thereby collapsed...and there is reciprocity between individuals and works.¹ We the public, the workers, are the subject of *indigo blue*. As such, we are witnesses to this monumental pile of individual identities (bearing the name tags of its occupant) that makes up our collective American identity. Hushed by disbelief, we marvel at the obvious labor involved in the folding and staging of so many uniforms. Meanwhile, the intensive erasure of boundary regulation goes on – an act suggesting our loss of the American work ethic.

Typically deploying a limited number of materials, Hamilton applies them in inordinate abundance. This discretion reflects both domestic and industrial scales of production. Its effectiveness is dependant on both its correlation and juxtaposition to a specific site. As pointed out in John Dewey's book "Art as Experience:"

The material out of which a work of art is composed belongs to the common world rather than to the self, and yet there is self-expression in art because the self assimilates that material in a distinctive way to reissue it into the public world in a form that builds a new object. This new object may have as its consequence similar reconstructions, recreations, of old and common material on the part of those who perceive it, and thus in time come to be established as part of the acknowledged world – as 'universal'.²

With regard to reader response, this thought is of interest in relation to the work of Ann Hamilton.

Hamilton's medium incorporates historical research, video, photography, audio, text, paper, fabric, honey, horse hair, phone wire, bread dough and charcoal sticks to name a few. In a conversation with Dave Hickey, Hamilton states her desire for people to be "absorbed into a physical kind of mass."¹ One way of being "absorbed" is to be meditative, reflective, or introspective as when engrossed in a book. This "absorption" takes place as a result, I believe, of material arrangement relative to the space it occupies as well as material abundance.

Within her works there are intended conditions without which the experience of absorption cannot take place. These conditions typically have to do with the unusual manner in which the material accumulations are brought together relative to the surrounding architectural signifiers; entry, floor, ceiling, windows and walls. Through, what I refer to as *place setting*, Hamilton summons curiosity. As held by Edmund Burke:

By curiosity, I mean whatever desire we have for, or whatever pleasure we take in novelty. Some degree of novelty must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind; and curiosity blends itself more or less with all our passions.²

Hamilton arouses her audience's curiosity by arranging ordinary materials in non-traditional ways.

In 2001, Hamilton was invited by the Akira Ikeda Gallery in Japan to conduct another inquiry. The site for this work was a warehouse in the port city of Taura. Historically, this facility served as part of a torpedo-loading site during World War II. Currently the building lies between American and Japanese naval bases. It is a rather unassuming concrete warehouse with heavy, steel-studded doors.

³ Simon, 105.

⁴ Simon, 105.

¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984): 107.

² Simon, 107.

¹ Ann Hamilton and Sherri Geldon, *the body and the object*, (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996): 4 (In a conversation with Dave Hickey. Quoted in Hickey, "In the Shelter of the Word: Ann Hamilton's *tropos*," *Ann Hamilton, tropos* (New York: Dia Centers for the arts, 1995), p. 129)

² Edmund Burke, *The Sublime and Beautiful*, (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909): 29-30.

Beginning with her customary research, Hamilton delved into an archive of historical photographs she found in her hometown, Columbus, Ohio. This, coincidentally, is the birthplace of Paul Tibbets, pilot of the Enola Gay, who dropped the Hiroshima bomb. In so doing, she concluded:

No matter what picture, or image, horrific or otherwise, I looked at, I was struck again and again by the most obvious fact: that time can not be retrieved. The act of tracing the surface of the photo is a way to return time to an image.³

This work, *the picture is still*, (ill. 8) consists of a steel grid mounted to the ceiling from which 150,000 sticks of charcoal are suspended. This useful commodity, typically burnt as a fuel source for heating and cooking, is symbolic of a traditional Japan, a Japan as yet untouched by western culture.¹ These sticks (ill. 9) range in size from 9 inches to 16 inches long and vary in diameter from very thin to one inch. These pieces are suspended from the steel grid with a polyester thread.

Hamilton incorporated two identical videos that were projected down through the center of the space, along a trench, onto a pair of painted heavy steel doors. The video was made by slowly tracing a still photograph of a child's face with a miniature video camera. This video also explores sound and voice. With one projection, you hear Hamilton describing what she sees as she traces the image; such as "this is an ear, this is an eye..."² and simultaneously the other projection's sound is a digitally slowed recording of a child learning to whistle.

This former torpedo arsenal is 16 feet high and 49 feet by 89 feet in plan. Its trench is 2 feet deep and runs the entire length of the building.³ The cloud-like suspension of charcoal sticks creates a new ceiling plane 6 feet above entry level. Upon opening the access door, the visitor is confronted with this hovering-black mass. There is a pause before crossing the threshold as the visitor must optically adjust to the sudden light level change and as well, almost as a gesture of reverence, is forced to bend down in order to proceed inside. Although the occupant could actually stand erect, the almost negligible clearance presses upon his /her psyche in a manner that causes this awkward posture. Having crossed the entry-level space, the participant is (in a sense) beckoned to step down into the projection trench. From this stance, he or she can comfortably stand erect again and view the work in its entirety. In this position, the viewer is literally immersed in the physical mass of the installation. While confounded by the magnitude of effort involved in the actual act of suspending 150,000 sticks of charcoal, the occupant's silence is broken by the utterances of what the artist sees and the annoyance of the retarded whistling. Meanwhile, the observer's body is masked with the projected image of a child's face.

Throughout the 1990's, Hamilton's work was associated with the presence of an attendant, a person conducting a secular activity related to the material items. Initially Ann played this role, however, as a matter of logistics and personal commitment, she eventually turned this task over to her assistants. Remarkably on the role of the attendant, Hamilton states:

Often someone is in the work because a conversation or relationship has been established by actually putting it up. So the private making of the work continues into its public life.¹

As I see it, the role of the attendant is more critical when considering this work in terms of reader response. This figure affects the manner in which the viewer behaves and in fact reads the work. The attendant is a signifier of self for the viewer. The participant unconsciously identifies with this person and to some extent incorporates, through what Susan Stewart refers to as introjection², his or her characteristic role into their own psyche. With the recognition of the attendant's specific activity, making impressions in bread dough with their mouth, erasing text from a book as it's read, or simply sewing by hand, the viewer's focus returns to the material inventory. The viewer, by reciprocal examination, becomes aware of his/her personal presence and its coincidence with relation to the referent material and attendant.

One of the extraordinary effects of the attendant in Hamilton's work is his/her ability to link the viewer to the defined elements, and thereby making the audience and environment whole. Questions of the viewer's own role in life and circumstance are raised by this inclusion of a figure engrossed in an obsessive gesture. In turn, the viewer reacts in his or her own obsessive way by sniffing, touching and staring.

³ Simon, 246.

¹ Jungen Geiger, Michele Schons and Nanae Suzuki, *Ann Hamilton, the picture is still*, (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003): 7.

² Simon, 246.

³ Simon, 7.

¹ Simon, 22.

² Stewart, 107.

The Louver Gallery in New York's Soho district hosted a brief work by Hamilton from December 7 (the anniversary of the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor) to December 23, 1992. This installation, *malediction*, (ill. 11) recalls the history of place; the gallery occupies an industrial building formerly known as the R & K Bakery. Historically this building was neighbor to the rag trade – a thriving clothing business.¹

This work occupied two rooms within the gallery, an entry hall and its sanctuary. The entry hall contained a massive amount of wrung out wine-stained bed linens. These sheets were strewn across the entry hall floor. At the far end of the sanctuary, facing away from the viewer, was Ann Hamilton seated at a long refectory table. At the table to her left was a bowl of raw bread dough and, to her right was a woven basket used in the nineteenth century to deliver bodies to the morgue. The far wall was lined with a six-foot tall mound of clean linens. The opposite wall, behind Hamilton and the viewer upon entry, housed a concealed speaker system. In a soft voice, as if recounting to oneself, the readings of Walt Whitman's poems "Song of Myself" and "I Sing the Body Electric" are heard.

In a wonderfully repetitive activity the viewer bears witness to the pleasures of eating and the pain of disgust. As recounted by Hamilton,

I slowly stuffed a piece of dough into my mouth until it took form and impression of the mouth's hollow space. The dough containing the impression of this interior orifice was then placed in the bottom of the casket. The activity, repeated slowly, half-filled the basket over the course of two weeks.¹

When considering Whitman's words about the body and its spiritual connection to others in the context of this installation, the viewer is left standing in the dark between the entry hall, containing remnants suggestive of some sort of bloodshed, and the ritualistic production of oral castings. These indexical marks of the body represent the ephemeral nature of human existence and offer the viewer a correlative to the procreant urge of the world², our desire to make lasting impressions.

Ann Hamilton's various inquiries into self-identity are silent recognitions, for both her and her audience, of culture's experience and make-up. As Dewey writes:

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live. We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience.³

In the human desire to comprehend our relationship to culture is issued the simultaneous desire to belie its representational content and hence transcend it. To this end, Ann Hamilton's work offers our culture a series of referent chambers – collective catalogues of humankind that contain the indexical marks that are an impression of self.

¹ Anne Hamilton and Sherri Geldon, *the body and the object*, (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996): 4.

² Simon, 56.

³ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1980): 51.

³ Simon, 195.

PHENOMENA: AUTHENTICATE IT

phenomenon: a thing as it appears to and is constructed by the mind, as distinguished from noumenon, or thing-in-itself.²³

– *Kantianism*

Architecture is about constructing the event as much as it is about providing the shelter for its associated rituals. Our disciplinary chore is to mine the gap that exist between the logic of objects and that of its *figure*, between *a people* and their anticipated surroundings. The dimension of this divergence, as suggested by Immanuel Kant, is based purely on perception.

Although the intellect is capable of synthesizing experience in terms of noumena, it is by intuitive means that we experience such observed spatial and temporal relations. However, the initial formation of our perceptions is based on empirical grounds. Hence, the distinction of object and figure as things they are in themselves is the first step toward comprehending the nature of an objects relationship to its figure. Mainstream analysis within the discipline is fairly efficient regarding the collection of noumenological data as it relates to a group of peoples utility requirements. It tends to fail when surveying the behavior and ritualistic aspects of *a people*. Its short coming has little to do with technique and outcome. Rather, it is a result of neglect; an absence of desire to inform the design process. Analysis must go beyond quantifiable data. A qualitative intension toward collecting data holds the potential for revealing a more subjective set of logic from which to develop a design proposal.

The establishment of analytical methods of inquiry (the separating of any material or abstract entity into its constituent elements) is imperative in order to stabilize the disciplines worth in society. This query, in order that it be a contributing factor to the design process, must broaden ones comprehension of the constituent elements not only as a matter of how they relate to ones personal account of self, but how they chronicle the history of *a people's* ancestry.

Examining the gap, then, is a matter of synthesis; the (re)combining of the constituent elements, as understood based on analysis, of separate material or abstract entities into a single or unified whole. An examination of this sort, ultimately, leads to a major problematic which Martin Heidegger, like Kant, was concerned with – that of Being (ontology). However, Heidegger breaks from Kant's philosophy by expanding his interpretive enterprise of self to include the significance of historicity (the constitution of being of world-historical occurrences).²⁴ Heidegger refers to the customary interpretation of self as *Dasein*.

The architect, however, must be willing to accept this charge independent of their own historicity. This is not to say that the architectural solution should, or even that it could, evolve absent of the author's historicity. Consequently, an authentic projection will incorporate the conditional placement (or constitution of being of occurrences) of all those involved in its conception.

The bond between the figure and its object can only be understood through synthesis; a recombining of the constituent elements upon comprehending the ontological aspects present for both the figure and the object as constituted by the presence of both. As a result, our perception of *a people* matures. The authentication of our perceptions as architects is dependant on our will to develop the means by which we can accurately establish an informed interpretation of the nature of *a people's* being based on their historicity. The following research excerpts demonstrate two methods of authenticating our comprehension of the items of experience and their correlation.

²³ Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 17.

ABSTRACT RECOGNITIONS: 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 research excerpt, *ov course*, is an assessment of the traditional mealtime situation.

The following research excerpt, *ov course*, is a translation of the various research excerpts cited throughout this thesis. It is an assessment of the traditional mealtime situation. Its manifestation is based on the desire to represent the material culture of a particular ritual. It is the demonstration of the experiential nature of mealtime specific to the Midwest.

As an art installation, its content is temporary, incomplete and universal. It is an interpretation of a lived experience and thus provokes dialogue. The act of producing such a material survey serves as an agent for anticipating its architectural potential. It is intended to be used as a guide for the design process in conjunction with written forms of inquiry. Like ethnographic and biographic writing, its purpose is to unfold a cultural view of the world.

OV COURSE

Iowa Architect (Des Moines), “ov course” Issue No. 04:250



That individual experiences vary with respect to their context is well known among those engaged with the conception and enactment of works based in human occupation. This variation in response to environment derives from our interpretation of the items of experience (phenomena) and their material arrangement. Cross-culturally, perceptual readings of context correlate with reflective and anticipatory processes of understanding.

Öv course, an abstract documentary of these findings, is a buildup of mundane matter (a table, its cloth, cutlery, feed sacks, grocery bags, and burlap) associated with the mealtime ritual. The enclosure created by this inventory produces what Joan Simon calls a socio-graph, a support system for the metaphysical occupation of its environment. The ordinary quality of this type of material surround yields a deeply reflective engagement.

This work was hosted by the Karolyn Sherwood Gallery in Des Moines, Iowa. It contained a constructed abstraction of the mealtime setting. Essential to this place setting is the accompaniment and arrangement of various recordings of story, artifacts and sketches along a materialized line of measure laid out on the floor. The goal of this work was to develop a manner of procession or approach that allows for a hallucinatory type experience like that of our collective memory of mealtime.

The material culture occupied a gallery space measuring 16 by 40 feet. A staging area (8 by 24 feet) consisting of 3/16” thick steel floor plating defined an area of intimacy within the galleries confines in which to engage the table and its measure. This pickled plating had been cleaned of its protective grease in effort to reduce risk of slipping. As a result, the individual plates became recorders of foot traffic. This result was due to the moisture tracked in and the subsequent oxidation that would occur over the next 24 hours.

The measure, a rhythmical arrangement of 1/2”x1 1/2” steel bar stock set two feet on center, provided an extension of the table settings into the foreground upon entry. This component and its frequency spoke to the distribution of people at the table as well as food. Its development is based on the desire to bring about a processional approach to the table using the rhythm and sub-rhythm established by the measure and steel plating respectively.

The table hosted a party of five guests (Dolores Joan Goche, David A. Burns, Debra Marquart, Elizabeth Zimmerman and Oliver Gillen Goché). An audio recording represented the presence of each of these midwestern storytellers at the table. Each recording contained a story related to food production, food processing, or mealtime as a child. Each place setting hosted a discrete voice, yet all stories were heard simultaneously. The conclusion of the five stories was announced with a sequenced script; ‘*öv course, öv course, öv course.*’

While the underside of ‘the board’ supported a DVD player and five speakers, the top of ‘the board’ was concealed by a tablecloth, a salt and peppershaker and six place settings. Each place setting consisted of a plate (nickel-plated drain strainer) and a teaspoon. The handle of each spoon at the five live settings were cast up and to the left in reference to the desert spoon as cited by Emily Post in her manuals for etiquette. In each of these five cases, the spoon was placed upright with its bowl in the center of the plate, a signal that this person was still present and not finished with their meal. The spoon at the sixth place setting (anonymous) was turned face down with its handle to bottom right; an indication that this spot at the table had not been occupied.



A backdrop to the table and its measure had been developed using 36 by 108 inch pieces of burlap. The intent of this tapestry was to enhance the intimate quality of the table setting as a result of its inherent characteristics of tone, texture and aroma. This burlap, from Calcutta, has various uses. However, it is largely known as a material used for packaging large volumes of grain given the strength of its natural fiber.

Accompanying the table setting and its measure were six Kitchen Abstracts. Mounted on the right hand wall of the gallery space, each piece was centered on each of the steel plates that made up the staging. Each drawing consisted of a brown paper grocery sack, a chain stitch and serger needles. The sacks had been moistened, crushed and then pressed. The chain stitch, which navigated across the resulting wrinkles, was an effort to bring about a stronger awareness of the topographic nature of the paper. Equally, the piercing of each serger needle was established as a matter of composition and interpretation of the bags' surface qualities. On the whole, the abstract illustrates a type of binding similar to that of the stories that bind the lives of those that make up a particular culture. These stories, brought to table, are the extension of stories constructed while preparing the food and artifacts for its culminating ritual.

The cultural references emerging in this work result in an experience that is nostalgic. Through the buildup of mundane matter, the occupant is confronted with the ponderous burden of dealing with its significance. They are led to comprehend the nature of the work based on their prior mealtime experience and its relationship with the direct sensuous matter (the offering) of the installation.

ACCOUNT: PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL

Just as a silhouette, the shadow of our memory stands in sharp contrast to its background. As the sun passes over, so too does the shadow's distinction. And now, in the late afternoon, we are shown our experience, no longer a shadow. We depart day wondering about the circumstances which calendar such events. And so to, we speculate on its connection to ancient ritual – to night.

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 origins, evolution and eccentricities. The following research excerpt, *Table (tǔng)*, is a biomythographical juxtaposition of my personal account of mealtime ritual and its history as laid out by Margaret Visser in *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*. This research excerpt is an essay in historicity.

TABLE (TÜNG)
An Affair Conducted from Various Floors of the Mouth

“Bread,” in western European languages, often means food in general; in our tradition, bread is basic.¹

– Margaret Visser

f.1

Beyond the prayer, Oxbow scrapes his plate incessantly while distant eyes blather.

f.2

Companion means literally “a person with whom we share bread.”²

Dolores, Dolores Joan, Dolores Joan Markfort, Dolores Joan Goche, Mother, Mother Mom...rise!

f.3

The Aztec culture cared intensely how they ate people and also who they ate, when, and where. Every gesture of the sacrifice was laid down as ritual: architecture, costumes, sacred weapons, and utensils were carefully prescribed and prepared. The Aztec were terrified by the idea of human sacrifice carried out in chaotic disorder; it could mean darkness and destruction. Eating people was bedged about with ceremony and elaborate care; what they saw as neatness and propriety governed every gesture.¹

By butter and salt they would caress their bellies as the figurehead fell from grace – consumed by tension and ultimately grief, they’d give thanks, to almighty God, for you, their brothers and sisters.

f.4

*Historically, touching cooked food has always been a defilement to the highest-ranking men; the Maori accordingly invented a kind of fork in the sixteenth century, a pointed stick called a *tūrou*, with which an exceptionally pure man could convey food to his mouth.²*

She gently places the empty spoon upside down beneath the roof of his mouth with a nod and continues to run her fingers along the table edge. Remnant thoughts loom beneath her board as cutlery dangles in his mind.

f.5

Human beings, like animals, are extremely sensitive to small signs, to tiny noises in the night, to small discrepancies in the customary layout of their environment.³

The smell of pancakes pierces the darkness as hot syrup runs to the edge of the table and onto [his] pants as the flame dances about (not from a candle ‘ya dipshit’ – from an oil lamp) – bless us O’Lord and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen.

f.6

Ritual, being both expected behavior and correct, is a series of actions constantly repeated. Repetitiveness serves the meaning being expressed, for if the pattern is at least generally constant we can concentrate on the message embodied in the performance. Repetition soothes us, apparently, in and by itself. Human beings rejoice in the action of patterning. Rituals make difficult passages easier. Rituals are about lasting.⁴

With sister’s brood, he’d move with the sun out onto the countryside and scorn the earth’s volunteer growth, an incessant tending to one-half acre of potatoes and one-quarter acre of supplemental vegetables and fruits.

f.7

The Chinese Book of Rites, compiled in the first century A.D., warns “the ruin of states, the destruction of families, and the perishing of individuals are always preceded by their abandonment of the rules of propriety.”¹

¹ Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991): 2.

² Visser, 3.

¹ Visser, 11.

² Visser, 15.

³ Visser, 18.

⁴ Visser, 19.

¹ Visser, 23.

According to family lore, a rooster attacked Oxbow when he was three years old. He was knocked down and pecked on the forehead. His father, in an apparent symbolical act of protection, butchered the cock that evening and the family feasted on chicken soup.

f.8

Feasts, by means of structure and ritual, deliberately use the powerful connotations of food to recall origins and earlier times. Every meat meal began with a sacrifice, the slaughtering of an animal for dinner meat. The way in which sacrifice was performed was extremely important, being sacred ritual: the rules were like a solemnized code of table manners.²

By his brother's administration, their subject genuflects as a single shot rings out beneath autumn's bleakness. With lacerated throat, the carcass is suspended as blood pools below.

f.9

An African child had to become accustomed to using both hands when receiving anything. What more appropriate place to learn the essential gesture than when sharing a family meal? In many cultures, accepting in both hands means appreciation of the generosity of the donor: the idea that one hand would not be sufficient to hold the symbolic value of the gift.³

Oxbow crouches near the trash burner and mars the earth; an archeological search ensues. His mind soothed by the wind and dirt. Just beneath fertile plane lies a Zelco 18/8 spoon. With tenderness, the young boy unearths the metal conveying instrument, rubs it thoroughly with ash and binds it in burlap shreds.

f.10

An anonymous Victorian manners manual (1879) calls etiquette "the barrier which society draws around it self, a shield against the intrusions of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar."⁴

At sunset, he reappears and replaces the artifact and its dressing beneath grade with the head of the spoon pointed east. In the distance, his mother calls out.

Looking at his father sideways, Oxbow lowers his chin and requests another piece of bread. Off at the other corner of the table, his brothers nag at his kid sister for eating like a bird. He doesn't acknowledge his mother's note that it is about to rain.

f.11

In our own culture, children are taught to eat at an exceedingly culture-specific table. The dining table is not only a setting they will surely encounter, and need to have mastered, in life away from home; it is a constraining and controlling device, a place where children eat under the surveillance of adults.⁵

Oxbow tilts his head back to receive a goodbye kiss from his mother. He watches as she disappears into the rain shed with his father, her words, "mind your manners" pound on the windowpane. At the time, he understood his "manners" to be his older siblings. He stood at the glass for hours awaiting his mother's return.

f.12

People everywhere teach manners to their children by means of precepts, riddles, and traditional proverbs. Medieval manners books (at first in Latin, and later in Italian, French, German, and other vernacular tongues) had been jingles and rhyming verses, written to be easily memorized.⁶

A late afternoon reminder: "Oxbow, you have a sharp tongue" – he calmly exited the house and walked toward the sun.

f.13

Taste implies experience, direct acquaintance and familiarity with what is desirable. Manners, which include speech, bearing, and gesture, are to be learned at one's mother's knee. You must sit straight, no elbows on the table, no slouching or fidgeting while, of course, contriving to look relaxed and "natural." There are particular ways of handling knives, forks, and spoons.⁷

² Visser, 29.

³ Visser, 50.

⁴ Visser, 69.

⁵ Visser, 54.

⁶ Visser, 62.

⁷ Visser, 71.

Oxbow spent his evenings working by oil lamp at his “mother’s table.” One evening, he inadvertently marred the tabletop with a knife – this mark lived with him and his mother the rest of his childhood.

f.14

One definition of family, a definition with different degrees of significance in different cultures, is “those who eat together.” In our society the dining-room table traditionally stands in a room separate from both the kitchen and the fireplace. It has for centuries been the locus of the typical household’s daily meals, and represents, as no other piece of furniture can, the family as a whole.²

Oxbow, standing over his shadow, notes the advance of a car off in the distance while looking back toward the house.

f.15

Only food – a basic necessity that is an external object which becomes internal, and which then turns into the very substance of the host – could give rise to such a clear yet mysterious ritual.³

Initially, Oxbow understood his shadow simply as a mark made by the sun. Having wondered through the seclusion of summer’s doldrums, he came to rely on the notion that, other than fellow human engagement, the shadow was his only testimony for existence. This indexical mark was a featureless version of self that conformed to and revealed every nuance beneath his feet.

Oxbow spent long June-July days absent his mother’s knee. Crouching beside himself in the dirt, he’d recall the times he and his mother spent alone. Most notable were the times she’d set him down at the table and teach him to draw elephants. Not considering its meaning at the time, Oxbow’s favorite drawing was of an elephant with a chain-link harness tugging at a spherical shape that represented the world.

~

Her illustration remains. I have wondered if it was one of those silent lessons in my mother’s pedagogy. A metaphor for the burdens of this woman’s life weighs on my mind. The burden of having had fourteen children. Having married my father, the excommunicated heir of a farm cult, who spent most of his life being damned if he was going to be told what to do. The burden of spending her days alone doing household chores. Having had no real source of income. The burden of being left out on an acreage alongside a gravel road hardly recognized by the county. Having to shop for groceries in distant towns in order to conceal the use of food stamps to our own “community.” What about her belief in Jesus and his almighty assistance which rarely came about? Blessed are they who suffer in faith.

~

Oxbow, standing over his shadow, notes the advance of a car off in the distance while looking back toward the house with an intense longing for the next time he’d sit in the grace of his beloved mother mom.

Burying his knees in tall grass shoulders, Oxbow awaits the collapse of distance between him and the on-coming car. On approach, he buries his head in the lap of his shadow and mumbles segments of prayer in an effort to protect against gravel thrown by the vehicle’s pass. Just as the car crosses in front, he swings about and lies back against the grade. As the dust cloud stretches along the road it drifts over Oxbow’s desire and stagnates.

Overcome by the noxious ghost, Oxbow lets go of his body and gives way to the pleasures of reflection; the hallucinatory pleasure of his own acquaintance via the invasion’s black out. Dreams of life beyond the familial took shape. The hope of flesh melting in our pot bleeds into the retarded notion of being “someone.” The irony of being regarded a half-breed. The absurdity that “somebody was watching over.” The impression that “intelligence was in no way synonymous with poverty.” The resolution that “effort garners its own wage.” The longing.

As the dust settled, the boundaries of his existence emerged. Adorned with litter caught in its barb, the recital of a red-winged black bird ensues atop.

Oxbow returns to gravel. Every step greeted with the sound of rock rearranging itself. Accompanied by his shadow, far off to his right now, he watches as it grazes the bottom of the ditch running alongside him. Recalling the bird song, he gives an occasional shuffle step.

The optimism fades with the sun. The regularity of life begins its evening smart.

Just inside the porch door, Oxbow pauses to study the 22-gauge Remington rifle standing in the corner. He ascends the stairs into the kitchen. The sweet smell of onions and boiled potatoes frying in butter thickens the air. A pot of homemade pudding sets on the back of the stove. Standing over is Oxbow’s mother acknowledging his return with a smile.

² Visser, 80.

³ Visser, 87.

With a reciprocal smile, Oxbow proceeds to wash his hands and face in the adjacent toilet. This room, a “half-bath” by today’s standards, was the only private chamber in the house. He pondered the reflection of himself in the mirror briefly before drifting off into the imagery of the world as presented by National Geographic magazine and the Encyclopedia Britannica. Consumed by other books as well, the space offered sanctuary to most of his siblings.

Present at the table was his father, four sisters and a couple brothers. Oxbow placed himself at the table as his mother poured him a glass of water. Blessings, prescribed by his father’s notice to pray, were to be requested by all. These petitions were carried out by his father’s extreme reverence and his mother’s gentle grace, all the while the children’s eyes fussed about. Ending with the sign of the cross, his mother would gently tug the tablecloth in order to rid it of any wrinkles.

The food was passed from left to right. The ceremonial aspect of supper would diminish with the distribution of food and a mandate that everyone must eat a slice of tomato. Those who hadn’t been persuaded, by oral influence, to eat their portion in its entirety were subject to what came to be termed “an education” by Oxbow’s father. The lessons terrified all who were present as the teachers only aid was his hand - open for a female and closed for a male subject. Begging all to eat in peace, Oxbow’s mother resumes her effort to straighten the table linen. Oxbow trembles beneath her cloth.

The sun pauses on the horizon as if having noticed the darkness that had already crept into this house.

f.16

The words “host” and “guest” originally meant the same thing. They both derive from Indo-European ghostis, “stranger.” This is the origin of the Latin hostis, which meant “stranger” and therefore “enemy”; from it English derives the word “hostile.” The Old French, hôte used to mean both “host” and “guest,” as hôte still does (though the French increasingly call the guest an invité). What this single term refers to is not so much the individual people, the host and the guest, as the bond that unites them.¹

In September, the harvest was unearthed. Typically, each plant would yield anywhere from four to seven regular size potatoes and a handful of midgets. Holding the plant by its above-grade growth, Oxbow would shake the dirt clods from between. The fruit would then be separated from its host vine and thrown in the bushel basket. Once filled, the basket would be emptied into the truck bed and filled again. We didn’t count the number of bushels; we knew we needed approximately a full bed to sustain us through the winter months.

Precipitated by a forward lurch, Oxbow swings his legs over the tailgate of the three-quarter ton pickup box filled with potatoes and drops to the ground. Oxbow skips along as the truck is positioned near the old coal chute of the house. Several sets of hands and feet worked to unload the potatoes. Conveyed by gravity, the harvest would tumble into the basement cellar. Contained by a large wooden bin, their provision would be stored and consumed through the winter months.

f.17

The word “invite” appears to come from the Sanskrit in (“towards”) and vitas (“pleasant”). But there is a possibility that “invite” is related to Latin invitus, meaning “unwilling”; in- is more frequently a negative than a positive prefix.²

Somewhere near the end of normal growth, Oxbow and his sisters are ordered to rob the stocks of corn and vines of bean.

Beneath the stand of autumn’s canopies, they’d labor in attendance of their mother’s eight-quart pressure cooker. The repetitious acts of cutting, stemming and husking ensued as the cicadas accompanied with their daylong preparation song. Absorbed by the Magi cicada Septendecim Cadence, Oxbow gives all consciousness over to repetition and drifts toward the horizon.

Accepting the invitation of late afternoon creep, he pulls the blanket of humidity over his head and closes his eyes as Asiam bares herself before him. Arraigned by evenings whispers fall, he wanders off beyond the machine shed and inhales the remnant drag of his father’s cigarettes. The exhaust intoxicates as the sun crosses the plane of the earth’s equator.

f.18

In Ancient times Arabs and Jews would pour perfumed oil over the heads of arriving visitors. Jesus rebuked Simon the Pharisee at a dinner party when criticized for letting a prostitute approach him and then wash his bare feet with her tears. Simon had not welcomed him as a truly caring host should, had not kissed him when he came in, had not provided water for his feet, had not anointed his head with oil.¹

¹ Visser, 91.

² Visser, 104.

¹ Visser, 113.

Anointed by the blood of the chicken, Oxbow stands back as the headless hen dances about its lifeless companions. Snatching the next victim by its wings and then stretching its neck about a wood block by grasping its head and feet, he rears his head back as his brother drops the machete. The blade of autumn's table is set. The warmth of silence reigns over.

All remaining life is extinguished by the plunging of the birds into a five-gallon bucket of scalding hot water. The feathers are ripped from each corpse and placed on newspaper spread about the basement floor. Their bellies are slit open and guts removed, save the gizzard and heart. Meanwhile, preparations for piecing, cleaning and packaging are made by the females on the floor above. Just outside the cellar, the compressor on the deep freeze kicks in as the little red light on the lid burns.

¶.19

*A Roman banquet would include parasites. The word designating these people literally means "bread with," like the root of the term "companion." Parasites were clients or retainers, fed at the table of a rich man. (A "parasite" now means, in English, a person who lives off others or a creature that feeds on another animal, known as its "host.")*¹

Throughout the year the neighboring children, who lived about a quarter mile away, just across the field accompanied Oxbow and his family. In the inaugural blizzard of 1978, their sixteen year old arrived just after supper in stocking feet. He had walked across the field through the snowstorm out of apparent boredom. He now stood in the kitchen and watched as the table was cleared. His hunger was obvious as my mother sat him down and fed him. Professing to have stopped over to see Oxbow's older brothers, he ate. Oxbow and his younger sisters knew he had pulled this stunt simply to ogle at an older sister. She too would nourish his hunger, but not until the following summer.

Oxbow draws the curtains back from the aperture and watches as the bitter arrival of winter conceals the pane with frost. Submitting to its annual stay, he retreats beneath his electric blanket – the bare light bulb burns as a fly orbits.

¶.20

*An empty chair, with its empty place at the table, easily becomes an eerie, uncomfortable sight: it insistently calls to mind the person who ought to be sitting there. In Rembrandt's painting of the Supper at Emmaus in the Louvre, a glass upside down is on the table, signifying the despair of the disciples at Jesus's death. The moment portrayed in the picture is that of the bread being broken, to reveal that the unknown guest is really he.*²

Oxbow gazes at the reflections in his glass.

¶.21

*In the Middle Ages, special guests and the host of the banquet sat at the raised "high table," upon which stood a huge silver salt cellar, marking the place of the host or of an outstandingly important guest; the other people sat therefore "below the salt," and further away. Seventeenth and eighteenth century aristocrats in Europe, on the other hand, increasingly ate together in small groups, and would not bear of hierarchical seating.*¹

Buried in wind-driven snow, the road leading to their farmstead had disappeared. The road would lay impassable through the month of December. Oxbow spent Christmas day at the table playing cards with his parents while awaiting their company's arrival on foot.

¶.22

*The dinner bell in a monastery would declare what time it was not only to the monks but also to the people outside the monastery walls. The Victorians opted for the butler and his gong. We ourselves are supposed to have washed our hands before approaching the table. In medieval France the nobility, and they alone, were allowed a trumpet blast to announce dinner; this action was called corner l'eau, "to sound the horn for water" – the water being that used for washing hands in preparation for the meal.*²

¹ Visser, 105.

² Visser, 109.

¹ Visser, 110.

² Visser, 138.

Oxbow tucks his stocking feet and pant legs into bread bags and binds them with rubber bands prior to slipping on his boots. In silent procession his brother's administration crosses the threshold and load the toboggan with five-gallon buckets and harness the husky. Departing the darkness, they advance across the field toward morning.

The dead of winter had been present for weeks. Neither the electric-tape on the water main, the space heater in the well, nor the wood stove in the pump house had kept up for days. The water supply had simply stopped. Oxbow grabbed the pick ax leaning next to the well and hurried along behind his brothers.

Having arrived at the creek, Oxbow surrendered the weight of the pick to his older brother Chuck and stood by as his four brothers fitted their way through the ice. As the baling of water took place Oxbow slid down the bank to the creek bed and moved along the ice toward his brothers.

Daylight now nested in the old tree just beyond. It was a wonderful deciduous that had relaxed over the years and leaned out over the creek. Oxbow and his sisters spent many summer days in that tree watching the water flow by. And now, the world had come to a complete halt beneath his feet.

With eight buckets of water, the team climbed out of the stillness of the creek bed and marshaled the loaded down sled face first into the wind. The image of the stead grew bigger as January sifted through Oxbow's hood and hat.

A.23

European medieval ceremony required that in a noble house hand-washing should be followed by an elaborate, often extraordinarily lengthy tasting ritual, where the food for the lord or his high table was "assayed" by officers whose job it was to die if the food should turn out to be poisoned. Tasting was called "credence," because of the belief or confidence which the ritual was meant to instill; side tables at feasts were known as "credence" tables. (The term is still in use for the table standing near the altar in a church; and an Italian sideboard is known today as a credenza.)

Another initiatory rite before dinner is prayer, a blessing on the food and a thanksgiving (which is the meaning of the word "grace") for substance, life, and the health implied by being able to eat and enjoy. An ancient Christian custom accompanying grace was the host's marking with a cross the round bread-loaf that was about to be shared. Prayer may end the meal, as it commonly does in Jewish practice. There may be two prayers, strictly speaking a benedicite ("blessing") at the beginning and grace, a thanking, at the end. Each diner at an Arab meal rolls back his right sleeve with the prayer "Blismil'lab!" ("In God's name!") before beginning to eat, and says "Hamdallah!" ("Praise be o God!") at the end. ¹

The day belonged to the first awake – the making of pancake batter did too. Oxbow was keeper of these. His obsession with morning, early morning, wasn't necessarily understood. For him, it somehow correlated with the sun's rotation, our cycle. It had become a ritual, a repetitious act. That for one reason or another helped to bind his relationship with the rest of the world. A world he believed existed beyond his own but had not experienced. For Oxbow, this was a matter of connecting to others.

The preparation of the breakfast batter began with ridding the large metal mixing bowl of its popcorn residue from the night before. The old maids, having been picked through thoroughly, were emptied into the trash and the grease and salt rinsed clean. The ingredients for the batter were as follows:

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
2 eggs
2 cups milk
4 tablespoons vegetable oil

This was not written. It was basic knowledge, presumably handed down from his mother. It was years later when Oxbow learned that the making of pancake batter was actually prescribed in writing.

Enough batter was to be prepared in order that all would be able to make their own pancakes as they arose from night. Oxbow seasoned the skillet with government butter as he stirred the ingredients with a series of gentle folds followed by a vigorous whipping. Negotiating the open oven door, Oxbow returned to the stove top with the mix and eased a ladle full to the sizzling grease.

¹ Visser, 141.

As bubbles started to form atop the puddle of batter, he held his hands out over the plume of heat rising up out of the electric oven. His mother had turned on the oven sometime earlier in the morning in effort to warm the room, as the other room on this level of the house had grown cold over night. It was a manner of heating along with electric blankets that they couldn't afford; the utility company was mandated to continue service throughout the winter months by the state. Typically the service was terminated come summer as they couldn't come up with enough money to cover the bill that had been incurred. Apparently, and certainly as a matter of pitching in money while taking summer jobs, we managed to pay Osage Municipal Power up in full and renew our service just prior to the cutoff deadline for the next winter.

Just as the bubbles began to pop, Oxbow would flip the cake and inspect the coloration of the side revealed. Always hoping for a consistent golden-brown color, he was contented with the ones that were slightly burnt. Those that were pale were stomached. The remaining dough was left standing on the counter top with a dishtowel covering the bowl. The frying pan was set aside. Concurrently, a saucepan full with water had come to a boil. Oxbow added a cup of sugar and two tablespoons of maple extract. As he stirred the syrup, the sugar crystals dissolved and caused the water to thicken slightly. This too was set-aside at completion.

Oxbow sat alone at the table. Raising his right hand, he pressed the first knuckle of his index finger against his forehead, then his chest, his left shoulder, and his right shoulder followed by a quick brush with his left hand. With silent approach, he placed pieces of pancake on his tongue and concealed them with his lips as the stair began to creak from his sister's descent lead by his younger sister Jolene. His other four sisters followed in a congested sort of arrival. Simultaneously, his older brother Jeff arrives from below.

While feeding, Oxbow is amused by the ensuing arguments about who had been first. Just as the bowl of pancake batter is clutched by various pairs of hands and the argument switches to shouting, the staircase from above begins to creak once more. The match falls silent and the bowl left in Jolene's hands. Appearing from around the corner, Oxbow's mother approaches while buttoning up her nightgown. The silence is broken by the hiss of batter being ladled onto the overheated electric skillet.

Having finished his meal, Oxbow raised a glass of water to his lips and then became motionless. With piercing intent, he scanned the horizon's white until the yellow school bus appeared. Grabbing his coat and books, Oxbow exclaimed its approach. The chaos of his sibling's last minute arrival from night ensues as his mother says goodbye and with a calm economy takes another sip of her coffee.

J.24

The spoon is the safest, most comfortable member of the cutlery set. It is the easiest implement to use – babies start with spoons – and the one with the most versatility, which is the reason why its employment is constantly being restricted. Spoons can inspire affection as knives and forks cannot; they are unthreatening, nurturing objects. Superstitions about them show that they are subconsciously regarded as little persons. A spoon is a bowl with an arm attached, the earliest spoon being a cupped human hand.¹

Oxbow quietly removes a teaspoon from the kitchen drawer. With saliva and a soft cloth, he polishes the back of the spoon until the evening sky appears...Oxbow pulls the moon from the night and places it in the belfry.

¹ Visser, 195.

CONCLUSION

Remember: Architecture and that which it contains is the archeological measure of past civilizations. Our impression of such matter is dependent on the manners and techniques employed by those who excavate its surrounds. Its examination (identification/qualification) and re-presentation (communication) are critical to the formulation of our impression of whole civilizations.

An idiosyncratic architect occupies the space between *the figure* and its envelope. The crafting of such space is, as Tschumi suggests, dependent on the articulation and relationship of its constituting parts; its language, its composing materials and its individuals or societies. Yet, his question remains: how are these three terms articulated and how do they relate to each other within the field of contemporary practice?²⁵

In effort to answer this question, we must understand the critical nature of architecture as a vocation; that the products of our discipline are posits of *a peoples'* customs and values. These associations are drawn into an architecture by the inclusive effort and sincerity of all those party to its reason for becoming. As stated in "Work Life" by Tod Williams and Billie Tsein:

Architecture is never a single person's stroke of brilliance. It is at once much less daunting and much more difficult than that romantic notion. Vision is balanced with the desires and capabilities of many people. Like a piece of Chinese embroidery, the form of a design may be clear, but the richness of pattern comes from many stitches.²⁶

Although this reference to needlework is particular to the effort associated with making, it stands quite beautifully as a metaphor for the fabric of a civilization.

As individual designers, we must develop a method for synthesizing the criterion with which to construct an architecture that deepens the relationship between its language, composing materials, and individuals. To be comprehensive, this methodology should consider both the phenomena and indices of its subject. As well, it must give access to various perspectives by examination of its subject through cultural perceptions as portrayed through the eyes of another, personal and historical accounts relative to specific rituals embodied by the study group, and ethnographic analysis in effort to make scientific description. Finally, the methodology must incorporate a means by which the research and its evaluative outcome can be re-presented so as to communicate and foster communication between the architect and *a people*.

Each of these means, whether textual or visual, provides linguistic extension to our field of study. Language gives form to our experience, providing, through narrative, a sense of closure and providing, through abstraction, an illusion of transcendence.²⁷ It is a way of drawing out that which invokes a profound sense of *a people*. In his sketch, The Otterlo Circles, Aldo Van Eyck states:

Each culture stresses specific aspects – fundamental solutions – which are universally relevant but random, for various reasons, particular and random, are emphasized whilst others are repressed. Ultimately man suffers from these limitations, from what is overemphasized at the cost of what is omitted and often forgotten. Now, today, what is specific, what gives meaningful identity, should no longer depend on what is thus arbitrarily omitted or stressed, but on how these specific aspects are absorbed, adapted, and combined for the sake of more inclusive solution which can respond to the nature of the human person as a whole instead of in part.²⁸

The craft of articulating and juxtaposing the language, the composing materials and the identities of *a people* is founded in our lived experience. To do so as a practice would require the development and execution of a whole methodology based on biographic, historic, ethnographic and phenomenological means of interpretation. The role of the architect as cultural inclusionist is to make place settings which are ethno-specific by thoughtfully linking an environment to the story of *a people*.

²⁵ Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. MIT Press, 1996. p. 112.

²⁶ Tod Williams and Billie Tsein, *Work Life: Tod Williams Billie Tsein*, p. forward.

²⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 13.

²⁸ Aldo Van Eyck, *Aldo Van Eyck: Works, The Otterlo Circles* (Basel; Boston; Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1999). p. 12.

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