

CONCERNING THE MASKED IN ARCHITECTURE

FERNANDO BALES

Image: Casa Barragan, Mexico D.F.
Jose M. Buendia Julbez

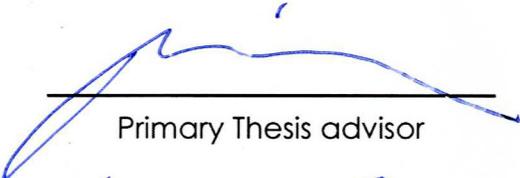
CONCERNING THE MASKED IN ARCHITECTURE

A Design Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
of North Dakota State University

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Architecture



Primary Thesis advisor



Thesis Committee Chair

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Abstract	9
Problem Statement	10
Statement of Intent	11
Proposal	13
Narrative	15
User/Client Description	17
Major Project Elements	19
Site Information	20
Project Emphasis	23
Studio Experience	25
Program	27
Theoretical Research	28
Typological Research	37
Historical Context	50
Aims for the Thesis	56
Site Analysis	61
Programmatic Requirements	70
References	71
Personal Information	72

The thesis responds to the statement that queries the role of the designer and asks whether or not one can “unmask” that which has been covered up by our tendencies in the way we live. The typology being a master-builder university will help to resolve this issue. The unifying idea here is that through a “slowing down” in the approach to design, be it through poetic interpretation of an “artefact” or narrative one can then root a design in a tangible meaningful process. In justification: it is essential that we (as designers) slow things down in order to stop the machine of culture that has consumed our lives and bring back a true meaningful way of living to our society.

Key words: unmask, culture, artefact

Abstract

The Problem Statement

Through design and as designers, can we truly affect our modern day society, our day to day activity in a way that brings interpretation and participation back into the way we dwell in hopes of “unmasking” that which has, over the decades been covered over by particular cultural tendencies.

THE SOI

Typology: Master-builder School.

Through deliberate slowing down within a design process, or through design methods, I believe our immediate built environment can indeed be affected by the approach taken in design. If the design process is rooted in a true meaningful, and tangible manner, say via an 'artefact' then not only is the physical Architecture affected but quite possibly so can the people and programs within.

I feel it is the responsibility of designers (actor) to question how buildings today are being conceived and erected.

Allowing a process, say, the realization of an artefact, (object) we allow interpretation (action) to take place in the way we are working and how we design.

If we begin here (manner), at the root of the design process then this meaning, this knowledge gained from process can trickle its way down the 'rungs' of culture in hopes that the larger machine might make a move in a more humanistic direction.

Conclusion: With a particular process based design approach the things we build can in turn affect the larger aspect which is our lived world today.

Project Justification: In the realm of Architecture too many building become realities with no meaning or justification as to why or how they will affect the lived world. For that reason I am questioning the reasons for how this could possibly happen and how in turn an architecture with the before mentioned qualities can make a difference for the better.

Statement of Intent

Proposal

The standpoint taken here is that of critique. The built environment we inhabit, from the places we sleep, to those we work in, to where children are taught have all been influenced in some manner by the larger “machine” which I deem as culture. That machine has established itself in our lives, created a rut, and like the rungs of a ladder given structure to how we live.

Through this thesis I hope to elucidate how particular cultural tendencies, i.e. (mass media, advertising, consumerism) have worked their way down these rungs into the world of architecture and created meaningless, banal, and homogenous environments. By designing a University not only of thought but an actual place of doing in a particular way I hope to evoke the idea that the body has been removed from most modern day building. Using poetic endeavor, such as artefacts and narrative as catalysts towards an Architecture of meaning, translation, interpretation, and of the body I hope to bring forth a built environment that can truly affect how we live.

Students from all forms of education are of interest here. From the design field to writers, all will work towards what I see as a new Architecture. Trying to influence students to think through their hands and allow an interpretation to occur through how they work and how things get made.

Can a designer be deemed a “social engineer”? Can ways of working that run against the current of the modern day norm really take affect and ripple out into our society and grab hold. If through this school students and professionals from the “real world” come together and slow down in this process there could be some changes in the standards of how things are done.

What happens at this school will hopefully be used at a larger level of culture. Hopes that professionals might adopt these ideas in their industry or design is what people here will strive for.

Narrative

The major users here will be individuals (students, professors, etc.) from universities around the globe wanting to pursue an interest in the act of poetic making/building. Professionals from industries of design, media, music etc. will all be invited to come witness these approaches as well. The idea that those working in their respected fields will come and collaborate with students in hopes of digging deeper into certain issues.

The client will inherently be the State of Minnesota. Being a public university setting the Master/Builder School will be funded by the state.

Between faculty and students there will be around 50 people inhabiting the school. It will be inhabited most of the year with the summer months being the peak time of use.

User/Client Description

The first major element of the project is focused on how a way of life can be changed, or moulded through living within a community that is rooted on the ideas of poetics and manifest through the actual doing of things. Second, a focus on how within an existing context can a school of thought integrate itself into outside communities to spread and share ideas. Lastly, a focus on how the idea of “place”, meaning its local culture, ways of living, industry etc. can help shape the project, from materials to construction methods.

Major Project Elements

Special Ideas:

- Living quarters (washrooms, kitchen, bedrooms)
- Studio Spaces
- Community Spaces Indoor/Outdoor
- Classrooms
- Central offices
- Transportation Center (Light Rail Connection)
- Parking for visitors and residents

Site Information

Chosen Site: Red Rocks Amphitheater (surrounding area)

Site:

Red Rocks Amphitheater, Red
Rocks Park

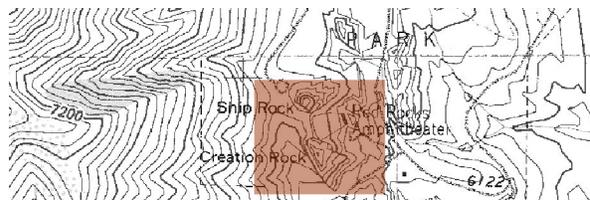
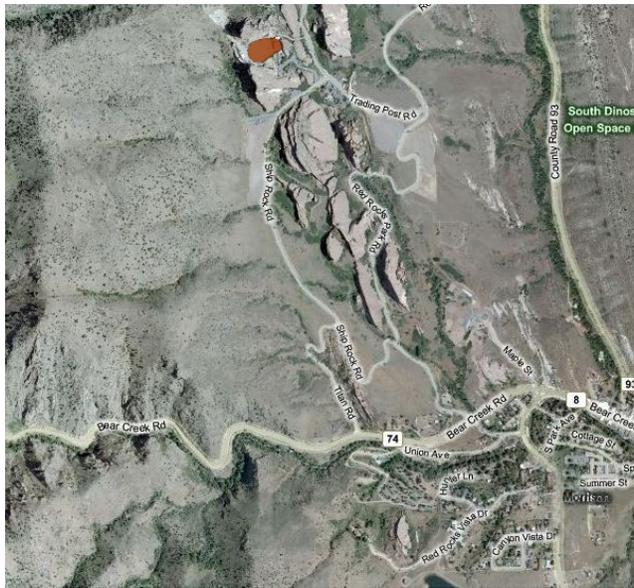
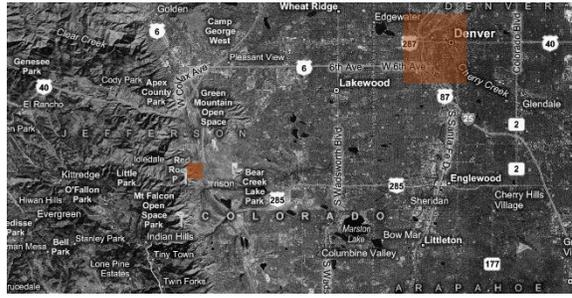
City:

Morrison, Colorado with a population of around 500. The town is located about 40 miles west of Denver

Region:

The Region is on the Eastern Border of the Rocky Mountains. It is right at the meeting of the flat land and the outgrowth of rock.

This site is of particular interest because of its landscape. The amphitheater is located between the two 300 tall monolithic stones that frame the site. Hiking and climbing are both popular activities



Plan for Proceeding

The next stages of this thesis will include the creation of the artefacts. Allowing them to help inform and open paths of inquiry into the before mentioned problem statement. These will stem from inspiration from the site and interpretation of multiple readings. Analysis of case studies including the built environment at the *Ghost Lab* in Nova Scotia, Canada will help to inform the direction of the project. The pursuit of artefacts that can “sustain” a community will also be taken into consideration.

The design methods will include those of interpretation of the site via the making/doing of artefacts. These creations will be made with real material that is commonly known in the construction world, but will serve to help “open” and elucidate the feelings, atmospheres, moods, that the site evokes. Parallel emphasis will be focused on the design itself using artefact to help guide the design process. A back and forth from parti to design ideas will be done through out the entirety of the design.

Documentation of all these processes will be done through sketches, photos, models, recordings, the artefacts themselves etc.

Project Emphasis

Studio Experience

2nd Year

Prof. Stephen Wischer (Fall 2006) Arch. 271

- Tea House Project, Fargo ND
- Boat House Project, Minneapolis MN
- House for twins, Fargo ND

Prof. Darryl Booker (Spring 2007) Arch. 272

- Prairie Dance Academy, Fargo ND
- Montessori School, Moorhead MN

3rd Year

Prof. Cindy Urness (Fall 2007) Arch. 371

- Center for Excellence Furniture Design School, Fargo ND
- Cranbrook Academy Library Addition, MI

Prof. Ron Ramsey (Spring 2008) Arch. 372

- Bicycle Hostel, Fargo, ND
- Architectural Archives, Chicago, IL

4th Year

Prof. Bakr Aly Ahmed (Fall 2008) Arch. 471

- One Nidus* High-rise, San Francisco, CA

Prof. Stephen Wischer (Spring 2009) Arch. 472

- International Design Studio, Barcelona, Spain

5th Year

Prof. Regin Schwaen (Fall 2009) Arch. 571

- Bohemian Flats Boathouse Competition

The Program

In structuring this report I wanted to be able to talk in terms of lived experience. Revelations have come to be through the research of the need to return to the body.

Priority in the research plan was focused on the articles of work that could be relatable to a larger audience. Focus on work that through different layers was/is inherently connected to my intentions for design. The larger idea of culture is always kept in mind, but by framing my critique through a work or works of a smaller scale I hope to emphasize just how important it is to think about how things are done even in the simplest of tasks.

Elaboration from the scale of the painting is made and further explores the relationship to the body. Juhani Pallasmaa states:

“My Body is truly the navel of my world, not in the sense of the viewing point of the central perspective, but as the very locus of reference, memory, imagination, and integration.”

Theoretical Research

I use the body as the central reference point, as the beacon to which all the research aims towards but also comes from. From the individual body I move into the larger realm of a more “societal body.” Using the painting as the medium through which to gauge the strength/ or the lack there of what it is our society gives to us. What type of things are we doing, making, concentrating on, and how are these affecting the way we are? Focusing on the ‘out of bodyness’ that has made up our society and it’s detrimental affects is the proceeding topic.

Framing this argument with the analogy of material. Material which has integrity and how we use it is the underlying argument. I speak of this through the larger context of what modern day material has become. Juxtaposing the two ways of thought will in turn shed light on how our modern day technologies and way of doing might inherently be flawed. The priority here is to understand the connection we have as humans with tactile sense and material. Understanding what a material wants to be through it’s own characteristics is the aim of this argument. The word “sus-

tainability” is a point of reference in this query. Trying to understand the application through the body is the focus of this argument. Can we truly practice the idea of sustaining our methods of thought, and of building? When will things be progressive, not just for the sake of advancement but for a return to something meaningful.

This idea of meaning is the next portion of the program. How is symbolism important to a painting? My endeavor is to help evoke these questions onto ourselves. What is the built world really doing other than enclosing our things? Is there a sense of ritual in what we design? Is there a knowledge of what it means to build? The question of whether or not these questions are even important in today’s society has even come to the forefront.

Lastly the idea of the education system comes about. I will correlate the issues within how we teach our own and how we have lost the body in the way we approach education, catering to those excelling in the sciences and mathematics. Instead of ‘teaching’ our youth what about nurturing to each person’s individual talents. Instead of putting them through a system that tries to equal the playing field why not let them excel in their own way? These are questions that arise from this research.

So in moving forward towards the design and realization of an actual built form I must reconcile these statements yet to come. A foresight to moving forward is that all I am saying is in reference to the past, in correlation to how things used to be. To be aware that there is a danger in what we have been doing is of crucial importance, an ignorance to the historical context of where building came from is the utter failure of our society in its progression forward. Kenneth Frampton states

“...instead for practitioners to assume the position of an *arriere-garde*, the rear guard, which turns and faces the past, protecting and conserving shared disciplinary principles. Here, it is also important to remember that the rear guard

becomes the advance guard when a retreat is sounded.”

The design of a master/builder university is the driving force. This program will serve to guide the design principles and its symbolic nature.

Artefacts transcend the painting. They part from the drawing and in so doing they serve to preempt the ethical responsibility of what architecture should be.

In further exploring this thesis, more questions than answers have come to the forefront. In pursuing this critique of modern day culture and the *'machine'* that I have deemed as our constructed consciousness, certain elements in the way we live have taken a precedent. The ideas of efficiency, standard, and the way we 'do' have come into scope.

I would first like to talk about some previous work through which I have come to know things and root my thesis from. The image to the right is a painting/collage I created a few years prior. The premise of this piece was it's exploration with material. My intentions were to exploit the material itself to bring it out of itself. The piece is made of bits of twine and squares of canvas. Dipping the frayed twine into oil paint and 'kneading' it together to form clumps created the texture that one experiences.

When I was working on the piece recollections of things I had seen or done before were evoked. The kneading of dough, mixing cement, raking grass, etc. It was difficult to talk about what the painting meant and why I did it the way I did. There were certain feelings that I was unable to form into words, but I sensed that there was something larger behind the painting. It was not until a few years later that my mother saw the painting and immediately recognized a memory. During my childhood our home had caught fire. The memory of coming home and seeing the charred walls and the 'bubble gum' like TV, the boarded up windows and the collage of a mess that the kitchen had become is forever ingrained in me. When this memory was recalled and knowing the process of how it was made and its overall experience I understood the power of the subconscious memory. Through the way we work these 'ghosts' of thought are inadvertently brought forth. The scale of the piece is relatable to the human body. It demands that one confronts it and moves to and away

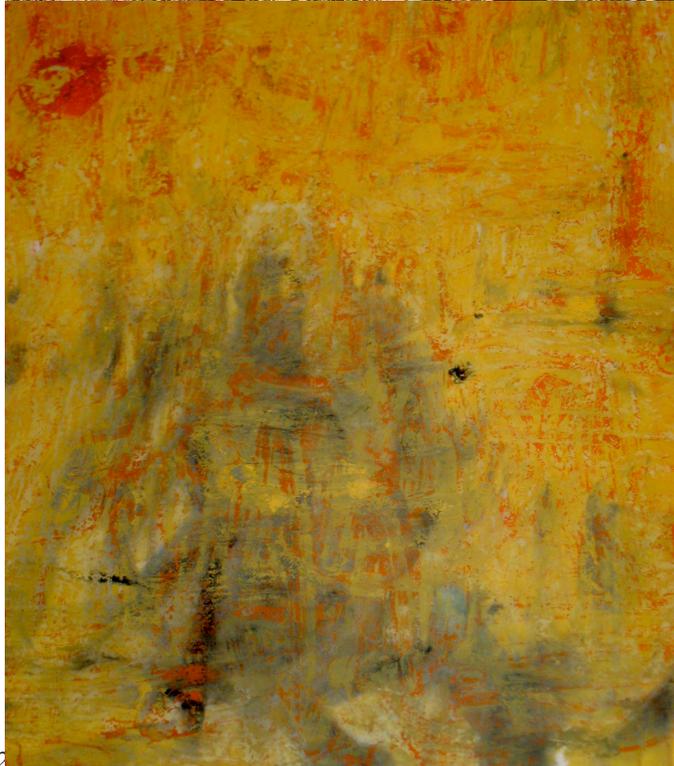


Burn
4' X 6'

from it. Much how these memories come and go.

“Nostalgia is the poetic awareness of our personal past, and since the artist's own past is the mainspring of his creative potential, the architect must listen and heed his nostalgic revelations.”

- Luis Barragan.



Within his words there is a critique. In our daily lives we how often do we confront our memories? How often does a piece of artwork demand attention from us? “Art” in this society is seen as an additive entity that we apply to our lives. For example, someone goes to a super store and purchases “artwork” for the sake that they believe that it is what you hang on the wall space within the home. They pick an image that aesthetically pleases them and might correlate to their life in some abstract way. Their never is, or ever will be a meaningful discussion or understanding of what the painting is really evoking. I would go so far as to say that in the true sense of the word *painting* and *art* these are opposites. It merely becomes a piece of decoration that essentially will become invisible in the room. *Kitsch* is the word to describe what these things are. The modern day home has become a box to put our things in. These things mostly hold no merit but like a television simply catch our attention with instant gratification and then fall out of our perceptual existence. The mind easily forgets that which is not felt.

We go to museums and galleries to find true art, fine art, the high art. But even then it seems that it’s too demanding for the general public to even begin to participate with all that they encounter. Its takes much energy and an inherent drive for discourse and questioning to really see a work of art. Every piece of art, music and architecture gives an opinion. Some more than others. Picasso believed that painting was never done to decorate apartments, but that it should be used as a lethal weapon against the enemies. To me their is no greater truth than this. Painting and what it questions, brings forth is not about representation, but about opening interpretation.

Participation in any work is needed by those who encounter it. But more so, from the one who creates it. The maker/doer/artist must be the first to truly confront the works, to truly question what it does in an immediate sense and in the larger, that of society and culture. If there is no participation, if a glazing over occurs

and the mind forgets the body, then all is lost.

I want to correlate these thoughts with a more narrowed scope to that of our built world. In today's lived world there is an inherent misunderstanding of the body. I will go so far as to say that there is an inherent deliberate ignorance towards the body. The body which is our being is not disconnected from the mind, yet in this ever advancing society of LCD monitors and projected touch-less systems the mind has taken over. This predominance of the applied knowledge of our computers and technologies is evident everywhere.



I have chosen to include this image in the body of work because it epitomizes the critique that I give our this way of being. This image is of a clinic entrance connected to a shopping mall. When I took this photograph a flood of thought and disgust overcame me. Imagining that I was physically or mentally ill, does this built environment give the sense of healing? A banal view, homogeneity of material and a careless desensitizing of the environment, help to create this meaningless place.

A weakness in our bodies has developed. I will go so far as to say that because of our way being has reached a point of 'body-lessness' we seem to be more and more susceptible to diseases, disorders are more prevalent. We become dependent on the world of science to simply solve all the issues are bodies encounter. Someone who tests their body, who taxes it, who interacts with it, who thinks through it has a different understanding of how we are in space.

“ A musician plays himself rather than the instrument, and a skilful soccer player plays the entity of himself, the other players and the internalized and embodied field, instead of merely kicking the ball.”

There is something within us that can not be described. Our bodies have a memory, they know how to perceive space. I have witnessed it in seeing a jazz quartet. The drummer sticks out to me. His body does not know how to read the music, but knows how to feel the music. It is like it remembered each stroke of the sticks, and how each drumhead felt at its tip. His body guides the sound. The music has an atmosphere, it has

The recent speaker here at NDSU Ali Hashmati spoke of a friend who is a cabaret director and who he always invites in as a guest critic for his studios. Ali states that it is important to have cross disciplinary conversations because different professions see space in a different manner. His friend does not ask how tall or wide a space is in a objective manner but asks maybe how many steps or paces to cross a room. A much more bodily and felt way of seeing space.

Juhani Pallasmaa states:

“ Instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience, architecture has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising and instant persuasion; buildings have turned into image products detached from existential depth and sincerity.”

Within this statement Pallasmaa opens an inquiry into how our lived world has come to this state.

Looking into today's construction methods efficiency is the precedent. There is a parallel between the advancement of speed in technology with the speed of which we build buildings. What would happen if we were to slow down and reconsider things?

Again Pallasmaa:

“With the loss of tactility, measures and details crafted for the human body - and particularly for the hand - architectural structures become repulsively flat, sharp-edged, immaterial and unreal...products of instrumentalised technology *conceal* their processes of construction”.

The concealment or masking that Palasmaa speaks of is distinguishable everywhere in this society. In rare cases one comes across a structure that has exploited material and has



actually *‘listened’* to what it wanted to be. Every material has particular qualities just waiting to be brought out of itself. The standard materials of today’s homes and offices can certainly be used in different ways. First we must progress out of this rut we are in.

There is a correlation with the weakening of the body and that of materiality in our modern forms of construction. The palette that the layman uses is homogenous and applicable to almost anywhere. There is in our world an almost globalization of materiality. What happened to the materials of the place? To the exploration of working with what one has? A weakening is again prevalent, not just of the body but that of the experience of time as well.

Materials have ages, they wrinkle, weaken, and have the ability of narrating their history. Recent travels abroad to the city of Barcelona, Spain have elucidated how a place such as

an entire city can have a character unlike any other. Barcelona is an incredibly dense place. The narration is told through the cities many layers. Where old aqueducts have fallen away a new structure is built onto it or connected to it. The material is preserved as it has an experiential weight to it. Visiting the history museum of this place I was able to see how the city recycled itself by building over itself again and again. Beneath the modern street level there is the ancient Roman city. Ruins encased by a structure preserve these historical tales, im-

pressions of old streets, half walled enclosures, all telling a story of how the city developed itself in such a dense manner. Gaudi understood this and captured it in his way of building. Stone like water, columns like trees, entrances like elastic bone. Such beautiful correlations and

metaphors are evoked from his work.

Today’s ways of ‘sustainability’ are in the opposite sense of what I have just described. The application of ‘new’ technology and different systems are at the forefront of cutting edge design. Can we simply keep applying these ‘green’ ideas to our buildings when the understanding of what it means to build has never been attained? Can we continue to search with our technologies for more efficient and easier ways to save energy when it was these same technologies that have caused us this state of being? Putting up green-roofs and solar panels has become a fad and in my eyes is inherently flawed. What about truly being knowledgeable in the experience of the sun, the sensation of the grasses. The issue is not about trying to find new ways of making energy and preserving it, but it should be about truly understanding how these phenomena can be explored to make a more sustainable structure. Rock heats up and cools down, under the earth

is womb capable of keeping us warm...water has the capability of sculpting just about every surface....wood bends, breathes, swells, burns... mud and straw compact...ore found in the earth can be transformed, bent, folded. They are latent. Each having a persona; meaning to 'sound through' and it is our responsibility to bring this forth in a powerful, meaningful way.

Our education systems seem to be at fault here to a certain degree. In the earlier formative years of childhood gaining knowledge of the world was solely about the perception of things. It was how we learned. Were we allowed to explore? Were we explorers of the elements through our senses? Many systems of education are aimed at trying to keep everyone level and teaching them in the same manner. Children, like most creative adults learn through doing. It is with their hands that they gain their practical knowledge. Sir Ken Robinson, a "creativity" expert and critic of the modern day education system explains in his TED speech how it is inherently flawed. He sheds light on the aspect that we are supposed to be educating the young to survive in the future. What we are teaching them is becoming further and further from the reality of who we are, human. Children fascinate us with how they learn because all they know is what their bodies have told them. They are not like most university professors who are floating heads with their bodies following behind which in turn is what the academic system is established to produce. The education system is working against creativity, mathematics and sciences prevail, then the humanities, and at the bottom rung are art, music, drama, and dance. Much like the approach to many modern day building budgets and plans the 'art' portion is given the smallest percentage. It becomes the additive element that is tacked on at the end, be it a fountain or a representational mosaic symbol. It is a completely backwards way of working. Its applying the hard sciences first and then allowing the 'artist' to make a mark.

What if things were reversed, if the 'artist' was given the liberty to design it all, what if instead of "teaching children out of their creativity" like

Sir Robinson says they were allowed to flourish in their own manner. Why is dance, or sculpting not taught in the same manner, with the same intensity that mathematics is taught? Why not?

There is a parallel here that Bryan McKay Lyons of Sweatapple Architects speaks of. From his GHOST Lab in Nova Scotia which is a design/build workshop Lyons expresses the unquestionable need for the doing of Architecture through the body. Traditions is we have come to know the are simply manners of thinking, doing, and feeling. But they are not simply preserved and crystallized but in constant flux. The bodily interpretation that one is faced with when in the act of 'doing' can not be forgotten. Through tradition and ritual one is tested against what their bodies know, in this testing one also gains. The body recalls memories, adapts, and innovates.

The 'praxis' or doing of Architecture is a quintessential point of understanding the body. Leonida Koutsonmpos in his writing 'The Flute and the House' speaks of the difference of poesis and praxis. Making versus Doing. He states:

"Nowadays, praxis is usually affiliated with the mere application of abstract ideas, rules and principles, preconceived by theory"

Understanding that the participation in a practice is theory becomes fundamental to the way things are done. To how we teach, to how we use the material, to how we interpret the painting. Perez-Gomez says

"Architecture is like a poem because it occurs in experience."

Architecture as a symbol has the potential and momentum to reveal meaning of how we dwell. Can a meaningful piece of architecture really make a difference? Can it really affect a life, or the lives of many because of how it reveals? I think so. What is the ethical nature of what we teach, and what we do with this knowledge gained? Architecture must, and is responsible for giving back to culture something more than itself. I often question what our mass produced

houses, shopping malls, and music are returning to us? Architecture that stems from the body can simply return us to ourselves and make us aware of things we have lost. True art, architecture, and experience summon the past, the present, and direct us to the future. Tradition is knowledge, what have we left behind with our fascination for the flat imagery of the modern day?

I would like to steer this ship then to the studies of inspiration. A quote by Luis Barragan again helps to frame these sources of study. In the sense that to ask ourselves this question seems to evoke more than searching for specific answers. In a lecture to students Barragan stated:

“...do not ask me about this building or that one, do not look at what I do. See what I saw.

Typological Research

The Fisherman and the Sea

In the church
the fisherman enters his pew.
From his seat he recognizes that the column
has the same dimension as his mast. Through
this recognition he feels secure. He sits by
his column, a form also acknowledged by the
gentle touch of his fingers. On the open sea,
the tree was a symbol he trusted, as it
brought him safely home. The same repre-
sentation assists him now in turning his
thoughts toward prayer. Within his spirit the
sea is calm. In his search for the stars, the
column offers him a personal dialogue.

- Sverre Fehn

This vignette of text stems from a design by the Architect. Although the design was never realized in the immediate built world I feel that because of the inherent metaphor and sensitivity to inspiration it comes into more real than seeing images of it actually built. Fehn, has a tremendous way of layering his words with true meaning through and through.

I want to make clear that in his statement Fehn, has made his design intentions utterly clear. This piece of poetry needs not be explained because that then makes the words redundant. Much like meaningful architecture, all excess has been “trimmed” away, and in so doing becomes like a poem clearly stated. The poem, in being precise also evokes a world of interpretation, in its narrowing of words it fills the mind and body with other interpretations. For this reason I feel that it is worth elaborating on.



In his words, Fehn relates the church in a very symbolic way to that of security. The analogies of the tree and the boat are also symbols that the fisherman can relate to. In creating the outer shell for the church the fisherman is able to relate through all he has known, which is the hull of his boat. A recognition is immediately experienced. The weight of the shell as well can be related to creatures from the sea. A shell protects many animals from predators and keeps the ‘pearl’ content inside.

Fehn goes on and speaks of the column. Again another symbolic gesture that the fisherman recognizes. The tree is analogous and vice versa. In a general context a column might not have any meaning, there are columns everywhere that go unseen for their quality has maybe not been evoked within it’s context. In relation to the shell the column sits as a separate entity, it has been set free to guide the fisherman into prayer. Much like the mast at sea it is the beacon, the guiding force that directs the boat.

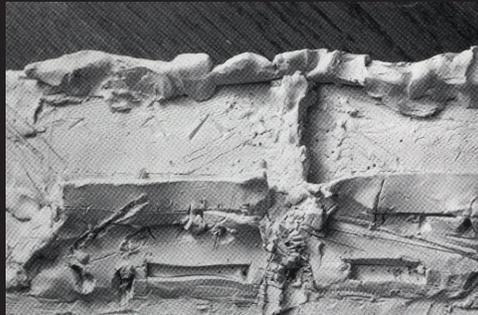


The open sea is then talked about. The activity which is prayer, much like an endless sea is the driving force behind the design. In distancing the shell structure from the ground floor Fehn sets many entities out to float amongst the space. They don’t float aimlessly, but are tethered symbolically through the pew to the column, out of the shell to the heavens. Because of this inherent and magnificent understanding the fisherman can be set free internally, focusing, on the sea inside.

A symbolic relationship to ourselves through what we do and how our inhabited spaces can enhance this is not seen in today’s culture. Buildings are reduced down to signs and literal symbols and neon signs. Even the language we speak is moving further and further away from words loaded with meaning and understanding. Acronyms and abbreviations are more and more prevalent to the point where we people almost are like data sputtering computers. The words spoken by Fehn are a wonderful way of showing how between language and the built form there is a powerful dialogue if things are viewed more perceptively.

Meaningful architecture does not need elaborate words to build it up, but instead evokes poetic language.

Rock Carving Museum Borge, 1993
Sverre Fehn - Not Built

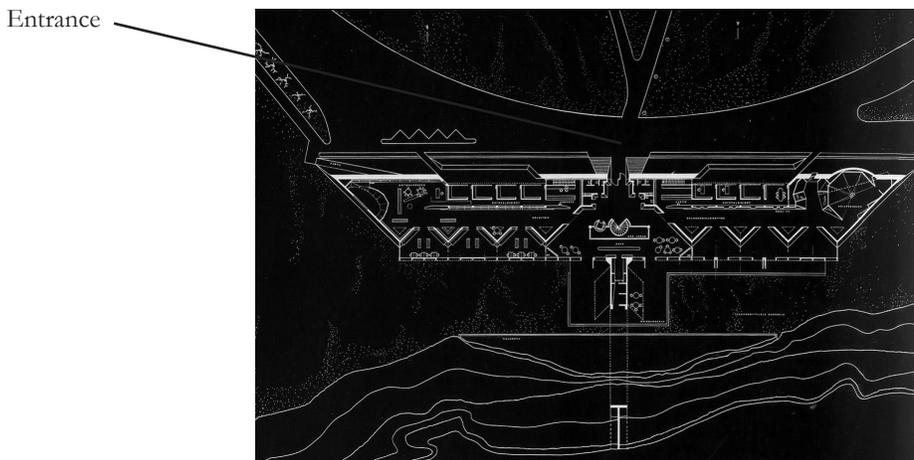


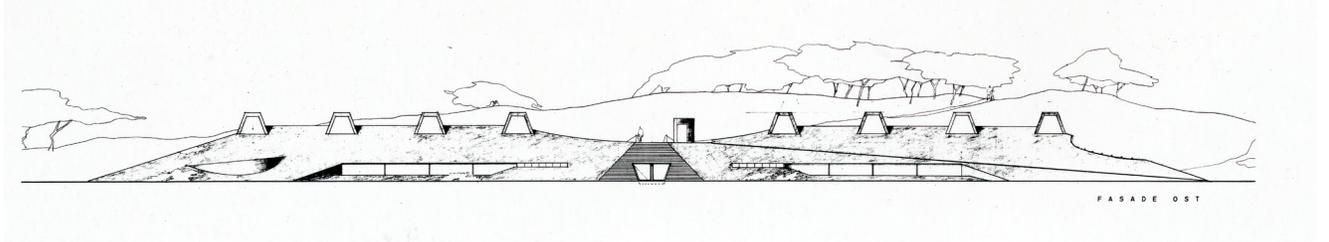
The image from the previous page is of a process model done by Fehn. I would like to elaborate on its condition. Granted, an image is a complete reduction of what the model truly would be, I can image the process taken simply by the thing itself. Fehn is recognized for the use of clay in his models, for this reason he in turn is a sculptor. His marks and gestures are felt, not just seen, which gives a much richer understanding of how he interprets the site. Fehn hints at the idea of carving. I see that he scored the clay with a knife or a sharpened tool of sorts, much like the ancients would have carved their rocks. He possibly cut the triangular mass of the building with a taught string, which recalls the feeling of a surgeon making an incision. To Fehn the Earth is like a body, a body in need of repair and suture. His need to open the Earth in order to heal it is reconciled in his process.

I chose to study another of Fehn's designs. This project was never built, but it certainly provokes interpretation and is relatable to my own intentions. Fehn says, "The structure of the building is like an incision in the Earth's surface. If you open it, like the cover of a book the past will be revealed." This cut in the earth is how he sees the building becoming part of the landscape and also helping to explain it. This museum sits at the base of a gradually sloping terrain. The fields of Ostfold county hold a mystery that Fehn hopes to elucidate with his incision.

Upon approach one is followed by a promenade that leads them directly to the front steps. If you are approaching from the parking lot one will encounter a small score of a path in the building that leads directly to the top. Moving past this you are lead to the front of the building by a gradual curve that wraps around the flat terrain. The incision in the Earth becomes apparent to the body once you reach the center of the building. Entering into the incision one is confronted with the "descent" as Fehn puts it. The bottom floor of the architecture is sunk into the ground a couple of meters responding to the slope of the roof. Moving downward into the space the sense of a 'womb' is evoked. This is how Fehn juxtaposes the movement upwards on the exterior.

The spiral stairs and elevator shaft are what is first seen in lower space. Again, the recognition of the space above is reconciled. Large light wells from above seep light in to help with the experience of moving out of the Earth. To the north there is the exhibition space where artifacts and exhibitions would be placed dealing with the ancient granite writings. These spaces are defined by thick partitions, to again evoke the sense of entombment. The the south are the library spaces with small reading rooms tucked under the fold of the ceiling. At the polar ends of the structure are large openings allowing light and perception to drift outwards towards the landscape.





If one were to follow the slope of the architecture upwards they would be led to the top of the museum. Atop the building they would see the triangular light wells pouring light down to the museum below. Moving forward there is a bridge. This bridge is like the gateway to the land.

Martin Heidegger speaks of the bridge and how it addresses the fourfold idea of being (dwelling). The Earth, the sky, the divinities, and the mortals. Fejn comprehends this and knows that his bridge is the connection between the earlier experiences, into what one is about to experience, the ancients. Open to the sky above one understands that these rocks are part of a larger world, a larger idea. The divinities relates to the understanding and questioning of why the way things are. Evoking these phenomena through the building brings questions of why things occur how they do and how Fejn has been able to frame them in such a manner. This bridge allows the original 'narrative' of rock carving to be set free, yet connected to his incision in the Earth. It is in direct contact with the hillside where the rock carving exist. Passing through this structure before setting foot on the ancient site is almost like a right of passage. One needs to slow down and realize what the design is doing. It's orientation, its direction, the slope upwards; all are helping to provoke the landscape to be seen in a particular way. A whole world of interpretation is waiting at the end of this bridge.

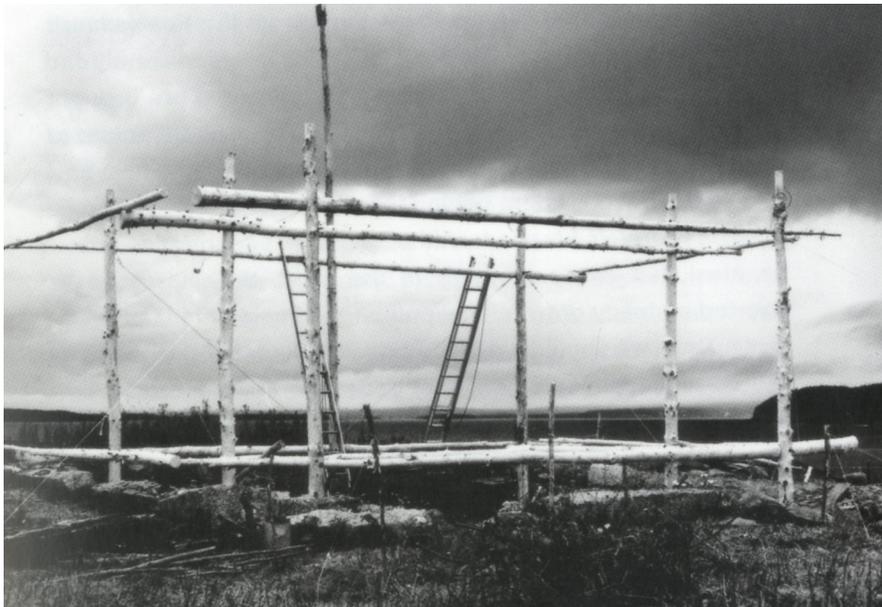
This project helps to reinforce the idea of what our modern day culture has lost. A connection through, to our past in a mytho-poetic understanding of who we are. A lose of sensitivity, and perceptive knowledge is so ever prevalent in the way we live today. Dependence on the modern technology of industry, advertising, pop culture has desensitized us from these simple yet profound occurrences that we live everyday.

GHOST LAB



I chose to use the design/ build school of Bryan McKay Lyons of Sweetapple Architects as a case study because it embodies the nature of what I intend to do. A two week long ‘course’ is held on the shores of Nova Scotia in Canada. Bryan started this school in 1994 because he felt that there was a complete disconnect between the designer and builder of a project. Bryan uses the term of ‘hands on’ to explain the reality of what this two weeks entails. It is the true coming together of theory and practice. He entitles his seminar with the word GHOST because that is what these structures essentially embody. Students from all over the world gather here and spend two intensive weeks first designing then actually manifesting their ideas into a built form. The Ghost Lab is meant to bring together those from different disciplines to show students what it really takes to put of a meaningful piece of architecture.

Bryan has many of these structures around his plot of land that sort of haunt it. They are all not necessarily used always but they embody and breathe through the ideas that made them. The likes of Juhani Pallasmaa, and Kenneth Frampton have been guest designers in some of these endeavours. History, theory, and common practice are all brought together to this place for two weeks. What if this were to occur everyday? In a very poetic manner Lyons instills in the participants the mythos of the land. Storytelling is a true part of the design and comes through in the end product. The ‘skeleton’ is how he elucidates what builders used to speak of when constructing a body of work.





A particular sense of place is felt through and through all the projects that Lyons produces. The water, the humid air, the clearing of the forest near the coast. They all are considered when beginning a design. As one sees the images of the first GHOST that Lyons and his team produced there is archaic almost fundamental understanding of what a building is. The structure was placed on a ruin of a barn that once stood on the land. The space is simple, merely on large platform that is enclosed by a permeable skin. The design was meant to allow the ruin to be brought back to life by simply putting its wall and roof back on. It evokes a mystery again and brings the ghost back from the dead.

The construction methods were simple. Post and beam is the fundamental way of building and many students and professionals have never experienced it. In this form of construction the idea of community comes through. The understanding that to build is ritual and how we build is how we dwell. The construction allows the ceremony of construction to take precedent and in turn the building speaks of this. After it had been built they held a party, serving local lobster and having live music. A very deep and enriching experience I imagine this would be. Enclosing a simple space gives the community a place to gather.

This study has opened my mind to a deeper understanding of what community and ritual can really do in the process of construction. What does ritual have to do with today's construction? Is it all about the immediate product being complete and then filling it with our things? In my eyes ritual is not explored enough in any part of culture. Ritual serves to help explore those 'ghosts' that lay latent in our every day lives. The memories of sites, and of experiences are never fully explored and allowed to come forth in our daily routines.

Historical Context

What was education in the historical sense? In my view, it was not separated from the act of doing. It was also not devoid of the body. Education was a craft that one learned. It was the experience of pursuing a trade, of responding to the needs of one's own environment. Of course life today is not how it was back in the days of the ancients or even 100 or 50 years ago.

In contrast I would like to speak

The proposal of a master/builder school relates to many schools through out history. Not just in the academic sense but in the idea of a specialization in a trade, or in a particular way of doing things. If we look back to recent history relatively speaking, the years of 1919 - 1933 a small coup of people attempted and succeeded in their own ideas of what education should be. Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus. In my own way I am proposing a similar undertaking.

The Bauhaus had three particular aims that were laid out in the manifesto written by Gropius himself. First their was the need to 'rescue' the arts from their isolation. Much like I have stated before, this symptom seems to still be part of our society. Art meaning the act of poetic doing is separate from mass culture; separate from the everyday way of life. Secondly Gropius proposed to:

“...Elevate the status of the crafts to that which the ‘fine arts’ enjoyed.”

A standpoint that there should not be a difference between the craftsmen and the artist was taken. The artist is the 'exalted' craftsmen. Again today that separation, that distinction is ingrained, even taught in our schools. There was almost a stigma in the education system growing up that those who were classified as artists would never survive in the "real world." Third was the idea and inherent need that the work from the Bauhaus would free themselves from the academic setting and eventually be brought into the public realm as products to be sold. In a parallel move I too envision the work at this school to not be internalized, but to be thrust outward in responses to the current conditions.

Like the Bauhaus, Cooperation, interdisciplinary and transcendent work would be the aim. The Manifesto states at the beginning:

“The ultimate aim of all creative activity is the building.”

This is not a brand new idea, I am not proposing to reinvent the wheel, but to simply be critical of how we are being taught and to respond through how we build. The idea of the master/builder also has historical meaning. Within history people did not see Architecture in the academic setting. The stone mason, the wood carver, the brick layer were the designers. Simply because they understood their material, they knew their properties best and therefore become artists of their craft. I see this in today's society as well. Suburban landscapes are erected in a number of months, that would not be possible without the expertise of the framers, the electricians, the gypsum board installers. Their is a work force like none other out their able to be efficient, productive, and craftful, but to what are these traits being applied to? Tadao Ando I believe was the last recognized Architect to be self taught, not having gone through the academic system but having traveled and learned through doing.

At the Bauhause students were encouraged to explore all areas of craft so one could find what they enjoyed best and were proficient at. Encouragement to explore and to learn in ones own manner was the motto that they lived by. In contrast to today's schools where students like products are put through the assembly line of classes and are expected to become knowledgeable.

Workshops and not the studio were to be a platform from which the Bauhaus established itself. Before this there were many schools trying to establish themselves in similar manners around Europe. As the Second Industrial Revolution took shape in the fifties many art schools continued to do work as they had in previous times. The craftsmen still learned their skills through apprenticeship and worked in similar manners of the last hundred years. Something needed to happen. In 1851 Joseph Paxton's

exhibition in the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park in London held what many understood as the dawn of the new era. It was to revolutionize the way we worked, thought, and lived our lives. More perceptive souls understood that this was the end of the skilled craftsmen left to his own devices. In relation to our modern age, this sounds incredibly familiar. Our technologically based way of living has drowned out the idea of craftsmen, the master/builder, the artist. Proposing a new school of thought, returning to the corporeal, feels like it is necessary. History repeats itself.

In relation to the trends of society, this school would seem to come of as a protest, as a political statement. Granted, these underlying symbols would be associated with this project unintentionally it is a good thing. It would make the school a target. Much like the Bauhaus was targeted by the Nazi Government, this school will too fall under political and social questioning. Socially it relates to those individuals who pursue their own endeavours and work towards their own aims. If done in a meaningful way this school of thought can certainly call attention to itself and be recognized for how it approaches education.

I would also like to share another narrative taken from the GHOST Lab publication by McKay-Lyons. It is titled

“Why Albert Oxner Shingled His Barn”
One morning when I was young, my dad and I Decided to change the barn around. It used to be double-boarded up and down between the heavy timbers, but it got rotten from the weather. We stripped off the double-boarding, and we put studs in between the old timbers. Then we covered them with horizontal boards across. On this we put shingles. We took the oil from the livers of the cod we caught and mixed it up with iron-oxide powder and ox blood. This we would paint onto the shingles. If you put a drop on a shingle one night, by the next day it would soak right through to the other side. It had a ‘good’ smell, but it was some stuff to make the shingles last.

This story shows a man who was caught between the old and the new. Albert was illiterate and had known nothing more than the work of his hands. Him and his father knew nothing better than to use the materials to how they thought would work best. The thinner lumber fit between the bigger. The shingles like the shell of a boat would protect it's inside. Not knowing better the ox blood was thought to seal the skin from the elements. It is a way of doing that has been lost in our society, like a child playing with an a toy does not attach symbols to it but merely sees it as an object. Albert and his father used these new technologies how they deemed fit. It makes sense it is bodily.

The proposed school would see in a similar manner. Not necessarily doing mindless and redundant work, but exploring and testing material, ideas, and creations for what they really are.

Physically this school is set in a very old and prehistoric site. Distanced from the larger context of Denver it will become almost a new town, or place, or The New School. Proposing to not only be added to, but integrating into the existing construction of the Red Rocks amphitheater, it becomes connected with the history of that place. Scrutiny and protest might even come about. This school being one aimed at the doing of art will relate to a certain degree to the history of the inspiration for the existing amphitheater. John Walker the visionary who saw the potential in this place wanted to not exploit the land, but work with it, being empathetic in a way. I too have the same vision, that the context of this place can be only revealed more in the manner of a school and how it is done.

Within a larger social context this project will be stepping on toes with those who feel the need to leave the landscape to it's own devices. I have spoke of the subject of sustainability and it's historical role and modern interpretation. I feel this directly correlates with the social agenda that certain people might have in the opposition to further constructing on this land. I would ar-

gue that this place can teach us something more if done correctly.

This amphitheater is part of a larger connection to the land. People use this place as one of social gathering. Large events, historically the likes of The Beatles, Jethro Tall, John Denver, and Neil Young have all made this sight a landmark by having performed at this stage. All of this plays a role in the moves I make in interpreting the site and how I proceed with it. What kinds of implication will I make that influence the reputation of the site? Can I enhance it or is it foretold that doing something to such a sight will ruin it no matter what. History again might have the answer.

Aims for the Thesis Project

The aims for this project range from a personal level to that of the larger ethical questions of what architecture should become.

First and foremost I would like to address the larger issue. At the professional level architecture has been preoccupied with the notion of modern day culture deems as appropriate. Most professionals who are making architecture have become lost in the world of technology and pragmatism. The understanding of what it means to build and make have been completely forgotten and it has become a field of applying conceptual ideas to just about anything. Evidence of this is seen in modern day constructions and designs. False facades, neon signs, and a repetition of spaces that are the same in a church as they are in a shopping mall. Architects nowadays select materials out of sample books, the language they speak is that of acronyms. Everything seems to be becoming more and more like a computer, simply because that is where the designs are coming from. My intentions with this thesis is to be critical of these methods and to offer a different approach to how we build. It is not an entirely new approach but it is one that comes from history. This proposal of a school will bring in professionals of all fields to expose them to what would be occurring here.

In the Academic sense my aim is to somehow influence how we ourselves are being taught. Departing from a 'system' that is similar to a mass production factory I hope to shed light on how focusing on the individual can possibly revolutionize and bring forth more novel and intriguing work. I am not saying that what this thesis proposes should be applied everywhere and that all academies must change their ways. What I intend is to hopefully alter the direction that the 'machine' of academia is taking. One that focuses more on the search for newer and more efficient technologies, how about a shift towards a slowing down, to a better understanding of what it is that we are teaching, and how it is affecting our culture. Why not teach dance all through our years much like we are taught math or science? How many students are being di-

verted from their true potential just because they are locked into the machine? The thesis is trying to focus on this point exactly. Is academic really what architecture should be? Can it return to an experience of gained knowledge, of travel of interpretation with material? Can other disciples adopt this train of thought? I would also like to state that it is not a theory or a method, which tend to categorize things in the academic setting, but more about a doing which in turn is theory. I feel that the aim for this project in this place is to question how things are being done and to provoke a discourse of what works and what doesn't.

Personally these endeavors are what I have been living through most of my life. They have simply been amplified in the last five years. With my own projects of making, and doing I have realized that is the way I learn. Challenging myself and being critical of my own work has only helped to enhance the basis for this proposition. I have always viewed the project as a catalyst towards something more. Be it the next design step, or even further into the future of where I see this work taking me. I have always been critical of previous thesis projects because it seems that it becomes too applied, there is no testing, no actual doing before the design process. I enjoy the questioning we do, but what do we test it against?

In learning about previous schools that are similar to what I propose I feel like this project can certainly make a difference and give back to our modern culture. In trying to comprehend and narrow the framing of what I am about to undertake I have learned much about the system of how things operate. Using these bits of knowledge I have been able to understand what it is that I want focus on and what it is that I do not, but possibly should. The project has helped me to acknowledge the need for meaningful architecture and it's influence in our daily lives. The cross disciplinary view that I see architecture as needs to become more rigorous and demanding of the designers and doers who make it all happen.

Site Analysis

Red Rocks Park Morrison, Colorado U.S.A.

The site once named the *Garden of Angels* is a phenomena itself. Two three-hundred foot sandstone monoliths create the amphitheater known as Red Rocks. There is an inherent movement that one witnesses here; 250 million years of the earths plates piercing the crust, being thrust towards the sky horizontally towering those around. What is called the *fountain formation*, is the theatre of the site and surrounding area. The formations are at the easterly border of the Rocky Mountain range and are seen as the threshold to the west.

Red Rocks is one of many parks around the region that attracts locals and many tourists from all over. Denver, being about half hour away is just close enough that many

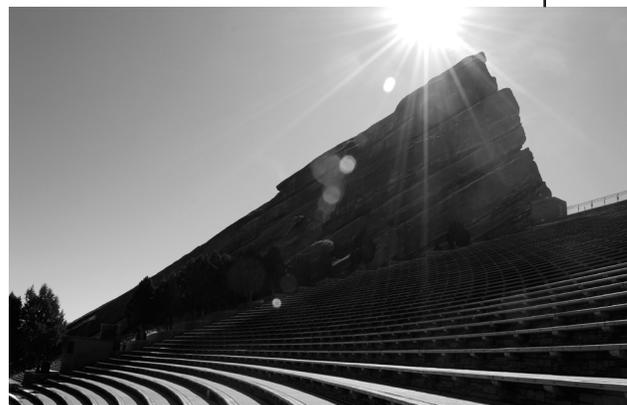
urban dwellers come to these mountains for escape. The city of Denver owns and operates the site hosting events year round at the theatre.

Earths history is told here. Fossils from the Jurassic period about 160 million years old are still being found nearby. Thousands of years of water erosion can be discerned from the large rocks. A geological museum is prominent as one walks around.

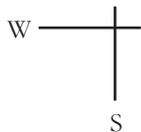
Creation Rock to the north and *Ship Rock* to the south create the frame and the heart of the site. A fantastical view facing east of the flattening land and the city of Denver in the distance is framed. In the opposing direction one can see the rising landscape and a growth of texture and elevation.



To the West:
The Rockies

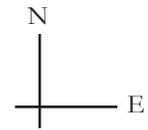


To the South:
Creation Rock





To the North
Ship Rock



To the East
Denver



Looming 300 feet into the air, these creations cast equally intimidating shadows. A change in temperature is certainly felt from the sun stricken rock to its cape of darkness.

Being at the site I felt that there is a harmony amongst a chaos of man and earth. This harmony can only be reached through the understanding of how the site exists and how people can exist within it. Amongst the brutal and giant rocks the amphitheater sits just so. Following the slope of the land and not applying itself to it the defined spaces seem to be in a tranquil existence.

John Brisbon Walker was the first to recognize the site in the early 1900's. Seeing the two monoliths, he was able to understand the amplification of

sound that naturally occurred. Between 1906 and 1910 he produced concerts and plays that took place at the base of the theatre. Later in 1927 the city of Denver bought the site from Brisbon and enlisted the help of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and the design of architect Burnham Hoyt build the permanent structure.

Scaling the rocks shifted my perspective of the site and how these rocks are what the ecosystems revolve around. Plants grow amongst the clearings where direct sunlight can reach them. Amongst the crevices and fissures in the rocks there is cold spaces. The shifting and friction that these rocks have been through can be seen

in the dirt you walk in. The underbellies of the rocks are rough and with definite striations. On the top surfaces the affect of water is ever so clear.

Over the hundreds of thousands of years small little pools have formed on their tops collecting water and ice throughout the season. The monoliths and water are tied in the endless battle of trying to turn solid into liquid. Here, one is witness to the *happenings* that are the earth.

Built Form

The existing amphitheater is built between the rocks and is capable of seating thousands. There is a small ticketing area and rest rooms atop the seats, lighting and mechanical spaces are held behind and to the sides of the stage



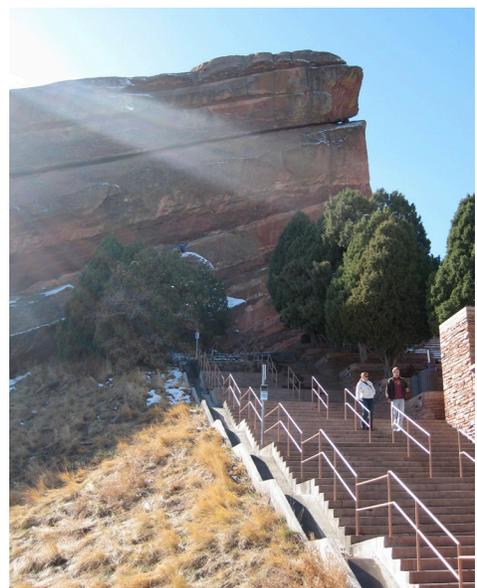
Light

Shadows loom deep and light strikes fierce where it can. The large rocks also cast long shadows over the built amphitheater as well. Change in temperature is certainly felt from being around the rocks to moving out past their casts.



Slope

The grade of the site is quite steep. The two major rocks jut out at about a 45 degree angle. Some come straight out of the ground and tower of the site as well.





Downhill

If it were icy, I would have slipped, too much speed and I would trip, leaning back, toes pressed to the fronts of my shoes.



Distress:

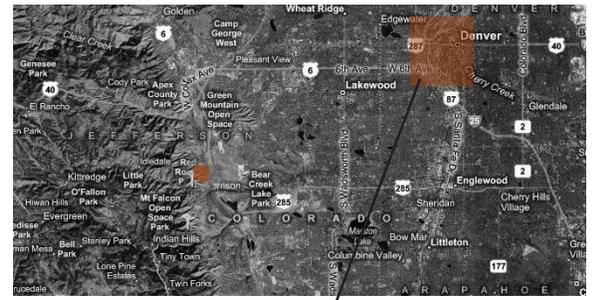
Human encounter is one of the most distressing elements on the site. People continuously climb the rocks slowing eroding them away.



Water is the other major factor on the site. Over thousands of years the rocks have been sculpted how they are and they give them their character

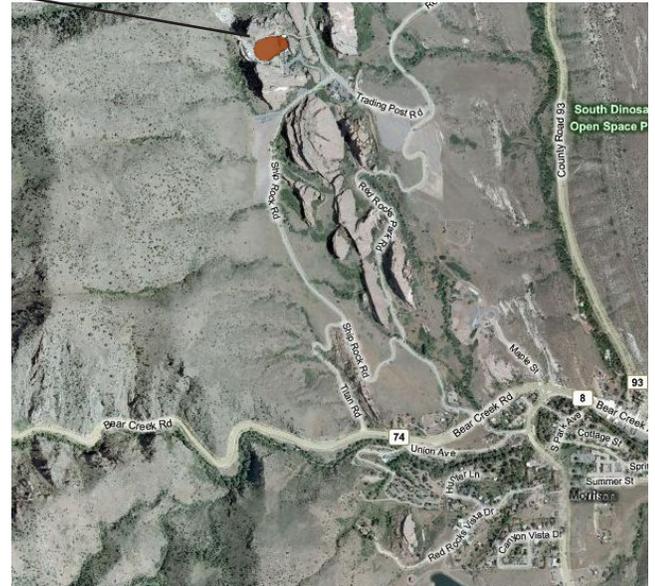


General

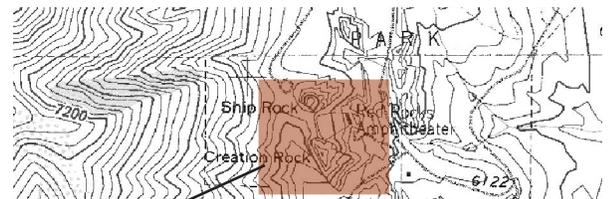


Denver

Built area



Site area



Programmatic Requirements

Presumed spaces

- entrance
- workshops
- performance space
- materials library
- exhibition space
- bathrooms
- offices
- bedrooms (dorm-like)
- library

- outdoor seating
- outdoor exhibition space
- testing grounds
- bridge
- lodging spaces
- free building space
- archeological defined spaces

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"The world is as interesting as one makes it, the academic setting here has been just that."