ON NEVER MISTAKING CULTURE FOR AN END
THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL AESTHETICS IN ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION

by

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As a title, *On Never Mistaking Culture For An End* has a meaning which is multivalent, one that is addressed in the beginning sections of this thesis in a discourse that acknowledges the influence of cultural aesthetics on the architectural conservator. Cultural aesthetics form the conservator’s presumptions, as well as the biases that guide their work. As conservators it would serve us well to embrace the ultimate subjectivity of our actions and to internalize the notion that cultural influences seep into every action we undertake. We are cultural agents. It may be understood that the conservator is a powerful interlocutor of meaning. The ultimate subjectivity of conservation as a practice is a great and good thing as long as this agency is acknowledged and is understood with a movement toward restraint and temperance, one that calls for an ever-present critique of judgment.

This acknowledgment of the agency of the conservator necessarily leads to the reevaluation of attitudes toward perceptual objects and historic architecture. With this reevaluation of cultural works a new awareness grows. Material aspects, which have long been suppressed under the influence of the cultural aesthetics formed within hygienic modernism and the industrial complex in the twentieth-century, may now be understood as being the self-same aspects that recount the conserved object’s passage through time. These aspects are what we may call temporal traces: signs of weathering, scars incurred by human violence, and the worn appearance accumulated with the quotidian happenings of human life. The recalibration of our understanding of material manifestations and transformations that appear
with the passage of time may lead ultimately to the alternative notion that cultural manifestations have a dynamic life – that they are never definite or limited in their presence or countenance – that they must never be understood as ends/termini of attitudes, beliefs, etc. – that theirs is a vital existence with an ever-changing form and character.

Companion to the assault by various expressions of modernization, other modernities, found in the fine arts world, lend counterpoint to the more widely held approach to temporal traces. The weathered, the scarred, and the worn are in parts of this world venerated, and thus we are offered an alternative means of conceptualization. We must hear out the stories of the past, as well as of contemporary movements, which venerate those material aspects destroyed in other quarters before passing final judgment. Given the full breadth of cultural exploits we may interpret these temporal traces differently – we may endeavor to engage the information and lessons in perception borne out of diverse and seemingly disparate manifestations of culture. Culture is a mysterious thing, its influence seeps quietly, many times undetected, between expressive forms – past, present, and future, penetrating those clumsy walls one may put up out of comfort or pretense. It is important to understand the relationship between ideas and cultural energies so that we may attempt to gauge the consequences of our actions. All cultural pursuits, especially architectural conservation, may gain from a measure of proportion in their practice, as well as an expansiveness of seeing.

Our lives, our point of view, are born of collage. Once the fragmentary assemblage that is the human mind is acknowledged we may begin to see how freely we may draw from the cultural experience of the world to audit our actions – to challenge our presumptions and our own biases. The ultimate goal in exploring the treatment of temporal traces in architectural conservation is a pervasive sense of grey – an acknowledgement of doubt, colored by curiosity
– which serves to provoke invention and discourse within conservation practice. And in a somewhat circular manner, we may ultimately acknowledge the generative quality of human perception.

*   *   *
The energies which I sought to express in these pages are an offering in recognition of the loving gifts I received from my mother who has always challenged me to see the beauty, the worth, and the goodness of the world around me. She has taught me to appreciate the exquisiteness of human endeavors – to feel their vivifying touch – and that, regardless of everything, to have an ornate and blessed life is to never mistake culture for an end.
Introduction
VIEW WITH A GRAIN OF SAND

We call it a grain of sand,

but it calls itself neither grain nor sand.

It does just fine without a name,

whether general, particular,

permanent, passing, incorrect, or apt.

Our glance, our touch, mean nothing to it.

It doesn’t feel itself seen and touched.

And that it fell on the windowsill

is only our experience, not its.

For it, it is no different from falling on anything else

with no assurance that it has finished falling

or that it is falling still.

The window has a wonderful view of a lake,

but the view doesn’t view itself.

It exists in this world

colorless, shapeless,

soundless, odorless, and painless.

The lake’s floor exits floorlessly,

and its shore exists shorelessly.

Its water feels itself neither wet nor dry
and its waves to themselves are neither singular or plural.
They splash deaf to their own noise
on pebbles neither large nor small.

And all this beneath a sky by nature skyless
in which the sun sets without setting at all
and hides without hiding behind an unminding cloud.
The wind ruffles it, its only reason being
that it blows.

A second passes.
A second second.
A third.
But they’re three seconds only for us.

Time has passed like a courier with urgent news.
But that’s just our simile.
The character is invented, his haste is make-believe,
his news inhuman.

- Wisława Szymborska  translated by Stanisław Barańczak

In being – within observing life, we unite form and character, and in this act we serve
as a powerful interlocutor of meaning. Without us, the shore exists shorelessly – the sky is
skyless.

The search for cognizance is an attempt to locate meaning – and bit-by-bit a command
of the world develops. The world is organized and rationalized by the imprinting we receive
from the society around us, we learn the customs of our place. We are enculturated. In this way our habits are influenced.

In order to make the world more manageable we construct hierarchies of attention – we give place and precedent to some things, and others we relegate to forgotten shadows.

On a dirt road lies a dead beetle.

Three little pairs of legs carefully folded on his belly.

Instead of death's chaos – neatness and order.

The horror of this sight is mitigated,
the range strictly local, from witchgrass to spearmint.

Sadness is not contagious.

The sky is blue.

For our peace of mind, their death seemingly shallower,
animals do not pass away, but simply die,
losing—we wish to believe—less of awareness and the world,
leaving—it seems to us—a stage less tragic.

Their humble little souls do not haunt our dreams,
they keep their distance, know their place.

So here lies the dead beetle on the road,
glistens unlamented when the sun hits.
A glance at him is as good as a thought:
he looks as though nothing important had befallen him.

What's important is valid supposedly for us.

For just our life, for just our death,
Perhaps when seen from above, we begin to appreciate the relativity of our being. We may begin to see greatness in all things, even those things we have suppressed and subjugated. And perhaps, in doing so, we might gain a measure of humility. Wislawa Szymborska attempted to see these over-looked aspects – she contemplated their meaning and their non-meaning. Whether plankton or a snowflake — when Wislawa Szymborska noticed something, she noticed it so well, her gaze reshaped the thing she saw, and gave it a dignity, a vividness. Perhaps she was aware of her powers to create, as well as those to see.

ii. I Do Not Know

>This is why I value that little phrase "I don't know" so highly. It's small, but it flies on mighty wings. It expands our lives to include the spaces within us as well as those outer expanses in which our tiny Earth hangs suspended. ¹

In her Nobel lecture Szymborska held up as the source of her inspiration the words "I do not know." Authentic poets, she argued, must keep repeating these words to themselves even as they grope toward makeshift answers in individual poems. This is what distinguishes them from the "torturers, dictators, fanatics, and demagogues struggling for power by way of a few loudly shouted slogans."

All sorts of torturers, dictators, fanatics, and demagogues.

...well, yes...they "know." They know, and whatever they know is enough for them once and for all. They don't want to find out about anything else, since that might diminish their arguments' force.

And any knowledge that doesn't lead to new questions quickly dies out; it fails to maintain the temperature required for sustaining life. In the most extreme cases, cases well known from ancient and modern history, it even poses a lethal threat to society.²

And it is precisely this doubt, which, in her view, unites artists with all the other "restless, questing spirits" whose miraculous works give rise to even more questions.

Granted, in daily speech, where we don't stop to consider every word, we all use phrases like "the ordinary world," "ordinary life," "the ordinary course of events"...

But in the language of poetry, where every word is weighed, nothing is usual or normal.

Not a single stone and not a single cloud above it. Not a single day and not a single night after it.

And above all, not a single existence, not anyone's existence in this world.³

In looking at the world in our midst, perhaps we all might gain from a mark of poetry in our seeing.

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² Szymborska, Wislawa. "Nobel Lecture".
iii. Architectural Conservation – *Seeing Our Cultural Patrimony*

In deciding what is to be protected we assign value. Those things that do not get protected are valued in a different way – those seeking to protect impact perception in words, in juxtapositions – in omissions and in thoughts – in the inequities of our distribution of attention. The agency of the conservator is thus demonstrated. A conservator who embodies the beliefs of his/her own mind, as well as the minds of those to which they have been exposed. They are part of a culture, and like every culture, it has its own ways of doing and seeing things.

In this way, architectural conservation is informed by cultural aesthetics, which change with every passing era, and thus we must acknowledge the fallacy of objectivity in any action and we must honor that the only truth we assert in conserving is one we have ourselves accepted or created.

The operation of cultural aesthetics within architectural conservation has greatly influenced interventions upon works of architecture. These ever changing aesthetics, which inform tastes, assumptions, and valorizations, have been applied to works of architecture in a manner that has compromised various aspects of the object while attempting to conserve other preferred aspects. These alterations and losses have provoked a need for an auditing of architectural conservation as a practice. We have been left to learn temperance from our past grievances and to construct a basis for self-audit. We can begin by contemplating our more recent past.
The cultural aesthetics formed within hygienic modernism and the mass-production of the industrial complex in the twentieth-century proved especially deleterious to the valorization within architectural conservation of what can be termed temporal traces – signs of weathering, scars incurred by human violence, and the worn appearance accumulated with the quotidian happenings of human life. Companion to this assault by various expressions of modernization, other modernities, found in the fine arts world, lend counterpoint to the more widely held approach to temporal traces. The weathered, the scarred, and the worn are in parts of this world venerated, and thus we are offered an alternative means of conceptualization.

The ultimate goal in exploring the treatment of temporal traces in architectural conservation is a pervasive sense of grey – neither black nor white – which serves to provoke invention and discourse within conservation practice. It is within the perpetually echoed, “I do not know,” that a persistent search for knowledge may be invigorated.

To begin an exploration of temporal traces – their treatment and the varying opinions concerning them, we must start by recalibrating our notions of time.
Section I. Locating A Temporal Image – Temporal Traces
Locating A Temporal Image – *Temporal Traces*

*It was February and the days had started to gain their vigor. The silver trees in the square had begun to bud, showing their promise.*

*I counted twelve bells. The noonday chimes ringing the selfsame song of centuries ago. Through the south-facing window of the room that overlooked the square, the sun was low in the sky, filtered through a screen of grey. Grey, like the Carrara mantel that had seen many fires. It had wanted to rain all morning.*

The passage of time is perhaps the most fundamental facet of human perception. Time and memory determine our perception of our own identity. Time, as a discernable, quantifiable concept, to be kept by every mantel clock and wristwatch, is a convenient conceit that serves to meter our lives in a seemingly tangible manner.

I. **Time – The Internal Construct**

Time is part of a measuring system used to sequence events, to compare the durations of occurrences and the intervals between them – to quantify rates of change. We construct time internally, by taking sequential experiences and noticing that they are different. Yes, we can look at a watch, but time is still the collation of the sequential images of looking at the watch.

We are born, we live, and we die. But ultimately, our being simply *is Becoming.*

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4 P. Harper
5 “From the fixed past to the tangible present to the undecided future, it feels as though time flows inextricably on. But that is an illusion.” Paul Davies, “The Mysterious Flow,” *Scientific American* 287, September, 2002.
She had not died there. A funeral is not a death, any more a baptism is a birth or marriage a union. All three are the clumsy devices, coming now too late, now too early, by which Society would register the quick motions of man.\textsuperscript{7}

Howard’s End – E.M. Forster

We operate with clumsy devices to name the substance of a life. They are attempts to make events tangible – maybe not even events, not even happenings, but that which simply is, or is Becoming.\textsuperscript{8}

The beginning is the end.

Fragment 70 – Heraclitus

Time cannot be directly sensed. To understand it, we must thus construct an internal gauge that begins to understand the relationship between events, between the lives of things and our own existence, and hence metaphors are employed.

II. The Tangible Metaphor

The question agonizing us as we attempt to find time’s own countenance concerns its invisibility – its immateriality, as well as, its unwavering influence upon the course of worldly events.

What does time mean? How does it manifest itself? Does it have a place? And if it does, where is it?\textsuperscript{9}

How can we describe what cannot be grasped directly through its own manifestations?\textsuperscript{10}


\textsuperscript{8} Theory of Becoming, Heraclitus. A greek philosopher of the late 6th century BCE, Heraclitus criticizes his predecessors and contemporaries for their failure to see the unity in experience. He claims to announce an everlasting Word (Logos) according to which all things are one, in some sense. Opposites are necessary for life, but they are unified in a system of balanced exchanges. The world itself consists of a law-like interchange of elements, symbolized by fire. Thus the world is not to be identified with any particular substance, but rather with an ongoing process governed by a law of change. See Barnes, Jonathan. The Presocratic Philosophers. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, vol. 1, ch. 4. Other modern works of ontology carry on this discussion.

Where can we read the passage of time?

On the face of our watches, where the minute hand shows how many cycles the second hand has already completed while the hour-hand fulfills the same task vis-à-vis the minute hand? Is that how we must read it, in numerical form, as something physically measurable? Or do we read it better in units of temporal transition?

Air dies giving birth
to fire. Fire dies
giving birth to air. Water,
thus, is born of dying
earth, and earth of water.

*Fragment 25 – Heraclitus*¹¹

Can we find time in the accumulation of light in the morning – awakening the shadows, mellowed during the night by the awakening of the moon?

By cosmic rule,
as day yields to night,
so winter summer,
war peace, plenty famine.
All things change.
Fire penetrates the lump
of myrrh, until joining
bodies die and rise again
in smoke called incense.

*Fragment 36 - Heraclitus*¹²

Most sequences of events in nature occur only in one temporal order and this gives meaning to “past” and “future.” Events in the world undeniably form a unidirectional

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¹⁰ Because the essence of time is to be in a “process of self-production. . .constituted time, the series of possible relations in terms of before and after, is not time itself.” Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 2002, 482.


¹² Heraclitus: *Fragments*. 25
sequence. In this way, time may be understood to have a direction. With this perceived direction – time may begin to take form in the accumulation of traces. Time exists in the world as metaphor. Our understanding of time is an impression of something absent. A way to give time, form and color, is to give time a subject. A common way to grasp time is to thus, cast it into space.

That Mighty Sculptor, Time

On the day a statue is finished, its life, in a certain sense begins. The first phase, in which is has been brought, by means of the sculptor’s efforts, out of a block of stone into human shape, is over, a second, phase, stretching across the course of centuries, through alterations of adoration, admiration, love, hatred, and indifference, and successive degrees of erosion and attrition, will bit by bit return to the state of uniform mineral mass out of which its sculptor had taken it.

We are. And we would simply be, if not for the collisions between systems – between energies, which in their interaction produce quantifiable traces – collisions that express the dynamism of systems. The Universe is energy, mass, space and – time mingled, and with the notion of cosmic inflation, a system which is continually expanding. In this entropic

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15 Spacetime. Einstein’s logical pursuit of the consequences of the universal constancy of the speed of light lead him to the conclusion that “Now” has no meaning in physics and that time does not pass or flow. all eternity is laid out in a four-dimensional spacetime. Hermann Minkowski described the radical change in our conception of space and time provoked by Einstein’s theory: “The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung up from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. Henceforth, space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind union of the two will preserve an independent reality.” Minkowski, Hermann, “Space and Time,” In: The Principle of Relativity. Calcutta: University Press, 1920. 70-88
universe, time appears to be found in the “between.” Time is most often noticeable after the fact, in the traces it leaves – in the weathered garden wall, the scarred redoubt, or the worn treads of well-used stairs in some obscure dwelling place. We see the traces of forces that operate as arbiters of time. In this way, time etches its particular traces on everything.

III. Temporal Traces - Weathered, Scarred, and Worn

*Time* is a draughtsman, strangely compelled to render the buildings of a metropolis like Paris as densely black as the engravings of Merian. When Andrew Malraux had the façades cleaned, it was like exposing a film negative to light – they had lost their *patina*.

*Patina*

A certain veneration of *patina* has in fact penetrated the aesthetic consciousness of our society, and in turn, it seems to be an appropriate shorthand for the manifestations of time. Even still, it is important to demonstrate a measure of caution when throwing around the term – caution to such a degree, that its general employment must be questioned. The most likely origin of the word patina is the old Italian word for *patena* used to refer to a shiny dark varnish applied to shoes.

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18 The origin of the work *patina*, which is Italian, is controversial; it first appeared in a text printed in 1681 in the Vocabolario toscano dell’Arte del Disegno by Filippo Baldinucci and, appearances to the contrary, has no obvious parallels in Latin. In Vocabolario it is mentioned as a term used by painters to indicate the dark tone that appears on paintings as an effect of time and that sometimes embellishes them. It is thus a natural phenomenon, which nonetheless, has an aesthetic effect. From Philippot, Paul. “The Idea of Patina,” *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. Ed. Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr. and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro. Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996. 366–371
Patina has traditionally been understood in association with metals, where it has been used to denote the accumulated surface condition acquired with oxidation or exposure with applied surface treatments, as with bronze works, many of which are chemically patinated.\footnote{Weil, Phoebe Dent. “A Review of the History and Practice of Patination,” for a discussion of the sifting tastes in surface finish on bronzes and also von Bode, Wilhelm. The Italian Bronze Statues of the Renaissance. London: H. Grevel and C., 1908.}

As an extension of this meaning, patina has been adopted by the decorative arts to include the broad range of process traces accumulated by an object throughout its life.

*Patina is everything that occurs to an object over the course of time. The nick in the leg of a table, a scratch on a table top, the loss of moisture in the paint, the crackling of a finish or a glaze in ceramics, the gentle wear patterns on the edge of a plate. All these things add up to create a softer look, subtle color changes, a personality. Patina is built from all of the effects, natural and synthetic, that make a true antique.*\footnote{Israel Sack was founder of Israel Sack Inc. Founded in 1905, the company was instrumental in elevating the commercial appeal of American antiques to a level once reserved for furniture of European origin. Sack, Albert. “Foreword,” Fine Points of American Furniture: Good, Better, Best. New York, NY: Schiffer, 2007. iv}

*Israel Sack*

In common parlance the mentioning of patina invokes images of chests-on-stand, ancestral piles, and threadbare elegance. It is easy to think of decorator and operator of the firm Colefax and Fowler – Nancy Lancaster, proprietress of the *Country House Look*, who draped vegetable dyed silks around the grounds of her home, Ditchley Park, so that they might catch the sun and mellow to shades appropriate to the timeworn interiors of the house.\footnote{Wood, Martin. Nancy Lancaster: English Country House Style. London: Frances Lincoln, 2005. 67} And it is easy to deride this perceived affectation. The simple fact is, however, that the harsh midday sun deteriorates vegetable, as well as, alkaline dyes. Instead of dismissing Lancaster’s preoccupation as a vapid pursuit, something society easily does with those employed in the decorative arts, it is important to understand this event as focused on understanding the subtleties of material aging.
Unfortunately, vegetable dyed silks in country house gardens are not the extent to which *patina* is observed in the decorative arts, for more often than not, the veneration of *patina* quickly slides into artifice – *patina kitsch.*

Patina has long been highly esteemed in the broadest sense and considered to be a part of the identity of the object. The prevailing significance of patina is as a symbol, as a sign that something is old, worthy of respect, and *genuine* – and as with all symbols, a general indication suffices to give the idea. Patina kitsch has developed where these symbolic values are “applied” to an object – hand-applied *craquelure*, a worn knob produced with a belt sander – tumbled “chateau” stone floors – and an “antique” brass doorknob which, when chipped, shows gleaming new base metal.

It is necessary to distance ourselves from the term *patina* as it has become a commodity within itself – which can be bought, sold in a bottle, and applied. *Patina* within this framework is an end unto itself, with little indication of the dynamic accumulation that is suggested by *genuine* manifestations. We must cloister the concept of *patina*, and return to an understanding of material expression and the processes responsible for this expression.

**Temporal Traces**

Within *Time*, spaces and materials are transformed by human beings and the cosmos, and over the years, they come to accept and integrate new forms.

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Only when consciously contemplating the surface phenomena around us is the unbelievable diversity in the appearance of objects apparent – and only then are we able to begin to understand the transformations of time.

In navigating the world, the immediate appearances of things are useful – we generally use them without fully identifying and assessing an object. By this material sense, we then know whether we are likely to incur pain in falling upon it, whether we will dirty our hands if we touch it, how heavy it might be if we were to try to lift it. Appearances are important.

We often pass verdicts on our fellow human beings based on the tiniest stains, on minute blemishes, on specks of dust. Entire industries are built on the inclination people have to repair the smallest deficiencies in surfaces of the most varied types: in clothing, furniture, cars, tableware, the human skin, et cetera.24

Here our perception is acute – even with a passing glance.

We use these surface deficiencies to identify and assess the objects around us. Our acuity in discerning these small indicators is potent. We are all profoundly knowledgeable about the signs of aging on the outer surfaces of things.

“Memory” in Architecture – Temporal Traces

Memory – what a strange thing it is! – does not record concrete duration, in the Bergsonian sense of the word. We are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of a thickness. The finest specimens of fossilized duration concretized as a result of long sojourn, are to be found in and through space. The unconscious abides. Memories are motionless, and more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.25

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We can tell when a book has been left out in the garden on a dewy night, or when the pile of a wool coat begins to bald. And we even know when a fellow human being shows the scars of some unfortunate trauma that has left them disfigured. The same is true with architecture.

. . . the pavilion in a shadowy corner of the garden, sheltered by the camellias and rhododendrons, its stones darkened by heavy rains and differential shade. . .

. . . that scene of human violence, the pock-marked façade – the wounded building that stood through the birth of a nation. . .

. . . the blurred funeral effigy on a cathedral floor, obscured by the passing faithful through years of devotion. . .

Weathered, Scarred, and Worn. Three ways of many, which give meaning and allow us to see those traces that persist – three ways to understand the built environment. Three ways that deserve our attention for they offer profound insight into the happenings of life. Weathered, Scarred, and Worn – these tangible metaphors for time, will be the three ways in which we explore the perception of temporal traces.

IV. Impressions of Architecture

We grow in an understanding of “natural” things – we build diaries to the way life manifests itself. We use this knowledge daily to find our way around people, places and things. Although we may not be aware of it, it is specifically the signs of natural aging and of wear that often provide us with significant information about the meaning of a space and about the ways and means in which it has been used – they let us know the extent to which it
is valued – or neglected – or abused. And in this way, we give name, color – form, to the very meaning of all things, and ultimately a meaning to architecture.

This simple phenomenon of the human intellect gives these temporal traces virtue and integrity in their existence. This seeing is a seeing of impressions – this must be made clear. For the only truth we have is an impression of truth, just as we only have an impression of time, an impression of life, and an impression of ourselves. In this way we must give our impressions reverence, but should never mistake them for an end.

Architectural Conservation - Impressions to Ideas, Ideas to Actions.

To operate within the world is to be propelled by ideas.

An idea implies — energy. An idea is not static, and it is, if anything, a cue, a suggestion of meaning. It is never fully formed, static, or sacrosanct. The danger with ideas, thoughts – impressions, occurs when they are enforced/ manifested with rigidity – immutable or unyielding or worse – dogmatism. To make wild generalizations, the more one considers, fewer actions are generally taken, which is the very nature of what to think /to consider suggests. It is folly to think impressions or thoughts equate truth – for what is truth?
Truth, in Architectural Conservation

When we speak about an “authentic” object, or about the “authentic” or “original” state of an architectural work, we are actually referring to an expected or preferred state of the object. Conservators often alter or delete the authentic imprints of history for the sake of “authenticity” – for the problem with those imprints (a marred surface, a missing fragment, a darkened varnish, etc.) is not that they are not authentic, but that we do not like them. They are repellant to our tastes and presumptions about the object. We prefer the object or space to exist in a different state. Architectural conservators thus modify reality, which is undoubtedly authentic, to suit their expectations, needs or preferences. It is easy to recall those generative works of Viollet-le-Duc or Fiske Kimball – or to make allusions to those anonymous workmen pressure-washing facades on Broadway. So authenticity, like time, becomes a conceit that aids in our belief that we are acting for some higher reason – truth, science, objectivity, etc. and not that we are simply implementing our own expectations or preferences.

Truth is always there within the object. The fact that we do not like that truth does not mean that it is not a truth. The fact that we do not like the state of a painting which is burnt does not mean that the true authentic state of that painting is not burnt. The fact that we do not like a statue which is broken does not mean that the true authentic state of the broken statue is not broken. So objects always exist in a true state.

Henceforth, what makes a restoration good or bad is not the fact that it abides by truth. Truth has nothing to do with conservation theory; we are not dealing with truth. We are dealing with preferences. We want an object to exist in a given state. And we tend to think that that preferred state is the true state of the object.²⁷

The only truth we know, is an impression of truth and the danger to the architectural conservator is to operate within the assumption of truth, for we work with materials that are both our own and not ours. We cannot claim to know all the truths that have been, or are, or will be – and in this way we must know a measure of restraint and avoid a course of action that does not attempt to take the various interpretations of “truth” into account. Of course, every action undertaken negates certain truths. As a concept, however, this is not a call to inactivity, this is a call to temperance – even in its most honest self it is a call to thought – to the acceptance of the navigation through the multiplicity of truths surrounding an intervention. This embrasure of multiple truths is a process/ a mechanism that will quiet any notions of magnanimity or definitive and infallible altruism. It will teach humility of the sobering kind – a quality not too much to be asked of those dealing with our cultural patrimony.

*Every human action gains in honour, in grace, in all true magnificence, by its regard to things that are to come. It is the far sight, the quiet and confident patience, that above all other attributes, separates man from man*. . .

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Section II – The Agency of the Conservator
The Agency of the Conservator

For a democracy of ideas to take hold, and for this consciousness to persist and expand, we must fully grasp the *agency of the conservator*, a conservator who works within a particular cultural aesthetic – one that colors their notion of the “truth of things.”

I. A Critique of Judgment 29: *The Construction of Heritage*

In deciding what is to be protected we assign value. Those things that do not get protected are valued in a different way – those seeking to protect impact perception in words, in juxtapositions – in omissions and in thought – in the inequities of our distribution of attention. Those engaging in preservation are therefore charged with the question of what we value and why. In the search for universal knowledge, many philosophies have been mired in their own presuppositions. Their illuminating principles have often turned out to be illusions, their eternal truths merely local knowledge, their moral imperatives the architecture of custom often disguising the interests of privilege behind the sanctimoniousness of ethical structures.

Anyone engaged in the conservation of works of architecture is familiar with scenes of scraping, buffing, smoothing – of the remediation of “graceless” aging. We must question this notion of the gracelessness of aging and challenge ourselves to see the integrity of other

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attitudes and differing perspectives. We may begin by challenging our understanding of the 

*significance* of works of architecture.

> She arranged my head, feet, hands, waist, and arms for me – . . . quite a lesson on monastic
elegance.

> For each state of life has its own.

*La Religieuse*, DIDEROT

II. *Approaching Perceptual Objects* – Rethinking Significance and the Fallacy of Objectivity

The notion of significance now guides much of this nation’s architectural conservation efforts, no matter how ambiguous the term. The concept of significance is especially dangerous when it is acknowledged that defining it according to certain qualities privileges those aspects above others, others within this hierarchy that could be lost because of preferential treatment – e.g. the prismatic white wall-surface privileged over the differential staining from decades of ambient pollution, etc.. The dilemma of delineating significance resides in the ambiguousness of its meaning. The notion of significance as an intrinsic characteristic has been presented for some time in both private and governmental conservation efforts – reflecting the influence of the Western philosophical tradition of empiricism-positivism (elements of empiricist-positivist thought have emerged in the laws and regulations pertaining to historic preservation).³⁰ In empiricist-positivist thought physical phenomena of the universe are believed to be characterized by inherent immutable qualities

that give rise to knowledge. Cultural properties are also seen as possessing or lacking an inherent, immutable quality – significance, that gives rise to our understanding of importance. Thus, significance in the empiricist-positivist view, will be present in a cultural property, rather than in the mind of the observer – which is clearly the thrust of the legislation and regulation currently in force. How can it be that the perception of meaning be the same for all? This viewpoint assumes that experiences are or can be “objective.” It assumes a theory-neutral observation language.

What is ultimately understood in discussing the empiricist-positivist underpinnings of modern conservation is that totally objective observation is a myth. In asserting that meaning is inherently fixed to the object of perception, it contradicts basic anthropological theory and experience. To anyone familiar with cross-cultural variation in symbol systems, it should be clear that meaning is assigned by the human mind, and in turn, meaning in the management of cultural resources is formed by conservators and their constituents.

Conservation throughout the twentieth century was marked by a belief in a theory-neutral observation language, a belief rooted in the immutable inherent truths manifested by an object. Two main branches of this lineage are described by Salvador Muñoz-Viñas in *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*: the aestheticist branch which Muñoz-Viñas centers around the work of Cesare Brandi, and the scientific branch, which gains its structure from scientific inquiry.

In 1963, Brandi published his *Teoria del restauro* in which he defended the relevance of a factor that was often neglected in scientific conservation: the artistic value of the object. According to this view, aesthetic values are of foremost importance, and they must necessarily

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be taken into account when making conservation decisions,

> Restoration is generally understood as any kind of intervention that permits a product of human activity to recover its function...

> Restoration is the methodological moment in which the work of art is appreciated in its material form and in its historical and aesthetic duality, with a view to transmitting it to the future.

> . . . to completely conserve all phases through which the work of art has passed must not contradict the aesthetic requirement.

> Once we accept the “unity of the whole” for a work of art, we must ask if this unity tries to reproduce the organic unity or the functional unity...

> The material form of the work must necessarily take precedence because it represents the very realm of the image’s manifestation; it ensures the transmission of the image to the future, and thus guarantees its perception within human consciousness.\(^\text{32}\)

In *Teoria del restauro*, Brandi speaks of unity and function, and aesthetic requirements. For Brandi, the conservation object has a message to be conveyed, one principally aesthetic in tone, where the accrued damage and patina, the materials of the object themselves, are secondary to the aesthetic concerns.

Brandi’s work is a response to what was then a growing attitude toward conservation: new scientific conservation. As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, conservation came to be contemplated as,

> Any action taken to the end of determining the nature or properties of materials in any kinds of cultural heritage or in their housing, handling, or treatment, any action taken to the end of understanding and controlling agencies of deterioration, and any action taken to the end of bettering the condition of such holdings.\(^\text{33}\)


In the twentieth century, conservation came to include not only actual conservation but also any action that leads to knowing the properties of materials and to understanding deterioration processes. Since producing knowledge and improving the understanding of physical phenomena have always been noble goals of science, this view warranted scientists a relevant place in the conservation scene.\textsuperscript{34} Sánchez-Hernampérez has made an interesting analysis on the evolution of conservation theory – concluding that the theoretical debate actually ended when scientific conservation came into play,

\textit{The theoretical debate began to subside in the first years of the twentieth century; today, technical research seems to have substituted it: techniques for loss compensation, original materials stability, suitability of treatments and reversibility; even attempts to substitute a merely material debate for a theoretical one have become very noticeable. In periodicals on conservation, philosophical questions have moved to a very secondary position, except for the attempts to establish codes of ethics, in most cases according to Boito’s views.}\textsuperscript{35}

Italian architect, Camillo Boito, in his \textit{Prima Carta del Restauro}, 1883, was the first to emphasize that the target state of a conservation process should not be dictated by personal tastes or by personal hypotheses over how a monument should have been but rather by objective, scientifically grounded facts. Boito’s notions became quite widespread and were somewhat distorted in the twentieth century. As science became what is described as a “universal religion” enjoying “an almost superstitious veneration,” no need to justify its use in any field seemed to be necessary, and thus, no theoretical reflection preceded or justified its

\textsuperscript{34} Muñoz-Viñas, Salvador. \textit{Contemporary Theory of Conservation}. Boston, Mass.: Elsevier-Butterwork-Heinemann, 2005. 79

use in conservation.\textsuperscript{36}

The perceived \textit{objectivity} of science is an attractive patron when justifying one’s work, but it is important to employ its powerful tools appropriately. Science may tell us the cause of discoloration – or the cause of material soiling, but it does not, however, tell us to remediate these signs of material aging. The decision to scour a statue or to remove the lichen from a garden wall resides not in the authority of science. This agency resides in needs and in expectations – it resides in people.

III. Relativism In Interpretation

In beginning to formulate an approach to conceptualizing and eventually intervening upon perceptual objects, and in particular historic objects, it is necessary to reflect on the subjective nature of the exercise. The notion of the \textit{point of view} must be taken into account.

In “Der moderne Denkmalkultus” – originally published in 1903, Austrian art historian Alois Riegl endeavored to achieve a full understanding of conservation – of conservation as a whole, without limiting himself to a single field of specialization. What is immediately interesting about the \textit{The Modern Cult of Monuments}\textsuperscript{37} is Riegl’s openness and directness when discussing the different intellectual perspectives that engage heritage conservation, mainly in regard to “monuments,” however loosely defined – whether a piece of paper or architecture.


His articulation of these different points of view and the juxtapositions he creates, and the conflicts he points out, are a necessary exercise, for they allude to the ultimate relativism that conservation embodies. Riegl’s discussion of age-value has a particularly saturated meaning for the interpretation and preservation of temporal traces. Riegl describes age-value as betraying itself at once in the monument’s dated appearance. The fact that it is apparent depends less on its unfashionable style, since this might be imitated and therefore recognized only by trained art historians, than on the fact that age-value lays claim to mass appeal.

*Its incompleteness, its lack of wholeness, its tendency to dissolve form and color, set the contrast between age-value and the characteristics of new and modern artifacts.* 

Here Riegl highlights a central problem in perception imbedded in contemporary architectural conservation. Riegl posits that within many Western circles, generally only new and whole things tend to be considered beautiful; the old, fragmentary, and faded are thought to be ugly. He then proceeds to discuss the collision of age-value and newness-value (still a hallmark of our contemporary cultural aesthetic) to point to the true function of those engaged within conservation. It is the notion that we must be adept at oscillating between points-of-view, and that preservation should incorporate a composite of many perspectives. And possibly, that there is something more at play in architectural conservation as a movement when we desire to make “new” old buildings, a preference which speaks to a larger social movement of our epoch. This social movement, this aesthetic fashion, is categorized as *relative art-value* by Riegl, and it is identical in his logic to the modern *kunstwollen* – the eminent art theory of the time – the contemporary taste. In this way, he demounts the authority of any one given age. For any conservator, sounding for the depth and integrity –

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39 Ibid., 31
the truthfulness – of their interventions, Riegl has exposed the underlying relativity of their actions, and in turn, calls for a re-centering of notions of authority.

IV. Cautionary Tales and Restraint

The Manifesto of *The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings*

Riegl was not the first – and he is surely not the last – to lend a measure of perspective to the exploits of architectural conservation. As we gain in our knowledge of the inherent subjectivity of conservation, the immediate consciousness provoked by the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings’ manifesto, drafted by William Morris in 1877, represents a call to contemplate – to audit action. Their prophetical tone is clear,

> . . .we think that if the present treatment of them [ancient buildings] be continued, our descendants will find them useless for study and chilling to enthusiasm. We think that those last fifty years of knowledge and attention have done more for their destruction than all the foregoing centuries of revolution, violence, and contempt.  

When we intervene – restore, conserve, etc., are we negatively affecting a structure? They are speaking to the violence of the best intentions – that what we may see as imperatives for the conservation of a structure, from a different point of view, represents the irreplaceable loss of another value system’s significant fabric. The concept that with certain restorations the “appearance of antiquity is taken away,” is also thought provoking. Do our cultural standards of cleanliness or our epoch’s own art-value make us indifferent to the preservation of the “appearance of antiquity”? One of SPAB’s most potent arguments resides in the position that any facet of a structure that an individual finds worthy enough to argue for its preservation

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should be preserved. Within the inherently conservative notions of their ideology, the members of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings engage subjectivity/relativism as a system of evaluation – in abstract, they appear somewhat democratic in their leanings.

*Of Language, and Of Life* - John Ruskin and James Beck

... it is in that golden stain of time, that we are to look for the real light, and colour, and preciousness of architecture. ...  

Historically, we have had a steady stream of prophetic – often times perceived as eccentric, or even zealous – admonishments of intense restoration and conservation regimens. John Ruskin, in the face of a rapidly industrializing England, argued for his “golden stain of time”, in which,

...we are to look for the real light, and colour, and preciousness of architecture; and it is not until a building has assumed this character, till it has been entrusted with the fame, and hallowed by the deeds of men, till its walls have been witnesses of suffering, and its pillars risen out of the shadows of death, that its existence, more lasting as it is than that of natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with even so much as these possess, of language and of life.  

Ruskin, along with the other founders of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings saw structures being manipulated physically according to contemporary tastes, which prompted them to respond and challenge these notions. More recently, in the work of art historian James Beck, who called out against the numerous “cleaning” campaigns being performed in post-war Europe, we see the manifestation of an important role within any

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42 Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture/The Lamp of Memory*, 126
cultural discourse – the counterpoint. His notorious criticism of the conservator who worked on the Ilaria del Carretto, a funeral effigy by Jacopo dalla Quercia in the cathedral in Lucca, entangled him in a libel case. When the Ilaria was cleaned in the early 1990’s, Beck was outraged by the results. “Ilaria looks as if she’d been washed with Spic’n’Span and polished with Johnson’s Wax,” he declared. If we probe deeper than these rather incendiary admonishments, it is possible to glean the substance of this conflict.

An effective starting point is the technical report that was submitted to the Superintendent of Pisa just before work on the Ilaria began. It was based on an on-site examination of the monument conducted toward the end of July 1989. Under the rubric, “the state of conservation,” the Ilaria was described as covered by a thin veil of dust and fats which had turned black in the depressed zones and in small abrasions and cracks. “The resulting strong blackening makes the contours appear stiffer and the volumes of the sculpture heavier.” This of course was largely an aesthetic observation. In fact the main thrust of the report on the appearance of the work did not seem to be scientific – yet the report adopts a tone and authority, in keeping with the rhetoric of modern restoration science. Impressions of the appearance of sculpture, objects – architecture,

...are by their very nature subjective and dependent on an individual’s beliefs and expectations. These in turn, are built upon the broader cultural environment of the age. What might have seemed harsh to Signor Caponi did not seem harsh to John Ruskin, nor to James Beck, and nor possibly to future generations whose taste will not necessarily be that of the 1980’s. 

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Beck’s most famous outcry, which saturates an understanding of his point of view, involved the cleaning campaign of the Sistine ceiling, with him remarking, “mere decision alone to carry on this restoration represented a cultural presumption, one which aims at dramatically altering the appearance of the ceiling as we have come to know it.” Not known for his diplomacy, and guilty of varying degrees of hyperbole, Beck’s inflammatory tone and trenchant positioning on cases has negatively impacted his legacy. It is important, however, to give Beck his due credit, his pointed indictment of the operation of “cultural presumptions” within conservation cuts through his acerbic and somewhat flippant rhetoric. Beck should be remembered for challenging the specious claims to truth that had taken hold of the conservation profession at this point, as well as, for his call for a probing awareness of the influences at work in the judgment of the conservator.

V. **Awareness – Sustainable Conservation**

*Our ancestors restored statues; we remove from them their false noses and prosthetic devices; our descendants will, in turn, no doubt do something else. Our present attitude represents both a gain and a loss…*

*The great lovers of antiquities restored out of piety. Out of piety, we undo what they did.*

*Of all the changes caused by time, none affects statues more than the shifts of taste in their admirers.*

The present attitude of architectural conservation does indeed represent “a gain and a loss.” Every attempt to conserve a piece of architecture is both generative, in that it accomplishes expectations and desires assigned to a structure, as well as, destructive, in that it

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46 Ibid. The Sistine Ceiling, 63-103


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compromises other possible uses, experiences and readings in doing so. Whether the
intervention is an “adaptive reuse” or a “restoration,” change is occurring, and even when
regarded as being weighted by the most altruistic of intentions, the expectations and
preferences of a given era – embodied by the conservator and their constituents – with all
their implied subjectivity, are being manifested.

The inversion of perceived benevolence is a sobering prospect. It calls for a greater
awareness in the practice of conservation – we can no longer assuage our doubts through the
conceit of objectivity – we can no longer rely on assumptions and cultural truisms in works of
conservation. We must even grasp that not intervening has a grace, and a dignity and a
worthiness, as great as any action. We must be sustainable in our actions, as Salvador Muñoz-
Viñas, in his Contemporary Theory of Conservation, so pointedly surmises,

\[
\text{... conservation should not limit the variety of messages that observers or scientists or}
\text{scholars can extract from a given object. Conservation should be sustainable in that it}
\text{should not make any reading impossible or, to be more practical, it should maintain as}
\text{many meanings of that single object as available as possible: it should not exhaust the}
\text{ability of an object to transmit different messages.}^{48}
\]

The path of sustainable conservation has no perfection, no stability, and no truth. It is
forever restless and incomplete. It will never know a complete form. It has, however,
an integrity that is owed to its underlying pursuit of knowledge – its attempt to see
multiplicity and difference, and in this regard it is a worthy lens through which to view
the works of humanity.

It is in this way, that we may begin to see the marks of human occupation and
the cosmos – the marks of time, on works of architecture in a different light. In doing
so, we see the work of architecture in a more complete manner.

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VI. Life, *As Seen Under Fluorescent Lights – A Cultural Aesthetic*

What is it to see the earthy pigments of Michelangelo after having seen the colors of Matisse? Or the ruddy brick townhouse next to the gleaming office tower?

The present casts its light upon what has passed and upon what is to come. Broadly speaking, it is a passage. In the present, what is *now* touches upon past traces and future projections. This *now,* is our cultural moment.

To recognize the formative influence of culture on aesthetic experience is more than to acknowledge the diverse guiding principles that lead to the various patterns of built landscape or the vastly different traditions in valued perceptual objects. It requires us to carry forward an empirical inquiry into the kinds and varieties of experiences associated in some way with aesthetic activities as these are understood most broadly. The phenomena of value perception exist and it is important to study their various cultural occurrences in order to consider their influence on architectural conservation, and in particular, their influence on the treatment of temporal traces. The idea of a cultural aesthetic can help guide such an inquiry.

The study of the manifestation of temporal traces in architecture, through its urge toward the comprehensive, accommodates diversity. It welcomes the neglected into study in order to acknowledge the reality of difference and conflict. In order to grasp our biases and

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assumptions – our expectations for historic buildings, it is necessary to explore the cultural moment that produced us – to analyze the lineage of various aspects of our seeing.
Works Referenced – Sections I & II

Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994. 9


Section III. Dialogues of Uncertainty
For the Biennale de Paris in 1975, Gordon Matta-Clark constructed a piece titled *Conical Intersect* by cutting a large cone-shaped hole through two townhouses dating from the 17th century in the market district known as Les Halles (Plate 1). The houses were to be demolished in order to construct the then-controversial *Centre Georges Pompidou*. The creation and destruction of this work is captured in a film made by Matta-Clark. We are given this text from the film’s opening:

*The site was at 27-29 rue Beaubourg using two buildings constructed for Mr. & Mrs. Bonville in 1690, which were among the cast to be demolished in a decade of Gaulist “renovation” of Les Halles. The project was focused towards the street, angled up with passersby as a silent “son-et-lumiere”/ and non-u-mentally carved through plaster and time to mark the skeletal steel backdrop of the soon-to-be Centre Beaubourg.*

As the film begins we see the north tower of *Notre Dame de Paris’s* west-work down a grey street in Les Halles. As the camera pans we see the steel skeleton of the new *Centre Georges Pompidou*, stark and white against its murky historied neighbors. Two of these ancient townhouses obscure the Northern elevation of the structure.

A small puncture slowly becomes a wide gapping hole in the newly exposed party wall of the townhouse. An architectural iconoclasm of sorts is occurring – workmen wearing pristine white helmets and clear plastic respirators performing the work, chipping away at a time worn, old house.

Their efforts producing newly projected curved forms, reshaping the spaces of the house – giving them a new geometry (Plate 2). A crane and the recently risen steel structure of the soon to be finished *Centre* loom in the background.

We witness the progressive carving of the house, the slow erosion of its protective outer shell. At first the work does not attract attention from those on the street, but as the aperture expands – people stop to view the spectacle of the house being defiled.

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A spectator snaps a photograph, another shields the sun from their eyes in order to get a clearer view. Our attention is given to their reactions to work we do not see.

Motorists lean out of the windows of their cars, gaped mouth.

We then are given a shot from the interior of the structure, to the street below, highlighting the passing automobile traffic (Plate 3).

The work has exposed the hollowness of the structure, its honeycomb of rooms and passages visible through the new work.

Then we see the Centre in its taut stance after the frayed imprecision of the slowly eroding structure. Sharp and regimented, it speaks to a new order (Plate 4).

The focused efforts of the workers are now overshadowed by the brute force of a newly introduced backhoe which has begun to tear through the opposite end of the structure.

Back in the circular void, white porcelain bathroom fixtures hang awkwardly from the walls – their implied privacy flaunted by their new exposure.

A short montage of distorted views follows – a jumbled collage in “unnatural” perspectives for a house (Plate 5).

Meanwhile, the backhoe continues to work – its erosion now meets that of the circular aperture, the smaller void being absorbed by the larger limitless void of the street and the sky.

Domestic wallpapers and the cheerful colors of inner rooms are now fully exposed to the grey city – their humiliation lasting only a moment. The rest of the old building falls, giving a full view of the new structure beyond.

For Gordon Matta-Clark, Conical Intersect, was a “silent” show above the street. In beginning to ground the narrative aspects of this work, the attention of the audience is always unerringly present, what is performed is performed for them. This performance also has a subject, two 17th century houses, threadbare and rather long in the tooth, to which events occur – first a puncturing and then a hollowing, and then total annihilation – all of which plays out down stage from the looming skeletal Centre Pompidou, too glaringly new and incomplete to have any active role that one might associate with the dynamism of the fully living. With all of the hammering and then the backhoe, we cannot conceive that this
performance was truly marked by silence. Perhaps the true “silence” of this event was the “silence” it sought to disrupt – the attention paid is not to silence, but to a studied artistic “death” to historic architecture. Matta-Clark’s own work may be seen as a counterpoint to a gravely silent death of anonymous undertaking that had in fact occurred to make way for the leggy steel of the Centre’s centipede. Of course the “Gaulist renovation” of Les Halles had not been silent, it was protested and published in numerous newspapers, and had been widely discussed. Matta-Clark, however, shows what actually was occurring, by presenting a self-conscious form of defilement, manipulation, undertaking – whatever you may call it.

Conical Intersect’s self-consciousness is made glaringly clear when juxtaposed with the conventional working of the backhoe. A cultural presumption is at work, to value the replacement of one order for another, the historic fabric of Les Halles for the new Centre Pompidou – and within a larger discussion, the conflicting dialogue between new and old monuments, the Centre Pompidou as our immediate backdrop, and the west-work of Notre Dame de Paris is the hazy distance. Matta-Clark was possibly issuing an awareness of events, of values manifest, that were subscribed to quietly or without great debate.² And in doing so, in brokering this awareness, he acknowledged that noble capacity of art. Conical Intersect serves, from one vantage point, to center awareness on various energies – the temporal traces, taking place to reform space. A reformation cultured by the inherent spatial, material, intellectual, and emotional disorientation of change – of, what we may clumsily call, modernity.

I. On or about December 1910

...on or about December, 1910, human character changed.

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I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.

Virginia Woolf

A change there was. Woolf was writing about the arrival of “Modernism” – its visual arts, its writing – its human behavior. Like scenery through the windows of a speeding motorcar, these changes had disoriented prewar Edwardian life, causing it to heave and merge like porridge. But what is the character of Woolf’s vague, formless change? Within the discussion of modernity, the experience of this change – which then begets modernism in cultural exploits – the more detailed “physical” signs and symptoms have often been enumerated and packed into summaries – of which, I have selected the following pregnant specimen, taken from Marshall Berman’s All That Is Solid Melts into Air,

The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms or corporate power and class struggle, immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurling them halfway across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly powerful national states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly trying to expand their political and economic rules, striving to gain control over their lives; finally bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. In the twentieth century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called “modernization.”

The visions and ideals nourished by these “world-historical processes,” Berman goes on, have “come to be loosely grouped together under the name of ‘modernism.’ This book is a study of

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the dialectics of modernization and modernism.” Though Berman does not go so far as to represent modernism as a “reflection theory” aesthetic, modernism (being a broad and seemingly dominant cultural trend) is for him a kind of mirror-image of social modernization. This point of view however, seems to weed out the complexity and implied chaos of the change occurring, making it too ordered and pragmatic – and perhaps too extraordinary within world historical processes.

Stripping The Altar

Pieter Saenredam’s seventeenth century paintings show medieval churches, usually Gothic, but sometimes late Romanesque, which had been stripped bare of their original decorations after the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation. Saenredam’s drawings of the Interior of St. Martin’s Cathedral, Utrecht and of the Interior of St. Bavo’s Church, Haarlem are typical of his work (Plates 6 & 7). Although Utrecht was the largest center of the remaining Catholic population of the mainly Calvinist United Provinces, all the old churches were retained by the Protestants. As a Catholic church the Cathedral had been highly decorated. Then, in the Dutch Revolt the church fell into Protestant hands, it was “cleaned” of Catholic influences. The altarpieces and statuary were removed, and the walls and ceiling were white washed. The Protestant reformation and the ensuing Catholic Counter-Reformation altered the practice of religion, of the arts – of thought and way of life. There was a wholesale “cleansing” of life and a systemic “iconoclasm” occurred. Within the scale of the day, the Reformation too was a black pit of chaos, for all things operate within a certain measure of

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proportion. The internal combustion engine of modernization, was perhaps, their *Ninety-Five Theses* – the modernist Villa Savoye, their whitewashed Cathedral of Utrecht (Plate 8). Though incredibly different, even within this “whitewashing” of architecture, there are irrefutable similarities within these events’ manifestations – within their influence on the human experience of life and its interaction with the energies of change.

*Our Change*

The elegance of Woolf’s vague, watery *change* persists. Perhaps modernity is just our own change – the change of our own time and own civilization, unique in its way but the same as all other changes – changes past, and those in the future. The scale might be different, but pain and suffering, happiness and joy are all relative. This point of view may help to ground – make more tangible, make more personal – this “grand event” we call modernization, helping us to see that our role in the matter is just as profound and active. It is important to acknowledge these changes to attempt to grasp them, so that we may attempt to gauge the consequences of our actions.

Our actions have consequences, both beautiful and ugly – and I should think that the experiences of this past century would demonstrate we have had our equal share of both. There is no doubt, however, that there is a hierarchy, a differential loudness of effect, in the currents that inform human experience. In our immediate past, as they have to a certain degree in every era, the technological advances of the past century have reformed civilization, and in turn, culture has both been created and changed to meet these new experiences.
II. Experience and Poverty

Part from your friends at the station
Enter the city in the morning with your coat buttoned up
Look for a room, and when your friend knocks:
Do not, o do not, open the door
But
Erase the traces.

. . .

See when you come to think of dying
That no gravestone stands and betrays where you lie
With a clear inscription to denounce you
And the year of your death to give you away.
Once again –

Erase the traces.

Poem I, Handbook for City-Dwellers, Bertolt Brecht - 1926

In his essay, Experience and Poverty, Walter Benjamin writes that, “experience has fallen in value, amid a generation, which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events of the world.” Those returning from the Great War were returning in silence – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience. There is nothing remarkable about this, Benjamin writes.

For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly; strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experience, by the ruling powers. A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape

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in which nothing was the same except clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny fragile human body.\footnote{Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty,” Translated by Rodney Livingstone. in Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1931-1934. Michael William Jennings, ed.. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. 732}

With this tremendous proliferation of technology, “a completely new poverty [had] descended on mankind.”\footnote{Ibid. 733} Benjamin goes on to discuss a new kind of barbarism, to which man had been reduced. Barbarism, perhaps, as a new form of innocence – a purity, which comes with the detachment from past culture by the experience of modern war, which had christened mankind anew, returning them to a zero point culturally. Heavily implied in Experience and Poverty, is the notion that humanity was to begin again, tabula rasa,\footnote{Ibid. 732} for history, past art and architecture – social custom, had been detached from the experience that it expressed, debased by the onslaught of modernization.


Benjamin’s account of human affairs as they were in the interwar period is representative of a paradigm newly forming within the arts and architecture, the expressions of which directly serve to accommodate the aesthetic manifestations of this new experience. He speaks of glass architecture – so very different from the cluttered late 19th-century bourgeois interior, in which the inhabitants’ traces are extensively cultivated, from curios and bric-a-brac to the impression of a head on the antimacassar of a plush parlor chair – Benjamin, like Brecht, calls for humanity to, “erase the traces.” This new architecture, was to
be of glass, for glass to Benjamin was a material “to which nothing can be affixed” – which was the enemy of secrets” – and which was also the “enemy of possession.” Humanity was to have rooms befitting its new condition – it was to have rooms in which it is hard to leave traces. To Benjamin, this new poverty of experience is not a yearning for new experience, but a longing for freedom from experience. For people, “who have grown tired of the endless complications of everyday living and to whom the purpose of existence seems to have been reduced to the most distant vanishing point on an endless horizon, it must come as a tremendous relief to find a way of life in which everything is solved in the simplest and most comfortable way. . .”

Brecht, Loos, Le Corbusier, Scheerbart, and Klee – had all, Benjamin asserts, taken leave of “the traditional image of humanity – ceremonious, noble, decked out with all the sacrificial offerings of the past.” The appropriate response to the poverty of experience was not to long for any renewal of experience or attempt to rejoin oneself to the great traditions of humanism and idealism. The order of the day was rather to collaborate in the work of destruction. Humanity was to begin from the beginning, make a fresh start, make do with little. One way they would do so was by attempting to eradicate the temporal traces that manifest in architecture.

11 “Experience and Poverty,” 734
12 Ibid. 735
13 Ibid. 733
15 Ibid. 735
III. Toward (A)n (New) Architecture

*A man of today, reading this book, may have the impression of something akin to a nightmare. Many of our most cherished ideas in regard to the “Englishman’s Castle” – the lichened tiled roof, the gabled house, – patina – are treated as toys to be discarded, and we are offered instead human warrens of sixty storeys, the concrete house hard and clean, fittings as coldly efficient as those of a ship’s cabin or of a motor-car, and the standardized products of mass production throughout.*

Frederick Etchells, *Introduction – Toward a New Architecture – 1931*

In his 1931 introduction to Le Corbusier’s 1924 work, *Vers une architecture* – incorrectly or interpretatively translated into English as, *Towards A New Architecture* – Frederick Etchells also captures the growth of a new aesthetic paradigm manifesting itself in the interwar period. Le Corbusier’s manifesto does not waste time on a catalogue raisonné of modern buildings – but rather, he has confined himself to the statement of some of the problems that confront the modern man, and so modern architecture. Le Corbusier’s discussions of the industrial aesthetic, with its mass-production and standardization, as well as his assertion of the aesthetics of hygiene and the new expectations for dwelling bred by the modern experience, all help to establish a consciousness of the vital currents of architectural modernism. What also comes to light in reading *Vers une architecture*, are the forces that had recently educated and would continue to educate the eyes of the public – eyes which would see architecture of the past, present, and future in a different manner.

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Our “age long detritus”

Architecture is one of the most urgent needs of man, for the house has always been the indispensable and first tool that he has forged for himself. . .

We throw the out-of-date tool on the scrap–heap: the carbine, the culverin, the growler and the old locomotive. This action is a manifestation of health, of moral health, of morale also; it is not right that we should produce bad things because of a bad tool; nor is it right that we should waste our energy, our health and our courage because of a bad tool; it must be thrown away and replaced.

and thus,

We are to be pitted for living in unworthy houses, since they ruin our health and our morale. It is our lot to have become sedentary creatures; our houses gnaw at us in our sluggishness, like a consumption. We shall soon need far too many sanatoriums. We are to be pitted. Our houses disgust us; we fly from them and frequent restaurants and night clubs; or we gather together in our houses gloomily and secretly like wretched animals; we are becoming demoralized. 17

These are the houses of the old order. Humanity has outgrown them. These time worn houses are outmoded, they are the “age long detritus” of civilization waiting to be carted off with the refuse of tradition. This tool for living – this “machine”, was to be reinvented given the new attitudes and habits of society, a society whose taste and expectations were changing due to the formidable activity of industry. Industry,

which is inevitably and constantly at the back of our minds; at every moment either directly, or through the medium of newspapers and reviews, we are presented with objects of an arresting novelty whose why and wherefore engrosses our minds, and fills us with delight and fear. All these objects of modern life create, in the long run, a modern state of mind. Bewilderment seizes us, then if we bring our eyes to bear on the old and rotting buildings that form our snail-shell, our habitation, which crush us in our daily contact with them – putrid and useless and unproductive. Everywhere can be seen machines which serve to produce something and produce it admirably, in a clean sort of way. The machine that we live in is an old coach of tuberculosis. There is no real link between our daily activities at the factory, the office or the bank, which are healthy, useful and productive, and our activities in the bosom of the family which are

17 Towards A New Architecture. 13-14
handicapped at every turn. The family is everywhere being killed and men’s minds
demoralized in servitude to anachronism.

Every man to-day realizes his need for sun, of warmth, of pure air and clean floors; he
has been taught to wear a shiny white collar, and women love fine white linen.
Man feels to-day that he must have intellectual diversion, relaxation for his body, and
the physical culture needed to recuperate him after the tension of muscle or brain which
his labour – “hard work” – brings. This mass of desires constitutes in fact a mass of
demands.

Now our social organization has nothing ready which can answer these needs.18

To Le Corbusier there reigned a great disagreement between the modern state of mind
and the stifling accumulation of age-long detritus. The “objects of modern life” were reshaping
ways of seeing materiality and form, the pristine, standardized elements of industrial life were
contributing to new expectations in living and dwelling – "Cleanliness is next to fordliness."19
There was rising in public life a desire for “a clean way of living.”20 Essentially, the problem
was one of adaptation, in which the realities of life were in question. Le Corbusier believes
society is filled with a violent desire for something new, which it may obtain or may not – and,
inevitably, for architecture, everything depends on the effort made and the attention paid to
these alarming symptoms.

Architecture or Revolution
Revolution can be avoided.21

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18 Towards A New Architecture, 276-278
21 Towards A New Architecture, 289
Le Corbusier’s most immediate answer to these new expectations for architecture, provided in *Vers une Architecture*, was his *The Manual of The Dwelling*, which speaks of light and air, of plumbing, of clean walls and floors and bare surfaces – rooms in which traces would be hard to leave – 

where it would be easy to, “erase the traces.”

*The Manual of The Dwelling*

*Demand a bathroom looking south, one of the largest rooms in the house or flat, the old-drawing room for instance. One wall to be entirely glazed, opening if possible on to a balcony for sun baths; the most up to date fittings with a shower-bath and gymnastic appliances.*

*An adjoining room to be a dressing-room in which you can dress and undress. Never undress in your bedroom. It is not a clean thing to do and makes the room horribly untidy. In this room demand fitments for your linen and clothing, not more than 5 feet in height, with drawers, hangers, etc.*

*Teach your children that a house is only habitable when it is full of light and air, and when the floors and walls are clear.*

*Conclusion. Every modern man has the mechanical sense. The feeling for mechanics exists and is justified by our daily activities. This feeling in regard to machinery is one of respect, gratitude and esteem.*

“Gratitude” and “esteem” toward the machine for they satiate our demand for “fresh air and clear light.” Up-to-date fittings, fitments for linens and clothing – glazed walls, plumbing, hot and cold water, electricity – were all made possible by machines and their

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progeny. Bathrooms would make us clean, where our old homes kept us dirty. Glazed walls, sharp and clear, so very different from those gloomy casements. These things would keep us happy, and more importantly, healthy. In many ways, the houses of humanity are an expression of a circumscribed world. To Le Corbusier, the steamship, the full manifestation of the powers of industry and the titanic efforts of civilization, was the first stage in the realization of a world organized around l’Esprit Nouveau.

Programme of l’Esprit Nouveau

No. 1. October 1920.

Nobody today can deny the aesthetic which is disengaging itself from the creation of modern industry. More and more buildings and machines are growing up, in which the proportions, the play of their masses and the materials used are of such a kind that many of them are real works of art, for they are based on “number,” that is to say order. Now, the specialized persons who make up the world of industry and business and who live, therefore, in this virile atmosphere where indubitably lovely works are created, will tell themselves that they are far removed from any aesthetic activity. They are wrong, for they are among the most active creators of contemporary aesthetics.

It is in general artistic production that the style of an epoch is found and not, as is too often supposed, in certain productions of an ornamental kind, mere superfluities which overload the system of thought which alone furnishes the elements of a style.

From a tract issued by L’Esprit Nouveau

We see this world manifest itself in the form of the sanitariums of Alto, and Hans Richter’s New Living. This new life was glass and porcelain – aluminum and steel, and hopefully without a spec of dust in sight. In invading the home, the products of industrial production would bring with them a new aesthetic character to life (Plate 9). Hygienic

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24 “A Great Epoch Is Beginning,” Towards A New Architecture, 89
modernism and the mass-produced aesthetic would replace Louis X and Napoleon Z, as well as the threadbare elegance and temporal accretions of the “Englishman’s Castle.”

A Great Epoch Is Beginning

A society marker by revolution was forming where you were to throw out your, “bergeres, your Louis XVI causeuses, bulging through their tapestry covers” – there would be no place for them in this new way of dwelling, for “A house is a machine for living-in. Bath, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion,” and in which, “An armchair is a machine for sitting in.”

Central to this reevaluation of architecture and aesthetics, is the discussion of materiality, for according to Le Corbusier,

The prime consequences of the industrial evolution in “building” show themselves in this first stage; the replacing of natural materials by artificial ones, of heterogeneous and doubtful materials by homogeneous and artificial ones (tried and proved in the laboratory) and by products of fixed composition. Natural materials, which are infinitely variable in composition, must be replaced by fixed ones.

To be of this “clean way of living,” to retain the efficiency and order, the standardization of the machine, the materials of architecture would need to retain their form, their prismatic qualities – the essential minimalism of the industrial aesthetic, and perhaps the nuanced notions of Purism. The formidable combination of Le Corbusier’s predilection for Purism, for

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25 Towards A New Architecture, 95
27 Towards A New Architecture, 232
he was one of two categorically Purist painters, and the mass-produced aesthetic would lead him to attempt to make all material traces negligible – one cannot help but to hear the echoes of Brecht and Benjamin in this new “nakedness”. Building *Towards An Architecture*, was an effort meant to repeal the accumulations of the past, within decoration, within possession, within the accumulation of material traces. The new vanguards would be hygiene and standardization, and the temporal traces manifest in architecture would thus be suppressed.

Mass-Production Houses

*A great epoch has begun.*

*There exists a new spirit.*

*Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on towards its destined end, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by the new spirit.*

*Economic law unavoidably governs our acts and our thoughts.*

*The problem of the house is a problem of the epoch. The equilibrium of society to-day depends upon it. Architecture has for its first duty, in this period of renewal, that of bringing about a revision of values, a revision of the constituent elements of the house.*

*Mass-production is based on analysis and experiment.*

*Industry on the grand scale must occupy itself with building and establish the elements of the house on a mass-production basis.*

*We must create the mass-production spirit.*

*The spirit of constructing mass-production houses.*

*The spirit of living in mass-production houses.*

*The spirit of conceiving mass-production houses.*

*If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the “House Machine,” the mass-production house, healthy (morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are still beautiful.*

*Beautiful also with the animation that the artist’s sensibility can add to severe and pure functioning elements.*

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30 “Mass Production Houses,” *Towards A New Architecture*, 228
To eliminate, “from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regards to the house” is perhaps one of Le Corbusier’s most influential maxims. It is representative of his own idiosyncratic musings, but also representative of the larger social and intellectual currents of the period. In his writing, we may hear echoed Siegfried Giedion’s *Mechanization*, the work of Adolf Behne and Paul Scheerbart’s *Glass Architecture* – the work of Walter Gropius and that of Ernst May, “Plumbers” by Adolf Loos, and even Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. We are able to use Le Corbusier as a litmus test in this way because he directly embraces, like all of the writers above, the dominant social forces of his period as his subject – he embraces contemporary technics, technics responsible for the lion’s share of civilization’s reformation. In turn, the new technics forming civilization were to influence every corner of cultural production, Le Corbusier’s and others. Le Corbusier serves an intercessor between the unified pair of “technics & civilization” and cultural realms – his own, and various manifestations of architectural modernism. Technics and civilization are married in an irrefutable way, culture’s association and union with technics, however, must be brokered.

IV. Technics and Civilization: Assimilation of The Machine

*She liked even less what awaited her at the entrance to the pueblo, where their guide had left them while he went inside for instructions. The dirt, to start with, the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies. Her face wrinkled up into a grimace of disgust. She held her handkerchief to her nose.*

"*But how can they live like this?* she broke out in a voice of indignant incredulity. *(It wasn’t possible.)*"

*Bernard shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "Anyhow," he said, "they’ve been doing it for the last five or six thousand years. So I suppose they must be used to it by now."

"*But cleanliness is next to fordliness,* she insisted."
"Yes, and civilization is sterilization," Bernard went on, concluding on a tone of irony the second hypnopædic lesson in elementary hygiene. "But these people have never heard of Our Ford, and they aren’t civilized. So there’s no point in …"

"Oh!" She gripped his arm. "Look."

An almost naked Indian was very slowly climbing down the ladder from the first-floor terrace of a neighboring house—rung after rung, with the tremulous caution of extreme old age. His face was profoundly wrinkled and black, like a mask of obsidian. The toothless mouth had fallen in. At the corners of the lips, and on each side of the chin, a few long bristles gleamed almost white against the dark skin. The long unbraided hair hung down in grey wisps round his face. His body was bent and emaciated to the bone, almost fleshless. Very slowly he came down, pausing at each rung before he ventured another step.

"What’s the matter with him?" whispered Lenina. Her eyes were wide with horror and amazement.

"He’s old, that’s all," Bernard answered as carelessly as he could. He too was startled; but he made an effort to seem unmoved.

"Old?" she repeated. "But the Director’s old; lots of people are old; they’re not like that."

"That’s because we don’t allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions artificially balanced at a youthful equilibrium. We don’t permit their magnesium-calcium ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them transfusion of young blood. We keep their metabolism permanently stimulated. So, of course, they don’t look like that. Partly," he added, "because most of them die long before they reach this old creature’s age. Youth almost unimpaired till sixty, and then, crack! the end."

But Lenina was not listening. She was watching the old man. Slowly, slowly he came down. His feet touched the ground. He turned. In their deep-sunken orbits his eyes were still extraordinarily bright. They looked at her for a long moment expressionlessly, without surprise, as though she had not been there at all. Then slowly, with bent back the old man hobbled past them and was gone.

"Brave New World, Aldous Huxley - 1931"

In order to grasp the influence of 20th century technics on cultural aesthetics, we must attempt to understand with what type of eyes we see. It is possible to say that the motorcar

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that has transported us to a scenic belvedere, has in fact, colored our impression of the scene itself, just as education and experience also color our perceptions. Mass-production, the industrial aesthetic – hygienic modernism, they all, by virtue of their proliferation in the civilization of the 20th century, may be said to have helped to form the cultural aesthetics of our epoch. It must be understood that aesthetic consumption is multivalent and finely woven with complex associations, and thus we must never underestimate the acuteness with which our intellect combines information in the world.

In *Technic and Civilization*, and in particular, his chapter entitled, “Assimilation of the Machine,” Lewis Mumford endeavors to delineate the relationship between the seemingly disparate notions of cultural aesthetics and the technics of civilization. One of Mumford’s most insightful critiques handles expectations – the new expectations for material “fitness” and surface regularity, borne out of the industrial aesthetic and the characteristics of mass-produced goods. In discussing this perceived *newness* value of the standardized industrial product, he attempts to delineate the complex unity of technics and the aesthetics of cultural production,

*The machine devaluates rarity: instead of producing a single unique object, it is capable of producing a million others just as good as the master model from which the rest are made. The machine devalues age: for age is another token of rarity, and the machine, by placing its emphasis upon fitness and adaptation, prides itself on the brand-new rather than on the antique: instead of feeling comfortably authentic in the midst of rust, dust, cobwebs, shaky parts, it prides itself on the opposite qualities – slickness, smoothness, gloss, cleanliness.*

*To say all this is merely to emphasize that the modern technics, by its own essential nature, imposes a great purification of esthetics: that is it strips off from the object all*

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barnacles of association, all the sentimental and pecuniary values which have nothing whatever to do with esthetic form, and it focuses attention upon the object itself.33

The new goods of industry and technology have bred new expectations within society. If we take this thinking a step further, the new, the regularized, the pristine – the machine efficient and the machine “perfect,” are the tenets of a new Hellenistic perfection – one that slides cleaning between the human form, objects, thoughts, and architecture.34 Some of those living in the hitherto untouched world of tradition and *age-long detritus*, would soon look at their surroundings in a different light. And some, where they were able to, would replace, and elsewhere they would make “new” the old – the new/old city, the new/old house – taming the surfaces of aged things, aged buildings, so they might not fade against the shine of a polished fender of a *Delage*. Society would no longer feel “comfortably authentic” in the presence of the material traces of time – the *style* of the epoch had asserted other standards.

Mumford argues that our tastes will refine – will develop, our sensibilities will become “acute,” and within the machine age, “a hair’s breadth, a speck of dirt, a faint wave in a surface will distress us – and pleasure will derive from delicacies of adaption to which most of us are now indifferent.”35 Yet still, one is left to ask, with these new instruments, this new environment, these new perceptions and sensations and standards, this new daily routine, these new aesthetics – what sort of person comes out of “modern” technics?

... this esthetic refinement spreads out into life: it appears in surgery and dentistry as well as in the design of houses and bridges and high-tension power lines. The direct effect of these techniques upon designers, workers, manipulators cannot be over-estimated. Whatever the tags, archaicisms, verbalisms, emotional and intellectual

33 “Assimilation of the Machine,” 353
35 “Assimilation of the Machine,” 358
mischiefs of our regnant system of education, the machine itself as a constant educator cannot be neglected.  

For Mumford, the new archetype of civilized society is the objective personality — “The technique of creating a neutral world of fact as distinguished from the raw data of immediate experience was the great general contribution of modern analytic science.”  

The new order of the scientific method and the “machine technique” has created a new social character, one marked by a new objectivity. This objective personality will assimilate the machine into human existence. This point of development in human civilization Mumford believes is necessary.  

It is helpful to approach Technics and Civilization as Mumford’s sober navigation of the energies confronting society in the period of his writing. Technics and Civilization was published in 1934. The assimilation of the technics of the first half of the twentieth century was the great effort of society in the interwar period. Society was forced to broker this change, and Mumford gives a grave account of the necessary process that was to occur. Grave, for though adopting a neutral observation language of the facts that be, he desperately projects beyond the confines of the matters at hand, and suggest that society was progressing toward a change that only a christening by the fire of technics might beget,  

Our capacity to go beyond the machine rests upon our power to assimilate the machine. Until we have absorbed the lessons of objectivity, impersonality, neutrality, the lessons of the mechanical realm, we cannot go further in our development toward the more richly organic, the more profoundly human.  

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36 “Assimilation of the Machine,” 359

37 Ibid. 361

38 Ibid. 363
We must absorb the lessons of objectivity – the steely world of the machine, in the hopes of progressing beyond it, to command it, in order to touch those realms that are organic, more profoundly human, and perhaps most importantly, subjective.

In “An Appraisal of Technics and Civilization,” 1959, Lewis Mumford, after having lost a son in the Second World War, wrote, “Technics and civilization as a whole . . . are the result of human choices and aptitudes and strivings, often irrational when apparently most objective and scientific: but even when they are uncontrollable they are not external.” 39 This cloak of objectivity is well known, and often manifests itself in time. This repositioning does little to diminish the force of his original argument, which at its core is a simple recognition of society’s need to acknowledge the interrelations of technology with society and culture – that an interplay of mind and matter, of internal and external, of identity and technology exists and that its implications for human expression are profound. We may still attempt to emulate, to impose, to mirror the objectivity of the machine in pursuits far from the factory floor.

Although the most intense applications of the scientific method were in technology, the interests that it satisfied and re-excited, the desire for order that it expressed, translated themselves in other spheres. 40

The assimilation of the machine into civilization has been, and will be, uneven, differential, and wildly diverse in saturation. Its completeness and duration are unimportant. As humanity progresses, Mumford has given us words of caution and perhaps hope – he has given us an understanding, which might temper our efforts and manage the clumsy processes of this uncertain modern life,

...in the arts, it is plain that the machine is an instrument with manifold and conflicting possibilities.


40 “Assimilation of the Machine,” 328
As substitutes for primary experience, the machine is worthless: indeed it is actually debilitating. Just as the microscope is useless unless the eye itself is keen, so all our mechanical apparatus in the arts depends for its success upon the due cultivation of the organic, physiological, and spiritual aptitudes that lie behind its use. The machine cannot be used as a shortcut to escape the necessity for organic experience.\textsuperscript{41}

The machine may properly replace the human being when he has been reduced to an automaton, but in the arts, the machine can only extend and deepen man’s original functions and intuitions –

\textit{In so far as the photograph and the radio do away with the impulse to sing, in so far as the camera does away with the impulse to see, in so far as the automobile does away with the impulse to walk, the machine leads to a lapse of function which is but one step away from paralysis. But in the application of mechanical instruments to the arts it is not the machine itself that we must fear. The chief danger lies in the failure to integrate the arts themselves with the totality of our life-experience: the perverse triumph of the machine follows automatically from the abdication of the spirit.} \textsuperscript{42}

This fear of the abdication of the spirit must be the closest to a maxim those working in the arts should hold. On a basic, primal level, this “spirit” – this human \textit{presence}, is our one definitive possession. One that must never be mortgaged.

All of the processes, all of the aesthetics turns, that have been experienced by humanity have been necessary, for they are part of our history. This acceptance however, does not negate the need to grasp the implications for seeing and behavior this change might have. In approaching the material and intellectual matter that has existed before us temperance must be exercised – for what is to be of those things that have not found a place within the ensuing orders of civilization – those relics of foregone tradition – what will our tastes or new creations, new thoughts and attitudes imply for their persistence? Perhaps this is what it truly means to conserve – to maintain simply by granting an awareness to the

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. 343
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. 344
consequences that our human presence has on those things that are not of our own time, or of our own being.

V. A Dialogue of Uncertainty

*Changes* have occurred in the built environment, in the arts, in thoughts and actions, and in the way we see things. Things will continue to change, but it is possible to mindfully embrace change – to broker its effect. This agency to broker change must be central to notions of what it truly means to engage culture, to conserve it, and to create it. In order to live up to this agency – we must acknowledge the diverse ways of seeing the world. The various aesthetic tenets of hygienic modernism – of the mass-produced aesthetic – *L’Esprit Nouveau*, aspects that palpitated throughout the 20th century, are only part of a larger whole of existence. Though they may be heavily prescribed to and inordinately influential, they are still only representative of part of the cultures of our civilization.

These aspects of modernization are but part of the large movements of civilization – they reflect important, possibly dominant motifs in the larger polyphony of modernity. They are energies – like the vibrations of a symphony, that are only part of the total effect of the piece of music, for music also relies on dissonance and changes in pitch to express itself, so to does civilization, and civilizations so does, by a diversity of culture – or even better, a diversity of points of view. There are in fact many modernities.

The dominance of the cultures of hygienic modernism and the industrial aesthetic, I will leave to you to determine their proliferation within architectural conservation. What is truly important to understand is that they exist, and that they inform, and that they may and have informed the treatment of temporal traces in architectural conservation in the past.
These discussions are not about, at their core, the demonstrations of threats, but about potentials, and when discussing potentials alternative views must be aired and explored. In operating within the world it is necessary to see this diversity and to see when difference exhibits conflict, for the treatments of various aspects of monuments are suggestive of many conflicts. In exploring the happenings of the world – the energies that manifest themselves in civilization, one can be assured that there is a diversity of experience, and thus a diversity of points of view.

Eyes That Do Not See

"But how can they live like this?" she broke out in a voice of indignant incredulity. (It wasn’t possible.)

Those practicing architectural conservation must be aware of the many eyes with which they see. These eyes can be ardently myopic, feigning objectivity and truth, but they may also be wildly cultured in the truest sense. They may be aware of the polyphony of life experience, of points of view, and perhaps, most importantly, they may be aware of the influences that both color their own eyes, as well as how other ways of seeing, no matter how diverse or expansive a field, can provide new fodder for coming to an understanding about the world.

Yes, some variations of modernity have had mean designs on temporal traces, those weathered, scarred and worn aspects of material space, of architecture. But, if we expand our scales, other themes and variations of modernity – as explored through various instruments and past understandings, may proffer more accepting attitudes toward these traces. We must hear out the stories of the past, as well as the contemporary movements, which venerate those

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things destroyed in other quarters. Culture is a mysterious thing, its influence seeps quietly, many times undetected, between expressive forms – past, present, and future, penetrating those clumsy walls one may put up out of comfort or pretense. It is important to understand the relationship between events so that we may gauge the consequences of our actions. All cultural pursuits, especially architectural conservation, may gain from a measure of proportion in its practice, as well as, an expansiveness of seeing.
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Section IV. Weathered
Altorilievo dello stesso piedestallo (in due rami)

Giovanni Battista Piranesi
Nothing natural can be wholly unworthy... 

Anna Julia Cooper

In Praise of Shadows – Another Universe of Beauty

But what produces such differences in taste? In my opinion it is this: we Orientals tend to seek our satisfactions in whatever surroundings we happen to find ourselves, to content ourselves with things as they are; and so darkness causes us no discontent, we resign ourselves to it as inevitable. If light is scarce then light is scarce; we will immerse ourselves in the darkness and there discover its own particular beauty. But the progressive Westerner is determined always to better his lot. From candle to oil lamp, oil lamp to gaslight, gaslight to electric light—his quest for a brighter light never ceases, he spares no pains to eradicate even the minutest shadow.

As a general matter we find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter. The Westerner uses silver and steel and nickel tableware, and polishes it to a fine brilliance, but we object to the practice.

We do not dislike everything that shines, but we do prefer a pensive luster to a shallow brilliance, a murky light that, whether in a stone or an artifact, bespeaks a sheen of antiquity.

I suppose I shall sound terribly defensive if I say that Westerners attempt to expose every speck of grime and eradicate it, while we Orientals carefully preserve and even idealize it. Yet for better or for worse we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colors and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them. Living in these old houses among these old objects is in some mysterious way a source of peace and repose.

I am aware of, am most grateful for, the benefits of the age. No matter what complaints we may have, Japan has chosen to follow the West, and there is nothing for her to do but move bravely ahead and leave us old ones behind... I have written all

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this because I have thought that there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature or the arts, where something could be saved. I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing. In the mansion called literature I would have the eaves deep and the walls dark, I would push back into the shadows the things that come forward too clearly, I would strip away the useless decoration. I do not ask that this be done everywhere, but perhaps we may be allowed at least one mansion where we can turn off the electric lights and see what it is like without them.

In Praise of Shadows – Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, 1933

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki speaks of a universe of beauty rapidly yielding to another way of seeing the world. His universe is a universe where truth comes from the observation of nature – where greatness exists in the inconspicuous and overlooked aspects of life. His world is full of suggestions of natural processes, of irregularity, of earthiness – it is the world of the diffused and the murky.

Lessons from the Natural Order of Things

The Japanese have tried to control nature where they could, as best they could, within the limits of available technology. But there was little they could do about the weather – hot and humid summers, cold and dry winters, and rain on average of one out of every three days throughout the year, save during the rainy season in early summer when everything is engulfed in a fine wet mist for six to eight weeks (Plate 1). The hundreds of islands, which make up the Japan we know today, were able to glean important knowledge from their tenuous relationship with their climate – this experience of nature has had a formative influence on the world-view and aesthetics of its people.

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Beyond Ise Jingū

The Grand Shrine of Ise is held by many to represent the deeply engrained notions of material renewal and ephemerality in Japanese cultural aesthetics. Ise does indeed serve to manifest unique concepts of architectural renewal and conservation practice. However, the ritual rebuilding of the Ise shrine every two decades, is less representative of Japanese building and conservation practice as a whole, and more demonstrative of the nation’s Shinto religion, as well as the particular ritual dedication to the goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami. The renewal of the Ise shrine is more in keeping with Gunter Nitschke’s discussion in Shime: Unbinding/Binding of matsuri, of the ritual of renewal, commonly known as Shinto Festival, which is derived from the necessity for renewal of deified occupation marks, than with the building of urban machiya or city-dwellings. What needs to be avoided in the discussion of cultural aesthetics is the construction of cultural generalizations – the happenings of Ise Jingū are part of a larger dialog within Japanese culture about ephemerality and perishability, and have valid application in the understanding of architectural conservation, yet, they must be acknowledged as one point of view, of many, within Japanese culture, which have equal pertinence. For this reason, the happenings of the Japanese tea pavilion are equally worthy of discussion, and for our purposes, much more meaningful for their implications for the reading of temporal traces – in particular, the weathered aspects of architecture.
I. The Way of Tea, *Shadows on the Tatami*

*Even in the daytime the light in the room is subdued, for the low eaves of the slanting roof admit but few of the sun’s rays. Everything is sober in tint from the ceiling to the floor; the guests themselves have carefully chosen garments of unobtrusive colors. The mellowness of age is over all, everything suggestive of recent acquirement being tabooed save only the one note of contrast furnished by the bamboo dipper and the linen napkin, both immaculately white and new.*

Kakuzo Okakura – *The Book of Tea*³

The white camellia in the tokonoma⁴ had been selected for its promise. Five waxy pool-green leaves and the mention of a bud. My grandmother would have thought it a crime to have picked it so early. Even still, it did suggest promise – it was the beginning of February and I had begun my lessons in the Way of Tea.⁵

You wear simple clothing in a tea pavilion.
You do not wear any perfume or cologne. Nor do you wear any jewelry.
You do not wear a watch during a tea ceremony.

Only the changing shadows on the tatami are to meter your day.

In the coming months the chagama⁶ will be suspended from the rafters to catch the breezes of an early spring, and the pine needles will no longer be scattered in the garden. They will give way to young moss, and the flowers in the tokonoma will be of those fragile varieties which only spring can beget (Plate 2). And the cedar screens will blacken ever so slightly from the new

⁴ An alcove present in almost all tearoom forms where items of artistic appreciation are displayed. Stepping within it is strictly forbidden, except to change the display when a strict etiquette must be followed.
⁵ I began my study of the Way of Tea at the Urasenke Chanoyu Center, 153 East 69th Street, New York, NY in February, 2012.
⁶ The chagama or tea kettle will be hung with a jizaikagi or kettle hanger as a sign the seasons have changed. During the fall and winter months the chagama sits directly on the ro or hearth.
rains, their accumulated grey suggesting a life of many seasons (Plate 3). The tea house is a realm where materials are not deprived of language or of life.

The Reality of Things

*The Way of tea lies in studying the ceremony, in understanding the principles, and in grasping the reality of things.*

Hosokawa Tadaoki

The Way of Tea is sought through the extreme intensification of sensibility – it is about awareness, born out of our experience of an aesthetic moment. In pursuing the way of *tea*, the meaningfulness of all actions and of all signs of time – the meaningfulness of all temporal traces is acknowledged. The tea ceremony, or *cha-no-yu*, is emblematic of a value system which embraces the weathering of materials, their slow oxidation, their warping, their fading – their ultimate perishability. It embraces wabi-sabi.

II. Wabi-Sabi

*Wabi,* as a concept, implies a way of life, a spiritual path – an inward philosophical construct, a way of seeing – whereas, *sabi,* speaks to material objects, the outward, aesthetic principles – the collision of objects and temporal events. *Wabi-sabi,* as a concept unites form and character, the seen and the unseen, into a perception of being – a heightened awareness.

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For the poetically inclined, this kind of life fosters an appreciation of the minor details of everyday life and insights into the beauty of the inconspicuous and overlooked aspects of nature.9

Wabi-sabi is a way of living, a way of being – a way of seeing nature and our environment. As a principle, it is marked by an elusiveness and ineffability that are holistic. This is intentional.

_Aesthetic Obscurantism_

Wabi-sabi is a teleological benchmark – an end in itself – that can never be fully realized. From this vantage point, missing or indefinable knowledge is simply another aspect of wabi-sabi’s inherent “incompleteness.”10 Since ideological clarity or transparency is not an essential aspect of wabi-sabi, to fully explain the concept might in fact diminish it. Wabi-sabi, therefore, has the ability to allow us to experience, “a heightened sense of ‘ourselves’ and awaken our spirituality,” through a contemplative nature.11

This contemplative nature begets a developed understanding of the happenings of things and it affords a more detailed account of reality.

To the wealthy merchants, samurai, and aristocrats who practiced tea under tea master Sen no Rikyu in the late 16th century, a medieval Japanese farmer’s hut, on which the wabi-sabi tea room was modeled, was quite a lowly and miserable environment (Plates 4,5,6).12 Yet in the proper context, with some perceptual guidance it took on exceptional beauty.

_The simplicity of the tea-room and its freedom from vulgarity make it truly a sanctuary from the vexations of the outer world. There and there alone one can consecrate himself to undisturbed adoration of the beautiful. In the sixteenth century the tea-room_

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10 Ibid. 17-18
11 Ibid. 24
afforded a welcome respite from labour to the fierce warriors and statesmen engaged in the unification and reconstruction of Japan. In the seventeenth century, after the strict formalism of the Tokugawa rule had been developed, it offered the only opportunity possible for the free communion of artistic spirits. Before a great work of art there was no distinction between daimyo, samurai, and commoner.\(^\text{13}\)

Wabi-sabi tea utensils, popularized by Rikyu, were rough, flawed, and of undistinguished muddy colors ( Plates 7 & 8 ). To people accustomed to the Chinese standards of refined, perfect beauty then being imported from the mainland, they were initially perceived as ugly. It is almost as if the pioneers of wabi-sabi intentionally looked for such examples of the conventionally not-beautiful – homely but not excessively grotesque – and created challenging situations where they would be transformed into their opposite.

*Tea began as a medicine and grew into a beverage. In China, in the eighth century, it entered the realm of poetry as one of the polite amusements. The fifteenth century saw Japan ennoble it into a religion of aestheticism – Teaism. Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order.*

*It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.*\(^\text{14}\)

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*Lessons of the Cosmos and Zen Buddhism – The Metaphysical Basis of Wabi-Sabi*

Wabi-sabi evolved out of the fundamental values prized by Zen monks who sought solace and contentment in simplicity, purity, restraint, and humility. All presided over by the prevailing influence of the impermanence of life.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Zen Buddhism is a product of Chinese thought, after its contact with Indian thought, which was introduced in China in the first Century, C.E., through the medium of Buddhist teaching. It then mingled with Taoist thought, with its preoccupation with life
Tsurezuregusa, “Essays in Idleness,” a collection of short essays by the priest Kenkō, written mainly between 1330 and 1333, illustrates the translation of these principles into aesthetic precepts in which the beauty of Nature, as a positive aesthetic value, was not to be appreciated at the momentary height of its full actualization so much as in its transient process of subsiding, or even in its vestiges left after its nullification.

Are we only to look at flowers in full bloom, at the moon when it is clear? No, to look out on the rain and long for the moon, to draw the blinds and not to be aware of the passing of the spring – these arouse even deeper feelings. There is much to be seen in young boughs about to flower, in gardens strewn with withered blossom. Men are wont to regret that the moon has waned or that the blossoms have fallen, and this must be so; but they must be perversive indeed who will say, “This branch, that bough is withered, now there is nothing to see.”

In all things it is the beginning and end that are interesting.

The love of men and women – is it only when they meet face to face? To feel sorrow at an unaccomplished meeting, to grieve over empty vows, to spend the long night sleepless and alone, to yearn for distant skies, in a neglected house to think fondly of the past – this is what love is.16

In the Zen Buddhist tradition things are either devolving toward or evolving from, nothingness. It is important to understand, within this worldview, while the universe destructs it also constructs,

New things emerge out of nothingness.
And nothingness itself... is alive with possibility.17

In metaphysical terms, wabi-sabi suggests that the universe is in constant motion toward or away from potential. This change, in the physical world, leaves traces and manifests itself

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materially. Wabi-sabi, in its purest, most idealized form, is precisely about these delicate traces, this faint evidence, at the border of nothingness.

All in One, One in All

The lotuses in the pond
Just as they are, unplucked:
The Festival of the Dead.

BASHO

The *morning-dew* nature of all things, even of the universe itself, may arouse grief, it may also be seen or overlooked, as the inevitable element in all change and variety. In Buddhism, “ignorance is the great evil of the world, rather than moral wickedness.”\(^{18}\) The great problem of practical, everyday life is thus,

\[ \ldots \text{to see things properly, not to valuate them in some hard and fast moral scale of virtue and vice, use and uselessness, but to take them without sentimental or intellectual prejudice.} \] \(^{19}\)

Mahayana doctrine teaches the equivalence of the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds, uniting the spiritual and the practical. The unity of the so called “sacred and profane” is unique to Zen Buddhism, and in particular, Japanese Zen.\(^ {20}\) One cannot help but think of the animistic traditions of Shinto, a belief system pre-dating Japan’s occupation by Zen, with its earth spirits, or *kami*, which exist within the same world and share its interrelated complexity with human life, emphasizing a unity of being.


\(^{19}\) Ibid. 19

The doctrine that all things, even the inanimate, have the potential for a so-called *Buddha-nature*\(^{21}\), has far-reaching consequences. While the no-soul teaching of primitive Buddhism tends to efface the idea of the water-tight separate individuality of things, including ourselves, the belief in the Mahayana tradition that everything will one day attain Buddhahood gives value – gives equal value – to the most trivial objects, and lays a foundation for a spiritual and practical democracy. Echoing these beliefs, the shapes "□△○" were sketched by the Zen monk *Sengai Osho* (1750-1837), to illustrate one of the most essential principals of Zen: the journey to bring meaning out of something that upon first glance, appears bereft of meaning.\(^{22}\)

In this world-view, all things are to be treated with the same caring, yet simple reverence. Zen practice, is a way of living, of seeing the world around us, as it is. What is attempted, is an intrinsic appreciation of the transient beauty in the physical world that replicates the irrevocable course of life in the spiritual world. This is how the marked traces of time, the temporal traces of fading and cracking – warping and oxidation, even rusting, are seen as having value.

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The Weight of All

Inside the clay jug are canyons and pine mountains
And the maker of canyons and pine mountains
All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds of millions of stars
The acid that tests gold is there and the one that judges jewels
And the music from strings that no one touches,
and the source of all water
If you want the truth, I will tell you the truth;
Friends, listen...
The God whom I love is inside.

Kabir (c. 1440-1518), This Clay Jug

In Zen spirituality, a consciousness of this “pulsation of reality,” being attuned to the cosmic order, is termed satori, meaning enlightenment. There are also flashes of enlightenment – momentary opportunities for enlightenment, called kensho – opportunities to “see into one’s true nature.” Kensho are everyday noticings that surprise us or please us because they seem to reveal a truth, or may momentarily connect us with a sense of awe. Kensho as a spiritual precept, reinforces the notion that the object of Zen training consists in making us realize that Zen is our daily experience and that it is not something put in from outside our being. The meaning thus revealed is not something added from the outside. It is in the being itself – in becoming itself – in living itself.

Haiku attempts to capture, in condensed poetic form, the spirit of kensho. The wabi-sabi state of mind is often communicated through poetry, as poetry lends itself to emotional

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expression and strong, reverberating images that seem more expansive than the small verbal frame that holds them.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{} &\text{A pattering of rain} \\
\text{} &\text{on the new eaves} \\
\text{} &\text{brings me awake}
\end{align*}
\]

KOJI

Rain, which will wet the new untreated timbers, is absorbed by the capillaries of the wood’s grain, newly exposed by cutting. The fresh brightness of new wood, will, with the first rain, darken ever so slightly – and, in years to come, it will trade the color of new cedar shavings for the tones of fog and charcoal (Plate 9). Here, in rain on new eaves, the transformations of nature indicate the impermanence of all things.

The Material Qualities of Wabi-Sabi: The Suggestion of Natural Processes

Things wabi-sabi are expressions of time frozen.

They record the sun, wind, rain, heat, and cold in a language of discoloration, rust, tarnish, stain, warping, shrinking, shriveling, and cracking. . .

Though things wabi-sabi may be on the point of dematerialization or materialization – extremely faint, fragile, or desiccated – they still possess an undiminished poise and strength of character.\(^{26}\)

Wabi-sabi suggests the subtlest realms and all the mechanics and dynamics of existence. The materials of things wabi-sabi elicit these transcendent concepts. The way rice paper transmits light in a diffuse glow. The manner in which clay cracks as it dries. The color and textural metamorphosis of metal when it tarnishes and rusts. We are reminded of the

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physical forces and deep structures that underlie our everyday world. Wabi-sabi is an aesthetic that at its center is weighed by an appreciation of the cosmic order. Materials are merely changing state, expressing themselves.

III. The Way of Tea – The Art of Spatial Awareness

On the wall of the sukiya\(^\text{27}\), white paper lines the wall behind the host – to highlight their movement. Darker papers – many times indigo, lend a backdrop to the guests, into which they are meant to recede.

The tea pavilion reminds us that everyday places say much, quietly.

**Why not consecrate ourselves to the queen of the Camellias, and revel in the warm stream of sympathy that flows from her altar? In the liquid amber within the ivory-porcelain, the initiated may touch the sweet reticence of Confucius, the piquancy of Laotse, and the ethereal aroma of Sakyamuni himself.**

Those who cannot feel the littleness of great things in themselves are apt to overlook the greatness of little things in others. The average Westener, in his sleek complacency, will see in the tea ceremony but another instance of the thousand and one oddities which constitute the quaintness and childlishness of the East to him. He was wont to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace; he calls her civilised since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields. Much comment has been given lately to the Code of the Samurai, - the Art of Death which makes our soldiers exult in self-sacrifice; but scarcely any attention has been drawn to Teaism, which represents so much of our Art of Life. Fain would we remain barbarians, if our claim to civilisation were to be based on the gruesome glory of war. Fain would we await the time when due respect shall be paid to our art and ideals.\(^\text{28}\)

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\(^{27}\) tea room

1st Gutai Open Air Art Exhibition
Ashiya Park, 1955
A Sky of hope and peace

The Taoists relate that at the great beginning of the No-Beginning, Spirit and Matter met in mortal combat. At last the Yellow Emperor, the Sun of Heaven, triumphed over Shuhyung, the demon of darkness and earth. The Titan, in his death agony, struck his head against the solar vault and slivered the blue dome of jade into fragments. The stars lost their nests, the moon wandered aimlessly among the wild chasms of the night. In despair the Yellow Emperor sought far and wide for the repairer of the Heavens. He had not to search in vain. Out of the Eastern sea rose a queen, the divine Niuka, horn-crowned and dragon-tailed, resplendent in her armor of fire. She welded the five-coloured rainbow in her magic cauldron and rebuilt the Chinese sky. But it is told that Niuka forgot to fill two tiny crevices in the blue firmament. Thus began the dualism of love – two souls rolling through space and never at rest until they join together to complete the universe.

Everyone has to build anew his sky of hope and peace.

Kakuzo Okakura. The Book of Tea

1951 - Hope and Peace

The formal occupation of Japan did not end until 1951 – ten thousand American soldiers remained on its islands throughout the decade.

In 1951, Japan was a culture in conflict. A conflict that exposed itself in the rebuilding of a nation, a nation caught up in change – in “progress” and “modernization.” It was a conflict that influenced artistic expression – conflict which colored the process of seeing and of gaining an awareness in the world. Expression was reforming itself in “chaos.” Chaos, it must be acknowledged, has various forms.

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degrees, subjects, and perpetrators. Culture can experience chaos, for it is derived through the collective efforts of human beings – and chaos, instability – confusion, can touch a subject, a human being, who directly touches culture. This agency must never be underestimated.

Abstract Expressionism and Japan

In 1919, German Abstract Expressionism was a post-conflict reaction against the “crudely sensational images of war-time expressionism,” resulting in the shift from figurative to abstract imagery. Analytical formalism was rejected as too impersonal. In beginning to explore the artistic production in the 1950’s, one cannot mistake the parallels between aesthetic attitudes in post-World War I Germany and the post-World War II art environment. At mid-century, we might think of Pollock, Tapié – Newman. Subjectivity was promoted in both responses, and this shift was clearly delineated in 1915, by Oswald Herzog in Der Sturm, “The artist must create his own view of nature, i.e. his own experience, be it from nature or independent of it.” In his 1934 book, Expressionism in Art, Cheney asserted that abstract expressionism “may be a revelation of something detected as a deeper value or hidden truth in the object, or may be a manifestation direct from the well of truth beyond all objects.” Here we have a challenge to perception, to reading information in the world around us.

In the lineage of the interwar period, most significant forms of artistic research

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4 Herzog, Oswald, “Der abstrakte Expressionismus,” Der Sturm, May 1919.
developed between the aftermath of the Second World War and the 1960’s centered their aesthetic interest on certain crucial concepts of Western Art. Form, matter, emptiness, time, space, and the creative act itself were called into question in the search for new artistic paths and unprecedented modes of expressing contemporary reality.

A substantial contribution to the radical experimental research of the post-war years – as had already been the case in the mid-nineteenth century with Japanese prints and the spread of *japonisme* – was made by a Japanese artistic avant-garde, the Gutai Group.⁶

I. GUTAI: The Recuperations of an *Avant-garde*

*We believe that these are an epoch-making group of works and a style of presentation unprecedented in both the East and the West.*

Jiro Yoshihara, *The Gutai Group*⁷

The Gutai Group were radical in that they proffered a viewpoint contrary to the dominant social orders of the time, but they were avant-garde in the truest sense of the word, for they were not without precedent or lineage. Even before the advent of the Gutai movement, the “Zen” vision, emphasizing space and time, was present in Japanese art. Even though they exposed purely generative points of view, if they are looked at closely, the Gutai may be seen as an extension of their ancestors’ thinking, of those dwelling in Sen no Rikyū’s

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time, where the turmoil and upheaval of a Japan in civil war provoked the re-centering of
aesthetics on the simplicity and the perceived naturalness of a peasant’s hut.

The parallels with the Muromachi period can be extended further – for in the
glittering accumulation of artifacts of Chinese aesthetics – the jades, the famille vert,
the brocades, and the elaborate Heian mannerisms – the peculiar mark of Japanese
Zen – or even the traces of an animistic Shinto past, pulled various realms of Japanese
aesthetics into a different form and language, demonstrated by the refinement and
growth of Teaism as a dissemination of the humility and restraint of the wabi-sabi point
of view.

In freely resorting to the most unexpected tools and means of expression in this
period of the machines and “modernization,” Gutai artists succeeded in making a
contribution to challenging the accepted notions of the creative act both in Japan and
abroad. By framing certain phenomena – the weathering and expression of materials,
with their own language, the Gutai Group illustrated the human capacity to transform
meaning in the world. These artists brought awareness to the capacity to read nature –
climate weatherization in the temporal traces that surround us.

Seeing in Space and Time

Only nine years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in mid-1954, The Gutai Art Association
was founded by Jiro Yoshihara in the town of Ashiya, situated between Kobe and Osaka. The
group name, Gutai, means concrete, as opposed to abstract or figurative, and reveals an engagement with the conceptual issues of representation and materiality.

For Gutai, as for many artists working in the wake of the Second World War, painting as it existed before was no longer adequate to the human condition. Their experiments with materials and techniques were ethically as well as artistically motivated, as they sought to articulate a form of expression that defined a new era of authenticity and creative autonomy. In this way, Gutai works took a stand against the mass psychology of Japan’s military past, which flourished during the interwar period and was made possible by the rapid industrialization introduced by the Meiji Restoration.

Gutai artists embraced the humble materials of everyday life in order to define a vocabulary of expression pertinent to their generation, and defined the relationship between artist and material as creative partnership. They made work using wood, water, plastic, newspaper, sheet metal, fabric, wood, light bulbs, mud, sand, light, smoke, matches, and whatever else was on hand. Their exploration of non-art materials in the name of “new painting” serve to reorient perceptions about art and materiality.

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Gutai experiments with materials took several forms. First are the artists who embraced the notion that “in Gutai Art, the human spirit and the material shake hands with each other, but keep their distance,” and interpreted it as a kind of automatism. The works of Toshiko Kinoshita, who created colorful paintings that revealed themselves slowly through chemical reactions, are a prime example of this trend in early Gutai work (Plate 10). So too, are Toshiyo Yoshida’s burned wood works, which supplant paint with heat, partnering with the wood to create a mark (Plate 11). Sadamas Motonaga’s poured enamel paintings such as Work 32 (1963), and Fujiko Shiraga’s rice paper works, which were wetted and allowed to dry, both kept the artist’s hand at a distance from the canvas and allowed materials to assert themselves (Plate 12).

Other artists conceived of their natural environment as a source of materials. Michio Yoshihara’s work employed sand as a material in light bulb-filled boxes and meticulously sculpted cones reminiscent of the Mount Fuji-shaped sand piles found in Shinto Temples. Motonaga’s work with water, smoke, and stones are perhaps the most probing examples of this trend. At the 1st Gutai Art Exhibition, he began experimenting with natural materials, suspending bags of colored water in the windows of the exhibition space and juxtaposing them against painted rocks gathered from the local Tokyo area (Plate 13). In the play of light on water and the accumulations on the surface of found stones, we are not so very far away from the aesthetics of the sukiya.13

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12 Yoshihara, *Gutai Manifesto*

13 tea room
Yet what is interesting . . . is the novel beauty to be found in works of art and architecture of the past which have changed their appearance due to the damage of time or destruction by disasters in the course of the centuries. This is described as the beauty of decay, but is it not perhaps that beauty which material assumes when it is freed from artificial make-up and reveals its original characteristics? The fact that ruins receive us warmly and kindly after all, and that they attract us with their cracks and flaking surfaces, could this not really be a sign of the material taking revenge, having recaptured its original life?

In this sense I pay respect to Pollock’s and Mathieu’s works in contemporary art. These works emit the loud cry of the material, of the very oil or enamel themselves.

From the Gutai point of view, art wears many different guises.

The House of Jiro Yoshihara

In Japan, at the house of Jiro Yoshihara, founder of the Gutai Group, nature carries on his work (Plate 14). Although Yoshihara died in 1972, the impulsive hands of time continue to create an abstract art form on the outside of his home. Yoshihara’s son still lives in this house in its nearly as-built state.

Every choice of material in this modernist house exemplifies the Gutai attitude. The sliding gate was designed by his father and was made by his friend. They poured the fiberglass composite material onto the surface of the road to obtain its texture. At the

beginning, the door was a pristine ivory but it turned yellow in the sun (Plate 1). Yoshihara knew that the color would ultimately change and therefore chose a green roof to make a composition with the white walls. Right from the beginning he took into account the effect of ageing in this creative process (Plate 16).

Gutai is not a fixed idea, it is freedom of the mind, a concept that corresponds to the Wabi spirit of personal, non-stop creative exploration. A fascination with the “patina” that materials manifest when things become distressed or decayed with age was central to the Gutai manifesto. These temporal traces were seen as a way of revealing the inner truth of art and architecture that have changed in appearance due to the passage of time.

Gutai work is an acknowledgement of the tangible – the material, in all of its expressiveness.

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17 Vervoordt
Section IV. Weathered – Part III - *The Language of Materials* – Alberto Burri
Cretto Bianco. Cellotex. 1968

Alberto Burri
I have never had an obsessive relationship, as some have said, with the materials I have
worked with over the years. What I’ve sought to draw out of them is only their
property. Iron, for example, suggested a sense of hardness, weight, sharpness. I was
not interested in “representing” iron. It was immensely obvious that the material was
iron. I wanted instead to explain what iron was capable of. Alberto Burri

Resin, zinc oxide, and thick black tar. Ground pumice and kaolin, tutu netting and PVC glue.
Sackcloth and ashes.

With these, and other materials, Alberto Burri painted. He painted with fire, and acid,
with temperature and with oxidation. His canvases are “weathered” and corroded – they have
been exposed, and in turn, they share the existential life of materials and things.

A work by Burri is a character study of a material and its expressive qualities. His
sacchi, with burlap sacks, tortured and manipulated – his combustione, with fire – his ferri, with
iron sheets – his c Brett, with celotex and oxidation – all suggest the self-aggregating aspect of
the material, its uncontrollable density. It is painting precisely because there has been a
transition within the materials assumed. The conditio sine qua non for the pictorial event to take
place therefore lies in the transformation, in a process or trauma that unfolds in time and
space. This is the case with the laceration or the patching in the sacchi, the oxidation in the
ferri, the combustion in the plastiche, the cracks in the cretti, and the “darkening’ in the neri.

What happens within the confines of the painting recalls the phenomenology of the elements:
fire and earth, but also light and shadow, light and dark. Everything becomes, in pre-Socratic

manner, or has become. These works are the contracted space of life reduced to the inflexible square of painting. They are a horizon by which we may begin to see the language of materials in the world around us.

Pictorial Sophism

Marguerite Yourcenar writes, that to create “is to look in the dark.” With Burri, this darkness is the material – the obscure, the formless, the seemingly inert. Awaiting the vivifying touch. The eye of the artist perceives entities that are invisible to others, rescues them from the shadows, from the void, from nothingness – it gives them form, dimension, measure weight, and above all, “brings them to sublimation.” It delivers them.

In many regards, art has historically rested on a duality in which the material had been an instrument in the service of the artist, rising, to an “ingredient” that had to pass through an intervention of sublimation in order to become form. Within the Academy, the Salon, and before, matter itself played a decisive role within the convention of painting – that of an object that can be reproduced and represented mimetically. Painting had always feigned air, light, earth, solid, bodies and liquids, vegetable matter and crystal, skin and fire, gold and dust. In other words, materials had always been translated, in manner of illusion, with other material – paint – though still retaining a substantially secondary role. Before realizing that matter in itself could establish itself as an independent aesthetic category, art was immersed in a long

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3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty took this horizon to be the “place” that allows the location of the objects and the absolute identity. For the French philosopher the world is “the horizon of all horizons, which among the collapses of our own life and of history gives our experience some unity.” Phenomenology of Perception. Trans. Colin Smith. New York, NY: Routledge, 1995.
dogmatic sleep. Burri has helped to challenge this notion, for with his work there is a “call to order” addressed to the viewers and their aesthetic habits, warning them that they must no longer make ideological distinctions between the “thing” and the work, “. . . it is painting, or if we like the pretense of a painting, a sort of trompe l’oeil the other way round, in which it is not painting that feigns reality, but reality that feigns painting.” Within this dialogue, one cannot help but think about white-washed walls and polished bronze fittings. In adopting the material awareness of Burri, a paneled room is not longer composed of inert material, but of timbers artfully manipulated into their current form – wood, in the form of a mantelpiece.

I. Sacchi, Ferri, and Cretti

The Sacchi

In Burri’s work this dedication to championing materiality and material expressiveness came first with his sacchi (Plate 17). With the sacchi, Burri performed a metonymy, showing us that the containing element is the content. The canvas, the elected support for painting since time immemorial and henceforth – here in the rough form of used jute transport sacks – is no longer the material on which to paint, but is the painting itself, the work. In a word, it is the form. The material, and the form, also shows signs of manipulation and of the exposure to various forces – ripping, stitching, soiling, burning, etc.. In this sense, Burri’s burlap is neither outside art nor some kind of pictorial super material. Rather, it is what it is, growing

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7 Argan, C.G. Presentation at the 30th Biennale, Venice 1960.
and dying like any other life. Through his work we see materials in a different light, and we begin to appreciate their capacity to exhibit their own potential in response to various phenomena. In turn, the material, seemingly inert, comes to teem with life.

It is as if Burri, with the “Sacchi,” had reacted to the world’s excesses by endorsing something simple and vagrant, something sunken below all possibility of being valued. Making a nothing visible, he brought about a rebirth that plays out in our consciousness.

The Ferri

In the case of the ferri (iron), on which he began to work in the autumn of 1957, it is the blow-torch that becomes the artist’s “brush”. Extremely cruel flashes and rusty slashes of an “almost medieval rigor” construct the architecture of the painting. Once the action of the solderer is over, only the light permits the visual recognition of these impenetrable barriers where the pictorial event consists wholly in the patina left by acid etchings. The signs of painting can rarely be seen. When they are present, as in Ferro (1961), at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, Rome, it is once again the red that spreads like a slash of light over the metal epidermis, or later gold (Plate 18).

Aesthetic Naturalness

During the same period Burri was producing his ferri, Pop Art produced one the most glaring reversal in the scale of aesthetic values that the art of our century has experienced.

_The multicoloured world of Pop marked the requiem of a historical era, just like the apocalypse joyeuse described by Hermann Broch with which, at the turn of the_

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century, Vienna had announced the poisoned birth of modernity to the rhythm of the waltz.\textsuperscript{10} Pop art replaced the artistic work with the production of mid-culture, magnifying its banality, emphasizing the equivalence between consumption – even only visual consumption – and absorption, destruction and death.\textsuperscript{11} The icons of fame and those of the product glorified by the media coincided perfectly.

A master of refined technique, Burri had always worked in such a way as to ensure that the aesthetic factor was characterized by absolute naturalness. In his painting, the confine between the creative gesture and chance had constituted a challenge for the eye of the viewer, which for centuries had been helped to see the difference, to distinguish between nature and art, not to fall into the trap of mimesis.\textsuperscript{12} But the intervention did exist, and was in some way “represented” – the sacchi displayed the patch and the seam, the legni (Plate 19) and the plastiche (Plate 20) had been attacked by a flame that someone must after all have lit.

The Cretty

With the cretty, which Burri began producing in 1972, the “staged” intervention – the manual manipulation of the material surface is almost wholly forgone, and what replaces it is barely a geological phenomenon. The hand of the artist is, in theory, absent – invisible. However, this new turn is not intended to deny the certification that the work is actually art, it was meant to regenerate our conception of art.

The cretti are made with an industrial building and insulating material called Celotex\textsuperscript{13}, which on drying produce a cracking of the surface (Plate 21).

When I was in California, I often went to Death Valley. The idea came from there, but then in the painting it became something else. I only wanted to demonstrate the energy of the surface.\textsuperscript{14}

Although these works exists in a sort of “posthumous” condition, in that they presuppose that the time necessary for their function has passed, it is no less significant to see or “imagine” the phenomenon as it evolved during that time. On the subject of the cretti, Italo Tomassoni observed,

\begin{quote}
The cretti constitute the heraldic turn in the radical developments brought about by Burri, marking the advent of the expropriation of the tools of painting from the hands of the painter. The cretti announce the beginning of a way of experiencing art that is unique in the history of contemporary art and in the entire career of the artist. . . The final effect of the cretto, once it has solidified, produces a result that completes the deconstruction by constructing it.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

The cretti exhibit the traces of antagonists – the temperature in the room, the quality of the air, its movement, and the time that must have passed in order for the material to harden and in hardening, crack. Burri’s cretti are the direct presentation of temporal traces, of materials reacting to time in the form of climatological forces in space.

II. Form and Space – Material Epiphany

Perhaps conceived from the beginning in terms of this extension, the cretti are works that aspire to spatial hyperbole. Consider the gigantic black cretti – each fifteen meters wide

\textsuperscript{13} Composed of kaolin, resins, pigment and polyvinyl acetate.
\textsuperscript{15} Tomassoni, Italo and Maurizio Calvesi. \textit{Alberto Burri. Artiste e material}. Parma: Silvana Editoriale, 2005. 7
and five meters high – for the *Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden* of the University of California, Los Angeles and the *Museo di Capodimonte* in Naples, produced in 1976-1977 and 1978 respectively (Plate 22 & 23). There is no distance between the pictorial event and the constructive space. A project done by Burri for Gibellina, Sicily was born of this discourse.

The rebirth of the inland area of western Sicily, destroyed by the earthquake of 1968, gave rise to a wide-ranging series of projects with the contribution of architects, town-planners, and artists. Burri was invited to Gibellina in 1981 by the mayor, Ludivico Corrao, but refused straight away to plan a work for the new city. “There was no point in having an open air museum. That wasn’t what I was interested in.”

So he asked if he could visit the ruins of the old city where it became clear to him what he should do.

The project consisted of casting concrete over 90,000 square meters of the ruined town, of which 68,000 were completed (Plate 24). The decision to make the project match the found state of the site produced a mimesis of the place itself, or rather of the traumatic event that had marked its history. However, the place and its historical memory were in themselves phenomena that had occurred in the form of a *cretto*, an enormous geological crack.

A shroud that covers and at the same time assimilates the traces of the geological phenomenon – the earthquake, the *cretto* is the “mold” of the event – in theory, therefore, no change, addition, or prosthesis alters the place. Burri attempted to capture the event, just as he attempted to capture material energy and temporal traces in his canvases.

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IV. Irreducible Presence

In his work, Burri was against image and interpretation – more or less everything truly painterly except the rectilinear shape of a picture. “I see beauty and that is all,” was his definitive comment on the reading of his work. Instead, materials are championed.

In viewing a piece by Burri, material and material expression are nearly inseparable. His practice of intensifying materials – unleashing their pure energies – opened ways for artists of the next generation to transform canvas or the human body into artistic signs within themselves, laying the foundation of the various expressions and innovations of the arte povera.

Burri’s use of chance, intrinsic to the sign of fire, opened up a powerful awareness – the form of visual invention that emerges when artists deny themselves complete control. Transforming that relinquishment into a resource, Burri found an expression that came out of the material itself. He developed the consequences of this discovery in his cretì, the results less of individual action than of uncontrolled and unappeasable forces involving cracks and desiccation dependent on chance, on the material making its own forms.

Words are no help to me when I am trying to speak about my painting. It is an irreducible presence that refuses to be converted into any other form of expression.\(^{18}\)

Alberto Burri’s work may be understood, thus, as materials in an irreducible presence – as materials and their existence in the world. Burri’s oeuvre reminds us that the language of


\(^{18}\) Ibid. 85
materials depends on a certain silence in the observer – his reverence for rectilinear presentation helping to culture this approach. The appropriation of the traditional form of painting was a necessary allusion aiding in the reorientation of perception – a like format, different subject. After Burri, however, this pretense is no longer necessary. His work, having been released into the world, expands beyond the confines of its stretcher bars – for Burri’s great art was helping us to see, and the dimensions of perception are limitless.

*richness like that of a still, dark pond.*

Whitespire grey birch were among the self-seeded species that grew on the out-of-use elevated rail tracks during the twenty years after trains stopped running on the New York Central Railway’s *High Line.* Where dairy products, sides of beef, the fruits and vegetables of rural farms, and the raw and manufactured goods of riverside factories were once transported and unloaded without disturbing traffic on the streets below, bluebird smooth aster, wild geranium, red feather clover, and sweet Black-eyed Susan had taken root. Years of quiet existence above the seething city streets had bred new life, blooming from the elevated path of gravel and oil soaked soil (Plate 25). The materials of life have the capacity to turn about new forms – and many times, periods of endurance produce the most unexpected things. It would only be time before that world below took notice, and when they did, perhaps some of this magic was lost, for attention is a changing force of its own.

This railroad spur once passed through the former home of Bell Laboratories, its two brick chimneys projecting into the overcast sky like two ancient stele marking a system of belief that no longer has a place in their new surroundings (Plate 26). The sides of the chimneys
that front the river have been etched by many seasons of storms coming off the river, their red brick unceremoniously exposed. This differential weathering adds to their countenance, reinforcing their place as the inveterate sentinels of another era’s aspirations. The soiled rusticated quoins of the building’s water table help to root these new world redoubts to the earth, decades of accumulated grime possibly adding to their classicized pretense.

From Bethune to West Streets, the bricolage of structures that compose the waterfront are united in their weathered poise – on those densely foggy days were the moisture of the air is tangible, they stand huddled, the city’s first line of defense against the unpredictability of the river and the bay beyond. Three white towers front this guard. In their taut, sharp order they pierce the densely foggy sky, their white anodized aluminum cladding captures the pearl grey of the atmosphere. These three towers are not spared this dialogue with nature – the petroleum based window gaskets capturing particulate matter and showing the cracking that comes with the fluctuation of temperatures between day and night. These sealants create deep shadows in the control joints of the façade. When the moisture of the sky condenses on the white panels and in these deep fractures, streams of charcoal colored water vein the façade. A heavy rain from the west might erase most of this activity, but the small suggestions in the metal of warping and sagging will continue to enliven the façade. Each ledge and crevice will embolden further with time.

At the river’s edge, all that remains of another structure, which bravely confronted the powers of the river, are the piers that once supported it – an army that remains calm amid the lapping waters. Their common timbers have been rendered anew, blackened and smoothed by years of service in the murky depths.
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**BURRI**


Section V. Scarred

Lucio Fontana
Nature, too, can be violent

Beyond the differential breeze and the gloss of morning dew, nature, too, can be violent.

A violent world turns about new forms. The tree denuded by a storm, the earthquake, the wild fire – these are but a few marks of violence in nature. But the violence of climate and of geology are of their own order. Another manifestation of violence, human violence, has through millennia of human occupation been personified – it has a countenance and can no longer be abstractly attributed to the cosmos.

Humanity is a key to understanding distinct forms of violence and their manifestations in the physical world. Human subjects inflict damage and thrust destruction upon objects, upon landscapes, upon architecture, upon culture, and upon other human beings. The violence of the human world turns about new forms altering all things – including the countenance of all human occupations.

Throughout centuries of the arts no single subject has dominated across cultures more than that of human violence.\(^1\) Central to this narrative are its protagonists and its antagonists. Thus, it may be argued, that there is no better manner through which to grasp a society’s attitude toward the traces of violence in the world than through its depiction of human subjects.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Huyssen, Andreas. “Trauma, violence, and memory: Figures of memory in the course of time,” in Barron and Eckmann, eds., 2009. 225-239

I. The Aestheticization of Violence

The treatment of the human subject through centuries of the aestheticization of violence serves as a starting point in the understanding of different attitudes toward the treatment of scarring in architectural conservation. By exploring key points in the history of the depiction of violence in the graphic arts, we may begin to lay a foundation for understanding a move toward the embrasure of other traces of violence in our midst.

Efforts toward this understanding are essential for each wound helps to reconstruct a crime and sometimes to discover its cause. Scars on bodies of any scale are a material marking that prompt future discourse and the re-examination of the events that caused them. They are traces of the violence that perpetrated them, and in turn, these material scars are an opportunity to further aestheticize violent acts in the world. There are stories to be told by the removal of figures from a funerary monument (Plate 1), the bullet and shrapnel pock marks on the façade of a chapel (Plate 2), and the charred and incomplete remains of a fire-bombed cathedral (Plate 3). Scarring is another way to read, to understand, to appreciate – to see, architecture.

The varying approaches in the depiction of violence through history attest to the need for the more sustainable treatment of the signs of violence in architectural conservation. Far too often in the past, material manifestations of violence – scarring, material loss, and disfigurement – have been suppressed for other more heroic, perhaps cleansed, traces and representations of violent events. The shifts in the perception and reading of violence that occurred in the 20th century demonstrate the potential of these scars to hold cultural value. The developments in the aestheticization of violence provoked by the devastation of two world
wars, the growth of photography as a medium, and our predilection for abstraction in the arts serve to substantiate such potential readings.

_Triumphant – The Art and Architecture of Victors_

The battle scene is perhaps one of the oldest genres of art. The _Battlefield Palette_³, a cosmetic palette from the Protodynastic Period of Egypt – 3500-3000 B.C.E is incomplete, but what it does show is prisoners being led away from a battlefield while wild animals feast on the dead. The _Stele of the Vultures_ – 2500 B.C.E, is one of a number of Mesopotamian “victory stelae.” Though it has come to us in fragments, the stele is believed to have been made of a single slab of limestone nearly six feet tall and four feet wide, with a thickness of about four inches. The stele can be placed in a tradition in which military victories are celebrated on stone monuments, a celebration, which centered around the unity of the mythical and historical.⁴ The stele unites ideology and the temporal event – on one side the god Ningirsu and a chariot of mythological animals, and on the other, Eannatum ruler of Lagash and a phalanx of soldiers. The _form_ of the violent event is given, through the construction of a particular depiction of violence, a _character_ of meaning. These traces of events, these works of art, are meant to mark the occasion of great victories – and simultaneously are meant as the proper _form_ of the violent event, instead of the brutal material manifestations that actually would persist. And, of course, central to this depiction, this narrative of violence, is the human subject.

³ The British Museum
One has only to look upon the *Alexander Mosaic*, the *Column of Trajan*, or any number of antique triumphal arches to fully appreciate the human subject’s central role in such aestheticizations. An especially intriguing depiction of this human drama during antiquity can be found in the calm violence of the portico of the Erechtheion (Plate 4). The *Porch of the Caryatids*, or “Porch of the Maidens,” is composed of a standing of six draped female figures as supporting columns, each sculpted in a manner different from the rest and engineered in such a way that their slenderest part, the neck, is capable of supporting the weight of the porch roof while remaining graceful and feminine. *Graceful and feminine*, for this is part of the violence commemorated and depicted if one accepts the account of their conception by Vitruvius.

Cary, a city in the Peloponnese, allied herself with the Persian enemy against Greece. Later the Greeks were rid of their war by glorious victory and, by common consent, declared war on the Caryates. And so the town was captured, the males were killed and the Caryan state publicly disgraced. The victors led the matrons away into captivity, but did not allow them to lay aside their robes or matronly ornaments. Their intention was not to lead them on one occasion in a triumph, but to ensure that they exhibited a permanent picture of slavery, and that in the heavy mockery they suffered they should be seen to pay the penalty for their city. So the architects of those times designed images of them specifically placed to hold a load, so that a well-known punishment of the Caryates’ wrongdoing might be handed down to posterity.

VITRUVIUS and *The Origin of Caryatids*

This is how the “architects of those times” chose to commemorate the occurrence of violent happenings. We have the violent occurrence, coupled with a subject – the Caryan women, both imbued with meaning and then sculpted in three-dimensions. What is important to note, however, is that the temporal traces of the event, here the Erechtheion and the Caryatids, have been “cleansed” of the traces of material violence – the rips, the tears, the damage, and

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decay – the mangled bodies and the scarred countenances brought about by the rebellion of a tribe. *Shame* was chosen as the trace instead of brutalized flesh. The finished work of art is a replacement for the unsavory aspects of war. This is not a unique occurrence, it is an early example of a long lineage of the obscuration of certain aspects of violence in the aestheticization of violence in the arts.

**CORPUS**

The epic and heroic aspects of violent acts have long been chosen as the desired subject of most military and battle scenes. The depictions of other aspects of warfare, especially the suffering of casualties and civilians has taken much longer to develop. The banalities of war – the blood, the gore and the unsavory aspects, historically have been subsumed by the heroic goals of art patrons. Velasquez’s *The Surrender of Breda* is a crowd scene in which two sides meet peacefully to accept a surrender (Plate 5). *The Surrender of Breda* was one of twelve life-size battle scenes intended to perpetuate victories won by Philip IV’s armies that hung in the *Salón de Reinos* in the *Buen Retiro*. What is notable about the painting is its air of courtly refinement and the gallantry of the subjects – their *honor* is palpable. Beyond generals Nassau and Spignola and their brocades and their banners – the faceless clutter of weaponry and the expansive landscape beyond – newly conquered, are the major elements of the piece. On one side a disparate collection of antiquated weaponry and on the other, the uniform and pristine stand of the expressionless pikes of the victors. Generals, those in their immediate periphery, banners, two masses of men, weaponry, and conquered land – that is all. There is very little here to remark on the true horror of battle. Indeed, there
are many more intimate compositions – and other far more expansive, even other more expressively violent, but no matter the scalar shift or the number of subjects in a composition, the blood, the stains, the wounds – the later scars of war, are difficult to find.

Things will slowly change by the end of the 18th century for humanism was perhaps too new through the Renaissance and the Baroque to show a mangled body other than that of Christ’s, of Judith’s Holofernes, or of those in hell. There is a small trail of work, however, perhaps too quiet in their scale and ambition, that recorded the less heroic aspects of war. *Les Grandes Misères de la Guerre* are a series of eighteen etchings by French artist Jacques Callot, 1592-1635, that record the devastating impact on Lorraine of Louis XIII’s troops during the Thirty Years’ War (Plate 6). Despite the grand themes of the plates, the images only measure 3.5” x 7”. Yet, regardless of their diminutive scale, they are considered the first anti-war statement in European Art.

Other attempts to capture the non-heroic violence of war will be made by Goya, Copley, Delacroix and Géricault. In 1770, Benjamin West will put the attendees of a dying General Wolfe in clothing of the day, a turn against the contemporary fashion to classicize military scenes – a convention which tended to veil their violence with aesthetic distance. In 1793, just months before *la Terreur*, Jacques-Louis David gave us *La Mort de Marat*, the radical journalist Jean-Paul Marat assassinated amidst green baize and his papers while *au bain* (Plate 7). Painted in the months after Marat’s murder, it has been described by T J Clark as the first modernist painting, for "the way it took the stuff of politics as its material, and did not transmute it" – the swift puncture of Charlotte Corday staining the bath, with a vermillion trail

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6 Included in this could be Rembrandt van Rijn’s, “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp,” 1632, Though it is not especially violent, however subjective the term. This investigation explores expressions of bodily violence that are not necessarily “heroic,” “religious,” or “allegorical” in nature.

of stains on the bath sheets.\textsuperscript{8} Even still, \textit{La Mort de Marat} is often compared to Michelangelo’s \textit{Pietà}, given its shared compositional qualities. Regardless of the traces of the violence, David rendered Marat in the style of the Christian Martyr, like Caravaggio’s \textit{Entombment of Christ}, and one must wonder whether he obscured the true violence of the assassination.\textsuperscript{9}

Francisco Goya’s \textit{El Tres de Mayo} and his set of intaglio prints, \textit{Los Desastres de la Guerra}, commemorate the Peninsular War of 1808-1814 (Plates 8 & 9). Reflecting on \textit{The Disasters of War}, biographer Margherita Abbruzzese notes that Goya asks that the truth "be seen and... shown to others; including those who have no wish to see it... And the blind in spirit stay their eyes on the outward aspect of things, then these outward aspects must be twisted and deformed until they cry out what they are trying to say."\textsuperscript{10} In his 1947 book on Goya’s etchings, Aldous Huxley writes,

\begin{quote}
And so the record proceeds, horror after horror, unalleviated by any of the splendors which other painters have been able to discover in war; for, significantly, Goya never illustrates an engagement, never shows us impressive masses of troops marching in column or deployed in the order of battle. ... All he shows us is war’s disasters and squalors, without any of the glory or even picturesqueness.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Goya attempted to capture, in the chaotic and crude scrawls of intaglio, traces of violence.

Goya’s graphically rendered dismembered carcasses would be a direct influence on Théodore Géricault, a contemporary who would also come incredibly close to touching in his work the mark of violence on human form.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{8} T J Clark, "Painting in the Year Two", in Representations, No. 47, Special Issue: National Cultures before Nationalism (Summer, 1994), 13-63.

\textsuperscript{9} Angelitti, Silvana, "La Morte di Marat e la Pietà di Michelangelo" in \textit{La propaganda nella storia}, sl, (sd), e-toricelli.it


\end{flushright}
Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819), adopts the proportions of the heroic canvas, usually reserved for history paintings and military subjects, but his subject is not epic (Plate 10). Géricault depicts a moment from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse* which ran aground off the coast of today’s Mauritania on July 5, 1816. 147 people were set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft – all but fifteen died in the thirteen days before their rescue, and those who survived endured starvation, dehydration, cannibalism and madness.

This was Géricault’s first major work, and one he was not commissioned to paint. The event fascinated the young artist, and before he began work on the final painting, he undertook extensive research and produced many preparatory sketches. He interviewed two of the survivors, and constructed a detailed scale model of the raft. His efforts took him to morgues and hospitals where he could view, first-hand, the color and texture of the flesh of the dead and dying. Géricault’s preparatory sketches, *Heads of Torture Victims* and *Study of Truncated Limbs*, are perhaps more brutally realistic than the final work (Plates 11 & 12).

Although *The Raft of the Medusa* retains elements of the traditions of history painting, in both its choice of subject matter and its dramatic presentation, it represents a break from the calm and order of David’s stoic Neoclassicism. Géricault’s frankness would be echoed in the realism of Courbet and others. A real glimpse of the traces of violence on flesh, on worldly material, had been hung high on the wall in the *Salon* – but it would be nearly a century.

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before the depiction of violence knew another monumental turn, one that might only be beget by looking into the face of war.

Mutilé de Guerre\textsuperscript{13}

In the surgical and convalescent wards of 1914, it was grimly accepted that facial disfigurement was the most traumatic of the multitude of horrific damages the war inflicted. “Always look a man straight in the face,” one resolute nun told her nurses, “Remember he’s watching your face to see how you’re going to react.”\textsuperscript{14} The Great War had overwhelmed all conventional strategies for dealing with trauma to the body, mind, and soul. On every front – political, technological, social, economic, spiritual – World War I changed Europe forever, while claiming the lives of 8 million of her fighting men and wounding 21 million more.

The large-caliber guns of artillery warfare with their power to atomize bodies into unrecoverable fragments and the mangling, deadly fallout of shrapnel had made clear, at the war’s outset, that mankind’s military technology wildly outpaced its medical, “Every fracture in this war is a huge open wound,” one American Doctor reported, “with a not merely broken but shattered bone at the bottom of it.”\textsuperscript{15}

From the mud of the trenches or the field to a first-aid station – to an overstrained field hospital – to evacuation, whether to Paris, or, by way of lurching passage across the Channel, to England, the wounded men were carried, jolted, shuffled and left unattended in long drafty corridors before coming to rest under the care of surgeons.\textsuperscript{16} Multiple operations

\textsuperscript{13} war “cripple”
\textsuperscript{14} Alexander, Caroline. “Faces of War.” Smithsonian, February, 2007. 4
\textsuperscript{15} Alexander, Caroline. “Faces of War.” Smithsonian, February, 2007. 2
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 1
inevitably followed. But, surgery had its limitations. It was for those who were too disfigured that the *Masks for Facial Disfigurement Department* had been established in several hospitals. Here, by careful artifice, broken men would be made complete [Plate 13].

Great pains were taken to produce masks which bore the closest possible resemblance to the prewar soldier’s uninjured face – sometimes the process took the better part of a month. Plaster casts were made, portraits with eyeless sockets and missing noses and jaws. The mask itself would be fashioned from this, being made of galvanized copper, no more than one thirty-second of an inch thick – which was then enameled and painted. Matching the skin tone of these newly completed forms became an art, “Skin hues, which look bright on a dull day, show very pallid and gray in the bright sunshine, and somehow an average has to be struck,” wrote the chief of the *Bureau for the Reeducation of Mutilés*. A “Reeducation” [Plate 14]. These masks were part of a long reintroduction into society for maimed men, a reeducation, which occurred when they bore their new faces to society.¹⁷

“*Épater la bourgeoisie.*”¹⁸

In Sidcup, England, home to a noted facial hospital, some park benches were painted blue – a code that warned townspeople that any man sitting there would be distressful to view.¹⁹ These townspeople and the rest of society had not been prepared for this all too real aestheticization of violence. These men had experienced the ultimate trauma – safe from

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¹⁷ Anna Coleman Ladd papers, Archives of American Art, S.I.
¹⁸ “shock the middle-class.” This dictum is usually associated with the avant-garde writers and artists who were exploring modernisms of their own in this period.
¹⁹ Alexander, Caroline. 5
death, they would persist in life disfigured. The violence of death would have been too complete, leaving very little as a reminder. Instead, a being halfway between life and death would serve as a tortured trace of that violence.

As society became adept at inflicting destruction to the human form, its technologies of war began to recast the landscape. By 1918, few cities had been destroyed, save, most notably, the Belgian city of Ypres and its soaring 13th century Cloth Hall, which had been eroded by shell fire into a few jagged stumps of masonry (Plate 15). Instead, agrarian and wooded landscapes – those expansive plains, popular sights of war a century before, were the sight of a new trauma. Deep scars had been carved into potato fields and pasture land. Redoubts of abject squalor and pestilence were excised from the earth. At its beginning it was believed that it would be a war of movement, but instead it had been a war that clutched helplessly to the earth in countless miles of trenches (Plate 16). With Armistice, these trenches would be filled in, the fields would be made complete and crops would be planted. Yet, these scars would lay dormant – manifesting their violence in other ways some twenty years later – for these were scars that had not properly healed.

In time, the Cloth Hall at Ypres would be entirely rebuilt, its delicate tracery once again punctuating the grey Flemish sky. Monuments would be built to the dead, the triumph of old, now marked by funereal dimensions. In heroic stones and bronzes, Memorial and Triumph are composed in a hopeless unity. The human forms that ornament these monuments, some done by the same sculptors who had made masks, are whole and complete – they are composed, they are heroic.\(^{20}\) The only indication of the preternatural capability of this war’s technology to disfigure and to maim, was suggested by the long lines of engraved names of millions of

casualties. One cannot help to think that these works are somehow incomplete, or that their makers had been as selective in their depiction as those who conceived the *Stele of the Vultures* two and a half thousand years before. What had changed, however, was that Society had been confronted by the acrid vapors of a new form of war.

Photography & The War Correspondent

*August 9, 1945*. 11:02 a.m. *Bockscar*, the B-29 bomber carrying a plutonium-core atomic bomb and commanded by 25-year-old Major Charles Sweeney, dropped its deadly cargo over Nagasaki from a height of 9,600 meters. Like the primary target Kokura, Nagasaki was overcast that morning. With barely enough fuel remaining to reach Okinawa, Major Sweeney and his crew had to pinpoint their target in the course of only one run over the city. By chance a crack opened in the clouds, revealing the industrial zone stretching from the Mitsubishi sports field in Hamaguchi-machi to the Mitsubishi Steel Works in Mori-machi and automatically designating this as the bombing target. The actual explosion, however, occurred some five or six hundred meters to the north over a tennis court in Matsuyama-machi (Plate 17).

The city of Nagasaki had been flattened. The Japanese would surrender on August 15, 1945.

The Nagasaki municipal government officially adopted the figure of "more than 70,000" deaths on the basis of information from population surveys and the estimate made by the Nagasaki City Atomic Bomb Records Preservation Committee in July 1950. The committee
recorded in its report: "73,884 people were killed and 74,909 injured, and 17,358 of the deaths were confirmed by post-mortem examination soon after the atomic bombing."21

There were no traces of 56,526 bodies.

One only has to survey photographs of Berlin, Wieluń, Dresden, Essen, Düsseldorf, Warsaw, London, St. Petersburg, Hamburg, Munich, Manila, Hiroshima, Bristol, Liverpool, Nagasaki, Wesel, Krakow, Freiburg, and the countless others cities which had been traumatized in aerial bombardments to grasp the scope of devastation experienced during the Second World War (Plate 18). B-29 bombers, panther tanks, snipers, long-range missiles, and grenade launchers had helped to place distance between enemies. A seemingly benign technology, however, brought violence to the movie palaces and the homes of even those safely out of reach. The images captured by newsreels and the still photography of war correspondents unleashed an unprecedented exposure to violence unknown in the graphic arts. The real-life iconoclasm of the human form had never known such a true depiction (Plates 19, 20, & 21). The destruction to towns and to cities, to art and architecture, became scenographic when punctuated by human suffering. The tortured bodies of the dead and those of the dying were preserved in celluloid. Photographs appeared to be reality, but they were not – and this distrust was dully noted.

Under the Auspices of the Weimar Republic, the prelude to the utter catastrophe of World War II, Siegfried Kracauer, in opposition to photography as a form of graphic

representation, warned that “the image-idea drives away the idea.” This belief is echoed by Bertolt Brecht who loathed photography and who believed photography was a barrier to political knowledge. A barrier – an aesthetic distance, discussed by Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which, he discusses a distrust of photography based on its mass-production and mass-consumption. This suspicion, even dislike, of photographs was absorbed by many subsequent critics, including Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes – and certainly by the postmodern critics who came after them. This criticism, in some regard, tells us not to look at photographs.

With all their perceived shortcomings – shortcomings which only bely the role of the all too human war correspondent, one of the things that photographs do is bring us close – closer than many representations, to violence. They bring us within voyeuristic proximity to physical suffering and to bodily harm. In this role, photographs, in particular photographs of human violence, demonstrate a certain potential.

*People often talk about the horror of war, and about the necessity of building a politics of human rights, in extremely abstract terms. I think we need to engage, far more concretely, a series of questions: What does war actually do to people? What does political oppression, defeat, physical suffering do? How are people broken?*

Of course, photographs cannot explain the complexities of their histories or their context. Yet, photographs are powerful hints, depictions – traces, of violent events. They force the viewer into a form of self-constructing authority – they challenge and they are generative as an intellectual exercise. Yes, there are superficial aspects of photography. Susan Sontag touches

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on the possible shortcomings of the medium. She argues that certain well-known photographs have become “ethical reference points,” such as, the many images depicting the victims and liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. From this perspective, the subtext of such images, though still connotatively open to interpretation, has been somewhat restrained by familiarity, predominant cultural beliefs regarding the Holocaust, and perhaps by over-usage. Photographs within themselves are objective and they are incomplete. It is up to the viewer, however, to begin the process of a mental construction of “completeness”, with no particular end. And perhaps this is not inherently problematic. Photographs are there to provoke questions, like the ones Gerhard Richter’s own intentionally blurred images invite one to ask. Photographs are open to interpretation – they are an opportunity.

We often do not have the “right” reactions to the photographs that depict violent acts or their manifestations. By experiencing the photograph, we manage and navigate complex emotions and we familiarize ourselves with the material traces of violence. Recollections of these traces may begin to interrupt visual associations, and new, real-life signs that we are confronted by are caught up in the objective correlative, and we begin to think and feel new ways about the scarred materials we visually consume. Crucial to this approach to photography is an intellectual authority.

In 1963, Shōmei Tōmatsu published in his portfolio 11:02 Nagasaki, the persistent history of the wounded and horribly scarred survivors of the atomic attack. The photographs are in black and white (Plates 22 & 23). The ”keloid” scars, atomic bomb cataracts, the signs of leukemia and other cancers, and the microcephaly (small head syndrome) due to intrauterine

exposure to radiation do not have the tinting of human flesh. We must complete their form, and their color [Plate 24]. These photographs are more realistic than any conceit of past artists, but they still are artifacts, relics, of the violent act – they are still incomplete, greys and blacks, and paper in the place of flesh.

II. *L’existentialisme est un humanisme*

We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road leading from the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbor’s arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his mouth behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: “If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don’t know what is happening to us.”

That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife’s image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.27

Between 1942 and 1945 psychiatrist Viktor Frankl labored in four different Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz, while his parents, brother, and pregnant wife perished. Based on his own experiences and the stories of his many patients, Frankl wrote, *A Man’s Search for Meaning*. Having lived a compromised existence in a world whittled down to the human intellect, for in slavery one does not own one’s body, Frankl tells us that we cannot avoid suffering, but that it always remains in our power to choose how to cope with it, to find meaning in it, and to move forward with renewed purpose. Frankl’s theory - known as

logotherapy, holds that our primary drive in life is not pleasure, but that we are emboldened and satiated by discovery and by the pursuit of what we personally find meaningful.

Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards. . .

Everything can be taken from a man or a woman but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.  

Frankl’s concept of logotherapy is intimately interwoven with a budding humanism, a humanism that only the steely reductionism that is war can parent.

The existentialism of Heidegger and Jaspers a half century before, and the centuries old echoes of Descartes’, cogito ergo sum, took on a contemporary pertinence in Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1946 lecture L’existentialisme est un humanisme – “Existentialism is a Humanism.” Perhaps the most profound implications for human perception and its interactions with material existence – with the arts, resides in the following portion of the lecture,

Rather let us say that the moral choice is comparable to the construction of a work of art.

But here I must at once digress to make it quite clear that we are not propounding an aesthetic morality, for our adversaries are disingenuous enough to reproach us even with that. I mention the work of art only by way of comparison. That being understood, does anyone reproach an artist, when he paints a picture, for not following rules established a priori? Does one ever ask what is the picture that he ought to paint? As everyone knows, there is no pre-defined picture for him to make; the artist applies himself to the composition of a picture, and the picture that ought to be made is precisely that which he will have made. As everyone knows, there are no aesthetic values a priori, but there are values which will appear in due course in the coherence of the picture, in the relation between the will to create and the finished work. No one can tell what the painting of tomorrow will be like; one cannot judge a painting until it is done. What has that to do with morality? We are in the same creative situation. We

28 Ibid. 62
never speak of a work of art as irresponsible; when we are discussing a canvas by Picasso, we understand very well that the composition became what it is at the time when he was painting it, and that his works are part and parcel of his entire life.

It is the same upon the plane of morality. There is this in common between art and morality, that in both we have to do with creation and invention. We cannot decide a priori what it is that should be done.29

Humanity is in a creative situation, not only in the material generative sense, but in the cognitive sense. This principle suggests the potential for cognitive abstraction in perception and in the visual consumption of art and architecture, for it speaks to the generative power of thought – new thinking both in form and character. Within this mindset, complex meanings can be assigned to an abstract system of symbology, that are without archetypal forms, but are correlated with meaning by emotional cues and memory.

III. Lucio Fontana and The Gesture

Aesthetic pleasures, sensations, satisfactions, feelings – whatever they might be called, however they might be characterized, are dependent on form. In the same moment, the absence of form, or as a consequence of the destruction of form with violence, aesthetic experience of all types tends to depend on ideas.30 There is an implied conceptualization in the act of seeing. It is no accident that Argentinian-Italian artist Lucio Fontana described himself as a “conceptual artist” long before there was a genre known as conceptual art, or that his most characteristic works were called “Concetto Spaziale.” His technique, which Fontana

named *Spazialismo,* was conceived in 1949 when he punctured a thinly painted monochromatic canvas with a knife, exploding the definition – or at least the conventional space – of art (Plate 25). This act challenged the entire history of Western easel painting and led him to the understanding that painting was no longer about illusion contained within the dimensions of a canvas but a complex blend of form, color, architectural space, light and – gesture.

*Concetto Spaziale*

As early as 1946 in the *Manifesto Blanco,* published in Buenos Aires, Fontana denounced figurative art, but also, the static, classical style of abstraction. At the same time, he began to formulate the theories that he was to expand as *Spazialismo,* or Spatialism. With the *White Manifesto,* Fontana also questioned the reliance in Western art on a flat support such as canvas or paper, proposing instead that the time had come for artists to work in three or rather four dimensions, since time also had to be added to the equation, in order to disturb the entire environment with their interventions.

This concept of disruption owed to Fontana’s concept of *Spazialismo* which was centered on the principle that in our age matter should be transformed into energy to invade space in a dynamic form. He applied these theories to a feverish, violent, subversive and radical production in which he synthesized the various elements of his art. He devised the generic title *Concetto Spaziale* – spatial concept – for these works and used it for all his later paintings. They can be divided into broad categories – the *buchi,* holes, beginning in 1949 and

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tagli, slashes, which he began in the mid-1950’s (Plates 26 & 27). In both types of painting, Fontana assaulted the heretofore sacrosanct surface of the canvas, either by making holes in it or by slashing it with sharp linear cuts. In doing so, Fontana reduced painting to a level below what the cultivated sensibility of his era expected.\textsuperscript{33} Perhaps one has to be a certain age to appreciate the baseness and violence of his gestures – and to remember a certain history.

**Painterly Iconoclasm**

In 1955, in a short opening text from the inaugural issue of the magazine *Il Gesto*\textsuperscript{34}, Fontana declared that painting was impossible after Hiroshima and Nagasaki – an echo of Theodor Adorno’s much-cited 1949 dictum — "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."\textsuperscript{35} And yet Fontana did not abandon his paintings, instead he attacked the canvas with the reverse side of the brush and, eventually with a blade. At a time when the expressive presence of the artist was celebrated in the work of American hero Jackson Pollack, for example, Fontana’s voided mark seemed to ask if the concept of a “subject” even made sense.

What is demonstrated by Fontana’s buchi and tagli was the beginning of a new iconoclasm.\textsuperscript{36} As with Burri’s ferri or cretti, Fontana’s canvas is solely a vehicle or vessel, where as, the violent act itself, the defilement of the form, becomes the focus – the spatialism, with the cut or puncture merely the remnant or trace (Plate 28).

\textsuperscript{35} Adorno, Theodor. "Cultural Criticism and Society," Prisms, 1949. 34
In this assertion, Fontana’s canvases demonstrate the complete entanglement of experience and concept. The “form” of the slash in the canvas is so reduced that even though we can both know and feel the space that breaks through the picture plane, the balance is more toward knowledge and the feeling is fugitive, flickering, weak, quickly subsumed into art history. The gestural event, now an abstract “memory,” becomes the spatializing link between form and perception, and the cut is the scar that remains as acknowledgement in space and time of the violent act.

*Material of Thought*

These scars, along with emblems, paintings, poems, and architectural ornament, provide the material for thought. Temporal traces of violence are, in turn, abstract symbols of violence to which we then connect our own intellectual associations of violence. Thus the historical aestheticization of violence is challenged. With the assertion of the symbolic nature of material traces of violence, the pictorial depiction of violence can shed the necessity of conceit, or it can be discarded altogether. By doing so, we are left with the potential of the *found condition* as “pictorial.” And thus, an architectural scar, is both symbol/representation and material manifestation of violence.

IV. Architectural Iconoclasm

A key aspect of this system of symbols, as was the case with Fontana and the art historical canvas, is the implication of the once “pure” form. The classical statue that has been pushed from its pedestal or that has been subjected to the iconoclast’s hammer, is infused
with pathos – these mutilated gods have the air of martyrs, for they imply a once complete form.

*That emperor’s face received a hammer-blow on a certain day of revolt or was rechiseled to serve for his successor. A rock thrown by a Christian castrated that god or broke his nose. Out of greed, someone extracted the eyes of precious stones from this divine head, thus leaving it with the cast of a blind man.*

Through this state of incompleteness – of damage, we read the trauma clearly.

By combining our extensive knowledge of the expressive language of materials and a close reading of architectural form, it is possible to register the defacement of architecture. The formal dignity of Berlin’s Reichstagsgebäude has been challenged by the crude scrawls of Soviet soldiers upon its marbles (Plate 29). And a seventeenth-century synagogue in Krasnik, Poland, converted a few years before these Soviet inscriptions into a factory, was worked by slave labor from the Majdanek concentration camp (Plate 30). Today it registers this cruel inversion of purpose with a Torah niche defaced and defiled by Nazi hands. One can trace the completeness and sanctity of architecture in this way, for there are forms and symbols, both literal and abstract, which speak to the “original state” of certain places, just as we understand the loss of a nose on a marred patrician portrait bust or the trauma to the flesh of a radiation victim in *Life* magazine. This is not an indictment of these manifestations of violence, but simply an acknowledgment. The scars of architecture in their bare presence are enough to warrant respect (Plate 31). The trauma of materiality allows for the quantification and location of grief (Plate 32).

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The Scar – The One Incomparable Tribute

St. Paul’s Chapel, Lower Manhattan

I walked through a building, tired in its dignity, time worn – having been saturated in the happiness of life and the grief of death, intense feeling patterning its walls, softening its crisp provincial pretension – the events of life having rendered it unnecessary – commuting it instead to a calm – an accessibility that is cultured when space is lent over to things other than adornment.

The volume within St. Paul’s has been consecrated again, by a different order – the trauma of September 11, 2001 having ordained it by different right. Standing within the shelter of the door – looking over the humble graves in their differential shade, one acknowledges the little churchyard that regards that scene of human trauma across the street. Beyond the tilting gravestones, through a space of emptiness and grief, light can be seen beyond.

Neither clouds or gracious elms frame this view – the stacked plates of office towers’ sheet glass, rather, bracket it – composing a viewing instrument of sorts – a stereoscope – a faceted foci to a sliver of oscillating blue – cutting to the smoke of green of a distant shore. Beauty made possible by loss. This, possibly, is the one incomparable tribute for a structure that, as modernity fell at its feet, graciously helped to pick up the pieces of broken souls in the months to follow.

A little once suburban church stands united with its river frontage – the scale of the un-built landscape bolstering the meaning of the structure. Its stones are more plainly of the earth – the steel and glass of its scrim highly digested by the men of later centuries. It is
possible to see this moment as an act of atonement – as if the surrounding structures themselves, and those which were lost, signified a world-view that had grown grotesquely out of scale with the human heart. Even though our hearts may have an unlimited capacity to endure – it may also be true that life must present matter that is worth enduring.

This vacancy, this void, it may be maintained, is respect – is compassion in form – in space. What is a monument but an attempt to assign meaning to an event – to make it tangible – to access a physicality that inspires emotion. Here at the site of the two towers, however, instead of manifesting it physically, we may simply allow this condition to exist, for however long or however short a time – to experience its life and death. Many times, the focus is on material ends – three-dimensional realizations of what is immediately tangible. And what of the space of imagination, of individual thought – of emotion? Contemplating this void, this absence gave rise to a moment – suspended between life and death – of death generating life – of death and of life mingled in space.

*Les Lieux de Mémoire* – Between Memory and History

*Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.*

Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*\(^{39}\)

Memories have been polluted, formed – cultured – elaborated. Whether they are factual, able to be analyzed and criticized, is irrelevant. It is much more important to dwell on

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\(^{39}\) Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire.*” *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989). JSTOR
the capacity that they represent – the capacity to think and feel, to champion our apperception – to synthesize on our own accord, the one incomparable tribute to our being – alive.

...if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each, and God of all?

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Eolian Harp*40

Standing in the windswept portico of the church – that moment, had been air in my *eolian harp* – it had conferred a measure of feeling, acting as intercessor for the intangible and my soul. For the poet, the harp allows the abandonment of himself to philosophical thought, which not only concerns his own private world but also the humanity as a whole.41 Thus, my *world-image*, apperception, had inverted and expanded – just as the space around me had some twelve years before. I felt the space differently – it was as if the souls of that day– freed from their captivity, had been carried by the breeze to the water’s edge – the current taking them to the great expanse of the blue – the infinite, beyond.

Returning to the chapel, I looked at the centuries old memorial plaques on the western wall, rendered in dull chalky white and ink black marbles and ornamented with fine engraving (Plate). Below them, a straight-backed pew ran the length of the wall, its milk-white paint violently scratched to the pine it covered (Plates 33 & 34). This frothy shell pink room had been the site of a medical triage and control center for relief workers that fateful day. Perhaps the pew had been the sight of momentary repose amidst the chaos, the worker’s heavy rescue

suits and sharp tool belts having been traded for parishioners’ Sunday best. Or it might have been simply a catchall for the equipment required to sound the ruins for life. Putting a hand, or face, or act to these violent scrawls is not necessary. It is understood that something unhappy and violent has occurred to defile the tranquility of this venerable house of worship. These scars are an affront to the careful consideration that had rendered this edifice in faith, hope, and love two and a half centuries ago. Here in lies their power.

It might be seen that the scar is the one befitting tribute, for it is the most lasting symbol of violence – there are scars of all ages, languages, and ethnicities, and there will continue to be.

It is never good form to ask the cause of someone’s scar – but perhaps, owing to the elegance of universal symbology – we know something unhappy, unfortunate, traumatic or violent has occurred. And that is enough for us to feel a measure of the weight of the situation. Perhaps we are not meant to know more than that. The human mind is complex and it will – were it must or were it must not, it will, reach its own appropriate understanding.

And see how the flesh grows back across a wound, with a great vehemence, more strong than the simple, untested surface before.
There’s a name for it on horses, when it comes back darker and raised: proud flesh, as all flesh, is proud of its wounds, wears them as honors given out after battle, small triumphs pinned to the chest—

For What Binds Us - Jane Hirshfield, 1988

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The War Correspondent


Lucio Fontana and The Gesture


Architectural Iconoclasm


Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations,* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory [Spring, 1989]. JSTOR

Section VI. Worn
“Indian Grinding Stones”

Inyo County, CA
2010
Some events in life happen without ceremony or gravity. They are the quotidian happenings of quiet lives, and they too leave their mark on architecture. These lives are present in the many traces, trailings, and paths worn into space.

A *Desire Path* in landscape architecture is a term used to describe a path that is not designed but rather worn casually away by people out of convenience, pleasure, or habit. There are certain paths we have been told to walk, but others, where humans have chosen to walk. Some were given concrete and chose the grass and earth instead. And, so many followed that the informal path has become clearly worn. Though not formally delineated, these routes are more confident in that they were created in experience – and in turn, they have their own narratives to tell.

Human presence is recognized in many ways. There are the grand expressions of great lives – grand paths, marked in space and time with some of the most exalted works of art and architecture – epic sagas of existence, human and divine. And yet, there are still others – other more obscure trails, which have a grandeur and a worth all their own.

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1. The Basilica of the Nativity

_Bethlehem, The West Bank_

There is something beautiful in the symbolism that the church has a door so low that all must stoop to enter. It is supremely fitting that every man should approach the infant Jesus upon his knees.²

The Basilica of the Nativity is entered through a very low portal, called the “Door of Humility” (Plate 1). It dates from the Ottoman period, when it was created to prevent carts being driven in by looters, and to force even the most important visitor to dismount from their horse and to detach their scabbards as they entered the sanctuary. The surrounding wall tells us that the doorway was reduced from an earlier Crusader portal, the pointed arch of which can still be seen above the current door – an early breath of gothic form conceived in violent times.

Evidence of the Basilica’s turbulent history can readily be seen in the fabric of the building. The original structure, finished in 333 C.E., was destroyed in the Samaritan Revolt of 529 C.E.. The Basilica was rebuilt between 527-565 on the same site, and only due to its depiction of the Magi in its rich mosaics, was it spared destruction during the Persian Invasion of 614 C.E.. It was the only major church in the country to survive. Later, the building was seized and defended by a succession of Muslim and Crusader armies – thus explaining the brutal fortress-like appearance of the church’s exterior. In 1847, the theft of the silver star marking the site of the Nativity was an ostensible factor in the international crisis over the Holy Places that ultimately led to the Crimean War. And again, in 2002, the church was violated when it was placed under siege by Israeli forces until Palestinian militants withdrew. Bullet holes from these recent events have further marred the delicate 12th-century

mosaics of the nave. Clouded by a history of violence and struggle, a tragic inversion of meaning has taken place. Before their depiction of the violence of centuries past, the walls of the basilica were once marked only by faith and piety.

St. Helena – *Divine Traces*

In 325 C.E. Empress Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, emboldened by her new faith in Christianity, made the dangerous journey from the Roman port of Ostia to retrace Jesus Christ’s steps in Judea. In his *Life of Constantine* (c. 340 C.E.), Eusebius wrote (only about ten years after her death) that Helena lavished good deeds on the Holy Land, and “Although well advanced in years, she came, fired by youthful fervor, in order to know this land” and she “explored it with remarkable discernment . . . . And by her endless admiration for the footsteps of the Savior. . . . she granted those who came after her the fruits of her piety. Afterward she built two houses of prayer to the God she revered, one in the Grotto of the Nativity and the other on the Mount of the Ascension.”

Helena endeavored to connect Christ’s presence to environments and landscapes, and in turn, to reaffirm the truth of these events, and the beliefs they supposed, by locating them in reality. Her pilgrimage, was an acknowledgement of the existence of human events in space and that places can be vessels for deeper meaning, however abstract.

The Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are made to places where gods or heroes were born or wrought some great action or died, or to shrines where a deity had signified it to be their pleasure to work

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wonders. Once theophanies are localized, pilgrimages necessarily follow. Helena’s own incarnation of the practice was bound inevitably to draw the pious across Europe to visit the Holy Places.

Beyond Christendom, the pilgrimage is a practice found in many religions. The Egyptians journeyed to Sekket's shrine at Bubastis or to Ammon's oracle at Thebes – the Greeks sought for counsel from Apollo at Delphi and for cures from Asclepius at Epidaurus – the Aztecs gathered at the huge temple of Quetzal – and the Incans massed in sun-worship at Cuzco and at Titicaca. But it is evident that the religions which centered round a single character, be they god or prophet, are those most noted for their pilgrimage. They express the perfectly natural wish to visit spots made holy by the birth, life, or death of the god or prophet. Hence Buddhism and Islam are especially famous in inculcating this method of devotion. Huge gatherings of people intermittently all the year round venerate Kapilavastu where Gaukama Buddha began his life, Benares where he opened his sacred mission, Kasinagara where he died – and Mecca and Medina have become almost bywords in English as the goals of long aspirations, so famous are they for their connection with the prophet of Islam. Crucial to this process of remembering, architecture inevitably manifested itself as a means of marking in three dimensions the temporal event that had taken place.

Depictions of the Devout

For Empress Helena, churches were erected as makers and symbols of faith. At sites of pilgrimage, architecture is used to reinforce memory, to claim ownership, and to coordinate

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ritual. In the past, historic events, lacking physical traces— their occasion perhaps too brief, required material representation and manifestation in order to hold presence in the spiritual lives of the devoted. It was not enough to know Christ had been somewhere, it had to be shown, it had to be concrete and tangible— architecture needed to be performed.

Down in the Grotto of the Nativity, a silver star in the floor marks the very spot where Christ is believed to have been born. The floor is paved in mismatched marble slabs, and fifteen ornate brass lamps of varying ages and styles hang above the star— six belonging to the Orthodox faith, five to the Armenians, and four to the Franciscans— all of whom share control of the basilica. The star’s Latin inscription reads, “Here of the Virgin Mary Jesus Christ was born— 1717.” Its fine chasing is worn and blurred from centuries of devotional touching and kissing. Here, at the nucleus of the pilgrims’ visit— the axis mundi of the basilica, the material rendering force of human occupation competes with the intentional markings of place. Countless thousands— hundreds of thousands of people have inhabited this space, ultimately rendering its countenance over time. Climbing the stairs of the crypt, the passing of these pilgrims can be read in their worn, eroded stone, the treads smooth and undulating like a feather pillow after many hours of repose [Plate 2].

Once back in the calm dignity of the austere Byzantine nave, the gilded iconostasis, with its innumerable icons and religious paintings contrasts with the humility of the time worn walls. The meter of the forty-four pink limestone columns anchors the space. The upper portions of these columns are painted with images of various saints of the Western and Eastern churches. A guidebook will tell you that St. Sabas, St. Euthymius, St. Olav of Norway, St. Canute of Denmark, and St. Cathal of Ireland are depicted, and that their names are written in Greek and Latin. But, in truth, these paintings have been obscured by centuries of burning
offertory candles and vigilant oil lamps – a thick murky grease of tallow soot has burnished the column shaft, laying like a heavy veil over these forgotten saints. We only know of the stone’s pale coral by the bottom portion of each column – the base to the height of a human being, having been polished clean by the passing of many pilgrims (Plate 3). Though the obscuration of these Crusader paintings is at first disheartening, there is something affirming about their accumulated soiling. These columns are as representative of devotion as any gilt icon or lofty nave. This architecture has witnessed the rituals of human devotion for seventeen hundred years, and this history can be read in the materials that compose it.

Human occupation has worn itself into the fabric of the place, giving and affirming its habit.

Passing once again through the diminutive portal, the glaring mid-day sun looms high in the cloudless sky. Young children are leaning against the outer walls of the sanctuary and a woman carries a large basket of produce. They take refuge in the deep shadow cast by the towering walls of the basilica – they look on as life plays itself out in the simple happenings of the market square.

Perhaps it is not only the grand events of life that color space – perhaps it is the habits of living, or the overlay of lives which impart some form and color to architecture. The great bulk of the church, with its heaving buttresses, attempts to mark space, to commemorate a past life in its own way. Yet, the manner in which this structure has worn through centuries of occupation echoes the presence of other lives – those more humble, more obscure, that mark space in their own peculiar, enigmatic way.
II. The Marker and Transcendental Apperception

What is the limit of the monument – the marker, the placeholder for life and memory? These physical constructs ask for explanation – second-hand remembrance induced by curiosity of hard-lined facts. Not, however, the original heartfelt emotion that bred their creation – that fulfilled specific needs of the heart. Perhaps a monument can be less about a rational understanding and more about the capacity to feel – *space lent over to emotion*, as well as, the transferring remembrance through consciousness – requiring engaged participants.

When facts decay, when the lives pass, who holds the secrets to intended meaning? When symbols die – we must reflect on the futility of resurrecting iconography, at least with the intention of maintaining its historic meaning. Even through ages of meaning, of deep-seated and powerful influence, these symbols – their interpretation, was cultured by consensus – by memory, by the simple persistence of their existence. It is true that their value may be reclaimed in their restoration or their renewal in the social consciousness. But in an alternative way, these icons demonstrate the potential to represent something wholly new – informed by history and present reality, but appropriated for a different emotional need. In this case, poetry, allows the infinite through the finite, and meaning may expand beyond the limits of convention, the strictures of habit, and the physical extents of a material. We are left to question the nature of what it means to mark a human’s place and time in the world – what it means to mark their presence.
III. A Line Made By Walking

*My art has the themes of materials, ideas, movements, and time.*
*The beauty of objects, thoughts, places and actions.*

Richard Long

On a sunny day in 1967, Richard Long, then twenty-two years old and a student at Saint Martin’s School of Art in London, caught a train south-west out of Waterloo. When the suburbs gave way to countryside, Long got off the train, and found a field whose grass was starred with daisies. He walked back and forth, until the flattened grass caught the light such that it was visible as a line. Then he photographed the line in black and white, and went home. *A Line Made By Walking*, is visible because the grass of the meadow has been trodden down by footsteps and the flattened grass reflects the sunlight (Plate 4). This path is only perceptible because of the reflected light, and the fact that the path had been walked multiples times – a line walked once is practically invisible, walked ten times its would leave a trace, and walked a thousand times it would make a fairly permanent mark. It is this personal physical involvement with the natural world – with materials, that serves as the core matter of Long’s work. His work, digested to its essential components, is elemental – “The source of my work is nature. I use it with respect and freedom. I use materials, ideas, movements, and time to express a whole view of my art in the world.”

Beyond the simplicity of its form and the minimalism of its construction, Long’s *walk* as an art form takes on complex meaning and deeply probing implications for the reading of space, time, and memory. After *A Line Made By Walking*, Long has since replicated these *walks*

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in other settings, but universal to all, is the marking of place and material with human
presence [Plate 5]. These walks mark time with an accumulation of footsteps – they imprint the
form of the land, and sometimes with the placement of small rocks, carried by a single human,
place small remembrances throughout the landscape. They attempt to capture the human
occupation of space over time and to give this history presence.

My work has become a simple metaphor for life. A figure walking down his road,
making his mark. It is affirmation of my human scale and sense: how far I walk, what
stones I pick up, my particular experiences. Nature has more effect on me than I on it. I
am content with the vocabulary of universal and common means; walking, placing,
stones, sticks, water, circles, lines, days, nights, roads.  

Long consciously maintains the scale of these works, and though walks may differ in
length or material disturbance, the hope is that they reside in the middling ground between
the “making of monuments” and, conversely, “of leaving only footprints.” Long’s humble
events are not so very withdrawn from the metered side aisles and soaring nave of the Basilica
of the Nativity, for both attempt to mark presence in their own peculiar way. His walks,
however, are tempered in their degree of expression, they are never as extensive or complete
as a monumental building, nor as ephemeral as passing shadows. Like William Wordsworth
who took the grand tour by foot to enjoy the pleasure of walking when it was unseemly to do
so, Long demounts the supposed hierarchy of commemorative forms, and offers an extension
of their repertoire. Other artists in the 1960’s and 1970’s, during Long’s early career,
particularly in America, were working directly with the land as well, but none had done
anything so simple or with so light a touch. The same year that Smithson was hiring earth-

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9 From a press release for a solo exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, 2000. Ibid.
movers to bulldoze his Spiral Jetty into place on the salt flats of Utah (a 1,500ft chameleon's tongue of black basalt, curling out into ruddy water). Long was simply walking due north over Dartmoor, England. As Turrell was starting to reshape an extinct volcanic cinder crater in Arizona, Long was arranging a small circle of stones in the Andes (Plate 6). "Nature has more effect on me than I on it," he observed in 1983. What differs in Long’s work is the credence given to the simple actions of a single human being, these walks, becoming, “just one more layer, a mark, laid, upon the thousands of other layers of human and geographic history on the surface of the land.”

Sculpture In The Expanded Field

Walking also enabled me to extend the boundaries of sculpture, which now had the potential to be deconstructed in the space and time of walking long distances. Sculpture could now be about place as well as material form.

What makes A Line Made By Walking so compelling when placed within the canons of art history, is that Long’s work demonstrates the radical notions developed in 20th century art: that sculpture could be made anywhere, out of any material, using any action. Sculpture could even be ephemeral as long as the viewer was willing to view it imaginatively through photographs and texts, a custom Long began with A Line. Sculpture as a genre had expanded, and within this expansion the generative possibilities were endless. Over the years Long has pushed the limit of “sculpture,” ever pressing conventional definitions, his sculptures explore


13 Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture In The Expanded Field," October. (Spring, 1979), 30-44.
some of the variables of transience, permanence, visibility and recognition. *Corkney Stones* (1992) is a photograph showing a circle made by tilting up stones in Ireland (Plate 7). At Bertraghboy Bay in the west of Ireland, he walked a cross into tidal mud, let a film of seawater flood the cross, then photographed the shimmering mark (Plate 8). In 1979, he marched northwards across Dartmoor in the north of England treading a straight pathway into the heather – a meridian made visible. In Spain in 1990, during a frosty night, he tramped a circle into wet grass (Plate 9).

In Long’s idiom, a sculpture may be moved, dispersed, carried. Since his first works, impermanence has been a key element of his work. Many of Long’s pieces – a brushed path in Nepal, a line of kicked stones in Bolivia, a circle of stones in the Gobi desert (Plate 10) – are either ephemeral or impossible to find. Stones can be used as markers of time or distance, or exist as parts of huge, yet anonymous, sculpture. Or on a mountain walk, “a sculpture could be made above the clouds, perhaps in a remote region, bringing an imaginative freedom about how, or where, art can be made in the world”\(^\text{14}\). *Waterlines* (Portugal and Spain, 1989) is a spacious work of mark-making. The *waterlines* are a ritualized tracing of a walk Long made each day. The whole walk took twenty and one-half days but each water line lasted only a few minutes. To Long, the act of both walking and pouring leave no trace, but are, nevertheless, “a kind of measurement of both myself and that particular route across Iberia. I poured the lines from the large collapsible water bottle that I used for camping. . . I walked each step across Portugal and Spain. For me these experiences are exciting, fundamental and

profound.” Even at their most ephemeral, Long’s temporal traces are forms that feed the imagination. They are an attempt to distill, in the most reductive way, the experience of the individual.

* A walk expresses space and freedom and the knowledge of it can live in the imagination of anyone, and that is another space too. *16

The Art of Presence

Richard Long’s 1982 photograph *Shelter from the Storm* is a black-and-white close-up of his walking boots, seen from above. The boots are lying on their sides on a tent floor, as if recovering from exertion. Their leather is clotted with mud and splattered with a milky wash from days on the go. Their tongues are hanging out. No wonder – they’ve done many miles over the rough basaltic lavas of Iceland, where Long was walking that summer.

The photograph nods to Van Gogh’s 1886 painting *A Pair of Shoes*, which shows a pair of peddler’s boots, worn out by use. It also quietly reproaches Andy Warhol’s 1980 reprise of Van Gogh, *Diamond Dust Shoes*, in which immaculate high heels (colored ice blue, lilac, aspic green) are scattered like glazed corpses across the frame. Bob Dylan is there too, his song lending the photograph its title. The other allusion is to Long himself – the invisible walker, the boot wearer, the track maker, the “vanished” artist. Of the thousands of photographs with which he has recorded his walks and sculptures over the past 40 years, he appears in only a

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handful. Instead, the images show the marks he has made: footprints in river mud, paths scuffed through leaf litter, stones aligned or piled. His presence, however, is undeniable.

It is through Long’s works in which he “paints” with mud, however, that the viewer is confronted with self-portraiture rendered with the upmost fidelity. His work, *Firth of Forth Mud Arc* – at the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, fills the whole wall of one large gallery from floor to ceiling (Plate 11). To make it, Long stenciled the bottom half of a bisected circle on to the wall. Then he filled most of the space within the circumference with marks made of watery mud using the palms of his hands in a full array of wrist motions. The same motions we might use to clean dirty window glass, here are meant to obscure the pristine white gallery wall. Along with the sweeping smoothing and smudging motions, the trails of his fingers allowing the white wall to show through the newly applied “grime”. Six jagged vertical channels run from the top to the bottom of the arc, creating empty spaces between the areas marked with mud. At the circumference, the overspill of this spectacularly messy creative process is still evident – from exuberant splash marks that shoot up toward the cornice to the sad dribbles of muddy water running down over the baseboard. There is perfect balance between chance and control, calm and emotion, and structure and initial contact between hand and wall that makes the splashes at the top. Although Long insists there is nothing metaphorical or symbolic in his work, he does allude to their meaning. He has mentioned that the mud he likes to use is tidal – mud made by the movement of water over stones due to the gravitational pull of the moon over millions of years. The mud is its own trace, the product, the remains and beginnings, of the cosmic order. The time it took Long to make *Firth of Forth Mud Arc*.

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Mud Arc might have been a half an hour or less from start to finish. Yet, the phases of the moon are perhaps little different from the movements of man – both are a matter of scale, a matter of proportion.

*Untitled, 2003*, may be seen as attempting to register this proportion – its two black circles showing the direct treatment of one circle with muddied hands, and the other circle, by association – its cleanliness disturbed by the trailing and the drippings of the other (Plate 12). The circle not directly regarded by Long, shows the distribution of attention, the focused presence of the artist, just as the tension of all the blanched white gallery spaces and their displayed mud works seem to quietly belie. We have in these works, and in varying degrees in all of Long’s work, a suggestion of the artist’s corporeal presence, mingled with a concern with impermanence, motion, relativity, and time.

*Riverlines*, New York, NY

At 300 West 57th St., amid the deep pooling shadows of midtown Manhattan’s office towers, in just three days, from the 26th to the 28th of April, 2006, Richard Long completed his largest mud work to date. The 35’ x 50’ wall painting in the main lobby of Hearst Tower is rendered in Hudson River mud, collected from a site blocks away (Plate 13). The rhythmic gestures in muddied hands are a primitive counterpoint to the steely glass and metal volume that the work ornaments. The escalators – with their finely grooved mesh of steel, flowing cruelly to the upper levels – regard the frayed splatter edges and organized chaos of *Riverlines’s* nine regimented rows. The lobby, with its clear glass railings and polished metal surfaces, is given a tonal reprieve by the déshabillé appearance of Long’s work (Plate 14). *Riverlines* offers
the rigidity of the lobby’s material expression a human presence, for in the work, materials, though added to the pristine white wall, are freed from rigid confinement in placid surfaces by the vivifying touch of the human artist. These nine rows record the traces of an unspecified human body moving through space and time. Like the soiled collar of an unwashed shirt, Long has worn himself into the materiality of the place.

The Intimacies of Being

By descending from the great rhythms forced upon us by the universe, those epic and heroic tales of gods and kings, to the finer rhythms that play upon a single man’s most exquisite sensibilities – the work of Richard Long allows us to examine the humble, intimate rhythms of life in detail. These primal images, the simple engravings of space, are but invitations to start imagining again the nature of human presence. Such images, through extension, speak to our primal notions of space and our interaction with material forms. Reduced to the capacities of a single presence, these primal images, these simple engravings, give us back condensed *areas* of being, they are, in the scalar hierarchy of the built world, “houses in which the human being’s certainty of being is concentrated.”¹⁹ In many ways, the house is a befitting container for gestures of this “grandeur,” for it is within the house that the greatness of humble lives makes itself known.

IV. In A House, As In Life

*For, in point of fact, a house is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally. Its prime reality is visible and tangible, made of well*

hewn solids and well fitted framework. It is dominated by strait lines, the plumb-line having marked it with its discipline and balance. A geometrical object of this kind ought to resist metaphors that welcome the human body and the human soul. But transposition to the human plane takes place immediately when a house is considered a place of cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy.

Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space

When a house lives humanly, it has been imbued with sentiment, with emotional weight. It may also be true, that a house is enlivened by actions. The material forming qualities of gestures, rituals, and habits, as they play out in the three dimensional space of the dwelling, mark the space with a presence that belies lives past within its walls. When we live in a space, move through it, mar its surfaces, our presence may become enmeshed in the presence of the structure –

The influence of houses on their inhabitants might well be the subject of a scientific investigation. Those curious contraptions of stones or bricks, with all their peculiar adjuncts, trimmings, and furniture, their specific immutable shapes, their intense and inspissated atmosphere, in which our lives are entangled as completely as our souls in our bodies – what powers do they wield over us, what subtle and pervasive effects upon the whole substance of our existence may not be theirs?

Lytton Strachey, Lancaster Gate

Beyond the emotional countenance of space, one that will be forever watery to affirm, the material traces of our occupation will unabashedly portray our tenure. Whether with hands, or feet, or the equipage of domestic life, the materials that compose our dwelling place will eventually be reformed by our presence. Writing about this vivifying touch and its effects on material form, Henri Bosco once wrote,

The soft wax entered into the polished substance under the pressure of hands and the

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effective warmth of a woolen cloth. Slowly the tray took on a dull luster. It was as though the radiance induced by this magnetic rubbing emanated from the hundred-year-old sapwood, from the very heart of light, over the tray. The old fingers possessed every virtue, the broad palm, drew from the solid block with its inanimate fibers, the latent powers of life itself. This was the creation of an object, a real act of faith, taking place before my enchanted eyes.  

The well-worn newel post, the site of many brief contemplations, will over time take on a dull luster as well. The parquet of the familiar sitting room will be made uneven by many passings, but also burnished and polished, silken to the touch. And the brass fittings of the entryway, will no longer be of uniform color, their differential wear will betray those areas most caressed or depended upon in entering. These surfaces will not necessarily be even, or prismatic, or pristine, but they are part of a house’s essential quality – they link its immediate past to its immediate future, they are what maintains it in the security of being – they bely its continued presence in time.

A Simple Flight Of Stairs

On a narrow street in the Manhattan’s West Village, there is a townhouse on West 4th Street that is distinguished by a magnificent gnarled wisteria vine, the planting of which was fashionable in the third decade of the nineteenth century. It is not one of those graciously scaled houses that surround Washington Square, with their Tuckahoe marble steps and well-proportioned parlor windows. It has a more humble countenance, beginning life as the home of a ship’s officer or a feed merchant, in a district that was once noted for its connections with the happenings of the sea and the trade of the ports. The house’s sober façade contains three unadorned floors above, and a basement and cellar below. The entry, with its single paneled door and furtive sidelights, is accessed by a flight of five steps in dusty iron-oxide laden

sandstone, resembling in color the faded Pompeian reds of Canaletto. By ascending these steps, the visitor is given some perspective of the street, a new horizon from which to regard the happenings of the block, a view every visitor has had since this little house was built. Tired and wilted, the wrought iron railings, mangled and crumpled by too many unadvised leanings, frame this attenuated ascent – several of their anthemion flourishes having been snapped off by playing children or the carelessness of workmen making repairs in the kitchen or cellar below. Braced by this metal railing, the news of the ending of several wars may have been delivered to the household by jubilant passersby.

The well-used steps of this humble dwelling place have seen generations of packing crates – the pianoforte replaced by the pump organ, which was then replaced by the Victrola, and so on and so forth – every mover chipping away at the nose of the tread, gouging and scarring the fragile stone. Heavy boots have worn away the placid finish of the riser, the treads softened by the soles of many shoes and the seats of many loiters who have used these steps to survey the narrow street. All the happy events of this house began on these steps, and all the saddest have as well. They have seen other buildings of its scale, simplicity, and era lost and replaced by slightly more ambitious structures, several floors more or gaudily arrayed with adornment. Other flights of stairs on this little narrow street – an anachronism in a city taken over by a spacious grid, have been patched or repaired, or have even been replaced. These new graceful flights gain marked presence through their inexperienced sharpness and haughty precision. Yet, perhaps, the steps of the little house with the gnarled vine demonstrate an elegance of a different order. They bear the mark of time, a mark which can only be worn by bearing witness to the now anonymous events of past human lives. And this is how we may trade the heroic gesture, for the greatness of humility.
The Lineage of Presence

Like Long’s *A Line Made By Walking*, it is the accumulation of many paths taken, of a building’s years of imposed purpose or of impromptu habits of use, over many days and years, that bring to full view the continued presence of human beings in architecture. The anonymity of the subject – and subjects, of this wear is thus assured, save for the most impactful scratch, dent, or chip, and even then the perpetrator is lost after the initial scolding. This obscuration is unimportant, for it is the collateral traces of these events which contribute, and continue to contribute, to the ever dynamic form of architecture. We may only be able to understand events, such as the favorite path from room to room, or the frequency of fires being burnt in a fireplace, but even then we do our fair share of projecting. It is the lineage of presence, both of the anonymous human form and the work of architecture that is necessary to acknowledge.

We construct our fair share of the character of place when we attempt to reconstruct the life of a house, but in the end, we may only be more aware of the generative potential of our magnifying being. For it is often our own inner immensity that gives meaning to the visible world.

*While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.*

William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*
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*In A House, As In Life*


Fragments: The Conservator and Creation
The Conservator and Creation

There will always be mystery in reading life backwards from its traces. Whether the fragments of days and of storms, the fragments of malice and of hatred, or the fragments of the simple happenings of quotidian existence, in architectural conservation we deal with the found pieces of other lives, of past architectural existence. Works of architecture, with all of their plentiful aspects, their complex relationships, and their diverse cultural positions, are, fundamentally, fragments. Fragments because they are the result of tensions, of energies applied and influenced, ones never free of association. Architecture is part of an immense experiential world, one which cannot be reduced to any one aspect.

Seeing the Fragments of Other Lives

So much of life is a process of wading through a stock of remnants, of suggestions, of traces, of memories. Enfilade after enfilade of parquet holds the fragments of other lives, other ideals, and other explorations. They all wait to be experienced, to be consumed – they wait to be seen.

Seeing is an active art. It is never passive. Though it may defer to the vision of others, it is always essentially generative, even if the sphere of influence of that seeing is contained within the vast limits of a single human form. The mystery of this aesthetic process engaged by all is at its most robust when dealing with perceptual objects which are noticeably fragmentary in nature. In the realm of visual fragments,
one cannot help but to think of the photograph. All photographs have both a history and a prehistory — they are a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience the image directly. Thus, every image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past adds special color. This depth may be owed to its incompleteness, its fragmentary nature, as it has been divorced from its physicality and temporal event. It may also be true that no single form or image is, or ever was, truly complete. Even when something is seemingly complete, seeing, as an arbiter of the human intellect, attempts to render the physical world further. This is how we might understand the infinite generative potential both of fragments and of seeing.

To see, is to create.

The Angel of Nagasaki, UNESCO

At 7 Place de Fontenoy, 7th, in a damp garden at the UNESCO world headquarters in Paris there are a few flowering cherry trees and many beds of spring flowers – tulips, hyacinths, narcissi. On a quiet wall, in this garden with its Mirò and Calder, the head of a stone angel is mounted. The sculpture that has become known as the Angel of Nagasaki was meant for a different life. It was originally carved for the Urakami Church in Nagasaki, built between 1873 and 1925. The church was home to a devout population of Japanese Christians who had suffered two-centuries of persecution for their faith. It was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that they were not called kakure kirishitan, or hidden Christians.
The Angel of Nagasaki

UNESCO, Paris
2008
In preparation for the Assumption of Mary, *Sacramentum* was held on August 9th 1945. At 11:02 in the morning, services ended. The epicenter of the bombing was five hundred meters from the church. All worshipping inside perished. The church itself was completely destroyed, save a few sculptural fragments – one of which has a new home thousands of miles away in a garden dedicated to peace. Mournful, hopeful eyes had seen a message in it, and having thus, sent it out to the world to see. *Seeing* in the world relies on understanding the powers of associations, as well as the liberating and generative potential of looking at events through different eyes.

An Expansiveness of Seeing

Far too often we do not see the relationship between events, and we believe in the fiction of the independence and disparate nature of life’s happenings. Much can be gained from exploring the spirit of seemingly far removed modes of expression. There is a volume-less depth of richness to be gained by engaging the ornate intricacies of life and their broad spheres of influence. We may come to understand how richly embroidered culture may be, both its finely sewn influences and its limitless field of potential. All the energy that has been put forth within these pages has been ruled by the expressed desire to learn from and to expand our understanding of the intimacy of all things. If these reflections should have any marked aim or resolve it is to demonstrate the complexity of cultural interactions, however multivariable, multifaceted, and diverse their character, and that, for the conservator, their navigation may lead to a measure of delicacy, sensitivity and restraint in action.
If I have done my work, I have left you questions. Questions that arise out of trying to see the poetry in those weathered, scarred, and worn aspects of architecture, which we have become so proficient in obscuring. These are the questions that arise out of attempting to see life from other promontories. They are thoughts that provide a greater expansiveness to our seeing – questions that are the affirming gifts of never mistaking culture for an end.
Plates
Dialogues of Uncertainty - Plates


(Plate 6) Interior of St. Martin’s Cathedral, Utrecht. Pieter Saenredam - 1662.

(Plate 7) Interior of St. Bavo’s Church, Haarlem. Pieter Saenredam - 1660.

Weathered - Plates

(Plate 3) Cedar Screen. Katsura Imperial Villa, 1616-1662, Kyoto.
Plate 4: The Tokonoma of the Taian teahouse, Myokian Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Sen no Rikyu - 1582.

A Teahouse Exterior.

A Teahouse Tokonoma.

(Plate 8) Cracklure Raku Vase - [1558-1637] Edo period.


Sacco. St. II. Alberto Burri- 1954.
(Plate 19) Legno. Alberto Burri - 1959.


Plate 26: *Bell Industries*, 2012.
Scarred - Plates
Plate 1: Cathedral of St. Martin, Utrecht, 16th c. Iconoclasm from the Protestant Reformation.


Plate 3: The Dresden Frauenkirche, Church of Our Lady, 1726-1743.

Built in the 18th century, the church was destroyed in the firebombing of Dresden during World War II. The reconstruction used parts of the chapel that remained, as well as masonry units that were salvaged from the ruins.
(Plate 4) The Portico of the Erechtheion. 421-406 B.C.E.

(Plate 5) The Surrender of Breda, Diego Velasquez. 1634-35.

Plate 8: *El Tres de Mayo*. Francisco Goya - 1808.


Plate 13: Masks for Facial Disfigurement Department. 3rd London General Hospital. 1918. Smithsonian
Plate 14: American Red Cross Studio for Portrait-Masks, Anna Coleman Ladd - 1917. Smithsonian

Plate 15: Cloth Hall, Ypres, Belgium. 1918. Smithsonian

Plate 16: WWI Trench. 1916. Smithsonian

Plate 18: Dresden, 1945. Getty Images
(Plate 19) Rows of bodies of dead inmates fill the yard of Lager Nordhausen, a Gestapo concentration camp. April 12, 1945.

(Plate 20) Dead soldier Federico Borrell García, from Alcoi - Frank Capa, 1939. © Cornell Capa

(Plate 21) A U.S. Marine, killed by Japanese sniper fire, he lies in the black volcanic sand of Iwo Jima, on 2/19/45. The Atlantic.
During World War II, after St. Martin’s Church in Warsaw had been bombed, members, sifting through the debris, found only the lower half of the 16th century crucifix that had been sculpted by Barneckowski. The crucifix was “completed” in 1967 by a Franciscan Sister Alma Skrzydlewska.


Plate 29) Interior of the Reichstagsgebäude with Soviet graffiti. 1945. Life

Plate 30) A Seventeenth Century Synagogue in Krasnik, Poland. Jeffrey Gusky.

Worn - Plates

Columns in the nave. *The Basilica of the Nativity*, 2012
**North and South**

A Walk of 279 Miles
Northwards and Southwards
Out and Back on the Same Road
Eight Walking Hours Each Day

<table>
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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Hours South</th>
<th>Distance</th>
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Wales and England 1991


