

Double Operative

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"Storytelling...does not aim to convey the pure essence of a thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel."¹
- Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller"

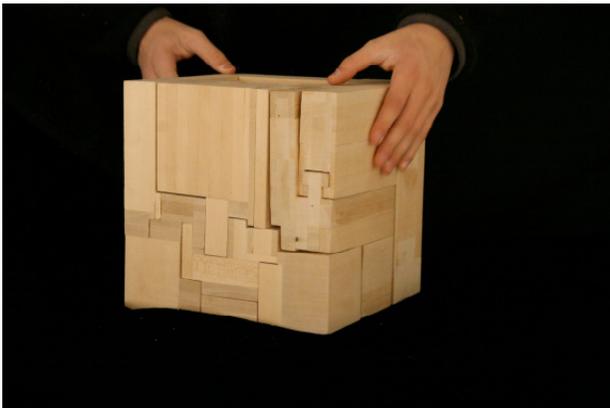
Double Operative:--The Architecture Writing Program: Language/Making is a transdisciplinary collaboration of the School of Architecture and the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Pratt Institute, an established school of art, design, architecture and allied informational and theoretical practices. The program, which locates its ground in the interstitial space between a seminar and a studio, aims to achieve coherent, individual authorial voice for architecture students who are enrolled in an undergraduate five-year professional program. At the time of the post-critical studio, when architecture has refocused its attention to the discipline, language-making practices produce a rich and supple architecture that responds to very real pressures of ecology and ethics. The practice of language-making looks to literature, film, theory, criticism and philosophy as material with which to make and name space. Through mapping as a critical practice, students learn how to write into their design projects as if writing were drawing; writing is clearer in crafting experience and engaging and informing the body. Writing is generative; it moves ideas forward, maps future possibilities and delineates the performance of a body moving in space as it experiences the senses, so as to locate a humane, responsible design.

By aligning the conceptual agenda of the first year writing seminar with the trajectory of the studio, students are stimulated intellectually to want to

read, write and speak by appealing to their innate spatial intelligence as it is expressed in the studio; students learn more effectively when their interests are represented in the curriculum. Language moves back and forth between studio and seminar in a synergetic feedback loop, which has the potential for transforming studio education and re-imagining the teaching of liberal arts in demanding professional programs. Rather than making architecture operate like words, words are made to operate like architecture. The instruction moves fluidly between the abstract and the Real to locate a phenomenal parallel language for the studio projects to reside within and a metalanguage to arise from interpretative practices in language and making.

Through concerted research in the vital intersection of language and making, the program has engendered a language/making practice that enables students in the design studios to engage in a radical form of knowledge dispersal. Radical means going down to the roots to locate a form of otherness that is neither wholly verbal or visual but a map of future potentialities. Rather than seeing language as a secondary material in the studio, through mapping students come to see language as the means by which the mapping process both sets up and puts into place complex sets of relationship that remain to be more fully actualized. The mapping practice allows students to move from the abstract to the concrete to the interpretative through a tissue of associations. "Mapping is neither secondary nor representational, but doubly operative: digging, finding and exposing on the one hand, and relating, connecting and structuring on the other."²

ings. The phenomenal quality of joints and cubes that are the main work of the first semester studios—the joints inform the cube and disappear into the cube as a memory, which is revisited when the cube aerates—or is expanded spatially—to provide an inhabitation for essential actions—has found a parallel text in *Tender Buttons*, the cubist poem by Gertrude Stein.⁸ For Stein, the poem was a way of rendering the way that people appear to be moving and talking from across the room in a language composition that emphasizes the construction of language in the body. It is mathematically precise and phenomenological, as are the joints and cubes. Students are led in a poetics workshop in the studio to take the poem apart in an analytical exercise so as to locate a skeleton—or structure—for their own poems (or language diagrams) in the manner of *Tender Buttons*. The first joint poem is expanded for the cube into a composition that is unique to each project; and literally turned inside out for the final project, an inhabitation for the body on multiple scales of negotiation.



Eric Moed: "Cube Project." First Year Design Studio and Seminar of Marc Schaut and Jeffrey Hogrefe, Fall, 2007.

The body in a landscape is the central project of the seminar readings, which provide a complimentary level of abstraction for the object of the studio that is, in turn, subject to interpretation in the final assignment of the semester. (Each studio instructor is paired with a language instructor—accomplished writers from diverse backgrounds with a practice that can be located in an architecture studio.) The seminars are organized thematically—landscape is the fall semester theme. In the design studios, students spend a

great deal of time creating constructions of two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms that could be viewed as landscapes, in the sense that a landscape is a complex, man-made perspectival device that enfolds and encases the body. In the seminars, students study texts, which argue, from a variety of viewpoints, that the perception and representation of landscapes is mediated by many different forces: cultural, symbolic and historical. They study literary and philosophical texts, criticism, theory and film, which address landscape as a narrative device and abstract vector of space. Three five-page papers are written for the class: essays that perform a close reading of a literary text, a film and in the final, qualifying assignment, of their own architectural projects. The final paper brings the work of the design studio into the center of a liberal arts seminar.

For many of the students, the seminar provides the first introduction to reading and studying theory. We begin with a classic work of literary criticism, Erich Auerbach's "Odysseus' Scar,"⁹ as a critical lens through which to examine two of the oldest stories known to humankind: "The Story of Abraham and Isaac," and Chapter XIX of *The Odyssey*. The abstract, undifferentiated bodies of Abraham and Isaac on the sacrificial mountain are contrasted in the essay with the concrete, authoritarian body of Odysseus in the king's palace, the circumspect body of Penelope and the nursemaids. The scar as an analogue of time is revisited in our analysis of the joints, which are seen as scars that move time forward and backward. From Auerbach's close reading of western classics, the students go on to perform their own close reading by mapping a theoretical text and a work of literature to locate a new understanding of the spatial/temporal construction of texts. The operations regarding the Panopticon as, "a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form," in the analysis provided by Foucault's "Panopticism,"¹⁰ are mapped onto the construction of Dublin that is presented in Joyce's "Araby."¹¹ The abstraction of Panopticism as a totalizing system of self-monitoring political power is applied to the real of the streets of Dublin, as precisely ordered in the tightly composed concrete and sensorial language employed by Joyce so that students begin to appreciate the correspondence between abstract and real, and the movement of a human body in a fluid exchange of ideas and objects.

The centrality of a city as a landscape of sensation in Joyce's Dublin is furthered in an analysis of *Blow-Up*.¹² Michelangelo Antonioni casts mod London as a central character of the 1966 film. *Blow-Up* addresses the interrelationship of works of art that Walter Benjamin posits in his seminal essay in film theory, of detachment brought about by the separation from the aura of originality that has occurred in a world in which originality has been replaced by reproductions.¹³ At a time when the students are beginning to construct their cube, the analysis of a film that Benjamin presents in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" provides a way to understand the twelve sides of their cube as iterations of time.¹⁴ What is more, they can see the ways that the "aura of originality," of their handmade constructions is altered by the introduction of photography, which enters into the studio now to study the latent potential of their propositions.



Peter Greenaway: *The Draughtsman's Contract*, 1982.

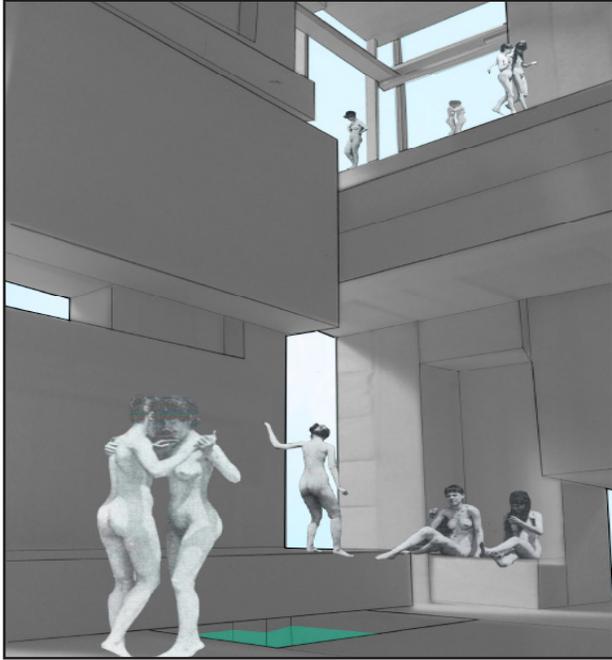
The relationship between a work of original art and a reproduction, the abstract and the Real that the analysis of Antonioni and Benjamin introduces to the seminar is further explored in an analysis of the landscape that is presented in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, a film by Peter Greenaway that is set in a cunning seventeenth century manor house garden complete with a live statue of Hermes.¹⁵ Extending the study of the relationship between theory and practice that Benjamin and Antonioni have provided for the seminar, students come to see that Greenaway find his logical theoretical counterpart in Laura Mulvey, the feminist film theorist who was writing in London at the same time that Greenaway was making films. Assisting the students to see that theory can be constructed in a genealogy, they discover that Mulvey extends Benjamin's observation regard-

ing the value of film as a medium that runs parallel to advancements in psychoanalysis when she asserts that the female figure has been represented as an object of desire for the audience or spectator of the film by appropriating Freudian analysis of gender construction.¹⁶ It is seen, moreover, that Alice Friedman has challenged Mulvey's theory on the construction of gender in a subsequent essay that introduces the female gaze. Two approaches to theory for a focused mapping of the construction and negotiation of the body in a murder mystery.

By this point in the fall semester, students will have learned how to perform close reading and close textual analysis of literary texts and films as landscapes of perception for a body. Through this critical practice, they will have furthermore come to see these literary and filmic landscapes as representations of language systems that are mediated by cultural forces. They have come to see, what is more, the ways in which these representations have pursued the Real. Now, for the ultimate mapping exercise, they also come to see that architecture is, too, a representation of a language system that is in pursuit of the Real. To assist in a close reading and close textual analysis of their projects we read and study three essays which address the role of the author in the construction of architectural language.

In, "Architecture as a Second Language," Peter Eisenman offers a textual analysis of architecture, film and literature. He makes a telling point--supported by the analysis provided in the seminar--that for the architect, who must locate the story of the architecture from within the form itself, it is not so much a narrative that is operative, "but the structure of the form of the narrative." Michel de Certeau, in his essay, "Spatial Stories," locates the narrative in the relationship between place and space, and the ways in which stories emerge from a place to generate a space—"a practiced place." In his essay, "Form, Substance and Difference," Gregory Bateson locates the narrative in the relationship between the map and the territory. Bateson sees the map as pathways of information that move between the inside of the body and the outside, which represent differences. He sees bodily or immanent difference as critical in the formation of ecology of the mind. "The individual mind is immanent, but not only in the body. It is immanent also in the pathways and messages outside the body."¹⁷ Appropriating one of these critical lenses as the generative device for

their final paper, students complete the fall semester with a post-rational analysis of their design projects, which, together with the poetic diagrams, results in a metalanguage for their architecture.



Marisol Reed: "Public Intersection." First Year Design Studio and Seminar of Marc Schaut and Jeffrey Hogrefe, Fall, 2009.

SPACE

The body in the landscape--the theme of the fall semester seminar--anticipates conceptually the spring semester studio, which centers on the design of a landscape that can support a dwelling for a gathering event. Enlarging their vocabulary as designers and artists who can organize and delineate space, the seminar theme of space provides an introduction to subjectivity. Students study texts, which argue, from a variety of viewpoints, that the perception and representation of space is mediated by many different cultural forces, which, in turn, affect the body, the dwelling, the city, and the state, as well as the networks joining those constructions together.

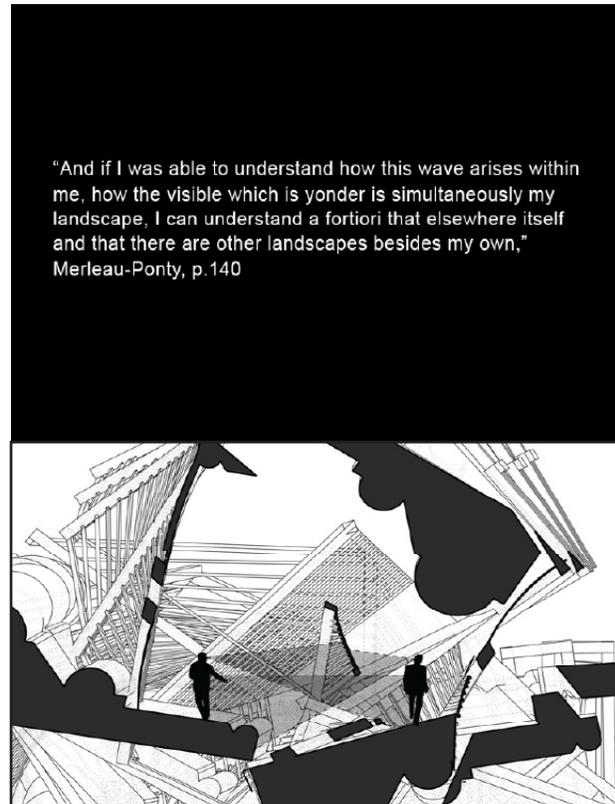
The consideration of space as a force that influences and directs actions begins with reading and studying a poem by Paul Celan from the *Breathturn* cycle. A Holocaust survivor whose biography can

be read in his art, Celan organizes his poem in plateau-like stanzas that juxtapose extremes of sensorial experiences, in landscapes that are marked by highly idiosyncratic accretions of word play. The landscape of "Breathcrystal" provides the ground for the first poetics workshop, which focuses on the creation of neologism that are made up of animal forms that the students themselves read from analysis of their aggregate landscapes, ie, snake-dove.¹⁸ The juxtaposed animal forms eventually become field forces that provide the foundation for the inhabitation of the landscapes by human bodies. The project proposes an event structure that looks back to the landscape as a mythic structure--composed in myth-making narratives that incorporate the animal forms together with light rituals taken from traditional cultures for short film projects with voice-over narration and textscapes.

At the same time as students in the studio are writing poems in the manner of Celan, they are also performing critical operations on the text in the seminar—a doubling of operation on the same text. Students read "The Chiasm," by Merleau-Ponty and consider topics such as texture, flesh, language, wave of Being and landscape, and the intertwining movement and weaving of layers of subject and object, as they can be mapped onto "Breathcrystal."¹⁹ They discover in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that a book has neither a subject nor an object, but is in fact a rhizome, or "subterranean stem," that is both subject and object, which leads to a deeper reading and mapping of Celan.²⁰

The study of emergent, autopoetic—self-generating--spatial constructions continues with a close reading of *America is in the Heart*, a personal history by Carlos Bulosan, a Philippines-born poet and West Coast migrant farm worker and labor organizer whose authorial voice emerged from economies of struggle. Bulosan's history is set in the shifting political space and economies of the Pacific Basin. Upping the ante from the previous assignments, the mapping project looks at Bulosan through four theoretical lenses; we study the distinction between space and place and the relentless ways in which everyday practices continually claim and mark places from space, the ways in which émigré's to the United States such as the displaced Filipino farm field workers are subjected to ritual cleansing, acquire a language of the disposed and the ways in which memory acts as a place holder

for those who occupy a Diaspora of both hope and despair in a global space.²¹



Mandi Fung. "Excavated Spillbreach." First Year Design Studio and Seminar of Adam Dayem, Jeffrey Hogrefe and Filip Tejchman, Spring, 2009.

While designing gathering spaces that are informed by the language of a landscape of aggregate parts, students come to appreciate the interrelationship between space, place and subjectivity that is addressed in the seminar. They conclude the semester and the year with a close reading of a chapter from a *The Body in Pain*, a seminal text in language-making practices.²² Elaine Scarry writes that a "made object is a projection of the human body," and proceeds to describe several ways in which the body has been projected onto objects that represent the eyes, brain and heart, among other specifiable parts. Clearly, Scarry is referring to the human capacity to extend the functioning of the body analogically to the made world, so that the pain of existence is relieved by the act of making on multiple scales of negotiation, from the basic chair and coat to a work of literature and architecture.

The final paper proposes a thesis that can consider the ethical implications of the designs. If "...creating is undertaken to assist, amplify, or alter the felt-experience of sentience..." in what ways can your final project be regarded as an attempt to assist, amplify or alter the felt-experience of sentience? What is your relationship to the architectural proposition as a maker of a place that results from an understanding of space? Consider the architecture as an autopoietic structure which can support a new world such as the ones proposed in "Breathcrystal" or *America is in the Heart*. What kind of experiences does the architecture provide? Is there a spatial story, a memory machine, a chiasm or intertwining in your architecture that can be amplified by a comparison of one or more of the texts we studied this semester? Is this an ethical place? An ecological place? Students are asked to see the projects and papers from earlier years on the Architecture Writing website <http://doubleoperative.wordpress.com/>.

Double Operative:--The Architecture Writing Program: Language/Making is only in its third year as a transdisciplinary program. The first class of graduating students to have been enrolled in the program as first year students will not arrive for two more years. A Fifth Year Authorship Workshop currently provides a review of language/making practices for Degree Project students who were still not enrolled in the first year collaboration. A full assessment of the program based on learning outcomes in the fifth year is yet to come. However, there are already many signs that augur well for the future of the program, both inside and outside of the Institute. The greatest response has come from the students themselves, who have acquired clearly a new type of agency, through the presentation and development of their language-making propositions. In the studios, the poetics diagrams are now privileged equally alongside drawings and often serve as the diagrams that Peirce and Deleuze may have envisioned when they saw writing as more than a form of signifying but as a way of mapping future potentialities. There are many things that could be said about the program as an example of a postcritical-postmodern exhibition in architecture. Let's say that for a bastion of modernism with a long and distinguished history, the transdisciplinary program has introduced the opportunity for students to speak and write and perform architecture as lucidly as they have been able to design.

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ENDNOTES

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