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Biblioteca España

BY DIEGO ARANGO

Giancarlo Mazzanti's Biblioteca España has changed the landscape of the Santo Domingo Savio barrio, formerly one of the most violent slums in all of Latin America. On one Saturday morning, I rode Medellín's clean, efficient metro to a cable car that took me soaring over the impoverished slum, dropping me in the heart of the barrio, a place once deemed prohibitively unsafe for tourists. The Mazzanti's library is visible from most of Medellín, a city of nearly four million that sits in the Medellín River's valley, and expands far up the mountains that create the valley. From the river, the library, jutting out from

Photo credit: All photographs by Diego Arango



the dense slum, looks like a black stone, an exposed part of the mountain it sits on. Sitting in the metro cable, a resident proudly points out her home, a teetering, unstable mass of brick walls and tin roof, mimicking the jutting nature of the library itself. This pride is particularly characteristic of *el paisa*, or someone from the state of Antioquia, where Medellín is the capital. The Biblioteca España has increased the *paisa's* self-recognition and pride, its effect felt across all social classes in this highly stratified city. Tourists, rich and poor, rush to see this new architectural symbol, which is supported by a low-cost gondola that serves as public transportation for residents of the slum.

As the gondola reaches up over the city, one can more clearly see the massive, dark façade of the library, which appears to be made out of solid, black and brown slabs of stone. The building consists of



three masses; the geometry appears to be the result of slicing off corners of a cube like an unevenly cut stone. Small, horizontal windows, which seem incredibly few in quantity to illuminate such large spaces, rise diagonally across the façade, heightening the angular nature of the building's geometry, as well as the rising sensation one feels upon approaching the site.

Many tourists simply view the library from the gondola, and then either transfer onto a purely tourist-oriented gondola that continues its ascent over the mountain into a national park or ride back down to the metro. I get off at the barrio, and avoid the landscaped park and path to the library. I cut through a small street, and take a more meandering route, until reaching a set of stairs that descend to the library's entrance. The library continuously plays with your sense of scale. From down below, it's a small rock. Now, it towers above me as I am about to enter. From the side facing the mountain. The lobby is nestled under a concrete slab that the surrounding park sits upon, and one enters from the building's third floor.

Once inside, I come to understand the structure. The façade is a skink, encompassing simple slab stories supported by large circular columns. The interior programs on these levels are the main have open, square floor plans, and they are surprisingly well illuminated,

given the small windows on the façade; all the light comes from above. The ceilings are large, glass skylights. Disappointingly, the façade, which looks so solid and monumental from outside, is a thin steel frame covered with tiles inside. It is not the solid stone structure it appears to be. The interior end of the façade is drywall, which already shows signs of water damage. Despite these construction problems, however, the library bustles with life. Students check out books. Young boys and girls read in the childrens' section on the lower level. And on balcony-like mezzanines, a group of nuns read Wikipedia and log onto Facebook.

This new symbol of Medellín is part of a campaign to bring infrastructure and education to the slum. Many residents now have running water and electricity. They boast sidewalks, and of course, the massive, convenient gondola system. More than a symbol of progress, its use is evidence of its success as a public space for the community. The construction flaws, though, cast a shadow over this success. Why was it the public library in the slum that couldn't budget a secure, waterproof façade? Also, I would like to have seen the Mazzanti take more advantage of the imposing, magnificent view of the city. He aimed to de-contextualize residents from the poverty within which they live by limiting the views of the expansive slums that dominate the mountainsides of Medellín. Yet, this view, this reality, is awesome. Not necessarily uplifting, but impressive, and a reminder of all the work that is left to be done. Why hide this? The Biblioteca Espana is a start towards giving the most marginalized communities in Colombia a cultural, intellectual, and community center. An open window to the rest of Medellín would have raised awareness about the need for similar projects throughout the rest of the city.





Learning the Hard Way

A TALE OF ZONING AND COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

BY RIAN ROONEY

108 East 96th Street does not seem particularly out of the ordinary. It's a redbrick, 19-story building, in the midblock between Park and Lexington. Also known as Park 96, this residential tower's apparent innocence amid the row houses and blander new residences of Carnegie Hill belies a controversial history.

In March 2009, I began working as a volunteer at an organization called Civitas, a name inspired by the Latin word characterizing the virtue of citizens active in the life of the city. Civitas is a community organization, committed to urban planning and policy that protects neighborhood, residential and environmental interests. It's a bit of an anomaly in terms of the community organizations and non-

Photo credit: All photographs by Rian Rooney

profits with which one might be familiar. For one, Civitas represents the interests of two vastly different communities, the Upper East Side and East Harlem, which are, albeit, neighbors.

Once or twice a week, I would hop on the 96th Street cross-town bus and make the inexplicably slow trek over to that not-too-distant Upper East Side brownstone which houses the one-room headquarters of this community defender. To Columbia students, the Upper East Side seems to represent some sort of netherworld of old New York wealth, disliked more for its relative inaccessibility than for any more substantive reason. In truth, it's a very beautiful place. Most students only ever risk leaving the 1 line to bring friends or family to the Museum Mile. But as I soon found out on my commutes to work, 96th Street represents a real borderland between the Upper East Side and its northern neighbor, Spanish Harlem. And unbeknownst to me early on, my commute would take me right past Park 96.

I first learned about the building while digging through old archives in the Civitas home base, looking for historical documents that could potentially roadblock the construction of a new high-rise over a park in Yorkville. The site did not always hold an inconsequential 19-story building. In fact, in 1986 108 East 96th Street stood, not-yet-occupied at 31 stories. During construction, someone at Civitas realized that the building was in stark violation of a special zoning code that extends east of Park Avenue and alerted the New York City. According to the developer, Parkview Associates, the original zoning map issued by the city was faulty and did not accurately mark this special zoning area on the site of the new tower. However, with forceful campaigning from Civitas and neighbors, construction was stopped and the issue entered years of legal battles.

In 1993 the City of New York saw twelve stories removed from 108 East 96th Street. It was the first time in the history of the city that a building had stories removed to comply with zoning regulations.

In the years since, Civitas has worked with the community and the city to continue to maintain northeast Manhattan's skyline. Today, Civitas is working to help expedite the 2nd Avenue subway and express bus routes, rezone East Harlem for more efficient and community-oriented development, and create a pedestrian bridge to Randall's island.

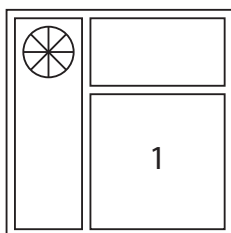
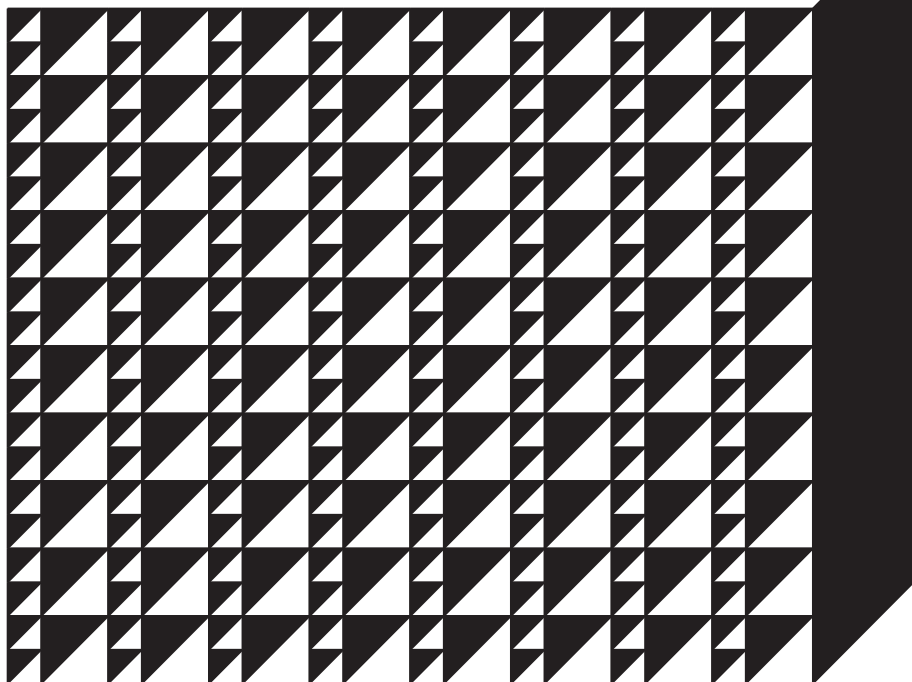
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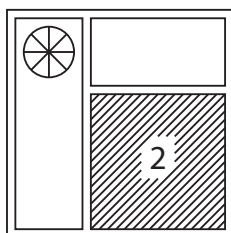
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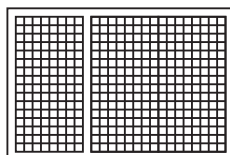
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Writing the City

BY MARSHALL BALL

The descriptive scene and passage through text bears a material relation to procession through the urban ecology. The sensory impact of language plays across the skin similar to the experience of the street. The compression of the urban. The city provides a rich code, in writing it one is able to appropriate its language, rearrange it, deconstruct, deterritorialize, smooth its striation. Therefore writing the city is necessarily a political act, a redirecting of the vectors of force through heretical combination. It differs from writing the landscape because, the rural environment is contaminated by nature, in the city all objects are hybridized and symbolic. They lack the essence of being given. When compressed into architectural canyons, things pass into sign. They become transitory elements which, if they have essences, one could not say they were wholly their own. Things are forced into networks or systemic arrangements, ambiguous apparatuses. They become intertextual in the built verticality. Stacking forces a relationship of planes and simultaneity of location, a coordination, not found in the pastoral environment. Beside of this layering writing the city takes on a distinct sensory, material, embodied edge. It is subjective, or revolves around a subject but an entangled one not found in naturalism and a discrete one not found in proletarian literatures.

Forest on the Northwest Corner

BY CHENOE HART



The most frequent praise which I have heard about Columbia University's new Northwest Cornerscience building, designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, is that it is modern. That might initially seem to be a curious angle of approach, given that my architecture classmates often laugh off such party lines as an obsolete conflict of the last millennium. For the rest of campus, however, modernity remains a contentious issue. The style is still associated with the controversial 1960's athletic center proposed in Morningside Park with segregated facilities for the local community. The students called it "Gym Crow" and took over college buildings during

Photo Credit: All photographs by Chenoe Hart.

a week of violent protests. Around the same time, architect I.M. Pei's proposed campus redesign also drew controversy for its intent to barge into our school's original McKim, Mead, and White master plan with towering concrete buildings.

The negative associations lingered, and our campus architecture spent decades tiptoeing in tradition. The open glass of Bernard Tschumi's design for Lerner Hall was weighed down by masonry additions after local activists complained. The Business School received similar renovations, and even our departments of electrical engineering and computer science hide under the mansard roof of the Shapiro Center. Although some contemporary campus work, such as the Journalism School café recently designed by Marble Fairbanks, is more openly progressive, its presence remains subtle. In a lecture last year, co-architect Karen Fairbanks remarked that she had been pleasantly surprised to find that, from certain angles, a reflective facade made her building appear almost invisible. So I can empathize with critics' excitement when they proclaim that a major new edifice on the Columbia campus is loudly, triumphantly, modern.

The new science building is big, too big to ignore, and every inch of its exterior presence stands firmly as an ode to functional expression. The zig-zagging aluminum angles on its facade are particularly brash, a rippling skin that clings to the outlines of the tower's structural muscles as they heroically cantilever the weight of thirteen floors 120 feet over the hidden underground successor to the Morningside gym. It's likely a kindred spirit to the athletes inside.

For a building that seems so rational, however, architect Moneo might be a curious choice of designer. He first gained notoriety as a pioneer of Deconstructivist architecture, seeking to apply the rifts and contradictions unearthed by the literary movement of the same name to the traditionally stable realm of the built environment. His 1974 town hall for Logroño, Spain, for example, rendered the touchstone archetype of the classical portico as a tinny awning propped on hollow pipes for columns. Its effects seemed to destabilize institutionality and rules. According to Christopher Alexander, an architectural theorist inclined towards science and order, he was "f--ing up the world."

Such past opinions could not veer further from university President

Bollinger's contemporary decision to hire Mr. Moneo because of his "extreme sensitivity to context," suggesting that the architect now draws from a different stylistic register. And indeed, his artistic voice has mellowed. Current work is more likely to draw inspiration from the humanistic materiality of Finnish Modernism. Occasionally the former maverick still sneaks another deconstructive surprise into his designs, but their comprehensive experience feels more mature in comparison to the experimentation of what might be explained, in architect-years, to be his rowdy youth.

Such grounding is evident on the exterior of his latest building. The facade's diagonal louvers provide a sense of texture and scale not normally expected from metal. Further down, the tower meets the sidewalk in a granite base complementary to its century-old neighbors. Those buildings likely feel more sympathy than the local people walking past, however, whom it mostly turns a blank wall towards. The barricade is at least softened where its streaking texture continues the facade pattern, a move which rewards visitors' eyes as the wall turns the corner near the building's entrance.

The tactile sequence continues inside, greeting visitors with rich expanses of green marble. The effect recalls the most refined work of Mies van der Rohe, or, as New York Times Architecture critic, Nicolai Ourousoff, points out, the surface treatments favored by the earlier architect Adolf Loos. Upstairs in the building's coffee shop, a few contemporary elements - but not too many - are sprinkled into the airy space, offering some needed relief from the compressed orthogonal weight of the previous entry sequence. A similar antidote is applied to the campus-side entrance, where touches of wood welcome student users.

The more private laboratory floors, meanwhile, are all business; endless marches of white, sterile hallways. The efficient design appeared to enforce the building's functionalist aims, but as I explored its spaces I felt a growing concern that some of their intended utility was missing. Environmental psychology studies have shown that the most functional laboratories must also account for the softer human factors involved in research. Breakthroughs are more often produced by the conversations that happen during unplanned chance encounters between people than by formal meetings or individual toil. Recent labs such as Rafael Vinoly's Janelia Farm



center in Virginia are designed to provoke interaction, including cutting corridors to force researchers to pass by each other and even incorporating a bar as a social center for the institution.

Mr. Moneo attempts to breed interaction by placing lounges in the skybridges that connect to other adjoining buildings. Inside his own walls, however, such nodes occur less frequently. While the open floor plates enabled by the building's cantilevers will spark collaborations within each lab, interactions with groups on other floors will require researchers to either wait for elevators, or else trek down an inconvenient fire stair. In a more likely scenario, they might suffice with the purely visual connections found between the mezzanines adjoining their offices. And Columbia student readers will be dismayed to learn that no, the new building does not include a bar.

The architect's hand was likely forced by practical considerations. Where Mr. Vinoly's science lab could minimize its vertical disjunctions by stretching fewer stories out across its generous rural site, Mr. Moneo needed to come to terms with the cost of Manhattan real estate. He built up. The fact that the building's height so limited its vertical connectivity, however, is still surprising given that a possible solution already existed on campus. Lerner's ramps may be infamously vacant, but they successfully fuse the hall's discrete floors into a single continuous surface. The potential remains fascinating, and Lerner's lessons could have informed our newest building.

The building's timid pursuit of Modernism's larger mission of experimenting with new possibilities for the future could, in spite of its use of the movement's formal conventions, open up questions about its deeper modernity. For decades architecture has been divided into two types of "modern." In the movement's heady early days, Modernists pursued an activist direction. New visions for social housing and city planning responded to the conditions of the urban poor. In subsequent decades, however, as Modernism was enthusiastically adopted during America's post-war economic development, something within the movement seemed to change. Low-budget imitations of the Bauhaus masters often ignored quality and function, and critics began wondering where the movement went wrong. Enter Phillip Johnson, whose 1932 MoMA exhibition, *The International Style*, shifted how Modernist works were perceived at the same time

that it brought the movement to a wider audience. The show's use of the word "style" re-defined the social mission as an applied decorative trend.

For Columbia, the social imperative was Harlem. Anchoring the northern corner of campus at the intersection of 120th street and Broadway, it aspired, in the words of President Bollinger, to serve as a "beacon" to the local Manhattanville community, a group now being displaced by University expansion. Mr. Ourousoff believed that the tower could "bridge the divide between the insular world of the campus and the community beyond its walls," and went so far as to declare it "a work of healing."

At the most literal level of physical circulation, the building succeeds. The spatial sequence of passing between the Broadway sidewalk and campus an attractive experience. The 2-story elevation change between the street and campus levels is traced in the manifestation of a generous public room filled with light and air, although the marble around the space's entrance feels strangely intimidating.

I would be more impressed with the attempt, however, if I had not previously witnessed the trace, but not the actual realization, of an even greater spatial potential. It happened one morning a year or two ago, when I walked past the tower as it was under construction. Looking up, I blinked. There was a vast hole running through the center of the building. Thanks to the science center's dramatic trusses, its spaces no longer had to be enclosed with walls, and could instead open up, quite literally, to the surrounding landscape. From my position on the sidewalk I could see into the campus through it. The sense of spatial fluidity between the diverse social classes found on the the sidewalk and the campus was a surprising realization of the most quintessential Modernist dream.

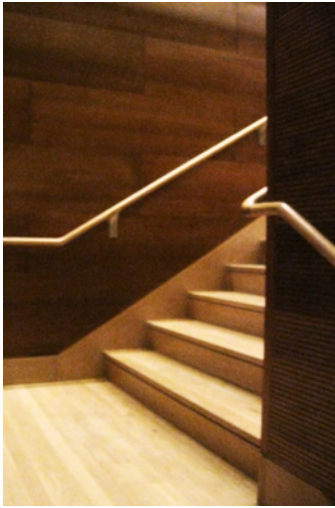
Intrigued, I wondered what the architect planned. Was the opening meant to become a great new public place for the community? Or perfect as a new center for science education; in true interdisciplinary fashion, its researchers might tutor the local children who needed their inspiration the most. The presence of so many intersecting spatial and social vectors on the site left me excited by the thicket of possibilities available for a Pritzker Prize-winning Deconstructivist to potentially articulate.



Instead, Mr. Moneo simply covered the opening up. The space is now a library. A noble use that belongs somewhere in the building, but as a room restricted to Columbia students it can't live up to the civic potential of its street-front location. Glass windows still admit light and views into the space, however, because of which the University still credits it with providing a sense of transparency.

The view isn't as clear, visually or conceptually, from the sidewalk. A casual passerby must strain to notice that the span even exists. Inside the space is sorted into a standard library layout which takes little advantage of the exotic open plan. It would be no major insult to the space's present functionality if it were dotted with ordinary structural columns. Given the secluded, individual character of library study, their dividing effect might even improve the design. The space's unique experiential and social potential was overlooked.

The building's social position, however, may go beyond ignorance. Across from the library there is another void in the building, the site of a lecture hall. As I entered its lobby my experience grew stranger. My paces were muffled by the uncanny sound of wood underfoot. And on the walls, and the handrail in my grasp, and even spreading up to cover the ceiling. Where the tower's steel bones stood proudly exposed outside, this interior showed no signs of structure, every inch of its walls instead engulfed in the soft cladding. Wood even covered the air vents, a move decidedly more indulgent than sane



functionalism could endorse. The science of structure was replaced by the abstraction of form.

The effect disoriented me. With all forms covered in identical material, I almost lost my sense of up and down. I could not have felt more removed from the city life of nearby Broadway as I sank into the self-contained totality of the discrete world. The indiscriminate use of so much raw material also felt decadent. With no indication of how the room was built, or oriented, or how much it cost, its architecture seemed to recall a level of social, structural and economic abstraction where, in the words of Karl Marx, "all that is solid melts into air."

In more directly architectural terms, this tender room inverts the parti of a recent new building across the street. Weiss and Manfredi's Barnard College Diana Center is a taut adventure in concrete, her every surface left unfinished except those which flame with industrial orange paint. The resulting spaces rumble with intentions of punchy activism, a kindred spirit to Rosie the Riveter or the counterculture authors of the school library's edgy zine collection. It is a setting more inclined to recall bra-burning than negotiations over polite tea. The revolution this building proposes, however, is a just cause, at least in terms of tectonics. The Diana believes in her own modernity.

Further afield, the gallery experience of Louis Kahn's 1974 Yale Center takes another relevant approach. Its galleries assume the Moneo lobby's rarefied air without losing sight of the modern reali-

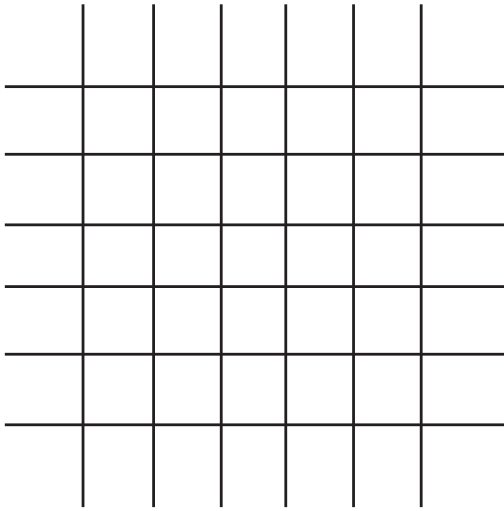


ties of construction. Kahn's rooms are, like Mr. Moneo's auditorium, lined with painstakingly crafted wood. Given that the architect once crowned his design the "Palazzo Melloni" after its donor family, one might suspect his building to seep into even further decadence. Such concerns are relieved, however, as visitors glance away from the warm oaken panels surrounding its paintings to the juxtaposed structure of the building's exposed concrete bones. The concrete also retains the form-work imprint of its pouring in an unusual acknowledgment of its construction workers' labor.

If a palazzo of tea and crumpets could be braced by an undercurrent of such steely nerve, then what does it mean for an engineering building to assume such formal abstraction that it momentarily forgets gravity? Such a decision could, in Mr. Moneo's Deconstructivism, potentially be a trace of further ideas. One interpretation may be found by examining the architecture which might have actually influenced his auditorium, in particular the work of Adolf Loos.

As with Mr. Moneo's auditorium lobby, Loos designs often employed vast expanses of elegant materials while paying less attention to how their supporting structures were articulated. Loos, a former interior designer, also enjoyed blurring the lines between furniture and structural walls. Such non-functional indulgences were curious given that Loos simultaneously also condemned the use of ornament on pragmatic grounds, calling its consumption of excessive materials and labor wasteful enough to be a "crime."

The contradiction can be explained, however, by examining another facet of Loos's arguments. His brand of proto-Modernism was much based on societal mores as on function, and his critique of ornament derived from traditional Western racial and cultural biases. In *Ornament and Crime*, Loos dismisses decoration as an inappropriate sign of "degeneracy" for modern Europeans because it is "something every negro tribesman could do." If Mr. Ourousoff's citation of Loos's influence is accurate, then it is a bizarre metaphor for the architects to project in a building meant to, in the critic's words, "bridge the divide" between Columbia and Harlem. Yet Loos's spell runs most rampant in the lobby of the auditorium, the void most able to recreate the purity of his material adventures because its wide floor span was created by the displacement of the university's infamous gym.



One-Dimensional Cartography

BY THOM BETTRIDGE

We must rid ourselves of the cartographic dominance of the Grid.

I have never lain face-down while suspended in the sky--have never seen my island of Manhattan from the god's-eye vista portrayed in maps. I do not live on a piece of graphpaper. I live in a line. Projecting myself onwards as I stumble through space.

I am not disowning the Grid because of its hyperreality, because of its representative disconnect from "the way things really are." On the contrary, I am calling for a change in cartographic consciousness that will render maps unrecognizable in relation to what can be seen from above.

Maps, by their very nature, are simplifications. Details are excluded in order to promote their universal use-value as navigation aids. Geometric forms of organization are stamped onto the landscape and a neatly-parceled representation of space is presented to the public. However, why have we never tried to carry out this simpli-

fication of space to its logical extreme? Why have we never dared to represent our urban space with the most ambitious of simplifications: the line that projects forward?

In undertaking such a theoretical re-invention of cartography, I wish to dismantle the cartographic sovereignty of the imaginary man in the sky; the traditional map-maker who imposes the dominance of the Grid upon us through misguided organization. How could the vast complexities of space be properly organized by the grid? How could they be by the line, for that matter?

In both schemes, organization fails. However, one-dimensional cartography allows us to fully internalize these failures. The map, therefore, will no longer be a schematic diagram of thresholds, but rather a threshold in itself--a symbol marking the void between the subject and space.

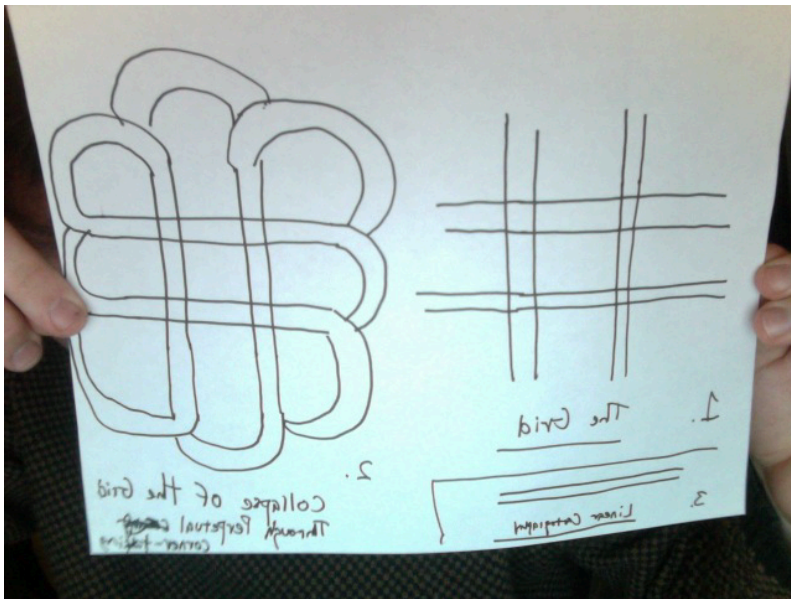
The work of one-dimensional cartography will stand as a monument to the confusion that is coupled with the freedom of moving through space. Central to the cartographic regime of the Grid are the enigmatic difficulties coupled with the Corner. When viewed from the perspective of the traditional map, the Corner presents no problems and, in fact, serves to reinforce the logic of the Grid. However, to the ground-walker, the Corner creates a site of the utmost confusion. For not only does the Corner hide what is on the other side of its ninety-degree angle, but it also fosters the false sense that our travels do not occur in a linear fashion. The corner seems to provide us with the option of diverging from our path, but, in fact, no such divergence exists. Walking on a new avenue only constitutes a change in path within the logic of traditional cartography, for, within the framework of the one-dimensional cartographer, there is only one avenue within space: one's own avenue.

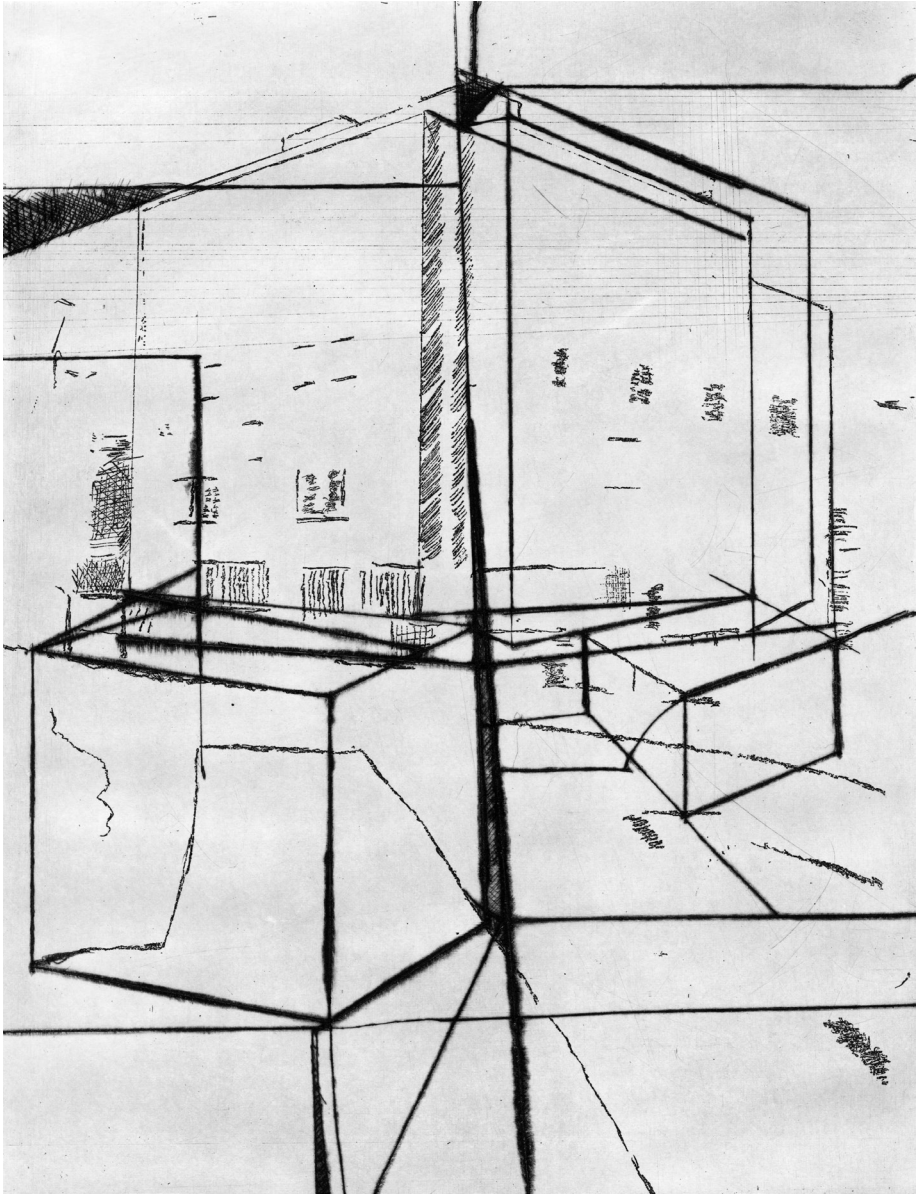
Because all seemingly discrete avenues can potentially feed into any other avenue through the execution of corner-taking, the one-dimensional cartographer must view Manhattan's urban layout as one giant Mobius strip. The Corner, as a concept, is therefore rendered unnecessary, and the obscurity of the Corner's ninety-degree angles are rounded into non-existence within the mind of the one-dimensional cartographer.

The new perspective of one-dimensional cartography will be

a solipsistic perspective. Maps will not be shared anymore. They will be traces of our past dérives that will contain no universal use-value. However, this new solipsistic mode of cartographic representation will not serve as a reinforcement of the subject, but rather as a confused over-simplification that deflates the subject.

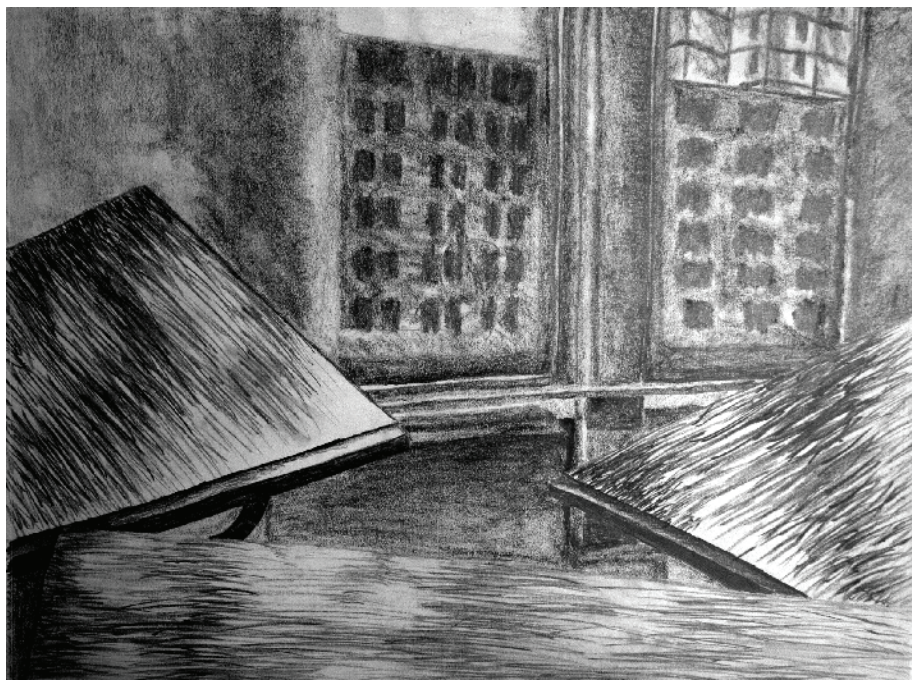
Maps will no longer serve as trophies representing our jingoistic mastery of space. We will no longer be gripped by the arrogance of thinking that our euclidean logic can be stamped onto the space that envelopes us. Instead, our maps will stand as obscure indexes correlating to lost spatial experiences and the failures of our organizational instincts--ciphers of longing that encourage us to keep drifting.





Above: Etching, Ben Zisman

Artistic Recollections



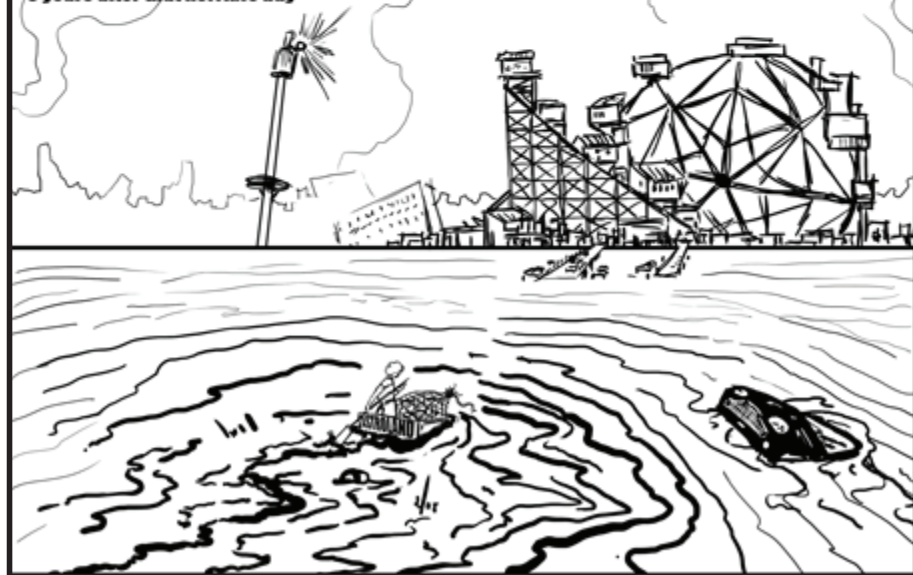
Top: Drawing by Alex Bancu
Above: Photographs by Yeereina Wu

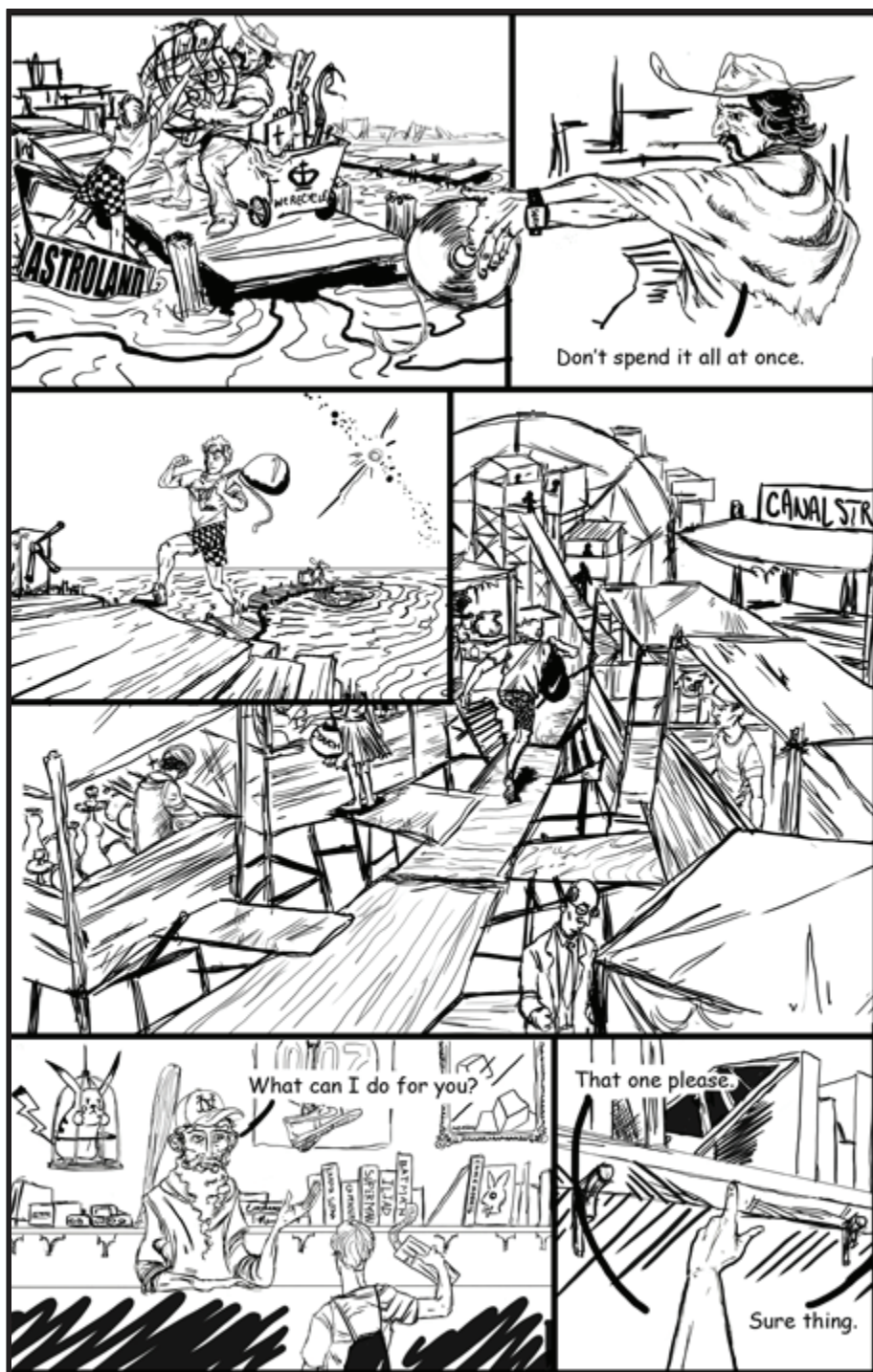


Above: Drawing by Lisa Tan

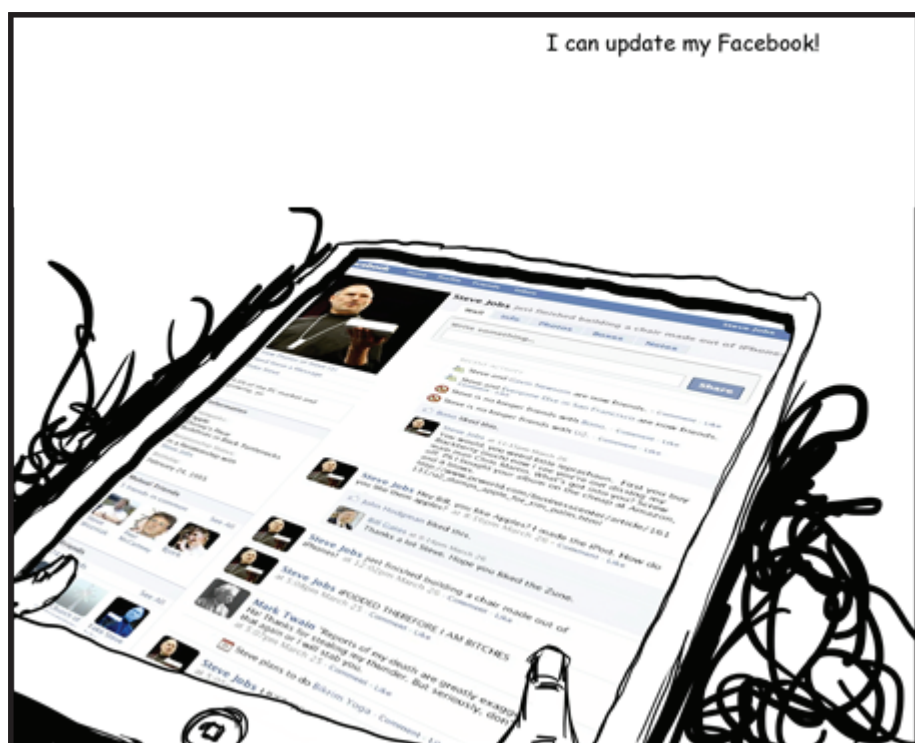


3 years after that horrible day









Photograph by Rian Rooney

Year in Review



The 2011-12 academic year saw the Architecture Society engage in an unprecedented number of new activities. Participants on our firm tour of LOT-EK were pleasantly surprised to find themselves engaged in an hour-long discussion with firm partner Giuseppe Lignano on the finer points of making architecture out of recycled airliner fuselages. A visit to the construction site of the new FDR Memorial gave us a firsthand look at the intricate technical considerations behind a building project. Our Alternative Career Night speakers shared valuable candid advice to help students determine their futures. We also took advantage of the city's cultural and educational resources with group visits to GSAPP lectures and museum exhibits. None of these activities, however, could have been possible without the participation and engagement of our members.

Thank you for being a part of our adventures!

LIST OF ACTIVITIES

Museum visit, MoMA Rising Currents exhibit

Group lecture visit, R&Sie(n)

Firm tour, Selldorf

Firm tour, LOT-EK

Alternative Career Night

Construction site visit, FDR Memorial

Food for Crit

Above: FDR Memorial site tour. Photo credit: Chenoe Hart



Alternative Career Night speakers. Photo credit: Alex Bancu



FDR Memorial site tour. Photo credit: Chenoe Hart

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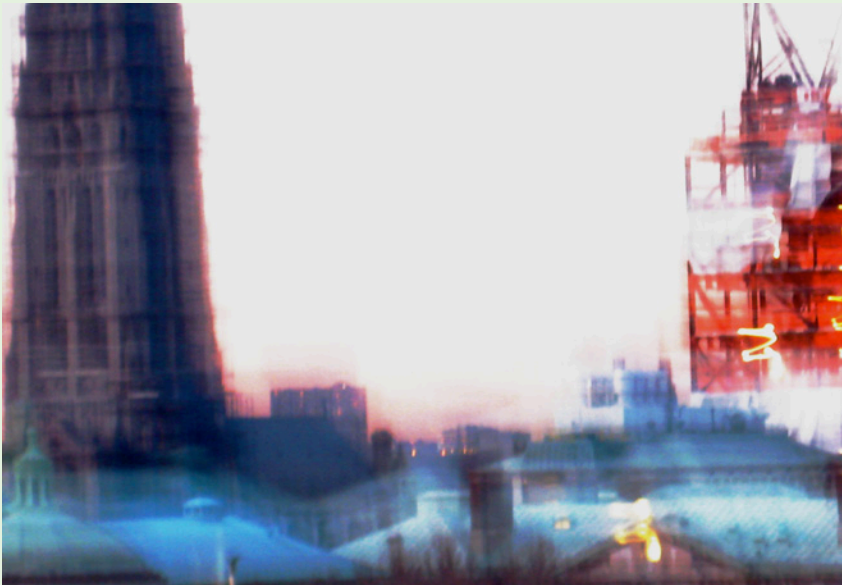
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Photograph by Rian Rooney

