TOWARDS AN 'EPISTEMOLOGY OF INVENTION'
FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

by

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ABSTRACT

Most contemporary cultural landscapes are designed and constructed by way of fundamentally flawed epistemological underpinnings: the basic simplifications and separations of which are progressively and perilously at odds with the 'social nature' of both physical and meaning-full life. Thus one of the most significant problems facing design is epistemological — how operative logics are embedded in and perform through the material world, to shape experiences of the built environment.

In a generalized sense, then, contemporary experience often becomes confused with too much disturbance, and we with our constructions often become predisposed to actions and attitudes of mastery through violence in relation to the world. This general condition — which has by now accumulated tremendous momentum — must be associated with both experiential and environmental crises. We must embrace transdisciplinary approaches through which we might better comprehend, contemplate, and more adeptly curtail this performing phenomenon.

There is a contingent relationship between being a responsible designer and one's awareness of and respect for what mediates one's interventions. The arguments presented here suggest that the practice of Landscape Architecture (and related fields) must better scrutinize and mediate how knowledges are experienced and deployed through the design realm.

Three main goals of this work follow:

1) Enunciate conditions and tendencies of everyday life manifest of this globally dominating phenomenon (this productive epistemology), and associate them with modes of authoring or design, method or style, perceived as more or less proper to the task.

2) Articulate or bring together the histories of both human and nonhuman actors as fully constitutive of our collective existence;

3) Tender propositions for an alternative 'epistemology of invention', which aims to redeem the hidden and oft-suppressed potentials of everyday life, by mobilizing all our faculties proper to the task of more life-sensitive design.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Originary concerns and aspirations*

With this thesis, I have attempted to construct and defend a basic set of accords or allegiances proper to the task of landscape-architectural design. This task is principally accomplished by suggesting how design has been derivative of and complicit with larger societal traditions — particularly those prohibitive of truly interdisciplinary (integrative of science, art, and life) comprehensions and ambitions. In this way, my writing is shaped as much by what I believe we should be against as by what I believe we should affirm. However, what is affirmed is not necessarily the obverse of what is opposed, but in the spirit of working together with what is at hand. As *poetry* (which comes from the Greek, meaning 'invention') can resist or rather exceed assimilation, so too can the principal procedures proposed here for doing design.

I don't believe localized creativity can be *captured alive* and marshaled as ready-made solutions for the systematic functioning of another locality. Something dies along the way. The residual of which haunts us with 'noise'. (We will soon return to this notion as discussed by the great, French scientist-philosopher, Michel Serres.) Under whatever guise, the act of enslaving reveals the nature of violence because it can only operate by severing off parts, which have constituted and give potential to a singularity. This always happens, it would seem, to a greater or lesser degree when we use things (in our languages as in our landscapes). My chief concern is that we seem to be building ‘realities’ which progressively sever as well our faculties for both evaluating and minimizing violence in everyday life. As argued and implied by the key thinkers discussed in this thesis, contemporary, dominant, globalizing forces tend to pull most of us ever-deeper into our own destructive illusions and/or forms of profound indifference, while generating physical conditions of increasing violence. I believe that we must work to reconnect with or rediscover ways of reversing this phenomenon if we are to avoid rapid self-destruction as a human race.

The concept of violence, as treated in my work, hinges around various forces operating through the design(ed) realm — forces that spread out and little by little destroy our habitats, values, capacities to resist, and opportunities to authentically alter and experience the world — forces that nullify difference, conflict, and dialogue. For the purposes of this thesis, then, we might generally think of violence in these terms: that which effaces what is mutually constitutive, that which transforms becoming into being, processes into facts/fetishes, relations into objects. Recognizing and resisting violence is but a beginning, however, and not from my side an end in itself.

***
It seems to me, a great critique adds to the world, not merely through finding a problem, but by *opening* its hidden contents and *discovering* new connections and possibilities. Growing out of critique, truly 'new' additions are rare — *invention is rare* — and I preserve no illusions that my work produces much in the way of this kind of rarity. However, the approach I emulate does strive to be inventive by way of its 'comparitivism'. I have sought to sustain fidelity to learning in diverse realms (in the sciences, the humanities, many cultures and/or languages) so as to discover implications and opportunities that grow from seeing *similarity* between them all. This experience (of knowledge) has *taken place in-between* difference.

"The only experience possible for man," which is "literally the absence of a road [a-**poria**]," as Giorgio Agamben put it in his *Essays on the Destruction of Experience* (1993a, 29), is the 'potentiality' I likewise believe we must endeavor to restore. Since, in the final analysis, I believe and intend to argue that design should be about the intimate art of making and *making possible* discoveries, should the basic theme of my work be labeled 'methodological' (of a *methodos*, a path) then, as the old saying goes, "method is the *path, after* one has been along it" (Granet 1932; cited by Dumézil 1988, 11).

***

We (the plurality that constitutes my writing vis-à-vis your unique reading) will work to share recognitions regarding today's collective constitution of design, its main operators and general consequences.¹ In the broadest or everyday sense, then — and through commonality with notions of 'authorship' — design will be posited as a rigorous undertaking of 'answerability'.² This idea has to do with how well one knows and is responsive to the constituent parts of an architectonic process — to the different aspects and actors of a composition, which are mutually answerable, but also mutually liable to blame (Bakhtin 1990, 2), and *together* make up an *unfinalized* whole.

***

Considering what it means to act or create in a responsible manner hastens our contemplation of what it means to 'invent'. What do contexts of high interactivity have to do with invention? Why should painstaking care for answerability open spaces for something fertile and new, for the surging of communicability? And what forces tend to stifle this kind of experience? Who and what, then, can and will ask questions; who and what can and will respond; and, above all, how well?

We will work to affirm the pertinence and potential of these challenging questions for design, questions that may tend to confound 'answers', as such, while nonetheless working *towards* invention.

***
Given the deliberately provocative nature of this endeavor, it shouldn't be surprising that the subject of epistemology has occupied a lot of my attention. I have worked from the belief that contemplating the nature of thought and knowledge — their forms of occurrence and transferal, alteration and integration — can once again be of practical importance to our constructive and collective well-being. We will therefore consider epistemology as it generally operates in the world we aim to understand and act appropriately with-in — epistemology as "embedded in social practices," or what many post-structuralists believe underwrites "claims about how we know what the world is" (Gregory 2000, 226) — epistemology as it informs contexts for creativity and the circulations of meaning and matter. We will generally 'problematize' variously constituted knowledges and how they embark on their own constituting (knowledge imbued, as it were, in the performance of things).\(^3\) This task is crucial, from my side, should we acknowledge the role of the designer as one who aims to "find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativity)" (Deleuze 1987; cited by Wolfe 1998, 101) — not of systematically prescriptive or perfunctory measures, but of place-based propagations and possibilities.

What approach does the answerable designer take when she or he mobilizes knowledges and their constituents? Should a kind of knowledge be produced in a highly controlled environment, for example, how will it act when freed of its confines or when deployed as a kind of agent? How might its answers to new situations invoke its origins? How, then, might the vacuum-like origins subsequently expand to compensate; and what or who resists this reactionary reverberation?\(^4\)

***

Hardened and laminar kinds of knowledge have often conspired, we might say, to increasingly ossify landscapes where, in the case of concrete's transfigurations, its basically impermeable performance has proliferated via storm water drainage systems. Having interrogated this pervasive phenomenon, well renowned landscape architect, Patrick Condon, now frequently proclaims that "Curbs are Evil."

Alternatively, should a kind of knowledge born of multiplicity embrace the messiness of its situation, of its socio-ecological 'experience', will its correspondence tend towards a more healthy contextual performance? Here we should envision local, singular, original knowledges, embedded in the collective incremental growth of a place, and not over-run by, but better adapted to, the ever-changing context. Condon's alternative storm water designs do attempt, for example, to enmesh and slow water flows, allowing for more place-based possibilities (both experiential and ecological) by preserving and propagating fertile plant and soil conditions, by preserving and propagating a 'roughness' of topography integral to a given site, and so on and so forth. This approach resists (at least in its spirit) the officialdom of perfunctory codes and infrastructure now commonplace and enforced though many kinds of inertia, throughout the so-called developed
world. Whether or not one set of codes and infrastructure is being replaced by another, while perpetuating the enervating effects of officialdom on everyday life is, however, as I will suggest here, an issue related to epistemology and its mutually constitutive relations with larger socio-ecological conditions.

If embracing a sound ethic of sustainability is indeed fundamental to our discipline or, more importantly, to our specie’s survival, I believe a more fundamental form of problematizing design(s) (as experimented with here) must surface in our contemporary discourse and practice with greater fluency, frequency, and fervor.

* * *

We can notice in the construction of different ‘realities’ (or the productions of science, art, religion, etc.) conflict with the processual and yet free character of ‘being in the world’. By employing epistemological constructs rooted in the sciences, at least those which resist and suppress the complex and open-ended state of things, I believe designers of the built environment have long worked within realms of assumption that turn away from what unites us all — the in-between of communicability itself. This problem has been compellingly articulated within several contemporary currents of thought (in Science Studies, Philosophy of Science, and Literary Criticism), each of which then favors ‘artistic-scientific’ constructions in the humanities for their ability to be truer to the unfolding of time, to how life and freedom happens.

By visiting these arguments we will work towards a practice characterized by an architectonics of increasingly adept anticipation, and appreciation of freedom — design/building procedures interlocking with the heterogeneous phenomena of local-global lived experience. Not only must we invent, we must invent “the common ground for future inventions . . . [we must] invent the conditions of invention” (Serres 1995d, 86).

We will search for principles that are discerning of and resistant to tendencies which enforce stasis and fixity — overwhelming tendencies which conceal and smother the emergence of multitudinous time(s) or influences. This means, in large part, abandoning the implicit purpose derived from our tools, and the aggressive ‘mission’ that they suppose (de Zengotita 2003b, 34). In so doing, the difficulty of design is considerably restored, along with its poetic task of compositioning. And we grow closer to discovering design procedures for a healthier or more actively lived cultural landscape.

This work is essentially concerned with the emergence of constructive implications, which suggest dispensing with dogmatic simplifications and separations, while advocating a design field rooted in dense socio-ecological mixtures of communication and complexity. I have intended that this ‘emergence’ should occur throughout the thesis.
Design or the experience of language

Form a community creative of values, values creative of cohesion.

Georges Bataille 1998, 121

This section adumbrates a basic kind of assumption and procedure through which crucial ideas in my thesis are conceived: we'll work from the proposition that design is an experience of language. This idea is an extremely important operator in my work. It casts the light of relevance over multiple discourses, heretofore bound by the allegedly autonomous categories erected by Enlightenment era epistemology — categories justified by notions of technical efficiency, total organization, repetition and equivalence of exchanges, assumptions of unlimited growth and forward progress. More specifically, then, studies of language (i.e. in philosophy and literature) are herein considered and compared with at least equal regard to studies of matter (i.e. in physics and ecology).

If design is indeed an experience (and thus the outcome) of language, it is a transmission of tradition through gesture and adaptation, a textual system of signification that incompletely suggests how things are. Design posits or positions combinations of presuppositions, the experience of which is activated by one's presence and imagination (how 'present' and 'imaginative' can one be in the given situation?). Through authoring or design, the very act of predication or building also distances what it brings to light. Through the experience of language, then, there is the sense of inauguration and the awakening of that which exceeds it. Herein lies its potential, its multiplicity, and also its relations to violence.

Design will vary with regard to the communicative potential with which it acts in every situation. In other words, it will be more or less demonstrative of difference, more or less sensitive to myriad constituents and myriad interpretations, and more or less creative of ongoing communicability — that which can form 'values creative of cohesion'.

I believe that design, in discourse as in practice, is insufficient only insofar as it fails to acknowledge and be accountable for its collective (temporal and spatial) performance with-in the world. In a positive sense, then, the degree to which it can be accountable corresponds to the degree to which it can engender at once liberative and generative contexts of creation. Design is always more or less evocative of larger contexts with-in which it operates and proper with regard to the potentialities it helps give rise to. What it can't know is what it must strive to be sensitive to. The human, albeit agonizing, sense of generosity lies in this very principle.

Like other forms of language, design is a rough approximation of its demands with more or less proximity to the meaning-full contexts of its determinations. It goes without saying, design as a form of language must be inherently incomplete. The unfinalized nature of its articulations is precisely what it must at once re-cognize and redeem the potentiality of. The act of ordering, then,
is more or less ‘benevolent’ as it seeks to redeem potentialities. Design endeavors to articulate things (or bring together particularities) and its relative success in so doing depends on how well it knows and reacts to its constituent and tendential parts. This is not to say, however, that the precision with which one is articulate is a matter of how closed-in a context becomes, but rather of knowing how genuinely open it can be.

How does design understand its functioning as a matter of opening different possibilities for dialogue among different actors (both human and nonhuman) in society-nature? How might design, in essence, work towards an absolute generosity, towards writing itself out of existence, that it might open the healthy co-authoring of others? I cannot pretend to fully address these questions. Rather, I aim to introduce their relevance and liberative potential within a field now suffering under the weight of their neglect.

**Basic organizational structure**

We begin in this introduction with ideas that constitute the basic and pragmatic implications of the thesis itself. This prefatory effort lays out a method (or the primary assumptions ‘put to work’) both in writing and/or in design. In this sense, it is emblematic of the overall effort: how does one cultivate potential and encourage the reader (the participant and the would-be designer/builder) to better ‘move on the boundaries’ of thought or use ‘multiple footings’ to explore across fields and great distances while, all along, sustaining the possibility of adapting or even abandoning his or her already prepared viewpoints and positions?6

While struggling to create such a context, I have adopted a somewhat unorthodox structure, which overlaps with both practical and more philosophic aims. Conventional discursive writing (the text you’re now reading) will be combined with more poetic or provocative imagery at once aggregate and separate. These peripheral images, thoughts, and fragments ‘create a feeling’ I indirectly take up and discuss theoretically; they have their own space, one that bleeds into the others. I use some quotations within the main text to similar effect. A material culture case study is another, more extensive, effort to accomplish the same basic goal — to provoke a kind of radical discourse that will augment design thinking and practice. Endnotes are used in a more technical manner than the periphery materials — for definitions, tangential elaborations, and other relevant trajectories. The main body itself contains the primary problems, procedures for engaging with them, justifications for doing so, and a set of suggestive outcomes.
Above all the colorful imagery, intuitional consequence and evocative evidence, however, I proceed in a more inductive fashion, since the aim of my work here is to grasp the current dimension of questions fundamental to the task of responsibly designing (and participating in) the built environment.

Chapter 1 introduces the primary ‘thinkers’ enlisted to support the basic arguments. Chapter 2 elaborates or better defines ‘the problem’ through the superimpositioning of contemporary environmental and experiential crises, and, similarly, through discussing the impoverishment and potential of ‘common sense’. Chapter 3 draws out epistemological implications by way of exploring ontic relations to irreversible time(s). In Chapter 4 a case study is used to help translate the more philosophical character of the thesis into a contemporary built environment. (This chapter also contains a more explicit critique of globalization and cosmopolitanism than the foregoing material.) As already mentioned, other vignettes throughout the thesis also aim to function in this ‘translational’ or ‘introductory’ fashion, each successful insofar as their ‘thickness’ of implication augments the main text. Chapter 5 works to gather together the central themes of the paper and rough out an ‘Epistemology of Invention’ for Landscape Architectural Design.

A provocative periphery

"Its green border repeats the dark outline of the buried lake; an invisible landscape conditions the visible one; everything that moves in the sunlight is driven by the lapping wave enclosed beneath the rock's calcareous sky."

Italo Calvino 1974, 20

"... the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness, and that what many consider to be the vitality of the times — noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring — belongs to the realm of death . . ."

Italo Calvino 1993, 12
Situating the basic argument

For many years, my walks have taken me down an old fencerow in a wooded hollow on what was once my grandfather's farm. A battered galvanized bucket is hanging on a fence post near the head of the hollow, and I never go by it without stopping to look inside. For what is going on in that bucket is the most momentous thing I know, the greatest miracle that I have ever heard of: it is making earth. The old bucket has hung there through many autumns, and the leaves have fallen around it and some have fallen into it. Rain and snow have fallen into it, and the fallen leaves have held the moisture and so have rotted. Nuts have fallen into it, or have been carried into it by squirrels; mice and squirrels have eaten the meat of the nuts and left the shells; they and other animals have left their droppings; insects have flown into the bucket and died and decayed; birds have scratched in it and left their droppings or perhaps a feather or two. This slow work of growth and death, gravity and decay, which is the chief work of the world, has by now produced in the bottom of the bucket several inches of black humus. I look into that bucket with fascination because I am a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts, and I recognize there an artistry and a farming far superior to mine, or to that of any human. I have seen the same process at work on the tops of boulders in a forest, and it has been at work immemorially over most of the land surface of the world. All creatures die into it, and they live by it.

Wendell Berry "The Work of Local Culture,"
In What Are People For? (1990)

This cavernous container enfolding matter, enfolding time, spills over in space, and fills up with meaning in the soul of Wendell Berry. His vision here is a fulfilling one for me. It is intelligent, subtle, deep, precise...faithful to the things themselves, faithful to our ways of knowing. He evokes the need to understand through the senses and through the soul without using concepts (or, at minimum, apprehension 'at once' intimate and abstract). Berry peers into this bucket to witness what is enveloped. He sees and shares aspects of dialogue at work in the world: multiples mixing, reconciliation with fluidity, raw matter transformed into organic matter, processes of interpenetration and the making of spongy soil...the unity of becoming, of meaning, of life. The multiple is here revealed as it is congealed, as it extends, as it spills over with the accretions of time.

This narrative too moves 'beyond the battered pail', exceeding limits and affecting the growth of something new. Just like the hanging pail, it is not like many lifeless containers surrounding us, necessarily reified by 'what they are supposed to be', what nonetheless bear the weight of time. Everything gathers and experiences the ongoing movement of time with others and yet everything does so in different ways. Berry never ignores this fact.

Time, it appears through our everyday experience, is registered by transformations of both matter and meaning. These transformations occur in infinite ways, each one leaving a mark on the social world as a whole. These marks or kinds of influence are the stuff of communication that makes the world a complex web of interconnection, one immense social space. This stuff out of which the world is made is configured by modes of communication, through different kinds of building, which ceaselessly give to new forms. The impacts these
forms, these outcomes of communication, have on the sociality of the world are “revealed to us only through the active construction in which we participate” (Prigogine and Stengers 1984, 293).

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This research paper endeavors to consider how different epistemologies or operational logics function in more or less socially tolerable fashions. (Let it be noted that by this usage of the term ‘social’ I’m not respecting any border between conventional notions of nature and society.) Epistemological ramifications spread out and multiply in unfathomable ways — especially as a consequence of acting like they don’t matter.

Historically speaking, landscape architecture has known that ideas and beliefs do indeed translate into the production of space and its experience. This has been especially apparent in its efforts to recognize the various land uses of antiquity as relevant to its identity as a modern discipline; and this recognition of the past is especially important as landscape architecture’s project of identity-building (responsibly) falters with regard to the project of modernity itself. Put too briefly, then, it has been convincingly argued that the ‘modern project’ constitutes a state of misrecognition with regard to the real actors and actions changing our world (see Bruno Latour, 1993), as born of

“I never have a rapport solely with an object. My attention, my perception, my knowledge are immersed in a social and cultural ensemble.”

Michel Serres 1991, 102

Numerous experiences shared in this paper have taught me too not to ignore how immersion in the appreciation of difference and contested composition — for builders of matter and builders of memory — can coincide with a certain apprehension of universal cohesion.

A period intense with wonder and experience, still flickering in my imagination, transpired during a month of rigorous investigation in Lijiang, China, towards the completion of my undergraduate thesis. There is in the heart of Lijiang a mature (over 800 year-old) town named Dayan. This World Heritage site is gradually being inundated on all sides by contemporary Chinese urbanity, with floods of corrugated steal, glass, concrete, and ash. The proximity of Dayan to the surrounding ‘modern’ city presents a startling narrative of so-called progress or tragic misunderstanding. What now barely survives through the trivializing voyeurism to which we assign nearly all hopes of conservation, is a human community of local, centripetal forces, so refined that the interpenetration of culture and nature appears total. However, like its burning coal, what was centripetal becomes centrifugal with the commodification of culture.

One wanders and wonders through the narrow streets of Dayan, senses and reads through the dialogue that has long ‘taken place’ there. In this catchment of organic materials and energy, heated like compost with the enriching movements of culture, saturated with time, with the daily flux of water and associated rituals (as shown above), with the smells of the landscape and far-away places... indelible marks on my understanding of ‘time texturing space’, the superiority of what some call organic or piecemeal growth, and the messy idea, ‘quality of life’, arose, like the inspiring Phoenix of the Naxi people living there.
bifurcations in historical time (i.e. the modern eclipsing the premodern) and societal constitution (i.e. the severe separation of exact knowledge from the exercise of power). By thoroughly bringing this kind of recognition to the fore, landscape architectural discourse and practice will each move towards a pivotal position for both comprehending and mediating epistemological proliferation. Staying faithful to this contention (this decomposition of so-called modernity and recuperation of lived experience) predominantly entails exploring how the 'reality' epistemologically embedded form communicates rarely, if ever, coincides with the reality of the everyday (uncertain, highly productive, ecological) world we should aim to survive in.

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Let's pause to consider the orthodox scientific method (scientia experimentalis, the construction of a sure road) as it exemplifies the generation of epistemologically embedded form. We have seen this productive logic in whose underlying assumption time is assumed to be reversible, giving way to perfect repeatability. Here, where matters are left incomplete there is failure — when, in fact, muddled multiplicity, incalculable residue, the always unfinished is the state of things. To the extent this method resists this (becoming) state, it enters into the process of constituting another, not necessarily desirable, kind of reality — particularly when mobilized into practice. (A kind of force emerges corresponding to the principle of inertia.) It follows that the experience that can be validated as certain by the scientific method has the distinction of being in principle absolutely independent of any situation of action and of every integration into the context of action. This 'objectivity' conversely implies that it is able to serve every such possible context. It is precisely this objectivity which was so quintessentially realized in modern science and which transformed broad expanses of the face of the earth into an 'artificial' human environment.

Now the experience which has been reworked by the sciences has the merit of being verifiable and acquirable. But, in addition, it raises the claim that on the basis of its methodological procedure it is the only certain experience, hence the only mode of knowing in which each and every experience is rendered truly legitimate. Now practical experience or the 'extra-scientific' domain must not only be subjected to scientific verification but also, should it hold its ground against this demand, belongs by this very fact to the domain of scientific research. There is in principle nothing which could not be subordinated in this manner to the competence of science.

It would seem, then, that the scientific method has acted as another breed of power with the role and function of making people believe both concept and reason, closure and domination exist, whereas there is only ever pure multiplicity. Of course, these 'beliefs' do exist, as such, and they pervasively configure the material world. In fact, they are not unlike those of the past,
which fought to show that the earth is flat, or that it can be organized and understood with a grid. In fact, as Serres points out, this sort of ideologically performance operates by creating more ‘noise’ elsewhere (or underneath) its sense of reality.  

Michel Serres asks, “how much noise must be made to silence noise? And what terrible fury put fury in order” (1995a, 13)? The immemorial question for us, then, is how much noise is necessary for human beings to remain the main actors of history? Nobel Prize winner, Ilya Prigogine with Isabelle Stengers, interpret the proliferation of noise born of the construction of our reality through Michel Serres: “‘The city of communication maximally purged of noise’ . . . . For Serres, yielding to [this temptation to purge] has the ultimate effect of creating a situation in which the industrialized world is frequently condemned to considering the concrete universe as its [own] representation. Thus practical idealism comes into being, immune to the contradictions regularly inflicted on it by the unmasterable elements of the world” (Prigogine and Stengers 1983, 138 refer to Serres’s *Hermès IV: La Distribution* [Paris: Minuit, 1977], 156).  

Places born of dominating epistemologies tend to make one believe that one can understand through concepts. They make it seemingly possible to deduce with precision, to dominate and anticipate in theory and in practice, to be clear-cut and axiomatic in closure, whereas there is always only ever multiplicity born of the movement of time. They obstruct the opening in shadow and reward the misrecognition of this condition. From this epistemological bent, one’s language is born to be incompatible with other languages because it neglects, above all, to appreciate the complex and irreversible movement of time. (We will of course, and in due course, resurrect the scaffolding or the supports that have helped foster the preceding propositions.)  

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Thus, the thought (or vision) that happens during exchanges between different languages — of our writing and the terraqueous writing of the world — proves to be of great importance towards rejuvenating landscape architectural design. At least, this is, in so many words, my
thesis. Following the key thinkers introduced here, we will seek to celebrate the 'sparks that fly' from comparison across boundaries — particularly those separating the sciences and the humanities. It will be argued that through forming willingness to value the intermingling of all languages (both human and nonhuman) we can work towards a more adept form of practice — more discerning of life-giving tendencies and those that would tend otherwise. To treat the world as an object, for example, expunges Berry's insight in 'The Work of Local Culture' that the world displays "an artistry and a farming far superior to . . . that of any human."

By referring to those 'tendencies that would tend otherwise', I'm aiming at technocratic or productivist logics embedded in everyday routines and spaces of contemporary, capitalistically-defined society. I'm concerned with the mobilization of tools and processes born of operational logics that make designers like Christopher Alexander remark: "our own environment has been ruined by the current architectural process" (1991a, 80). "It has created a mental climate of arbitrariness [not attentiveness, moderation, courage], and has laid the foundation for an architecture of absurdity" (2001, 19). The improving of this woeful state, he argues, "requires certain changes in technology," and above all a fundamental change in how building happens (ibid.). Perhaps, he says in another article, "it is better, safer, not to think about these things" (1991b, 109). Perhaps one should avoid risky behavior, in other words. It might be better to fall in line and play the same imitable game that allows "money to triumph over people" (ibid.). Perhaps, but this isn't true to Alexander's calling: "what I do is so different, in every pore, that it is almost impossible to describe it from the inside of the profession as it exists today in the words the profession uses" (ibid.). "At the bottom of the whole thing is a system of understanding the world, what space and matter are, which includes the idea of soul . . . what it means for spirit to occur in something, that shows how feeling is inevitably integrated in design — and how matter itself is understood as a Godlike substance . . . it becomes clear, because it comes from an entirely different way of looking at the world" (ibid., 111).

Having followed a similar calling, I've pursued the challenge of writing in the design realm, admittedly in reaction to what seems to be going wrong, but primarily to understand and articulate other 'ways of looking at the world'. If, as so many people argue today, forms of separation and domination are indeed rapidly ruining our world, I believe one must endeavor to comprehend how and why, so as to avoid complicity in an unwitting fashion, and by way of proposing proper alternatives or visions. A major challenge for this endeavor, in the words of Marcel Hénaff, "is first of all the recognition of an incommensurable relation (even and especially for the architect) to the obscurity of the world, to its noise, to its reserve of possibilities — that is to say, to its ever-renewed birth (even and especially for an already 'constructed world')" (1997, 66). He correctly points out that through the sustained obsession
with human societal relations, with what Donna Haraway has called ‘disembodied culture’, “we become and remain oblivious to our foundational link to the world . . . . Immerged in the collective, we only talk about the collective; the social blinds us and we ask it to explain the origins of things; we consider the world as its effect and reflection. The history incessantly refers back to history . . . just as the signs only refer back to signs . . . ‘closed up in the social collectivity, he could be splendidly ignorant of the things of the world’” (ibid., 65, 61; Serres 1995b, 75). This difficult problem or condition is elaborated in Chapter 2, while addressing ‘the sense we hold in common’; it is also one of the central issues raised through the case study, whereby food, language, ethnicities, and building materials all act to obscure, while simultaneously lending to history “a certain impression of reality [as] self-promotion” (Serres 1995b, 51).

Michael Gardiner, in Critiques of Everyday Life, invokes a handful of important twentieth-century thinkers who oppose today’s dominant systems, whose “overriding criterion of success [are] based on efficient, utilitarian operation, rather than the satisfaction of non-instrumentalized needs as expressed by people and communities” (2000, 7). The critiques I find of the greatest relevance to design, discern in these ‘instrumentalizations’ patterns of ideological and physiological ‘determination’ (for lack of a better word), never all-encompassing, but nevertheless stifling to those people who are interested in designing/facilitating conditions for people to develop a “heightened understanding of their circumstances and use this comprehension as the basis of conscious action designed to alter repressive social conditions” (ibid., 8).

Moreover, these thinkers do not perceive dominating tendencies to be bound up in social discourse and politics exclusively; they see them acting through the agency of nonhumans as well. (One might rethink, for example, the ‘performance’ of interstate infrastructure, the materializing concept borrowed from Germany after World War II, which has textured considerably our relations to so-called Nature, the city, and so on.) This is, of course, extremely messy territory to negotiate, packed full with so-called advances and those that tend otherwise. It is from this difficult positioning, however, that a nature-culture ‘collective’ can be better understood as a concept of rapprochement, as comprised not only of our limited ideological agendas and scripts, but those given motion to in the material surroundings that we (actors) and they (actants) together build: “actor-actant symmetry force[s] us to abandon the subject-object dichotomy, a distinction that prevents the understanding of collectives” (Latour 1999, 180). From this perspective of ‘symmetry’ between human and nonhuman performance, one might better perceive or learn to appreciate the ecological language of these things with the world itself.
For example, a plastic pail in Wendell Berry’s narrative wouldn’t enter into the dialogue with everything surrounding and falling into it, nor with old Wendell, in the same way as the well-built galvanized bucket. It wouldn’t have been used in as many ways, thus collecting that many more stories (i.e. Berry tells of it once containing tar, then again being used to boil eggs, which were blackened by the tar, flakes of which still adhere to the inside). It wouldn’t rust, eventually allowing water to drain. When the plastic pail is paled by the sun and begins to splinter, it shortly thereafter cracks open and can no longer carry any life. The galvanized bucket will eventually fall to the ground, rust and wear away. Should Wendell decide to retrieve it at this point, it might make for a handsome ornament, recalling the life he loved to observe. There is no saving the pail from decomposing though, at least not in Wendell’s foreseeable future. Plastic doesn’t become ‘battered’. In my opinion, plastic ages poorly, making time itself appear to us only as negativity. By extension, plastic represents the purification of time, the extension of an excess confidence in formulas, perhaps the fear of complexity, and a consequence of serial production and industrial fabrication. Other materials show time at work in ways that reflect and inflect dialogue with-in the world, cycles of disruption, enrichment and decay. These processes are at work in our own being, texturing the shared movement towards death, and thus allow life to be beautiful. Note that there are ‘ecological’ arguments regarding the lifespan of materials I’m not meaning to pass over here, should we, for example, take Doug Patterson’s argument seriously concerning the ‘overlap’ of environmental and experiential crisis.

Before moving on to the next section, let’s briefly consider another production performing in the world as an outcome of embedded or stratified or programmed logic. Our increasing reliance on computers fulfills short-term desires efficiently, but the more we rely on their operation for the systems we depend on to run our daily lives, the more we are at their mercy. Anyone who’s lost their hard drive knows this too well. When failure occurs, the tendency here again is a rapid splintering and falling apart, leaving little time to observe a gradual breakdown at work. The (now arguably staged) terror of Y2K clearly testifies to this predicament, to this debatable master-slave reversal. More importantly though, what we are seeing take place is a displacement of our proximal faculties for understanding and buffering change, while mediated by these other social actors. But, computers don’t have responsibilities like we do; they merely have tasks pertaining to efficiency. Their logics cannot deal with the messiness of everyday life the way we can by using all of our senses, and yet they’re commanding ever-increasing space within it. Lyotard warns, “technology is . . . a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency: a technological ‘move’ is a ‘good’ move when it does better and/or expends less energy than another” (Lyotard 1984, 44). (Moreover, Lyotard overlooks the issue of energies embedded in producing, operating and disposing of technologies,
an issue which on its own offers a damning 'social cost' appraisal.) As their tasks subsume in
countless ways our efforts and our attention, one grows resigned to alienated ways of operating
in the world. As their tasks subsume in countless ways our efforts and our attention, one grows resigned to alienated ways of operating in the world. This is a resignation not only of 'active capacity' (i.e. knowing a place with all one's senses versus the primarily optical experience of a computer simulation); it is of 'moral capacity' as well. The 'deviating function' of technologies repeatedly renders our knowing an 'other' as an object, not as a subject. One can only have a 'monologic' relationship with objects; but with subjects there is 'dialogic' potential.

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We must as responsible designers attempt to grasp not only our own mediating roles in the creation of new futures, but the 'performance' of the nonhumans we enroll into those futures. Mikhail Bakhtin's privileging of the polyphonic (or multi-voiced) novel, I will argue, provides an archetype proper to our creative responsibilities because it confronts this very task — accountably or responsibly setting a work into social motion. Michel Serres helps us to better see what Bakhtin's 'polyphony' means as a 'collective'. For Bakhtin, if actors are reified they blunt possibilities for dialogue; for Serres, actors can be both human and nonhuman. For us, if we take each at their word, we must endeavor to comprehend all actors that will perform with more or less dialogic propensities. This undertaking aligns itself with 'philosophy', as Serres proposes, a form of practice which “excludes nothing; better yet, it attempts to include everything” (Serres 1995d, 27). Both philosophy and design do, after all, strive to create conditions for understanding and living better. Why shouldn't they share a common mission? What and who stands in the way?

**Thoughts on writing and design for reading and experience**

This section contains basic observations on writing and reading as aligned with designing and experiencing in order to introduce an underlying style or method. The implications of this style:method will likewise suggest that authoring with a dialogic sensitivity is analogous to a proper notion of design. (Needless to say, the reading or engaging with ideas presented throughout this work is an ongoing experience of its 'results': as in good art, I believe we should aim to deliver messages as embedded in the forms we construct; in this way, the forms themselves can live on and be circulated through many more contexts.)

Freedom of thought always has to be reinvented. Unfortunately, thought is usually only found constrained and forced, in a context rigid with impossibilities.

Michel Serres 1995d, 43

Intellectuality and thought are not a form of life among others in which life and social production articulate themselves, but they are rather the unitary power that constitutes the multiple forms of life as form-of-life . . . they are the power that incessantly reunites life to its
form or prevents it from being dissociated from its form . . . . Thought is form-of-life, life that cannot be segregated from its form; and anywhere the intimacy of this inseparable life appears, in the materiality of corporeal processes and of habitual ways of life no less than in theory, there and only there is there thought.

Giorgio Agamben 2000, 11-12

It is important that we form an awareness — or at minimum, an imaginative willingness to become aware — of connections between language and the physical world, the languages of landscape and the landscapes of language. The most significant part of my challenge here is to justify and help prepare the grounds for this kind of awareness. By failing to do so, the ‘rationalist’ reader (not only of this text, but of all texts) will not make the primary connection between semiological pursuits and the experience of historical matter, between literary discoveries and those of the cultural landscape. This reader would not begin to see the rationalist’s “fundamental split between the content or sense of a given act/activity and the historical actuality of its being” (Bakhtin 1993, 2). In a broad sense, then, this kind of reader remains “alienated from the lifeworld” (Gardiner 2000, 48). To help clarify and then remediate this problem, Michael Holquist (1990, 30) proposes that “Bakhtin [used] the literary genre of the novel as an allegory for representing existence as the condition of authoring.” The reader lives through the ‘active construction’ of meaning she or he enters into through the process we might more accurately call ‘co-authoring’. To read as though (or to assume) the text is closed, revealing only a limited set of definitions, is to treat it without ‘imaginative willingness’; it is to treat it monologically, like one does a transit, only able to register grade changes.

It is an ideal here, then, (as it should be in other forms practice/creation takes, i.e. as it has in theatrical production) that a provocative context for reading:experience will fully allow “the attentive reader [to] become a participant” (Assad 2000, 271). This happens, in part, by emulating a style less concerned with confrontational critique and more concerned with opening the transformation ‘thought’ engenders. We can find inspiration in this regard from Michel Serres’s “mode of textual articulation [which] eloquently presents an acritical philosophy that adds itself to the world rather than distances itself from it” (Ma 2000, 244 emphasis added). However, from this ‘mode of textual articulation’ dogmatic approaches cannot preside, for true “thought knows only conditional points; thought erodes all previously established points” (Bakhtin 1999, 162).

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Finally, another fundamental characteristic of this paper is its inherently ‘iterative’ and ‘introductory’ com(position)ing, which raises another parallel between design and writing. Writers and designers participate in the active construction of possibility: we introduce conditions of interaction, and we do so over and over, with each increment of our action. Through this iterative influence we ‘educate’, which means “to lead elsewhere” (Serres, 1995b,
Inasmuch as one aims to educate, therefore, one engages with the very nature of design as it affects other people and the world itself, as it leads others elsewhere. (The close link between educating and caring needn't be belabored here, except to say it suggests that we have 'no alibi'.) Bakhtin insists the author has no alibi: both writing and design are accountable acts or require responsibility on the part of the creator. Again, this is at the very least what I hope to communicate with this paper. As we iteratively confront propositions in various forms, various conversations will unfold.

Preparing for a feast

The challenge (or responsibility) entailed in introducing influences is estimating whether or not these so-called conversations will be nourishing, food for thought, or that which will tend otherwise. In *The Parasite*, Serres (1982, 232) speaks of the ways we consume language (or the experience of life because language is everywhere only experienced) as analogous to the ways we consume food, which raises questions of the atmosphere giving to one's digestion:

One does not simply eat the words of a language; one tastes them as well. Those who eat as quickly as possible find that a bit disgusting and repugnant. There are gourmands, however. One speaks as one eats; style and cooking go together — vulgar or refined. Words are exchanged as food is passed either like fast food, so as to move on to something more important, or in an atmosphere of ecstasy. It depends on us for certain quasi-objects to become subjects. Or rather: it is up to us for this transformation to take place.

I recall a session in Doug Patterson's landscape theory course, where the best demonstration of 'authenticity' arrived in the form of a coffee cake. One of my fellow students compared the difference between combining the ingredients and procedures she knew well with simply using a box-mix. One involved knowledge (sensuous memories) and processes gathered over a lifetime, the other erased all of that with a formula for efficiency. Needless to say, the cake made from scratch was far superior to generic version.

Christopher Alexander describes the setting of a feast in such a way: the conversation growing out of a setting, built up from the alignments of furniture, placemats and plates, silverware, flowers, and the spaces these embellishing things together give life to. With each enhancing increment, with care for a certain opening dynamic, the setting approaches its eventful consummation, our 'presence' with-in it.

Although every context we consume or 'consummate' (Bakhtin) is inherently different than others, and thus requires different approaches, our capacities for doing so do indeed have similar requirements. One can savor and assimilate only so much information at one sitting. One might argue, thus, repeated sittings or iterative experiences enrich both creator and creation. Literature saturated with meaning, places filled with (intelligible) time, meals
delightful with mixture, are all best composed and absorbed in iterative fashion as an entire context echoing and enlivening many others.

In a somewhat roundabout way, then, I'm suggesting that a proper style recognize its continual introduction of embellishments, each savoried and then sent along. Here is a series of introductions, a context that iteratively overlaps many contexts. In this sense, it is a kind of 'chronotope' (however disjointed) in being a "place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied," mixed in one fashion and then in another (Bakhtin 1998, 250). Should the reader not appreciate a certain theme in one section, by changing the ingredients and mixing into another section, it will perhaps become more palatable. As this approach is fleshed out, we will consider the various and overlapping contexts of contingency that give to 'dialogic design' — i.e. visualizing time, its semantic and physical emergence, the ways that actors and attitudes perform, and so on. Therefore, if you do not understand what I am trying to do immediately, trust that the opportunity is not lost. Please allow your meal to settle some then move on to the next course.

Multiple footings for the multiplicitous reader

The overall form of a proper presentation or design should seek to offer multiple footings for the 'multiplicitous reader' whereby, especially in less familiar reaches, she or he might actively explore and multiply creative responses. While creating a context for experience we should recall that "readers are never passive, and understanding may be genuinely 'creative',' although "the text is not mere putty to be shaped however a given reader or 'interpretive community' wishes" (Morson and Emerson 1989, 3). There is a kind of dialectic at work here, then, a relation between the unique reading and the author's voice(s) — between a 'relativist' and a 'dogmatic' formulation. While leaving room for creative interpretations (which really signal potential connection rather than relativism), I believe one should circulate key themes so as to generally share closer understanding with the reader, while multiplying potential for the discovery of a concept's richness in different contexts. To this end, the form should function, however primitively, as a kind of archetype proper to the task of design. If the designer is concerned with facilitating relationships to the sacred, then, this concern is cast into all the increments or interventions authored. This idea corresponds to the concept we will approach in the Boundaries section (Chapter 5 pp. 105-7), concerning 'benevolent demarcation'. What is more, as we will see in the section on Aesthetics (Chapter 2, pp. 25-32), this goal conjoins aesthetic and moral evaluation.

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I aim write and write about interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinary work endeavors to acknowledge and assemble multiple perspectives (or properties or mediums) to make possible a dynamic context, new and lively with exchange and elaboration. According to John Berger, "to take in what is happening, an interdisciplinary vision is necessary in order to connect the 'fields' which are institutionally kept separate" (2003, 14). And "any such vision" he continues, "is bound to be (in its original sense of the word) political" (ibid.). (In Chapter 3 we will consider common sense as potentially liberative, full with truth, and, conversely, as "reified and unreflective praxis" (O'Neill, 1995, 172).) To pass over an originary concern with politics is to dismiss a concern for the way people (and the world itself, for that matter) represent their lives and rights; it would mean ignoring "how things in society are counted, or go uncounted" (Badiou 2001, 102); ultimately, dismissing a relation to politics would be untrue to my own experience and aspirations. In other words, I believe a parallel can be drawn between 'political life' and how one experiences 'everyday life' — how one forms common sense or interdisciplinary knowing with all one's senses, poetically, irrationally, corporally, ethically, affectively, and effectively.

The multi-representational style this paper therefore emulates is something akin to 'common sense' or that which makes our thinking a heterogeneous fusion of art and humor, explored in literature, landscape, textiles, song, film, and so on. One's 'sense of discernment' involves a willingness to superimpose separated realms of study, to examine and discuss diverse yet parallel kinds of relationship, their tendentious properties, their complicated interests, and what lies beneath them all: noise. In short, I believe a proper method for creating mobilizes a generalized principle of superimposition or cross-over or exchange.

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I'm writing about a mindset proper to the context of creation, both as it is authored and understood (or co-authored), a kind of sensitivity which upholds meaningful relations between the conceptual and the physical, the personal and the social, the cultural and the historical. As a designer and as an author, one principally does better to recall the fact that each reader engages every context somewhat differently and, as such, one should work towards providing conditions favorable for connectivity or comparison, whereby his or her understanding is something true and not to be betrayed. Hence, the 'multiple footings' that we might stretch our 'dialogic imaginations', take leaps and bounds, and avoid looking "down at our feet, thinking only of the next small step" (Berger 2003, 13).
CHAPTER 2: ALEXANDER TO BAKHTIN & SERRES

Contemplating ‘things’ by way of introducing the key thinkers

Our thought and our praxis (not the technical one, but the moral, i.e. the set of our responsible acts) take place between two boundaries: the relation to the thing, and the relation to the person. Thingification and personification.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Concerning Methodology in the Human Sciences 1999, 162

Over ten years ago, a dear friend and landscape architect lent me A Timeless Way of Building by Christopher Alexander. This book inspired me with a certain warmth of insight, while illustrating the ‘material poetics’ indicative of occidental premodern places. In so doing, it germinated a serious and sustained effort on my part to understand how and why places have been transformed from, one might (too) simply say, ‘beautiful’ to ‘ugly’ (see two images of poverty below, one still highly textured, prepositionally rich, etc., the other harsh and vacant). Alexander has likewise remained faithful to a process of understanding this ill-fated phenomenon of our so-called modern era, as his recently published compilation, The Nature of Order, testifies.

A Timeless Way challenged me to contemplate ‘things’ as having “the quality without a name.” We learn that things have a magnificent ambiguity. They are ‘out there’ or separate, and yet they are part of larger living processes and procedures that involve history. Things are a kind of connective tissue comprised of meaning, energy, and potential. They ‘perform’ like actors to hold together and transform social and/or ecological circulations.

* * *

How things are assembled makes all the difference to Alexander, the author/designer — including, then, how things continue to participate in everyday life or continue in processes of
assemblage. Things, Bill Brown once posited, "are the sum of the world" (2001, 4). By way of formally introducing the key thinkers examined in this thesis and my basic ways of employing their thought, we will first consider 'things', the life that they can take on, the significance of their communicability to 'dialogic design', and above all what they disclose about our being in the world. We will then be better prepared to consider more abstractly how epistemologies play a role in the construction of the built environment, and how things are given various voices from this com(position)ing.

The pathway as a ‘thing’

Let's think of the pathway as a thing. It is a connector of times and spaces and a channel for experience to different destinations. The path is also those destinations' in-between, which can as well be a kind of destination in itself, the interval between what is no longer and what is not yet. Pathways are made up of things, they are aggregational, the melding of meaning and matter. The connectivity of times and spaces a path offers corresponds to the makeup of the path itself, a structure which is as a matter of experience, more than the sum of its parts.

Recall, as a small example, how well-attuned the great Japanese garden-er was to the tactile importance of the path. Whereby one's feet are also included as crucially perceptive appendages: while, say, walking on a bed of pine needles, one more precisely knows the contrived and exceedingly fragile order cultivated (the slight trickle of water shifting and bending through, but not completely overgrown by, mossy banks). Seeing the movement of different times (the decay of needles, the movement of water, the growth of

This street, built by the Naxi people, in the ancient town of Dayan portrays another kind of pathway, one I traversed every day during my research there. Each trip along this gentle curve had a sort of gravitational pull my interest was drawn into — a dense texturing of past and future, the ongoing heritage of tradition.
moss), the path loosely guides experience. Alternatively, one might better apprehend the inexorable fortitude of ‘great time’ (the sturdy landing from which a distant stone mountain is eternally ‘borrowed’ into the garden).31

The making and re-making of a pathway, this shifting ‘thing’, gives birth to and is born of stories. For those who can listen, these stories begin a passage for the ‘thing’ into what Alexander meant by “the quality without a name.” Attachment to the concept or referent ‘path’ blurs some, giving way to a thing which has, however slight or even sublime, a kind of life and thus a kind of agency. Like our own lives, a thing’s life is recognized through its participation during events, and through the recalling of its particular influence on a situation.

There are stories written by the world and those co-authored, involving our own volitions (not to say that we are not part of the world). When a path rapidly covers the landscape, hot, heavy and congealed, like a lava stream or tracks of asphalt, one might say the story of its becoming, its very density and explosiveness, is ‘monologic’ in the sense that all other stories stifle under its force. Then again, recalling an example closer to home will suffice to draw out other aspects of the pathway’s assemblage — one that requires one’s deep involvement in the process of construction, not only conceptually but concretely.

**Building my parent’s stairway**

*It is our main intention to make things which feel alive in our own time...*

Christopher Alexander 2001, 50

Various ways of being active... The activity of the one who acknowledges a voiceless thing and the activity of one who acknowledges another subject, that is, the dialogic activity of the acknoloider.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1999, 161.

If you had gotten your hands dirty, you would no doubt be aware that there is some dirt.

Michel Serres 1995a, 132

About five years ago, my father and I carefully selected over twenty tons of limestone from a local quarry, loaded it onto a moving truck and unloaded it at my parent’s residence, and all by hand. With trip after trip to the deep pit, gouged out of surrounding prairie land, with the trial and error of manipulating the stones, and the buildup of calluses on our hands, we came to know what a ton of limestone is ‘in our own time’. We then roughed out grades for a stairway with two landings and a lower patio. Several wing-walls would spread out from certain risers, such that planting beds might cascade at the outside periphery of our centripetal stairway and suggest a transition into the larger yard. The ordered yet organic feeling of the overall pattern that we would basically follow was suggested by the house against a space of large surrounding trees, and of course the existing grade changes.
One can literally see our learning process at work, moving from the lower patio to the upper, better-crafted landings and stairs. But for us, the builders and maintainers, the stones speak of so much more: moments of discovery and accomplishment, moments of aggravation and intense argument, moments of pleasure and of pain. The memory of an individual stone can be like the texture of its surface, totally unique and slowly grown over by algae. The weight of the stones, the chiseling to help them fit, the ensuing alterations and maintenance when the fit wasn’t properly found — these experiences impart life to stubborn yet increasingly supple stone. Being close to the stairs now is like being close to a friend. They reflect to me, like any good friend, a process of learning, maturing, and caring. Although it may sound silly, I like to believe the feeling is reciprocal.

Not just the stones took on a new meaning for us. We pushed wheel barrows to their limits, used shovels in new ways as levers, created ramps with boards that would arch under our weight, developed a great regard for the simple level, and the list goes on. The point I want to make is many objects were used a lot and in unconventional, even inventive ways. They became something a bit more in the process. Their capacity to be something other than a standard signification made them “slide between objective and subjective predication” (Brown 1999, 2). Perhaps the point needn’t be made that appreciating these transformations, these new-found kinds of respect, cannot happen without participating in such a way that tools can be used in a malleable fashion. The fashioning whereby we come to understand limitations and new
possibilities allows the tool to be in the hands of the person as an extension of the person and not
the reversal.

*Leaving room for the unexpected*

I should add that there were aspects of our project left unfinished. There are neglected
remnants (i.e. repairing an old limestone wall that begins the cascade of retaining walls, leveling-
out several of the lower stairs, buffering a rough vegetation area from the lawn with a limestone
border/path, periodically rejuvenating the stairway’s crushed aggregate, creating a more
conversational planting design, etc.). Something remains for an upcoming project, a
continuation of the dialogue. It was a blessing that this composition never went exactly
according to plan because, as is the rule, the (apparently less rational) ideas that emerged *during*
the process made the composition what it is, opening it out to unfathomed potential. This is the
continuing outcome of time well spent, of piecemeal growth and/or dialogue.

Thus, good construction is not entirely predetermined and rational:

A touch of irrationality is a saving grace for us, a stroke of luck which gives us some breathing
space, a loose fit in the machine which makes us alive. Life, intelligence, goodness probably
came out of this free play and this lack of restraint. Leave some ears of wheat in the field for
the gleaners, he said. Perhaps we shall learn one day that the most reliable machines leave
room for the unexpected.

Michel Serres 1989, 11

The experienced draftsperson knows the serendipitous aspect of the rough sketch or the
diagram: the fortuitous discovery of something fragile in the lines that didn’t go precisely where
they were intended, and the slow but sure build-up of imprecision that reveals honesty and
character. The use of this medium, as opposed to the refined determinations of computer
aided design, gives to an entirely different probability for discovery, for the ‘unexpected’ as
Serres would say. However, he would also contend, and rightly so, that the ‘situated’
enagement of all one’s senses is, above all, the supreme instrument for knowing and adjusting
(to) the world, that making marks on the page is nowhere as rich as making them on the land.
Moreover, environmental opportunities for understanding and making marks, is what gives to
quality of life.

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One of the most burdensome and yet curiously overlooked problems with the human
drama is how we lose sight of the impact our intermediaries have on us and on the world. Doug
Patterson introduces his LARC 520 ‘authenticity’ lecture by stating that the designer is
inherently detached from an authentic relation to a site, a problem the contractor, client, or, for
that matter, all intermediaries only exacerbate. This is a fundamental problem which, however
difficult to avoid, must not lead to a form of resignation in practice, but must be challenged
continually. I've come to believe that this issue (comparing different ways of mediating design/building/experience) is not just a technical or performance issue, but a profoundly aesthetic and/or moral one.³⁵ Again, there is 'no alibi' for what one puts into action.

Bakhtin once said that "a philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy" (1993, 56). Why wouldn't this maxim apply to design philosophy as well? Should we agree that it does, what are the primary operatives engendering moral praxis and by extension those that would tend otherwise?

By way of returning to the impact Christopher Alexander has made on my thinking about 'things', and signaling my provisional departure from his work, let's move into the next section concerning the link between communication and aesthetics.

**Communication & aesthetics: moving from the work of Christopher Alexander to Mikhail Bakhtin & Michel Serres**

Accompanying my travels and learning of other languages (spoken and built), an interest in 'communication as constitutive of all life and all things' led me to wonder whether or not landscape architects are properly appreciating the transdisciplinary laws of communication influencing our mediating responsibilities.

Where I attempt to add to or augment the work of the preeminent Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who is normally or merely associated with literaturary studies and its creative potential, I combine with Science Studies and 'thing theory' to help us acknowledge all actors participating in the 'world synopsum' (Bakhtin's favored characterization for history culminating in the dialogic event). To do so will engender bakhtinian 'dialogism' with an open-ended yet operational logic proper to the task of design thinking. In other words, Bakhtin is know for having conceived of "everyday speech genres and idioms as various cultural forms (especially the novel)" as able to "transform human consciousness in a more open, reflexive and dialogical direction" (Gardiner 2001, 44). Should we conceive of the generic spaces we author/design in light of those literary genres (i.e. the time-space of the epic as generally reversible and closed; the time-space of the novel as irreversible, yet open and 'free';³⁷ see Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* 1998, 84-258), which tend towards certain patterns of experience and/or exchange of meaning and matter, literary studies do indeed serve to enhance design thinking.³⁸ (This fundamental argument is intermittingly developed through the duration of this chapter.) Underlying this contention is the belief that design must collaborate to make the right choice, if indeed "the only choice is between a history that is aware of what it is doing and a history that is not" (Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* 1991, 69; cited by Humphrey 2000, 164). This position is all the more interesting in the wake of recent discoveries in physics (as shown by Prigogine and Stengers, 1983, and substantially growing out of Serres's
insights), which I believe suggest Bakhtin's take on the novel proves to be more coherent with reality than the 'reality' handed down by pervasive modern epistemology.

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Naturally, being in a discipline (landscape architecture) primarily concerned with 'aesthetics', their deployment and discernment — and not aesthetics as confined to museum experience, but those of everyday, active or lived experience, the contingent register of our interaction with the world — I've made a path towards understanding in a more profound way aesthetics today.

This kind of concern with aesthetics is analogous to what Bakhtin termed architectonics.39 Bakhtin's early and persistent ideas on architectonics (developed in the 1920s-30s) were what first attracted me to his thinking, having already cultivated a healthy interest in Alexander's work. Both individuals have rigorously developed a (aesthetic) science of relations that consists of organizing parts into wholes. Both confront the logics behind building and the experiential/physical ramifications that grow out of them. Their architectonics each entail a concern with ratio and proportion (including closing-centripetal and opening-centrifugal movements, capacities for different kinds of interruption and disturbance, etc.) which are never static or always in the process of being made or unmade. Thus, time (or more accurately 'time-space') is crucial to the theories of both individuals. In fact, as I see it, the crux of their basically-shared aesthetic lies in its portrayal of transformation and temporal change, of the contradictory yet interconnected processes of death and birth, ending and becoming. I believe they each assert, albeit in very different ways, that the integrity of material culture is contingent with the aesthetic sensitivities of a rich dialectics of perception that explicitly denies the possibility of completion, of ending, of finality.

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Another important (methodological) aspect shared by Bakhtin's and Alexander's work surfaces on the boundaries between mind and matter. Alexander generally leans on a mathematics of ever-increasing subtlety to elucidate how our intuitive notion of 'life' corresponds to the complex patterns present in materiality (i.e. his 'reflection of the self test' in The Nature of Order series, 2001).40 This material grounding corresponds to Alain Badiou's explanation (from Ethics, 2001, 130) that "the more you decompose the concept of matter into its most elementary constituents, the more you move into a field of reality which can be named or identified only with increasingly complex mathematical operations... I am a materialist," he states "in the sense that I think that any presentation is material." Alexander holds to this mathematical grounding to justify the capabilities of intuition — parallel schema that connect wholes to parts, integrals to derivatives.41 Bakhtin also used the measured sciences (Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson) to augment his historically rich arguments, to speculate on the
nature or interconnected configurations of our relationships. Bakhtin's favored notion of the 'chronotope', for example, was "introduced [by Bakhtin] as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity... [and] expresses the inseparability of space and time" (Bakhtin 1998, 84).

Different 'chronotopes' and different 'wholes' may in fact offer a point of contact whereby a thorough comparison between Alexander and Bakhtin might spring. For example, in the following quotations, Bakhtin's mode of demarcating the artistic composition (ibid.) is followed by Alexander's general topology (2001, 80):

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

A view of the building as a whole means that we see it as part of an extended and undivided continuum. It is not an isolated fragment in itself, but part of the world which includes the gardens, walls, trees, streets beyond its boundaries, and other buildings beyond those. And it contains many wholes within it—also unbounded and continuous in their connections. Above all, the whole is unbroken and undivided.

The physics of the twentieth century has taught us that there are limits to what we can measure. And in my opinion this fact alone merits strong hermeneutical interest. This is even more the case when we are, like Alexander and Bakhtin, concerned not just with the quantifiability of nature but with living, meaning-making, human beings, whose faculties of judgment can in some cases surpass those of the measured sciences. While maintaining a strong concern for the nature of composition, Bakhtin and Alexander take into account the 'subjective', that is, largely unverifiable and unstable, and show how it cannot be ignored; and not least how the deluge of so-called 'objective' information threatens to engulf our human faculty of judgment. In a nutshell, then, concern for 'compositioning' has to do with finding proper modes of balance between our technical capacities and the need for responsible actions and choices. Care for our own well-being, in this way, is an original manifestation of human existence.

Let's briefly speculate on some of the questions we might ask of a 'comparison' between Alexander and Bakhtin, by way of then devoting several pages to Alexander. Given that Bakhtin is dealt with at length later on, he receives less attention here.

Does Bakhtin really conceive of the event as attended by all collective actors, both human and nonhuman positioning(s)? Should we consider ideas themselves as a form of the nonhuman, then he certainly does conceive of the event this way. But if this rather strange argument isn't accounted for, and if it's proven Bakhtin wasn't concerned with more conventional nonhuman interactions — of physical things, animals, plants, etc. — would this fact somehow expunge his insights on authoring from terrain outside literary spheres —
particularly from appreciating integrations and overlappings with the architect-ecologist, who
also contends with 'typologies' (or "operators of flexions or declinations that designate . . .
connections and relations of vicinity, proximity, distance, adherence or accumulation, in other
words, positions"; Serres 1994, 71)? In either account (the full acknowledgment of actors or not,
which makes less difference that one might think if discernment happens through the redeeming
lens of 'comparitivism'), I will later argue for serious and sustained recognition of Bakhtin's
work.

As for Alexander, that great architect-ecologist, does he, despite himself, seem to
perpetuate an epistemological bent or a breed of pragmatism that condemns its bearer to the
contingency of a private, dissociated ego, no matter on what scale it pursues its goals? Is his a
rather limited appreciation of contemporary chaos theory, thus forming a basic problem in his
thinking — how order grows out of disorder, how order(ing) gives to disorder, and so on?45 Is
Alexander's conception of a 'self' in the 'dialogic fullness of time' therefore insufficient?
Moreover, one gets the feeling in many of his descriptions of 'wholeness' that time is somehow
suspended. The image of a 20th-century steel-working lathe, has this quality of wholeness, not
as something embedded in an historical or social sense in the world, but as an object with a
straight-forward function he finds appealing (2001, 55). Does he therefore avoid considering the
victims, the noise, born of the beauty he celebrates?

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Both meaning and matter give to Alexander's conception of 'life', and yet we are
somehow suspended in his world, free to appreciate the latter while the texture of the former
isn't to be equally involved. Again, we're cut in two: mind or meaning and body or perception
(and there is no explicit mention of the third, the background, and that which unites against
uncertainty). Alexander's logic, although a considerable step away from conventional orthodoxy,
doesn't seem to go as far as it ought to. In bergsonian fashion (though not referenced to my
knowledge), Alexander argues that intuition is indeed a conduit of objectivity; but thought,
engendered by historical experience, is separate, a kind of subjectivity which cannot be trusted
as speaking to reality.46 (Even a person's lie remains a kind of truth though, doesn't it?) In
short, Alexander seems to perpetuate a kind of mind-body dichotomy that has propagated
modernity's epistemological bifurcations. His own evaluation of historical context is valid or
(somehow!) doesn't affect his discernment of beauty, but we must make sure that others'
assertions concentrate on physicality, and are dislodged from other messy associations.

This 'god trick' will enable the architect to continue to combine things, while avoiding
larger frameworks facilitating his or her activities. It still avoids the problem of authenticity as
referred to above by Patterson. It will allow for the creating of supposedly beautiful objects
nonetheless suspended from the past, from the violence in their wake. This, in fact, may indicate
a kind of thinking that has inhibited a deeper historical-materialist understanding of Alexander's own progressivist values.47

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Alexander uses two ordinary spoons to demonstrate a majority's predilection for one [The Order of Nature manuscript, second book]. The first is square-edged and very basic, the other's middle is fluted slightly and its dimension's somehow better proportioned. He exclaims that everyone finds the second spoon more beautiful, thus proving that people have an innate capacity for choosing beauty. The implication being that in the latter we see something reflected or shared by other objects and beings that have 'life'. Then he moves on to six or eight more examples basically like this one. However persuasive the demonstration, I'm left feeling swindled. Albeit less sophisticated, I'm reminded of the City Beautiful logic, which assumed a whitewash would make a clean sweep of urban ills.48 Without the component of judgment I mentioned above — that which is based on knowing in the world through lived experience — Alexander's examples can simply be mass-produced and everyone (who can afford to) can live in a world of splendid beauty.49

No, he's actually not nearly so simple about it: involvement in the becoming of one's reality through time is indeed important to Alexander, as shown in his Mexicali Project (1991a). But there is still something afoot in his authoritarian prescriptions for a better world, something not quite consistent with authentic participation in a dialogic reality. What is it? Is there a door left wide open for others (architects) to enter and perform the job of constructing one's world, leaving behind a composition, not of rich, co-authored meaning, but vacant, monologic matter?

Meaning is, of course, coloring one's lens and it generates creativity — it even inscribes kinds of physicality in our bodies, and is thus a kind of objectivity (see Kuberski, 2000). And yet, as mentioned above, Alexander's approach to so-called subjectivity seems to perpetuate the mind-body problem he wishes to transcend, thus sadly leaving his representations of 'life' all the more suspect of being but nostalgic misgivings, never able to accomplish what he wishes — the founding of design which truly strives for life in avoidance of death (as though one doesn't hinge on the other). (Perhaps this is last comment is somewhat misguided as well, in the sense that his appreciation of Wabi-Sabi, for example, correctly recognizes life's necessary imperfection, its bond with death.)

Along these lines, we might also contend that Alexander falls into the same camp as a Bachelard or an Althusser, in that a break is made between the measured or mathematical sciences and the messy realm of the so-called subjective. It's not that the two realms don't present parallel discoveries, but their separation is nonetheless made distinct.50 (As we shall see in Serres's discussion of Lucretius, the division is erroneous and less fertile for understanding.) To perform innumerable operations in the construction of modern society, this break seems to
have been necessary, but not necessarily appropriate. (Perhaps it is now today necessary for architecture to even continue as a self-contained profession.) Again, I contend that this epistemological observation in Alexander is subtle and happens despite his ‘rhetoric’ and noble efforts to think otherwise.\textsuperscript{51} Let’s consider another example to draw out some more ideas, however.

Alexander repeatedly describes a situation with ‘life’ — the loading dock workers on break, eating their sandwiches in the sun (2001). From this example, ‘I’ agree that there is a certain degree of life in an otherwise sterile environment of steel, concrete, and purchased labor. And this is likely to be the whole point, but let’s interrogate the example a bit anyway. There is a matter-of-factness in Alexander that presumes anyone in their right mind can appreciate a feeling for this prosaic beauty, whereas associations of a timed break from hard, industrial labor might evoke drastically different and valid interpretations from others. It may represent to some people a context of futility and stifling heat, a sort of sad dead-end for life, even a kind of slavery the break makes barely tolerable. (Would Alexander fancy himself as one of those workers off break?) This example demonstrates an attitude whereby assessment of a larger social context (of meaning and matter) is avoided. Perhaps he is elusively making the point that life today is indeed impoverished. To me, this sort of example risks depleting critiques of everyday life of their polemical force by its resignation to the status quo. Perhaps he rightly shows some friction in the system, a breath of fresh air, a moment of roughness. This run-of-the-mill example does little more, however, while tacitly accepting the overall situation. Does Alexander, with the simple phrase, perceive the ‘whole’ of the situation? (Despite harboring a difficult-to-avoid bellicose assessment, I’m writing in a speculative manner here. In other words, I’m fraught with hesitation while being critical of this luminary, who’s work I deeply admire.)

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One sometimes gets the feeling that Alexander would like to see (notwithstanding some qualifications to the contrary) sophisticated, operational formulas to create wholeness, which I believe misses the whole point: wholeness happens through sustained, situated, meaningful actions and alterations; it isn’t of proscription, but of active participation.\textsuperscript{52} He seems to contend that ordinary people, now adulterated by modernity, need the architect to replace their banal, mechanically-mediated world with wholeness. Sure we’ve been somewhat adulterated, disembodied, duped by hegemony, and so on, but healing will mean the feeling-out of our world with adept reactions, and the creations of new meanings and material configurations. The architect may, at best, be a framer and partial maintainer. Otherwise, architecture tends towards the art of domination, exhibition, imitation, simulation, and commodification, instead of the vigorous ‘art of everyday life’. Wholeness must correspond to what Morson and Emerson said is bound up in a continual process of non-teleological becoming: “all social and
psychological entities are processual in nature. Their unfinalizable activity is essential to their identity" (1990, 50). Physicality corresponds to this principle, giving way to communication (among humans and among nonhumans).

Again, none of the preceding material reveals a final prognosis — that Alexander is fundamentally wrong, a hopeless romantic or something like that — but it does form a line of inquiry I would follow to attempt to enrich the fecund nature he seems to have discerned. I would only be compelled to critique his work (or anyone's for that matter) because the lion's share of it resonates deeply within me and my ambitions. As seems to be the rule with critique, the voice I've used above doesn't express my deep admiration for someone who is creative, and shows the all too easy tendency to judge and dismiss.53

I believe a thorough comparison of Alexander and Bakhtin would, most significantly, show how ‘truth procedures’ involved in co-authoring are analogous to those in design, and that the cultivation of life in each realm today must indeed involve experience of the other. Let's pause to re-consider some of the similarities between the two realms of creative construction. The author and the designer each do better to become intimately familiar with all the actors (or actants) they plan to enlist into active participation in a particular context. This kind of knowledge is transdisciplinary in the richest sense, if the work itself is dialogic (or facilitates the ‘co-authoring’ of readers/users and context). Should one mobilize actors as 'closed objects' in a plan, a dictatorial medium will emerge that we might correlate with Bakhtin’s notion of monologic. Each practice must also share characteristics with organic phenomenon as discerned by both Alexander and Bakhtin. The following quotation (from Bakhtin’s Art and Answerability 1990, 190) begins to summarize the similarity of this insight — particularly regarding the plurality of meanings and irreducibly multiple aspects of the realm of the center to the realm of the whole, which is another center of another whole . . .:55

All of the world's values enter into the aesthetic object, but they do so with a particular aesthetic coefficient, and the author's position as well as the artistic task he has set himself must be understood in the world in conjunction with all these values. What is consummated or formed into an integral whole is not the material (words), but the comprehensively lived and experienced makeup of being. The artistic task organizes the concrete world: the spatial world with its own axiological center — the living body, the temporal world with its own center — the soul, and finally, the world of meaning — all in their concrete interpenetrating unity.

“Here are two men, the one who transforms and the one who criticizes, the one who picks the chestnuts and the one who sorts them, the one who roasts them and the one who tastes them, the one who produces them in the trees, the soil, the ashes, the fire, and the one who judges them, sitting around indolent; why should reason always be on the side of the parasitical judge? Critical rationalism stages a grand courtroom scene, the producers make do with what they have as best they can.”

Michel Serres 1995a, 132
Lastly, beyond the important similarities between Alexander and Bakhtin, I will say that the latter is less pedantic in his style of writing, contains more philosophical depth, and is less prone to premature formalization of his objects, which might dogmatically establish categories of science without necessarily reflecting on their meaning or appropriateness. Bakhtin (as similar to Michel Serres) demonstrates a different sort of epistemology (method or style), one of openness and 'rapprochement'. He does more to provide philosophical depth whereby we might formulate something of a hermeneutics of nature-culture, as a way of addressing the spiritual crisis of modernity. Bakhtin's theoretical structures are today accessible routes by which we might question and respond to what numerous intellectual traditions (i.e. growing out of Heidegger and the Frankfurt School) assert is the desacralization of nature under the impress of modern capitalist civilization and its 'creation of value'. (As we shall see, for example, in the Knickerbocker Place case study, many designed spaces devise a bourgeois sentimentality that endeavor to disguise the heartless mechanization of the market, where pursuits of pleasure are indolently or mechanically performed and, of course, made to be profitable.)

**Reading with Mikhail Bakhtin**

[A] grandiose philosophy is hidden behind the fable's feigned simplicity and naïveté.

Michel Serres 1999, 97

The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.

Reified (materializing, objectified) images are profoundly inadequate for life and for discourse. A reified model of the world is now being replaced by the dialogic model. Every thought and every life merges in the open-ended dialogue. Also impermissible is any materialization of the world: its nature is dialogic.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1984, 293

Shortly after finishing Dostoevsky's masterpiece The Brothers Karamazov, Mikhail Bakhtin first caught my attention with his book on Dostoevsky. Bakhtin perceived, as I'd long felt, a brilliant mind at work literally authoring the (semantic) conditions of life. "The spirit of the world-in-the-state-of-becoming," Bakhtin declares, "found its fullest expression in the works of Dostoevsky" (1984, 19). This is because "Dostoevsky destroys the flatness of the earlier artistic depiction of the world. Depiction becomes for the first time multidimensional" (ibid., 285). It is therefore 'futile', Bakhtin contends, after revisiting numerous other theorists who failed to understand Dostoevsky's tradition, "to seek [to understand the novel as] systematically
monologic, even dialectical, philosophical finalization — and not because the author has failed his attempts to achieve it, but because it did not enter into his design” (ibid. 31).

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices ... remove the intonations ... carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness — and that’s how you get dialectics.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1999, 147

Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky’s primary impulse for accomplishing this feat was to “concentrate in a single moment the greatest possible qualitative diversity” (ibid. 28). His texts, according to Bakhtin, contain a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses that are not completely subordinated to unified authorial intensions: “each character's voice is a full-blooded and fully signifying other consciousness which is not inserted into the finalizing frame of reality, which is not finalized by anything (not even death) . . . . This other consciousness is not inserted into the frame of authorial consciousness, it is revealed from within as something that stands outside and alongside and with which the author can enter into dialogic relations” (ibid., 284). Thus each actor’s voice is equally as important and ‘fully weighted’ as the author’s own; as such, every hero’s work “sounds, as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters” (ibid., 7). Furthermore, “in Dostoevsky’s work each opinion really does become a living thing and is inseparable from an embodied human voice. If incorporated into an abstract, systematically monological context, it ceases to be what it is” (ibid., 17 my emphasis). It is emphasized that “only in the category of coexistence could [Dostoevsky] see and represent the world” (ibid. 29). The result is an endless, unscripted clash of 'unmerged souls', involving the architectonic construction of a multiplicity of diverse yet continuously interacting ideological worlds. (Should we read of this construction as Serres or Girard would, the principles that

Death: the ground of communication

"In other times and places the debate rages (305) . . . [thus] death, it appears, is the fount of magic! . . . And boy! Are these dead capricious! (309) . . . The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type . . . [And poetry or that which is] breaking up language no less than composing it, exquisitely self-aware while at the same time resolutely on the march with something to say . . . will criss-cross the division between the living and the dead creating thereby a state of living-dead . . . Benjamin may have lost hope for the storyteller, but he was quick to seize on the magic of the commodity, the congealed pulse of the market, as epitomizing thinghood itself. By virtue of such an epitome he constructed an extraordinary poetics of death (310) . . . [and added to] the dilemma thus posed; a thing is like a person but is not one. Marx struggled, too, seeing people like things and vice versa as the trademark of capitalist epistemology following which Adorno describes the cast of Benjamin’s thought as one of ‘natural history’, guided in the materiality of its writing by ‘the need to become a thing in order to undo the catastrophic spell of things’ . . . Here they are today with us heavy with literality because they are true, authorized and heavy with truth, waiting to be metamorphosed so as to energize our speech. And for this we are grateful, not least to . . . poetry because poetry is what after the death of God is the privileged form of mimetic language that can invoke the spirits of the dead as the ground for communion with things as people (316)."

Michael Taussig 2001
construct ideological worlds are analogous to those that construct the world itself — by similar multivariate negotiations, bids for power, indeterminate emergence of influences that create new conditions for survival, controlling these, and so on.)

Bakhtin feels this ‘dialogical principle’ inheres in every element of the polyphonic text — indeed, it is constitutive of social life itself: “when dialogue ends, everything ends,” he writes, “thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot [and must not] come to an end” (ibid., 252). Dostoevsky’s utilization of multi-voicedness is the centerpiece of a dialogical principle which subverts the monological point of view, wherein the matrix of ideological values, signifying practices and creative impulses of socio-cultural life are subordinated to the hegemony of a single, transcendental consciousness. Bakhtin argues that monologism has been encouraged by what he terms the “cult of unified and exclusive reason” promulgated by enlightenment thought, in which the other is treated as “merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness . . . . Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons.” (1984, 292–3).

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This analysis, I intuitively transferred to the socially ‘authored’ and ‘unfinalized’ cultural landscape. I wondered, could Bakhtin have been, in considering ‘dialogue as the authentic mode of lived experience’, simultaneously thinking about the world itself in ecological and cultural spaces other than the novel’s? Few argue explicitly that he was. Many theorists do not seem to possess the tools for positing such a thesis, nor I assume would most (particularly the self-proclaimed postmodernists) believe that it could lead to sturdy principles from which we might rebuild the vitality of our society, at once physically and morally. (Need it be said that I believe true morality and good health go hand in hand?) I thus grew to believe Bakhtin could illuminate our domain of practice as relevant to the facilitation of healthy spatio-temporal transformations. This thesis would proceed by weaving his ideas of dialogism (which are at times irreconcilable) with our already accepted fields of sociology, ecology, psychology, engineering, etc.

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Bakhtin’s focus had to remain in literature (in part, for political reasons, see Holquist, 1990) making it difficult to visualize his ideas on the ‘production of space’ (as put by Henri Lefebvre, 1974), or put more ideally, “the production and simultaneous re-enchantment of nature” (Smith 1998, 272). This last point or kind of deficiency may be seen as a problem for us in the design realm, but one that I argue we should attempt to overcome. Thus, as I contend, Bakhtin would have discerned in great literary works not only the circulations of meaning in human society, but the analogous circulations of energy apparent in nature. This means ultimately a
comprehension of the complex configurations which constitute a full-fledged notion of culture-nature (or some might correctly say 'holistic society') with all its actors and actants. How to prove this assertion is part of my problem here. Many thinkers cited below contend that such breadth of thinking, growing out of the humanities, blooms because literature, as opposed to the sciences, invokes the voice of the victim, of the outside, the 'other'. Bakhtin hears these voices, and like Walter Benjamin shows, "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past — which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments' (from Illuminations 1985, 254). Burying the past here amounts to the worst kind of crime (Simone Weil 1952, 51-2).

* * *

Bruno Latour's interventions, I should add in passing, work in a similar vein when he comprehends, and even attempts to 'redeem', the lives of nonhumans in our 'collective'. This often outlandish science studies thinker works to demonstrate nonhumans' agency (from his 'bag of tricks', e.g. wrist watches, speed bumps or 'sleeping policemen', the simple hammer, desk drawers, etc.), the multivariate and unforeseen 'scripts' they deploy, their evolution or capacity to be re-born, and inability to 'live' without the sustained (if unwitting) commitment of their creators. Latour once contended something to the effect that 'understanding what nonhumans are, is akin to understanding who people are'.61 (This is another slippery subject we'll charily revisit during a discussion of his 'pragmatogony' as influenced by Serres.) In so doing, Latour likewise endeavors to restore to literature "the vast territories it should never have given up — namely, science and technology" (from Aramis or the Love of Technology 1996, vii).62 (Michel Serres is the master of demonstrating this contention through the diverse literary-scientific voices of

"Literature, in its broadest sense, has become the legacy of the poor, in a new sense, Science is on the side of power, on the side of effectiveness; it has and will have more and more credit, more intellectual and social legitimacy, and the best positions in government; it will attract strong minds — strong in reason and ambition; it will take up space. Science has chased away, is chasing away, and will chase away what it calls idle talk, until it has cleaned up the place where it alone reigns and will reign. The poets will be driven from town, reduced to recounting, after dinner, a few poorly-conceived stories to a population overwhelmed by serious work based on science. Literature will be the legacy of the debilitated, emptied of all power . . . . Letters, the humanities, and literature will henceforth attract only soft minds, too feeble to shine in the realm of sciences; literature is dying surrounded by tearful invalids who are laughingstocks."

Michel Serres 1997c, 22

"Someday, epistemologists will go through the dustbins. Someday, scientists, tired of a sterilized field where nothing more will grow, will go off to look for a new fertility on the very ground they disdain today. Even in old wives' tales, even in what they call talk, literature, imagination. We humanists and philosophers are perceived more and more as residues of the division of knowledge. In fact, we are the reserve of knowledge. Yes, the fertility of science future."

Michel Serres 1980 (see Paulson 1997, 24-5)

"Nothing can convey the extent of the change that has taken place in the meaning of experience so much as the resulting reversal of the status of the imagination. For Antiquity, the imagination which is now expelled from knowledge as 'unreal', was the supreme medium of knowledge."

Giorgio Agamben 1993a, 24
Lucretius, Turner, Carnot, Zola, Quixote, The Bible, etc.; but we'll wait a little longer to be formally acquainted with this polymath.)

Another serresian scholar, invokes yet another argument as to why (in the sciences) we must listen to the humanities as, I contend, Bakhtin was in the process of proving: "stories and novels 'construct a very elaborate technology for observations that are more precise and detailed, more faithful to space, time, and circumstance than those of social science' (Eloge 1995, 120 citing Serres)." Clarke sees in great literature an allegorical functioning "play[ing] a crucial role . . . as a discursive mediation between the mythic and the scientific . . . it tends to confound or subvert epistemological separatisms" (1996, 35). "As an intermediary discourse . . . [however, literature] has always been a shifty enterprise, vacillating between desire and constraint, revisionism and dogmatism" (ibid.). (This is actually a helpful problematic Bakhtin uses to assign different chronotopes.) Tzvetan Todorov, a former bakhtinian scholar, adroitly argues that literature should once again circulate in the realm of "tools for thought that can serve us again today" (2002, 77). Arguing the (anthropological and scientific) legitimacy of literary studies and other arts towards the comprehension, authoring or designing of social space became fundamental to my interests while reading great literature (Dostoevsky, Borges, Calvino, Pynchon, Camus, Henry Miller, etc.) and then, subsequently, discovering thinkers like Bakhtin and Serres reaffirmed many of my suspicions.

Namely, we must hear and see cruelty, pain and injustice as above all concrete and local, existing in the singular suffering body of each member of the human race. And beyond this seemingly anthropocentric concern, we must seek knowledge in such a way that it includes all the world. Suffering and evil can be 'understood' locally then universally, not the reverse. The abstractions of science and 'management of order' then show themselves for what they are. “At the point where local singularity intersects this universality, 'local pain cries out its narrative. Literature has been bewailing misery and suffering since its birth. Science has not yet learned the language of this sobbing'” (Serres's _Le Tiers-Instruit_ 1991, 115; cited by Paulson 1997, 27). Obviously, a kind of delinquency or negligence to listen runs counter to science's previously lauded mission 'to serve humankind'. Hiroshima is for Serres one obvious and deplorable event which makes this deadly point (see both _The Natural Contract_ and _Conversations_).

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Perhaps the polyphonic novel, as Bakhtin understood it — particularly in light of its coherence with recent ecological and physical discoveries of how things coexist — might help us to invoke and enrich missing (or scapegoated) voices. At a minimum, we might ask of our design procedures a new set of questions in light of Bakhtin's artistic discoveries. We are led to believe, seeking a 'special interrelationship' or truth procedure between these 'others' and the author or designer is the activity of a higher quality of growth. Thus, Bakhtin (1994, 285) concludes:
Our point of view in no way assumes a passivity on the part of the author, who would then merely assemble others' points of view, others' truths, completely denying his own point of view, his own truth. This is not the case at all; the case is rather a completely new and special interrelationship between the author's and the other's truth. The author is profoundly active, but his activity is of a special truth. The author is profoundly active, but his activity is of a special dialogic sort.

**Reading with Michel Serres**

One word on that word *author*, which comes to us from Roman law and means 'the guarantor of authenticity, of loyalty, of an affirmation, of a testimony or an oath', but primitively it means 'he who augments' — not he who borrows, summarizes, or condenses, but only he who makes grow. *Author, augmenter . . .* everything else is a cheat. A work evolves by growing, like a tree or an animal.

I might be a cheat! This enervating realization was once confessed by Georges Bataille in relation to Nietzsche: "why even consider writing given that my thought — the whole of my thinking — has been so fully, so admirably expressed" (Joris 1988, xix)? Sometimes I just want to ask people to read a writer like Serres, rather than face the impossible task of doing justice to his thought in my own way. (These people often accuse me, and perhaps rightly so, of deifying certain thinkers and not carefully acknowledging the accretions of time and learning, which likewise mark these mortal heroes.) Other times, during the process of writing from/about Serres or Bakhtin, I learn a bit more or find something new, and also feel some solace in spreading others' good work as it makes sense to me. In this way, they provide a bit of shelter where I can think and endeavor to create something new.

Like Serres, I prefer to mix influences rather than enter into separating them. Serres seems to have anticipated more profoundly than any other thinker the movement of my thinking, how it opens out, how it gets fragmented and reconfigured over and over, how perceptions become promiscuous with each other to reawaken and also obscure consciousness, how it is touched by combinations of art or literature and the visceral reminders of the world in which one dwells. The 'exploratory instinct' I follow is in most academic circles seen as lazy or...

"Do you sometimes go for walks in the country? You cannot approach the houses, because watchdogs, usually fierce, keep you at bay. I have a panic-stricken fear of those beasts, which my contemporaries seem to prefer to their children. So, you find yourself forced to blaze a trail off the beaten paths, to avoid bites and barks. Anyone on the outside seeing you proceed has a hard time understanding where you are coming from . . . and which way you are going, since you continually change directions — but he will understand very well if he sees and hears the dogs.

When you have no affiliations and want above all to avoid them, when you have no home and cannot live anywhere, you are very much obliged to begin a project. All my life I have had the distressful feeling of wandering in the desert or on the high seas. And when you are lost and it is stormy, you quickly feel the need to build a raft or a boat or an ark — even an island — solid and consistent, and to supply it with tools, with objects, with shelters, and to people it with characters . . . doesn't philosophy consist of such a series of domestic improvements? Later, whoever wants can seek shelter there."

Michel Serres 1995d, 21
undisciplined. Serres can demonstrate that this is not *necessarily* the case (see Girard’s introduction to *Detachment*, or Paulson, who says of Serres’s writing: “What matters most is not a single line of argument running through a book (though strong and coherent argument there is) *but rather the connections being made* through continuous interwoven ‘digressions’ that turn out to be the very texture of the writing and thought” 1997, 31 emphasis added). It takes a lot of work to clearly differentiate and disentangle theorists and their theories from the time(s) they write from. And every so often, a scholar comes along who can helpfully even creatively perform such a dissection (many of the scholars cited in this thesis fit such a description). For the time being, however, I’m not this kind of scholar. Therefore, there is some truth to the above accusation. But I’d gladly endure this criticism for now, as Serres does during heated conversations with Latour (1995d), so as to ‘take risks’ (Stengers, 2001), so as to ‘skip over boggy patches’, and find syntheses instead of divisions.67

If separations must be made, however (as a literature review calls for), Serres makes a clearer demonstration of how the terraqueous world itself speaks through turbulence, noise, etc.; and Bakhtin more explicitly deals with the artistic composition as something potentially giving to ‘life’. And yet these two characteristics mostly amount to the same thing in my eyes. It is from this position that I work to integrate their scientific and literary analyses into design. Each thinker in their own turn lends a hand in guiding and in recalling our responsibility to remember and ‘watch over the meaning of being’ (Heidegger).68 Both Bakhtin and Serres help us to see literature that has prefigured science and the science embedded in literature: “Art, beauty, and profound thought preserve youth even better than a glacier!” (Serres 1995c, 61). Regarding “the problem of time” as similar to Bakhtin’s ‘great time’, Serres continues, “an unpretentious true story [usually of antiquity] agrees with recent science, to produce good philosophy” (ibid.). Observations like this hardly seem worth making, but for the fact that contemporary thought rarely acknowledges the contemporarity of premodern thought and the mechanisms through which knowledge is buried and rediscovered.69

Each thinker likewise posits what has been excluded from modern conceptual frameworks. Namely, the non-unitary, the loose aggregates, the deviate, the disorderly, the monstrous, all that cannot be recuperated into binary deterministic systems or linear thinking: in Bakhtin, the ‘carnivalesque’ aspects of culture (see especially his book on *Rabelais*) and the heteroglot nature of one’s language take the place of these excluded and yet fertile forces. Michael Gardiner contends that it is through the carnivalesque that Bakhtin celebrates “invention, human creativity, and the liberation of human consciousness from the dictates of official truth in a manner which encourages a ‘completely new order of things’” (Gardiner 1992, 58). As we have seen in Serres, ‘noise’ can be the fundamental operator in this regard. Both noise and the drive towards carnival manifest themselves in not necessarily liberating fashions, however. Neither
are inherently recuperative, but both indicate how systems are functioning and how the transcendence of closed systems fuels invention. These primary concepts or phenomenon both give and take, free and suppress; their existence is complex and resists dialectical reductionism.

Both Serres and Bakhtin share a concern for re-cognizing that confusion of mixing, where the "inner properties of objects" do count, that they are not seen, in Latour's words, as "mere receptacles for human categories" (1993a, 53). This means a devotion to discernment in the relational space of the hyphen, as it were, of culture-nature, subject-object, self-other, etc., in order to exhume the in-between, or listen to the cacophonous third — in order to actually recognize what makes dialogue rich while it is sustained.

I should note, however, that 'dialogue' is treated somewhat differently by each writer (a subject worthy of more focused study). In short, we can see important similarities: dialogue is a contested terrain of thought; it is composed of monologic aspects and/or kinds of interruption; and it is not dialectical, but situated in time-space, wavering with uncertainty. The multiplicity harbored in a situation calls for a knowledge of multiplicity, an adeptness, a dialogicity as a participant, if one is to find 'health' (see periphery pp. 45-6) in the event of dialogue.

Science is the totality of the world's legends. The world is the space of their inscription. To read and to journey are one and the same act.

Michel Serres 1968, 14; cited by Harari and Bell 1993, xxi

In a superb introduction to Michel Serres's seminal Hermes volumes, Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell (1983, xxiii) summarize the basic and liberative thrust of Serres's entire project:

What holds for space in general holds for the space of knowledge as well . . . . To know is thus to navigate between local fragments of space, to reject techniques of classification and separation in order to look for units of circulation along and among displacements. To know is to adopt the comparative and pluralistic epistemology of the journey, to implement a philosophy of transport over one of fixity in order to counter the dogmatism of unified and systematic knowledge . . . . The ultimate goal [is] to fulfill the conditions for the broadest possible communication.

They follow this wonderful appraisal by citing Serres's affirmation (Serres 1968, 15; Harari and Bell 1983, xxiii):

Exchange as the law of the théoréthical universe, the transport of concepts and their complexity, the intersection and overlapping of domains . . . . represent, express, reproduce perhaps the very tissue in which objects, things themselves, are immersed — the all-encompassing and the diabolically complex network of inter-information. Communication asserts itself once again at the end of a circuit that renews theory.

Prigogine's and Stengers's Postface to Hermes refers to Serres's discussion of Leibniz's style as not speaking of science, not speaking about science from an external position, but speaking science, and he "did so even when he 'spoke' metaphysics. Thus, speaking the language
of dynamics in a philosophical manner" (1983, 144). This style thus allows Prigogine and Stengers to "identify precisely what is now at stake in science: the description of a world of processes, the definition of entities that participate in the becoming of the world" (ibid., 145).

Let's consider a few of these exemplary and multiplicitous descriptions: first through Serres's analysis of ancient geometry, which "begins in violence and in the sacred" (Serres 1983, 133), then through his analysis of Joseph Turner's paintings, where "mechanics, geometry, the art of drawing vanish before the fire" (Serres 1983, 61). Both examples offer understanding of phenomenon still very much alive and productive in contemporary landscapes, as they exhume the relevance of the past.

The first example makes more legible an implicit mathematical language or immemorial process at work while building things, making architecture, and so on. In "The Origin of Geometry," Serres organizes the properties of communication around a mathematical formulation we have all by now grown quite familiar with — a formula we use for organizing space — a kind of language, the origin of which has receded and become nearly inaccessible. This is because "mathematics presents itself as a successful dialogue of a communication which rigorously dominates its repertoire and is maximally purged of noise. Of course, it is not that simple, the irrational and the unspeakable lie in the details; listening always requires collating; there is always a leftover or a residue, indefinitely" (Serres, 1983 126). Like anything, then, should we listen closely "the problem [will remain, however slightly] open" (ibid., 125).

In this front view of a rock cave Buddhist temple in Gong County, Hunan Province, we see curves rounding out edges. Perhaps we see understanding of the irrational, of the $\sqrt{2}$. Christopher Day has discerned a kind of quality like this and imitated it in his own architecture. With the image below, he suggests that buildings should curve and meet or rise from the ground with a certain durability. The quote then suggests Day's 'way of seeing', or the 'swerve' in his design-philosophy.70

"An example of life-filled, life-enhancing curves is the movement of water in a mountain stream. Here all the lines and movements have a breathing rhythm. This has a rational, physical basis made up of the interaction of forces — gravity, momentum, friction and so on. It is in fact a manifestation of the interweaving relationships between the different elements of water, air and earth. The ever-changing pictures we see in the sky are made up of a different combination: air, water and warmth."

Christopher Day 1990, 64
Through the first mathematical proof, given more than two millennia ago, Serres shows why $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational by using the Pythagorean theorem (see 1983, 130 for this demonstration). As in a common dialogue, this irrational figure must be objectified or purged if we are to solve something. “Be quiet, don’t make any noise, put your head back in the sand, go away or die. Strange diagonal which was thought to be so pure, and which is agonal and which remains an agony” (ibid., 127). Utilizing yet one more medium to show how dialogue is organized between two parties (or points), Serres has demonstrated how they are “linked [by banding together] against the noise which blocks the communication channel” in order to find a solution (ibid., 126). Communication between two “requires the exclusion of a third term (noise) and the inclusion of a fourth (code)” (ibid., 126). In other words, “coding is nothing more than showing unities in the stead of multiplicitary noise. Thus concepts are born” (Serres 1995a, 86).

This conversational dynamic “can easily be shown, through the play of people, their resemblances and differences, their mimetic preoccupations and the dynamics of their violence” (ibid., 126). Here is the fundamental connection between Serres and Girard, as each describe how noise must be purged in order to form a link or to fit together, in order to have religion in the sense of ‘creating a cord’ that binds together against the multiple. (Noise: the background of our existence, that which interrupts and kicks up a fuss, that which guarantees uncertainty, contingency, beauty, novelty and difference; it can take the form of pollution, the individual’s mood, the flapping of wings, the reverberations of bombs; it is everywhere. See Genesis for exquisite elaboration of this notion, and argumentation for its incorporation rather than its exclusion from the human drama). For both thinkers a “crises is at stake. The crisis is sacrificial. A series of deaths accompanies . . . translations . . . Following these sacrifices, order reappears: in mathematics, in philosophy, in history, in political society” (ibid., 133). But not without exacting a certain price.

As with all the material I aim to introduce with this paper, one of the underlying impulses is to open up dialogue about fundamental issues, which are seemingly passed over or brushed aside during a design education. When I learned trigonometry and began using it to build things, grade the land, and so on, I wasn’t aware that the orthogonality of my procedure grows out of a kind of violence, and that through this re-production there is a certain complicity in constructing forms generative of more violence and/or disillusionment. And yet these outcomes would seem to contradict the spirit of the discipline I have chosen. This is an example of the “practical idealism [which] comes into being, immune to the contradictions regularly inflicted on it by the unmasterable elements of the world” (Prigogine and Stengers 1983, 138).

Serres has demonstrated in the above material “the absurdity of the irrational. We reduce it to the contradictory or to the undecidable. Yet, it exists; we cannot do anything about it” (Serres 1983, 132). What needs to happen, then, is an on-going reevaluation of our models.
By politely listening to 'other' realms, as Serres always seems to, we might discover passages to better conceive and navigate forms, to be able to adjust the theorem he posits: “beneath the forms of matter, stochastic disorder reigns supreme” (ibid., 61). After all, “legend, myth, history, philosophy, and pure science have common borders over which a unitary schema builds bridges” (ibid., 133).

As we shall see, art could have been listed as well (were it not for the assumption that it is already born into each family; only by respecting modernity does art become something else). Serres shows the prescient lessons Turner taught (through *implication*) about global warming, thermodynamics, and history. This again exemplifies, in Maria Assad's words, Serres's attempt to reinstate a “‘method’ which had been relegated long ago to the fictional, irrational, or emotive-intuitive spheres of perception” (Assad 1999, 164).

Although there have always been social approaches for mobilizing nature into culture that tend toward mastery and domination, for a relevant epistemological critique it is most helpful to begin with the powerful Enlightenment era tools and the ensuing rapid industrialization which still ‘heatedly’ lives on today. This, despite the fact that one can hardly believe the old machine can continue functioning much longer.

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In “Science and the Humanities: The Case of Turner” (1997b) and in “Turner Translates Carnot” (1983), Serres portrays a great painter who discerned the unfolding of a new era, saturated with the cultural physicality of what was emerging. Turner cultivated a medium for representing overlapping multiplicities reminiscent of Serres’s own privileging of the mélange. “‘Mélange’ explains . . . better than ‘middle’ . . . The middle point is abstract, dense homogeneous, almost stable; it concentrates upon itself. Mélange fluctuates. The center point is part of solid geometry as it was once called. ‘Mélange’ favors fusion and moves fluidly. The center point separates, ‘mélange’ softens: the middle as a concept creates classes, but ‘mélange’ produces half-breeds” (Serres 1985, 82-83).71 (Privileging mélanges helps to distinguish Serres’s work from dialectics: “having a dialectic in one’s logic . . . It allows one to remain comfortably within the concept, never to contemplate multiplicity” 1995a, 84.) The mélange in Turner's depictions is “matter in fusion, the canvases . . . efface the boundaries of things and make their limits tremble . . . the outline is lost, on the canvas, in favor of a fuzzy-edged cloud . . . which confirmed the results of this historical analysis ['fire replaces air and water in order to transform the earth' (Serres 1983, 56)] . . . Consequently, the whole critical perspective changed. Far from the consciousness of the artist, far from his body and the fine and qualitative perception of his senses, it entered directly into matter itself and the things of the world” (1997, 10-11). Turner displayed a ‘vision of emergence’: “The source, the origin, of force is in this flash of lightning, this ignition. Its energy exceeds form; it transforms. Geometry disintegrates, lines are erased;
matter, ablaze, explodes; the former color — soft, light, golden — is now dashed with bright hues. The horses, now dead, pass over the ship's bridge in a cloud of horsepower" (Serres 1983, 56). And in the process, Turner depicted the furnace "as the new model of the [Modern] world" (ibid., 61).

The landscapes portrayed show “smoking from the first factories, all England of that era was stockpiling capital, materials, energy, and men, and these diverse accumulations transformed cities, the countryside, social groups, even theories and mentalities—in short, they changed the face of the world . . . . It created a new burning society. Everywhere, fires unknown before that time were lit in such a way that a thousand things that had been stable for a long time disappeared, while others began to move” (Serres 1997, 6-7). The discovery of carbon cycles and thermodynamics comes to mind as an outcome of this new movement. Even the ancient poet Lucretius knew of this spreading-out, as it were, which we see and feel increasingly in everything around us: “see how the shipwreck, the aplustria scattered in the surf, and the convulsive waves are the obsessive metaphors of dissolution, of mingling, of exhaustion, for a poet who himself had also entered full force into swarming matter” (Serres 1983, 59). “Matter: it is in movement, it forms into aleatory clouds, the stochastic is essential, the border disappears and opens up a new time. The instant is not statically immobilized, fixed like a mast; it is an unforeseen state, hazardous, suspended, drowned, melted in duration, dissolved” (ibid., 62). This exhaustion occurs, however, at different speeds; and we learn there is here even such a thing as ‘negentropy’: The function of the philosopher, the care and the passion of the philosopher, is the negentropic ringing-of-the-changes of the possible (Serres 1995a, 23).

We have touched on how informative and provocative Turner's contexts were. Growing out of this, I wonder, for example, if a language of negentropy, high and low entropy might not be one solution for dissolving or making more symmetrical, otherwise onerous and misleading distinctions between culture and nature; i.e. the city as 'not natural', wilderness as 'not cultural'. Additionally, I wonder if negentropy should not only be comprehended in the conventional framework of thermodynamics. William Rueckert suggests that “a poem is a stored energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow . . . poems are part of the energy pathways that sustain life” (in “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” cited by Harris 1997, 46). Would kinds of knowledge then be associated with negentropy and likewise, kinds of information with high entropy? I certainly experience different texts this way, as I do walking through a meadow or conversely a parking lot.

A language of neg-entropy would be gentle or delicate in the ways Serres and others suggest a proper artistic-science must be, while aiming to incorporate everything it can. How outrageous is this contention though? For one, Paul de Man suggests that such a (totalizing?) language must contend with his own “larger argument that aesthetic significations are often the
most violent of significations, this because they appeal to ‘clarity and control’, operations which force language to submit to ideology” (Cohen 1999, 94). In this paragraph, I’ve merely raised one line of inquiry Serres’s demonstrations open for his readers. Reading with Serres, the possibilities seem to be limitless, which may in fact be his purpose for writing.

**Charting a ‘passage from passion to accomplishment’**

To answerably or responsibly practice as an author or designer, one’s comprehension of the human-ecological condition is an ongoing struggle to ‘preserve possibilities’. When I sit down to write or sketch or design, the biggest problem I invariably confront is a longing to spill over all the edges at once. Some deep down doubt resists the prioritizing and ordering necessary to reduce and channel my energies into ‘coherent’ communication. I know, for one, that the things under my scrutiny are always richer and more precise than my commentary can ever be. Practice, whether we think of it as artistic or scientific must involve interpretations and reductions. In order to practice at all, I must therefore push beyond this ‘healthy apprehensiveness’ and be reductive. Only then do marks on the page, only then do ‘boundaries’ start to happen. In Bhabha’s quotation of Heidegger, he posits the end and the limit as signs for something new: “a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, 1). Boundaries animate possibilities for exploring and expressing an increasing intertanglement of dialogue with the object or context of my attention. These marks on the page can release unforeseen potential to the apprehended; they can begin the object’s return to the status of a subject.74

Potentialities waver and spread in multiple directions, however. Another problem. Another layer will be needed to ‘flatten out’ and direct the medium, so
as not to end up where I began, with a messy, ineffable whole to be confronted. Hence, the application of another series of questions, another phase or context seeking to understand relations between times and spaces. The process of questioning is, in the end, painfully unfinalized, as it should be. Diligence to this fact, to this way of being, is fundamental to any pretensions of 'healing'.

During a lengthy process, like the one this (introductory) paper represents, diverse layers of ordering or thinking build up around the object. But the layers, the different aspects of considering a problem of representation, have in themselves revealed something quite striking: each varied approach to the material at hand, each characteristically different vocabulary, shows to be mostly interchangeable with the others. Each one is heterogeneous with multiple influences and tendencies. However, whether considering a problem philosophically, scientifically, poetically, even politically, it all seems to amount to the same general set of phenomenon. (Describing just why is another fertile discourse in itself.) Through each of these cultural filters, knowledge happens or is 'added to the world', it becomes part of its beauty and mystery. One might say that it is another translation of the world into the real wealth of culture.

So I had this startling apprehension, after realizing that most of the material I have written and read over the last few years is essentially concerned with how messages are delivered and received, with how thresholds open and close, with how arrows of time penetrate our present and with how "space is strewn with [these] simple arrows, pointing in only one direction" (Serres 1982, 27). And, moreover, how all of this together cannot be safeguarded alone by science, religion, literature, or mythology because it cuts across them all.

Although it is not likely prudent to be so explicit — 'discovery' and 'redemption' happen independent of force — one will find that each section of this thesis evokes or is analogous in some ways to every other section, as each is underpinned by a concern for 'how dialogue happens' while carried along by irreversible time. Is this a letdown, I wonder, or does it involve too much processing; or is it intriguing, all this texturing, or possibly more memorable and free? When I write (or idealize) about how or what I should like to write, I am doing the same activity with regard to design. Thus, the ideas presented here whether explicitly appealing to writing or gardening, etc., are intended to be combined in such a way that they can appeal to creation in many spheres simultaneously. This approach is, after all, what has allowed me and the thinkers
followed here, to discern in the novel, for example, significant compositional parallels in the physical and/or social world.

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The 'iterative nature' one should aim for is perhaps richly varied in colors and textures but, above all, speaks to what moves slow and deep throughout the artistic endeavor: "so naked, so blank, so empty, so absent that it brings forth a presence" (Serres 1995a, 45). But, following Serres, this thesis is not such a medium, however much it may want to be. "A work achieves more excellence when it cites fewer proper names. It is naked, defenseless, not lacking knowledge but saturated with secondary naïveté; not intent on being right but ardently reaching new intuitions . . . . A university thesis [on the other hand] aims at the imitable; a plain and simple work seeks the inimitable" (1995d, 22). Serres later reveals "a diabolical link between repetition and recognition. The imitable is doubly ugly . . . because it enslaves" (ibid., 94 my emphasis).⁷⁶

Bakhtin expressed this problem of representation in a somewhat different way, according to Batstone (2002, 106-7) when he claimed that "one can make a monologic argument for dialogism." This means that the "interiority of the living and thinking human being" is displaced by a presiding, even stultifying agenda (ibid, 107). The reader thus loses a sense for the author's 'mind at work', which (despite the fact that the ordering of the ideas are indeed laid out by the author) leaves the reader in a state which is less participatory. One mode of authoring is aporiatic as it enrolls the reader into a cognitive, even visceral state of thought; another mode is flattening, more like an assured directive uninterested in hearing a response. Again, let's reflect on more or less systematically mediated design procedures in such a light.

One should aim towards a certain utility, but one you might say is "repeatably unrepeatable" (Bakhtin 1999, 165).⁷⁷ In so doing, one is attempting to be in full correspondence with the nature of the universe. Why? Everything fluent with the duration of the world is repeated in unrepeatable ways. One thinks of the leaves of the tree, the seasons, every chess game, every conversation, and so on. The implication being that 'forced' repeatability is fundamentally at odds with, or more precisely, a kind of illusion — thus one's propositions shouldn't pretend otherwise. When constructing a world where time seems to be repeatable or at least of little consequence to day-to-day human concerns, we end up with a kind of simulated façade of reality that destroys one's common sense and/or good judgment, or sense of responsibility. I'm not the only designer who would argue that the everyday experience of repetition (the epistemology that it is born of) has generated problems ranging from a throw-away culture, to a form of capitalism that rather than building soundly, opts to reinvent space so frequently one is led to believe it is of little consequence to our ecologies, psychologies, and so on. John T. Lyle, for example, makes a similar argument with regard to making more explicit
the infrastructure that operates in our society, i.e. how waste is dealt with (1994). Michael Hough, likewise attacks 'dummy-strip' visual buffers along highways because he is weary of mass disillusionment (1990).

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I'm discouraged with most design as a means of palliative and placatory approaches to problem-solving, which speciously addresses human needs for 'liveliness', making the most out of the environment, and so on, while simultaneously working to conceal fundamental contradictions of a larger system at work. Note: The word 'environment' in this context more often than not "assumes that we humans are at the center of a system of nature" (Serres 1995b, 33).

This idea emerges through the case study, where so-called 'good design' is precisely what is so troubling. Is there much of an alternative? most people ask. Perhaps not, but let's not kid ourselves about it either (i.e. Landscape Architecture principally emerged, in order to ameliorate, or make tolerable for those who can afford it, the effects of an industrial urbanity out of control for seemingly irrefragable reasons pointed out by Marx and many others in his wake. Should we fancy ourselves as healers, we must (as the old saying goes) recognize the disease before finding the cure.

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And yet in approaching difficult questions, I believe we must ask: "does light ever come from quarrels? No, it always comes from elsewhere and from unexpected places" (Serres 1997b, 16). As a principle, then, we should avoid getting embroiled in the cliquish trends that make thinkers, by some new turn of criticism, wholly redundant. Subdividing them, sterilizing the 'collective fury' created prior to such order(ing)s, is really of little interest to me. The writers I appreciate most also have an open attitude towards the writing (the 'times') they are willing to acknowledge as relevant today. Again, Serres (1995d, 26) states this ambition better than I:

I have always preferred to construct, or put together, rather than destroy . . . . And don't take the word construct necessarily in the sense of hard stones—I prefer turbulent fluids or fluctuating networks . . . . I have never ceased to seek beauty.

One's creation should resist forms of organization which stifle the potential that might 'glimmer through the cracks' (Lévinas). One should seek to provide multiple footings or opportunities for comparing, connecting, transforming — of which the author cannot possibly be the author of. As such, it should attempt to offer a rich experience whereby the reader does indeed feel like an author. This is at least the ideal, and again the ideal that applies to design as much as it does to writing.

"The city is redundant: it repeats itself so that something will stick in the mind" (Calvino 1974, 19). In my favorite readings (as in great places) I find a mix of events (relatable examples
of time) and theories (struggles for truth) composed in inventive, and yet iterative fashion, as though in a fugue. Providing numerous, multivalent, and overlapping, but well-grounded examples can be helpful and is well worth emulating. This may mean frequently skipping over rough areas and boggy patches, the “unfinished portions left to the gods, for chance, for life, for unlikely occurrences” (Serres 1989, 8). “Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist” (ibid., Calvino).

Given the subject material — “the very incarnation of thought as an adventure” (Delcò 2000, 230), the serious and sustained recounting of a journey filled with vocabularies, ideas, and feelings, likely to arouse the suspicion of those specialists whose territory is unceremoniously invaded — exactness and specificity are not always easy to come by, but I trust my generalizations may be found more suggestive and provocative than confusing and irritating. Needless to say, I do not, and fundamentally should not, pretend to completeness or absolute precision.80

The gathering, arranging, and adapting of materials here should augment potentials for creative reflection and adaptation. This kind of creating aims to be highly communicative in rich and practical implications — a ‘style’ moving in the same motion as a ‘method’, a ‘creative epistemology’, a path towards ‘invention’. In the aftermath of considerable reading, dialogue and thought, I’m writing an intuitive culmination of ideas, a particular product and process of learning, of opening my understanding for others, which would seem to be the purpose of writing a thesis.

To talk about innovation . . . it’s impossible without that dazzling, obscure, and hard-to-define emotion called intuition. Intuition is, of all things in the world, the rarest, but most equally distributed among inventors — be they artists or scientists. Yes, intuition strikes the first blows.

Michel Serres 1995d, 99

It is only after a long and arduous frequenting of names, definitions, and facts that the spark is lit in the soul which, in enflaming it, marks the passage from passion to accomplishment.

Giorgio Agamben 1995, 22

Although it often feels as though it should be, I know this is not some kind of magnum opus, but a master thesis. Presumably, in my case, this means a ‘substantively’81 written reflection of an extensive survey of theoretical material, which is relevant to design and carries considerable potential to augment it in the realms of education and practice. All along I have been detailing this description, and will continue to aim for points of contact which allow for a genuine dialogue between different fields, or for charting a ‘passage from passion to accomplishment’.

To open this passage, so to speak, I will discuss the fundamental issue of integrating philosophy and science studies into landscape architecture, and in so doing, re-iterate core
objectives — which do, by the way, increasingly coincide with how I envision my professional work developing. Demand for interdisciplinary programs and programming is everywhere on the rise while, presumably, few people are soundly prepared to help make the most of it.

Underlying most of my efforts to date has been a longing to integrate philosophical thinking towards engendering a more fundamentally self-critical and responsible discipline of landscape architecture. One wonders though: “because we’re so fond of explaining the universe and history according to the groups that we belong to, does our specialization forever shut our eyes and close our ears” (Serres 1997b, 17)? I believe that this work is worthy and in the spirit of the MASLA program, which aspires to privilege interdisciplinarity and the freedom to break away from specialization, as a path towards learning. Donna Haraway (2000, 111) contends, learning happens not by “looking only for the flaws or the absences [which, in fact] . . . seems like the opposite of learning.” Learning happens by doing and by comparing, and above all, by open-ended dialogue.
CHAPTER 3: RE-DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Third worlds compelling (radical) research

This paper is not specifically about globalization, and yet it cannot avoid what Serres (1995b, 110) calls “the progressive erasure of local events [which] constitutes the greatest contemporary global event.” In questioning the mobilization of Enlightenment era epistemology, I implicitly deal with how this ‘progressive erasure’ operates (aesthetically and/or physically) from intimate to immense scales of perception and communication.

Our tranquility chases death off to these neighboring and remote worlds, to these third worlds. Everyone considers these worlds dangerous, but what they actually call for is simply presence, because there one must respond, at every point and in real time, to the active attention of death; one must be as alert and present as it is, in order to reply to it tit for tat. Granted, death does not actually attack — aggression must not be its character — but it is passive like a black hole, it takes everything that is neglected and punishes without fail. That makes you very supple, very intelligent; that keeps you awake. Diligence against negligence.

Michel Serres 1995b, 113

I came to graduate school in ‘Landscape Architecture’ after spending over four years in Southeast Asia, the so-called ‘Third World’, working in many different capacities related to teaching, land use, conservation, and design. During this period my progressive ardency changed its color as I embarrassingly realized, like many others before me, we are but one more discipline complicit in the spreading of ideas and practice fundamentally at odds with the circulations internal to diverse places and the peoples inhabiting them. Years of travel, exposure to unspeakable injustices and startling differences, shook me free of many simple assumptions or prejudices and, needless to say, contributed to my design philosophy.

Abject destitution reveals a fundamental time and existence which history lessons here have never taught. I share Alexander’s perception: “in the slum, in some way, the direct voice of the heart... a direct human quality, quite different from our own experience in a plastic tract house, or in a motel, or in a

Sleeping here ‘bare life’ reveals ‘abject destitution’
McDonald’s” (2001, 59). Before my travels, I only barely sensed the conflictual dimension always eliminated from my science and design background. Slowly, I began to believe that my scholarly learning process had been inappropriate to the real world in which we live, a world which is a confused mixture of technology and society, of insane or wise traditions and useful or disturbing innovations. One wonders if (and if so, why) landscape architecture programs bother to teach anymore the intimate relationship the Japanese gardener of antiquity once cultivated with his world, while drenched in precise sensory adherences, traditions, and time(s). We generally learn about our history in isolation from that of the sciences (and design should be thought of as a science) — as though, for example, our creativity has persisted unaffected by so-called advances in knowledge and technique. We study various disciplines uprooted from the soil of their own history, as if they had happened by chance. In reality (or in principle?) those Japanese designers are not and should not be lost to us.

Nor should someone like Jens Jenson, who at the end of his prolific career in landscape architecture, decided that Nature (before its representation) provides for the best design (Tishler 1997). His idea taken seriously would problematize the ubiquitous, usually a-historical notion in design that we ‘enhance’ Nature. What we almost always do is transfigure a landscape

In the first image, a ubiquitous post-war subdivision represented ‘progress’ for those people able to flee the city. Below, a New Urbanism image represents ‘progress’ for those who can escape the monotony of the previous state — yet another stage of simulation . . . Both require the effacement of what came before, and tremendous resources that they might have ‘life’. Neither really represents progress, but the continuing story of capitalistically-defined individualism, however unwittingly, bent on destruction.

. . . there has never been a more revolting sight than that of a generation of adults which, having destroyed all remaining possibilities of authentic experience, lays its own impoverishment at the door of a younger generation bereft of the capacity for experience. When human kind is deprived of effective experience as controlled and manipulated as a laboratory maze for rats — in other words, when the only possible experience is horror or lies — then the rejection of experience can provisionally embody a legitimate defence.”

Giorgio Agamben 1993a, 16

‘Provisionally’, through what?! . . . video games, drugs, four-wheeling . . . ?
already claimed by the clutches of a culture bent on destruction. Serres uses an analogy to dogs marking territory (1995d). Something is ruined through ‘development’ then made to be somewhat more tolerable — for some — which then stands for ‘progress’.

While traveling, I plunged into the ‘so-called’ fictions of Dostoevsky, Borges, and Henry Miller, among many others. I found that these texts portrayed something more ‘true-to-life’ than the others. Their superiority made me profoundly question the lessons I’d heretofore assimilated, that would set to one side literature as subjective, hence suspect. As far as I could tell, both realms, the sciences and the humanities, dealt with aesthetics: both were concerned with comprehending and facilitating conditions of experience. But was the later appealing to the truths emerging out of my everyday life, while the former worked to obscure these from me?

Something seemed afoot (was this postmodernist disenchantment?), something that would lead me to thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Serres. Each helped to confirm my suspicions that the (disenfranchised) humanities are indeed superior — at least, in certain crucially demonstrative senses. Each thinker would thus help with my experience of ‘disillusionment’ or better, incite another ‘way of seeing’.

**The sense we hold in common**

From “Common Ground: Finding our way back to the Enlightenment,” in *Harpers* (Jan. 2003a, 44) Thomas de Zengotita calls for a ‘radical response’ and suggests:

What radicals should be doing right now is studying and thinking. You need to put in your ten years at the library, the way Marx did. You need to be figuring out what makes human beings tick and what, if any, direction is to be found in history. And I don’t mean some half-assed sci-fi anarcho-Gaia nonsense you cobbled together before you dropped out of Bard; I mean serious study, working toward an alternative to a global bourgeois democracy. What radicals need most right now isn’t action but theory.

Some of us must indeed study the foundations theoretically, but we all must study and alter them with more than words. I believe landscape architects ought to have the ability to effectively do both. Too much time reading (and writing) books impoverishes other ways of knowing and being in the world of ‘the everyday’, with all our senses, poetically, irrationally, corporally, ethically, affectively and effectively.86 Only authentic participation, as such, can know its art, its embodiment and insistent exhibition of “personal and collective identities, aesthetic and instrumental purposes, mundane and spiritual aspirations” (Glassie 1999, 42). We must not fall out of the common milieu of mixing in material culture if we are to celebrate all of its potentiality.
The classically attractive and humble spirit of landscape architecture knows this too well. In the past, for better and worse, we have rejected theoretical pretensions and opted to embrace the messiness of the everyday in a more or less situated, hands-on manner. This might remain the best way for our field to operate, were it not for the need to comprehend and struggle against pervasive political, technological, economic, and sociological forces, which undermine the designer who wants to make something beautiful. “And that,” Alexander says, “is where the wound that young architects feel today is coming from,” one’s “moral force . . . coopted as part of the money-image machine” (1991b).

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In the everyday it is difficult to define what we are, but our works speak for us. Common sense — in its root sensus communus, the sense we hold in common — does ‘matter’, perhaps more than anything. But, the rationales once put forward for slavery were full of common sense more often than they were of hatred, or at least hatred unmasked. As were the rationales for the draining of marshes, then expansive grading projects, now making open spaces surveyable against terror, and so on . . . We may look back on the normalized, mediating role of AutoCAD with similar dismay (seeing subordination to its will, to this actor’s grand ‘artificial intelligence’ and its incumbent forms of inertia).87

"The better a person understands the degree to which he is externally determined (his substantiality), the closer he comes to understanding and exercising his real freedom."

Mikhail Bakhtin 1999, 139

I’m reminded of another relevant aside you might appreciate. These images or provocations in Adbusters (Jan. 2003) reflect increasing discontent with the status quo, its aggressive liquidation of difference, and could potentially provoke needed discussion in our discipline, which purportedly seeks to mediate or facilitate proper composition, engagement and understanding of our built environment.

Gazing out on ‘wreckage upon wreckage’, the individual wonders: “What today remains of our capacity to reinvent the world?” Other questions that might emerge from this one: If I’m not struggling against it can I help but be for it? Given the vast circulations of capital, codes, computers, construction techniques, commodities, confining knowledges, and so on, can we as designers really be accountable for our productions of space?
One of the very seductive aspects of being abroad for me was comprehension local common sense — of, for example, the Karen people in Northern Thailand (above photo taken in Thung Jor). The German agro-forestry specialists I associated with (Sam Muen Project, 1994-95) were continually humbled by the Karen's indigenous wisdom, to the point of feeling redundant, sometimes foolishly defensive. John O'Neill's description, in *The Poverty of Postmodernism*, coincides: "common-sense knowledge is far from being a poor version of science. It is self-critical and, above all, capable of dealing with the contradictions and paradoxes of social life . . ." (1995, 172).

Needs to control and fears of uncertainty are ubiquitous — and materialized all around us — but not necessarily well-founded, nor likely to give to good 'common sense'. All too often, aspects of ordinary practice and places — how they are designed, built, maintained, etc. — are full of an inertia that diminishes our common sense and 'our capacity to reinvent the world'. (Perhaps, I'm preaching to the choir here, but for the continuing purposes of justifying my work . . .) We must carefully consider what generates this so-called inertia (in its epistemological and/or material forms), and whether or not we as designers are capable of extricating ourselves far

Can we be anything but complicit in the tragic history painted in Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus" as described by Walter Benjamin (from *Illuminations*, 1969, 257-258):

"This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angle can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

Benjamin owned this painting and it deeply impacted him, as it emerges in several of his writings. The website I lifted it from had one rendition with Benjamin's face replacing the angel's. There are many other 'angels' around us — which incidentally, comes from the Greek word for messenger — also being carried away, yet longing to 'awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed'. Then there's another whole ridiculous menagerie of angles mixing-up the messages (see Serres's *Angels*).

What is it about modern lived experience that can contradict or ameliorate what great poets like Baudelaire and Lautreamont first showed us, now echoed (from *The Ticklish Subject*, 1999, 157) in Slavoj Žižek's characteristically arresting insight?

"[Since] modern subjectivity emerges when the subject perceives himself as 'out of joint', as excluded from the order of things, from the positive order of entities', [so] for that reason, the ontic [real, this world] equivalent of the modern subject is inherently excremental . . . . There is no subjectivity without the reduction of the subject's positive-substantial being to a disposable 'piece of shit'."
enough from it to begin to change it fundamentally. We are in a crucial field for the task, that is, if we can sustain a fidelity to being truly accountable or responsible as mediators and creators. Moreover, it is obvious that our relevance from this perspective is increasingly apparent as time marches on. Thus, like any healthy system, we must be poised with the tools to continually challenge our assumptions if we are to genuinely aim for an open, liberative sustainability. Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue does precisely this: it opens a space for thought and (or as) action.

Unfortunately, without books and their theories most of us tend to lose sight of how history operates in the abstract and is translated into common sense. We lose sight of how, for instance, Kim Dovey’s notion of ‘power-over’ expands and governs subjectivities such that “architecture and urban design always represents and stabilizes authority” (1999, 194). Whose or what authority?

In practice and in living (as if there should be a difference!) our sense of everyday being means listening to the voice of the present — the presence. Listening to it, speaking with it, deciphering it, expressing it . . . this is, however, an increasingly ‘noisy’ affair: the pulse of motors, the onslaught of lighting, the proliferation of violent words, strident advertising, increased speeds, agitated human intercourse . . .

RCA entertainment district, Bangkok, Thailand

Journal entry, 19 Sept 2002:
Carried along with the throng last night at RCA (one of Bangkok’s many busy entertainment streets), I was almost trampled (again) when hit with the question: ’what really generates all of this resplendent design? All of this shiny lipstick, plastic, and steel; it all seems to exists parasitically, on base, primordial exhaustion . . . all of it! And the whole damn city feels this way: all welling up out of a hot core, and violently concentrated in common values and spaces. All these occupations saturated with tears, blood, sweat, and semen . . . all this monstrous, breathing infrastructure rejuvenated by real expenditure, by all the frantic energies of the world . . . and especially explicit here, by that suspended and disguised idea ‘entertainment’ . . . the more polished it becomes, the smoother its circulation, the more it all seems to beg for more, the more opaque and deplorable it really is . . .

People thinking that they’re ‘postmodern’ have actually learned to “relish this completely naked, sleek, ahuman aspect. In other words, they [may] accept the disenchantment argument, but they just take it as a positive feature instead of a negative one’ (An Interview with Bruno Latour, Virginia Military Institute).

I feel depleted now. I’m no longer seduced by this gigantic fetid brothel, pimping culture and nature as violently and tragically as its heterogeneous prostitutes . . .

Jean Baudrillard (from The Transparency of Evil, 1993, 102-103) — reminiscent of Georges Bataille’s ‘general economy’ and invoking Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees — helps us to consider what ‘generative expenditures’ underlie today’s throbbing cities, most of which are devastatingly evident in the built environment:
One must read Zengotita's previous work in *Harpers*, "The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic," to appreciate why he wants radicals hidden away in musty stacks. He is weary, and rightly so, of the extreme effectiveness and insidiousness this embodied 'power-over' has on the mind in everyday life. And he cites Nietzsche's description of modern day life to make this point (2002, 33):

The massive influx of impressions is so great; surprising, barbaric, and violent things press so overpoweringly — 'balled up into hideous clumps' — in the youthful soul; that it can sane itself only by taking recourse in premeditated stupidity.

Zengotita surmises that today (ibid., 35):

The moreness of everything ascends inevitably to a threshold in psychic life. A change of state takes place. The discrete display melts into a pudding, and the mind is forced to certain adaptations if it is to cohere at all.

The experience of time — that presence in which trajectories of past (and 'futures') converge — can indeed be transformed in ways that deprive our 'active participation' — a deprivation of our exchange and assimilation of energies and meanings with the world and each other. I believe we as designers routinely and usually unwittingly help to facilitate this alienating transformation in the name of 'progress' or 'business-as-usual' — especially, when we enlist and mobilize, with little or no hesitation, the mechanics and materials of industrialized processes — as though one selfish, short, raging period of heat and destruction can raise such practices beyond reproach. Lewis Mumford, from *Art and Technics* (1960), said as much; but he's not really taught and thought

"The splendor of [our] society derives from its vices, its ills, its excesses and its shortcomings. This thesis is diametrically opposed to the economists' claim that if something is expended, it must obviously be produced. On the contrary, the more we spend, the more energy and wealth increase. The energy in question is, precisely, that of catastrophe — an energy that economic calculations can never take into account. A kind of exaltation familiar in mental processes is now to be encountered in material processes as well. All these considerations are quite unintelligible in terms of equivalence: they can be understood only in the context of reversibility and inordinacy. Thus energy flows from their fouled air, from their speeded-up pace of life, from the panic and asphyxia created by their unimaginably inhuman environment. It is even quite probable that drugs, and all the compulsive activities that drugs bring in their train, also contribute to the level of vitality and crudely metabolic vigor of the city. Everything plays a part — from the most refined activities to the most degraded: a total chain reaction. Any notion of normal functioning has evaporated. All beings conspire . . . in the same excess, the same dramatic overexcitement, which, leaving the need to live far behind, has much more to do with an unreal obsession with survival — with that glacial passion for survival which seizes hold of everyone and feeds off its own ferocity."

"Postmodern theorists are useful, like salt added to the academy. A pinch of Lyotard, a pinch of Baudrillard might be good, but a whole meal of salt? . . . People thinking that they're 'postmodern' have actually learned to 'relish [the] completely naked, sleek, ahuman aspect. In other words, they [may] accept the disenchantment argument, but they just take it as a positive feature instead of a negative one."

Bound to a raging collective of humans and nonhumans, mesmerized by rapid change, by information, technologies, etc., sacrificing communicability itself — can we avoid inadvertently depreciating our capacities for both evaluating and healing the places we design?

Unfortunately, the problems besetting us mostly dictate solutions that perpetuate the status quo (i.e. increasing dependence on non-vernacular technical mediations, which further divorce us from authentic life). This dilemma won't improve without proactive radicalism; and what better place to start than with those who help design culture-nature conditions — landscape architects?
anymore, just mentioned in passing, and perhaps now dismissed as positivist or ‘pragmatist’. Anyway, to sum up where I began this paragraph: one’s ‘power-to’ intimately know and act, to live fully, suffers often and severely today — a phenomenon many compellingly argue, as I am showing, is linked to the implementation of so-called ‘Modernity’. We must recognize contemporary design in its most prevalent productions, in its ‘buried epistemologies’ (Braun, 1997). We must recognize this first in order to change it.

Having become abstract and inexperienced, developed humanity takes off toward signs, frequents images and codes, and flying in their midst, no longer has any relation, in cities, either to life or to the things of the world. Lolling about in the soft, humanity has lost the hard. Gadabout and garrulous, informed. We are no longer there. We wander, outside all places.

Michel Serres 1995b, 17

**Forming the heart of the matter**

At the heart of this critique, then, we must recognize the image of the human being as an active, creative force that always seeks to transform the conditions of his or her existence, to turn one’s life into a ‘work of art’. Henry Glassie, who studies art or material culture or “the unity in things of mind and matter,” uses a Turkish definition of this ‘image of the human being’, that is “centered existentially in performance, [and] stresses the individual’s passionate commitment to creation, despite differences in medium, function, and consumption . . . . It gracefully welcomes women as well as men, the poor as well as the rich, the educated as well as the uneducated” (Glassie 1999, 41, 26).90

How the texture of the creative life is inscribed in time, how one searches for and creates from the sacred, is considerably influenced by the built/design environment one dwells in.91 This contention is basically repeated in all of the primary thinkers brought to the fore here. From my side, this observation attains urgency in light of the fact that increasingly the human species is concentrated in cities and, moreover, what many consider the general ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the built environment or its ability to embed and hide relations of power and knowledge more effectively than other social constructions (see Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* 1995, and “Other Spaces” 1986). David Ley, similarly, acknowledges that “action, and particularly the culture-building routines of everyday life, are nonetheless commonly taken for granted and opaque to actors” (1989, 229).

By working to ameliorate this phenomenon through authoring as a dialogic endeavor, we should engage in a process or method of discovery towards firing up and rejuvenating our field. We will have to invoke lessons learned from the human sciences that augment and sometimes reaffirm what the measured sciences have taught us. Sometimes, the they lead the way, as Serres loves to show; i.e. *The Birth of Physics* exhumes Lucretius’s poetics, that we might better
comprehend chaos theory, etc. Both realms illuminate functions and properties of communication as a life-sustaining process. Both show how "communication is at the base of what probably is the most irreversible process accessible to the human mind, the progressive increase of knowledge" (Prigogine 1984, 295). Communication must be better understood in the complex cultural landscape—moving with different times, through different channels or mediums, with more or less intelligibility, potentiality, destructive force, etc.

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In science studies, literary criticism, philosophy, anthropology, and material culture the basic ideas of the principle thinkers I invoke are slowly becoming well known; however, for a variety of institutionalized imperatives, they remain trapped while business-as-usual effectively buries them deeper. Henri Lefebvre (1991, 4-5) for one calls for a theory-practice of 'mediation' to better integrate the 'mental and the social':

Foucault never explains what space it is that he is referring to, nor how it bridges the gap between the theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, between mental and social, between the space of the philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things. The scientific attitude, understood as the application of 'epistemological' thinking to acquired knowledge, is assumed to be 'structurally' linked to the spatial sphere. This connection, presumed to be self-evident from the point of view of scientific discourse, is never conceptualized.

As it should be, no doubt, according to Lefebvre and others like him, namely Bakhtin and Serres, who each from my perspective (Harari & Bell cite René Girard 1983, xi):

"A full existence is linked with any image arousing hope and fear."
Georges Bataille 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' 1988, 18

"He dreamed the heart warm, active, secret — about the size of a closed fist, a garnet-colored thing inside the dimness of a human body that was still faceless and sexless; he dreamed it, with painstaking love, for fourteen brilliant nights."

In The Circular Ruins, Borges's sorcerer has searched his soul and contrived the will to comprehensively create something fantastic — a living man — in all its physiological detail and spiritual potency. The heart's palpable, beating flesh is first conceived, around which each body part is painstakingly designed. His goal miraculously accomplished, he is ready to die peacefully when he discovers, while wrapped in the flames of a wildfire, that he is safe, and yet, as well, dreamed by another.

Similar to Borges's fictional character, I also am impelled to create a full semblance representing my search that I might, with one comprehensive gesture, have manifest before me years of learning and struggle. I also long for a kind of demonstration engendered by my own growth, strong enough to survive as a singular, full-blooded actor in the social world of meaning, circulation and return.

And yet even if I could muster the sorcerer's great fidelity to the procedure, I should never pretend to any pretensions of completeness. This is, perhaps, where the sorcerer deceived himself. In life there only is a glorious incompleteness — where influences spread like fluctuating fires. Common sense knows the impossibility of identifying the traces of one's endlessly emerging, combustible mix of ideas and experiences that culminate in thinking and action — or what has ignited the flames that wrap around, caress and bathe understanding. Like the sorcerer, I have also realized with some bewilderment that the flickering of my thought has its 'volatile' origins, channelled through or given a new appearance by my volitions.
Always run counter to the prevalent notion of the two cultures — scientific and humanistic — between which no communication is possible. In Serres’s words, ‘criticism is a generalized physics’, and whether knowledge is written in philosophical, literary, or scientific language it nevertheless articulates a common set of disciplines and artificial boundaries.

This ‘conceptualization’ of theory ‘on the borders’ or ‘out of bounds’ is essential within the field of landscape architecture, which is already rooted in and sustained by our aptitude for mediation (i.e. between nature-culture, poetic-practical, sacred-profane, public-private, etc.). These hyphens, we should note, are the most dialectical of punctuation marks, since they unite only to the degree that they distinguish, and distinguish only to the degree that they unite.95

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Let’s pause to consider the first pairing, nature-culture, as it claims epistemological territory in our field. In science studies we see that gradually all sciences will be (conceived of as) ‘social sciences’ (see Bruno Latour’s essay, exhuming Gabriel Tarde as one of his ‘forefathers’), and take shape “within an ongoing history of humankind’s coimplication in the natural world” (Markley 1999, 173). Today the nature-culture distinction is already the mere result of inertia.96 As such, it is, of course, a relatively autonomous concept, capable of surviving for some time via the conditions of its formation. The insight that the nature-culture distinction is a cultural rather than a natural distinction enables us to visualize the social and political processes that governed its formation and development (see Remaking Reality). It is then possible to see that modern science, besides being modern, is also Western, capitalist and sexist.97

Bruno Latour is especially helpful for his analyses of Modernism, which unpack the origins and their derivatives comprising this generic classification (see especially We’ve Never Been Modern). In a recent essay, Latour proposes that we note two traditions in modernity: the first uses ‘natural law’ or a naturalizing gaze to exoticize and objectify others, while perpetuating nature-culture divides; the second is an older tradition, which he calls ‘constructivist’ (2002, 39). In the latter, ‘facts’ are understood for what their etymology indicates as “fabricated [as are] fetishes, gods, values, works of art, political arenas, landscapes and nations” (ibid.). Furthermore, “if gods, persons, objects and worlds are taken to be ‘constructed’ entities, that is, entities that could fail (and the notion construction implies nothing else), then here is perhaps a means of opening peace talks” among the many differing ‘others’ of the world (ibid. 41); talks of...
this nature can, as he proposes, “begin with the question of the right ways to build” (ibid. 40). By this proposition, he is suggesting a language to even the playing field, one that can be shared by all, a language not altogether different than the one based on entropy as proposed here (see pages 34-5). Here is another example of a will towards ‘rapprochement’, opening passages through which we might gather as much as possible, while resisting the complacency and violence many modern forms of rationalism are saturated with.

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By discerning certain of our activities as the expression of devastating epistemological currents (with self-reinforcing parallelisms in science, politics, and economics), we can see how our actions are complicit with the impoverishment of ‘everyday life’ — the common ground for contemplating and reinventing the world. From here we can also problematize with a will to improve the so-called sustainability movement, still commanding so much attention in landscape architecture. Or should we leave such analyses to cultural geography? Should we leave it to specialists who may adroitly analyze, but rarely build viscerally, with their hands our material conditions? I don’t think so.

Lived experience suffers under modern regimes of production, bureaucratic domination, latent exploitation. Without tools to contemplate and articulate larger historical transformations and tendencies, without the goal of finding rapprochement in the perennial rupture between theory and practice, we must be less certain of whether or not our agency is being manipulated or ‘absorbed’ to our collective detriment. How are we as designers to examine, mediate, perhaps appropriate, perhaps reject, larger organizational logics?

The recent Zengotita article mentioned above, led me to revisit an article by Doug Patterson, which reveals The Necessity for Radical Revisions:

Change is too readily absorbed in these times... revisions to community [to the everyday lifeworld] must assume radical proportions wherein the interventions made return us to root ideas and processes of community. The radical, in this respect, and by definition, is at once both fundamental and revolutionary, both a source of nourishment and stability while also a source of challenge and uncertainty, both a constitutional and a common sense concern. Only in the radical, it is asserted, can new life be found for community.

And yet, the opinion that the landscape architect or designer cannot be the philosopher is alive and well. We likewise study philosophy devoid of any scientific reasoning and great literature in detachment from its scientific context. We therefore lose site of equally helpful and fruitfully overlapping forms of exploration. By my measure, however, the landscape architect is necessarily the philosopher if she is indeed ‘radical’. (I know we aren’t ready to call ourselves cogs in the machinery.) This is an issue, in fact, at the heart of my work: the banishment of the humanities from the sciences is draining our field’s ‘power-to’ help cultivate everyday life with dialogic sensitivity (i.e. to ascertain and respond, using all of our faculties, to the ‘performance’
of certain ideologies and technologies). I wonder, in fact, if it is even appropriate, given our entrenched segregational stereotypes, to call the study and practice of the everyday 'philosophical', when so many others are just as concerned with the contested ground that affects emotions, bodily experience in the constitution of social experience, interpersonal ethics, language and 'intersubjectivity', all of which variously correspond to the world we dwell in.

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This may be well-trodden ground, but I think it bears repeating: from my side, philosophy, or deep contemplation about the nature of our interactions underpins the making of great (living) places. Our interaction together in time-space, in aesthetic events, authentically, dialectically, prepositionally, etc. — these are all primary categories in philosophy many of our greatest minds wrestle with. If my work is characterized by a philosophical bent, then this is because it is where I believe designers must be proficient.

Michel Serres said that "philosophy speaks in several voices... like mathematics... and, through this pluralism, produces sense" (1995d, 201). This is why he spends so much time writing about sailing, surfing, climbing, walking through forests, pastures and their rough edges, old towns and cities, and so on and so forth: he is philosophizing or finding connections and implications. Great designers do the same thing when they explore spaces and look for opportunities. They use all of their faculties proactively: "whoever does not construct a world — place by place, object by object, faithfully, with his hands, with his own flesh, creating a totality — is devoting himself not so much to philosophy as to criticism, logic, history, etc." (ibid., 168). Serres's work — which I would personally endeavor to teach to landscape architects more than that of any 'other' supposedly outside our field — sets before us how we can naturally be graceful scientists, artists, and human beings, and all at the same time. We will need philosophy as much as we need science: the former has long known things the latter is only now, painfully, glimpsing. To be sure, Pascal once said that "the final achievement of reason is the recognition that there are an infinity of things that surpass its power (Badiou 2001)"

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Design must work towards a creative method which rigorously incorporates the findings of many different disciplines and sciences, and gears itself towards understanding society and nature as a totality, as a complex whole with multiple and mutually conditioning interconnections. This will mean a method of taking risks on a road with obstacles and disasters, our labors always to be begun again, to shake out of increasingly instrumentalized modes of short term problem-solving, to link spaces, to reconnect times, to listen with all our senses to all the various angels bearing messages for us, to be able to orchestrate conditions for 'collective' holistic and open-ended dialogue. Do we subscribe, then, to Nietzsche's faith that "the secret for
harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is — to live dangerously" (Kaufmann 1978, 68)?

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How to facilitate rejuvenating dialogue? Towards this general goal, it is our responsibility to do the work to both justify and cultivate a sense of discernment of what is 'proper', to have the courage and endurance not to betray it (Badiou, 2001), to have a full sense of moderation and restraint, to discern how our actions or productions oscillate between local and universal. It is thus necessary to pull together enough breadth in one's research to be able to see interconnections and the potential ramifications of one's efforts. Our lists of those entities doing the work must indeed grow long and heterogeneous (Latour 2002, 56). Forced specialization is the bane of our intelligence. The academy knew this principle not long ago. Spatial as well as semantic experience (which, arguably are one and the same, in the larger scheme of things) can be more or less fertile for knowing and adjusting, for being irenical and/or adept. As we have seen, the categories of dialogue and monologue explored in Bakhtin's work are helpful towards understanding how such a principle of evaluation might operate in a complex world. It is only through time, as reaffirmed in the next chapter, that these assessments can begin to be made.
CHAPTER 4: DIALOGUE DRENCHED IN TIME-SPACE

The fullness that gives birth to dialogue

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) — they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1986, 170

I don't make my abstractions starting from some thing or some operation, but throughout a relation, a rapport . . . . It's better to paint a sort of fluctuating picture of relations and rapports — like the percolating basin of a glacial river, unceasingly changing its bed and showing an admirable network of forks, some of which freeze or silt up, while others open up.

Michel Serres 1995d, 104

The theories which underlie these quotations give rise to a perception of life as it is lived and endlessly becomes in both semantic and physical contexts, "life being, as Bichat says, nothing other than the set of functions that resist death" (Badiou, 2000, 11). The theories themselves are based on the existence and the importance of recognizing time. Bakhtin celebrates the immortality of all meanings, the endless circulation and return of semantic energies, the interaction of live contexts in infinite dialogue across hundreds and even thousands of years. Serres has made similar observations with no less temporal profundity, bringing to life what is otherwise bound or suppressed.

How might a shared notion of time — time that facilitates the surfacing, absorption, and dispersal of all matter and meaning — illuminate the relationships on which our satisfactory or sustainable survival depends? Engaging this question is increasingly important today because it holds the potential to which any accountable or responsible notion of advancement must first reconcile itself. In the context of design thinking — from its birth in the primordial increments of antiquity to today's massive mechanical mediations — we will understand that design properly augments our lives to the extent that its adaptations fully embrace the implications of our relation to time.

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While perceiving, as Bakhtin has, this dimension in which meaning opens out, Serres concentrates on analogous operations of exchange and movement in the sciences of the world (e.g. in physics, mathematics, ecology, geology, as well as sociology, literature, architecture, etc.). He has worked to fuse separated disciplines in order to rejuvenate our sensitivities, our
depth of insight, our dialogical understanding. Bakhtin, likewise, articulates at similar junctures (or bifurcations) a will to propagate rapprochement over continued separation. For each thinker, it has become apparent that “one of the crises [crisis actually means that which severs relations] in our knowledge comes from its inability to function without these divisions and from the need to solve the problems posed by their integration” (Serres 1995b, 110). Our realms of “analysis and separation” must henceforth, as Serres says, lose their isolated modes of observation to be “in favor of relation” (Prigogine and Stengers 1993, 151).

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“The world as it is is not the product of my representation; my knowledge, on the contrary, is a product of the world in the process of becoming. Things themselves choose, exclude, meet, and give rise to one another” (Serres 1977, 157-158 emphasis added). Compare the similarity between this statement and the ‘dialogic principle’,101 from which Bakhtin derived his complex and steadfast observations on relatedness:

All true relationships are, as a rule, creative and productive. That which in life, in cognition, in deed we call a specific object acquires its specificity, its profile only in our relationship to it; our relationship defines the object and its structure, but not the reverse; only where the relationship becomes random from our side, as it were capricious, only when we retreat from our authentic relationship to things and to the world, does the specificity of the object confront us as something alien and independent; it begins to decompose, and we lose as well the stable definitiveness of the world.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1984, xliii (see also, 1990, 5)

The last phrase may be somewhat misleading. Unless we see that Bakhtin's insight was similar to Serres's: it was based on fluidity and turbulence; he had no illusions of stasis in social much less physical existence. Everything is mixing and moving irreversibly, all at different speeds. By losing ‘the stable definitiveness of the world', he was concerned with a condition whereby comprehension of the flux and flow of relations becomes abstract and hollow; where, to some extent, we experience an 'expropriation of dwelling' in dialogic relations with the world.102 On the other hand, he celebrated life by describing more or less proactive situations of ongoing intercourse, the constant interchange between self and others, which gives birth to experience/existence. In certain great novels, for example, Bakhtin discovers an architectonics for facilitating the complex relations from which dialogicality unfolds:

We are dealing with ... a dialogicality of the ultimate whole ... it is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category ... and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1984, 18, emphasis added
With decreasing or rarefied or monologic forms of communication, the world is increasingly simplified and yet increasingly unknowable. Participation in the fullness of time is blurred . . . We run the risk of falling into a miserable sleep in such contexts (of language or of place), devoid of that riveting, ineffable concreteness given rise to by highly attuned exploration or communication.

To be means to communicate. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered. To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another . . . [We will return to this idea as related to mimetic escalations that give to violence in both human and nonhuman realms.] Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries: in this is its seriousness and its significance; abstracted from boundaries, it loses its soil, it becomes empty, arrogant, it degenerates and dies.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1975, 25

The irreversible movement of time opening view to an 'epistemology of invention'

A transformation in contemporary science is reverberating throughout the academy; it is usually associated with chaos and systems theory, but perhaps more powerfully demonstrated by thinkers who worked over two millennia ago. Their redemption follows Bakhtin’s proper epistemology for the human sciences, one that endeavors to know ‘great time’. And their vision of emergence is emblematic of what I am suggesting we emulate as an ‘epistemology of invention’:

Remember Oedipus, the lucidity of his mind in front of the sphinx and its opacity and darkness when confronted with his own origins. Perhaps the coming together of our insights about the world around us and the world inside us [their symmetry] is a satisfying feature of the recent evolution in science.

Prigogine and Stengers 1984, 312

Greek wisdom arrives at one of its most important points here. Where man is in the world, of the world, in matter and of matter. He is not a stranger, but a friend, a familiar, a companion and an equal. He maintains a Aphroditean contract with things. Many other wisdoms and many other sciences are founded, conversely, on the violation of the contract. Man is a stranger to the world, to the dawn, to the sky, to things. He hates them and struggles against them. His environment is a dangerous enemy to be fought and kept in servitude. Martial neuroses, from Plato to Descartes, from Bacon to our time. The hatred of objects at the root of knowledge, the horror of the world at the foundation of theory. Epicurus and Lucretius experience a reconciled universe, in which the science of things and the science of man are in accord, in identity. I am the disturbance, a vortex, in turbulent nature. I am an ataraxy, in a universe where the foundation of being is undisturbed. The wrinkles on my forehead are the same as the ripples on the water. And my repose is universal.

Michel Serres 2000, 131 emphasis added
Reading and visualizing emergence by the light of time

By way of forming a basic orientation toward reading/thinking time, we’ll visit some core concepts on interacting with-in a context or a construction that, ultimately, we might better understand and improve design as an adaptational process, as a dialogic endeavor. Time is revealed through space, that is, without time space has no texture; and likewise, “there is no time without things” (Serres 2000, 174). To not comprehend time is a form of delusion, for one would have to remain in a state of stasis, which we well know by now is impossible without death. And yet the world we construct today would seem to refuse this simple idea. Time itself opens the possibility of freedom and responsibility, for without its recognition one cannot think and adapt to, or with, the world.

The context of reading is conceived in conjunction with facing the complex webs of feedback that reveal the past: though both seem indirect routes, both attempt to gain access more easily and more directly to the world around us. To understand the attitudes and activities of yesterday (the different shapes and life born of thought) allows us to change the thought of today, which in turn influences future acts. Without an ability to read (the past) we lose a basic human faculty for understanding and organizing the world, to give meaning to the chaos of events happening in quick succession.105

Visions of emergence: visions of time

“You walk for days among trees and among stones. Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and then only when it has recognized that thing as the sign of another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger’s passage; a marsh announces a vein of water; the hibiscus flower, the end of winter. All the rest is silent and interchangeable; trees and stones are only what they are.”
Italo Calvino 1974, 13

“When we look at mountains, whether from far or near, and see their summits, now glittering in the sunshine, now shrouded in mists or wreathed in storm-tossed clouds, now lashed by rain or covered with snow, we attribute all these phenomena to the atmosphere, because all of its changes and movements are visible to the eye. To the eye, on the other hand, shapes of the mountains always remain immobile; and because they seem rigid, inactive and at rest, we believe them to be dead. But for a long time I have felt convinced that most manifest atmospheric changes are really due to their imperceptible and secret influence.”
Johann Wolfgang Goethe 1962, 13

"...to get back to the naked immediacy of experience as it is felt from within the utmost particularity of a specific life, the molten lava of events as they happen ... [to seek] the sheer quality of happening in life before the magma of such experience cools, hardening into igneous theories, or accounts of what has happened ... to understand how the constantly aetiolating difference between what is now and what is after-now might be bridged in the relation I forge between them in all the singularity of my unique place in existence.”
Michael Holquist, In Forward for Towards a Philosophy of the Act by Bakhtin 1993, x
We should be somewhat clearer with these prosaic yet physically established ideas regarding time. It is also shown scientifically and we know through our best teacher — everyday life — that we live through spontaneous activity and the irreversibility of time. Thus, it is very important to conceive of time as an ongoing 'construction', claims Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, because only then do we know that time "carries an ethical responsibility" (1984, 312). Of course, the experience of time, like the experience of literature, is varied and reveals its construction in equally varied ways. For example, we have all likely experienced Gadamer's extreme description of boredom: "the featureless and repetitive flow of time as an agonizing presence" (1986, 42). During events of discovery, transgression, and profound resonation, time can be filled in such an amazing way that it seems to disappear.

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Whatever might nuance our apprehension, experience, meaning and existence happens precisely in the present. The present 'stages' the past and our reading of it, or our communicative moments of creativity and freedom. The theater of experience is 'draped with adherences' (Serres); it is charged with more or less intelligible and/or tolerable influences, and attended by more or less capable observers. The author or the designer sets the stage and 'opens out' the emergence of time(s).

Again, I am suggesting that we consider joining the experience of time (or the past 'happening') with the experience of reading. Perhaps I should simply dispense with any distinction between the two. Reading, then, would consume the whole of experience: everything drenched in

"Don't you think it's rather arrogant of us to assume that we're the only intelligent beings in this world, when the River Garonne and the south wind carry with them and express more things than I would ever be able to write — and express them better? They read instantaneously the messages of other fluxes, filter them, make their choice, combine them with their own, translate them, and write them on the land or water. They conserve them for a long time. They express themselves through explosions, roarings, noise and murmurings, tinkling and lapping . . . . The movements of these fluxes need nothing to inspire them, because they are the inspiration!"

Michel Serres 1995c, 31

"Everything in motion — water, rocks, seaweed, air currents, birds, great baroque composition — all echoing each other."
Lawrence Halprin 1972, 30

Halprin's 'vision' above, beautifully written and turbulently expressed in his sketchbook, is then materialized the following year (see image below). However refreshing this oasis may be, relative to the sterility of its urban context, the dynamic 'echoing' he imitates is insipid in comparison. Why? The problem is, substantively, an outcome of the materials mobilized. Their history's of hardened, deadening, industrial production and assembly, embody physical and semantic disturbance, which 'echo' lifelessness.
Language would, furthermore, suggest an active rapport between authoring and reading written texts, and all other constructions, human and nonhuman.

Are we ready to consider taking such a risky jump? It would transform our distinct appreciation of the humanities and the sciences; it would give a renewed 'objectivity' or 'materiality' to literary language studies, and equally as strange, it would prompt grave problems of morality for the sciences. Surely, thinkers on both sides would hate to see their comfortable boundaries crumble, founded now for over 300 years or so (but never really based on a solid foundation).

From this crudely simple idea, procedures that suppress or efface difference in the novel, therefore implicate similar tendencies in the built environment and of all its constituent participants. And likewise, going in the other direction, an artistic medium like the novel, can be evaluated by another realm of criteria (i.e. the famous readings of Zola and Carnot by Serres, 1975, the integrity of their insight discerned through applying thermodynamics). And again, the writing of the distant past also takes on new relevance (i.e. Bakhtin’s 1984, 1986 notion of 'great time').

* * *

Where obligations to a future enter into our purview (say, to stabilize a steam bank undermined by currents of change), the past, its network, is now known to be germinating. The past 'percolates' (Serres 2000) into the present; it propagates thick and indeterminate growth that fills the present with myriad tendencies and inertia. We surely know, even if we do not always think about it, that we as a 'collective' are formed from this past; to make it intelligible in the present is also to begin to know ourselves, to enrich the dialogue born of life's
uncertainty, ceaselessly propelling us towards another present.

Thus, in light of the past the present is transformed, allowing us to read ‘others’ — however authoritative or ‘right’ they may seem — with greater perspective. Yet, as we also know, illuminations take on many forms or forces: at least, in the adored short term, an ‘irenical’ logic often loses out to a violent logic, the proactive wholly swallowed by the reactive, life trampled by death. Both literally and figuratively, then, “being blinded by the light, we cannot see it” (Serres 1995c, 63). How then can we be free of illusions, of discourse, of style that fuel emergency and desperate revolutions that stabilize stifling status quos? How then can we free ourselves of those deadening entities clinging to us for generations or likewise those created by the last critical fashion? “Does not each generation, by means of suppression, concealment and ridicule, efface what the previous generation considered most important” (Hesse 1956, 8)? “Serres does not believe in revolutions at all, so then we are not cut off from our past” (Latour 1993b, 251).

The key thinkers introduced in this paper offer myriad ways through which we learn to ‘listen’ and read in the shadows, in the residual, the dejected things, rough, cold, hungry, third world; while all along scrutinizing possibilities in the glaring establishment, in the positive, refined, heated, first world. In so doing, the notions ‘progress’ and ‘quality of life’ (and perhaps the newcomer, ‘sustainability’) once again share common ground:

Being concerned with the things of the world, we advance human affairs. Conversely, improving human affairs, we progress in the understanding of the world. Knowledge springs from their intersection.

Michel Serres 1997b, 18-19

Something I heard of recently, a scant sort of example, now comes to mind: that there are buildings punctured with bullet holes that trickle rainwater, creating stains . . . wounds that let everyday materials speak at once of history, time, the poetic, and so on . . . evoke questions in my mind of what it takes to have a multiplicity of edifying place-specific meanings irrupt in the cultural landscape, of what forces act to reveal and conceal the residuals of time — time fleshing out dialogue between culture and nature — and what opportunities the designer has to learn about and enrich this dialogue, that we might be able to be more sensitive to truth, adept, moral, free, irenic, sane, well-rounded, sustainable . . .

“A truth punches a ‘hole’ in knowledges, it is heterogeneous to them, but it is also the sole known source of new knowledges. We shall say that the truth forces knowledges. The verb to force indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning. If a truth is never communicable as such, it nevertheless implies, at a distance from itself, powerful reshapings of the forms and referents of communication. This is not to say that these modifications ‘express’ the truth, or indicate ‘progress’ among opinions . . . Of course these modified opinions are ephemeral, whereas the truths themselves . . . shall endure eternally.”

Alain Badiou 2001, 70

“To write under the pressure of war is not to write about the war but to write inside its horizon and as if it were the companion with whom one shares one’s bed (assuming that it leaves us room, a margin of freedom).”

Maurice Blanchot 1988, 4
The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.... History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now.

Walter Benjamin 1968, 261

Incessantly emergent, the past impels the irreversible movement of time and fills it with heterogeneity (a plurality of singularities and groups, each beating their own time). “Our vision of nature is undergoing a radical change toward the multiple, the temporal, and the complex” (Prigogine and Stengers 1984, 292). In other words, we’re haunted by the murmurings of the multiple, we hear a diverse chattering of languages; but it all means little until it is embodied, made flesh. An analogy might be drawn to the biblical theme ‘the word became flesh’. This happens in different ways: “each kind of record provides a unique type of information, each with its own spatial and temporal scale” (Russell 1997, 1).

The silencing or effacement of these scales of intervention, for our purposes, produces what Michel Serres has called ‘noise’. When change is animated — by ‘means’ of domination, subordination, simulation, or violence, through overwhelming technological deviations and dissipating agents, by deadening drifts of steel, glass, plastic, and concrete — by ‘actors’ indifferent to the qualitative configuration of things—we tend to call this unifying process ‘history’. History sections in libraries and book stores are filled with treatises on war. Needless to say, our history reverberates increasingly with *deafening* noise! (But there are other routes to peace.) Today, it’s less likely to hear the ‘desolate cry of a bird’ than the ‘chirping alarm of a car’, sometimes set off by a crash of thunder.

Noise is everywhere: this is the ‘ground’ of all relations, “the ground of the world, the backdrop of the universe, the background of being, maybe” (Serres 1995a, 62). By Alain Badiou’s measure (2001), on its own, the very medium of being itself is the multiple made of infinite multiples. In Maurice Blanchot’s words, it is “the pell-mell of associated differences .... The existence of every being thus summons the other or a plurality of others” (1988, 6).

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Should we look to Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogue’ more closely, as integral to both human and nonhuman becoming, his notion ‘heteroglossia’ would suffice to represent the singular embodiment of the multiple. In other words, it helps us understand the unfinalized performance of entities as both linguistic and physiological aggregations, constantly erupting with time(s).

Only by one’s interactions, by one’s situational correspondence with ‘others’, by one’s ‘taking place’, by one’s ‘dialogue’, can truth emerge. Only by preserving fidelity to the situated truth born of this sharing of difference, can there be an active redemption of the past, can the
flesh become connective tissue, so to speak, forming an increasingly healthy or resilient body (of knowledge as of material).

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Obviously, the complex and volatile nature of these statements won’t do. Interpretations are destined to run counter to my intentions. Thus we continue to find adequate clarification, to enter into detail, to flesh out truth procedures and their obstructions. This again is too broad, however: we are evaluating the pervasive tendencies and conditions facilitating dialogue (or monologue) today in and with—within—the built environment; this, by way of exemplifying a process or method of discovery towards firing up and rejuvenating the field of Landscape Architecture. All this, by way of showing that design must work towards an ‘epistemology of invention’, which rigorously incorporates diverse yet analogous disciplines, charging itself with the comprehension of culture and nature as a dialogic unity, a complex whole with multiple and mutually conditioning interconnections.

The following quotations conclude this portion and plant seeds of anticipation for the growth of the forthcoming:

The artist-scientist would never have painted against nature!... Geology’s objectivity can separate the true from the false in a work of art. Rainfall, diseases, the exchange of viruses, the growth of plants, and the variety of soils impose their own time on human time, and societies must pay attention, on pain of death.

Michel Serres 1997b, 14

The position from which a narrative can be unfolded, a representation constructed, or information given, must be set in a new mode in relation to this new world—not a world of objects but of subjects vested with full rights.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin 1984, 10

Through contact with the present, an object is attracted to the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making, and is stamped with the seal of inconclusiveness. No matter how distant this object is from us in time, it is connected to our incomplete, present-day, continuing temporal transitions, it develops a relationship with our unpreparedness, with our present.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin 1986, 30

**Immersed in ‘basic time’**

What we need in design is a conception of time and space, or more accurately, ‘time-space’, for their simultaneity is the whole point as defined by our lived experience. Designers, by concerning themselves with collective lived experience, then, concern themselves with the basic flow of time. In our multidisciplinary field, a sound conception of ‘time articulating space’ (and visa versa) should not endeavor to “conquer a territory, but ‘to attempt to see on a large scale, to be in full possession of a multiple, and sometimes connected intellection’” (Serres 1980, 24; cited by Harari and Bell 1983, xiii).
This, which I see and hear, which I imagine, is a theoretical and abstract landscape, a model of knowledge. And this, at the same time, is nothing other than the world.

Michel Serres 1995a, 127

The most plausible, from my side, and illuminating (or helpful) notion of time operates in much the same way as the powerful and mysterious glacial landscape Serres describes at the beginning of this chapter (page 62): influences from “immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings” temporarily freeze, ebb and flow (Bakhtin 1986, 170), they emerge from long-since-gone, they waver at the margins, and sometimes rush forward with fury . . . The influences we ignite through action and thought — together by listening and responding — open up endless streams of discovery, some of which converge and spring into new understandings. Others may lay “dormant in our habitual behavior,” to form a faint glow of potential in the background (Serres 1995a, 72). Against this background, we unceasingly perceive, enroll, and create more implications and tendencies, “conditioned by specific historical destinies” (Bakhtin 1981, 270), all of which roll forward at different speeds as masses of “different combinations of past and present relations” (Holquist 1990, 37) with more or less momentum, fluctuating and spreading out like waves . . .

What we experience appears to be, upon careful contemplation, less metaphorical than this prose portrays: “it is correlated with the idea of worldwide wholeness, the fullness of the cosmic and human universe” (Bakhtin 1986, 159). Indeed, “time can be schematized by a kind of . . . multiple, foldable diversity . . . . An object, a circumstance, is thus polychromic, multitemporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats” (Serres 1995d, 59). From recollections of Einstein’s folded universal time, to Serres’s applications in unfinalized atomization, we are working towards what Bakhtin likely meant by ‘great time’ as he saw it ‘percolating’ through literature.

Bakhtin’s books on Dostoevsky, Goethe, and Rabelais, each describe the attributes or style of writers who were deeply concerned with how one creates the conditions for lived experience. In this sense, as pointed out by Tzvetan Todorov, “the dialogical principle remains [Bakhtin’s] dominant theme whatever the object under scrutiny” (1984, 13). Time-space (or the ‘chronotope’ in Bakhtin’s terminology) is a necessary category in all recurring elements of perception; it is also fundamental to the nonrecurring particularity of any specific act of perception; it is the basic unit of our lived experience in dialogue with each other and with the world; and its characteristics, not unlike differences in literary genres, give to tendential ways of knowing (and/or being?), which have objective consequences for perception and ethical possibility we all must live with in our daily lives. Chronotopic knowing, helps us to see the differences between so-called first and third worlds, situations of more or less proximity to a comprehensible equilibrium, more or less aware and attuned to the ‘percolation of time’, more or less likely to have understood: “life that is good is interested only in death, which, in
exchange, shapes it" (Serres 1995b, 114). Such ancient wisdom is allowed to enter into the
dialogue of any culture wholly interested in its survival.

***

The places we dwell in, navigate, attempt to be responsible to, the places where we author
experience, each give rise to how time, albeit in distinctive ways, "... thickens, takes on flesh,
[and] becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the
movements of time, plot, and history" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). While Bakhtin refers to and celebrates
the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed
in literature," I believe that he was (however carefully while under the scrutiny of an oppressive
political situation111) providing evidence, dense with meaning, that shows great literature to be
crucial as an epistemological operator for building a better world (ibid., 85).

In his long essay on "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin surveys
ancient forms of the novel and shows general characteristics of the methods used to express time
in these works. These analyses are helpful towards imagining what the general characteristics or
performative tendencies of different generic built environments might be — especially from the
standpoint of the particular participant's ability to become or understand, by engaging the
various situation dialogically. Some chronotopes or conditions tend to dictate and receive
monologic responses. I argue that these would, from the standpoint of Serres, be heavy with
distinct and alienated forms, consist of solids with clear outlines, rather than fluids, full of flow
and circulation.112 The chronotope is, according to Michael Holquist, "a useful term not only
because it brings together time, space, and value, but because it insists on their simultaneity"
(Holquist 1990, 155). It is thus a helpful notion for understanding different, dynamical localities
(from imbued tendencies of literary genres to invoke responses, to fluctuating capacities of
spaces to invoke or provoke life).113

Time flows "not [always] according to a line ... nor according to a plan but, rather,
according to an extraordinarily complex mixture, as though it reflected stopping points,
ruptures, deep walls, chimneys of thunderous acceleration, rendings, gaps — all sown at
random, at least in a visible disorder" (Serres 1995d, 57). If we follow this difficult yet physically
demonstrable portrayal that Serres paints, our manipulation of things — just as we might
manipulate the words of a story — impacts the way things are experienced, but never precisely
as we might predict (unless, perhaps, in a vacuum). Time, thus, keeps us humble in everyday
life.

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The inherent connectedness all things have to their own becoming or emergence — like
the more or less elaborate, potential-giving, character build-up in the novel — can be hidden
from view or alienated. Preferably, things, like story characters, are richly elaborated or visibly
saturated with the relations of time. This obviously requires a sustained and local (dialogic) understanding (Jackson, 1994). We may then perceive the apparent complexity or perhaps the relative simplicity of things as a relation to their 'becoming' context. Similarly, Bill Brown explains, “the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (Brown 2001, 4).

Therefore, the 'hi-stories of things' impact our perception of the unfolding of time and 'history' (which is nothing more than a conceived register of relations). Attuned perception is necessary for attuned living, which amounts to attuned morality. A return to things undoubtedly implies a more lucid and free relation to how we think about — or how we mobilize epistemology to understand and carefully perpetuate — the becoming of the world around us.

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When Walter Benjamin exposed 19th century commodity culture in *The Arcades Project* as a new relation to time, a new chronotope, he constructed an arena for exploring the implications of labor, materials and death as compressed into things — particularly, as they give the effect of normalizing reification, the making of increasingly opaque materializations. Needless to say, the power and transformations of money played an enormous role in this burgeoning era of obfuscation, which gave the ‘aura’ of isolation not only to things but to people as well. Because learning happens by studying relations, rather than isolated things, this history appears tragic because, as Bakhtin would say, “nothing is anything in itself” (Holquist 1990, 38). With the advent of so-called Modernity, the coarseness of previous societal relations became increasingly refined, individualized or internalized, systemized, or collectivized masked mediations (Foucault 1985). By commanding ‘nature’, Modernity hastened the world-wide movement to smooth out difference into a ubiquitous sea of opacity.

**Tolerating temporal disturbance**

The arrow of time affects differentially vegetative growth rates (tendencies) according to species ‘type’ and the evolving, living conditions each one must adapt to. Individuals or singularities, thus, experience and modify temporality (possibilities/experiences of change) for others in space, and space becomes a textured register of this intractable or ongoing dialogue (the heterogeneous process of communicating and responding).

What happens to our dialogues with each other and the world itself, as time rolls on inexorably and irreversibly — particularly in contemporary contexts of technical mediation? The pushing-over, heaping-up, compacting and burying of time(s), the building of walls and the grading of the land with a front-loader, for example, changes the unfolding of time. How? One
might consider this by investigating this “prime mover of an action [as] a new, distributed, and nested series of practices whose sum may be possible to add up but only if we respect the mediating role of all the actants mobilized” (Latour 1999, 181, emphasis added): in other words, whose aggregate sum, or consummation with the world, involves interaction from a multitude of participants for its performance to be set in motion. Where all of this history is compacted within the agency of a prime mover (or group) its force can quickly undercut others. Powerful concepts can operate in much the same manner: as enormous historical aggregates, they can dig deeper with so much weight that others’ dialogic potential is deracinated, the hubbub is silenced (i.e. concepts like ‘truth, ‘reality’, ‘progress’ and ‘relativity’ have been challenging for most people to negotiate). Of course, an opposing force with comparable inertia or violence may rise up (i.e. contemporary, US-defined, notions of terrorism come to mind; also, revisit the ‘bullet holes’ vignette in periphery section, page 64, for another sense of reverberation). Perhaps there are as well concepts, like bedrock, too deep to be disturbed by our movers.

Bruno Latour identifies associations of actors and actants in the mediation of authoring ‘reality’ or constructing the world we inhabit. We are not alone, he convincingly contests, and we can no longer properly relate to time without enfolding all of its participants’ potentialities. Each of which, as mentioned before, carries a varied weight or potential in changing temporal experience for others in a collective of associations. This is because each participant has its own history (and, practically or tendentiously speaking, its own future in a given context); i.e. each entity has been exposed to more or less violence, beauty, and so on — the accumulated moments of which give humans and nonhumans alike their particular, ‘heteroglot’ potentialities in particular situations.

This logic is woefully inappropriate when it turns a particular propensity, a singularity, into a closed-in ‘determination’, a category derived from avoidance or fear of uncertainty. It is always moving toward violence when the laziness of rationalism pervades over the difficulty of time (or the dialogic world of constant interaction, the primacy of the relation, the endless struggle for meaning and existence). This determined separation from the confusion of which something emerges, this monologism, sets a certain momentum towards yet more determinations, and a frantic movement away from reality as given birth to by ‘basic time’.
Basic time, close to chaos, is made up of jolts, of fluctuations, it is not integratable, it cannot congeal either in mass or in class, it can’t freeze. This sort of time is not primordial alone, or rather it is primordial and it is always there, it never stops being at my side or bombarding me with unexpected jostles, I am always, we together are, we and the world, immersed in it.

Michel Serres 1995a, 100

The similarities between Serres’s and Latour’s discourse both suggest notions of responsibility in recognition of the so-called chaos of basic time. And each unearths a graveyard of violence as laid down by dominant strains of rationalism, or the story of so-called modernity. Together, they show in asymmetrical ways the following:

Why rationalism comes under the heading of the sacred, why rationalists are priests, busily ruling out, cleaning up the filth, expelling people, purifying bodies or ideas. [A proper rationalism beholds] the positive chaos, the casting mold, the matrix. And behold[s] the pure possibility.

Michel Serres 1995a, 99

Awareness of this emerging discourse — which gives voice to things as they invoke and perpetuate tendencies — say of Mars (war) or of Venus (love) — and its epistemological coherence in light of Bakhtin’s thought on the nature of authoring/experiencing in ‘great time’, sets up our interdisciplinary task of introduction and invention in the context of design. Again, there is this idea of introduction, of playing the role of the messenger, that is, the messenger who picks and chooses, makes the best reductions he or she can, and disturbs boundaries, makes them fertile.

* * *

Let us return to the front-loader transforming the unfolding of time. Here is one of many machines manufactured from a complicated industry and an ideology, intense with heat, with a physics of death (Serres illuminates this idea using the birth of mathematics and physics), with objectives of increasing ‘power-over’, with slicing teeth, severe edges, pounding steel, and unintelligible speed.

This last attribute, which is a culmination of so many others, is of great importance to us here. Front-loaders (popular models are produced by Bobcat and Case) cannot allow for the landscaper or perhaps better said, the landscraper, to know the soil as flesh, to see, for example, the thousands of worms, insects and the inverted forests of roots being chopped up, as one does with a shovel (a slower moving tool, also of rationalistic origin, but still more likely to facilitate the use of both hands, the use of both sides of the brain, the good
judgment of intuition, the knowledge born of investing ourselves in time). The obfuscating power of this relatively small (war) machine is immense. Massive walls can be constructed with it, roads graded, deep trenches cut. These rapid changes to living places much more often than not cannot be properly assimilated in accordance with existing conditions (of the psyche and the physical environment). Every scale of change enfolds future patterns more or less resistant to change, more or less able to answer to another set of challenges. And those who can answer aren’t necessarily desirable characters (i.e. noxious weeds, SUVs, and killer bees).

Like the violence imbued in the production of the machine, its complicity in the production of space is likely to pass on a general degree of violence. (One may even, if feeling rather bold, suggest such a thesis for the becoming of the engineer and the correspondingly violent performance in the world his or her knowledge touches.) The machine has been too overwhelmed to tell the story of its history, too reified, and it tendentiously bequeaths this burden to whatever it touches as its script unfolds.

***

Anything that disturbs to such an extent that history (becoming) is unreservedly deracinated should be deeply scrutinized. For the existence of any such mechanism is what depletes or empties out categories for understanding. They will work to mitigate intelligent response or adaptation in the great dialogue of time — which requires maximum sensitivity toward cultivating minimal disturbance, minimal pain and suffering. We have just, in so many words, re-defined one practical-ethical foundation from which ‘sustainability’ can operate.15

Contemporary mechanistic culture can usually only give to the built environment (which, for us includes everything from parks to city plazas to neighborhoods to agriculture . . . ) a logic or a voice more akin to the unintelligible mutterings and roarings of the beast itself (its engineered edges, laminar flows, ‘fractured’ sounds, its anonymity) than that of the multiple accretions of change or of time (Mumford 1955, Lefebvre, 1990).

One set of simple parameters obeyed by the machine and its cog-like operator, produces environments easily exhausted by thought because they, in fact, repel it; they lack the texture to attach memory, to germinate meaning. Designers must unceasingly question how they will affect the experience of time for all participants with regard to the machinations and materials they mobilize into productions of space.

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Suppose, then, the ‘hybrid’ chainsaw-user, confronted with the task of felling a tree, has enlisted this tool, this form of mediation. What are possible outcomes? How will this pairing affect time? Roots and branches spreading out in all directions, bending and breaking in adherence to a changing context, straining for sun and water . . . all corrective measures are paid for, and time’s accretions show in weathering layers. Saw off the limb of thick shade and a patch
of rapid succession is opened up. The swift intervention has changed growth conditions ... a
new series of replacements, a new set of nebulous adherences, a new set of temporal experiences
ensue. The capacity with which an organism or group can absorb a particular disturbance
corresponds to the scale and rapidity of the disturbance inflicted.

Latour points out that the technical process usually requires more than one 'subprogram'
or technological enlistment. He gives the example of the monkey who grabs a stick to stab a piece
of fruit, then after realizing its dullness, sets to sharpening it: a subprogram. "How far the
multiplication of these subprograms can continue raises interesting questions in cognitive
psychology and evolutionary theory," Latour says, which, I again correlate with the notion of
capacities for dealing with disturbance. (1999a, 182). Perhaps one could argue the more
subprograms the better, in the sense that one is involved in more associations, communications,
more friction, thought, and inevitably moving at a slower more intelligible pace.

It goes without saying, we are not the only entities (or groups) that can tolerate only so
much disturbance, before becoming numb or separated or non-reactive or increasingly-static
within the world. Emphasis on the kinds of relations we give rise to carries important
implications if Hornburg is correct in contending that "from cells to ecosystems, their material
reproduction is contingent on communication" (1994, 146). This means, in part, contending
with the idea that "organic power cannot rest, for stases means death ... [for] it realizes itself
only in the action of organizing, breaking down and assimilation in order to build itself from
within outward, as a plant is said to do" (Walls 1997, 432). This also means, in part,
understanding Serres when he says that everything is happening as if there were always another
set of problems, or deviations, endlessly reborn in the process of adaptation:

There is a nature to things, a process of emergence .... Its function is universal. Whether we
look at atoms, at species, and later, at society, the same model is always at work. That is, at
first an equilibrium and, here, there, tomorrow or yesterday, a deviation .... [Things are]
either rushed towards disappearance, or subsist and reproduce, protected for a moment by
their strength, their speed or their guile. All virtues which allow them temporary escape from
the extinction imposed by the drift towards death.

Michel Serres 2000, 176

We see in most design today socially inherited ways of thinking shot through with
notions (prominent must be the impact technologies have had on our agencies and literacies,
while mediating and obfuscating most of our actions) that predispose us to adopt attitudes of
mastery through violence in relation to the world. And yet most of us know deep down that
there are notions available for which we might establish a more life-sensitive existence. One of
these notions is multiplicitous time as it 'percolates' through the being of all things, carrying with
it more or less tolerable quantities of change for a given locality. How time textures our lives is,
in part, and however loosely, determined by the spaces we dwell in. Space, after all, is
articulation with time, together delivering messages which aren't necessarily 'articulate'.117
We know by now that an event here correlates to a counter-event elsewhere — the crude logic of cause and effect. So, then, how does the transmutation of matter by industrial means affect time? At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but transit, hardly watched over by an attendant, half-god, half-automan.

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In a similar vein, Italy's provocative philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, writes “finality without means is just as alienating as mediality that has meaning only with respect to an end” (Agamben 2000, 58). At the sight of each terminal and increasingly ubiquitous form (monotonous deserts of sod, engineered exotics, repellent pavers, plastic-covered furniture, or most products advertised in *Landscape Architecture* magazine, which designers purchase in perfunctory fashion, which represent 'resistance' or a state which merely means an absence of yielding) the mind does not cease from considering the original matter as inscrutable. Overwhelming reification, alienation, numbness, and/or a kind of death ensue.

As described in Chapter 3, the opacity and plasticity of our productions has amazed our senses to the point of indifference, a paradoxical situation that gives humanity the measure of its power, conferring the feeling of a prestigious free-wheeling through 'nature'. This would seem to be the impetus for that intoxicating mixture of so-called postmodern discourse, that incredible and cult-like popularity of late, which would have us believe that everything is presupposed by our representations or constructions or languages. All this talk about language . . . while the burning ideology of endless growth represents an ever-expanding assault on the air, land and water. Turned in on themselves, with culture precluding all of nature, great minds burn and are burnt up, while the world burns faster, burning up the past. Too many minds have learned to tolerate, for example, the “monotonous and dominant model of the city . . . ruthlessly overrunning space” (Serres 1995b, 100).

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We have faculties for language as we do for other acts of heat or expenditure. Studying the world and studying language should happen in tandem. Serres demonstrated, using Zola's novel, that "little by little written or spoken language becomes an energy like any other, and narrative becomes a trivial motor . . . hence we find repeated translation of cardinal categories: difference, closure, supplement, and so forth all the way through to dissemination, a concept precisely foreseen by the second principle of thermodynamics" (1975, 65). Anticipating this thesis, Simone Weil once said "all the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception" (1997, 45). (Grace from this perspective may be the only thing that *really* distinguishes the human.)
Reducing times to concepts: attachment and detachment

Attachment to concepts always threatens detachment from reality. Places built from concepts or referents and not the malleability of imagination 'taking place', give rise to situations that can reduce time to an incoherent condition of constant emergency and/or exception (Agamben), to passing fashions, to mimetic violence and/or revolutions, to a false sense of stasis, to the deepening sadness of alienation from the world and from each other. Attachment to concepts: detachment from life. Love traded off for false happiness or slavery.

'Slowing down', from my side, will mean heightened intelligibility of how exactly an adaptation or a compensation will mean new drift, deviation, and death. The wish remains to begin again with the belief that seeking clarity and knowledge in a shifting world does not have to mean discovering new ways to purify and kill it. "The promise of science is attended with peril. The genius of science must capture the object, take it into mind, without being captured by it. The challenge is unremitting, for the stars though always present are ever 'inaccessible'. As are all natural objects 'when the mind is open to their influence" (Walls 1997, 427; cites Emerson's *Collected Works* 1971, 16). A belief in cultivating life (which incorporates the potentiality of dialogue, symbiosis, negentropy and, perhaps most importantly, grace, or as Serres puts it in *The Natural Contract*, 'stepping aside') is nonetheless uncertain. And yet to not believe in reinvigorating potentialities, rigorous respect for the thing's potential, to not try with all that we can intelligently muster, to not be answerable or responsible, is to take a tremendous gamble which, in any case, cannot be won:

If we judge our actions innocent and we win, we win nothing, history goes on as before, but if we lose, we lose everything, being unprepared for some possible catastrophe. Suppose that, inversely, we choose to consider ourselves responsible: if we lose, we lose nothing, but if we win, we win everything, by remaining the actors of history. Nothing or loss on one side, win or nothing on the other: no doubt as to which is the better choice.

Michel Serres 1995b, 45

There are two principal human sins from which all others can be derived: impatience and laziness. Because of impatience they were driven out of Paradise, because of laziness they do not return. Or perhaps there is only one principle sin: impatience. Because of impatience they were driven out, because of impatience they do not return.

Franz Kafka 1983, 30

Since partaking from that mesmerizing tree of knowledge, cultivating life has nevertheless required great patience or rigorous and unfinalized awareness of all action—particularly in 'the garden of the local' (as explored by Serres in *The Birth of Physics*), while keeping a curious yet wary eye on the universal. This lesson is especially salient today, as basic predominant modes of manufacturing reality still seem to think that they are creating the conditions for life and peace, using 'social universals' which, in reality, fan the flames of violence,
and grow ominously, at speeds difficult to estimate, using as fuel to heat up and mold history, the sovereign, the struggle, and the exchange of power or the money:

What I have termed a social universal is the solution to the question of primitive violence. These solutions, in history, wear out. The most recent to date, economics, is wearing out even more rapidly than the ancient sacred solution or the woeful military one, even if each is still around; the most inspired philosophy in these times would invent a fourth solution, the informational.

Michel Serres 1995a, 87

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In order for us to appreciate the overlapping and edifying nature of both semantic and ecological phenomenon, we must consider the (densely bifurcated) epistemological circumstances we find ourselves in. We must consider, therefore, what originary mechanisms have spawned today’s pervasive tendencies (of knowledges, actors and actants) as they have emerged to define a history sadly reliant on violence and/or exclusion. It is through this epistemological aspect that meaning-filled monologic and dialogic trajectories (as imbued in actors and actants) can begin to make sense in both material and literary constructions. What meanings, what things, will we as designers enroll into the ongoing performance, the endless circulation and return of energies, the interaction of live contexts in infinite dialogue across hundreds and even thousands of years?

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In the following chapter, I will look to a specific built environment to ‘imply’ the necessity for alternatives, by way of re-addressing capitalistically-defined, architectonic approaches. As an extension of its underlying epistemology, this (non)place effaces links to the world itself and concomitantly human society or history. We will see a fairly sophisticated design scheme that incorporates an array of strategies currently lauded as good design; but I contend this strategic culmination epitomizes a powerful trajectory ruining design by depleting its function as a truly context-sensitive, life-giving practice.
CHAPTER 5: KNICKERBOCKER PLACE: MIXING ALL THE INGREDIENTS FOR A LOCAL COSMOPOLITANISM

The community should not... dissolve its constituent members into a heightened unity which would suppress itself at the same time that it would annul itself as community.

Maurice Blanchot 1988, 8

The opacity of globalization is that it uses difference for undifferentiation; it congeals culture as a conduit for stasis; it renders the local merely a fragment of its larger picture; it promises freedom via a worldliness that means oppression for those who are not among the 'golden billion'.

Peter Hitchcock 2000, 14

Introduction

This material culture analysis is focused on a highly designed and economically successful shopping complex in Madison, Wisconsin, called Knickerbocker Place. The overall design and particularly the restaurant located there are strategically geared toward providing an alluring and profitable community hearth in an older urban neighborhood. We will become acquainted with this design strategy, which I believe is increasingly pervasive today in a wide array of 'spaces for consumption'. I begin with a very basic historical context concerning food and its consumption. The subject of food, its distribution and consumption, is emphasized in this chapter because of its explicit life-sustaining role as a mediator between culture and nature — or more precisely, it is an entity that clearly blends the two categories. The functioning of food in our society still holds great potential to nourish understanding with regard to how we represent and sustain a certain quality of life, nature, progress, etc., which as pointed out repeatedly in the preceding material has suffered during modern times. An analysis of everyday places (i.e. parks, streetscapes, neighborhoods) may in fact be less evocative or desirable at this point because they are indeed more messy (more things happen) and less discernable (recall Foucault's idea of their 'taken-for-grantedness') as essential to our well being. We will nevertheless consider the built environment as well; but I hope in this dual analysis the reader will not be thrown off by the (somewhat allegorical) emphasis on food.

That said, then, following an impartial description of the locality and various design or presentation strategies employed, I will discuss this place as a hub of spatial and theoretical axes, which make distinct and at times blur our comprehension of the built environment as a product of recent history. In this regard, I pay the most attention to links between food consumption and the experience of 'place' in the wake of vast colonializations now associated with globalization. One portion of the interpretative section will compare my case study with a similar effort concerning the design evolution of Adelaide Zoo, in Australia. In a bare sense, the implications
of this overall study problematize prevalent representations of progress, cosmopolitanism, and the highly mediated ‘slickness of presentation’ associated with contemporary design trends we see all around us. In the concluding chapter, I will refer to this material culture analysis by way of reiterating the primary themes of this paper, and work towards articulating an epistemology more proper to life-giving design.

**The place of food: a generative source of culture**

It was only within the last 11,000 years that some peoples turned to what is termed food production: that is, domesticating wild animals and plants and eating the resulting livestock and crops. Today, most people on Earth consume food that they produced themselves or that someone else produced for them. At current rates of change, within the next decade the few remaining bands of hunter-gatherers will abandon their ways, disintegrate, or die out, thereby ending our millions of years of commitment to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle . . . Only for today’s affluent First World citizens, who don’t actually do the work of raising food themselves, does food production (by remote agribusiness) mean less physical work, more comfort, freedom from starvation, and a longer expected lifetime. Most peasant farmers, who constitute the great majority of the world’s actual food producers, aren’t necessarily better off than hunter-gatherers.

Jared Diamond 1997, 86, 104-105

There are those who believe that we in the First World are not better off than the hunter-gatherers either. But whether or not, in the course of human history, this radical transformation represents ‘progress’ is not the primary subject here. By briefly recognizing the historical context of food — a ‘generative hybrid’, as it were, a mixing of humanity with the land — and its ever-changing relationship with human cultures, we will be better able to evaluate the ‘performance’ of places that distribute experience in contemporary culture building.120

In his highly acclaimed study, Jared Diamond (1997) plants the seeds for understanding how food production has been a “prerequisite for the development of guns, germs, and, steel,” which are the “primary factors that enabled some peoples to conquer other peoples.” Food production thus gave rise to the forms of dominance, choice, and uncertainty we experience today (ibid., 86). It is a key provision around which we can raise questions concerning globalization. Food will always be a generative source of socio-cultural determinations which underlie the broadest patterns of human history. From Latour’s assessment, then, food is a kind of source or artifact from which “the many connections between humans and nonhumans” attest to a proper notion of a collective (1999b, 311).

As a driving force in the diversification of civilizations, food (like open space) has mediated the creation of knowledge, customs, levels of sustenance, and forms of place-specific artifacts. Obviously, changes in the hybridization of food (its production, distribution, and consumption) have affected and been affected by other cultural and environmental changes.121
The various adaptations human societies have made (e.g. forms of domestication of plants and animals, invention of various technologies, and systems of exchange) have given to the unique cuisines we now associate with different geographic regions. Certain selections of the world's stock of cuisines are now being celebrated and mixed together with others to convey cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism.

I am, in large part, working from the assumption that analyzing food performance — as an essential mediator between humans and the world — can help free us to contemplate the contemporary nature of our relationships with one another and with the world itself. Having grown out of these introductory and very general food-related observations, we will concentrate on both the performance of food and its presentation at Bluephies Restaurant, in effort to discern local generative relationships in a West Madison community and, to a lesser degree, generative relationships in the global community as well.

**Local context: Knickerbocker Place, Food Fight Inc. & Bluephies's**

In general, we have moved from a world that had bounded, national cultures to one that has city-based identity, and at the same time is part of the well-publicized 'world-village'.

Charles A. Jencks 1984, 5

CONTEXT MAP Knickerbocker Place is located on the west side of Madison at 2701 Monroe Street. Monroe Street is locally known for its great variety of small-scale, high-quality businesses. And Knickerbocker Place is, on the surface, no exception; it contains do-it-yourself pottery and tile shops, an art gallery, coffee, bread, and wine shops, children’s clothing and toy stores, and Bluephies Restaurant. According to a senior manager at Bluephies, the entire complex was constructed about seven years ago. Prior to this, the restaurant's site was a corner grocery store that operated for over 50 years. No visual evidence of this establishment remains at the site.

This commercial center seems to have developed as an imitative outgrowth of the older businesses on Monroe Street and, to a lesser degree,
the surrounding neighborhoods. Considerable attention has been paid to architectural scale and relationship to the street. This amounts to greater compromise with the automobile than older strip malls, thereby suggesting (New Urbanist-type) concern for 'pedestrian friendliness'. The building materials also are reminiscent of surrounding buildings. However, there is definitely a contemporary distinctiveness which stands out in the austere, higher technology detailing (i.e. the lighting, masonry, awnings, signage, windows, etc.). Thus, this complex has attempted to fit into its context, and yet it displays the latest, increasingly ubiquitous, fashions from an *Architectural Digest*. The message is mixed — like the 'world-village' — both local and global.

![View of Wingra Park from back of Knickerbocker Place](image1)

Knickerbocker Place is in the heart of a neighborhood, surrounded with culturally significant open spaces. A public golf course and a cemetery are just to the north. Forest Hill is a Civil War era cemetery, previously used by Native Americans for burial mounds, few of which still remain. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Edgewood College and High School are to the east. The plaza is bisected by Knickerbocker Street, and forms a gateway into Wingra Park to the south. This somewhat hidden park connects to the University Arboretum to the west, Vilas Park/Zoo to the east, all adjacent to Lake Wingra (see Context Map). A large synagogue is just behind the site. And pictured above are near-by buildings, which demonstrate architectural aspects found at Knickerbocker Place (namely in material appearance, and details such as the pronounced feature at the corner in the below images). Most buildings on Monroe Street front the street, unlike Knickerbocker Place, set back for parking.
Bluephies has a red brick façade with repetition of large windows and stiff black awnings. (The right-side image, taken from behind the building, reveals the façade is, in fact, a brick fascia.) These basic elements are repeated throughout Knickerbocker Place, with variation in the logos used to designate the various businesses. The distinguishing characteristics of each use/identity are thus combined with a repetitive design continuity, to tie together diversity in one comfortably whole composition. This theme which 'marries diversity under an overarching unity' we see repeated, as described later, in Bluephies's menu and image-building campaign.

Bluephies is the largest unit, and is afforded the most parking. As shown above, the parking arrangement sets the entire development back from the street. We may assume that the city planning department required this design, one that has the appearance of pedestrian friendliness while making plenty of room for the automobile. Or perhaps the architects were able to persuade the city that given the importance of this location, automobiles should be allowed in. Whatever the case, this space allocated for parking stands out when compared to the other business on Monroe Street, which have none, save street-side parking. One might also assume that parking conditions play a role in patronage. Where the other businesses might depend heavily on local people who walk or ride a bicycle, Knickerbocker businesses might attract a broader clientele. This is, of course, in agreement with the overall business plan, but we'll wait to delve into that subject.
Bluephies Restaurant is the only unit which, from a distance, appears to be two stories; and it is the only one with a clock tower-like feature (shown at far right in picture). Inside this tower-like construction, there is a decorative neon wire-shaped, three-dimensional, piece of pie. This dessert image illuminates the tower's interior in bright red light, which distinctively marks Bluephies at night. The large windows give an open and welcoming appearance, especially at night when filled with a warm glow of light. The fairly wide sidewalk next to the large ground-level windows and the corner overhang, combine to create an arcade-like illusion. Peering inside, one notices that Bluephies is not two stories, but one big room with a striking decor.

Bluephies's interior is basically a high ceiling box with lots of big windows, conspicuous and multivalent decorative elements. There is also a small reception area with a cash register and counter seating. Behind the counter, western desserts and a variety of wines are displayed for sale. The kitchen — one place of production — is concealed from view.

The dining area is fully equipped with spacious, richly colored seating and tables (saturated purple, maroon, blue, yellow). The interactions between people, people and space (indoors and outdoors), and people and food, are all generously facilitated by the way the space is designed. In other words, the largeness and variety of the artifacts, and their arrangement, accommodates a dining experience for people of all shapes and sizes, allows for a variety of group sizes, and provides quality amenities (e.g. coat racks, comfortable seating, views to outside, and relatively interesting views inside). For example, at one table the backboard that projects up from the seat has a wavy design of wood and steel with a 4 inch diameter hole punched through it in an odd place (see above photo). Through this hole the person sitting across the table can watch steam rise like smoke from a coffee station set below. This framed view may, or may not, have not been planned.
The interior design seems to reflect some influence from the 50s era (i.e. asymmetrical forms and contour lines are dominant and intentionally create a sense of movement). The room is decorated with variety of stream line objects reminiscent of the past perhaps, but now they somehow seem more subtle, refined or smoothly machined. The "EAT" sign in the entryway, the knobby coat racks, a sign with asymmetrical rectangular form and an oblique angle as a background for the restaurant's logo — each have a 50s feeling about them. And yet there is something not quite the same.

There is a different sort of abstract quality open to more interpretation, but never quite literal. One cannot be sure if smooth waves of colored paneling are meant to evoke a sense of nature, for example, or time, or music, etc. Where the 50s airplane motifs represented progress and a belief in the rational, the forms used at Bluephies, and their unfamiliar juxtaposition against others, is much more difficult to decode, if not impossible. For example, there are several massive ornaments hanging from the ceiling and one projecting from a wall, all of which are open to interpretation (see below image). Looking up, a person familiar with 50s designs might see a starburst or atom design influence; others might see flowers or some sort of mechanical devices that may make sense close to the sled-like ornament cantilevered from the wall. Perhaps the wall ornament is supposed to be a reminder of the rafters that would have once been exposed in such a building if it was opened up the way this one is (the unreal imitating the unreal. . .). Whatever the interpretation (which we do not want to linger on in this section anyway), the point is that the descriptions we are striving for in this section of the paper cannot easily label the concepts employed in the interior because of the
contrived multivalency and anonymity in the design approach. Again, this brand of assimilation is an important concept repeated throughout our material culture analysis of Bluephies restaurant and Knickerbocker Place.

The clearest consistency, with regards to 50s design, is the fact that most details are in some sense a confirmation of technological advancement. The materials used in the interior are similar to those used in post-World War II American material culture (i.e. painted ply wood, steel, chrome, veneer, vinyl, and plastic). Both eras certainly employ the interaction of line, form, color, and lighting to create visual excitement; and each strives to project the present using a very clean and well maintained appearance. However, Bluephies's appearance is put together in a more seamless, subdued fashion. The colors are more complementary, rich, warm, and saturated, as opposed to the bright, almost violent, contrasts typical in the 50s. This move seems to indicate refinement and more sensitivity to the tastes of a wider population, while still reaffirming the success of science and technology.

Bluephies's clientele

The nights I've patronized this establishment, there were young families, groups of young professionals, married and non-married couples, and a few singles. The average age was around 35. The majority of the clientele was white with a scattering of Asians. One would assume that most are formally educated and financially secure.

There was no way to tell for sure where most of the clientele live. However, Bluephies is somewhat hidden from Madison's main transportation routes, indicating that most patrons have local knowledge and are likely to live fairly close by. If this is the case, then again the social class probably ranges from middle to upper-middle (i.e. working professionals, university faculty, small business owners). The success of Bluephies therefore hinges on how it is received by this socio-economic category. Presumably, the most important factor revealing why this restaurant is well-received by this general class of people lies in the food.

Bluephies's menu

The cultural accretionist will laud almost anything as long as it represents variety.

Peter Hitchcock 2000, 15

A variety of meals & prices

Bluephies provides three menus, for brunch, lunch and dinner. We will narrow the bulk of our analysis to the dinner menu. It is divided into typical sections for a variety restaurant, including: 5 appetizers, 40 entrée dishes, soup and 10 kinds of salad with 3 kinds of dressing, desserts, and beverages. The variety displayed in each category is fairly impressive.
Entrée dishes are categorized in 5 types, some with flip descriptions, such as: SOME darn big SAMMIES “served with crispy fries or a cup of really awesome soup”; BURGERS “all burgers are made with black angus beef, hand pattied and served on a toasted handmade Kaiser roll with lettuce, tomato and grilled onion”; TORTILLAS “we roll them, grill them and serve them to you”; BOWLS of NOODLES “Handmade pasta . . . any pasta can be vegetarian, subtract 1.00”; and, RETRO CHIC “we are doing the food you grew up with in a fun way.”

A range of appetites can find satisfaction at Bluephies for a reasonable price, especially given the costly architectural design. Prices range from $4.59 (e.g. a half-size ceasar salad without the soup) to $11.59 (e.g. grilled salmon). Some dishes, like rotollo and fresh fish, are subject to market price.

One of the most conspicuous characteristics about Bluephies is its ethnic food representation: asian chicken salads, greek salad platters, thai bbq chickens, santa fe burritos, mediterranean pasta, alburquerque jerk chicken, reubens, ksadillas, enchiladas, english muffins etc.

Note that Webster’s defines cosmopolitan as “composed of persons, constituents, or elements from all or many parts of the world.” Bluephies certainly seems to be emphasizing a ‘cosmopolitan’ identity through their menu.

If you eat the world then, of course, you must be part of it.

Peter Hitchcock 2000, 16

A variety of food preparations

Naturally, all the ethnic representations mean that many preparation techniques must be employed, such as: stir fried, pan fried, wrapped tortillas, smoked, “we roll them, grill them . . . ,” etc. Homemade (or home-like process) quality stands out: “homemade dressing,” “all desserts are homemade,” “hand pattied,” “handmade Kaiser,” “house smoked turkey,” and “handmade ravioli . . . ,” etc. The description of the various procedures for food preparation gives the impression that the cooks must be multi-talented.

A variety of ingredients/tastes

Bluephies uses a combination of ‘fresh’ and processed ingredients. Freshness is strongly emphasized: “fresh asian style vegetables,” “fresh home made ravioli,” “fresh atlantic salmon,” “fresh broccoli and red onions,” “fresh spinach and peppers,” and “freshly baked sour dough bread.” Examples of ingredients usually considered processed include: canned peaches, capers, kalamata olives, mung bean noodles, sun dried tomatoes, black bean sauce, soy sauce, sour cream, and cheese. Some products are obviously local like “Wisconsin goat cheese,” but most are probably not, such as: atlantic salmon, yellow fin tuna, plum dressing, chowmein noodles, portabellas, Italian parsley, basil, rice noodles, spicy ginger chipotle, sweet and sour sauce, shitaki mushrooms, sesame seeds, coffee, tea, wine, etc. The variety of ingredients used
is really quite astounding as compared to the everyday restaurant of the recent past. This must
represent progress in the minds of most patrons who make the comparison.

A variety of lifestyle choices

Following the emphasis on freshness, comes the message that Bluephies provides healthy
lifestyle choices (e.g. “organic wheat bread,” “light herbed broth,” “any pasta can be made
vegetarian,” “pan-roasted tofu can be substituted,” “full of vegetables,” etc.), along with the not-
so-healthy (e.g. “crabmeat and cheese, pan-fried and served with homemade tarter sauce,”
“calamari spiced breaded and fried,” “bbq’d pork spare ribs,” and their “pies are yummy” too).

A variety of appearances

Foods are presented nicely. One might recall photographs in popular magazines’ recipe
sections, or TV programs that exemplify modern life styles with food. Recipes for fresh, fast, and
creative ways of cooking and living are the focus. And freedom to delve into traditions or
combine whatever ingredients one wants to is key to the highest creativity. Bluephies uses
special garnishes, sprinkles of whatever it considers fun. The house salad is served with many
vegetables with different textures and colors, including a layering of red lettuce leaves, shredded
carrots, wedged tomatoes, and homemade salad dressing. Most entrees appear to be delicious
with competing textures and tastes. Big pieces of pie are rich in color: bright orange-yellow and
red, from canned peaches and whole fresh strawberries, all encrusted in flakey golden sugared
pastry.

A variety of language

Under most of the food choices, descriptive details of the main ingredients and methods
of preparation are provided. The food titles rely to some extent on customers’ knowledge of the
various ethnic modifiers used (e.g. “juicy thai bbq’d pork”). Words like Thai, Greek, Asian, and
other proper nouns are not capitalized, indicating a change in their typical usage/status. Other
even more ambiguous modifiers are used, which anyone can easily guess at, but nevertheless
require knowledge of American nuances, like the phrase “natural chicken gravy,” and
“homemade breakfast salsa.” Most of us, of course, understand that the idea of “un-natural”
chicken gravy is not the issue, nor were the numerous products labeled “homemade” actually
made in someone’s home.

Straightforward language is used for certain, serious or potentially legal matters: “if you
have a food allergy, let your server know so we can assist you,” and “18% gratuity added to
parties of six and larger, please no separate check for parties of six or more.”

Most of the ideas in the menu are supposed to be informal and fun to read. For example,
“You like brunch we do too.” They leave out why. “Our pies are yummy.” One recalls a
childhood phrase: "Yummy yummy in your tummy." "We made this stuff because we like you." Really? "We couldn't decide so we're gonna make a new one every day and bake it with some really yummy sauce." Sounds exciting!

Lastly, we note the emphasis on bigness: "big bowl" is printed in bold describing portions for noodles. They serve "SOME darn big SAMMIES" and "... we will do something big ..." etc. The assumption is probably that at a neighborhood restaurant, people are going to be somewhat pragmatic, meaning that they will want to be full when they leave. On a more elegant occasion (i.e. at L'Etoile restaurant, in downtown Madison), over-concern with meal size is not considered sophisticated. Bluephies is somewhere in between moderate and high class though, just like its clientele. As one of Bluephies typical customers, one can expect to get a fairly good deal and a taste of something more sophisticated.

The business plan

History lends a certain impression of reality to self-promotion.

Michel Serres 1995b, 51

The company that owns Bluephies is called Food-Fight Incorporated. They own five other dining establishments in the Madison area (Monty's Blue Plate Diner, Pasta Per Tutti, Luigi's, Eldorado Grill, and the Hubbard Avenue Diner). Food Fight Inc. claims to “run the best restaurants in town,” each providing “fun,” “memorable,” and “unique” experiences. These businesses are distinct in their own ways, but have each employed similar, aggressive approaches, in terms of overall presentation. This may, in part, have to do with employing the same architect. It may also have to do with a Food Fight Inc. business philosophy indicative of its name and its logo.

The overall image Bluephies conveys is a mix of high quality products and service with easy-going flexibility. The restaurant provides dining-in and carry-out service, for lunch and dinner on weekdays, and brunch and dinner on weekends. Bluephies is about making eating an event — a way to make time for fun, excitement, and memorable meals — with its artistic architecture, friendly service, up-beat music (mostly light jazz) and tasty, creative recipes. Reasonable prices and a special atmosphere should make frequent and spontaneous return dining experiences appealing.
The Bluephies logo pictured here seems to epitomize several important images that they are after. It is multi-colored, perhaps suggesting a multiple response to customer needs and/or a multiple conception of its own identity. The “B” inside what appears to be the sun is playful, happy, and suggestive of liveliness. This connection to the sun is a connection to an essential sustaining symbol/reality of life. As a relatively new member to the fairly old, yet vibrant West Madison area, this life-giving imagery seems to have been a good strategy. The informality of the logo is repeated throughout the formal architecture and is one of the many elements intended to liven-up the menu.

**Interpretations: Bluephies manufacturing a local cosmopolitanism**

The act of consumption is spurred by the production of desire, globalization as desire, and comes with desire’s intricate dependence on lack—a lack that remains in excess to the moment of consumption and thus requires still more of that global fix.

Peter Hitchcock 2000, 15

*A recipe for living vicariously*

First of all, we need to acknowledge that for the time being Bluephies is very successful at being what it wants to be, and that the majority of people who dine there seem to be satisfied with their experience. As critical remarks emerge in this analysis, then, they should be viewed as part of a larger ongoing critique concerning Western culture and globalization. Bluephies and the functioning of Knickerbocker Place definitely spark big questions about local-global relationships in Madison, Wisconsin.

Globalization has meant that many more Americans have traveled to and come from ‘exotic’ places — especially in an internationally-oriented university town like Madison. Their experiences have generated a desire in many people to travel as well. Bluephies offers the opportunity to capture some idea of what foreign cuisines are like (even if not authentic), and thus both relieve and stimulate some of this desire in many patrons’ imaginations. For those who have had a chance to travel the world, or even just larger cities in North America, Bluephies may also satisfy their desires to experience other cultures. More discerning patrons will know, however, that Bluephies’s Thai dishes, for example, are nothing like Thai dishes. And yet there are surely those patrons who are fooled into believing they are experiencing the ethnic variety advertised, and may even have less interest in visiting the country of origin now that they can get a taste of what the ‘others’ (supposedly) have to offer. This can now be done close to home. Other customers may be intrigued and reaffirm a desire to visit the Mediterranean or China.
Still others may be disenchanted or let down when they discover that Bluephies's santa fe burrito is nothing like the one they had in Santa Fe.

Whatever the case and regardless of the language used in the menu, the fact remains that Bluephies can gather together numerous kinds of experiences, in order to offer customers a diversity of decisions not possible to middleclass customers only ten or so years ago. This phenomenon must be a direct outgrowth of globalization — a huge network that facilitates the assimilation of a diversity of experiences and brings their possibility to the localities of those who can afford them. This assimilation proceeds in a somewhat biased manner, according to certain tastes, agendas, and so on, but does not define a particular ethnic group as its origin. Bluephies's campaign, as previously mentioned in several sections, appears to be diverse and unifying at the same time — its design is at once multivalent and anonymous.

A first impression of Bluephies's architecture and its up-beat interior may lead one to expect a place peopled with urban yuppies, decked-out in trendy outfits, spending their money in dining rituals, talking business and gossip over a fancy meals, with friends and clients. This is the 'progressive' life style many people imagine as typical in big cities. However, as described earlier, most customers in Bluephies appear quite different from this. The typically more casual Madison population can dress how they like or, if they wish, imitate a more trendy appearance and still fit in at Bluephies. Relaxed families are welcome. And for those who might be attracted to some food image in *Cosmopolitan* or a restaurant scene on *Sex in the City*, those experiences can perhaps be accommodated as well.

Another thing that this business has going for it as part of a larger devouring culture, is the presumed expertise that comes along with its sophisticated imitations. For example, the numerous ways of preparing food and knowledge of the vast variety of ingredients, as listed in the menu, make the idea of cooking these entrees oneself daunting. Decorating one's house with the same sleek sense of subtlety is also difficult to fathom. However, at Bluephies you can relax and consume all of this complexity, just like other successful cosmopolitans, and for a reasonable price.

Bluephies can also make it easier for the customer by “eating better in healthier way” to embrace a wholesome modern lifestyle. This idea is reaffirmed over and over by their emphasis on “freshness,” another quality that people may consider difficult to obtain in their own cooking, again making Bluephies increasingly appealing. Vegetarianism has significantly taken hold in the ‘progressive’ city of Madison. Vegetarians usually express a high degree of health consciousness, and are having a major impact on the American diet, as shown at Bluephies. Tofu is a fairly new ingredient, probably derived from Chinese cooking. Along the same lines, acknowledging “homemade” qualities also seems to be very important. This may indicate a
perception of nostalgia for the good old days when a mother of the family carefully selected fresh ingredients, and skillfully cooked to please everyone.

Strategic illusions & ambiguity

We will start with the glowing pie tower described earlier. This type of structure should perhaps remind us of what was once a clock tower or perhaps another public landmark of some sort in a town square. At Bluephies, it is still intended to function as a landmark, but not of the public nature. A town square feeling at Knickerbocker Place may indeed be the intention of the architects, but it is just the feeling that they are after. It is not aimed at being a place to linger or loiter (outside seating is as sparse as is pleasant shade). We see another mixed message: public square for gathering, but, no, really it’s a space for consuming.

We can discuss many other features — the false façade, the arcade-like, the two-story-like, the interior design — in much the same way. There is a simulation of context or past, but with a technological gesture so refined as to trivialize this past/context or make it another appealing accoutrement, another an object for consumption. All the 50s-like imagery and its somewhat transfigured presentation, feels like a continuation of modernism except that a certain confidence in the extension of reason has (it would seem) been abandoned. We are likely to be left with a sort of ambivalence, even indifference, in our perceptions. Some patrons may wish to hark back to the 50s, some may not — neither individual is really let down, and yet neither individual can really put a finger on what they are experiencing. The idea seems to be that if they can afford to enter all kinds are accepted, but they must leave any ontological pretensions of authenticity at the door.

I should add, from a materials standpoint, the brick fascia, for example, draws on a lot of energy for its production, transport, and construction; then, unless the future can figure out how to reuse this hand-me-down, brick solidifies yet more landfill space. There are, of course, much less resource-exhaustive alternatives.

Marrying of diversity under an overarching unity

Like the overlap in the different categories of this analysis, this interpretative section also has overlap. Throughout this analysis we have demonstrated in each section the exceptional variety in the kinds of presentation at Bluephies. We have also noted a sense of larger unity, which pulls all of the variety together. For instance, the playful way in which the menu combines everything from reubens to fish tacos to veggie egg rolls; and the way Knickerbocker Place combines a great variety of businesses by forcing their identities to merge into a unified semi-repetition. The next section also shows how this idea works.
**In terms of language**

Loss of the capital in normally proper nouns shows the difference between vibrant cultures who gave birth to something, and simple, transferable, commoditized adjectives. The demotion of the capital letter actually sends a subtle message that Bluephies does not make a real claim to authenticity — that their Greek food is not to be strictly associated with Greece. The reality is that they are not claiming to represent any particular reality, but their own carefully tailored one. They sever words from the world and then reconnect them together in a tapestry of possible experiences presumed to be delightful and yet comfortable for their patrons. These recipes seem to be created to accommodate the customers who do not like to take big risks or make drastic changes in their lives. Just a little bit of excitement is tolerable. There is no denying the seductive and subtle quality of this (homogenizing) stratagem. Several examples follow:

The Asian chicken salad, prepared with carrots and mixed greens, topped with grilled chicken, chow mein, toasted sesame seeds and plum dressing is superb. It is a marriage of East and West. Salad is a typically Western food, but a lot of significant ingredients in this dish are formally Asian. On the other hand, we cannot call it Asian because salad is not Asian in the first place, and the vegetables used are native to the Western world, not the Eastern. Hence, the small “a” in Asian salad.

Another example is Thai BBQ chicken which is prepared by marinating chicken with spicy ginger, grilled and served with Asian slaw on a toasted bun. Actually, this dish seems to taste more like Chinese than Thai, with the spicy ginger marinating sauce. Having married a woman who grew up in Thailand, I know ginger is not typical in the native Thai kitchen, but it is in the Chinese. Thai’s use more garlic and cumin. Moreover, Thai food is not served with a toasted bun but rice. Again, we see another hybrid of East and West, designated by the demoted proper noun.

The menu evokes a sense friendliness and informality in its language. Perhaps this will break the ice, so to speak, between different people or between people and the space itself. It says, more or less, “don’t be at all intimidated by this place, our uniforms, etc., we want it to be as comfortable as home.” In fact, they literally claim that their food is “like you grew up with.” This is obviously not true for most if not all of Bluephies’s customers. Again, there will be those people who completely blow this off — “graphic artists have been doing this forever” — and don’t care or notice that they are being lied to, that Bluephies is in many ways selling ‘artificial memories’ in the guise of being friendly. And there may be some people who actually (unconsciously) fall for these ploys or perhaps want to because it seems to enliven their personal histories.
**The global in the local and the problem of authenticity**

The universal now only appears as the local monstrously inflated.  
Michel Serres 1995a, 3

The true face of globalization is precisely its facelessness.  
Peter Hitchcock 2000, 6

At Bluephies the great variety of food influenced by international cuisines includes Italian, Chinese, Mexican, French, German, Mediterranean, and Thai. These varieties are inundating many of our local restaurants and grocery stores in a wide range of forms. In the Madison area (and presumably throughout much of the so-called First World) the adoption of many (but not nearly all) ethnic foods is becoming increasingly mixed into our diets. We are therefore growing more accustomed to more choices. Bluephies obviously helps to mediate in this process because it claims to represent tastes from so many places.

Bluephies is a new and improved version of older variety restaurants, which embraces globalization and in the same specious motion, its surrounding neighborhood. Most of Madison's ethnic restaurants are different in the sense that they do not try to embrace and mix in the same way. They therefore have to stay smaller in this kind of consumer culture.

These smaller restaurants are also an outgrowth of global movements, but would seem to strive to represent their origins in a somewhat more honest way. Problems acquiring just the right ingredients and utensils, adjustments made for perceived tastes, and many other factors, do alter the degree of material authenticity with regard to their homeland cuisines. However, especially among those who are recent immigrants, these changes are not likely to be that drastic. Usually, effort is made to decorate following their ethnic theme, and so on. (This is, of course, another kind of disruption for a locality: again, the question of how much noise can be assimilated?) These restaurants are more likely to satisfy the experienced traveler, however, or the expatriate who longs for a favorite dish.

If we were to compare a street full of these more ethnic-based restaurants to a street full of restaurants like Bluephies (which claims no real origin), which would represent more diversity? This is perhaps a slippery subject, but one important today. What if something like Bluephies started to replace traditional cuisines in other countries with its short memory and fashionable mixing? Does it matter more then or not? Bluephies is very seductive and yet one wonders if it can be too successful? Probably not. One reason is that Bluephies relies on a vast, energy-intensive, network to fill its pantry. It also uses a lot of ambiguity in its appearances and false constructions of 'place', which people should grow tired of. Then what new trend will replace it?
Knickerbocker Place: an island in a sea of opportunity

Hard mineral matter, hard lines, hard corners, repetitive unambiguous form. Nothing can live in such places if it were not artificially sustained to an immense degree. Along with other things this abstraction and artificiality feeds alienation so that you can walk with your eyes open eyes blank past an accident, past a cry for help.

Christopher Day 1990, 60

Our thought, our understanding, our life, our masteries would just be foolish and simple if they maintained ties only to an orderly world. And the world would be stupid if it were so. Redundancy cannot be the master of things.

Michel Serres 1995a, 133

Form serves as a necessary bridge to new, still unknown content. Form was a familiar and generally understood congealed old world view. In precapitalistic epochs there was a less abrupt, smoother transition between form and content: form was content that had not hardened up, was still unfixed, was not hackneyed. Form was linked to the results of general collective creativity . . . . Form was, as it were, implicit context: the content of a work developed content that was already embedded in the form and did not create it as something new.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1999, 165-6

The materials and the technological actions embedded in them would (if not closed tightly within 'black boxes') tell of the real multiplicity making up Knickerbocker Place, which does indeed span the globe. Instead, the actual presence of things, the materials making up the place, are presented as almost magical manifestations with subordinated or simulated relations to local context and to the world. (One should recall the discussion of geometry in Chapter 2, another path of enquiry as to why this site seems inherently island-like or closed.)

* * *

The community . . . is constitutionally . . . linked to the death of those one calls, maybe mistakenly, its members.

Jean Luc Nancy; cited by Blanchot 1988, 10

Effacement of death though, marks the same fate for life. As shown in the local context descriptions, Knickerbocker Place is located in the heart of a great part of the city. In fact, one might argue that it is the hub of some of west Madison's most sacred sites (the cemetery, the parks, the arboretum, the old school, the synagogue). None of these places are drawn into or respected by the design though. Perhaps it is because none of these places typically associate themselves with commodification that none of them connect in any meaningful way with the site. They all gather attention and the accretion of meaning through free participation.

Each surrounding place deserves some response from this heart which has turned in on itself, however. Not the refined absorption of surrounding spaces and meanings, so as to institutionalize them, or commoditize them, making it hard to reconstruct what is being dismantled — but a design which really acts as a hub, a transfusive or relational space. How?
Provision of parking is very questionable, to begin with, but if it must occur, the parking area could, at the barest minimum, be more flexible or malleable. It could at times act as an open space for community gatherings, markets, etc.; it should be more permeable, given the degradation of Lake Wingra's drainage basin (see Ross, et. al., 1990). This might happen by reusing local construction materials, something to provide more roughness and a sense of time. Vegetation and seating are scant and shouldn't be. There is literally no response to the park, which the site might open out to quite delightfully. Rather than nourishing this locality, Knickerbocker 'Place' (which has all the ingredients for being called a 'non-place') is less like a heart pumping life into its host, and more like a parasite drawing off of it. The members of this community, both local and global, remain unseen.

**Synopsis and transition to other theoretical comparisons**

Thus far, I have tried to emphasize some key ideas regarding how many Madison residents of the near west side consume (experience) as exemplified at Knickerbocker Place and Bluephies Restaurant. This has involved analyzing and questioning why this development has been so successful. We have thought about how cultural heritage and far away environments are consumed, and how this consumption fulfills certain (imitative) desires in Bluephies's patronage. The chapter began with some basic ideas about food as a mediator of exchanges between ourselves and ourselves with the Earth. This was intended give some gravity to the subject, and to get us thinking about how some of those relationships have changed over time in not just the realm of food. An important issue raised here is the problem of whether or not these fundamental relationships are overshadowed by modern systems of food/image production, distribution, and consumption. More specifically, do economic campaigns based on obscuring reality by using a flood of fleeting images and exuberant atmospheres signal a kind of experiential crisis (local) that can also be translated into an environmental crisis (global)?

Most 'successful' North American foodways seem to be increasingly complicated or strategic in their layers of presentation, and therefore increasingly difficult to comprehend. In the case of our study, success has been generated by assimilating more and more difference, and turning away from any pretensions of authenticity. The fashion seems to be American multiculturalism and maximizing what it can offer. This will probably continue until (somewhere) resources give out or the (bourgeois) people grow weary of this manipulative scheme. Until then, it will not have to be changed to reflect 'others' values/realities (i.e. honesty in representation, discontent with the Western breed of cosmopolitanism/ethnocentrism, and social/environmental degradation). Presently, images are borrowed and stirred together in whatever recipe the proprietors assume will satisfy a society's craving for an imitative
cosmopolitan ethos. It is a delicious recipe for success and a tasteless attempt at proper representation.

It has become evident here that the prevalent and extreme uneasiness with the conventions we can see materializing today (even out of our best intentions) should be understood in the wake of current globalizing patterns. However, as pointed out by Hitchcock (2000) these patterns lack — beyond superficial and self-reinforcing rhetoric lauding technological innovations, cosmopolitanism, consumer culture, and the like — any coherent way to understand ‘globalization’ without looking to philosophy. “The failure of globalization” this Bakhtin scholar points out, “is not only the horror of economic hierarchy it brings, but the absence of a cognitive correlative for its apprehension . . . . Bakhtin’s warning is that the world is not realized by naming it. His world has chronotopes (the time/space of comprehension [the temporal and spatial relationships as they connect and interact in the social world]), bodies and borders, and conditions of answerability that have yet to be met by anything like the world according to globalization . . . . Far from being a distraction, such thinking keeps alive capacities for change that don’t simply mirror the imaginary relations of globalization as currently construed. It actively presages a world according to a different sense of participation and responsibility . . . a world that is not just predictive or finalized” (Hitchcock 2000, 18).

Bluephies and the Adelaide Zoo

The zoo was being shaped by culturally mutable and contestable efforts to craft an experience of nature for human consumption.

Kay Anderson 1995, 288

Ultimately, however, the new naturalistic enclosure delivers a culturally commodified and socially produced nature, designed to shape a distinctive ('human') experience of Nature for late twentieth-century audiences. If the message is conservational, it is paradoxically (I think) one that continues to rely for its meaning on animal captivity and rationalist conceptions of human/animal divide.

Kay Anderson 1995, 291

Our analysis of Bluephies finds many parallels in an analysis of the Adelaide Zoo by Kay Anderson. The parallel at Bluephies is the construction of an experience of global culture that, however appetizing, is an effacement of and tacit, self-congratulatory testament to domination and assimilation of difference. Like the zoo, there is no fooling anyone that it is a “space where nature [and cultures that are rooted in different natures] is abstracted from its contexts and shaped into an image and experience by, and for, humans” (Anderson 1995, 291). Both evaluate ensembles that mediate or reflect an image of (organic) nature for consumption and self-fulfillment/actualization. Each institution reads its clientele's changing attitudes and contrives to make ‘others’ exciting so as to spur greater consumption of these images. “The more stock,”
Anderson notes, “the more striking the image of acquisition and possession, and the more ‘exotic’ so much the better, since it was peculiarity that was believed to afford the greatest recreational and educational advantage” (ibid., 281). And as similarly noted in the Bluephies experience, “one of the appeals of the zoo [is] to provide a vicarious journey abroad. . .[and for youngsters] the Children’s zoo which sought to bring the ‘farm’ to the Adelaide child” (ibid. 282). Recall the emphasis in the menu to childhood, home style, like you remember, and so on.

Referring to those people responsible for the zoo’s design, she makes another observation, one really central to our concerns here: “they were chief crafters of a way of seeing and master authors of the public landscape” (ibid., 283 emphasis mine). Designers ‘craft’ and ‘author’ to a large extent the experience of place (or how it is co-authored by its participants). They considerably suggest the questions that can be raised and the dialogue (kinds of contestation) that can unfold therein.

Anderson likewise recognizes language-use as a didactic tool: “Exhibit labels, complete with maps of the global distributions of specimens, served to translate scientific thought into a form amenable for popular consumption and instruction at the zoo. The exhibits showed nature not only confined and subdued but also interpreted and classified. To that end, the zoo space occupied that critical nexus in the traffic of ideas between scientific and popular. Such maps also tended to imply that there was some fixed provenance of the exhibits in nature, when, as we have seen, it was other zoos that in reality supplied a large part of the stock” (ibid., 283 my emphasis). The zoo, like Knickerbocker, is a space of informational mediation, of active learning, and the spreading of an epistemology (conceptions of relations to nature, culture, local, global, etc.).

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At the zoo, nostalgic desires on the part of humans for nature’s ‘recovery’ have been tapped and commodified.

Kay Anderson 1995, 289

The language campaign at Bluephies would, on the surface, contradict fears of homogenization as attached to anti-globalization rhetorics: multiculturalism seems alive and well here, thus the world is being shared and celebrated . . . And as discerned at the zoo: “Significantly the conservation language has echoed the more inchoate public lament for lost natures, turning ‘nature’ more transparently than ever into a cultural product. Indeed, scarce nature, like other ‘positional goods’ in capitalist economies” (Thrift and Leyshon, 1992; cited by Anderson 1995, 289). Again, we are confronted with a severe symptom of commodified reality — the (however incomplete, but nevertheless insidious) manufacturing of simulacrum at work. (One might also recall Michael Hough in Out of Place (1990) criticizing the “dummy-strips” lining our interstates, which conceal clear-cuts just 30 meters away, so that North Americans can
feel like our countryside is still pristine, 'natural', and more easily deny environmentalist banter regarding the continued degradation of forests, soils, water, weather, indigenous rights etc. Where the zoo is a new 'ecological theatre' the multiculturalist boutique is the new 'cultural theatre': “As a therapeutic display, [the zoo] shores up public anxieties and guilt about lost natures. It invokes a romantic reversal of hierarchical oppositions of human and animal (without overcoming the dualistic legacy of past relationships). The animals enter the stage as monuments to their own disappearance in nature. This is the post-modern biopark of the 1990s that bears the stamp of an insistently human discourse — a globalizing narrative of nature's loss (at human hands) with the promise of its heroic, human-led, recovery . . . . Yet what remains offstage, obscured behind the décor, are walls and fences, and the electrified security systems without which the zoo cannot function” (ibid., 290). Enough!

A cosmopolitan ethos

The tragic comedy of universal history brought together and exposed in a phantasmagorical vacuousness.

Giorgio Agamben 1993b, 63

I chose the Knickerbocker case study because it represents a strategic materialization of certain currents of postmodern theory, which I find especially destructive for their patterns of resignation to what is deemed 'reality'. In short, reality for them is what we confusedly represent and fight over amongst ourselves (in the West), using history as though it alone generates itself. On the contrary, as Serres and Latour have shown, history is born of the world itself, and its representation must boil with collective multiplicity. Using 'relativism', then, to quell disputes and negotiations is to consider what produces as a product in itself — the problem of reification—it is to act as though the heterogeneity actually doing the work does not need to be counted because the experience of their labors is relative. Meantime, this anthropocentric confusion proliferates in “perverse ways through which the talk about progress interferes, accelerates, blinds and perturbs the many entanglements of humans and non-humans that are being generated on an ever-expanding scale” (Latour 2002, 20). In other words, as many critics have correctly pointed out (e.g. Jameson, Harvey, Latour), there is a tendency demonstrated by this strange breed of modernism to sit back and 'watch the world go by' or more correctly 'go down', while the abusive status quo has its way with increased maneuverability and detriment to us all.129

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Having introduced Bakhtin's ideas on polyphony as a dialogic context or medium, I have in this chapter been concerned with demonstrating how this notion must not be misinterpreted in the design realm.130 For example, the enrollment of maximal plurality does not mean
organizing a menu as Bluephies has, a collection of businesses as Knickerbocker Place has, and so on, as a ‘unifying’ multicultural statement. Unity is not forced but experienced in ways the sacred, beauty, and truth have been described by many great thinkers, i.e. that which “lights up the soul in proportion to its purity, not in any sense to its quantity” (Weil 2001, 66).

There is a cosmopolitan ethos (an ethos in the sense of an overdetermining configuration of cultural form) today striving for a new ‘moral vision’ — one that is not altogether different from what Food Fight Inc. has exploited in the ‘nonessential’ variety of its many venues. To probe the theory establishments like Bluephies feed off of — or just about any contemporary institution seeking to maximize on the “existential problems of our times” (Corner 1991, 115) — we will confront a pervasive mentality I associate with ‘doubt-filled modernists’, as Latour describes them, or ‘postmodernists’. Jason Hill, in *Becoming Cosmopolitan* (2000, 94-95), epitomizes this specious drive towards a ‘cosmopolitan metamorphosis’:

To take place, for one to really wean oneself from the unchosen identities, the bequeathed narratives foisted upon one, the inherited and internalized prejudices and pathologies and fears, one begins the process of forgetting ... [because memory] reinforces a nostalgia for the familiar. It can breed sentimentality that valorizes the traditional because it is comforting ... . Fixation to the inherited and the bequeathed prevents the innovative and the creative from coming into existence ... one has to learn to forget the old and the familiar: the weight of ancestral values and of outdated tenets is too much for one to resist for oneself.

This kind of thinking weighs in on so many of my conversations of late that I have actually been forced to take it more seriously. There are so many convoluted themes here; we can only afford to touch on a few. So, if forgetting one’s ‘unchosen identities’ (as though they can be burned off like warts) were actually a good thing to do, what then would be left of the person who accomplishes such a feat? What are the mimetic assumptions that underlie another project of purification? Is one now completely ‘open’, given that the ‘closed’ past has been abandoned? How often would one need to empty out what constructs meaning in life, every decade, every day, every minute? With regard to those influences weighing on one’s ability to be flexible and plural, do we include the built world also ‘foisted upon’ us? Or does one become so supple that rituals of navigating, consuming, and communicating are not hindered and facilitated by physics? But surely if one judges the built environment as fixed, guided by prejudice, and so on, one must be freed from it too. Problem being that that freedom would involve a form of scrutiny informed by the past; it would, in other words, by this standard, be nostalgic.

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Passing over this contradiction, then, is nostalgia and/or a longing for the familiar really so bad after all? Or might this kind of longing shed light on other paths of innovation and creativity? Some people associate our pathos and nostalgia with the ‘utopian impulse’. Breton, for one, said of utopias that “poets and artists in particular would be inexcusable if they tried to
guard against 'utopias', when the very nature of their creation leads them to draw, at least initially, from the vague realm where utopia reigns. In some instances, this utopia might prove fruitful in reality, thereby revealing itself as having been not such a utopia after all" (1993, 217). Given the argument that I have been developing throughout this paper — the inclusive, even innate, nature of being creative, of thought, of being dialogic — we should not let this idea of a utopia's everyday significance reside only with the poets and artists. The utopian impulse indicates the imbroglie of wishes and desires, facts and fetishes manifest in a person's vision — visions designers must respect and, with a fair amount of reserve, even cultivate. The leap being that they don't merely represent 'subjective' opinions, but place-based 'objective' knowledges. The sciences don't have exclusive claim to truth here. But, on the other hand, ideas are nevertheless suspect, given the conditions an individual has been exposed to. How does one distinguish 'thinking utopia' from imagination? If anything, the difference must lie in the sense that thinking utopia is an alternative which might transcend the 'dominant social imagination'. Therefore, it might actually lead to something new or reborn, something transformed and inventive. We must learn to listen to and live utopia, or 'critical utopias' (see Gardiner 1992).

The cosmopolitan agenda goes hand in hand with amnestic prescriptions handed down by a 'ruptured' modernism. I am again referring to the "temporal rupture . . . equivalent of a dogmatic expulsion" Serres (1995d, 50) and many others (notably Lefebvre, Foucault, Benjamin) treat as an 'epistemological break' that "gave rise to a style of ruptural thinking, and to an aesthetics of parallel incomprehensibilities" (Boyne 1998, 206.) There certainly are aspects of the past that are now 'outdated', as Hill said above, such as heavy reliance on the whole industrial paradigm of heat, its incumbent disregard for the law of diminishing returns, and so on. However, we must always remember this era. It does not only reveal what we have woefully abused, it teaches us what has been liberated by brutal warfare (how local problems are traded for global, etc.). In other words, this era that taught us thermodynamics also taught us about the deferment of violence to nature, to the local, to others too heterogeneous, and thus in need of purification. It helped constitute a politico-scientific world; it helped fulfill the 'social contract' and has now illuminated the necessity of a 'natural contract' (Serres, 1995b). Again, in a round about way, I am trying to demonstrate that merely discarding an era, an epic, an episode, because it is somehow distasteful or politically incorrect, is also to discard what it can teach, what can be reused, what should be avoided, and to a great degree, what we are.
CHAPTER 6: CONSIDERATIONS FOR A DESIGN METHOD

**Discerning and demarcating the boundaries**

Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries: in this is its seriousness and its significance; abstracted from boundaries, it loses its soil, it becomes empty, arrogant, it degenerates and dies.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1984, 301

Ideally: the adept designer identifies, challenges, transforms, and also creates boundaries. She does so by moving at the threshold between multiple disciplines, “at their junctures and points of intersection” (Bakhtin 1999, 103). Always situated within liminal spheres, and in the present where friction happens — between being or becoming, intellect and imagination, creating and passivity, facts and feelings, forms and functions — she learns to encounter, actively understand and evaluate the new and unfamiliar. It is from this always challenging orientation that she recognizes some boundaries repeated and discovers the new unrepeated, that she “participates in the whole [or the ‘dialogic event’, which is], as it were, repeatably unrepeatable” (ibid., 142). From here, dogmatic thinking can not preside, for “thought knows only conditional points; thought erodes all previously established points” (ibid., 162). Her active participation, her thought, is manifest as a perpetually differed process within a given field of procedure: in her intervention lays the recognition of multiplicity; and through her intervening, others will likewise find themselves on the boundaries, listening, seeing, altering, etc.

Therefore (too hasty a ‘therefore’, I admit), thought accompanied by the designer’s other faculties gives to what Mikhail Bakhtin once called a ‘vision of emergence’. I have aimed to show that cultivating this fullness of vision gives to a ‘vital rationality’ (Georges Canguilhem’s intriguing phrase, 1994) or an ‘empathetic imagination’ (Anne Whiston Spirn, 1998), which is fundamental to design as an inherently ‘dialogic’ endeavor. (Another route to enunciating this ideal may be found in the Greek root of “architecture” meaning to engender, to love.)

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Typically: however, the designer’s orientation today — particularly as mediated by the use of prevalent technology and ideology — recognizes and searches only for the ready-made, the familiar (that which has already been), thereby disallowing the revelation of new and unrepeatable realities. “Quite frequently,” the designer’s like the author’s “methods of explanation and interpretation are reduced to this kind of disclosure of the repeatable, to a recognition of the already familiar, and, if the new is grasped at all, it is only in an extremely impoverished and abstract form . . . . Everything that is repeatable and recognizable is fully
dissolved and assimilated solely by the consciousness [of this person, and] . . . he is in no way enriched. In what belongs to others he recognizes only his own” (Bakhtin 1999, 143). This form of enclosed, even ‘autistic’, orientation to the unfolding of new possibilities and relationships in a context or work, moreover, makes it impossible to comprehend the “work’s future life in subsequent repetition of centuries” (ibid., 4).

Should we consider vegetational growth in the same vein, then, the sustainability-minded planting designer, in his particular yet complex task, is basically successful to the extent that he can propagate the healthy growth of a plant community (within larger communities) in the long term, which implies the possibility of predicting myriad influxes of change, fraught with conflicting inertia, more or less appropriate to an ecology’s capacity for absorbing disturbance. (We should recall that Gregory Bateson evinced the buffering capacities in ecologies as comparable to those of our own psychologies, thus proving a necessary rapprochement between experiential and environmental being/becoming.) How, then, does violence in all its shapes and forms live on or perform? Can we, in this spirit, conceive of the regenerative life of caring or of love?

General principles or questions are helpful to the task at hand, although they open up difficult problems. If ‘low-entropy’ ecologies, such as a marsh, conceal contaminating, self-reinforcing and ultimately deleterious societal activities(outputs), should we use them as sinks? If a ‘high-entropy’ built environment destructively conceals ecological processes at work in a self-reinforcing pattern, do we use them at all?

We’re likely to answer in the positive to both questions today, at least in the short-term. But at the very least, one is provoked to probe for more holistic alternatives; one is ‘opened out’ to questioning only a rich interdisciplinarity can properly engage. In both questions, the designer’s (always ‘socio-ecological’, as Harvey posits) problems require the engagement with boundaries. On the boundaries, what potentials for ‘predation and parasitism’ (both human and nonhuman) might proliferate? On the boundaries, mixing and mashing of differences makes abstract dialectics appear dumb and disastrous. On the boundaries, friendship or the ‘possibility of community’ and the ‘possibility of loss’ happen simultaneously. Recall J.B. Jackson in *The Necessity for Ruins* (1980, 115):

The boundary creates neighbors; it is the symbol of law and order and permanence [and, we should add, of mimesis]. The network of boundaries, private as well as public, transforms an amorphous environment into a human landscape, and nothing more clearly shows some of the cherished values of a group than the manner in which they fix those boundaries, the manner in which they organize space. And, because these values change in the course of time, the organization of space also undergoes change.

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106
The more demarcation the better, but benevolent demarcation. Without border disputes. Cooperation. The existence of border zones (new trends and disciplines usually originate in them).

Mikhail Bakhtin 1999, 137

For an extended meditation on the cross-fertilization of internal and external boundaries between the author and his or her object of creation, see "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (1990), an early and pithy essay by Mikhail Bakhtin. I have not addressed the content of this essay with rigor, but believe that it unlocks enormous insight with regard to one’s creative and architectonic potential in relation to the material and living world — particularly, by way of introducing the properties of identification found in ‘transgressience’.136

Some considerations for an artistic-design method

One might assume that my effective ‘architectonic’ (or form-giving) goals should coincide with ‘design’ relative to its etymological roots: dessin, a “drawing, draft”; dessein, to have “purpose or plan”; désignâtre, “to mark out, point out, delineate, depict, contrive, designate,” and finally the more archaic and amorphous, “to have in mind or include as a matter of consideration” (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology 1966, 259 my emphasis).137 But do these organizing definitions fully capture the spirit of the task I have proposed above?

In ‘art’ one finds some overlap with ‘design’, their similar meanings "to put together, join, fit"; however, only in ‘art’ do we find the “dexterous, wily, craftily ingenious, skill in contriving an active participation” (ibid., 175, emphasis mine). By way of dealing with this inconsistency, I invoke a parallel controversy in the work of 'social' scientist, Bruno Latour, who, from my side, also seeks to stretch our ‘dialogic imaginations’ to include the “missing mass of morality” (Latour, 1992).

In Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies, Latour has distinguished the Greek’s “straight path of reason and scientific knowledge, episteme, from the clever and crooked path of technical know-how, metis” (1999b, 174). Where the former is commissioned to ‘mark out’ and ‘designate’ the latter is ‘craftily ingenious’. Where reason strives for a direct relation to reality, technique follows a curved path to its proposed destination. Technologies, however counter-intuitive this might sound at first, come ‘in between’, then; science defines a problem, technologies mediate to arrive at an outcome. Technologies participate by enabling a deviation from or circumventing a more direct procedure — an episteme — to help produce an outcome (but not always an expected one, and not usually a just one!). These are unrecognized if we stay within the box, so to speak, but are precisely what we need to navigate our existence.

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We should at this point deviate somewhat ourselves and visit an ancient story Serres recounts in *The Birth of Physics* — this, by way of comprehending what has been at stake during technological emergence (or evolution?) and its recurrent life or acting 'residual'. He writes of human adaptations in correspondence to local equilibrium: With the coming of an ice age, humans had to adapt. They built huts, fires, and killed animals for their skins. Each technique avoided a lot of shivering and huddling together for warmth. And each sparked irreversible changes to the larger culture-nature they'd grown accustomed to. The correctives had unforeseen effects: they would each prepare the ground of history with another set of 'reparations' or 'counterweights'. For example, "life in the hut and before the fire makes the body more sensitive, people no longer sleep out under the stars" (Serres 2000, 178). These people inevitably lost some of what the stars illuminate. A continuous struggle for isonomy inexorably engendered one deviation, compensation, and drift after another. Maneuvering with increasing techniques, the accretions built up, networks grew longer with new dependencies, new accruing debts to be paid or avoided with yet more technique, ad infinitum. . . (Actor Network Theory does its best to trace the networks or 'becomings' of technological/collective life that we might know better the tradeoffs in heterogeneous realms.)

Designers enroll technologies into culture-natures, thus inevitably complicating the 'networks', usually making them longer; and, however opaque our notion of 'equilibrium', we help set new trajectories for the local. Meantime, with the compensations based on increasingly unintelligible violence, local equilibrium is awash with 'noisy' residuals. Today immense accretion of residuals submerges 'equilibrium' so deeply in the subjective and/or objective manipulations of the world, that only by mobilizing all we can, can it even be glimpsed or imagined. (Recall the Latourian notion of 'subprograms' above, p. 72; also, the noted importance of utopic thought. These aspects are part of what is submerged with technological inundations.) Perhaps now more than ever, we cannot afford to lose our imaginations!

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Let us return to Latour's (etymological) analysis. He is looking to form an increasingly supple apparatus to discover, penetrate, and forthrightly recognize the mythico-technological "full-fledged social actors" animating our collectives, that they might be "housed in our intellectual culture" and be better understood for their active and often polemical character (ibid., 214). He does so not by way of arguing for their exclusion, but to include them in our so-called democracies.

Everywhere we find ourselves in possession of intensified human technical capacities which are as astounding as they are disturbing. The central task he foresees integrates these new capacities into the social and political order, understood as an interconnected and unfinalized whole. How, for example, does the infrastructure we build weigh in or have a vote, so to speak,
for the future of a place? What other technologies and kinds of labor will it enlist for its use and its maintenance? How will it be able to negotiate with other ecological and/or social constituents? Does it tend towards monologue or dialogue? What, or, better, who will its victims be?

I should mention in passing the shared and highly relevant argument of both René Girard and Bruno Latour, which demonstrates “the scientific model is no less mythical — more mythical, in truth — than many myths, since it makes a clean sweep of everything that could conjure up the victim” (Girard 2000, 183).

Accordingly, Latour attempts to follow and reveal the evolution of so-called ‘objects’ (and their incumbent ‘knowledges’) which will, to be sure, ‘conjure up the victim’. But this ambition is sticky and complex, in large part, because the associations between objects (or ‘quasi-objects’) and subjects (or ‘quasi-subjects’) are weighted differently, given the particular situation. In a more general sense, it means discerning in technique ritualistic foundations or, likewise, the consubstantial relation between ritual and knowledge.

Latour characteristically opts to borrow an invention from Serres, in order to somewhat disentangle himself, and operate with renewed (allegorical) assertiveness. In this case, Serres’s ‘pragmatogony’ neologism serves well to suggest a “mythical genealogy of objects” or, from my side, another ‘method of redemption’ reminiscent of Benjamin’s and Bakhtin’s interventions — all of which endeavor to account for a much larger cast of active characters (ibid., 309). Maria Assad points out, despairingly, that this is a “‘method’ which had been relegated long ago to the fictional, irrational, or emotive-intuitive spheres of perception” (1999, 164). But we are doing our best to mitigate this deplorable state of affairs, aren’t we?

Whence Latour commences with the production, the opaque curtains of reason are drawn, revealing ritualistic or historical ‘progress’: the impetuous and terrifying force of means manufacturing means, a treacherous storm “piling wreckage upon wreckage” (Benjamin 1969, 257). Stepping around and re-considering this devastation (but still not beyond an arguably reproachable elusiveness) Latour begins his wily magic: with typically comical narratives, and a paradoxical penchant for simple diagrams, he revamps our understanding of technical objects with his so-called ‘bag of tricks’ — then stands back and ... presto! he pulls from a ‘black box’ this astonishing idea: “objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed, they grow together, and they do so irresponsibly” (ibid., 175, 214).\(^*3\)\(^*8\) Latour’s use of a pragmatogony (a ‘method’ of accepting/mixing so-called subjective and objective knowledges) has contrived to creatively uncover the ‘life of the subject’. And if his audience takes him at his word, if they can stand to do more that clap or shrug their shoulders, the implications are of deep practical or political or moral importance (the point is, these categories must be accepted and accounted for together).

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Again, and only in passing, I want to mention that what is essentially at stake here is a point of contact Latour shares with other renowned contemporary ‘thinkers’ — each having worked hard to circulate “the power that incessantly reunites life to its form or prevents it from being dissociated from its form”, that we might reverse today’s “increasing atrophy of experience” and overcome the crushing “autonomous laws” that suffuse our cultural landscape with violence and ineptitude (Agamben 2000, 10; Benjamin 1968, 159; Bakhtin 1993, 7).

While caught up in comparison, I will also note here that Latour can be distinguished by his matter-of-fact, even ‘positive’ stance, regarding what Bakhtin bemoans: that “we are simply no longer in [the world of technology] as individually and answerably active human beings” (ibid. Bakhtin). Latour holds that, in any practical capacity, disentangling the human from the nonhuman is now virtually impossible. This is, in fact, one of his central and most controversial themes. “Do they mediate our actions? No, they are us,” and we need to invent “institutions that can absorb this much history” (Latour 1999b, 214). Latour and Serres, according to Whiteside in Divided Natures, “would not even concede that green theory is ultimately ‘human based’. In a symmetrical study [or one that irreversibly mingles society and nature], ‘human’ characteristics are so interwoven with ‘natural’ ones that such an assertion is no longer deemed meaningful” (2002, 114). The implications open outward in the most fascinating of ways.

You are different with a chainsaw in your hands as compared with an axe. Time moves along at a different pace, its intelligibility changes. Likewise, the chainsaw is different with you holding it: “You are another subject” because of what you hold; it is another object because “it has entered into a relationship with you” (Latour 1999b, 179). The “translation” or outcome, he says is thus “wholly symmetrical” (ibid.). This conception of hybrid performance does indeed make more complex, but I don't believe irreconcilable, Bakhtin’s notion of answerability. We have to know who or what we’re colliding with. How much room is there to maneuver or improvise? How fixed are the ‘scripts’, will they persevere, will they multiply our uncertainties?

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I cannot continue to delve into this new and exigent controversy, however. It’s perhaps more fitting to pick up with the one I began with: what are the connections we can draw between a proper notion of ‘design’ and Latour’s move to a ‘pragmatogony’ of practice? It would seem that this science studies theorist has marked out a new terrain, whereby our representations of what things are don't count as much as what they actually are in interaction with others. Associations, interactions, transformations, new configurations, how can we make sense of movement and change? We can begin by accepting and again embracing what seem to be ‘mistakes’, what may indeed be opportunities (and, need it be said, not just in the sciences).
‘Time’ renewed with a new vigor as one tenders propositions and inventions, as one aims to redeem the hidden and oft-suppressed potentials of everyday life, as one attempts to mobilize all faculties proper to the task of more life-sensitive design. Bruno Latour (among ‘others’) has demonstrated the active, meaning-filled and physical consequentiality of the non-human world, of collective society, and shown it to be so intertangled with one’s own ‘constitution’ that separations can no longer be made.

I believe in the ‘gravity’ of this assessment, but believe that through dialogue, through time, we still have ‘grace’. We still have the potential to ‘step aside’, to give without compensation, to receive and truly be human.

Like the archaic notion of ‘design’, Latour’s method (or epistemology) seeks to include as a matter of consideration all the performers on (and under) a stage. But this procedure takes a curved path and is ‘artistic’ in the sense that including others means a process of negotiation, a kind of induction that contrives an active participation (i.e. Daedalus’s ant induced into threading a shell’s labyrinth; 1999, 175) instead of another series of objectifications. Where design designates, therefore, it must do so artistically.

The idea of morality or being responsible has ‘thickened-up’, as Doug Patterson would say, because fixed concepts will no longer do. Now we must learn to comprehend transformations and make our best guesses with regard to combined tendencies. This is obviously extremely challenging. On the one hand, ‘risky’ explorations are the best, perhaps the only passage to invention, but accepting risk must mean accepting a responsibility to learn. Acting with precaution, with slow, sincere interventions also makes good sense; i.e. although some people stubbornly preserve skepticism regarding global warming, it’s better to be safe than ultimately sorry; we can bury toxic waste, but are the sealers, earth’s plates, etc., more stable or trustworthy than watching over it in carefully monitored environments (Latour 1999a)? We have to start asking difficult questions about who or what is going to act, on who’s behalf, at what costs (both experiential and environmental), and so on. We need to better negotiate and set up, rather than define and lay down (the law).

Again, I think landscape architecture (or whatever nomination this sort of practice takes) is poised to contribute in this capacity. In large part, because we already fancy ourselves as ‘scientist-artists’ (the best definition for ‘designer’ and ‘author’), who long to tell a good story, enlist a grand host of dialogic characters, and make the world a richer place to be. Our art-science is rooted in the ‘everyday’. We are, from this assessment, always already on the boundaries, precisely where the sparks of invention fly.
Conclusion: towards an ‘epistemology of invention’ for landscape architectural design

You have to invent a localized method for a localized problem. Each time you try to open a different lock, you have to forge a specific key, which is obviously unrecognizable and without equivalent in the marketplace of method.

Michel Serres 1995d, 92

Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of authoring (or designing, as I have argued) implies that one’s relative success in creating a ‘living whole’ is contingent on one’s ability to know or visualize and consummate (i.e. through his notion of transgression) heterogeneous actors. In Art and Answerability, he describes an “epistemological consciousness,” which “cannot have another consciousness outside itself, cannot enter into relation with another consciousness . . . this unitary consciousness creates and forms any matter it deals with solely as an object . . . aesthetic consciousness, on the other hand, is . . . lovingly consummated” (1990, 89 emphasis added). Bakhtin’s ‘aesthetic consciousness’ gives to Serres’s ‘epistemology of invention’.

We have looked at many examples of operative logics ‘at work’ in contemporary everyday life, busily materializing and separating what is whole in relation to time articulated by space. We have considered how inappropriately some boundaries are fixed while others are blurred, and above all, how some constructions perform with especially insidious effects on one’s consciousness for knowing and responding to others, both human and nonhuman, both local and global. The sometimes overwhelming outcome demonstrates that we suffer as a collective, which should be understood by seeing overlapping environmental and experiential conditions. The Knickerbocker Place analysis, for example, revealed a systematic commodification of our perceived desires to know or relate or imitate, which, through design, deteriorate our actual knowing by masking the work and deterioration of others, including the world itself.

Lost in a predominantly reified world is a wholeness of vision, once beautifully expressed by Goethe, Lucretius, Dostoevsky, and many other visionaries. These individuals created knowledge that stands the test of time, that is, of interconnected, socio-ecological, ‘great time’. They should live once more; we should not be satisfied with the historical, reified characterizations. The experience of reified reality means to be blinkered and bound in multiple ways, one’s vision disciplined or kept too narrow for the kind of authorship they produced. This thesis has explored how and why this happens, so as to break free and see with more breadth and depth the construction of contemporary realities. Inasmuch as this is accomplished in practice, one’s creations can grow closer to an art-science of invention. As Derek Gregory once told me, a bit too simplistically, one must know right-side-up if one is to turn something up-side-down. One only works ‘towards’ such a goal, however.
In the following, somewhat redundant, rather rudimentary listing, we can recall basic themes and/or principles elaborated in this paper, from which a Bakhtinian or Serresian approach to invention might occur in the realm of landscape architectural design:

1) Re-cognize the fullness of time(s) in the unfinished everyday lifeworld as potentially liberative and/or repressive, potentially inscrutable and/or intelligible.

2) Re-cognize the emergence and mobilization of nature into culture, how all entities’ hi-stories variously open and mingle during their ongoing collective performance, as key to the transformation of any context, of any ‘nature-culture’; we thus comprehend facts, actors and actants mobilized into interaction, not as they might miraculously appear, but as entities which affect literacies and agencies or capacities for change.

3) Re-cognize all constructions as if there is no difference between natural and social assemblages, which liberates or makes relevant innumerable other languages for contemplating the becoming or performance of things in a collective.

4) Re-cognize contingency between experiential and environmental crises and, in so doing, value the exquisitely perceptive beings that we are, while problematizing the mediators and technologies, which replace our intimate participation in everyday life.

5) Re-cognize the degree to which we can and do know how things are enrolled into the production of space (and do their own enrolling or creating of intermediaries) as fundamental to facilitating dialogic conditions.

6) Re-cognize the possibility of creations, which push understanding to an illuminating summit, which produce reactions that bypass or exceed intellectual appraisal, leaping from reading/experiencing to ineffable feeling, in a movement that compels an intense apprehension of truth; and re-cognize our responsibility to be faithful to this truth, to not betray it, and yet to not force it upon others.

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The artistic-science of the designer, as tendered throughout our work here, departs from today’s ubiquitous officialdom, from pervasive modes of suppressing local variations, which make us blind to the richly various actualities of the material and meaning-full worlds. In other words, the designer is cognizant of and actively resists how thoroughly the suppression of ‘noise’ has been incorporated into the foundations of modern thought and practice. Using all of her faculties, she enters into a pluralistic journey, that she might better seek an ‘aesthetic consciousness’, appreciative of the empirical differences or local turbulences resonant in everyday life. She moves adroitly among ‘subjects’ and attempts to see how they, likewise, “participate in the becoming of the world” (Prigogine and Stengers 1983, 145). She feels or hears their kinds of momentum. In so doing, she ascertains how things are built and begins to comprehend differences between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ constructions (Latour 2002), those which are
fertile with possibility and those which tend otherwise in a given context.

Making such assessments, however arduous, is crucial to her task. It means ceaselessly trying to understand how 'noise' interacts around and through various constructions. She has a sense that positive or negative effects on a locality have to do with the overall stability of systems, the kind of feedback loops at work, the amounts and kinds of noise injected, and when injections occur. Thus, she develops a complex 'sense of scale'.

Even more challenging, but never separate from her aesthetic consciousness, is the 'practice of making' inherent in the notion of design. Aggregates and boundaries (while developing and dissolving) must be actively understood, and they must also be manipulated or created — but 'benevolently'.

The degree of appropriateness or adeptness with which assessments are made and put into motion parallels the degree to which she is being responsible. The designer's process is fragile: it freshly respects differences, while being open to similarities. It is best done through intimate and ongoing exposure to the everyday lifeworld for which she is responsible. In this way she is more able to be transgredient or conceive of conditions for other participants, who also require intimate intercourse with the places in which they dwell. Emphasis on knowing the local means, in part, recalling that 'a' in a construction, in a truth, in, moreover, Christopher Alexander's A Pattern Language.

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The designer's task is 'to help invent conditions for life'. The entities (or different constructions) she enlists for building will themselves act through transformations with others.
They will vary by way of their correspondence with others, their nuanced way of reacting during the ongoing movement of time.

She invigorates her own sense of accountability, her own sense of redemption, as a method for firing up and reinvigorating the fields now overgrown with invasive, homogenizing fury. Her work seeks to make the most of what is available, to enrich it all, to make it once again combustible (for others), to make it flourish with laughter, to disturb the fury, as Venus disturbed Mars (Serres 2000). Only then may more of the noise be made into more of the harmony.

Some interactions are more harmonious, some more noisy: “Harmony is increasing or decreasing in inverse proportion to the noise and the fury” (Serres 1995a, 128). We hear noise now through a daunting array of channels (the ozone’s openings, the voices of terror, the diseases, the murmuring and screams of the downtrodden).

Endeavoring to grasp interactive tendencies towards transformation, now local, now global, therefore, has become an extremely complex venture, one that is never finalized, and one which nonetheless must be sustained. Diligence to this condition, to this way of being or hearing or seeing, is fundamental to any pretensions of ‘healing’. (Recall that Alexander correctly conjoins ‘healing’ and ‘designing’.)

Our challenges are such that only through a proper co-mingling of the humanities and the sciences, only through a revived artistic-science or epistemology of invention, will our tools for ascertaining and articulating new and more healthy realities become possible. We will learn to celebrate the co-mingling of our comprehensions, left and right hemispheres, masculine and feminine, humans and nonhumans, and so on... recognizing that the hybrid nature of existence is indeed the state of things. Discovery through courage, precision, and oscillating balance (not crude dialectical procedure) is fundamental to the task. Mixing and yet respecting, thriving on apparent contradiction, the adept designer knows, creates, and lives...
SOURCES CONSULTED


Griffith, B. “Return to the Centre: Marriage between East and West, and The Tree of Life.” In *The Ecologist* 30 (January 2000): 9-12.


**Literary Sources and Poetry Consulted**


**ENDNOTES**

1 (p. 2) While working as a teaching assistant in design studios, occasionally a good comment during project critiques was to point out the appeal of referential remarks that avoid beginning with 'my' and 'I'. I would dutifully add that this nebulous gesture may only appeal to certain situations, subtly feels pretentious among some audiences.

I've often wondered how the other students responded to this suggestion: Did they consider it evasive to talk around a proposal, an object, without claiming some sort of ownership? Or did the infused quality of the object — its potential, its plurality, its 'taking-place' — suggest to them otherwise? Who might have considered the expropriation of one's identity a way to appropriate belonging itself? Did some of the students consider this speaking as a collective, as 'we', a way to open up interpretation around an object (to begin moving it to the status of a subject)? Perhaps it at least provoked slight hesitation with regard to how something becomes (or is reduced to) a concept — perhaps even how this concept performs to prolong and to multiply certain interpretations. Who might have (speciously) reasoned that the gesture is simply being other than what one is? Was I, from their side, promoting a disingenuous glaze of humility — or perhaps an aesthetic strategy for avoiding issues of commitment, responsibility, and authenticity — or precisely the opposite? Was this advice (passed down to me from others) understood in the light of efforts to democratize language (a striving to be less official and authoritative)? Was it set to make one PC — politically correct or a perfunctory copier — or in tune with the times? If so, was the basic social tone ignored and replaced, as such, by trivial, flat and abstract stylistics, slippery, shallow, and curtailed to assumptions about a general receptivity?

The 'singular acting plural' although an important ideal, may not be a hard and fast principle for practice. In the context of group conflict resolution, for example, a facilitator may insist on participants using "I" as a way to acknowledge one's own role or stake in a dialogue. This approach is usually intended to curb the blaming of others and, in turn, emphasize everyone's involvement and necessary cooperation. Eventually, as the dialogue matures, however, a collective consciousness begins to evolve and "we" takes on the greatest force. We don't ever completely see eye to eye of course.
One might raise the problem that speaking on the behalf of others would always seem
to be more or less tinged with violence, given the nature of language and its concealment of
pure experience and/or difference. Just as the various notions of a "people are more or less
successful masks of factum pluralitatis" or the simple fact that humans form a community, "it
is only by breaking at any point the nexus between the existence of language, grammar,
people, and state that thought and praxis will be equal to the tasks at hand" (Agamben 2000,
70). It would seem, then, one's proper articulation through design necessitates poetic facility,
not the mere (however important) acknowledgment of multiple authorship as a mask of "we",
as such, but the place of sharing through creating change. As suggested above, the use of
"we" may at the very least, and for the time being, spark important questioning of otherwise
tact assumptions.

2 (p. 2) Bear in mind that in 'everyday' practice, social interaction should not here
interpreted as binary, that is, either there is interaction or there is not. Rather, participants
position themselves along a continuum of involvement — from highly involved to relatively
uninvolved. We should therefore be concerned with the ways things tend to be with others.

Concern for everyday interactions means concern for 'answerability', the guarantor of
connections — of science, art, and life — internal to the constituent elements of a human
being (Bakhtin 1990, 2). It is not a matter of whether, but how different actors (and entities)
question and respond, how they're mutually answerable and also mutually liable to blame
(ibid.). What are their proclivities in so doing? How do designers (the authors and co-authors
of changing content in the built environment) begin to appreciate these concerns? Only in the
heterogeneous realm of the everyday are such questions really engaged as enmeshed with
Being.

I'll argue that as one aims to be answerable, in a broad sense, one aims to be
responsible. One's dialogic capacity lies in the very adeptness through which one interacts
with all one's faculties, in the gauging of what/who emerges through building and what/who
one affects. We are all answerable to others for the plurality our meaning. Meaning only
happens with others. By turning away from answerability, monologic proclivities increasingly
impinge on the potentialities of being-with-each-other.

3 (p. 3) In "Theory as Practice: Foucault's Concept of Problematization," Roger Deacon
summarizes 'problematization' as that "which is concerned with how and why, at specific
times and under particular circumstances, certain phenomena are questioned, analyzed,
classified, and regulated, while others are not" (1990, 127). Following the Foucauldian side of
Edward Soja (1989, 105), 'problematization' accords that "We must be consistently aware of
how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline
are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life."

4 (p. 3) Michel Serres goes as far as suggesting "science's rise to power supposes such
a level of recruitment that soon, all-powerful, it creates a vacuum around itself. Which is the
reason for the sudden decline of all the surrounding areas of culture — the humanities, arts,
religion, even the legal system" (1995d, 87). While contending with this interconnected world
(in which, for example, both nature and nurture always co-mingle, neither absolutely
dominant), the vacuum metaphor is powerful because everything with life seems to be saying
"nature abhors vacuums."

5 (p. 5) The absence of imagination would for Antiquity, according to Giorgio Agamben,
leave experience "sterile and ineffective" [that is, in terms of the creation of knowledge;
physical ramifications persist regardless of the relative emptiness or fullness with which we
comprehend and celebrate existence]: "the imagination which is now expunged from
knowledge as 'unreal', was the supreme [premodern] medium of knowledge" (1993a, 24).
Following Agamben's proposition for us, then, the true experience of language (and likewise
the potentiality emergent in building and design) presumes mediation of the imagination.
At this juncture, the metaphor of the craftsperson at the threshold works quite well — the laboring artist, iteratively re-configuring the entrance to a cathedral (fluctuating between authoritative and personal voices), exhausting or expending one’s self creatively — a ‘formal’ (in the original sense of the word) metaphor proper to design, opening the way for ‘meaning-full’ dialogue with the world and with the sacred.

‘Thinkers’ because those primarily invoked in my writing are concerned with thought, but should not be isolated in the (conventional) realm of philosophy, since thought is itself wider, closer to practice, and less technical. I have aspired to think with their thought and to convey meaning, more than to explain it by tracing the causes reconstituting its original context. This desire to go downstream rather than upstream, and to stay in the realm of ideas, does not imply that I would consider the opposite choice illegitimate; it is simply not part of my present project. (Perhaps one would argue the reversal, that indeed this approach is going upstream, in the sense that it is seeking syntheses rather than separations.)

Paradoxically, as Serres puts it, “we conceive of time as an irreversible line . . . of acquisitions and inventions. We go from generalizations to discoveries, leaving behind us a trail of errors finally corrected — like a cloud of ink from a squid. ‘Whew! We’ve finally arrived at the truth’ (1995d, 48).

What seems to be something irrational is, in the eyes of the scientist, a phenomenon on the frontier of science; this is how phenomena appear on that border where science finds applications to practice. What occurs in practice as the unexpected and mostly undesirable consequences of the application of science is seen as something altogether different from the irreducible irrationality of chance. According to the essential character of science, then, this presents nothing more than a task for further research. The progress of science is sustained by its continual self-correction. And practice which is passed on the application of science likewise requires that science further and further improve, by continual self-correction, the reliability of the expectations placed upon it.

Should it be argued that we cannot escape this general pattern of obfuscation when striving to create knowledge, it would seem, then, at the barest minimum, such endeavors should embrace a rigorous ethic of moderation. This idea and the situation laid out above will be developed in this paper.

Proof of this contention is exemplified by combining communication theory and geometry within the section devoted to introducing Michel Serres, pp. 37-44.

What is meant by ‘capitalistically-defined’ is helpfully circumscribed by the following quotations:

Capitalism is represented as inherently spatial and as naturally stronger than the forms of noncapitalist economy (traditional economies, ‘Third World’ economies, socialist economies, communal experiments) because of its presumed capacity to universalize the market for capitalist commodities . . . . [Globalization as a function of the market accordingly] involves the violation and eventual death of ‘other’ noncapitalist forms of economy: ‘Capitalist production destroys the basis of commodity production in so far as the latter involves independent individual production and the exchange of commodities between owners or the exchange of equivalents’.

Timothy Mitchel 1998 cites Karl Marx 1977, 951

It is often said that the West’s great undertaking is the commercialization of the whole world. The hitching of the fate of everything to the fate of the commodity. That great undertaking will turn out rather to have been the aestheticization of the whole world — its
cosmopolitan spectacularization, its transformation into images, its semiological organization.

Jean Baudrillard 1993, 16

Underlying this model of economic growth is a blackboxing of the natural world as a storehouse of infinitely exploitable resources. For classical economics to work, Foucault declares, 'nature must be endowed with endless fecundity'.

Robert Markley 1999, 164 cites Foucault's The Order of Things, 1971, 199

We might, therefore, 'problematize' how the 'capital' in capitalistically-defined society functions in terms of the scales of change exerted on a locality from an outside, commoditizing force. Of course, this 'outside' is by now everywhere part of the 'inside' — and yet it always has been 'naturally' through the weather, etc. — making any such project based on the all interlocking phenomenon at work in the local-global functioning of a society. Exchange is inevitable. The scales of influence on a situation, if never comprehensive, must be better understood with regard to the absorptive capacities for change of the local.

13 (p. 12) Serres says of money that it will "channel violence, it carries it along and substitutes itself for it . . . [But we must wonder] "for how long" (1995a, 90)?

14 (p. 13) Bruno Latour has borrowed from semiotics the term 'actant' for the nonhuman, so as not to create confusion with humans as actors. Although this may, in fact, be exactly what Latour has done, if 'creating confusion' is understood as interrupting relations, mixing categories, and showing much like Bakhtin has that "separateness and simultaneity are basic conditions of existence" (Holquist 1990, 20 emphasis added). Latour has challenged the establishment(s) with network theory to construct increasingly sophisticated and increasingly sensitive knowledges and adaptations. His is a practical project of survival, following an aspiration to discern what mechanisms underpin our productions (including the activities of nonhumans) and what they will give rise to.

I'm working from the contention that design practices will be dialogically successful to the degree that they also rigorously attempt to discern what their productions come from and give rise to. This line of argument may sound like a return to modernist logics of determinism. Determinism is not compatible with dialogism though, in that the later plunges one into constant interaction and constant struggle, whereas the former has been criticized for stagnating or overly-simplifying categories of discourse. One conceptual compromise (which is too easy at this point) is the notion of 'tendency' — which is especially helpful through Deleuze's animation of Bergson's notion of tendency in Bergsonism (1988).

What tendencies of perception and ecological assimilation (or dealing with disturbance) might a pre-manufactured and opaquely alien context have, as compared to a context based on slower, well-rooted, forms of participation and interaction? This issue has been raised in design discourses — to be sure, see Alexander, Lynch, Relph, J.B. Jackson — but from my perspective, they have not adequately dealt with issues of epistemology which, if not problematized, lead one down various ideological avenues that will fork, again, and leave out complexity so as to maintain their own preeminence. "Both everyday worlds and technical subworlds seem to go on their knowledge-producing and knowledge-assessing ways without the benefit of such theories [those of ongoing rapprochement]" (Shapin 1999, 1). The primary thinkers of this thesis ceaselessly introduce conditions for understanding and articulation. Exclusion will amount to objective violence. The idea of subjectivity becomes dubious.

For Michael Gardiner (1998), two epistemological tendencies amount to the difference between 'utopian' verses 'critical utopian' endeavors — where the later celebrate, first and foremost, an unfinalized questioning, so as to minimize violence in irreversible time. The former, conceptualizes a perfect future (or past) where stable categories mitigate disturbance (where it is not chaos that gives rise to order, but order which gives rise to order).
Other design theorists similarly perceive this critique and the scrutiny of epistemology it suggests, for example: "The most overarching of the current metaphors is ecology. In the words of Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan, 'It is time to stop designing in image of the machine and start designing in a way that honors the complexity of life itself... we must mirror nature's deep interconnections in our own epistemology of design'" (Ellin 1996, 3). Through thinkers like Latour, I'm inclined to push this idea somewhat farther in the sense that a 'symmetrical' perspective sees "the possibility of metaphor disappearing in every sphere," to borrow Baudrillard's phrase (1993, 8) because distinctions between subject and object, culture and nature, etc., collapse under this 'trans-' perspective. While introducing the chronotope, Bakhtin said as much long ago, referring to the "not quite metaphorical" correlation between Einstein's physics and certain poetics (1998, 84).

Douglas Paterson, in "Sustainability and the Public Realm: Learning from Agriculture and its Sense of the Civic: Strategies for the Chesapeake Basin" (1997), suggests these crises are interdependent: "one cannot be solved without also solving the other. In the environmental crisis we are all aware of our growing inability to sustain our future. In the experiential crisis we witness a fragmentation of self, community, and sense of the civic." He goes on to suggest that the civic nature of past agriculture societies serves as a potential model for future sustainable community development. Here I want to repeat another quote written in very much the same vein: "Nonhistorical [vernacular] action is not only more common among the world's people, it is more moral. Our salvation abides in the darkness" (Glassie 1999, 8).

Alexander discerns overlap or symmetry, saying: "there is no difference between ornamental order and functional order. We learn to see that while they seem different, they are really only different aspects of a single kind of order" (2001, 22). He says later, "the different degree of life we observe in every different part of space is not merely an artifact of our cognition but is an objectively real physical phenomenon in space which our cognition detects" (ibid., 64).

Moreover, 'technology' for many people, resembles how we deal with 'death' as Derrida puts it: "the obsessional fascination that makes us lose sight of the battle for a better life, and the evasion toward fantasies of consolation (narcissism) or compensation (mortifying behavior)" (1993, 58).

Furthermore, objectification can create, write Morson and Emerson (1989, 19), a "blind faith in...technical' systems and laws, unfolding according to their own immanent logic... [which] 'can from time to time invade the singular unity of life like an irresponsibly terrifying and destructive force' (Bakhtin 1993, 87)." "The most appropriate metaphor for modernity is rape" says Banuri (1994, 7), "rape of nature, of the body politic, of vulnerable minorities, as much as that of women, both literal and metaphorical... This is happening to me and I feel violated."

The exact sciences are a monological form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates a thing and speaks of it. Here, there is only one subject, the subject that knows (contemplates) and speaks (utters). In front of him there is only a voiceless thing. But the subject as such cannot be perceived or studied as if it were a thing. Since it cannot remain a subject if it is voiceless; consequently, there is no knowledge of the subject but dialogical.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1974, 363

"The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several
individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event" (Bakhtin 1984, 21). We will return to this idea with care to not avoid its translation into so-called cosmopolitan procedures for creating 'place' today in design circles. The Knickerbocker Place case study will best bring to the surface this problem of misinterpretation and eventual homophony rather than polyphony. Our architectonics have learned by turning away from the collective, from its 'constituent members' as Blanchot would say. Serres writes that "the collective is not an architectonic, or, rather it is an unfinished architectonic surrounded by noise" (1995a, 124). The better we hear noise the better we are.

21 (p. 16) The following quotations help position several important thinkers in relation to predominant forms of rationalism, which seek to contain and stabilize dynamic interactions within abstract systems of classification and order:

- It is a sad misunderstanding, the legacy of rationalism, that truth can only be that sort of truth that is put together out of general moments, that the truth of a proposition is precisely what is repeatable and constant in it.
  Mikhail Bakhtin 1993, 110

- He could live on simple and easy chains, but he is horrified by the complex. He does not understand that chance, risk, anxiety, and even disorder can consolidate a system. He trusts only simple, rough, causal relations; he believes that disorder always destroys order. He is a rationalist, the kind we just spoke of. How many of these rough political rats are there around us? How many of them break things they don't understand? How many of these rats simplify? How many of them have built such homogeneous, cruel systems upon the horror of disorder and noise.
  Michel Serres 1982, 14

- Viewed from the heights of reason, all life looks like some malignant disease and the world like a madhouse.
  Johan Van Goethe

- I mistrust all systematizers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.
  Fredrick Nietzsche

22 (p. 16) For the designer, then, as for the participant, we all co-author (conditions for) experience. It is from this standpoint that I would argue the principle of infinite possibilities in textual interpretation, rather that closing in on the text itself, (the perhaps dubious proposition of) its endless plurality, its internal contradictions, and so on, as deconstructionists do too well.

23 (p. 16) Leland Deladurantaye, in diacritics 30.2 (2000) page 20, cites Nietzsche in his discussion of "Agamben's Potential":

- In accord with the entire history of Western humanity hitherto, and in accord with the interpretation of beings that sustains that history, we are all too accustomed to thinking purely and simply in terms of actualities, to interpreting in terms of the actual (as presence, ousia). For this reason we are still unprepared, we feel awkward and inadequate, when it comes to thinking possibility, a kind of thinking that is always creative.

24 (p. 18) But there are many kinds of chronotope, many representations of space-time. The one unfolding here evokes (however confusedly) a transdisciplinary comprehension during an era of so-called modernity where all categories of experience — i.e. realms of male and female, public and private, local and global, economics and politics, culture and nature — are known as thoroughly interfused. My writing is a product of the (seemingly increasingly undifferentiated) world I’m living in. My revelations are collective with my era. Bakhtin is especially interested in why different narrative chronotopes become inadequate, and how new ones develop as social and cultural circumstances change.
He opens ways to discuss how assumptions about time condition narrative forms, how narratives reconstruct experience, how characters' temporality shapes their perceptions, how multiple senses of time can be at play in a single text, and how the process of reading reshapes texts. By working out crucial connections between time, perception, and language, he suggests that questions about time are fundamental for studies of both texts and experience.

Within any narrative, he explains in a crucial passage (1998, 252), several chronotopes may be at work:

Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships . . . . The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word) . . . (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. And all these worlds are chronotopic as well.

25 (p. 18) Attitudes can 'perform', for example, by preventing those in power from perceiving or resolving a crisis. A familiar problem today.

26 (p. 18) The reader is 'multiplicitous' from Bakhtin's standpoint because he or she is 'heteroglot in nature' (a culmination of life experience, which nuances one's language, and so on, giving to a unique individual with unique, uncertain responses to others). Michel Foucault in The History of Sexuality says this somewhat differently: humans (like nonhumans) are imbricated in a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (1990, 92).

27 (p. 19) This generalized approach allows us to, for example, traverse the extraordinary terrain of a Michel Serres or an Italo Calvino, and then more fully appreciate and adeptly react to historic cycles of attraction and accretion, as in the build-up of urban spaces (see Rome 1990 or Invisible Cities 1974), layered with the wax and wane of violence or order(ing)s. These writers are ahead of most others, not by being successful in popularity, rather by following their own line, a line of active flight, a constantly shifting line zigzagging beneath the surface.

28 (p. 20) I should like to here again extend another thank you to Joni Palmer, for her continued temperate and tender support.

29 (p. 20) This sort of statement, harking back to old debates concerning immanent aesthetic categories, kicks up a whole lot of fuss today, and rightly so, in the wake of efforts to defend difference and/or subjectivities from the triumphs of 'colonializations' (of both consciousness and space), progressivist linear dynamics of the sciences translated into technologies and even into the social sciences, the ensuing debasement of the humanities, and so on. Although helpful for seeing how impoverished these colonizing logics have been, we are only left with "quite simply what there is. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences . . . . The whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question — and it is an extraordinarily difficult one — is much more that of recognizing the Same" (Badiou 2001, 25).

Many answers have been given in so many words for the transformations from 'beautiful' to 'ugly', most of which have not acknowledged the complexity of the question, in part, because of their discursive isolations. They have ranged from brutal attacks against certain domains of progress-thinking/action to attacks against holding esteem for the unnamable quality itself. Those that have resonated with me are radical by definition; they have investigated the roots of cultural and/or ecological transformations through space-time, and have posited tendencies relevant to situated design-thinking (among all other realms of human life).
I am, to note in passing, struggling with the idea of positioning one's self as 'non-modernist': meaning in the negative, the abandonment of modern, progress-laden agendas, as well as so-called postmodern states of apathy and collapse under the weight of ultimately undifferentiating forces, blinded by the kaleidoscope strobe of differences in a post colonial world of displacement, guilt and alienation, full with prognoses more often than not perpetuating, even accelerating, the inertia of mechanical, unsympathetic regimes. The heterogeneous form of this essay speaks to this profound ambivalence or struggle.

Bakhtin and Serres attracted my attention because they have both espoused to present a heterogeneous language to deal with our crises, one that tries to acknowledge all beings acting together, or as Badiou would say the 'all-together-one'. They overlap experiential and environmental phenomenon by seeing the truth in both literary and scientific realms (their contingencies and fecund correspondences). In so doing, they also efface epistemological breaks in both disciplinary categories and, more importantly, in time (see note 16).

30 (p. 20) Christopher Alexander refers to the quality without a name, something too specific to be defined with words because words are too broad: “Imagine the quality without a name as a point, and each of the words which we have tried as an ellipse. Each ellipse includes this point. But each ellipse also covers many other meanings, which are distant from this point” (A Timeless Way, 1979). Cherishing this quality amounts to cherishing the poetic and the search for a ‘feeling of fitness’ (Notes on the Synthesis of Form, 1964) within the flux and ambiguity of a larger whole. Another metaphor, that of an eclipse, reveals this uncertain and dialectical feeling upon encountering the poetic: imagine the penumbra, which removes one from the night and the day at the same time. It surrounds and adjoins things which exist to a lesser degree.

31 (p. 22)

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) — they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time.

Mikhail Bakhtin 1986, 170

Past and future time may be ‘borrowed’ to enlarge a present, just as we ‘borrow’ outside space to enlarge a small locality . . . . An environment that facilitates recalling and learning is a way of linking the living moment to a wide span of time. Being alive is being awake in the present, secure in our ability to continue but alert to the new things that come streaming by. We feel our own rhythm, and feel also that it is part of the rhythm of the world. It is local time, local place, and our own selves are secure that we are ready to face challenge, complex city, vast space, and the enormous future.

Kevin Lynch 1972, 88-89

32 (p. 24) Not to give the impression that everyday exertion of agencies between actors is or should ever be completely black and white: scripts bend all the time and sometimes break into the totally unexpected. But we shouldn’t stop here with some lackadaisical notion of freedom, but realize that freedom can indeed be hampered by performing abstractions.

Logics that operate as though representations are pure, not mixed or complex, define and produce ‘dumb objects’ according to Martin Krieger (1994). Objects which, in turn, act dumb. Krieger tests gender as a metaphor for the state of difference (or the ground of reality), by claiming “Male (or Female) is not sharply defined at the edges and does not have a center.” He then makes a link to scientific ‘dumb’ objects or “fetishes: parts separated out
from a whole that is the physical universe . . . marking off the world, and so force a situation into boundedness . . . a 'toy' world. Such a strategy of creating dumb individual objects leads to their potency, since the part is still attached to [the] world from which it has been pulled out or alienated" (ibid., 110-111). "Dumbness is retained . . . at the cost of recognizing the productivity of nature in its various kinds of elementarity" (ibid. 116). "As a matter of course," then, "dumbness will be extended through new properties" (ibid. 113). "Dumb objects are meant or designed to be combined: to be added up demographically much as integers are added up, or to be cumulated as bricks are stacked, or interdigitated as parts of a clockwork are put together, or to be structured as computer commands are put together into a program . . . If the objects are not very interactive, and they ought not to be if there is to be dumbness, then they should be additive or composable" (ibid. 114). Even among so-called dumb objects, fragmented actors, laminar flows, and so on, we see through complexity theory intelligent things occur — the clinamen, agglutinations, turbulence, life. And yet dumbness is still retained, its characterization has changed somewhat (ibid. 115). We should be inclined to struggle against the downward slope of dumbness, nevertheless, climbing upward, seeking negentropy, symbiosis, communicability, and so on (Serres). To do so, following the key thinkers in this thesis and Krieger (a physicist and professor of planning at the University of Southern California) suggests that we must listen to the humanities: "as far as I can tell, humanistic scholarship and criticism is of an entirely different sort: here, there is an infinity of discoverable properties, with few yes-no questions, and many that are inbetween, ambiguous, and polysemous” (ibid. 116).

33 (p. 24) See Diadalos: Architecture, Art, Culture. 74 (October) 2000, for an examination of the diagram as employed by numerous, successful architects for the primary property of its openness, ambiguity, its sense of life.

Also, I owe Doug Patterson for teaching me more about the nature of drawing as another sort of dialogue between the head and the hands. Christopher Day once wrote, "as a general rule, it is easier to make a firm curve out of straight lines and a life-filled straight line out of curves (that is, drawn by the hand and arm which tend to radial movements)” (1990, 67). In merely drawing by hand, we are more in touch with the nature of the universe, the curve of atoms that give to unfinalized turbulence and life.

34 (p. 24) I'm not quite comfortable with the notion ‘appropriation’ as circulated in the design realm, even though it carries similar connotations to the above text, because of its associations with ownership. To be in dialogue with others, whether human or not seems to be more about setting free, continuing, and suspending definition, rather than marking territory. Marks, like difference, will exist always, it’s what happens in between them that is important.

35 (p. 25)
One aspect of the transformation of a natural object, a stone, to an object of art is closely related to our impact on matter. Artistic activity breaks the temporal symmetry of the object. It leaves a mark that translates our temporal dissymmetry into the temporal dissymmetry of the object. Out of the . . . nearly cyclic noise level in which we live arises music that is both stochastic and time-oriented . . . Today we know that time is a construction and therefore carries an ethical responsibility.

Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers 1984, 312

36 (p. 25)
Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole — there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance . . .
A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes “dialogization” when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute.

Dialogue may be external (between two different people) or internal (between an earlier and a later self).

Mikhail Bakhtin 1981, 426-7

37 (p. 25) Deleuze claims, during his seminal discussion of Bergson:

True freedom lies in the power to decide, to constitute problems themselves. And this semi-divine power entails the disappearance of false problems as much as the creative upsurge of true ones. “The truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of finding the problem and consequently of positing it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up; The only thing left to do is to uncover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. Discovery, or uncovering, has to do with what already exists, actually or virtually; it was therefore certain to happen sooner or later. Invention gives being to what did not exist; it might never have happened . . . . The stating and solving of the problem are here very close to being equivalent: The truly great problems are set forth only when they are solved”.

Gilles Deleuze 1988, 15-16

38 (p. 20) In Foucault’s words what is important here is the openended representation of “fields that render intelligible an otherwise heterogeneous collection of events” (see Markley 1999, 156).

39 (p. 25)
The moment of cognition in all its uniqueness is what constitutes the event as aesthetic. The realization of co-being is the ability to cognize the world we inhabit by living aesthetically. To put it bluntly, if we do not live aesthetically, the world, as such, cannot be actively cognized.

Peter Hitchcock 2000, 9

40 (p. 26)
I have suggested that living structure lies at the core of all life. This living structure is in the very mathematics of space. It is a discernible, countable, and measurable quality, which arises — for structural reasons that concern only the appearance of centers, all of them differentiated structures — in space itself.

Christopher Alexander 2001, 443

41 (p. 21) The implications of this epistemological current are of utmost importance to those arguments centered around contextualist and integrationalist ‘pragmatics’, as shown in Cary Wolf’s Critical Environments, 1998b. They also hearken Henri Bergson’s mobilization of intuition into mathematical operations (see Deleuze’s Bergsonism, 1988).

42 (p. 26)
Now, in the terminology of this cosmology, Alexander requires the city to exhibit continuing wholes, provide intense lures for feeling, and establish ‘places’ as centers of meaning.

Joseph Grange, 69-70

43 (p. 27) Serres warns us in Detachment about the “comparison, from which comes all evil of the world” (1989, 68). Comparing is an art he appears to have mastered, however; it is arguably the most fundamental component of his method for discovery (as explicitly dealt with, see Conversations, 1995d), and yet it is also an incredibly tenuous balancing act requiring an ethic of facilitation and ceaseless resistance to abstraction and fetishization.
Harris suggests Serres’s “basic modus operandi requires that” all knowledge circulates in an encompassing ecology. ‘Things’ in this ecology, such as philosophical concepts, literary texts, and scientific theories, are configured as topologies... This method enables one to move fluidly from ‘within’ the text to mobilizing the text in some larger web of relations” (1997, 46). Reading Bakhtin in such a way concurs with his article “Methodology for the Human Sciences” (1986).

Serres says of chaos that it is absolutely ‘open’:

It gapes wide, it is not a closed system. In order to code, one has to close, in order to class, one has to define, or shut off with a boundary. Chaos is patent. It is not a system, it is multiplicity. It is multiple, unexpected... Look how much trouble we have thinking or seeing it. The whole of our reason protests—I mean logically. Our whole classified rationality, all the coding, habits and methods, lead us to speak in externals or negations: outlaw and nonsense. But I say positive chaos. Spinoza does not say otherwise: determination is negation. Indetermination is the positive, and yet we express it with a negative word [chaos]... Instead of being excluded, rejected, confusion becomes an object, it enters the realm of knowledge, it enters into its movement... [Of reasoning] I understand finally why death, so often, is its result, its outcome or consequence and why hatred is, so frequently, its driving force. And why rationalism comes under the heading of the sacred, why rationalists are priests, busily ruling out, cleaning up the filth, expelling people, purifying bodies or ideas. Behold the positive chaos, the casting mold, the matrix. And behold the pure possible.

Michel Serres 1995a, 98-9

Ken Hirschkop may, in fact, posit a distinction between Bergson and Bakhtin that is helpful towards making a better distinction between how Alexander and Bakhtin, likewise, treat the notion of ‘life’: “Neither does Bakhtin criticize theory and science in the name of ‘life’ in the manner of Bergson and Nietzsche, for ‘philosophy of life’ rejects culture in the name of an equally blind and irresponsible devotion to biological impulse and intuition” (1999, 151). This is somewhat backed up by the idea that “like Lynch, Alexander remains too tightly bound to the metaphor of the organism” (Grange, 70). Joseph Grange makes this critique, however, without imagining that the character of meaning might in fact resemble the character of the organism — more or less supple in a particular environment, perpetuated by the sacrifice of others, and so on.

The questions and suspicions raised in this section underlie most of the issues explored in this thesis. The paucity of Alexander henceforth and the move towards the humanities will become more explicit and defensible as this writing progresses. There is an array of caveats and reservations I have passed over with regard to the questions raised here, but now is not the time to elaborate on them. Suffice to say, my reading of Alexander in particular may not be as open as it should be. I owe his work a great debt as an affirmative influence and a partial impetus for this research. The other design theorist who has significantly impacted my thinking, but left curiously silent through most of this thesis is Kevin Lynch (see my BLA thesis, 1996, examining ancient design sensitivities in the cultural landscape of Lijiang, China). I’m happy to tacitly reaffirm their ideas (and hope that my readership will appreciate these connections); and when our thinking might run counter, I’m not especially interested in pointing this out (although I understand that most readers gravitate towards such modes of comparison, which is why they’re given a small taste in the present, introductory section).

It follows that we are always right, for the simple, banal, and naïve reason that we are living in the present moment. The curve traced by the idea of progress thus seems to me
to sketch or project into time the vanity and fatuousness expressed spatially by that central position.

Michel Serres 1995d, 48

49 (p. 29) Presently, principles of Feng-shui and Yoga are busily being codified, commodified, and deployed following such a logic, a campaign that perceives the desperate need to help compensate for the seemingly necessary alienation our populations must endure. Similar to most landscape architectural design, then, a presumed form of expertise is employed to (palliatively) buffer people from the cruel edges of the ‘machines we live in’.

I’m reminded of another alexandrian example — the somewhat worn hammock — yes, beautiful! And yet not unlike a worn-in pair of jeans, one can now purchase at a slightly inflated price. Money here mediates wearing something in one’s self. I fear that if Alexander is actually taken seriously, he will basically fall into such schemas. Whereas he should be understood in a much more radical way. It is primarily this fear on my part which generates a critique of his work. Here also is a springboard from which one could begin dealing with politics and/or economics more explicitly.

50 (p. 29) One does find in design circles, however, that “the pursuant challenges posed to the separation between body and soul, between people and nature, and amongst peoples have led to a search of restoring connections. While the actual goal of this search vary widely, the path followed can be characterized more uniformly as one of slowness, simplicity, sincerity, and spirituality” (Ellin 1996, 2). This is more or less the path I have followed, nuanced by thinking which seeks rapprochement or a certain superimpositioning between these characterizations, experiential and ecological effects.

51 (p. 30) Bakhtin’s helpfully distinguishes the exchange of ‘rhetoric’ from its dissolution in dialogue, the higher truth process: “In rhetoric there are the unconditionally innocent and the unconditionally guilty, there is complete victory and there is annihilation of the opponent. In dialogue the annihilation of an opponent also annihilates the dialogical sphere of the life of the word itself” (1999, 150).

52 (p. 30) Christopher Day is in agreement on this point: “Neither socially nor in any art can you build living harmonious relationships out of rules. They depend upon listening responsiveness” (1990, 58). I couldn’t have written this idea better myself, what is so fundamental to the primary thrust of this whole endeavor. Day certainly covers a lot of the ground that I do in Places of the Soul, an yet we take entirely different paths to arrive at many shared ideas.

53 (p. 31)

This is a trait of Deleuze that I particularly appreciate: a sort of unwavering love for the world as it is, a love that, beyond optimism and pessimism alike, signifies that it is always futile, always falling short of thought as such, to judge the world.... And it is this that we should joyously acclaim: not at all because divergence is in itself ‘superior’ to convergence, or dissonance to harmony—which would simply be a surreptitious return to judgment and a transcendental norm—but because this is the world that is ours and thought is always an ascetic, difficult egalitarian affirmation of what it is.

Alain Badiou 2000, 44-45

54 (p. 31) While Alain Badiou marks a departure from other contemporary philosophers, such as Derrida and Lévinas, I believe he is not all-together contrary to Bakhtin and Serres. He writes of genuine thought as an open-ended yet connective process, a ‘truth procedure’ one must be faithful to. This thought, then, in accordance with Badiou (2001, 27), affirms the following principle: “since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths depose, or render...
insignificant.” This is an astonishing proposition in an era guilty with destroying difference (see note 15).

Beauty is born of a situation that “induces a subject,” something unfinalized and unspeakable; it is, like a truth, perpetuated by a certain fidelity to the life of the situation; it “proceeds in the situation, and nowhere else” (ibid. 42-43). Communication thus effaces truth and beauty; but at the same time it is a kind of communication through the event that has inspired a truth’s emergence. Communication is not the end, then, it is the beginning.

Simone Weil, in The Need for Roots (2002, 36) once said of truth that it is “more sacred than any other need” and that it is the expression of “the needs of the soul.” I invoke these ideas now by way of raising concern regarding the mechanization of thought, the systems and/or concepts we utilize which erode ‘eventfulness’, being in ‘communicability’, and the incumbent emptiness of what we operate by and label ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’. We’ll deal with these ideas in other, perhaps more intelligible ways as this paper is weaved together. As of now, it would seem, I’m still merely setting up the warp and weft, so to speak.

55 (p. 31)
This multiplicity of centers and this reiteration of the image of the world on smaller scales constitute one of the specific characteristics of traditional societies. Mircea Eliade, 43

56 (p. 32) I’ve borrowed in the titles of the next two sections variations on the book by Maria Assad, Reading with Serres: An Encounter with Time (1999).

57 (p. 34) With Bakhtin, the place of reification is taken by monologism, which prevents literature from doing justice to the multiplicity of human experience and the otherness. Lukács, following Marx, points out that reification takes place any time “a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people” (History of Class Consciousness). Lukács considers reification to be the historically generated incapacity of consciousness to see the totality of social life. Instead, the mind gets lost in the realm of the concrete, the particular, the reified. The world does not present itself as a whole to this damaged consciousness, nor as the product of human activities. It reveals itself only in the form of isolated items, i.e. in the form of things which stand out against the individual.

58 (p. 34) This sort of transferal of literature to comprehending built environment really began for me when I investigated Albert Camus’s The Plague for its descriptions of place and architecture as emblematic of particular trends in modern and premodern experience. This effort culminated in a twenty page essay presented to Professor Menical, at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1995.

For instance, in The Myth of Sisyphus, his depiction of the city of Oran in “The Minotaur, or the Stop in Oran,” illustrates in powerful metaphor a new conception of time emphasized in Serres, namely that it is not purely historical or defined solely by human activity, but is also founded in physical reality and on non-closure or dissipative structures (see also Prigogine and Stengers 1984). In The Plague Camus’s descriptions of Orin, the culture-nature facades that disguised until a critical mass the insidious evil seething below. He was writing about the extreme violence that springs from fatuous ignorance or insouciance.

59 (p. 34) However, we do have some of Bakhtin’s thoughts on the open, contested, ‘heteroglot nature’ (“the multiform speech genres and modes of discourse found in the everyday lifeworld” Gardiner 2000, 60) of the public square from the Rabelais book. For an analysis of this ‘space of democracy’, see Ken Hirschkop’s Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic For Democracy 1999, 249-271.
Harris compares the work of cultural ecology and Serres whereby each situate "knowledge in a complexly layered space where it interacts with nature and culture . . . cultural ecology complicates the nature/culture binary by treating natural systems as being always imbricated in cultural formations, and social categories as necessarily constrained by organic ones. Cultural ecology yokes together scientific knowledge and cultural studies in a single discourse — exactly what Serres has done all along" (1997, 43). Growing out of this messy position, is a discourse increasingly equipped to confront the overlap of environmental and experiential crises.

One wonders why Latour nowhere cites Benjamin’s influence, when surely he was one of the first to recognize and foresee the outcomes of the rapid proliferation of overwhelming mechanical mediation in the arts and in everyday life. Discussing the film, a mode of staging life one cannot help but sense in the larger world; Benjamin says: "The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology" (1969, 233). The stage is a kind of collective: "A body corporate is what we and our artifacts have become. We are an object-institution . . . The point I am making is symmetrical: what is true of the ‘object’ is still truer of the ‘subject’. There is no sense in which humans may be said to exist as humans without entering into commerce with what authorizes and enables them to exist (that is, to act)” (Latour 1999, 192).

In an interview with Crawford, Latour asks: “How can we invent literary style for science studies, and how can we pursue the fusion of social sciences and literature” (1993, 267). I believe this challenge is just as crucial in the realm of design because today we are essentially the main movers or framers of interactions in the modern world. We suggest and then considerably construct the contexts whereby collectives materialize and explode with different currents of change. Should the literary sciences be more adept at contemplating and impelling into action constructions more or less provocative of healthy dialogue, then it is in this realm that we must also invest our energies for the sake of increasing our adeptness as responsible designers.

But one of the enormous problems René Girard points out and powerfully explains, which threatens this possibility, is that “all our cultural disciplines are too uncertain of their own status in relation to science to treat literary works as equals, to hear them out” (1988, 89). He follows this thesis by showing us what makes science tic as geared by relations to rite, myth, and mimetic violence — aspects that are hidden, that science itself refuses to recognize, a state “we are all so thoroughly conditioned by...that we still retain its formal framework even when we have stopped believing in it” (Girard 1988, xvi). “The walls have crumbled,” he argues, “because there was never a solid foundation underneath” (ibid.).

Girard has substantiated Todorov’s above proposal, in part, by suggesting “we should try to divest ourselves of our misconceptions in order to reach the superior perspective they embodied . . . The truth, I believe, is that the social sciences, always trapped in a phenomenological or empirical impasse, are impotent. They need the great literary masterpieces to evolve; they need insights into mimetic desire and rivalries” (Girard 1988, xi). “In the Dostoevskian novel we find an orchestration ‘more mimetic’ or ‘more realistic’” (ibid., ix). According to Girard, “human desire really is mimetic, and the texts that portray it as such cannot fail to be more ‘true-to-life’ than other texts; the superiority of these texts is undeniable, but our reluctance to acknowledge its source has deeper roots . . . the seminal failure [of philosophy and the (social) sciences] to encompass the entire range of imitative behavior cannot be unrelated to the dearest of all our illusions, the intimate conviction that our desires are really our own, that they are truly original and spontaneous . . . If we are blind to mimetic desire, we will also be blind to the experience of ‘disillusionment’ that makes its revelation possible and to the unmistakable traces left by that experience, not necessarily
in all works of mimetic revelation but primarily in those transitional works that accomplish the passage from mimetic reflection to mimetic revelation” (Girard 1988, ix-x). We will return again to René Girard’s controversial thesis.

64 (p. 36) Actor-Network Theory, as posited by many science studies thinkers (see Introduction to Science Studies 1994), may in fact offer up another tool for making such approximate connections, but its better intuitions are nevertheless arching out of the humanities. Why? According to Paulson, through the humanities we more easily recognize networks: “Each level of knowledge and discourse production . . . actually arises out of a more fundamental level, to which it retains connections, without which it could not come into being, and whose knowledge is vaster and closer to its object” (1997, 26).

65 (p. 36) And yet we shouldn’t find any solace in ‘scapegoating’ the sciences. An entire societal ‘constitution’ mediates dialogue between those who make moral decisions, those who make (scientific or naturalistic) ‘truth’, and those who make and circulate things (see Latour’s We’ve Never Been Modern, 1991).

66 (p. 37) I think and I go astray. I think and I flutter about. I am I and one alone and just barely a plurality. The way I think and the way I am is no different than the way the world pulsates. I don’t know in any other way.

Michel Serres 1995a, 130

67 (p. 38) Modern philosophy was the philosophy of ‘unveiling’. Too often this was accompanied by an accusatory, prosecutor-like attitude on the part of philosophers. Illusions banished, nature stripped bare, enemies vanquished, appearance and hypocrisy finally put to rest — such were the guiding ideals of modern thought. For Serres, however, stripping, unveiling, accusing are of little merit. Taking a lead from the laboratory, he prefers mixing and blending. It is not by eliminating and isolating that we come to the fully real, it is rather by combining, by putting things into play with each other, by letting things interact.

68 (p. 38) Prigogine and Stengers suggest that we revisit Whitehead’s and Heidegger’s speculations on time, given their recent discoveries (by then already evident in Serres’s work), which contend: “Being and Becoming are not to be opposed to one another: they express two related aspects of reality” (1984, 310). Jacques Derrida similarly said of Heidegger that “Being and Time would belong neither to science, nor to philosophy, not to poetics. Such is perhaps the case for every work worthy of its name: there, what puts thinking into operation exceeds its own borders or what thinking itself intends to present of these borders. The work exceeds itself, it surpasses the limits of the concept of itself that it claims to have properly while presenting itself” (1993, 32).
See René Girard for his argument of revelation given that "human culture is organized around a more or less violent disavowal of human violence," the mechanisms of which will reveal, if it takes centuries or even millennia, what is hidden by religion(s) of man (2000, 158-65).

Likewise, "The curvature of writing" or inscribing meaning in the world is, for Serres, "equated with the swerve" he "identifies with chaotic turbulence. Writing is turbulence, or more precisely, brings turbulence into being. The association suggests that before the world could exist, there had to be chaos; and simultaneously with chaos came writing, in the swerving inscriptions of the atoms when they first deviated from their linear paths. From this point of view, anachronism is not so much a fallacy as an inevitability. The story illustrates how contemporary ideas of chaos and signification can merge with ancient beliefs to form a narrative almost as stratifies as culture itself" (Hayles 1990, 24).

Potentially link to Simone Weil's usage of mélange as an interesting addition to 'prepositional design' concerns.

In the following passage, Serres (2000, 180) gives us a richer illustration of this situation, during an extensive meditation on deviations from and compensations toward, yet the nonetheless widening bifurcation with, equilibrium:

Lucretius discovers the growth of complexity when deviation reappears during the cycles of return to equilibrium. He discovers this risk, this vertiginous instability, this flight ahead, in which the obligatory risk, necessary, natural, in which risk taken, not necessary or not natural, tries to catch itself, but pays for this catching-up by an even more vertiginous instability. I say vertiginous on purpose: disturbance, vortex. He discovers that only the insufficient is productive. But that production restores insufficiency. That labor, agriculture, navigation and the arts compensate for the effect of deterioration, but accentuates its impact. That decline requires a dynamic adaptation, but that the latter reinforces the decline. Spiral initiated by deviation. Snowball hurtling down Sisyphus's thalweg, self-productive growth. History to death, production to death, desire for death. To live from death, to die to life. Labor of life, labor of death. Life of desire, desire for death.

An example of high-entropy in this regard may be correlated with "the ghastly quicksand-like sinking of our strengths and our lives in administration . . . these days . . . . Parasitic growth has brought everything to a standstill" (Serres 1995a, 95).
76 (p. 46) We will return to this fundamental principle in the context of mimetic violence, and link it to the generative violence embedded in the built environment. Serres goes on to state: “I am driven by a strong disinclination to ‘belong’ to any group, because it has always seemed to require excluding and killing those who don’t belong to the sect. I have an almost physical horror of the libidinous drive to belong. You will notice that this drive is rarely analyzed as such, since it supports all ambitions and serves up the most widespread [im]morality” (Serres 1995d, 20).

77 (p. 46) Wittgenstein insisted on the “uniqueness of each experience” and went as far a suggesting that “words undergo change each time they are repeated” because the word’s meaning stems from its situational usage (Bohn 1997, 143-144).

78 (p. 47) If ‘environment’ is seen as mere “fungible resource for the self-realization and self-perpetuation of the organism—we do better . . . Bateson argues, to understand that both are components of a larger network or system of relations in which negative feedback is crucial to the maintenance of systematic balance. The Enlightenment face of Darwinism would tell us that the organism that most successfully exploits and maximizes its environmental resources is the one that wins, the one that lives to pass on its genes. But ‘[i]f this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology’, Bateson tells us, ‘your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell’” (Wolf 1998a, 24).

79 (p. 47) “One must be familiar with one’s object, including oneself, before defamiliarizing, problematizing, or transforming oneself . . . . Foucault sought to reveal what is so obvious and so superficial that it is passed over and accepted without further comment: ‘What I’m looking for are not relations that are secret, hidden more silent or deeper that the consciousness of men. I try, on the contrary, to define the relations on the very surface of discourse; I attempt to make visible what is invisible, only because it’s to much on the surface of things” (Deacon 1999, 128-30).

80 (p. 48) From this standpoint, we might simply recall the run-of-the-mill ‘caveats’ preceding any sensible GIS demonstration: “it is not true that uncertainty (lack of control) decreases as accuracy goes up: it goes up as well” (Lyotard 1984, 56). Hence, our attempts to make the boundaries ‘fuzzy’. I am reminded of a similarly humbling comment: “the desire to stabilize always renders it more unstable, like the clumsy fellow in his canoe who overcompensates for its rocking and capsizes himself” (Girard 1988, 98). I hope that the reader can preserve an attitude of openness that is forgiving when I inevitably overstate my case or raise the bar too high, when/if I come off as an authority, or at least one who appears to think himself so.

81 (p. 48) ‘Substance’ takes on a special meaning in Latour’s work which, in the end calls for a ‘slowing down’ that the associative nature of our collectives be better discerned and represented. I am interested in his definition by way of conceiving of the difference between chronotopes, realms of culture-nature that live and die through certain representations of order and disorder. Should we read Baudrillard from this starting point, the ‘simulacrum’ is both real and regrettable.

SUBSTANCE: This word designates what ‘lies beneath’ properties; science studies has not attempted to do away with the notion of substance altogether but to create a historical and political space in which newly emerging entities are slowly provided with all their means, all their institutions, to be slowly ‘substantiated and rendered durable and sustainable.

Bruno Latour 1999b, 311
Landscape Architecture "understood here to mean the art — or science, if preferred — of arranging land, together with the space and objects upon it, for safe, efficient, healthful, pleasant human use. Whenever and wherever this art was practiced in the past, both the process and the product were, in present-day terms, landscape architecture" (Newton 1971, xxi, emphasis added).

This wasn't a favorite book of mine by any means, owing to its simple utilitarian positivism, but parts could be interpreted to suggest that all of humanity's built environments, from antiquity to present, be recognized as various works of art/science, the "process and the products" of which are commensurable with future practice. I'm perhaps being generous in this interpretation of Newton's definition, but the implication it casts for humble discipline is a continuation or redemption of, and a contemporarity with, all of human history, unbroken by so-called Modernity, Postmodernity, and so on.

While first exploring the field, as an undergrad, I was allowed to believe in the integrity of others, the third world, situated or rooted ways of dwelling and building. I was allowed to recognize art as science and the visa versa: each contain, albeit filtered through intuition, an empiricism engaged in tracing the becomings of which multiplicities are made in order to invent. I was allowed to celebrate creativity or new performative trends in context, to wonder about the religiously-imbued spaces of the past in the glaring light of our scientifically-imbued spaces of the present, to wonder: how have we ancient and contemporary designers mobilized nature into culture . . . and to wonder: what can we learn from repetitious and divergent tendencies, the 'percolation' of 'great time', and its expunging from space/matter and memory?

To clarify, I prefer to approach reference to the 'Third World' without the dubious lens of 'progress' that generates "analytically irrelevant distinctions between the Third World (developing) and the First World (developed)," Berger (1993); or as Mackenzie (1992) states, I prefer privileging the "specific over the systematic." According to Escobar (1992) "The emergence of, and growing academic interest in, the new social movement [in the Third World] is also linked to renewed concern with historical particularity in the context of global process." A prevalent concern which has become especially meaningful today, is what can be learned from Third World countries and places before a kind of universal, homogenizing blight spreads over places as remarkably close yet as refreshingly distinct as, for example, Phnom Penh and Penang, or better yet and more proximal, the Lisu, Karen, Aka, Mong etc., Hilltribes in Northern Thailand. Also, it is a mistake to pass over Third World places in the First World and the visa versa.

In Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils, David Harvey invokes Nussbaum (1996, 169) to help articulate why indeed our history lessons in America are fundamentally flawed: "Our nation is appallingly ignorant of most of the rest of the world. The United States is unable to look at itself through the lens of the other and, as a consequence, [is] equally ignorant of itself" (cited by Harvey, 2000, 531). Hence, Harvey argues, we need education that "would supply the background necessary for...[deliberations] capable of respecting [other's] traditions and commitments" (ibid.). Bruno Latour tends toward a similar argument, but with more profundity. For all its sensitive word play, Harvey's 'system' would nevertheless give the final word to the 'mononaturalism' of Western human geography and science (not to mention an underlying, strident Marxism). Latour envisions a War of the Worlds (1999?) where dominant ontologies must re-introduce themselves to the 'other' such that one culture's religious forms of social mediation, for example, might be respected as highly as our (religious?) scientific mediations.

Having experienced introductions to other cultures first hand, with a willingness to richly dialogue and/or abandon my own preconceptions in order to learn, one of the most confusing issues is how notions of 'quality of life' dismantle local knowledges (those of interest which counteract inauthenticity, homogenization, ecological detriment, etc.). Neither thinker (in the articles cited here) recognize the mimetic power of the technological imagination.
already deployed (psychologically and physically), and already cultivating internally dismissive agendas among so-called 'others'. My disenchantment with modernity would seem to be at odds with local illusions of progress, which lends to a counter-intuitive cross-cultural conversation the problem of being reactive rather than proactive.

We might remark at this point one of the pervasive aspects of the mononaturalist or Western science influence, both abroad and at home. The use of science implies a rationality absent in the past, and thus an actual shift in human nature. To Lewis Mumford, for example, the shift from empirical, tradition-bound techniques to technology based on science and mathematics “produced alterations in the human personality” and a “passing from the primeval state of man...to a radically different condition”; see The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development (1966), 1:3. For a debate about those who have presented the emergence of modern technology this way, see Michael Fores, “Transformations and the Myth of ‘Engineering Science’: Magic in a White Coat,” Technology and Culture 29 (1988): 62-81.

85 (p. 51) All well-meaning chatter notwithstanding, I started to barely contain my indignation when faced with the degrading subordination of thought to the 'American way of life', which presently is: (1) a 'betrayal' of our good common sense, (2) an expanding form of 'delusion' or simulation, smothering the emergence of (situated) truth, and (3) undoubtedly propelling 'terror', or the effort to impose the total and unqualified power of (our Western) truth (Badiou, 2001).

I understand that not all science and technology must operate in the same three-pronged fashion. I understand that we — as designers, as scientists, as artists — can and must operate differently: sympathetically, by discarding out-lived or counter productive, objectifying, alienating, polluting, wasteful, dangerous, exploiting, and disfiguring activities.

86 (p. 52) In the spirit of Henri Lefebvre (1991), and de Certeau (1984), who wrote extensively on the notion of ‘everyday’, David Ley wants to negate the “treatment of subjectivity and experience as a virtual fetish, separated from context and material life” (Ley 1989, 230). Failing to do so, perpetuates the epistemological bifurcations Latour and Serres (1995b) associate with Bachelard.

87 (p. 53) “What makes this representational strategy effective is what Jürgen Habermas (1987) has described as the ‘splitting off’ of expert cultures from the lifeworld, such that communicative action becomes truncated or colonized by systems-imperatives. Questions of politics and legitimation are therefore displaced from the social realm ('value' or moral reason) to technical realms (instrumental reason). Likewise, technical interests become estranged from what Habermas calls 'enlightened action' and come to be established themselves as 'values' such that rationality (as technique) is no longer legitimation” (Braun 1997, 9).

88 (p. 55) This kind of power, according to Serres, “digs down . . . the winner is the one who gets in the most low blows” (1995a, 92).

89 (p. 56) Bruno Latour, In An Interview with Bruno Latour http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/conflgurations/1,2craford.html

90 (p. 57) Henry Glassie, in one of the most lucid accounts I know of, demonstrates within many modes of material culture — writing, collecting, pottery, textiles, and architecture — that “something called power and something called economy gather superorganic strength and drive facile arguments, while the workday realities of the millions cease to concern us” (1999, 77). This fairly common insight has impelled him to write an uncommonly beautiful analysis to prove “nonhistorical action is not only more common among the world’s people, it is more moral. Our salvation abides in the darkness” (1999, 8). Yes, indeed it does.
Day says, for example, that "Architecture . . . sets the mood. It also provides space or boundaries to outdoor space in which things happen. It influences both the physical mechanics and the mood — the soul relationships. The mechanics of how we come into contact with people influence the quality of our relationships" (1990, 72). Utilization of this principle has found its way into everything from office design, to prisons and shopping malls, surveyable parks, and so on.

Gardiner helpfully summarizes Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*: "the operation of power in premodern societies was a relatively straightforward and rudimentary affair, one that was transparent to most observers. Bodies were punished in a flagrantly violent and highly visible fashion, but there was little attempt to win over the hearts and minds of the common people to the legitimacy of a particular regime. As such, the broad masses were left to their own devices in most aspects of their daily lives, once a nominal allegiance to the status quo was secured" (2000, 10). "With the consolidation of modernity," he continues, "the scope of the mechanisms of social control have broadened." Citing Featherstone, to further describe this process of "structural differentiation" we hear that "science, art, philosophy and other forms of theoretical knowledge originally embedded within everyday life become progressively separated and subjected to specialist development, followed by a further phase whereby this knowledge is fed back in order to rationalize, colonize and homogenize everyday life" (ibid.).

Note that "Volatilis is the Latin word for things that have wings. 'Volatile' is also used of a substance capable of changing very rapidly from one state to another. It can also be used for something which appears and then suddenly disappears" (Serres 1993, 44).

The danger of ignoring the physics in Lucretius's poem is that 'it cuts Lucretius off from the world', whereas a transdisciplinary treatment of the text marks how its poetics, physics, ethics and metaphysics all replicate one another and are woven together in the body of the work. In weaving together different dimensions or 'spaces' of a fictional text, then Serres simultaneously demonstrates how literature weaves together the fabric of culture and without recourse to theological explanation, defines humanity's place in a natural order. In the Epicurean world Lucretius depicts, 'the science of things and the science of man go hand in hand, in identity''

Michel Serres 1983, 121; cited by Harris 1997, 47

A cross-fertilization between language and landscape, comparing punctuation and grammar, and their slippages, may be fruitful as another way by which mediation between mental and social spaces gives birth to 'awakening' or opening knowledges. Proper grammar usage eliminates nonsense by setting conditions for seeking sense. Certain threshold typologies, intermediary functions, etc., may, for instance, be helpfully conceived as the proper functioning of the colon — generally defined in terms of an intersection of two parameters: a pause value (stronger than the semicolon and less than the period) and a semantic value, which marks the indissoluble relation between two meanings, each of which is in itself partially complete.

The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds — and at the same time the paradoxical place where those world communication, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible . . . . The threshold, the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely; hence their great religious importance, for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles of passage from the one space to the other.

Mircea Eliade 1959, 25
Far from suggesting the materialization of another system of simple, technical rules, I am, along with a host of others, suggesting a field of study whereby rapprochement between built and written languages might yield a more open and generative correspondence.

Many have acknowledged that socially distinct experiences will be articulated as 'language' (i.e. by means of the creation of distinct, ideologically charged, syntactic, grammatical forms, etc.), but too many have failed to see the significance of parallel articulations in our cultural landscapes (i.e. that forms of defacement, like graffiti, take on possibilities of the sacred for urban dwellers, which raise questions of how similar energies have been exhausted in the past, and how they might be in futures).

However foreign such an idea may seem to our field at first glance, it is one of considerable relevance. Social vitality requires endless efforts to sustain a questioning confrontation with the inaccessible, inscrutable or impenetrable; in the words of some, 'the search for the sacred' (e.g. Mircea Eliade). What are the questions we must ask of ourselves (of our grammar by way of critiquing epistemology, of our manner of signifying, of our phenomenology if we acknowledge foundational language, of our interpretations or hermeneutics) while engaged in design or the authoring of — the facilitation of — such 'life'?

The following citations help us to better understand what is meant by this sort of mixing 'inertia' in both real and conceptual terms, for both society and individual:

We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out. Except that if we mentally draw back, if we go on with the singular abstractions, we are spared the efforts of looking, in any active way, at the whole complex of social and natural relationships which is at once our product and our activity.

Raymond Williams, 1980

Generalization of the relationship between people and the land . . . [was] made possible by the substitution of energy for knowledge, of methodology for care, of technology for morality.

Wendell Berry, 1977

The particularity of the body cannot be understood independently of its embeddedness in socio-ecological processes. If, as many now argue, the body is a social construct, then it cannot be understood outside the forces that swirl around it and construct it.

David Harvey 2000, 16

Dialogism has rightly been perceived by certain thinkers on the left as a useful correlative to Marxism for it argues that sharing is not only ethical or economical mandate, but a condition built into the structure of human perception, and thus a condition inherent in the very fact of being human.

Holquist 1990, 34

Does is require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

Karl Marx 1972, 351

How can I know if it is I or another who is talking?

Mikhail Bakhtin, cited by Michael Holquist 1990, 13

Lewis Mumford, fifty years ago, forecasted in different terms, the burgeoning of this devastating relationship to nature now spread over the entire planet. He knew, as the ancients did, "that few of the good things of life could come to consummation in the midst of moral landslides and political earthquakes" . . . that we increasingly create "problems that tax our human capacities for understanding, releasing forces we lack the confidence to control (1952, 3-4) . . . a situation Italo Calvino considers the tragic "vitality of the times — noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring — [which] belongs to the realm of death" (1988, 12).
Mumford saw, as did Heidegger, "that the humanization of the machine might have the paradoxical effect of mechanizing humanity; and that at this fatal moment the other arts, once so nourishing to man's humanity and spirituality, would become equally arid, and so incapable of acting as a counterpoise to this one-sided technical development...the tendencies toward mechanical organization and automatism... have been displacing man from the center of the stage, and reducing him to a mere shadow of the machine he had created" (ibid., 5).

Mumford notes in a similar vein to that which we will accord to the humanities' reflections of reality, "in those special realms of art, above all painting, that once recorded the greatest freedom and creativeness, we find that the symbols that most deeply express the emotions and feelings of our age are a succession of dehumanized nightmares, transposing into esthetic form either the horror and violence or the vacuity and despair of our time" (ibid., 7). The artistic portrayal of modern cruelty through assimilation and systemization, however helpful in Mumford's polemical arguments, does not go as far as illuminating scientific insights (from humanities toward sciences) as Serres's work.

97 (p. 59)
By rejecting the nature/culture divide, the approach that we might term 'eco-cultural materialism' explains a wider range of phenomena than does conventional intellectual history and brings higher standards of interdisciplinary accountability to bear.

Robert Markley 1999, 163

98 (p. 61) 'Intersubjectivity' in literary and linguistic circles refers to the principle that no text has its meaning alone; all texts have their meaning in relation to other texts. The constitutive relations between 'self' and 'other' take the place of this concept in Bakhtin's work, which helps to establish dialogue as a fundamental operative process in all semantic (and material) exchanges.

99 (p. 61) A paucity of this kind of exploration gives to a situation which makes it difficult to imagine a time free and fluctuating and not completely determined, when scientists looking for something did not know exactly what they were looking for, while at the same time knowing it instinctively.

I recall Bakhtin's views on Goethe in "The Bildungstroman," his comprehension of "the image... in the process of becoming" (19, 1986)..."the ability to see time, to read time, in the spatial whole of the world and... to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event—his is the ability to read in everything signs that show time in its [irreversible] course, beginning in nature and ending with [or circulating through] human customs and ideas [all the way to abstract concepts]" (25, 1986).

In a similar vein, I recall Will Marsh's (exemplary) study of Quadra Island, British Columbia, at different scales: the fluctuations of general and particular... from the large-scale map of the coastline indented by the full force of storms... erosion and drift of the rocks... to his own path walking over the stones on the ground, we go from continuous to haphazard, blind jumps which explore and meander... a scientific model?... knowledge adapting in real time to the unforeseen... stable and fluctuating, structured and open... to know without knowing... splendid landscapes of tributaries and confluences... things of the world mixed up together to the point of indecision...

He showed also, in part, what science might be without the mediation of machines (something most scientists can no longer imagine and, sadly, do not wish to) — not to disavow mechanistic mediation altogether, but to raise to the fore a set of serious suspicions regarding the blinding, numbing, disastrous breeds of systematic rationalism over-running the world, to give rise to a dialectical tension in a place between more or less mediated realms of being.
Basic observations and fragments related to epistemology should help color lenses through which we can see time as it takes on flesh in space. As a builder of connective tissue, the fullness of time vivifies dialogue, and dialogue articulates time in space (or time-space). By broadening the dogmatic notion of dialogue, from relations among humans to include nonhumans, the following statement makes more sense and is given an operative mode for discerning and adapting to this intertwined condition: "The intertwining of social and ecological projects in daily practices as well as in the realms of ideology, representation, aesthetics and the like are such as to make every social . . . project about nature, environment and ecosystem, and the vice versa" (Harvey, 1993).

The Dialogic Principle is the title of one of Bakhtin’s greatest interlocutors, Tzvetan Todorov.

We should briefly visit Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy with regards to this notion of the ‘expropriation of language’ as related to the Heideggerian notion of ‘dwelling in language’.

This notion ‘epistemology of invention’ makes its first appearance, as far as I’m aware, in Serres’s conversations with Latour (1995d).

“Until recently, however, there was a striking contrast. The external universe appeared to be an automation following deterministic causal laws, in contrast with the spontaneous activity and irreversibility we experience. The two worlds are now drawing closer together” (Prigogine and Stengers 1984, 311).

I have long sustained direct interest in the ‘significance of the past’, or more precisely, its ‘intelligibility’ as relevant to the experience of place and, likewise, the partial facilitation through design of such experience. The reader may recognize some of the following quotes in which I found affirmation and inspiration as an undergrad over a decade ago:

The man-made landscape — the ordinary run-of-the-mill things that humans have created upon the earth — provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and are in a process of becoming.

Peirce F. Lewis 1979, 15

Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing. To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement . . . to know a place is also to know the past . . .

Yi-fu Tuan “Place: An Experiential Perspective” 2

Awareness of the past is essential to the maintenance of purpose in life. Without it we would lack all sense of continuity, all apprehension of causality, all knowledge of our own identity.

David Lowenthal 1979, 103

It would be useless to turn one’s back on the past in order simply to concentrate on the future. It is a dangerous illusion to believe that such a thing is even possible. The opposition of future to past or past to future is absurd. The future brings us nothing, gives us nothing; it is we who in order to build it have to give it everything, our very life. But to be able to give, one has to possess; and we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated and created afresh by us . . . The past once destroyed never returns. The destruction of the past is perhaps the greatest of all crimes.

Simone Weil 1952, 51-52
In the conclusion of *The Birth of Physics*, Serres (2000, 191) elaborates on this situation:

There are no solutions, reasons or sciences, other than the local. This wisdom of the Garden, wisdom of my father Montaigne, this wisdom of the earth is then ours. It is not ignorant of science, you have to have written or thought about thirty or more books on Physics to arrive there, one day. And we will no longer have confidence in reason until we imagine some new reason.

Once upon a time there was a golden age. Where and when, I do not know. After it, they say, came the Bronze Age and the Iron age. Myths or history, always metal. Metal or stone: polished, shaped, neolithic or palaeolithic. We can only write of solids. Why? Because of their order and their relations. Coherence, rigor and rigidity, the local crystalline molecule is more or less the same here as there. It prolongs its identity, its monotony, under strong constraint. Thus we write [and/or build] history in which the local goes back to the global under the repetition of a homogenous law. The discourse is not different than the hard matter upon which it is written. A mechanics of solid systems.

Here are the waters, cataracts and flows, rivers and vortices, of Epicurean physics. Here the local rolls its weak viscosity without much affecting the global volume. Not far from its proximity, constraints evaporate. There are, as they say, many degrees of freedom. The vortex forms and fades away within uncertainty, but elsewhere the plane is tranquil, one way or another. Space seeded with circumstances.

107 (p. 67) It is helpful to reflect on the ‘presence’ Nancy proposes, whereby emphasis is on the ‘shared’ nature of meaning (even for the ‘I’), and existence is essentially co-existence. Towards the end of this quote, by ‘implosion’ we might recall the notion of reification.

*Being itself is given to us as meaning.* Being, is meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation — and we are this circulation.

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of Being. Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart in order to be itself as such. This “as” pre-concept of “presence” contains the necessity of this division. Pure unshared presence—presence to nothing, of nothing, for nothing — is neither present not absent. It is the simple implosion of a being that could never have been — and implosion without any trace.

Jean-Luc Nancy 2000, 2

108 (p. 68) This quote demonstrates the nature of observations exhumed by Serres through the classics, phenomenon which live on through the other ritualistic functions today — e.g. in the sciences and economics:

We have experienced the restless agitation of the multitude, unconstrained, on rare occasions, most often in a ritualized state. For a long time I believed that history was producing it before thinking that it was producing history. It has been acknowledged by some authors, rather well described by Lucretius or Zola, enlisted by Canetti, admirably limned by Homer, Livy, Shakespeare, the Greek and French writers of tragedies. Noise and fury are the tragic driving force. In this noisy state, free energy is diffused, it increases crazily, it suddenly abates and stabilizes. It is frozen in institutions, organizations, functions.

Michel Serres 1995a, 83

109 (p. 70) “The term ‘ground’ can legitimately be given to that which is determined as the real basis of singular beings, to that revealing difference of beings to be purely formal in respect of a univocal determination of their being . . . . The ground is, in other words, that eternal ‘share’ of beings by which their variability and their equivocity are moored in the absolute unity of Being . . . . [The ground] reaffirms that the thought of the multiple demands that Being be rigorously determined as One” (Badiou 2000, 45, my emphasis).
Alain Badiou (2001) goes to great lengths to create a contemporary space for understanding truth, and in order to do this he has reclaimed the significance of communication among inherently differing parties. The ground, rather than being lost in a discourse of those defending difference as though the rest of us can't see that it matters, is the situation of difference occurring or relating in the event. Later, we will see how Mikhail Bakhtin also focuses on the significance of the event as a mixing of 'heteroglot' actors.

Bruno Latour builds a similar case against the same genre of thinkers that Badiou does (the postmodernists, et al.) who use relativism to subordinate possibilities for compatrivism and truth procedures among diverse but nevertheless 'grounded' realms. It is not a matter of "flattening the landscape of values as if everything was of the same" truth value, but "the establishment of relations which are necessary for any judgment about differences, contrasts, oppositions, etc. Hence the preferred expression of relationism" (Latour, FAQ, http://www.ensmp.fr/~latour/faq-en.html, 2000, my emphasis).

110 (p. 72) How can we not see that the history of humanity and of groups evolves chaotically, in today's theoretical sense of the term?

How can we not feel that time percolates rather than flows? Far from flowing in laminar and continuous lines, like a well-behaved river under a bridge, upstream to downstream, time descends, turns back on itself, stops, starts, bifurcates ten times, divides, and blends, caught up in whirlpools and counter-currents, hesitant, aleatory, uncertain and fluctuating, multiplied into a thousand beds like the Yukon River. Sometimes time passes, sometimes not; but when it passes, it does so as if through a colander. Colander comes from the Latin colare, to filter, and this filter or percolator supplies the best model for the flow of time. Sudden explosions, quick crises, periods of stagnant boredom, burdensome or foolish regressions, and long blockages, but also rigorous linkages and suddenly accelerated progress, meet an blend in scientific time as in the intimacy of the soul, in meteorology as in river basins. Would we have understood such obvious facts without the theory of percolation? This theory rediscovers the oldest of intuitions, confirmed by linguistics: in Indo-European languages, the word time \( \text{temps} \) goes back to the aleatory mixture of the temperaments, of intemperate weather, of tempests and temperature. If the time of a planet and the time of a river can have such subtlety, what about historical time? We can say, at the very least, that history is chaotic, that it percolates. Simultaneously unpredictable and deterministic, its course blends all paces.

This is where we are today. A few decades ago, we knew very little about the nature of processes. Without a doubt, we will discover more about it as we enter more into both the inanimate and the living aspects of processes themselves.

Michel Serres 1997b, 15-16

111 (p. 73) See relevant interpretations of Bakhtin's internal exile by Morison and Emerson 1989, Gardiner 1992, Holquist 1990, and Todorov 1984. These authors have each pointed to the significance of Bakhtin's almost subterranean development in terms of his discourse on outsidedness and otherness, both fundamental categories to his ideas on perception and authoring, and perhaps, both fundamental to his similarities with Serres. For each thinker, it would seem, values the outside or better the boundary as the only space of creativity or invention which, in the end, will mean the only fertile space of survival.

112 (p. 73) What might the coinciding discoveries in both semantic and physical realities imply for design methods? How would we learn to think? What would our knowledge and our education henceforth consist of if things are animated? What might happen if, for instance, we engage Dostoevsky's genius by seeing the physiological 'free radical' and 'strange attraction' in Ivan Karamazov's movement, if we lead him elsewhere, if we discern the agglutinating forces of his unpredictable impacts and reverberations on the whole of the novel, on the whole of the space? Might we learn to better 'see how things are charged'... their passions or disruptive potentials that facilitate dialogue or life... their curving into a situation, their disturbance of relations between disparate and unfinalized entities... The
thickening of time. What ‘sparks fly’ from the ‘short-circuits’ of comparativism (Serres and Latour, 1995d) should we watch their lives, some dieing in retreat, some in jealously?

113 (p. 73) The chronotope, as a concept for distinguishing categories full with motion and relational potential, may have a sister term in the ‘typology’. It would be interesting to attempt to distinguish between these two terms in, in order to capitalize on and hopefully augment the work presented by Patrick Condon in “A Designed Landscape Space Typology: A Theory Based Design Tool.” Many other design theorists have flirted with these two notions (see the disappointing Anytime, 1999).

114 (p. 74) Actually, the evolving individual in a contingent rapport with a changing context may be better conceived in terms of ‘weighted associations’, rather than making the jump to types and classifications. Types, families, etc., are helpful, but must remain ‘fuzzy sets’ with mixed-breeds, hermaphrodites, etc. (Latour 2002, Serres 1995a).

115 (p. 77) From this theoretical trajectory, technical fixes would be evaluated not just from the standpoint of their physical behavior (say, to drain water), but their appropriation of agency in the future, of both matter and meaning. This idea as related to the re-evaluation of (contemplating the ‘scripts’ of) our deployment of technologies. This socio-environmental movement follows Serres’s implications:

> Being concerned with the things of the world, we advance human affairs.
> Conversely, improving human affairs, we progress in the understanding of the world.
> Knowledge springs from their intersection.

Yes, intelligence, discovery and invention — in short, the truth — are born from filling out the sets emptied by reciprocal deafness or blindness. Filled back up, these intersections have as much to do with nature and society as they do with science and the humanities.

Michel Serres 1997b, 17-18

116 (p. 77) “Fractured,” says John Law, “implies the failed possibility of a whole” (2000, 5), or from another side, the decreased possibility of that special character of dialogic experience/existence Bakhtin called ‘polyphony’.

117 (p. 79) “Articulation is not a property,” according to Latour, “of human speech but an ontological property of the universe. The question is no longer whether or not statements refer to a state of affairs, but only whether or not propositions are well articulated” (1999, 303). Recall that Latour writes form a mode of symmetry which respects no distinction between society and nature. Thus, “instead of opposing words and the world, science studies, by its insistence on practice [or emphasis on the local, material, mundane sites of negotiation] has multiplied the intermediary terms that focus on transformations” (ibid., 311). ‘Translation’ for example, is important because “in its linguistic and material connotations, it refers to all the displacements through other actors whose mediation is indispensable for any action to occur. In place of a rigid opposition between context and content, chains of translation refer to the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate various and contradictory interests” (ibid.). Beyond all the rhetoric of interconnectedness, it would seem, then, that science studies is creating the language and/or tools to trace ‘collective’ histories, open up the laboratories, and thereby give us more to go on in terms of predicting how things will evolve via various kinds of mediation.

118 (p. 80)

I do not like haste. What it hurries, and crushes, is what after the fact I find that I have always tied, under diverse headings — work, figural, heterogeneity, dissensus, event, thing — to reserve: the unharmonizable.

Jean-François Lyotard 1991, 4
This analysis is influenced by conventional material culture methods for describing and interpreting underlying mechanisms that have influenced a subject's composition and operation. The work of material culture is often described as 'decoding'. Baudrillard, in acknowledging this desire, says of the rapid circulations of art that: "Works' of art are no longer exchanged, whether for each other or against a referential value. They no longer have that secret collusiveness which is the strength of culture. We no longer read such works — we merely decode them according to ever more contradictory criteria . . . . All coexist with a marvelous facility amid general indifference. It is only because none of these tendencies has any soul of its own that they can all inhabit the same cultural space; only because they [various artistic genres] arouse nothing but profound indifference in us that we can accept them all simultaneously" (1993, 15). The outcome of modernity. Moreover, "a detailed confrontation with the objects of modern culture would lead us not to 'people' in the abstract, but to the facts of cultural production, to social divisions which structure texts and their interpretation, to the changing patterns and means of political and cultural power, and to the varied forms of modern social action and conflict. That what we experience as meaningful, we experience dialogically, as an event of communication, was Bakhtin's starting point; it was only the elaboration of this precept on the material of modern European culture which led him beyond aesthetics and philosophy towards social criticism" (Hirschkop 1999, 3). Bakhtin made this move because he was troubled with the 'general indifference' of a (Western) culture subordinating the difference of different cultures to an overarching monological form.

By contemplating the 'hybrid' character of food, we see something fundamental that represents a blend of culture and nature. We see as well a key reminder of our own mortality, and our ongoing bonds to one another and to the land. The land and the spaces we dwell in are, of course, also generative of such understanding. Use of the term 'generative' implies the active and contingent performance of food as it simultaneously acts ecologically, socially, politically, etc., to give to certain order. If we only see food as a commodity, we are not likely to acknowledge the broader history or future of it.

For example, as Marvin Harris puts it, intensification is "the investment of more soil, water, minerals, or energy per unit of time or area," which is humankind's "recurrent response to threats against living standards." But even if it raises living standards temporarily, intensification invariably proves counterproductive over time because, in Harris's words, "the increased effort sooner or later must be applied to more remote, less reliable, and less bountiful animals, plants, soils, minerals, and sources of energy"; as resources become scarcer, living standards decline and unrest spreads, until cultures "invent new and more efficient means of production which sooner or later again lead to the depletion of the natural environment" (1977, 5). Food and culture cannot be divorced from larger socio-ecological considerations.

See: http://www.ci.madison.wi.us/parks/foresthill.htm

Presumably, the distinction being that fresh ingredients are more rapidly perishable; although, most dairy products are an exception. The point we are interested in here is the illusion that most of the menu is composed of 'fresh' foods, or that we have moved beyond heavy use of 'processed' foods. In fact, the process may just be more elaborate and concealed, dissolving the traditional distinction between fresh and processed foods. The process genetically engineered rice, cabbages, and chickens go through is no less sophisticated than salsa chips and cheese dip, and as it turns out, may have serious side effects for us and the environment. Salmon have recently been genetically altered to grow three times their natural size. So-called fresh vegetables are genetically laced with
preservatives. This list and the attendant confusion goes on and on. Also, note that 'organic' is occasionally used in the menu, adding yet another somewhat mysterious distinction.

124 (p. 90) Many of these foods were once exotic ingredients, but by now have been thoroughly adopted in American cooking, and are available at normal grocery stores. Some of them are still available only at specialty grocery stores.

125 (p. 92) See: http://www.foodfightinc.com/about.cfm

126 (p. 92) This information is according to a Bluephies manager.

127 (p. 100) This is another messy idea in the framework of capitalism which Marx described as a state of constant revolution, unless, that is, one escapes the modes of self-promotion and sees this flux for what it is in a transformative material sense.

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation . . . All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and [humanity] is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life.

Karl Marx 1972, 338

Every ordinary situation is 'structured in dominance', as Althusser would say. The sum total of these structurings — namings, classifications, divisions, distributions — make up what Badlou calls the state of the situation. In an ordinary situation, the domination of its state is effectively absolute — indeed, so absolute as to be beyond any precise measurement or determination. It is precisely this indetermination that ensures conformity or obedience from the (classified, divided . . .) members of the situation.

Peter Hallward 2001, ix

128 (p. 101) A comparison can be made between the 'nature authoring' herbicides which eradicate invasive, parasitic weeds (plants indicative of highly disturbed environments), thereby giving way to more desirable, presumably native, otherwise unable to compete with so much disturbance. This venture has many outcomes to consider in terms of larger issues of intelligibility, perpetuating illusions of progress, the concealment of indications that impact not only the plant world, but terraqueous and psychological worlds as well. In the context of a comparison to Anderson's work: "The strategic use of native vegetation also suggests the sense in which human control over the plant (as well as animal) universe was iconically enshrined in the space of this zoo . . . . Such remodeling of the zoo's exhibits was in part enabled by the introduction of drugs for use on the zoo's population . . . . Prior to his development, the cement enclosures had however, removed from the fear of disease and contagion and enabled animals to be displayed on exposed earth . . . which, interestingly, were facilitated by greater technological control over nature" (ibid. 287). "Facilitated' by the notorious epistemology of piecemeal, palliative, problem-solving — separating out the noisy parasites, pushing them into other spheres of activity. Where will they pop up next? "The use of antibiotics and tranquilizers to tame and sanitize the animals is certainly further testimony to the confidence of the humans in their authority to domesticate nature at the Adelaide Zoo" (ibid. 287-288) Again, patterns of capitalistic pestilence, layer upon layer of deviations, simulations, abstractions, fooling humanity into thinking it's in control of things, while all the time it is increasingly out of control.

129 (p. 102) As an aside, I'm reminded of a certain landscape architecture professor from the University of Washington, who cultivates this 'postmodern' mindset. During a lecture I attended, she refused to debate ideas about environmental or experiential crises;
and when pressed to do so, she claimed a greater concern for maintaining her own subjectivity than for grappling with the difficult subject of rapid deterioration the planet and its cultures are now together suffering. In fact, ‘crises’ and ‘suffering’ may not even be words she’d accept to describe the current state of things. Apparently, she’s been given a license to not seriously contemplate the universal via the local under the guise of our inevitable fallibility for doing so. The truth is this procedure might affect her ‘comfortable’ notion of the local; it might also reveal that her prized subjectivity is not so subjective after all, but another congealed product of mimetic violence, in a sphere of individualism that crushes real subjectivity or dialogicity.

130 (p. 102) As Margaret Crawford (1999) states “whatever the intention, professional abstractions inevitably produce spaces that have little to do with real human impulses.” This is in part because the professional’s translation of values is monologic. Dialogic translation will be required to feel out both the value and limits of the other’s language and the value and limits of one’s own, in the context of constant interruption; it proceeds not by the motives of dominance and acquisition, but by respect of the other in a background of contingency. Through proper translation we will learn to live with difference. While disarming what Foucault [cite from Foucault’s introduction to Anti-Oedipus] called the “fascism that reigns in our heads” we will seek to create a frame that includes both self and other, neither dominant, in an image of inclusion and varying, incumbent exclusion of context. The author and the reader do not share symmetrical roles, however (a problem to engage later). We are offered both liberatory and repressive possibilities as we translate. Bakhtin emphasizes sensitivity around this crucial act. In dialogism, we have not discovered a kind of relativism that asserts that nothing can be known, but a holistic way of judging, and of doing so out of a sense of our position in a shifting world.

131 (p. 103) This sort of thinking has, in large part, germinated in the wake of Lyotard’s seminal work, The Postmodern Condition (1984, 82; cited by Corner, 1991): “We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole.... Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the same.” James Corner interprets the import of this quote by saying “language is [now suddenly and] vehemently resistant to completion, stability, and holism (utopia)” (1991, 124). Utopia, as perceived in this regard, has fallen into disrepute in the aftermath of tragic ‘grand narratives’ such as the failed experiments in socialism, fascism, etc. This is clearly a ‘modern’ reaction in the sense that we must now make a complete break with the motives and mechanisms that drive utopic visions. We must accordingly wipe the slate clean, and not let the past command our present. We should, therefore, opt for a program without fixity. On the surface, it is an appealing position and presumes to be in tune with contemporary physics; but just below the surface, we know that boundaries will nevertheless be demarcated. (And, needless to say, we won’t be extracting our left brains, our rationality, and our inherently incomplete languages.) ‘Benevolent demarcation’ (Bakhtin) therefore becomes central to this perspective. But does this tend toward the abstract design Corner seems to advocate? In a characteristically ambiguous way, he opts for design, as illustrated in Luis Barragan’s “The Plaza and Garden of the Through” by describing it as evoking “neither the past not any radical break from it, but rather there is an ‘assimilation’ or absorbance of the old into the new and the new into the old” (1991, 130). One could argue that this always happens in more or less intelligible ways. There is clearly an objective fixity to Barragan’s design though. It is an installation of industrial-based materials to suggest notions of the infinite and a melding of culture and nature. (Again, an inherent outcome of our constructions, whether intended or not.) People will presumably participate in this space by wondering what it is supposed to mean in the abstract. There is, however, little or no room for inscribing one’s own meaning in more than suspended intellectual fashions. Again, modernity pervades to the extent that a break is made between mind and body in the conception of this space. At best, one might retort that there is a privileging of certain
dialectics between the movement of the wind in the trees, the shadows against the large, white screen terminating the space, ripples across the austere, orthogonal reflecting pool, and so on; but these dialectics happen all around us all the time. Broadcasting simple dialectics as the primary redeeming characteristic of this design is just to declare the impoverishment of their everyday apprehension, which is much richer if one listens to them. I might add as well, that as language comes under fire, we remain at a loss with regard to the language embedded in materials. That the reflecting pool is very much ‘fixed’ with steal or concrete and forced to cohere to linearity, is not questioned; and yet these materials are handed down by the operational logics that gave rise to the scorned meta-narratives. All in all, Corner has invoked a lot of compelling theory, but seems to be, despite himself, bound to modern ways of celebrating a dialectics that drains the life from dialogue in spatial experience. He keeps art in a synthetic category in a modern fashion. He remains a modernist and doesn’t make the leap to being ‘nonmodern’ (see Latour 1990).

132 (p. 103) Note that in contemporary fashions a misunderstanding with Buddhism often arises here: yes one continually reinvents the self in the emerging moment as contemplated/lived through one’s whole dialogue with others and/or time-space (with every breath, every step, every bite of food, etc.). This doesn’t however relieve one from respecting traditions as paths which indicate complex relations and truths, one might redeem through practice/action. The Buddhist knows she is saturated with time, she is seeking to live through it in the new or emergent situation. (I believe this is how the idea of reincarnation can be understood, as coinciding with the freedom to change we see played out in the physical world as in the social, moment by moment.) Often, the postmodern who dabbles in religious ideas (often without even knowing it!) celebrates the liberative aspect of Buddhism which would suggest ‘no attachments’ therefore ‘no responsibility’. But what they miss is to truly be unattached is to love. We are attached to concepts.

I would elaborate this subject by comparing Georges Bataille’s notion of ‘expenditure’ with Simone Weil’s. The former as destructive of others as it is narcissistic; it involves violent transgressions, sacrifices, orgiastic irruptions, extreme pain/pleasure, and yet the breaking with attachments. From Weil’s perspective, these celebrated forms of release amount to the human attuned to gravity, an incumbent relation of attachment by dent of being of this world. For ‘grace’ or the latter notion of expenditure, one gives and forgives all, one decreases the self, absorbs the suffering of others, but doesn’t create it. Weil is (as she has acknowledged) speaking properly of Buddhist expenditure as well, and arguable the only characteristic of being human that truly distinguishes us from everything else.

133 (p. 105) “In what we call thinking the mind isn’t ‘directed’ but suspended. You don’t give it rules. You teach it to receive” (Lyotard 1991, 19).

134 (p. 105) Our shared concern here has to do with how problems of design are ‘seen’. Let me mention, as an aside a recent lecture by Professor David Orr on green architecture. He spoke of a paradigm shift, away from the reliance on fire we’ve become addicted to. I loved his phrase to encapsulate this shift: “we have to uninvent fire!”

135 (p. 106) “Having evolved as an edge species,” Motloch reasons that, “our ability to survive depended on being able to see our prey and at the same time be concealed from our predators. This involved positioning ourselves and moving slightly within the vegetated edge, rather than being exposed in space. It also involved positioning ourselves along escarpments or military crests of hills. These locations provided prospect for acquiring necessary foodstuffs, and yet refuge from predators. Therefore, when the earliest reptilian portion of our brain evolved, it did so with instinctive, precognitive responses based on prospect and refuge” (1990, 113).

136 (p. 107) “In every act (inner as well as outer) of my own object-directed life, I start out from within myself; I do not encounter any axiologically valid boundaries, any boundaries that
consummate me positively; I go forward ahead of myself and cross over my own boundaries. From within myself, I can perceive my own boundaries as an impediment, but not at all as a consummation, while, on the contrary, the aesthetically experienced boundary of the other does consummate him, contracting and concentrating all of him, all of his self activity, and closing off this self-activity. The object-directedness of the hero living his life is fitted in and enclosed in its entirety within his body qua aesthetically valid boundary or, in other words, it is embodied. We open boundaries when we 'identify' ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within; and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without. And it is this meeting of two movements that produces the fire of aesthetic value (much as fire is struck from a flint)" (Bakhtin 1990, 91).

137 (p. 107) Just like language, one can scarcely imagine any society functioning without the discriminating procedures of design. Design is widely taught in architectural professions as the originating, drafting, working out or setting forth of means by which to produce predetermined ends. Most of Webster's unabridged definition lays down similar interpretations: the mobilization of structural constituents for a larger composition; the production of an underlying scheme that governs functioning, developing, or unfolding; the creation of formal relations. Put in these terms, the concept of 'doing design' sounds a lot like that of 'doing language'. Both engender parts or means with a compositional charge that communicate (more or less effectively) concepts or 'ends'. Each must sort out from complex contexts of matter and meaning, relations communicable and stable enough for any given purpose. This means that each activity involves 'reduction'. Thinking itself, in fact, requires reduction, or as Rene Girard puts it: "unless we renounce thinking altogether, we cannot give up abstraction. Even if it were a viable option, a non-reductionist interpretation would be of no interest the only concrete choice is between good and bad reductionism" (Girard 1997, 144).

138 (p. 109) Another serresian neologism that holds connotations of the 'trampled multiple' (see *Rome: The Book of Foundations*).

139 (p. 110) Latour in *Morality and technology: the end of the means*, indicates the intensely complex nature, the loaded language deployed, and so on, indicative of this kind of recognition. He also raises again the great example of the 'sleeping policeman' participating in the landscape as a full-fledged actor, the effects of which — born of the crude logic of a traffic engineer — spread in untold ways: this "delegation of action is not immediately knowable," he says, but we must do the work to find a "regime of translation" (Latour 1993b, 266). Here are a few layers that first come to mind: Taken as an explicit sign, for example, the speed bump suggests a design flaw (or a larger structural flaw?). Traffic calming devices communicate the presumption that drivers are less concerned with their fellow citizens than they are their automobile's suspension. Maybe they are. This actant outlives its welcome in many ways, and yet for some it is a kind of buffer. Translations are absolutely local in the sense that others associating with the actant carry their own associations or adherences into each interaction: "you are modified more or less so, depending on the weight of the other associations that you carry" (Latour 1999b, 179). In other words, a gun in one person's hand means something else for both the gun and the person than it would for another set of 'somebody, something', and for that matter who or whatever is the recipient of this hybrid's action. The translations of an actants agencies, like those of a human being, are thus very messy and interdisciplinary. They open larger questions of our society's structural integrity, the risks we should or perhaps shouldn't take, and so on.

We readily understand how the notion of 'technological mediation' is rather inadequate to encompass this triple folding of places [where things come from], times [how and why they are made in ideological, political and otherwise cultural contexts] and agents [their complex performance in society]. The term mediation always runs the risk that its message could be inverted and that one could turn whatever makes it impossible to transfer a meaning, a
cause or a force into precisely what merely carries a force, a cause or a meaning. If we are not careful, we would reduce technologies to the role of instruments that ‘merely’ give a more durable shape to schemes, forms, and relations which are already present in another form and in other materials. To return to an example which has been very useful to me: traffic calming devices are not ‘sleeping policemen’ simply made of concrete instead of flesh and bone. If I consider calming devices as ‘mediators’ properly speaking, it is precisely because they are not simple ‘intermediaries’ which fulfill a function. What they exactly do, what they suggest, no one knows, and that is why their introduction in the countryside or in towns, initiated for the innocent sake of function, always ends up inaugurating a complicated history, overflowing with disputes, to the point of ending up either at the State Council or at the hospital. We never tame technologies, not because we lack sufficiently powerful masters, not because technologies, once they have become ‘autonomous’, function according to their own impulse, not because, as Heidegger claims, they are the forgetting of Being in the form of mastery, but because they are a true form of mediation. Far from ignoring being-as-being in favor of pure domination, of pure hailing, the mediation of technology experiments with what must be called ‘being-as-another’. Authority is imbued in the materialization of our reality; it is one of the ‘folds’; but we are not different in this respect, we also spend most of our time ‘being-as-another’ [recall that this is a basic premise of Bakhtin as well, the necessary fusion of self-other in time-space].


140 (p. 111) You might recall the allegorical importance of being ‘under the stage’ for Gunter Grass’s protagonist, Oscar, in The Tin Drum, which is similar to Robertson Davies’s concept of the ‘fifth business’, acted out by polymath character, Dunstan Ramsey. Both are complementary to Bakhtin’s characterization of ‘transgression’, that which authors otherness for others. Dunstan illuminated “the mythical elements that seem to...underlie our apparently ordinary lives” (1983, 44).

141 (p. 111) For instance, it is not the so-called art trumpeted by the likes of a Bernard Tschumi — an elitist repository of lofty abstractions and technological achievements, such as the installation of huge digital screens with images of ‘nature’ in the Downsview Park competition, 2000. Art of this ‘spectacular’ kind perpetuates epistemological breaks, while captivating the attention of critics. It fails to recognize complicity in the degradation of socio-historical conditions by its preference for the bizarre as an escape from the everyday. The bizarre is indeed important in the event of festival (Lefebvre) or carnival (Bakhtin) or heterotopia (Foucault), in that it decomposes officialdom, challenges ideals of predictability, stability and closure, while liberating new ways of understanding. But this is not something contrived as spectacle, or as shock treatment. There are plenty of shocking things going on all the time. Rather, it is something that happens as an event of transgression, of opening out in the company of ‘others’, and in realm of everyday life.

142 (p. 117) This huge and exhaustive work exemplifies Benjamin’s ‘thetic’ method of writing. It enacts a way of conceiving history that is discontinuous, constructed from what he calls ‘dialectical images’. According to Susan Buck-Morss, he “took seriously the debris of mass culture as the source of philosophical truth” (Preface, 1993). In this way, he suggested the essential rapport between the fragmentary form and his effort to write a history of modernity. The Arcades Project contains page after page of juxtaposed quotations which give an almost (Bakhtinian-like) ‘polyphonic’ character to space-times, to the histories of people knowing, forming and being formed by objects, which is unlike any other I have encountered. However much I would like to experiment with this artistic style of the reconfiguration of quotations, now may not be the time (in the MASLA thesis) as it transgresses yet more boundaries put up by academic orthodoxy.

Benjamin’s work will remain on the peripheries of my thesis, simply because I cannot afford it the energy or thorough emphasis it requires. I have, in particular, culled through Benjamin’s observations on the development and effects of commodity fetishism, as it takes
the place of or is merely the new face of a certain primordial investment in things. I wonder if Bataille's notion of a general economy found in the *Accursed Share*, and Benjamin's attempts to reveal the primal histories suppressed in the spaces of things have been adequately compared. Benjamin's work may also be complementary to Serres ideas on *noise*, as he amplifies the fragmented static of time(s) whirling around us, distracting our attention, and obscuring from consciousness the resounding beats of eternal time(s).

143 (p. 117) This entire collection is packed full of fascinating and pertinent discourse on the political-economic, technological and environmental enmeshments that fabricate definitions of, and wrap culture in the mobilizations of nature. It is a superb collection of essays that should be part of today's MLA reading list, if simply to become familiar with some of the implications the design of social settings and 'nature' might have. In addition to micro-climatic, nutrient flow and other such scientifically-defined estimations, the aesthetic effects of changing colors and textures and so on, designers should become familiar with vocabularies outside of our science-art. We should be informed by ideas on "hybridization," for example, and 'actor-network theories', as we mobilize the machinery of culture-nature to mediate between the city and the country, etc., as we set in motion re(new)ed ways of relating to the world. Our discipline is but a cog in the machine without constantly reaching out to and pulling together the humanities, social, and hard sciences.

144 (p. 127) This book is provides good transition into the difficulty of Heidegger. Steiner has great skill in actually making us feel the movements of Heidegger's thought as it flows along totally unexpected and amazing paths. It would seem that, for Heidegger, thought was something more akin to devotion, a devotion we come to share. His ideas, particularly in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, are arguably the most philosophically pervasive in the sense of place discourse, and occasional overlap with my central interests, make him hard to pass by. Note a few lines from this book: "We are trying "to listen to the voice of Being" (32); "Art is not, as in Plato and Cartesian realism, an imitation of the real. It is the more real" (136); "Creation — should be — custody; a human construction — should be — the elicitation and housing of the great springs of being" (136); "Man has labored and thought not with but against the grain of things. He has not given lodging to the forces and creatures of the natural world but made them homeless" (136); "The Heideggerian asker lays himself open to that which is being questioned and becomes...the permeable space of its disclosure" (55); "The earth, says Heidegger, must once again be made a Spielraum, literally, a space in which to play" (149). These are truly luminous thoughts, and the book is full of them.

145 (p. 127) Another Steinerian work of dazzling rhetoric and reflection. I have just begun this book, but should like to list some quotes from the first chapter to give a feel for where he might be going and the pearls of wisdom dropped on every page. As related to Bakhtin's musical analogy: "Our capacities to compose and to respond to musical form and sense directly implicate the mystery of the human condition" (6). "Throughout this essay, I shall try to elucidate hermeneutics as defining the enactment of answerable understanding, of active apprehension" (emphasis added, 7). "Interpretation is understanding in action; it is the immediacy of translation . . . . Such understanding is simultaneously analytical and critical" (8). Towards a haptic experience of beauty: "The meanings of poetry and the music of those meanings, which we call metrics, are also of the human body. The echoes of sensibility which they elicit are visceral and tactile" (emphasis added, 9). "Remembrance becomes recognition and discovery (to re-cognize is to know anew)" (10).

146 (p. 129) Perhaps this can be used for the powerful image of the fetish in "The Renegade" to convey the sacred or violent, disquieting, yet beautiful and stabilizing force it had over all in a desiccated, salt-filled landscape; its impotence in the face of systemized colonization, or rather, perhaps, its form-shifting. This explication augments the notion of
the fetish carrying sacred/profane connotations. As history unfolded and auras were constructed/commoditized, failing to acknowledging this other realm has been one of the modern's biggest failures. "The Growing Stone" also contains powerful imagery to possibly be reassessed. Camus presents an interesting figure on the boundaries, constantly and lucidly between tensions of culture-nature, colonization, race, life-death, etc. In my opinion he wins out over Sartre (should I resist making things competitive?) who seemed to crush everything and sterilize the movement and life Camus celebrated. Would a comparison between Adorno and Benjamin have similar undertones? "Benjamin's thinking was always more analogical than... Adorno's, more concerned with the universal implications in the particular" (Jay 1973, 203).