

This thesis could not subscribe to just one title...

[untitled]

By Jeffrey Salmon

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In morphological progress men apparently represent only an intermediate stage between monkeys and great edifices. Forms have become more and more static, more and more dominant.

Georges Bataille, *Architecture*

Abstract

This thesis challenges the characterization of architecture as the inevitable conclusion to a political process and sign of paternal authority. Drawing on Georges Bataille's *informe*, I propose an architecture in flux—sovereign and freed from Plato's ideas. If we must refer to the Greeks, let us look to Heraclitus.

Presented as a series of fragments, this document is a project against a project—a thesis against a thesis. The project of architecture presented here is an unfolding in time where the Plan, the view of the gods, is set aside and replaced by ephemeral glimpses. T-shirts, erasures, and street-art replace landscape, art galleries, and architects as 'precedents' in this patient search for a formless architecture.

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Pretext

How to Read This Thesis

This thesis is presented as a series of fragments and this is done for a number of reasons. As this thesis is founded on Bataille's *informe*, it was necessary to not only challenge the conclusive nature of architecture but also that of an architectural thesis. Most architects conceive a building as finished once construction has concluded. Similarly, a thesis presumes a definitive conclusion as product of a tested hypothesis. In fact, neither buildings nor ideas are ever really complete.

The *informe* disrupts the perceived stability of form put forward by Plato. Instead it suggests, as a counterpoint, an unstable universe in continual change where no form is permanent. Bataille acknowledges that he was not the first to articulate this idea; in fact it can be traced back to the theories of Heraclitus in the fifth century B.C (see Appendix A for more on Heraclitus).

This idea of constant change does not exclude interim conclusions. Rather, it suggests that it is necessary to acknowledge that they only represent a momentary stasis in an incomplete process. Writing in fragments is a technique to make this process apparent. Scans of my sketchbook inserted in the thesis mark the major shifts in the understanding and/or the application of the *informe* to architecture. By marking the major shifts, my intent is to introduce the element of time into the text and reveal the discontinuous process of writing a thesis rather than concealing it in a consistent body of text.

Lastly, the other reason I chose to write in a series of fragments was, once again, based on Bataille. While reading Bataille's work I realized that his novels and books are never just about one subject or idea as there are always other underlying themes or ideas present. However, in order to grasp this one cannot simply read one of his titles, as it will only reveal what he presents on the surface. By reading a cross section of his work it gradually becomes possible to understand that themes are circumscribed in the body of his work and not in individual texts.

Postcard Pictures - Ruined

Evolution of a Process

The critical process I am testing evolved out of a couple of projects, one in Banff and, the other, a competition entry that never made it to the production stages. Prior to arriving at the Banff Center for the Arts for a two-week residency, I took a road trip from Calgary to Jasper, stopping at the major attractions on the way. At the time I was on crutches, in an air cast, and easily recognized by other tourists at the different locations. It became obvious that I was—along with hundreds of other tourists—participating in a pilgrimage where the goal was to capture the iconic image of each site.

I had begun researching Georges Bataille while also looking at the work of Richard Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark; they became the pillars influencing my critical process. I was interested in Bataille's theory of transgression as I found it correlated well with the work of Smithson and Matta-Clark. Transgression is the act of going beyond established limits, which in most cases are constructed based on social expectations.

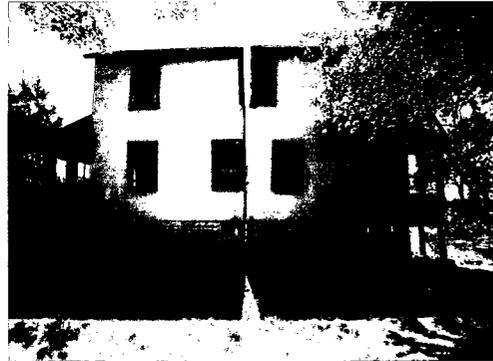


Figure 1. An exterior view of Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, 1974.



Figure 2. Interior view along the split showing how light cuts through the house.

For example: Matta-Clark, who was inspired by Smithson, appropriated a derelict residence and cut it in half, slightly lowering one side into the basement. By splitting the house in half he transgressed the expected/preexisting limits of a run-down house set for demolition. Thus, what constitutes an act of transgression is intimately linked to the boundary it surpasses. In Matta-Clark's case the building cuts momentarily gave life to otherwise dead buildings, making art from garbage—linking his art, as a counterpoint, to the expectation that nothing valuable can come from waste.

The focus of my project at the Banff Center was landscape, so it was my intention to somehow explore my understanding of transgression and subversive acts within the frame of the landscape. It was in this context that I developed the first iteration of my *critical process*: observe an existing condition and establish the framework in which it functions. These observations become the basis (the established limits) for the transgressive act(s). The critical process functions by isolating a piece of reality and analyzing it free from its context. Understanding the existing condition and framework outside of their context allows one to consciously work against this condition by inverting it and reinserting it back into its original context. The transgressive acts are found in this inversion of the existing condition, becoming its critique when tested back in the original context.

Taking Aim at Tourists

The initial road trip to Jasper was fundamental to my understating of the existing condition. I was concerned with our relationship to the landscape and, more specifically, "us" as tourists. On the road trip the spectacle of the landscape was overwhelming however the spectacle of tourists climbing over one another to capture the views shown on postcards and in the magazines was equally so. I established some clarity through my reflections on the trip and realized that the areas I had

visited on that road trip were completely commercially driven and focused purely at tourists. As tour busses would arrive at the different sights people would hurry off with their technology in tow and begin recording every moment. As soon as the flash mob appeared they would be gone and another would arrive. I had secured my existing condition—a situation where tourists were as much a part of the landscape as the physical landscape itself.

With the condition established it was necessary to look more specifically at a framework within it. Recalling the flash mobs that would appear and disappear as tour busses would come and go I realized that the tourists limit their experience to the lens of their cameras. They feverishly take pictures the entire time while jockeying with one another to capture the iconic *view* without anyone else in their photo, and then they must take pictures of every combination of family members in the picturesque setting. Watching this occur repeatedly revealed an unwritten code present among the tourists—tourist etiquette—that they all adhered to. This meant respecting the fact that everyone had only a short time before having to get back to the bus so take your pictures as quickly as you can, do not get in other tourists photos as you do not want them in yours, and when done taking photos relinquish your spot so the next family can use it.

Analyzing the existing condition and framework independent of context it is clear that the relationship between tourist and physical landscape is a constructed experience. The sites are aligned on the same highway making it very simple for bus tours. Due to the limited time these tours afford at each site the experience of the tourist is limited to the walk from bus to the viewing platform and back. It is as a result of the scripted nature of these tours that most tourists spend their time viewing the landscape through their various lenses.

The basis for my critique and intervention was to emphasize the fundamental role of tourists in the region to the point of becoming part of the landscape—for good or for bad. The constructed experience, complete with scripted views defined by

viewing platforms, is entirely reliant on tourism. However, the unwritten etiquette of tourism suggests that even though there are hundreds of people around you they should not be in your picture. This seemed a little absurd to me and became the point of inversion—the transgressive acts. I created a t-shirt that had *IF I AM IN YOUR PHOTO PLEASE SEND IT TO ABtourist@gmail.com* printed on both sides and went to Sulfur Mountain in Banff with the goal of getting in photos. The purpose of getting in photos was to insert myself, as a tourist, in into the scripted photos of the landscape and emphasize the role of tourism in this landscape. Additionally I hoped that by getting in the photos of others I could cause people to back away from the lens momentarily, even if only to reframe the photo. The t-shirt served dual purposes: it identified me as a tourist, and when people viewed their photos they would know that I was in their photo intentionally. It was important that my intention be known because it was my goal to generate a discourse about tourism either at the tourist site or via email afterwards. I was successful in engaging people at the site but did not receive any emails.

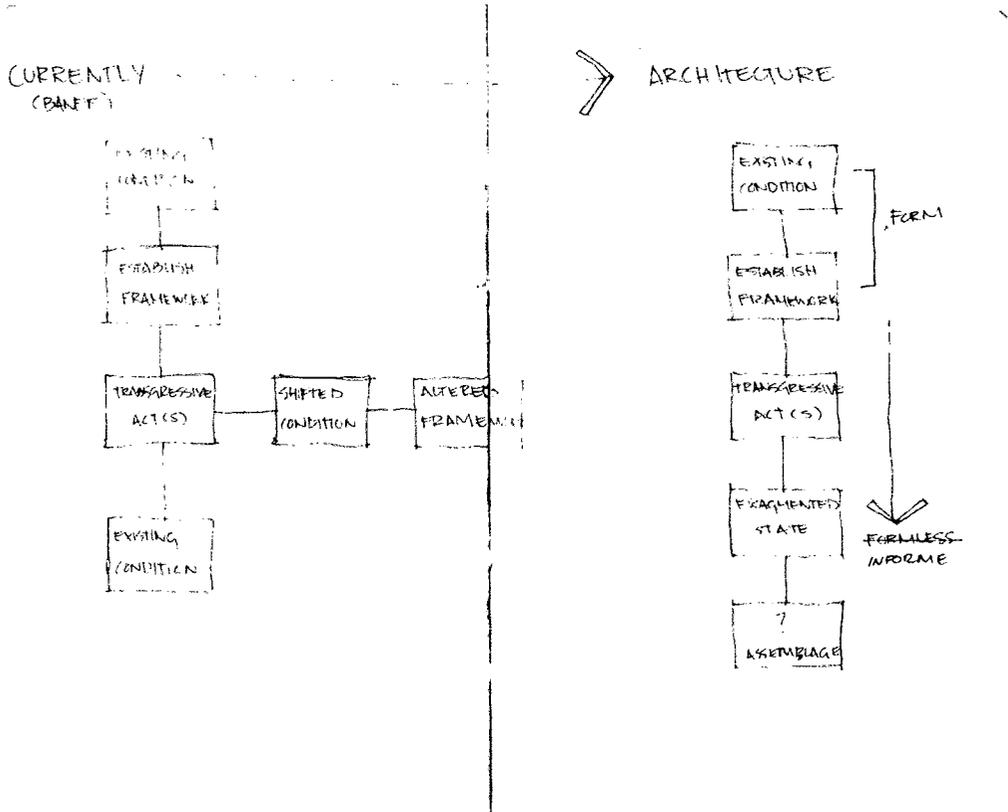
I shifted my approach with the aim of receiving more emails and made shirts for most of the group doing the residency. Although I was the only one actively trying to get in photos, having a number of people wearing the shirts meant that they would inevitably find their way into pictures as well. Additionally while at Lake Louise and the Columbia Icefields I found that having a group wearing these shirts made us more visible as a group of tourists. Although I believe there are considerably more photos now with my t-shirts in them than when I was working alone it still did not affect the end result. I did however receive a few emails from those who had approached me at the various sites.¹

Looking back on the Banff residency I concluded that there are two possible conditions that can come out of such a process. In the first situation the existing

¹ At the time this fragment was written I had only received emails from people I had already spoken with at one site or another. After this was written I did receive a couple emails with photos from people who had been going through their photos and noticed the t-shirt with the email address on it.

condition first observed remains unchanged after the duration of the transgressive acts has ended—this was true of the project at the Banff Center. This is not to say that it was not successful, however once I (or the group) had left a particular site the impact of the acts did not resonate with enough people to affect a change in the existing condition. It was successful by managing to engage a few people and simply making others step back from their lens, if only for a second, and question what I was doing. The aim in future projects would be to have a more direct impact that would increase the likelihood of producing some kind of shift in condition.

The second situation is not nearly as predictable as the first. This condition occurs when the transgressive acts impact enough people and the critique stimulates a shift. The direction and scale of this shift is entirely dependant on the condition and the reception of the acts. However it is important to note that many things are the way they are because they have been that way for a long time, and to enact such a shift may be a very challenging proposition. I think the project in Banff showed that there are many variables in the execution of the transgressive acts that may impact the viability of altering a condition. In this age where we are cultured to absorb and dismiss things without thinking it may require that these acts also be bold enough to grab and sustain ones attention long enough to allow them to actually contemplate what they are viewing.



Shifting the critical process into the realm of architecture requires altering aspects of the process to address the framework of architecture. Critiquing any existing architecture relies on an understanding of its form—both the outward appearance and as signifier of something else. Thus, the critique can be understood as working towards the ~~formless~~ informe—the opposition of its current form.

Form(ALL) Architecture

Form—seems simple enough—especially with regard to architecture as there has always been steady discourse on the role form should play. Should form follow function or function follow form? The debate is not as one-dimensional as it seems since almost all architecture is *formal*. This ever-present conversation regarding form and its relationship to function really only articulates one aspect of *formal architecture*. In this case the value of form really becomes a question of the emphasis placed on appearance and how it is derived, whether it is arbitrarily or as a product of the function it houses. Form however is more than just outward appearance; it suggests a definition and one could describe architecture as that which defines space or spatial relationships.

To give something form one must simply identify and state what it is—this is language! It is embedded in our nature to use language to classify and categorize our surroundings. When faced with something new or unknown, one instinctively looks for characteristics that may be similar to something already known in order to classify it and assign it a title; this process of assimilation absorbs the unknown into familiarity. Take rats for example, there are 51 species of rat (as defined under the genus *Rattus*) ranging from the Sunburned Rat (*Rattus adustus*) to the Yellow-Tailed Rat (*Rattus xanthurus*), each formally defined by their unique characteristics. If a new breed of rat were to be discovered that did not adhere to any prior classifications it would warrant a new classification under the genus *Rattus*.¹ Just as Rats adhere to such classifications so too does architecture, in fact the classifications for architecture outnumber those for rats. Classifications like Constructivism, Structuralism, or Post-Modern all formally define an architecture based on the morphology of the building. As new constructions appear that do not fit into existing categories new ones are created. This was the case with Greg Lynn

1 Hanson, Anne. "Rat Species, Strains, Breeds and Types." *Rat Behavior and Biology*. 11 Aug. 2005. Web. 18 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.ratbehavior.org/RatSpecies.htm#Species>>.

whose work led to the classification "Blobitecture." What this process yields is a set of boundaries defining what and where buildings fit under the title "Architecture."

Classifying Form

Having been molded to expect and look for such classifications in the world around us, we naturally identify forms either semiotically or semantically. As a result, the context in which the form is placed allows one to determine what it is. Just as we know a coffee table is a coffee table because of its scale and relationship to the space and furniture around it, we also know that the New National Gallery in Berlin, Germany, is a building because of its scale and relationship to space. Though their physical form is similar, their individual contexts allow us to distinguish them appropriately.

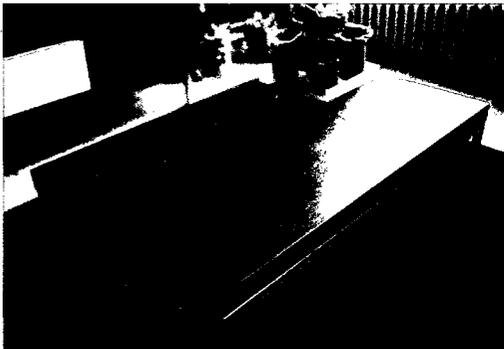


Figure 3. Ikea coffee table.



Figure 4. The New National Gallery in Berlin, Germany designed by Mies Van de Rohe

Alternatively, form can be derived from a title. In this case, where a form is presented independent of any context, the title provides the necessary context. The title, therefore, assumes that the viewer of the form has some familiarity with the classification presented so that the viewer may assimilate it to others. Both relationships are presented in Francois Blanciak's book *Siteless: 1001 Building Forms*.

Over the course of the first five chapters Blanciak represents 1001 forms that

he suggests could become the basis for architecture. The chapter titles categorize where the forms were drawn and, furthermore, each form is numbered. The forms are presented at the same size in void space, without geographical or situational context, and with a clever title that relies on the reader having some architectural background to animate the drawing. This shows, that although he intended to break from the traditional “program plus site equals form,”² that architecture is still bound by its formal relationship to language. The form of #340 *Open City Block* shows the basic geometry of what could be a European city block that had been pried apart at one corner. In this sense, the titles restrict the possible interpretations of the form. Consider this: if the 1001 forms were duplicated and their orientation rotated 90 degrees you would now have 2002 building forms—the new 1001 forms in need of a clever title.

In the sixth chapter of his treatise on form Blanciak feels it is necessary to defend these ideas against the criticism that 1001 forms do not correlate into architecture. He selects form #638 *Collision Crop*, scaling, cropping and altering it to fit zoning restrictions for an urban site in Japan. He produces plans and sections for the form-turned-building to make a convincing argument that these forms, which were only architecture in the sense their titles relied on the viewer understanding the commentary on city blocks, slabs, megastructures, etc., could fulfill actual requirements for an architectural project. However what is shown is a fear that he may be presenting something too far beyond the boundaries of architecture, and the importance of classification—“Literally rescuing this opus from art book shelves, it exploits and shows the ability of this series to morph into proper building proportions with the outcome of a project.”³

Acknowledging that architecture requires form, what Blanciak inevitably

2 Blanciak, François. Introduction. *Siteless: 1001 Building Forms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008. Print. P ix.

3 Blanciak, François. Introduction. *Siteless: 1001 Building Forms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008. Print. P x-xi.

ends up suggesting is that architectural form can be generated in the same way as contemporary sculpture, where form and commentary combine to create something with multiple connotations. Bruce Nauman's piece *Space Under My Metal Chair in Düsseldorf*⁴ or Robert Morris's *Footnote to the Bride*⁵, operate in the same way as Blanciak's forms: the objects in the artwork, when viewed independent of the title, could be described as many things—just as the title could evoke the image of many different forms. By this appropriation, it is possible to understand Blanciak's architecture as an object or purely formal, where any form may be scaled, cropped, and altered to become a building. This does not mean it will avoid all body-centric references but suggests that his focus was on creating an architecture based on altering an object—architecture as sculpture. In this case the embedded meaning is not product



collision crop

Figure 5. Francois Blanciak's form "Collision Crop."

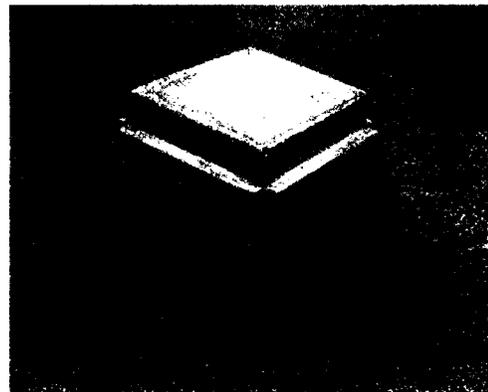


Figure 6. Bruce Nauman's sculpture "Space Under My Metal Chair in Düsseldorf."

4 Bois, Yve Alain., and Rosalind E. Krauss. *Formless: a User's Guide*. New York: Zone, 1997. Print. P 215.

5 Bois, Yve Alain., and Rosalind E. Krauss. *Formless: a User's Guide*. New York: Zone, 1997. Print. P 203.

of analogies to the body⁶ but rather a byproduct of its relationship to language as defined by the clever title describing the form.

Properties of Formal Architecture

If one were to classify *Formal Architecture* as a scientist would, it would be necessary to identify the properties of such architecture. The first, a perceived permanence; most architects actively try to suppress or control time suggesting that their architecture has the stability of form to last forever. John Ruskin reinforced this idea when he wrote, "When we build, let us think that we build forever."⁷ Architecture certainly does not last forever, which therefore pits every construction against time. Many architects use materials, such as glass or stone, that minimize the appearance of entropy which is really a product of time. The idea is to preserve the image of the building as it was first imagined and built. Of course this idea seems a bit ridiculous as all buildings age, decay, and change, however that doesn't mean architects can't dream. The notion of permanence has been embedded in architecture since the constructions of early civilizations when temples and cathedrals were built in the spirit of the Gods, and as such, were envisioned and constructed to reflect that timeless immortality.

The second property of *Formal Architecture*—stasis—is, in fact, intimately linked to the first. The notion of permanence yields static architecture, in that both the building and its projected meaning are fixed. Once a building is constructed it is understood, through its relationship with language, that it is *Architecture* and may now be inhabited. *Architecture*, here, should be understood as a "completed"

6 Through the use of metaphors and analogies architecture finds meaning in its relationship to the body. This dates back to some of the first architectures, for example the tabernacle; the unit of measure specified for its design was the cubit, where the length of one cubit equates roughly to the length of ones forearm. Furthermore, contemporary examples of architecture directly referencing the human body can be found in the work of Santiago Calatrava.

7 Ruskin, John "Lamp of Memory" section 10 of, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, as quoted in: Till, Jeremy. *Architecture Depends*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009. Print. P 82.

building representing something else or embodying some external meaning. Though over time the program of a building may change and even some of the physical characteristics may be altered, the *Architecture* of the building usually remains the same as it maintains the sign-signifier relationship. Should the physical characteristics be altered enough perhaps the terms “renovated”, or “rehabilitated” will be used in conjunction with its previous stylistic definition.

Lastly, the third property of *Formal Architecture* is its meaning or the meaning projected on it. “Science and philosophy (models of discourse *on*⁸) would like to fix and accumulate meaning hierarchically according to finite, calculable connections with no lateral linkage.”⁹ Architecture’s similar reliance on form implies that there is an associated meaning. In many cases the meaning is embedded by metaphors or analogies, the most obvious are related to the body: the foundation relating to the feet of a person, the structure likened to the skeleton, and the enclosure to the skin. *Formal Architecture* cannot separate itself from the language that defines it; it cannot escape the sign-signifier relationship. Coming back to Blanciak’s treatise, briefly, we are reminded that his forms are only suggestive of architecture because of the commentary—the architectural language animating them.

8 Hollier likens writing “*on*” (whether it is writing “*on*” something, or, “*on*” someone) to burying a dead person. In saying this he means that to write “*on*” something is to assume completion or that a finite end has been reached. His reference to science and philosophy as models of discourse “*on*” becomes clear, as they are disciples relying on, or striving for finite conclusions.

9 Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 26.

Informe

Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besoins des mots. Ainsi *informe* n'est pas seulement un adjectif ayant tel sens mais un terme servant à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme. Ce qu'il désigne n'a ses droits dans aucun sens et se fait écraser partout comme une araignée ou un ver de terre. Il faudrait en effet, pour que les hommes académiques soient contents, que l'univers prenne forme. La philosophie entière n'a pas d'autre but: il s'agit de donner une redingote à ce qui est, une redingote mathématique. Par contre affirmer que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat.

A dictionary would start from the moment in which it no longer provides the meaning of words but their job. *Formless* is thus not merely an adjective with such and such a meaning but a term for lowering status with its implied requirement that everything have a form. Whatever it (*formless*) designates lacks entitlement in every sense and is crushed on the spot, like a spider or earthworm. For academics to be content, the universe would have to assume a form. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of fitting what is there into a formal coat, a mathematical overcoat. On the other hand to assert that the universe resembles nothing else and is only *formless* comes down to stating that the universe is something like a spider or spit.¹

Georges Bataille wrote this succinct entry for the *Documents* "Dictionnaire critique," for which he was an editor. His article "Informe," one of fourteen articles published, offers some insight into the *job* of the critical dictionary itself. The goal of the critical dictionary is to undermine the form of more conventional dictionaries. His first act against this form is this article as it takes the place usually allotted to the article "Dictionary" where a conventional dictionary would objectively describe itself; the basis for the *Documents* dictionary, however, is outlined subjectively by Bataille's article "Informe."

Hollier notes, "The meaning (that a dictionary fixes) is identified with the

1 Bataille, Georges. "Informe," as quoted in: Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 30.

concept, with the idea: *eidos* = form,"² which, as mentioned earlier, is based on finite conclusions. *Informe*, alternatively, represents the exact opposite, reopening the dictionary by introducing the subjective. The introduction of the subjective is ultimately the undoing of the conventional dictionary because it dissolves the fixed definitions of words that language depends on. To achieve this the *Documents* dictionary had multiple contributors each presenting the *jobs* of different words and in some cases the same word.

It is necessary to clarify this idea that words are no longer to be described by their meaning but their *jobs*. Bataille's suggestion alters the operative value of language as a whole as well as words individually. The "operative value" of language relies on the fixed meanings of words as the basis for communication. *Informe* dissolves these fixed meanings and in doing so disrupts the structure of language and thus communication. This, in turn, gives words another form of "operative value," as they no longer have finite definitions they can only be understood through their *jobs*. Therefore the *job* describes the word as the locus of an event or action within language, one meant to lower the status of the word; lacking a fixed meaning it is what the word evokes that is significant. "It indicates all those processes of repulsion or seduction aroused by the word independent of its meaning. For example, the job of the word "formless" is presented in the reactions of disgust accompanying its utterance: a word not merely pronounced but spat out, flung in someone's face."³ Bataille also acknowledges that there is an implied requirement that everything have a form—even to say that something is *informe* is, by definition, to give it form. However it is the role of the *informe*, and the goal of the critical dictionary, to undermine and subvert the form/meaning usually presented in a dictionary. Articles included in the *Documents* dictionary sometimes included photographs referencing illustrated dictionaries that use images to reinforce

2 Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 29.

3 Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 30.

the meaning of a word. The images in the *Documents* dictionary, alternatively, not only reinforce the text but also add another layer of interpretation often as a reference to something else. Thus the inclusion of images becomes another act against the fixed form of conventional dictionaries but also undermines the function of images in illustrated dictionaries. Bataille's article "Abattoir" (Slaughterhouse) uses Elie Lotars photographs of the slaughterhouse at La Villette to emphasize the crude imagery of the site as a way of turning his back on the erotic aesthetic of surrealism.⁴ The photographs have since taken on further meaning as they remind readers that there was once blood on the site where Bernard Tschumi created an "architecture against itself."⁵

Bataille's reference to entitlement in the article alludes to hierarchical structures, yet by likening the entitlement of *informe* to a spider or earthworm he is stating that *informe* is at the very base of this hierarchy. By situating *informe* at the base Bataille suggests that it is so low that it is not entitled to a complete meaning, where any attempt to assign it a fixed form/meaning would be crushed on the spot. Applying the *informe* to language describes a process of lowering a word to a point where it is no longer entitled to a fixed definition. Now situated at the base of languages hierarchical structure the word may begin to operate independent of meaning.

To use as an example of these operations let us consider "spittle" which had two different articles written about it, the first by Marcel Griaule (Spittle-Soul) and the second by Michel Leris (Mouth Water). "Spittle" is inconsistent; it has no specific shape, its colour varies, and, to borrow from Leris, it is "unverifiable."⁶ Thus, it manages to deny hierarchy though its heterogeneity. This lack of specificity means

4 Hollier, Denis. Introduction. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P xii.

5 Tschumi, Bernard. "Abstract Mediation and Strategy." *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996. Print. P 189.

6 Leris, Michel. "Spittle - Mouth Water," as quoted in: Brotchie, Alastair. *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*. Ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995. Print. P 80.

that it is best described by the action that produces it—saliva exiting the mouth. At the end of his article on *informe* Bataille also suggests that if the universe were to be *informe* it would resemble something like a spider or spit. He suggests spit is an ideal representation of the *informe* as it avoids a fixed definition and the action (or operation) of spitting also carries with it a number of different connotations, none more correct than the other.

En Anglais: Formless and/or Informal

When translating *Informe* into English, there are two possible interpretation: *Formless* and *Informal*. Just as the *informe* lacks entitlement to a complete definition so too do the *formless* and *informal*. Though both are definitions are porous, it is important to distinguish the two as they both describe slightly different conditions of the *informe*. *Formless* is used to describe the unnamable, and typifies the intent to undo and declass—what every dictionary aims to suppress.

Just like Noah calling the roll of creation to fill up his arc. No species was going to survive the flood, hence reproduce that did not answer to a name. The nameless is excluded from reproduction, which is above all the transmission of a name.⁷

As Hollier notes, the nameless not only opposes the form of dictionaries but is universally unaccepted because it denies definition or categorization, forever eluding the “formal coat, [or] mathematical overcoat.”⁸ The declassification indicative of the *formless* can be understood as the process of lowering, it is the reduction of form to its base where it may operate independent of meaning. The *formless* also

⁷ Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 31.

⁸ Bataille, Georges. “Informe,” as quoted in: Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 30.

describes the heterogeneous, the dissimilar, that which exists beyond language, unable to be assimilated to something else.

Informal, alternatively, parallels a process of transgression, not to say the *formless* is not transgressive, but rather the *informal* is reliant on the existing boundaries. It describes the unofficial, the subversive; it is that which undermines the formal. This operation suspends that boundaries it challenges leaving them intact, relying on the juxtaposition of the two—taboo and its transgression. The *informal* in many cases is interchangeable with the transgressive as both represent an operation against a preexisting condition. However what differs between the two is the *informal* is unpredictable whereas acts of transgression may be calculated and planned. Lastly, both describe an event or action that is ephemeral or fleeting for if it were to last too long it would risk being absorbed into familiarity, fixing its form.

Reducing Safdie

A First Attempt At Informe

Applying the critical process derived from the residency at the Banff Center, the intervention at the National Gallery of Canada intends to reduce the static form of galleries to *informe*. Translating this process into architecture requires an existing condition—something to work against. Though stylistically the National Gallery could be *classified* as postmodern, the gallery spaces represent a model that has not evolved since the emergence of modernism. Modernism championed the elimination of ornament for the purposes of purity of form; articulated by glass and white walls the intent was to eliminate the appearance of time. In identifying the existing condition it is clear that this national treasure does not embody anything that particularly separates it from galleries before it and even most built after it. In fact, beyond the well-designed circulation, it houses a series of “white boxes,” the standard for modern art galleries. Brian O’Doherty describes these spaces:

Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of periods... there is no time.¹

These environments are usually comprised of white walls and ceilings with polished floors. This is true of the National Gallery and most others. These “white boxes” are wrapped by a shell that houses the rest of the programmatic spaces required in a gallery. The gallery becomes a container for the artwork by displaying it in a curated context that exists beyond the vicissitudes of time.² Though books are

1 O’Doherty, Brian. “Notes on the Gallery Space.” *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999. Print. P 15.

2 O’Doherty, Brian. “Notes on the Gallery Space.” *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999. Print. P 15.

an alternative way to view high quality images of the masterpieces housed in a gallery, it is the internet that has drastically shifted the accessibility of artwork. Once again, this relates to time as the internet has made entire bodies of work accessible at the click of the mouse thereby eliminating the time it would take to locate and go through a book to find the desired image.³ This being said, the question is whether the traditional gallery model is still relevant and, if so, will it continue to be as technology advances? What will happen when computer screen will be able to recreate texture three-dimensionally? Will there still be a need to go to the gallery to understand the application of paint by Van Gogh or the other impressionists? These questions fueled the acts against the Gallery.

Working to reduce the form of the Gallery to *informe* it was necessary to

³ It is also important to note that site specific or performance art exists beyond the realm of the gallery where the art becomes an ephemeral event, following which what is left is only a recording of the artwork. In this case the internet has made these recordings more accessible though the art itself—the performance—remains unchanged. This can be seen in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Smithson, and many others.

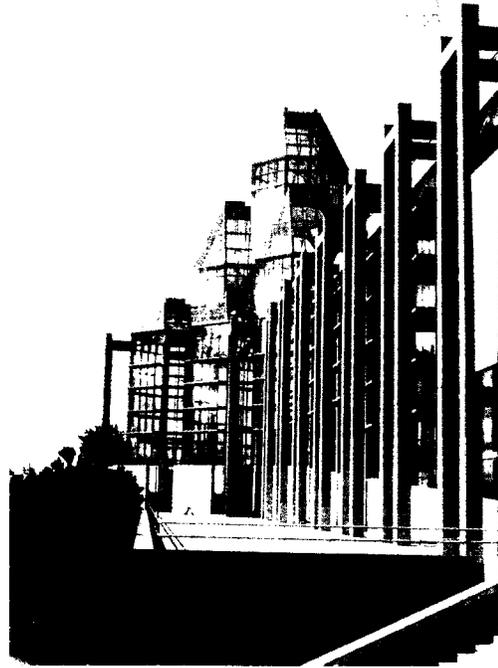


Figure 7. An exterior view of the colonnade that leads up to the Great Hall.

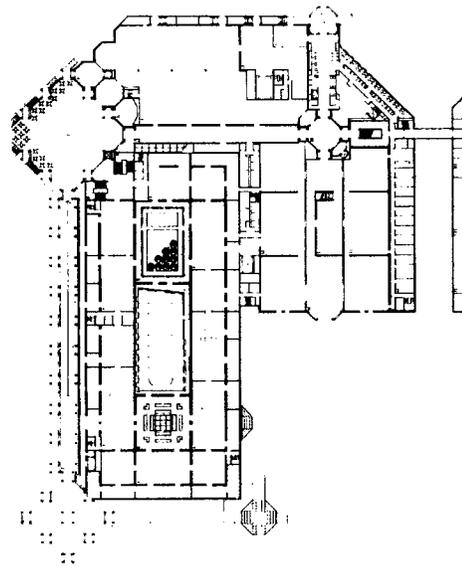


Figure 8. The level one plan shows the circulation (in grey) leading to the various gallery spaces or "white boxes."

undermine its core component: the white box. Removing the shell, as it primarily houses the circulation, the white boxes are exposed and destroyed. All that will remain intact of the original National Gallery is the underground archive.

As a site strategy the cubes are fragmented across the property with some extending beyond the property limits and into the city, blurring the boundary of the Gallery. Reducing the white walls and ceilings to scrims—stretched white fabric around a frame—reflects a movement away from the timeless security of the gallery, becoming instead fragile fragments exposed to the elements. The scrims will be operable allowing patrons to push and pull them out of the ground. When depressed the scrims will become part of the archives below and when lifted they will receive projections from projector units that can similarly be pushed or pulled from the ground. The scrims and projector units will be counter-weighted, just as old double hung windows, so that they will maintain their position once lifted from the ground. The ability to manipulate the scrims means that the boundary and form of the gallery will be in constant flux as patrons adjust them.

The gallery will no longer simply be a gallery any more; it will shift from a private institution to a public space. Those wishing to view artwork will be able to access the archive, but the new gallery space will become a public landscape condition that may also become a place to picnic or sunbathe. Alternatively the scrims may also offer refuge to the homeless, become a place for drug use, or become marked with graffiti. Of course anything offered to the public may be used for purposes deemed either positive or negative, and it is this that begins to dissolve the pretensions of a “gallery” by undermining the authority usually associated with gallery architecture. There are no longer lines one must stand behind, or alarm systems alerting security when you are too close to an artwork.

The digital projections of the artwork housed in the archives are meant to question the necessity of galleries as technology continues to progress while at the same time highlighting the current limitations of technology and its application in this setting. Viewing a projected image in daylight does not work well unless the

skies are very overcast, thus the gallery's hours are dependent on the time the sun raises and sets. This also brings forth the question: what is a gallery when it is not showing artwork? This proposal suggests that the meaning of a gallery is porous and as a public space it would take on various other functions, some that can be anticipated and others that can't.

Lastly, the scrims are intended to subvert the precious quality of galleries by removing the white walls and artwork from their timeless container. Though at first the scrims will be pristine and white their appearance will deteriorate from exposure to the elements. Allowing entropy in the gallery lowers the status of the gallery by exposing it to the effects of time and environment. The patina of the scrims will then become part of the artwork projected onto it altering the intentions of the artist. Of course the durability of the scrims is in question, but not a problem, it must be expected that over time the scrims with tarnish to a point where they are in need of repair or replacement. This adds to the heterogeneity of the gallery—something usually suppressed—as the scrims become a visual record of the new gallery's changing life.

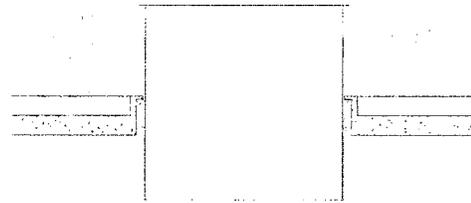


Figure 9. Detail drawing of a scrim shown half above ground to receive projections while the other half protrudes into the archive below.

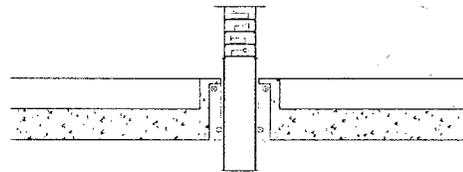


Figure 10. Detail drawing of a projector unit housing 4 projectors. This unit pushes and pulls from the ground.

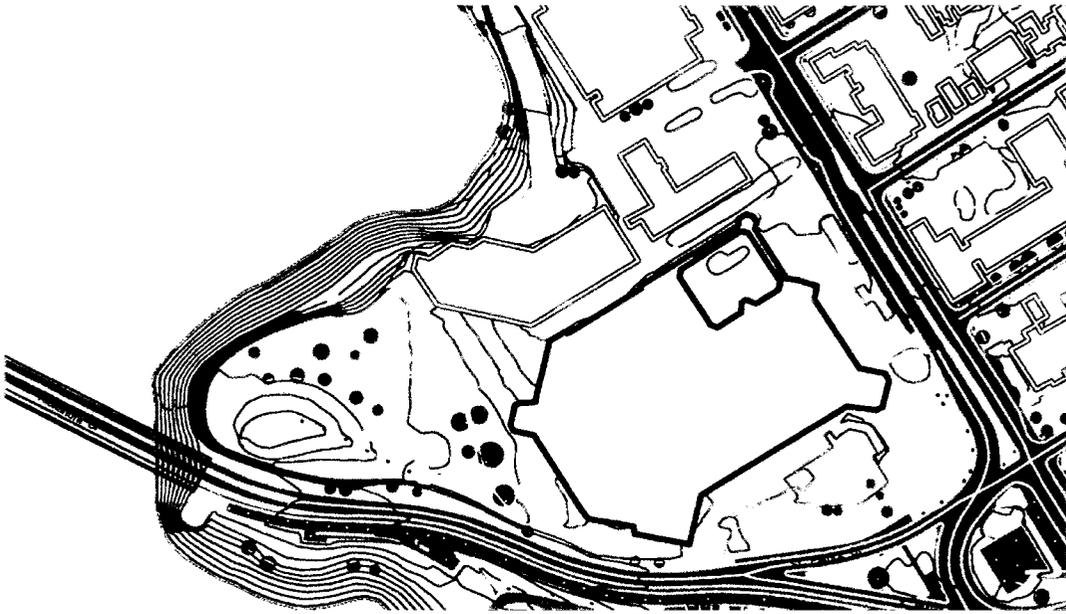


Figure 11. Overall site plan of National Gallery of Canada as it currently exists.

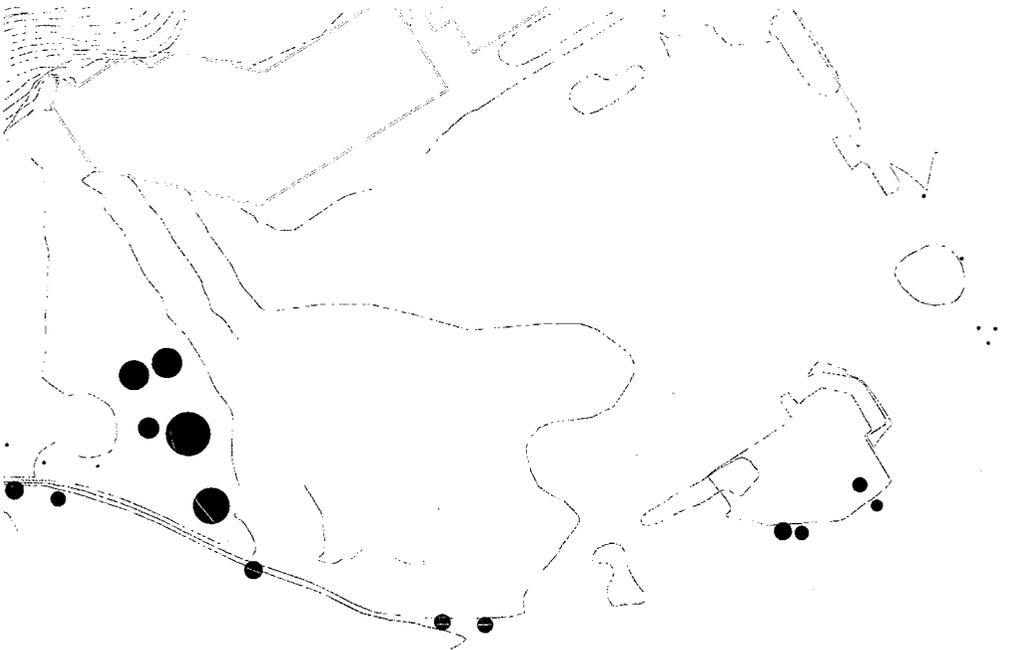


Figure 12. National Gallery of Canada site plan following the destruction of the former gallery, with the exception of the archives. The site plan shows the fragmented "white boxes," in the form of scrims, scattered across the site while some are also placed beyond the limits of the site.



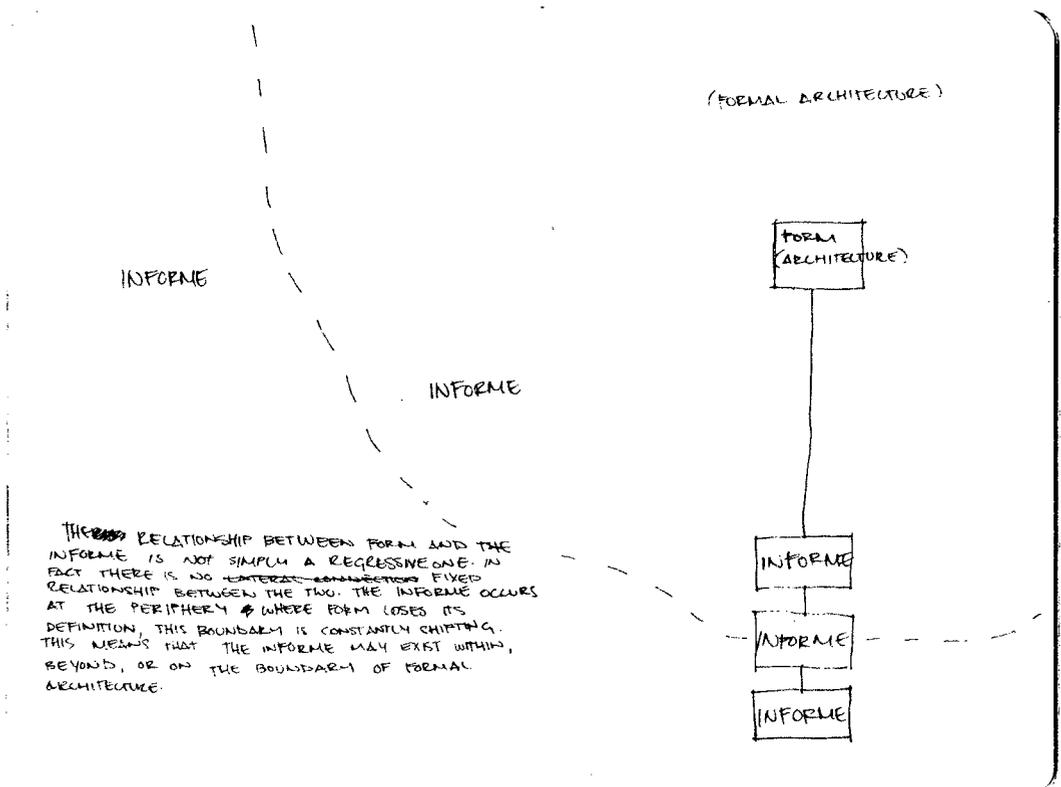
Figure 13. The South Elevation shows the new landscape condition created by the scrims on site. This represents only one of the infinite iterations that the gallery may take as the scrims and projector units are manipulated by patrons.

A Brief Reflection

Reacting against the National Gallery of Canada, as it turns out, was rather inconsequential as the project could have been applied at a variety of scales, to any number of galleries that subscribe to the same general form and perpetuate the same dogma: a gallery = a “white box” + container. However, on the other hand, choosing the National Gallery was necessary in a way because the choice acknowledges that boundaries are not altered or shifted easily, and for this reason a gallery with some iconic status was required.

The project, however, was only successful in that it made clear rigorous pursuit necessary to achieve *informe*. The destruction of the “white cube” and absolving it of the timeless environment begins a trajectory towards the *informe* yet still fell considerably short. The scrims end up recreating the gallery’s form in a fragmented state. Though they are operable their placement is fixed onsite and it is this stasis that gives the fragmented National Gallery form. The static fragments are a product of a preconceived plan that gives the New National Gallery form even before the demolition of the existing gallery. The plan eliminates the potential for variation and prevents the realization of the *informe*.

What was also exposed during this process was exactly how reliant on form architecture is, and just how easy it is to default back to that. This realization shifted the direction of the thesis away from simply identifying the morphology of certain building types and the frameworks embedded in them, and then working to reduce their form. Instead, this thesis must address the broader issue of architecture’s reliance on form by attempting to create *informe* architecture.



The relationship between form and the informe is not simply a regressive one. [Informe occurs when form has been lowered to the point where it operates independent of meaning. Mapping this relationship reveals that] in fact there is no ~~lateral connection~~ fixed relationship between the two. The informe [would therefore exist] at the periphery where form loses its definition, this boundary is constantly shifting. This means that the informe may exist within, beyond, or on the boundary of formal architecture.

Blinded By The Light

The *informe* was a fundamental theme in Bataille's work, yet aside from his brief article in the *Documents* dictionary there is no other explicit mention of it. The *informe* was at the core of his general project—his paradoxical theory—the impossible. In all of his texts, whether the subject was religion, economy, or even eroticism, the *informe* is circumscribed; it is written in the margins with invisible ink. However in order to grasp the rupture that yielded this *project* it is necessary to start at the beginning.

Strangely enough Bataille began with architecture. His first published work was titled *Notre-Dame de Rheims* (see Appendix B for full text). It was clearly written before he broke with Christianity as Hollier describes it as a "meditation, according to the most religious definition of the form and spirit of this term, on a cathedral."¹ He describes the cathedral, with utmost adoration, as the mother of the great city of Rheims. However, the ten years following its publication would be marked by a written silence only broken for professional reasons. This silence was the beginning of his shift towards the *informe*, breaking with Christianity, and away from what he saw as the constructed and oppressive values of religion. The text itself is only known because André Masson, who had been in his class at the l'École des Chartes, alluded to it in Bataille's obituary.

With the discovery of this text it is possible to understand the rupture that became the catalyst for the rest of the writing Bataille would produce. This writing was intended to silence *Notre-Dame de Rheims*. He would write against the cathedral, against the text, against the overarching ideology defining it. His writing, thus, would throw dirt on the light the cathedral represented with the intention of burying it. The text, as it exists, is no longer bound by silence, no longer buried.

¹ Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 14.

Notre-Dame: Our-Lady. Bataille's uses the symbol of the cathedral throughout his letter to the youths of Haut-Auvergne to mask the discontinuities of the events described. He writes of the cathedral as a "vision," not simply describing it, but as if it were not bound by the physical edifice. The cathedral acts as the counterpoint to all that is negative in the letter: the overwhelming noise and garish light of the new streets, the desolation of Joan of Arc in her cell, and the war. "The cathedral white and immense as victory, and the whole of the city open like the ornate portals of Notre-Dame to anyone coming in the name of the Lord."² Bataille establishes the cathedral as the eternal mother of the city of Rheims, one that will always be victorious, where even if in ruins they would be prepared to die for. The maternal character of the cathedral is emphasized throughout the text, to the point where Bataille asserts that the cathedral is not just the motherly figure of the city but Mary herself—mother to Christ. The cathedral is the matriarch and thus can be seen as a representation of moral authority. The projection of this meaning onto the cathedral—like a painterly wash masking the discontinuities of the text—makes it the symbol of continuity throughout. As Hollier notes:

[...] embodying it in a mystical radiance bringing together all the history and geography of France to turn it into a sort of vast and glorious resurrected body, a maternal body in glory—intact, removed from time and death because it is sustained by an immortal heart.³

The eternal quality of the cathedral, in Bataille's text, overshadows, almost to the point of denying, any destruction of the cathedral—a metaphor for a break from Christianity. Thus, the cathedral personifies the message to the youths of Haut-Auvergne: continuity. The letter is an appeal to the youth to continue in the name of the Lord, rebuilding the cathedral within each of them.

² Bataille, Georges. "Notre-Dame de Rheims," as quoted in: Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 16.

³ Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 20.

Rupture: Breaking the Cathedral

For Bataille the process of writing against the cathedral took on additional life, it was not only about silencing that haunting text *Notre-Dame de Rheims*, but also working against the authorities and ideologies engrained in architecture. Looking specifically at his text on Notre-Dame de Rheims one can derive the basis for his stance against architecture: the cathedral conceals the veiled ideology of Christianity, and he would come to see that as a representation of the oppressive potential of architecture. Bataille writes in his article "Architecture" found in the *Documents* dictionary:

Architecture is the expression of the very soul of societies [...] In fact it is only the ideal soul of society, that which has the authority to command and prohibit [...] Thus great monuments are erected like dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority against all disturbing elements: it is in the form of cathedral or palace that Church or State speaks to the multitudes and imposes silence upon them.⁴

For Bataille architecture becomes the expression of authority whether it is the moral authority representative of the Church or public authority of the State. His article continues by describing the storming of the Bastille as the reaction of a crowd against their true masters: monuments. This suggests that architecture can so completely embody the authority it is meant to represent that it may become the authority—the oppressor. Thus the storming of the Bastille can be likened to the rupture in which Bataille wrote, for when he wrote *Notre-Dame de Rheims* the cathedral was no longer the *representation* of Our Mother it was Our Mother—the enforcer of moral authority. His writing then became a way of storming the cathedral, he was writing against his former master.

⁴ Bataille, Georges. "Architecture," as quoted in: Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 46-47.

Architecture fundamentally became a prison to Bataille as it was representative of the authority projected upon it. Architecture is the prisoner of meaning, and we are all prisoners of architecture. Furthermore, Bataille would argue that we are the architects of our own prisons for the anthropomorphic qualities we attribute to architecture.⁵ Architecture is unable to escape metaphors and analogies of the human body. Further insight can be gained by looking at two of the other articles Bataille wrote for the *Documents* dictionary: "Abattoir" (Slaughterhouse) and "Musée" (Museum).

The slaughterhouse and the museum represent two opposing poles within us—articulating an internal struggle. In his article Bataille likens the slaughterhouse to the religious temples of past eras that were not only used for worship but also for killing. He notes that in both there is the convergence of "myth and the ominous grandeur typical of those places where blood flows,"⁶ yet one lacks the character of sacrifice once attributed by its former religious dimension. The slaughterhouse is pushed away—"cursed and quarantined;"⁷ the repulsion is indicative of our own unseemliness. We cannot stand in architecture what we cannot stand in ourselves.

The museum, oppositely, represents our attraction: clean and pure. Bataille draws a metaphor between our lungs and the museum, where blood flows in as patrons do a museum, and both leave, respectively, "fresh and purified."⁸ Thus the museum becomes a form of ideal where visitors come in order to feel at one with one another. Bataille ends the article by relating the museum to a mirror:

5 Bataille's belief that architecture is a prison is a way of working in reverse to say that our own form is first our prison, and we are the architects of that prison because architecture began by using the human form as its basis. Now the anthropomorphic qualities are inescapable.

6 Bataille, Georges. "Slaughterhouse," as quoted in: Brotchie, Alastair. *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*. Ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995. Print. P 73.

7 Bataille, Georges. "Slaughterhouse," as quoted in: Brotchie, Alastair. *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*. Ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995. Print. P 72-73.

8 Bataille, Georges. "Museum," as quoted in: Brotchie, Alastair. *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*. Ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995. Print. P 64.

The museum is a colossal mirror in which man contemplates himself, in short, in all his aspects, finds himself literally admirable and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all the art journals.⁹

Though the last sentence articulates the reciprocal relationship that exists between buildings and bodies, it is in the first two sentences that Bataille reveals his intent for the article. He attributes the first museum to the National Convention that turned the *Palais du Louvre* (Louvre Palace) into a museum to replace the king.¹⁰ Thus Bataille links the creation of the museums with the development of the guillotine in order to remind us that behind our reflection there is an unseemliness: what is now the symbol for cleanliness and purity was founded on death by replacing one ideal, the king, with another, the museum. Herein lies the struggle—as attraction and repulsion cannot exist without the other, but they also cannot coexist. Instead one resists their own ugliness preferring to get lost in their perceived ideal, what is most “admirable.”

Bataille’s animosity towards architecture, when reduced, is primarily for its anthropomorphism. Not only can architecture be seen as the process of edifying our form, it derives its meaning primarily from the metaphors and analogies to the body. Furthermore, it is the architect’s ability to construct and execute a plan fixing both meaning and form that Bataille takes issue with.

It is obvious, moreover, that mathematical organization imposed on stone is none other than the completion of an evolution of earthly forms, whose meaning is given, in the biological order, by passage of the simian to the human form, the latter already presenting all the elements of architecture.¹¹

9 Bataille, Georges. “Museum,” as quoted in: Brotchie, Alastair. *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*. Ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg. Trans. Iain White. London: Atlas, 1995. Print. P 64.

10 Hollier, Denis. Introduction. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P xiii.

11 Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 53.

The mathematical organization imposed on stone is the architectural plan. Though Bataille never explicitly identifies the "plan" as a source of contention, it is basis for architecture's form; it is where architecture acquires its anthropomorphic qualities. The plan also represents continuity by eliminating discontinuities that may undermine the final form of the edifice; it suppresses the unknown. Thus, the plan carries a great authority because it is through the plan that we cement our form. Bataille, rather, works against the plan, undoing the cathedral, by submitting it to the unknown: the *informe*. The *informe*, in its incompleteness, is the key that unlocks our prison, freeing us from the infatuation with our own form.

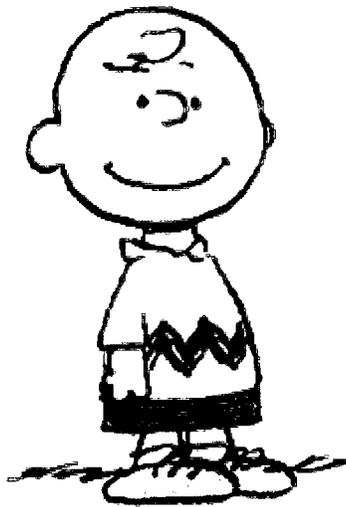


Figure 14.

Charlie Brown House

Recording the Informe



Figure 15. May 6, 2010 11:12 AM

The urban fabric of a city evolves from a plan, and although this plan may change over time, its purpose is to create and maintain a homogeneous and functioning city. This plan formalizes the built and natural environment within a city; there are however, gaps in the fabric. The alleyways and vacant lots undermine the totality of the urban fabric and become a stage for the *informe*. The *informe* is not limited to the interstitial spaces as buildings, too, can become *informe*.

The authoritative quality of formal architecture often suppresses the *informe* however as the condition of a building deteriorates with age, usually becoming abandoned, the *informe* begins to take over. When a building becomes derelict it no longer functions as part of the fabric of the city and it too becomes a gap or slippage and thus a stage for the *informe*. The work of Gordon Matta-Clark is a good example of this process, where he would appropriate abandoned buildings scheduled for demolition and they would become the basis for his intervention, whether it was splitting a house in half or cutting large apertures in a warehouse.

Locally, the "Charlie Brown House" in Ottawa, Ontario has become an example of this transition from formal architecture to a stage for the *informe*. The

building formerly housed the Pawn 'Da' Rosa pawnshop and a residence on the second floor; it however has sat vacant since the owner passed away six years ago (2004). It was slated for demolition in 2008, nevertheless leading up to its scheduled destruction the current owner was required to clean the graffiti and posters that had accumulated.¹ In what can be understood as a statement against the absurdity of maintaining the appearance of a building ready for demolition the owner's agent painted the building yellow. In actual fact the destruction of the Charlie Brown house has faced a number of delays with city council that have allowed it to become the locus for the *informe* within the city. The walls of the building are constantly changing as graffiti goes up and are once again covered by yellow paint.

The building itself has also become *informe* in nature, its status lowered to a point where it no longer functions within the fabric of the city, rather it is like a yellow stain on a monochromatic image. Its appearance—abrasive to some—is in a constant state of flux; it is now a place for those not welcome anywhere else: graffiti writers, skateboarders, the homeless, etc. Not surprisingly these communities seem to thrive on an *informe* existence moving from one site to the next. Prior to its stunning yellow paint job the city's requirement that it be cleaned up and the graffiti painted over reflects a fear of the presence of the *informe* in the city. The city's decision was likely an attempt to conceal the *informe* by suggesting that the building maintain a normative appearance. Though the yellow was most likely a reaction to the city's ruling, it succeeded in emphasizing the *informe* by making it stand out against the whites, browns and greys that comprise the colour palette of the neighborhood.

Of course the Charlie Brown house is not the only site of the *informe* in Ottawa however at the moment it is the most prominent because of the attention it has garnered as a result of its paint job. This building will not survive in this state

¹ Taylor, Scott. "Yellow House Nearing an End." *Ottawa Sun*. 3 June 2010. Web. 6 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.ottawasun.com/news/ottawa/2010/06/03/14251486.html>>.

indefinitely but that is the point. The strength of the *informe* is this ephemeral quality—the interventions temporary and the sites fleeting; yet as one disappears others emerge and the cycle continues—such is the nature of the *informe*. As the sites come and go it is the process of recording the transformations that allows them to survive beyond their limited life spans.



Figure 16. May 27, 2009 2:23 PM. Spots of a different colour of yellow mark where graffiti has been painted over. Also the notice for a zoning adjustment is posted.



Figure 17. June 3, 2010 5:48 PM. A group of skateboarders make use of the obstacles made available by the vacant building.



Figure 18. August 22, 2010 3:12 PM. The graffiti likening this building to Charlie Brown has now been painted over returning it to the state of blank yellow canvas.

An Informe Architecture

The architect saw his superiority guaranteed in his power to outline plans, to make projects. *Cosa Mentale*: the forms he conceives must guarantee the domination of idea over material. Execution has only to abide by his program, to submit to it until it disappears into it. The project by nature is destined to reproduce its form, to assure its own reproduction by overseeing the elimination of anything it has not foreseen, and the noninscription of whatever time might oppose to it. The future (the realized edifice) must conform to the present (the design of the plan). Time is eliminated.¹

Just as we can establish the common properties of formal architecture, so too can we with an *informe* architecture. These common properties however are more like a set of constraints that are essential to the *informe*. By articulating a set of constraints it allows them to be met in a number of ways that may not necessarily correlate into a set of common properties. The idea of common properties also suggests some level of homogeneity, which is something the *informe* opposes.

The first constraint is the prohibition of a plan as it reflects the authority of the architect. What this means is that the construction of *informe* architecture must be the product of a process rather than a plan. The process used can parallel this one, where a series of constraints are established based on the context and the construction evolves out of this relationship. This being said, it is necessary to acknowledge that the creation of architecture inherently includes some form of plan, even if it is not put to paper; the only process truly independent of a plan is one beyond the control of an architect. Using the constraints as a basis for

¹ Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 45.

architecture becomes a strategy, rather than a plan, for achieving *informe*.² The role of the architect then, in working towards an *informe* architecture, must be to resist the temptation of a plan by leaving the construction incomplete. In essence, the architect only participates by starting the process. This lowers the status of both architecture and the architect by absolving them of the authority derived from a plan suggesting that it no longer requires and architect to create architecture.

The second constraint requires the exclusion of meaning. This implicates the physical appearance and the analogies and metaphors conventionally embedded in the form of architecture. The architect must not only avoid projecting his or her own form onto the construction but also evade the metaphors that reduce architecture to a representation of something else. Bataille's aphorism accompanying the image of Acepheus perhaps describes just how challenging this feat may be: "Man will escape his

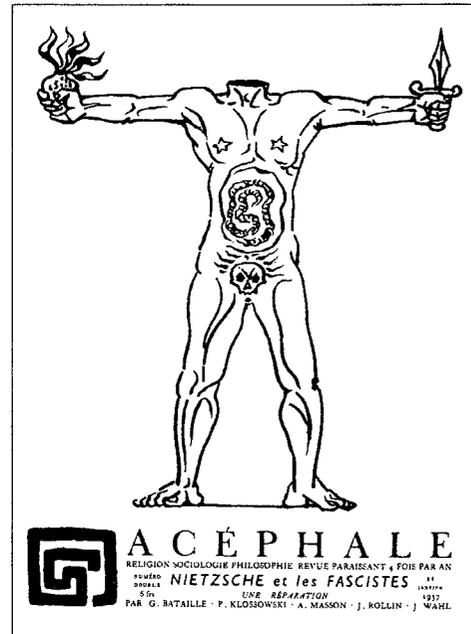


Figure 19. ACEPHALE - *adj.* Having no head or chief; = ACEPHALOUS (Oxford English Dictionary)

The image of Acepheus taken from the first issue of *Acepheus*, a journal put out by a secret society by the same name founded by Bataille. The drawing by Andre Masson is not only a headless body - man escaping his thoughts - but also suggests a headless organization, one without hierarchy.

² Though the notion of a strategy can be likened to the *plan*, it remains open-ended whereas a plan suggests that there is a conclusion or finite end one works towards.

head as a convict escapes his prison.”³ In Bataille’s writing one’s head is the locus of the labyrinth where one constructs their own prison; because we have, over time, drawn so many metaphors relating bodies to buildings what Bataille suggests is that the only way to break from this relationship is to break from our own form—to lose our head.

The third constraint, which is in fact part of the second, requires rupturing the relationship between language and architecture because it too is a source of meaning in architecture. The construction must be presented free of a title—even calling it architecture affords it meaning.

³ Hollier, Denis. Introduction. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P xii.

Street ARCHITECTure!

A Model for an Architecture in Flux

There are few better examples of the *informe* or a medium in flux than street art. Street art does not simply refer to graffiti but rather an all-inclusive art form based on unauthorized interventions in the city. Street art can be justly called a counterculture as the artwork usually occurs illegally and exists in the margins of the city. "Counter" because it represents a marginalized community that opposes social norms and breaks established laws, while at the same time exerting enough influence to substantiate a cultural movement.

Street art appropriates space in the city, taking over the most visible walls and public spaces. In most cases, as quickly as the artwork appears it will disappear, whether it is removed by authorities, altered by others, or simply destroyed. The art usually appears under the cover of darkness while most are sleeping due to its illicit nature. The artists are largely unknown to those outside of the street art community and only by the pseudonym identifying their work.

What aligns street art so well with the *informe* is the unverifiable nature of the work. The artists are described as *shadows* making their artwork a temporary vestige of their presence. The street art community has no rules and thus avoids both the projection of authority and hierarchy. The best sites are defined by their visibility and are available to anyone willing to accept the higher risk of being caught. Street art also has a similar operative value to the *informe*, where the negative connotation it carries has the potential to lower the status of buildings or even communities. This relationship contributed to the "Broken Window Theory" that suggests a broken window that is not repaired quickly indicates that no-one cares and graffiti will begin to appear and the petty crimes will give way to larger ones.¹ This is not the only way in which street art lowers status as it is also

1 Banksy. *Banksy: Wall and Piece*. London, England: Century, 2006. Print. P 130.

responsible for questioning the value of art 'proper.' The work is produced for the public, demanding no admission fees and no profit, just an audience. The temporary existence of these artworks also undermines the timeless quality of art preserved in galleries and museums.

The best-known street artist, and possibly the most well known living artist, is also perhaps the best example of the *informe*. The name Banksy may ring a bell; he is notoriously secretive yet is one of the most prolific street artists. He has self-published five books and, most recently, appeared in a film while his work now sells for considerable sums of money. His notoriety continues to grow yet he has retained his anonymity, remaining only known by his pseudonym.² He personifies the unverifiable. With regards to both his work and his identity it is hard to distinguish truth from fiction. Because he uses stencils for his graffiti it has been speculated that he is not always responsible for the graffiti that bears his name, yet at the same time it is hard to justify because graffiti, like handwriting, is unique to the individual. What is known about his identity, with certainty, is only the little information he has given out, but Banksy is also known to give out misinformation. His artwork, though, is notorious for its acutely critical commentary on social, political, and contextual issues.

Informe as street art offers a suitable building block for the creation of an *informe* architecture. The current model of the architectural profession is one of contingency: clients, city councils, engineers, contractors, etc. are all integral to the construction process. It is this framework that will inevitably destroy any attempt at an *informe* architecture by diluting the process with expectations of form. With this said it would seem that the only way to achieve an *informe* architecture requires escaping this prescriptive framework.

² With the growing popularity of Banksy's work there has been increasing interest in uncovering his true identity culminating in a convincing article published in 2008. Yet, because of the clever and elusive nature of Banksy one cannot help but reserve doubt that this could be an elaborate rouse. If you feel there is value in knowing his identity you will have to find the source yourself.

Once again, looking to street art as precedent *informe* architecture must be independent of a specific client; rather, it requires an audience of everyone. In this role the architect functions not only as the architect but also engineer, contractor, etc. This is a truly public "architecture" offered with no pretensions or stipulations. It is not Architecture but architecture.

Constructing the Informe

Unplanning Potential Architectures

Constructing the *informe* is the unfolding of not just a critical process, but also Bataille's general project. Bataille used language to work against architecture and did so successfully because of the strong sign-signifier relationship between the two. However to physically construct the *informe* is to use architecture against itself—a project against a project. In order to achieve this it is necessary to disrupt the relationship of architecture to language, where architecture is no longer a representation of something, rather, it is architecture about architecture. Therefore, these constructions must avoid the formal characteristics that undermine this process.

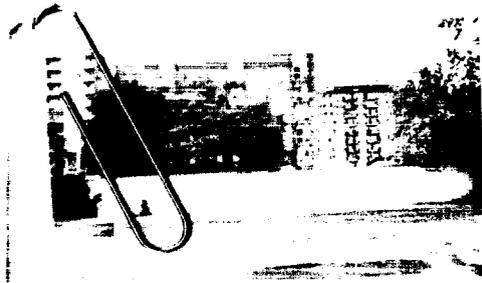
When creating an architecture about architecture the process is crucial to its construction. In addition to the three constraints fundamental to *informe* it is also necessary to identify contextual constraints. Working in response to the constraints as a strategy for achieving the *informe* becomes a way of working against the plan or project where the contextual differences add to the heterogeneity of the Constructions.

The Constructions

As discussed earlier, the *informe* is revealed through multiplicity. Four constructions were undertaken to underscore that this is a scripted event and not an accident or simple act of vandalism. The project in Banff demonstrated the ease of disregarding an isolated event—when I was the only one wearing the t-shirt—however with multiplicity there is the perception of credibility, as the action can no longer be perceived as an accident or oddity. Though they vary in appearance, their fabrication and locations were similar in an effort to suggest some sort of loose connection between the various constructions.

The two sites were chosen for multiple reasons but primarily for their visibility. The locations were also meant to highlight gaps or slippages in the urban fabric as they may already be a stage for the *informe*.

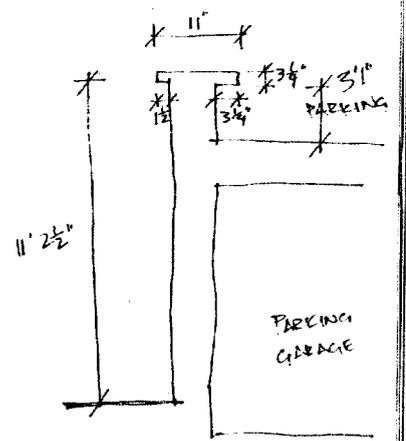
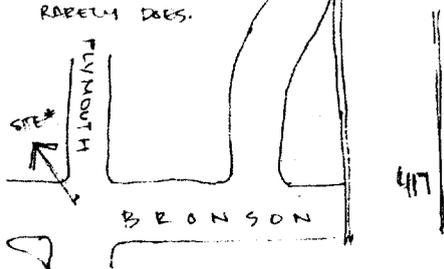
Bronson at Plymouth: Construction 1



VIEW FROM PLYMOUTH

A CITY IS THE FABRIC OF THE CITY,
ONE THAT HAS BECOME FAR TO FORMALIZE
LIKE A SCAR ON ONES BODY.

THE WALL AT THE REAR OF THE SITE
USED TO HAVE LOTS OF GRAFFITI NOW IT
RARELY DOES.



CONSTRAINTS

- PLAN IS PROHIBITED
- METAPHORS AND ANALOGIES ARE PROHIBITED
- DISSOLVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE + LANGUAGE
- CONSTRUCTION MUST OCCUPY THE WALL

Bronson Avenue is one of the North-South traffic arteries in Ottawa and this site, situated at the back of a vacant site, is located just South of the only Provincial Highway running through the city. At various points of the day traffic backs up on Bronson that would also allow a greater opportunity to see the Construction.

The vacant site has preserved its previous boundary with a black chain-link fence marking its formal footprint. The back of the site is defined by a large

concrete wall that supports a parking garage for an apartment building; since becoming vacant this wall has been a place for graffiti. This wall became the focus for the intervention, and the basis of the contextual constraint. Thus the constraints became:

- Any *Plan* is prohibited.
- Meaning must be excluded, disallowing any form of representation whether metaphor or analogy.
- The relationship between architecture and language must be dissolved.
- The construction must occupy the wall.

Without a specific material in mind I found a number of sites that I could “borrow” wood pallets (or skids) from. It was necessary to use found materials as a way of submitting the Construction to their material limits; rather than imposing an idea upon a material the Construction is derived from the material itself. The wood pallets, in fact, were quite ideal as they are heterogeneous in nature. Though they are all similar they do not come in a specific shape or size, they are often made from different types of wood, and their condition when found can be described as unpredictable at best.

Work began on the Construction for the wall as I was accumulating pallets. As one of the constraints was that it must occupy the wall, I began notching the pallets based on the dimensions of the wall. Each pallet was rotated slightly before being notched to avoid creating a large block of pallets sitting on a wall. This idea took on new life when I began playing with how the pallets were notched making an educated guess as to how this may turn out on the wall.

With all the pallets cut and notched, they were moved to the site two or three at a time and screwed together in manageable sections. There was a moment of uncertainty when the first sections were being lifted into place as they had been cut purely based on the dimensions with minimal room for error, and no test run.

Fortunately the dimensions and cuts were accurate and the sections were lifted onto the wall with relative ease. The elapsed time from moving the first pallets over to having them in place was 40minutes.

The following morning I returned to document the Construction at its momentary zenith—like any good architect (please see Appendix C for more images). Later in the day (only 27hours after being put up) I found that it had been knocked off the wall and lay in pieces in the vacant lot. It had begun another phase in its temporary life. By the following weekend it had been removed completely. This was extremely interesting as the Construction proved to be more ephemeral than the graffiti also occupying the wall.



Figure 20. September 3, 2010 11:49 AM
Once on the wall the sections were screwed together to support the pallets that were not notched around the wall.

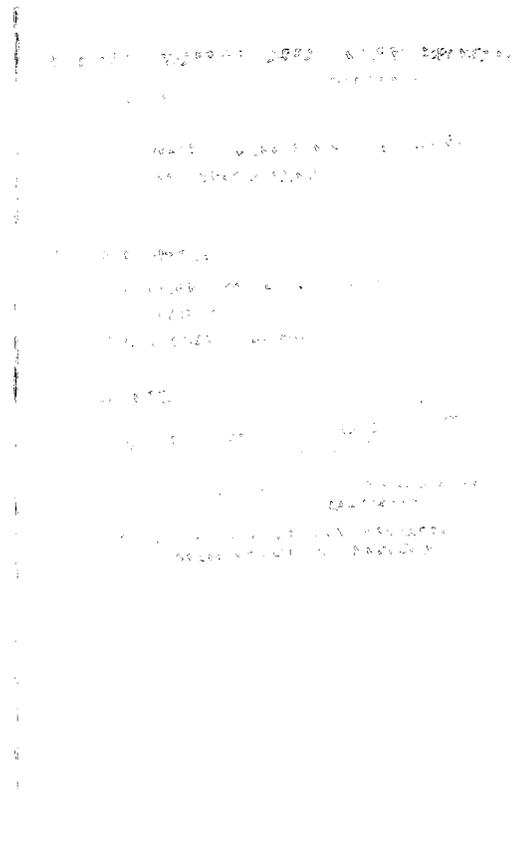
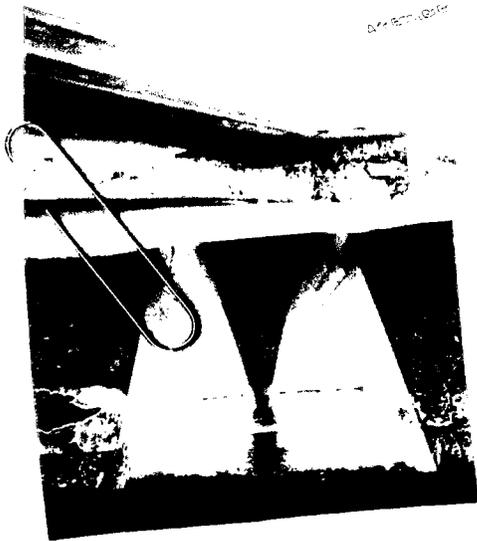


Figure 21. September 4, 2010 11:02 AM
Close-up of the Construction occupying the wall beside some graffiti.



Figure 22. September 6, 2010 9:32 AM
View from atop the parking garage looking at the construction that has been knocked off the wall into the vacant site.

Rideau River at the Bronson Bridge: Constructions 2-4



This site, located at the southern edge of Carleton University's campus, underneath Bronson Avenue where it bridges the Rideau River is one of the legal graffiti sites in Ottawa. The aroma of spray paint as you walk under the bridge indicates the consistency of change. More importantly however is the Rideau River, as it represents a large gap or slippage in the city that is bridged only ten times. Both sides of the river are lined with bike paths and parks for the majority of its length making anything existing on/in the river highly visible. Therefore, the Bronson

bridge became the intended launch site and the constraints became:

- Any *Plan* is prohibited.
- Meaning must be excluded, disallowing any form of representation whether metaphor or analogy.
- The relationship between architecture and language must be broken.
- The construction must exist on/in the river.

Having found three of the same pallets with Styrofoam that had been glued to the top of the pallets for whatever they had been intended to carry. By using three almost identical pallets the goal was to once again make each unique but ultimately create a stronger connection across the Constructions so they are not disregarded as an isolated oddity. The Styrofoam on each pallet was painted red to aid in finding them once out on the river. Once again in an effort to create a loose connection between the Constructions I used the off-cuts that remained from the pallets placed on the wall. This process became a matter of seeing what pieces fit

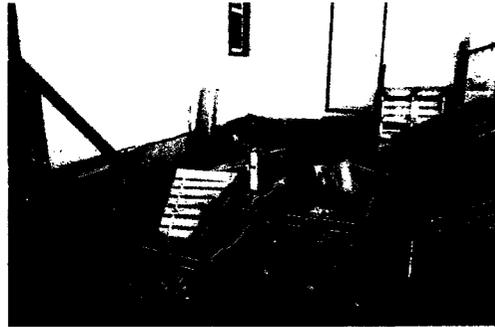


Figure 23. September 4, 2010 10:23 AM
Constructions ready to be taken to the site and launched.



Figure 24. September 4, 2010 12:21 AM
Launching the first of the Constructions into the Rideau River.



Figure 25. September 4, 2010 12:30 AM
View of the Constructions at their momentary pinnacle when their relationship could be understood.

together and could support each other and was, for the most part, trial and error.

With the three Constructions assembled they were brought to the site one at a time. Once more there was a moment of uncertainty when placing the first Construction in the water where I did not know if it was going to float or immediately sink. Though they floated it proved to be quite hard getting the Constructions out far enough so that they would be taken away with the current. Following their departure, I returned each day to track their progress, which yielded some interesting encounters with others curious about what "it" was and why I was taking pictures of it. (Please see Appendix D for more images)

Reflecting on the Outcome of a Process

Though I think the Constructions were successful in some ways, in the end they did not achieve their goal to be understood as a series of interventions rather than isolated acts. The Construction occupying the wall was in fact hardly noticeable because it was situated at the rear of the site and because the site has been vacant for so long now it has become like a scar on one's body—familiar and no longer noticeable. When documenting the Construction I ask someone standing in the bus shelter if they knew what it was and how long it had been up there for. To which they replied, "hmmm...no I have never noticed that there before." The limited time that it survived on the wall combined with the apparent lack of visibility suggests that nobody would make the connection between this Construction and the others in the Rideau River.

Similarly, by the afternoon of the launch, the three Constructions on the river could not be understood as a series bearing a loose connection. As all three had taken a different course and come to shore at different places along the river it was clear that it would be highly unlikely that anyone would come across more than one of the Constructions. Despite being considerably similar in appearance and set out from the same spot, the three Constructions could only be understood individually.

Though each Construction was interesting individually their relationship to one another could not be understood. It is clear that the constructions were too disparate both in their proximity to one another and their physical appearance (between the Construction occupying the wall and the Constructions on the river). In hindsight it may have been a good idea to paint the Construction on the wall red as well, though this doesn't solve the problem of proximity, as it would have likely drawn more attention and hypothetically added another layer of similarity between it and the Constructions on the river. Moving forward, this may mean that

Constructions in the future may need to be visually more similar. Also, with regards to the issue of proximity, perhaps the audience for these interventions are no longer everybody but rather specific people. This would involve identifying paths through the city that the Constructions could occupy, whether it is a bus route or the route of someone walking to work. The relationship between the constructions is then revealed only to those people who travel that route while remaining isolated acts to those who don't.

Postcard Pictures – Rescripted

An Un-ending

The purpose of rescripting the fragment “Postcard Pictures – Ruined” is to emphasize the cyclical nature of writing a thesis. The fragments that comprise this thesis were each written over the course of a day—usually in one sitting—however as my ideas shifted and my understanding grew I found myself holistically rewriting most of my fragments to incorporate these new ideas. The one that I had not rewritten was that first fragment, so looking back on my residency at the Banff Center I decided to rescript it as if I had the knowledge base that I have know, back then. As the original fragment represents the loose beginning of my thesis and this one reflects my current understanding, my goal was to not only make visible the process of understanding but also the aspect of time. Both conventional architecture and traditional theses attempt to suppress time with their perceived permanence and conclusive form. However the *informe* is neither conventional nor traditional; thus it was necessary to celebrate the inclusion of time as a way of subverting the plan. Rescripting the first fragment reduces the thesis to a state of incompleteness suggesting that it can continue to be rescripted therefore becoming and un-ending.

Re-Evolution of a Process

The critical process at the root of this exploration of the *informe* evolved out of two projects, one in Banff and a competition entry that never made it to the production stages. Prior to arriving at the Banff Center for the Arts I took a road trip from Calgary to Jasper stopping at all the major attractions on the way. At the time I was on crutches, in an air cast, and was easily recognized by other tourists at the different locations. It became obvious that I was—along with hundreds of other tourists—participating in a pilgrimage that’s fundamental role was to record the iconic *views* at each site.

The focus of the residency at the Banff Center was on landscape, so it was my intent to explore the *informe* as a method of subverting the landscape as an object to be captured and taken home through the tourist's lens.

Re-Aiming at Tourists

The initial road trip to Jasper was fundamental in understanding the prescriptive form that exists in that area. I was concerned with our relationship to the landscape and, more specifically, "us" as tourists. On the road trip the spectacle of the landscape was overwhelming, however the spectacle of tourists climbing over one another to capture the views shown on postcards and in the magazines was equally so. What struck me most was how scripted ones trip up the Icefields Parkway (Hwy 93) truly is. In many ways it can be understood as a modern pilgrimage where each photograph refers back to some sacred moment in the domestication of the Rocky Mountains. Every roadside stop offers another view to capture—how ideal for those driving themselves—however, many are limited to stops made by a tour-bus operator.

It was clear that the formal condition I was dealing with was defined by the tourism industry and perpetuated by those who wanted to participate in the pilgrimage—something I was also now guilty of. There was an unwritten etiquette along this route, because everyone had only a short period of time to record the *views* before returning to the tour bus or car it was important that you stay out of others photos and they will stay out of yours. This allows everybody to preserve an ideal image of the location and forget about the chaos behind the lens. In doing so each tourist elevates the status of the sites by suggesting, through their images, that where they visited remains an untouched pristine landscape. In reality, each view is scripted; already framed for them as defined by the different viewing platforms.

To undermine the nature of these sites was to expose what was happening

behind the lenses by putting it in front—thus the ABtourist was born. I created a t-shirt that had *IF I AM IN YOUR PHOTO PLEASE SEND IT TO ABtourist@gmail.com* printed on both sides and went to Sulfur Mountain in Banff with the goal of getting in photos. By getting in the photos of others I hoped to make the statement that tourists are just as much part of the landscape at these attractions as the landscape itself. The t-shirt served dual purposes: it identified me as a tourist, and when people viewed their photos they would know that I was in their photo intentionally. It was important that my intention be known because it was my goal to generate discourse about tourist agenda driving this region. Though no emails were received my trip to Sulfur Mountain was a success if only gauged by the reactions of the people whose pictures I was trying to invade. Both forcefully and subtly I would try and shoulder my way into photos, most would try and reframe the picture so that I would not be in it and those who became more frustrated would just not take the picture at all. I hoped that this frustration would expose the absurdity of trying to take a picture with no one else in it when there are hundreds of people around. I'm sure most just found it bizarre that someone was trying to get into their photo, though, curiously, most would not say anything or ask me to move—likely because of the cast and crutches.

Shifting my approach with the aim of receiving more emails, I made t-shirts for most of the group doing the residency. Although I was the only one actively trying to get in photos, having a number of people wearing the shirts meant that they would inevitably find their way into photos as well. Additionally, while at Lake Louise and the Columbia Icefields I found that having a group wearing these shirts emphasized the role of tourists at the sites by forming a recognizable group. While taking group pictures (all wearing the same shirt) I noticed other tourists looking over trying to determine who we were and the purpose of the shirts. This also yielded some emails with photos from people who were "going through [their] out West vacation pictures from the past summer, and found one of a guy wearing a

T-shirt with this email address on it.”¹

The *informe* in this case became a sort of performance art—the art of photo bombing.² Here, *informe* lowered the status of the landscape to something normative rather than spectacular, making the trip more like a visit to a shopping mall.



Figure 26. Image sent in by Antje and Karl from Germany. Photo taken at Peyo Lake lookout.

1 Email received at ABtourist@gmail.com on November 12, 2009 from Lauren Mussche. The attached photo was taken on August 26, 2009 at Lake Louise.

2 Photo bombing is the act of getting in the photos of others without their knowledge.

Pre-Postscript

What was this all about? ... Really?

The origin of this thesis was an architecture of transgression that explored the boundaries of my discipline.

Although the notion of transgression is no longer central to this thesis it brought me to Georges Bataille and *informe*. Upon reflection, the projects undertaken during the Banff Center Studio raised questions about our faith in form and our faith in architecture. The fact that architects, and society in general, remains reliant on the Platonic idea of form was something I was already familiar with however the *informe* represented an interesting challenge and applying it to architecture seemed completely counterintuitive.

As my knowledge of Bataille and *informe* grew, the question of reducing architecture to this point or creating *informe* architecture became a more and more daunting task. What I was looking for was best described by Anthony Kiendl in *Informal Architectures* as: "alternative strategies and criteria for the creation, representation and interpretation of space"¹—one critical of the concept, process, and production of architecture in its current state.

To remain true to the critical nature of the thesis it was necessary to also question the expectations of an architectural design thesis. As it exists both architecture and thesis rely on a fictional ideal—finite form. In reality a building is in a constant state of change from the point ground is broken on site until its destruction, even if the formal structure aims to minimize the appearance of these changes. Similarly the defense of an architectural thesis does not mean the idea on which it was based is complete. However this does not mean that some conclusions cannot be drawn without concluding.

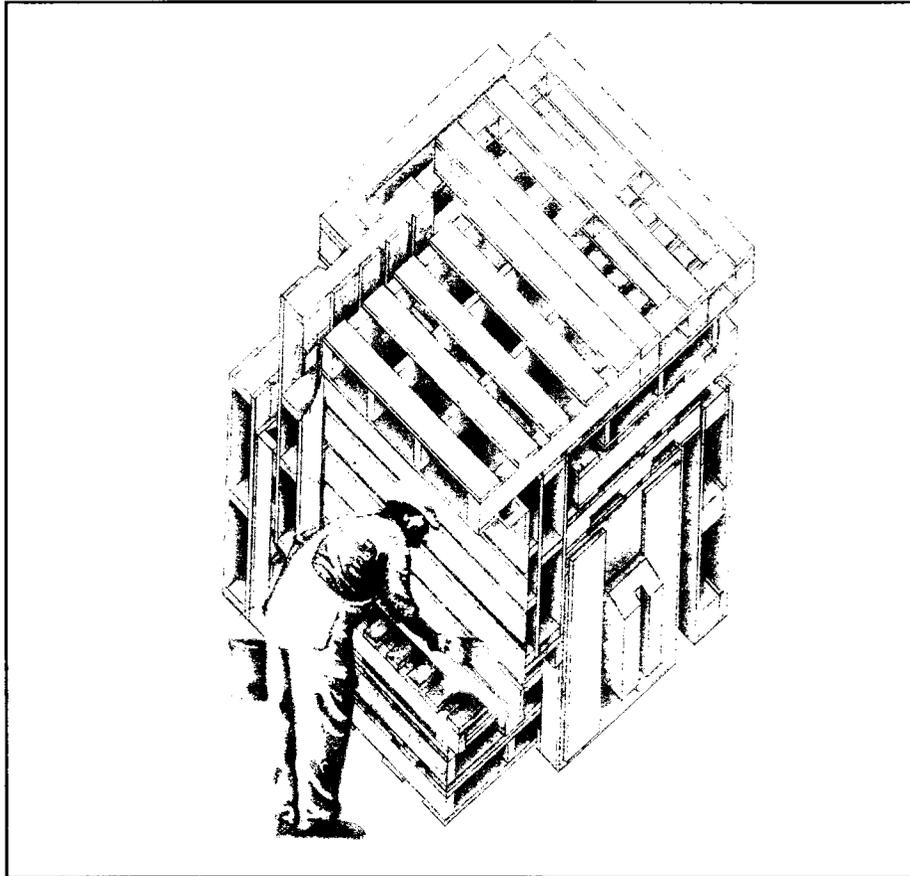
What this exploration has revealed is that the *informe* can free architecture

¹ Kiendl, Anthony. "Informal Architectures: Space and Contemporary Culture." *Informal Architectures: Space and Contemporary Culture*. London: Black Dog, 2008. Print. P 29.

by exorcizing the ancient *ideas* that still haunt architecture. Therefore this thesis represents only a few transient points located at the periphery of architecture that reflect the flux of Heraclitus and outshine, if only for a moment, the immutable spheres of Plato.

Post-project

Constructing a National Gallery



1

Revisiting both the Constructions and the proposal for the National Gallery, this “project” is a suggestion of how the two may converge. The first image in the series is perhaps the most telling as it shows an assemblage of pallets, roughly forming a cube, being painted white. Recreating the iconography of the gallery—the “white box”—with the imperfect module of pallets offers an alternative to conventional notion of a gallery where anything can now be assembled into a cube and become a gallery or, similarly, anything can become architecture. Though this cube sits on



2

the site of the former National Gallery, its construction suggests that not only is the form of a cube temporary but so too is its placement on site. Where the scrims became formal as a result of their stasis on site, the new National Gallery absolves the gallery of this canon. At any moment the pallet cube may be pulled apart and disseminated throughout the city. The dashed line in the second drawing suggests just one of the many paths the pallet gallery may create. The gallery will reveal the connection of its parts to those traveling that route while leaving others to question their purpose or simply disregard them as isolated acts of vandalism.

To prevent fixing our form to the point where we can no longer distinguish ourselves from the great edifices we must look to the informe as a way of reversing our current trajectory.

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Appendix A

Heraclitus: Fragments of a Constant—Change

Heraclitus was a philosopher in the fifth century B.C. and what remains of his work is only in fragments. Therefore what is known about Heraclitus with reasonable probability is limited with most information coming from Diogenes Laertius who wrote a short essay on him in *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. The accounts of Diogenes Laertius were known to be rather fantastic; with some information likely derived from popular misunderstandings of the teachings or generalizations about a philosopher's character.¹ The work Heraclitus produced only survives in fragments, most only sentences, which are quoted in the work of other philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Therefore the context in which Heraclitus wrote his treatise (he is thought to have only written one book²) is still largely up for debate as what is known is only through the accounts of others.

Heraclitus' philosophy is paradoxical in many cases, offering multiple readings or translations, requiring one to look at the subtle nuances and various interpretations, and for this reason his work cannot be reduced to a few simple propositions. However, to generalize, at the root of his philosophy, and what he is most noted for, was the concept of universal flux or change.

It is in changing that things find repose.³

This suggestion turns permanence into a relative term where everything is in the process of changing, however to suggest that everything is changing also implies

1 Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 10-11.

2 Diogenes describes the book as "on nature." It was thought by almost all ancient writers to be a challenging to read, which was likely intentional to ensure that those who read it were of adequate intellectual stature. Taken from: Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 12.

3 Heraclitus. "Fragment [D 84a; By 83]," as translated in: Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 29.

that things will change at different rates.⁴ It should be noted that his philosophy was based on the perception of qualities changing from one state to their opposite; one example Heraclitus uses is something that is cool becoming warm and vice versa.⁵ He views these opposites, warm and cool, in constant conflict with one another, noting in fragments “that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.”⁶ Interpreting his reference to strife suggests that he viewed strife and war as one in the same or interchangeable. In this sense when he suggests that all things must pass through strife, it can be understood that change is strife or war between the opposites. This implies that one cannot exist without the other; there can be no warmth without the cool.

Strife can also be seen as the conflict between form and the *informe* where neither could exist without the other yet each aims to suppress its opposite. Additionally, each quality—form and *informe*—reflect a different process of change. Though the form of an edifice cannot truly resist change it aims to suppress it as much as possible by fixing its qualities. The construction of the *informe*, by contrast, embraces the constant of change by accepting an accelerated process.

Coming back to Heraclitus’ philosophy it is also important to note that he views the process of change as beyond ones control—left to divine chance.

Time is a child moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child’s.⁷

I use the term divine chance because there is an implied necessity of occurrence revealed in this fragment, yet at the same time those affected by changes could only understand it as chance. Paradoxically, divine control is thought to adhere

4 Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 30.

5 Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 29.

6 Heraclitus. “Fragment [D 80; By 62],” as translated in: Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 29.

7 Heraclitus. “Fragment [D 52; By 79],” as translated in: Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 29.

to a strict plan—God as an architect scripting our reality—however Heraclitus undermines this idea preferring the notion of a child moving counters at random. This would suggest that occurrences are beyond the control of both human and God, instead each thing continues along its own trajectory based on the on a variety of forces, which—of course—are in conflict with one another.⁸

The themes of change, strife, and chance all act as lenses through which one can understand the juxtaposition of form and *informe*. As stated earlier formal architecture seeks control and in doing so attempts to eliminate both change and chance. For this reason formal architecture faces considerably more conflict when compared to an architecture based on the *informe*. To use another example from Heraclitus: “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters are continually flowing on.”⁹ Formal architecture attempts to halt the flow of the river, a process that at best may succeed in slowing it. The *informe* oppositely would prefer to flow with the river in a state of continual and unscripted change. In this sense, an *informe* architecture would become the game piece being moved by the child over and over.

⁸ Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 36.

⁹ Heraclitus. “Fragment [D 91, 12; By 41],” as translated in: Wheelwright, Phillip Ellis. *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1959. Print. P 29.

Appendix B

Georges Bataille – Notre-Dame de Rheims

Notre-Dame de Rheims¹

By Georges Bataille

To some youths of Haut-Auvergne

You have heard tell of Rheims, the great city on the plains of Champagne. It had an ancient history: Clovis the barbarian, baptized by Saint Remi, gave a pious renown to the good Christian city, and there the kings of France were crowned. In Joan of Arc's time it was a city with a secure bourgeoisie inside its walls, and the white cathedral in first youth watched like a shepard over its beating flock down on a thousand pointed rooftops, the hodgepodge of humble, familiar joys. And when the blessed Joan of Arc entered through the slightly twisty roads (as they are still in old crannies of the city), all the good folk of France were there: mothers showing their children the young Saint who was such a warrior and the king: joyful men who ran as they shouted "Noel."

Now the Saint never forgot the good welcome; she said she would have liked to go to her eternal rest next to her good people of Rheims, who were so Christian and so devout. And when she—who lived in the sunlit garden of her own voices—rode off again on new missions, she must often have fondly recalled this memory of the coronation: the people exultant with pious joy and hope, the cathedral white and immense as victory, and the whole city open like the ornate portals on Notre-Dame to anyone coming in the name of the Lord.

I too, when I was living in the old city, saw this, this vision as lovely as our dreams of paradise. There was much too much noise then in the new streets, too much noise and garish light—but always the cathedral was there and always her existence was a triumph of stone. The two towers rose straight into the sky like long-stemmed lilies and the image of friendly crowds slipped under the portals into the company of saints gesturing for eternity in hieratic robes, where their faces showed a joy that stone never smiled. And in the central portal Our Virgin Lady beneath her high crown was so regal and so maternal that all the company of the faithful could not help becoming joyous as children, like brothers, and all the stone was bathed in maternal and divine goodness.

And I think that for one to live one has to have seen this glowing. There is too much pain and gloom among us and everything looms larger under the shadow of death. Joan of Arc, so full of voices and hopes, went to prison and to the stake: we ourselves will have our days of sorrow and the day of our death lurks in wait for us like a thief. We too thirst after consolation. It is true that the light of God shines for us all, but we stray off into our daily wretchedness which is like the ashes in a cold

¹ Bataille, Georges. "Notre-Dame de Rheims," as quoted in: Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*. Trans. Betsy Wing. M.I.T. P., 1992. Print. P 15-19.

room, like a November fog. Now one day when I was pitifully bemoaning these woes, a friend told me not to forget the cathedral in Rheims and suddenly I saw it again, so large in my memory that it seemed to me projected outside myself into a light that was ever new. I saw it as the highest, most marvelous consolation left among us by God, and I thought that as long as it lasted, even if in ruins, we would still have a mother for whom to die. That is the vision that consoled the blessed Joan of Arc in her cell throughout her long ordeal; for in the darkest hours the bells of Rheims still trembled for her in the triumphant light for which she yearned with a desire greater than any man or any misery. And Joan of Arc's vision, still so thrilling to myself four years later, is the light I offer up to your desires, the vision of Notre-dame de Rheims bathed in sunlight.

Only today, mutilated, she rises in desolation.

I saw almost the last days of her splendor, in the fever of August 1914. I saw her naves full of soldiers who came to prepare themselves to die well. The faithful crowded in, aquiver with a prayer of anguish. In the morning there was silence as the cardinal most fervently offered a mass for France; it was like being on the eve of martyrdom, because we expected something too great. Because of their anguish he had wanted to come and pray with his people, and, lit by the sparkling glow of stained-glass windows, he seemed to exist in peace of a final day, as if he were haloed, already beyond humanity, come to bless us.

This abrupt vision—the cardinal then left for Rome to attend the conclave—was like a final flicker of peace in Rheims. Soon fear was in the city. Convoys of people in flight driven ahead of the invasion in distress as dire as human wretchedness; carts crammed with furniture and families perched on top came one after the other, and along the roads there were burdened, pathetic people, letting all their destitution show like those for whom all hope is lost. There were women going mad because they had lost their children in the flight. And a huge, miserable fear invaded Rheims. There was fighting in the Ardennes and our side fled; carts where the wounded lay bleeding in the straw unloaded the horror of nearby battle throughout the city. And, in the sudden heat of the moment, this became for some an exodus and for others the invasion by the German army, and inexorable as war.

I did not see the first denouement, nor that of the victory that came later: that time one of our detachments flung itself down on the city, exhausted but energized by the glory of a whole country weeping with joy. And yet misfortune persisted in Rheims.

And on September 19 shells tore through, killing children, women, and old people; fire crackled and raged from street to street; houses collapsed; people died, crushed by the rubble, burned alive. Then the Germans set the cathedral on fire.

There is no more painful turmoil and confusion than when a city burns. And one's heart rebels in far too violent agony at the sight of such a senseless spectacle. What is revealed then, in the red glow of flames and in the acrid smoke, is the symbol of war as crazy and brutal as fire and as dark as the smoke dimming the sky. The luminous balance of life is broken, because there is no one whose eyes are not burned by the light of the intense flames and whose flesh is not wounded by this bloody cruelty. So everyone who saw the cathedral burn was so weighed down with anguish that the vision they had was a wound scarring the whole world, desperately tearing apart all that used to make our life and our happiness.

When, therefore, I returned to this city where in reality, in the shadow of the cathedral, I was born again to the life and happiness God gives us, all I found were

signs of death and desolation. I had hoped, despite her wounds, to see in the cathedral once again a reflection of past glories and rejoicing. Now the cathedral was as majestic in her chipped or scorched lace of stone, but with closed doors and shattered bells she had ceased to give life; the statues of saints and of the Virgin, whose simple joy had formerly wrapped me in marvelous consolation, had disappeared under a pile of sand bags that protected them against further destruction. And I thought that corpses themselves did not mirror death more than did a shattered church as vastly empty in its magnificence as Notre-Dame de Rheims. Truth to tell a skeleton's rictus grimaced from the cracks torn in the formerly living stone, like on a human face.

The cathedral kept just enough semblance of life to sadden one, regretting the former glory and consolation she provided then as Mother of the Lord; for she had truly been Mother of Christ, Mary herself, whose charity lives among us, and the grief at seeing her broken-down frame and leprous façade was all the sadder for this. In the November mist the cathedral seemed a ghostly vessel, a wandering derelict, masts broken, crewless, on an empty sea: she turned every life-providing hope into ice.

Did we then have to despair and resign ourselves to seeing the world in agony and everything most wanted on earth, everything so marvelously desired, die? Was all our life's blood going to spill through the gaping wounds of numberless corpses slumping in eternal silence? That day the cannon, muffled as death, never stopped shaking the ground, and its answer was pitiless.

But there is one light stronger than death: France. And France was not about to want the enemy to reenter Rheims at whose gates the German divisions impotently and bloodily exhausted themselves. Dismantled, empty, disfigured, the cathedral is still part of France. Despair is not reflected in her ruins and the only suffering is in the anguished awaiting of the Te Deum, which will exalt a glorious liberation and renewal.

One should not seek among her stones something belonging to the past and to death. In her awful silence flickers a light that transfigures her vision; it is the flickering light of hope. Of course, she is stretched out like a corpse in the midst of plains that are a vast cemetery—without peace. But I realized that within her there was a great shout of resurrection. She is too sublime, too lofty in her frenzied soaring to give death's filth a hold on her, and she cries out to all the surrounding dead that it is in light that they are buried. She calls them to the eternal triumph contained in her sorrow. And it is not in vain that former centuries raised such hope in God. The light I described for you is not dulled but transfigured by sorrow and anguish.

You are the ones from whom she awaits renewal, for she is none other than a direct manifestation of Our Lady; and she shows you the light along the way leading to Christ. Others work for liberation in tortures such that they cannot be written except with bleeding hands, and truly Christ alone was able to write them with his blood. You must be worthy of those who suffer thus for you. You have to devote yourself to praying Jesus on the cross for them so that he will teach them what blood is worth. Above all, it is for you to take, in happy peacetime, the way they have opened for you.

Remember that the world has suffered because it believed it saw the light extinguished that keeps God, alive and in peace, on earth. It will only shine again

in your youthful desires. Peace is not a weary, heavy sleep after the storm: it is awakening to life and to all its beauty, to goodness, for you will love with new ardor. You will love our Lord because he has loved you so much he gave his blood for you so that your hope would not falter in suffering. And you will love one another, because mankind has suffered too much for having forgotten how to love each other.

Then you will imitate your ancient fathers towering above you from the past. They built cathedrals under God's heaven in order to open a luminous way for those who come in the name of the Lord toward the One who lived among us. And you will build the holy Church in your heart so that the light that leads to God will always shine within you. You will be glad sons of Notre-Dame and never will I see a youth more splendid.

Appendix C

Bronson at Plymouth: Construction 1 Images



Figure 27. September 2, 2010 6:34 PM View of accumulated pallets with a pile that have been notched to fit over the wall.



Figure 28. September 3, 2010 11:49 AM Assembling the Construction on the wall with a view of the vacant site in the background and a OC Transpo bus going by.



Figure 29. September 3, 2010 1:05 PM View of the Construction from the adjacent McDonald's parking lot.

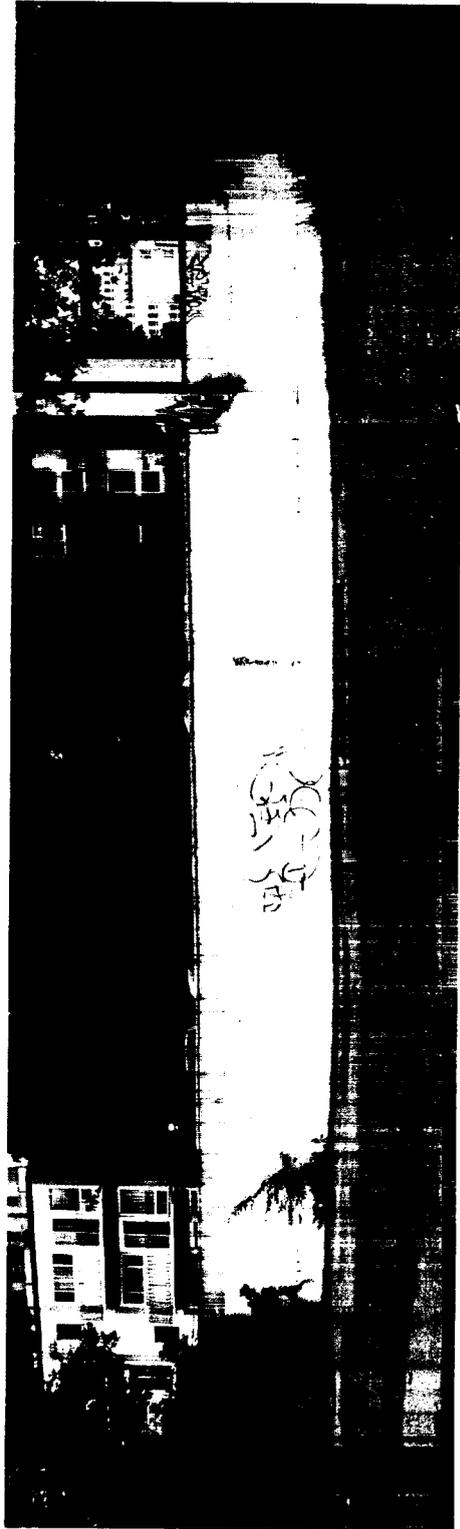


Figure 30. September 4, 2010 11:01 AM Panoramic view of the vacant site with the Construction occupying the wall. Image taken from the bus shelter on the West side of Bronson.

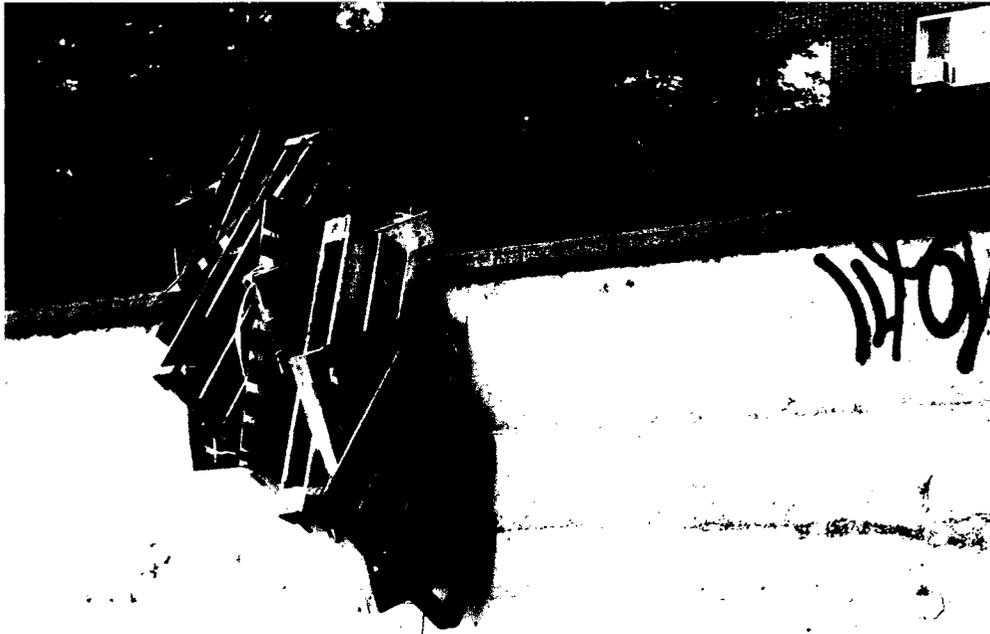


Figure 31. September 4, 2010 11:02 AM Close-up of the Construction adjacent to some graffiti on the wall.



Figure 32. September 4, 2010 11:03 AM Overall view of the Construction situated on the wall.

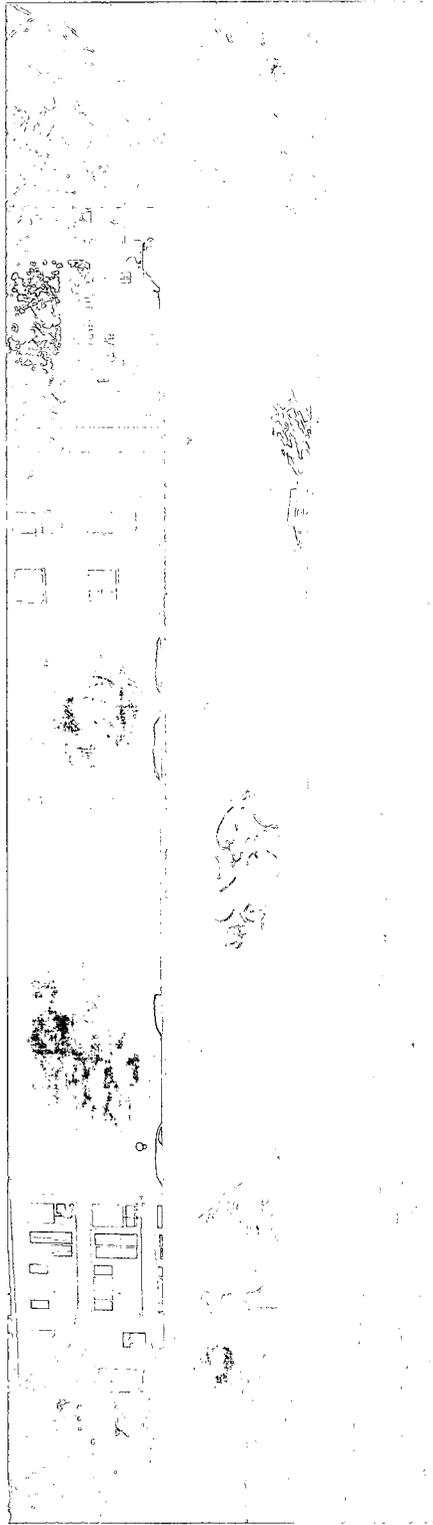


Figure 33. September 4, 2010 3:03 PM Panoramic view of the vacant site with the Construction now knocked off the wall. Image taken from the bus shelter on the West side of Bronson.

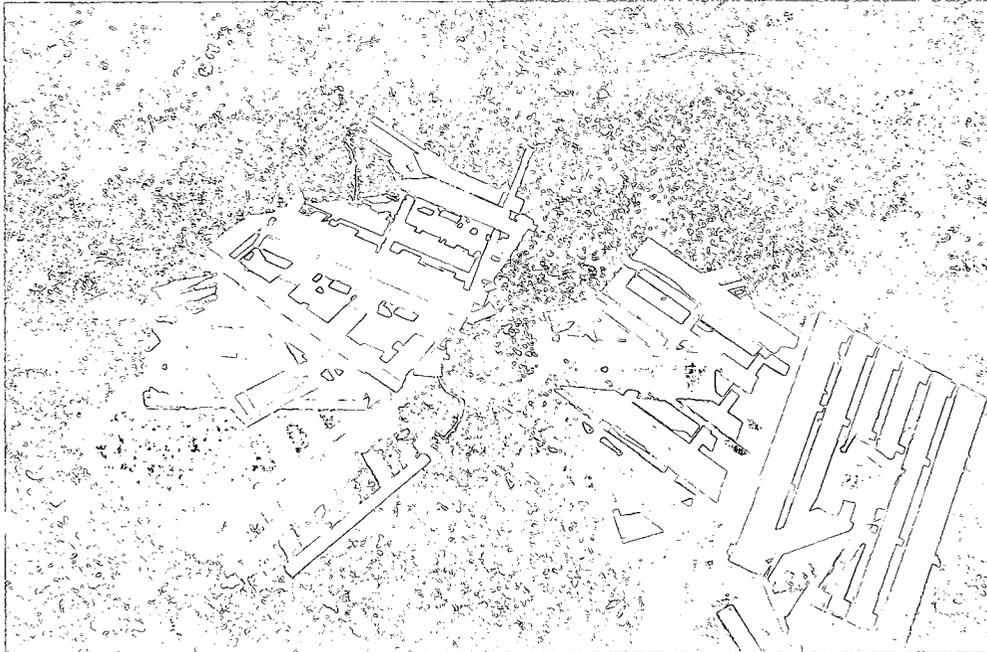


Figure 34. September 6, 2010 9:32 AM View from atop the parking garage looking down on the Construction that has been pushed off the wall.



Figure 35. September 6, 2010 9:36 AM Construction on the ground before being removed entirely.

Appendix D

Rideau River at the Bronson Bridge: Constructions 2-4 Images

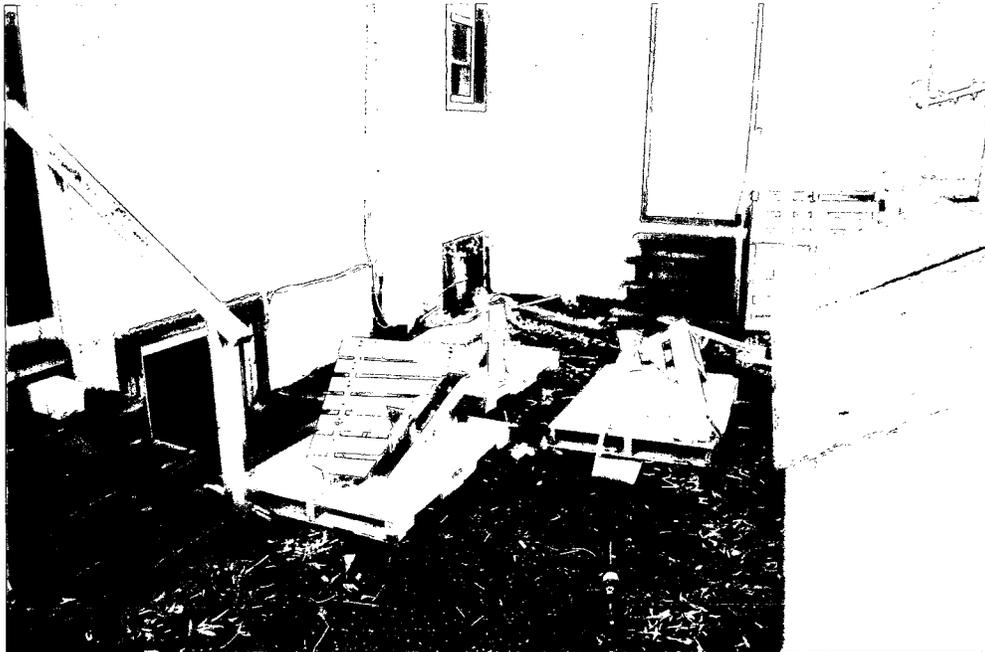


Figure 36. September 2, 2010 6:34 PM Constructions ready to be taken to the site and launched.



Figure 37. September 4, 2010 12:21 AM Launching the first of the constructions into the Rideau River.



Figure 38. September 4, 2010 12:24 AM Two of the Constructions as they pass the legal graffiti walls.



Figure 39. September 4, 2010 12:30 AM All three Constructions at their momentary zenith.

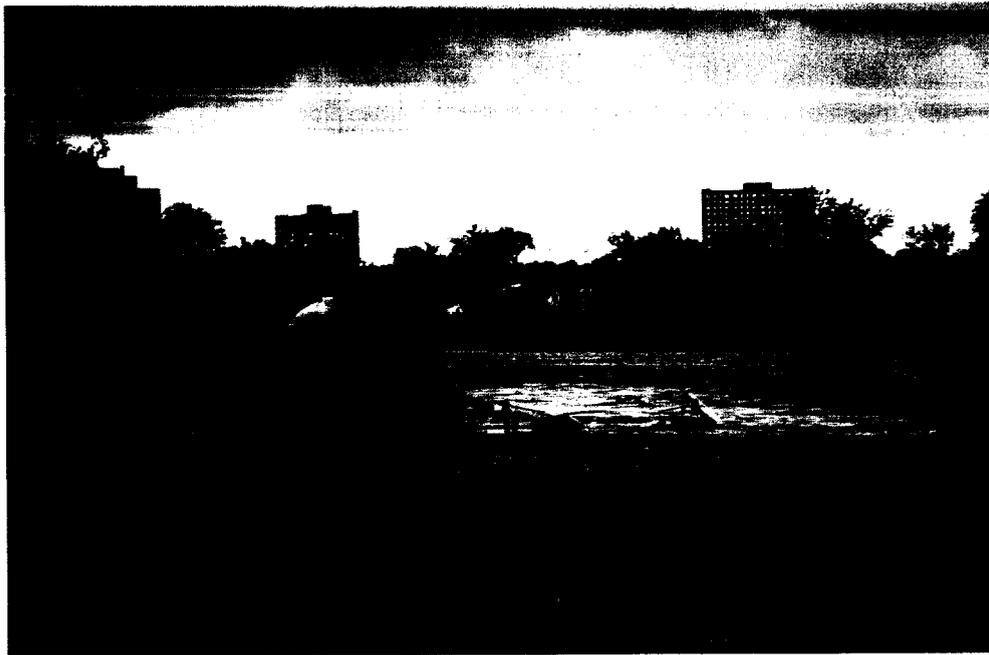


Figure 40. September 4, 2010 12:31 AM Pushing the Constructions out after coming back to shore.

Tracking Constructions



Figure 41. September 6, 2010 9:36 AM All three Constructions are launched below the Bronson bridge.

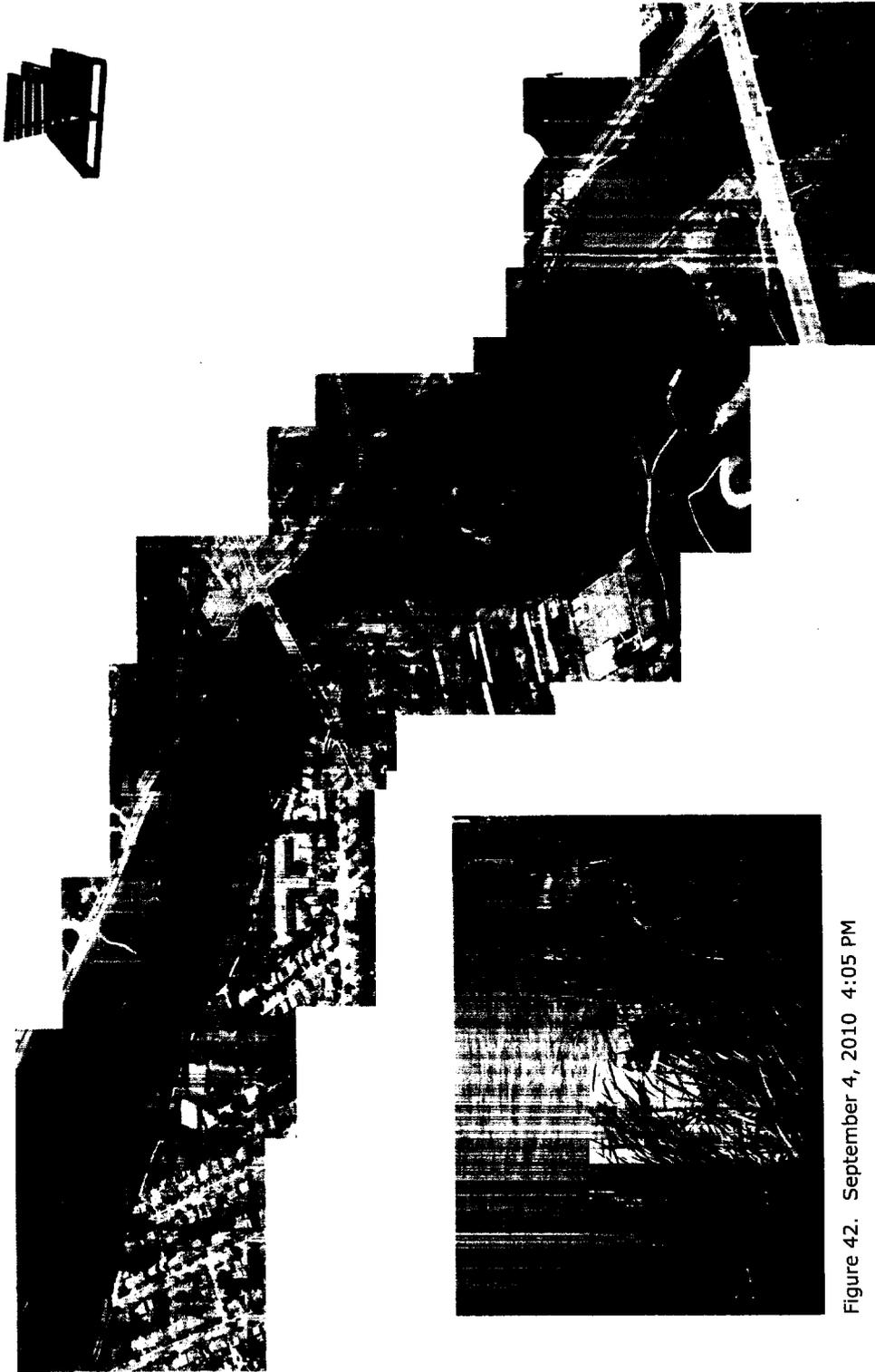


Figure 42. September 4, 2010 4:05 PM



Figure 44. September 7, 2010 4:07 PM



Figure 45. September 4, 2010 4:07 PM



Figure 46. September 5, 2010 2:11 PM



Figure 47. September 7, 2010 3:31 PM



Figure 48. September 5, 2010 1:54 PM



Figure 49. September 6, 2010 4:13 PM



Figure 50. September 7, 2010 3:21 PM