Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tabbles of Bower
Author(s): Jennifer Bloomer
Reviewed work(s):
Source: Assemblage, No. 17 (Apr., 1992), pp. 6-29
Published by: The MIT Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3171221
Accessed: 02/06/2012 11:09

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The MIT Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Assemblage.
The bulk of this essay was written when I was pregnant with my second daughter. At the time, the fact of the pregnancy was so all-encompassing that I scarcely could see beyond my belly, and I used it as a structuring metaphor. A year later, I realize that the metaphor is, in an important sense, inappropriate. While the bearing of a child is an essentially hermetic and private enterprise, the production of this project has been thoroughly collaborative and has been possible only because of many individuals who have put untold hours, ideas, and material into it. It is that kind of production and necessitates a foregrounding of acknowledgments to the major collaborators — Nina Hofer, Mikesch Muecke, Bob Heilman, and Jimmie Harrison — and others to whom I am most grateful.

Style is an indispensable adjunct to architectural knowledge, and . . . the cultivation of a sense of appropriate detail is immensely more significant than any pursuit of pure 'proportion' or 'form.' . . . Only certain approaches to form and detail answer to the demands of the aesthetic sense, and these approaches all lead away from prevailing fashions to some more settled 'classical' style.

Roger Scruton, The Aesthetics of Architecture

A true understanding of the self led us to uphold, not only the primacy of aesthetic values, but also the objectivity which they implicitly claim. It became possible to arrive at a conception of critical reasoning, reasoning which is at once aesthetic and moral but which remains, for all that, free from the taint of moralism. We were drawn tentatively to conclude that some ways of building are right, and others (including many that are currently practised) wrong.

Scruton, final paragraph of The Aesthetics of Architecture

To not be probative is to be trivial.

Jeffrey Kipnis, from a conversation recorded in Chicago

Preface: To bring forth allegory as a construct for theory is to point to a deconstruction of theory itself and, particularly, to a disacknowledgment of the separability of theory and practice. Theory and practice are suspended in the construction; theory is embedded, or disseminated, in it. Uncircumscribed by such concepts as foundation, regulation, or validation, theory becomes a potentiality, a possible pattern; it is dynamic, tracing a fragmentary process of object making. This essay and the project it attends are about such a tracing; they are, as well, objects resulting from the process.
One of the moments when it becomes abundantly clear what a peculiar construct time is occurs during the so-called nine months in which one holds a tiny, developing project within one’s own body. Toward the end, time, which yesterday flew like a hurricane, full of the debris of everyday life, flows like the proverbial molasses in January. And this restructuring of time does not go without its concomitant reconfiguration of space. By this I mean something beyond the very present fact that one can no longer reach the triangle on the far side of the drafting table or the normal—permanent-press—delicate button on the now distant horizon of the clothes dryer. It is more metaphysical than that; it is how the space takes on an anticipatory otherness. I tell you (many of you I do not need to tell, for you know well already), the furniture waits. Stark, empty, ticking. Waiting, waiting, waiting for “something that is about to happen.”

In the room where my husband and I slept and waited, there is a particularly compelling piece of furniture on either side of our bed. On his side (the right, nearest the door), there is a small bench, which, when it is not festooned with cast-off underwear and socks, is recognizable as the handicraft of Gustav Stickley: a simple, unornamented dark-stained oak frame with recessed pad, cased in a rather overly sat-upon, tanned and oiled hide of a cow. On my side (the left, nearest the gaping empty, nagging space of the bassinet), there is an ancient wicker rocker. Festooned with the elaborate twisting and interlacing lines and swollen rolled edges of its own structure, and not recognizable as the work of any proper name, it is known simply as “Miss Eleanor’s Rocker.” The fact of the matter is that both of these pieces belonged to Miss Eleanor in another place in time. Miss Eleanor, you see, was our child’s great-grandmother’s closest and dearest friend. In the Athens, Georgia, before REM and the B-52s were born, before their parents and even their grandparents were born.

A photograph of Miss Eleanor presents the very image of turn-of-the-century Southern femininity: young, demurely posed, eyes downcast, dressed in white, layers of fabric so fine it could float, edged with gossamer lace, lace that also encrusts her prettily held fan. Beneath the airiness and lightness of the fabric and facial expression, her body is formed in the fashion of the time. Confined in a posttensioned construction of bone, metal, and fabric, her chest is thrust upward and outward from a waist so tiny it is no wonder Mr. Bishop’s son fell in love with and married her. An entirely artificial construction, she, so beautiful and horrible it is hard to take your eyes away.

Miss Eleanor was given by her father (in marriage) to Mr. Bishop’s son. Mr. Bishop had once owned the house on Millledge Avenue in Athens in which my child’s great-grandfather and grandmother and father lived and grew up, the house that now hosts the Phi Mu sorority at the University of Georgia. Family legend has it that Mr. Bishop, having moved to Athens from Chicago on the advice of his physician, detested the un-Chicago-like summerrowning of the grass on his lawn and ordered a railroad car of evergreen nutgrass shipped from Africa. The windborn seeds of the nutgrass carried it all over the South, where it is currently viewed as a great regional pest.

Before becoming an importer of deleterious plants, Mr. Bishop had been a Chicago merchant, the proprietor of A. Bishop and Company, purveyors of fine furs. Mr. Bishop sold habitable and ornamental constructions made from the hides of animals. And this is where the nine-months-plus “project,” which I, my feet propped for leverage on the Stickley bench, now on many evenings soothe to sleep in Miss Eleanor’s rocker, meets another project that has been inhabiting the same space in time.

This other enterprise, the subject of this essay, is a project for and about Chicago and is an effect of the Great Fire of October 1871. Mr. Bishop provides a joint between the two. For Mr. Bishop and his hides survived the Great Fire. The story goes that Mr. Bishop, minding his store when the fire came whipping down the way, realized that he hadn’t enough time to procure a conveyance to rescue his merchandise. In desperation, he offered one of the fleeing throng in the street outside a very large sum of money to dump the contents of his wagon, his own domestic treasures, and take on the furs. Keepsakes, heirlooms, and necessities went out; sable, mink, and chinchilla skins went in. Mr. Bishop and his furs set up shop in another part of Chicago before the smoke had cleared.

I shall return to the fire and address a certain unexceptionable domestic animal, the responsibility of a certain blame-worthy housewife, that started it all. But first let us recall those two pieces of restive furniture, which, after all, were
never presented as benign objects merely decorating this manuscript. You will remember that the one is solid, rectilinear, and sturdy, while the other is airy, curvaceous, and lacy. Thus you will begin to perceive, had you not already, a certain dichotomy in the works, a duo that might be construed as some sort of metaphor, were one so disposed to do.

The ornament/structure pair has intrigued architects for many centuries and has certainly been a great architectural bugaboo of this one; and so I am by no means the first, nor will I be the last, to consider these, for some reason, uneasy bedfellows. I am not concerned with making yet another argument for the privileging of one over the other. What interests me is the why and how of the urge to privilege and the possibilities for architecture when this urge is absent. I am interested in how the work of Louis Sullivan that had more to do with structure (for example, the articulation of the basic structures of classical orders in the scratching of tall buildings or the development of the Chicago window and its freeing up of the structural frame to expose itself) has given greater weight to his reputation as the “dean of American architects” than has his prodigious body of work on ornament — for which the former has served more or less as an excuse to forgive. I am interested in how the pair ornament/structure has throughout the history of Western culture had an acritical relationship with the pair feminine/masculine and in the ramifications of this for architecture as cultural production. As Naomi Schor points out, neoclassical aesthetics and its successors are bound up in the conventions of classical rhetoric, in which the ornamental and the idea of feminine duplicity are practically synonymous:

This imaginary femininity weighs heavily on the fate of the detail as well as of the ornament in aesthetics, burdening them with the negative connotations of the feminine: the decorative, the natural, the impure, and the monstrous.5

A brief excursion into the work on ornament of two canonical architectural writers will suggest the particular territory. But I would like to suggest from the beginning that what is construed as “feminine” can also be read as a much broader category. For the duplicity and degeneracy of the feminine is a metaphor for many forms of alterity to the dominant. Throughout our project, this convention is mined and exploited. And so, in the Joycean (Wakean) mode, the not male, the not Caucasian, the not heterosexual, the not homeowner/head of house, the not Christian slide into identity under this metaphor.

In reading Alberti’s De re aedificatoria, four of whose ten books are devoted to the subject of ornament, it is easy to construe ornament as a supplement to beauty. (I am using the French word supplement in the sense in which it is exploited by Jacques Derrida: an entity that is added to another entity, which is both in excess of that to which it is added, that is, is excessive, and which by nature of being added points to, by supplying, a lack in the original entity.) In the Sixth Book, Alberti defines beauty as “that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse.” But he then goes on to state that

ornament may be defined as a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows, I believe, that beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional.6

Thus if the “inherent property” is a sufficient condition for beauty, ornament, as an addition that is for Alberti a positive one (“Who would not claim to dwell more comfortably between walls that are ornate . . .?”), at once is in excess of the conditions for beauty and points to a lack in the essentially beautiful (unornamented) object. A temporal condition is also suggested here: the beautiful object is beautiful prior to ornament. When ornament is added after the establishment of the beautiful object, there must logically be a slipping away of beauty, since, for the object to possess beauty in the first place, “nothing may be added . . . but for the worse.” So when something (ornament) is added, the beautiful object becomes both worse (no longer its pure self) and better (“more delightful”).

Our second canonical writer demonstrates great faith in the intimate connections of architecture with all aspects of cultural production, from ladies’ fashion to plumbing. Adolf Loos, who as a young man visited Chicago for the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, who remained in Chicago for some time thereafter, and who left an invisible mark on the history of the city with his entry to the Chicago Tribune
Competition of 1923, is peculiarly incisive on the topic of ornament, femininity, nature, and degeneracy:

The lower the cultural level of a people, the more extravagant it is with its ornament, its decoration. The Indian covers every object, every boat, every ear, every arrow with layer upon layer of ornament. To see decoration as a sign of superiority means to stand at the level of the Indians. But we must overcome the Indian in us.
The Indian says, ‘This woman is beautiful because she wears gold rings in her nose and ears.’ The man of high culture says, ‘This woman is beautiful because she does not wear rings in her nose and ears.’ To seek beauty only in form and not in ornament is the goal toward which all humanity is striving.9

Although Loos here indulges in the classical identification of the feminine and ornament, he elsewhere “excuses” woman for her barbaric degeneracy, claiming that, in turn-of-the-century European society, because of her forced economic dependency, woman must fetishistically adorn herself as a sexual object in order to “hold on to her place by the side of the big, strong man.”10 In the famous “Ornament and Crime” essay, Loos writes, “The urge to decorate one’s face . . . is the babbling of painting. All art is erotic.”11 He goes on to explain how the first ornament ever invented, the cross, was pornographic in its intentions: “A horizontal line: the woman. A vertical line: the man penetrating her. The man who created this felt the same creative urge as Beethoven.”12 Regardless of what this wonderful passage tells us about Loos’s own peculiar psychological makeup, it is of enormous import to the topic at hand because it marks a connection of the sacred/profane, writing, and ornament (altemity) in the tidy conjunction of a drawing, a hieroglyph that is also a symbol, that offers itself up, in oversignification, to florid undecidability. And this leads us directly into the territory of allegory.

Schor notes that

the detail with an allegorical vocation is distinguished by its ‘oversignification’ (Baudrillard); this is not a matter of realism, but of surrealism, if not hyperrealism. Finally, the allegorical detail is a disproportionately enlarged ornamental detail; bearing the seal of transcendence, it testifies to the loss of all transcendental signifieds in the modern period. In short, the modern allegorical detail is a parody of the traditional theological detail. It is the detail deserted by God [an un-Miesian detail, certainly] . . . . The allegorical detail is a disembodied and destabilized detail.13

Roger Scruton underscores this observation, from another viewpoint: “Certainly, there is nothing more meaningless or repulsive in architecture than detail used . . . outside the control of any governing conception or design.”14

What happens when we assemble such Nietzschean details into construction?15 The mode of such assembly must, to preserve the stabilized aspect of the detail, be something akin to collage. In writing of collage and allegory, the realm of both Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, Gregory Ulmer cites Derrida on the resulting undecidability of reading the assembly that is a collage. Each heterogeneous element, or detail, of the collage, because of its position both as a fragment that can be connected to its original context and as a part of a new whole, shuttles between “presence and absence” and thus disallows a linear or univocal reading of the whole.16

The phenomenon cited by Schor and labeled “oversignification” by Baudrillard is one of the mechanisms of the gram, that which is to grammatology as the sign is to semiology. One of the corollaries of the gram as Derrida approaches it is the notion of the supplément. Ulmer notes that Craig Owens, in a definitive article linking the allegorical mode to postmodern art, identified allegory with the supplément and thus with writing, in its supplementarity to speech.17 Of course, Benjamin had already made this correspondence when he identified baroque allegory with hieroglyphs and other forms of script.

In addressing objections to the possibility of sustaining the distinction that Owens draws — and that Derrida’s work suggests — between the self-referential (through metaphor) image of modernism and the problematized reference of postmodernism, Ulmer rescues grammatology and, more important for present purposes, allegory as articulated and used by Benjamin and Derrida from the realm of formalism:

Grammatology has emerged on the far side of the formalist crisis and developed a discourse which is fully referential, but referential in the manner of ‘narrative allegory’ rather than of ‘allegoresis.’ ‘Allegoresis,’ the mode of commentary long practiced by traditional critics, ‘suspends’ the surface of the text, applying a terminology of ‘verticalness, levels, hidden meaning, the hieratic difficulty of interpretation,’ whereas ‘narrative allegory’ (practiced by post-critics) explores the literal — literal —
level of the language itself, in a horizontal investigation of the
polysemous meanings simultaneously available in the words them-
\phantom{.} selves — in etymologies and puns — and in the things the words
\phantom{.} name. . . . In short, narrative allegory favors the material of the
signifier over the meanings of the signified.\textsuperscript{18}

In tracking these possibilities in architecture, with its grand
and enduring, however limited, canon of symbolic material-
\phantom{.} ity, we are once again shuttling between: maintaining the
veiled/layered possibilities of allegoresis while playing over
\phantom{.} them at the level of the detail with the tools of narrative alle-
\phantom{.} gory. This movement maintains the fetish: something, an
\phantom{.} absence, is being hidden here, but revealed at the same time
\phantom{.} that it is being covered up. The fetish apparatus is excessive to
\phantom{.} its object, and yet, in its addition, points to a lack in the
\phantom{.} object. This mechanism of simultaneous concealment and
\phantom{.} revelation is the mechanism of both fetishism and allegory,
\phantom{.} and it will be the connection through which to pursue a posi-
\phantom{.} tive fetishism in architecture.\textsuperscript{19} Benjamin likens baroque alle-
gory to texts written in intertwined Egyptian, Greek, and
\phantom{.} Christian pictorial languages. In addition to “a refuge for
\phantom{.} many ideas which people were reluctant to voice openly be-
\phantom{.} fore princes,” this kind of writing could provide a place for
\phantom{.} theology to preserve the power of sacred things by embedding
\phantom{.} them in the profane.\textsuperscript{20} Benjamin quotes Martin Opitz:

Because the earliest rude world was too crude and uncivilised and
\phantom{.} people could not therefore correctly grasp and understand the
\phantom{.} teachings of wisdom and heavenly things, wise men had to conceal
\phantom{.} and bury what they had discovered for the cultivation of the fear
\phantom{.} of God, morality, and good conduct, in rhymes and fables, to
\phantom{.} which the common people are disposed to listen.\textsuperscript{21}

What lies hidden in the allegorical is theological, the sacred
\phantom{.} buried in the profane. But this aspect of the sacred, the spiri-
\phantom{.} tual, has been carved away properly from religion — now a
\phantom{.} cagey structure of domination. Mark Taylor observes,

Bataille maintains that art now provides a more effective access to
\phantom{.} the uncanny time-space of the sacred. . . . In Lascoux, or The Birth
\phantom{.} of Art, he argues that art ‘begins’ in the bowels of mother earth.
\phantom{.} . . . From the beginning (if indeed there is a beginning), there is
\phantom{.} something grotto-esque and dirty about art. Bataille is convinced
\phantom{.} that the dirt of art’s grotesque, subterranean ‘origin’ can never be
\phantom{.} wiped away. Art [we might add architecture, “mother of the arts”],
\phantom{.} like religion, emerges from the filth of the sacred.\textsuperscript{22}

Allegory for Benjamin, like the Dionysian orgy for Bataille, is
\phantom{.} a “harsh disturbance of the peace and a disruption of law
\phantom{.} and order” that occurs where the sacred and the profane are
\phantom{.} indistinguishable.\textsuperscript{23} And this place can be allegorized (or
\phantom{.} emblematized) as allegory itself. Because in allegory “any
\phantom{.} person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely
\phantom{.} anything else,” the profane world — the material world —
\phantom{.} is rendered a world in which each person, object, or relation-
\phantom{.} ship is of no particular significance.\textsuperscript{24} At the same time,
\phantom{.} these “things” that are used to signify acquire a power that
\phantom{.} locates them on a “higher plane,” in the realm of the sacred.
\phantom{.} As Benjamin puts it, “Considered in allegorical terms, the
\phantom{.} profane world is both elevated and devalued.”\textsuperscript{25} This appar-
\phantom{.} ent paradox (which is, of course, not unrelated to supple-
\phantom{.} mentarity) is one of the processes at work in our project.
\phantom{.} The things of the conventionally constituted profane world
\phantom{.} of the other, in being foregrounded into significations, are
\phantom{.} brought out of convention into expression; that is, they are
\phantom{.} simultaneously elevated and devalued, shuttled between the
\phantom{.} sacred and the profane.

This phenomenon of foregrounding the profane world into
\phantom{.} significations in the domain of the sacred is also at work in
\phantom{.} George Hersey’s The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture.
\phantom{.} Hersey’s thesis is that the elements of classical temples de-
\phantom{.}rive from the residual constructions of pagan sacrificial rites;
\phantom{.} more precisely, that the remains of the sacrificial victims
\phantom{.} and the accoutrements of the ritual as they were arranged
\phantom{.} about the sacred place constitute the origins of the structure
\phantom{.} and arrangement of ornamental parts of the Greek temple.
\phantom{.} Hersey carries out this work by way of rhetorical operations
\phantom{.} on the words for the various elements and their accepted as
\phantom{.} well as some creative (Viconian) etymologies. As in Vico’s
\phantom{.} philosophy of history, words become the historical docu-
\phantom{.} ments that provide evidence of the thesis. One example
\phantom{.} will remain germane to the larger topic at hand: In writing of
\phantom{.} the caryatid as woman punished for sexual misconduct, Hersey
\phantom{.} notes what he calls the trope between caryatid and
\phantom{.} Corinthian, which contains the phoneme cor, meaning both
\phantom{.} “heart” and “horn,” body parts of a sacrificed animal.\textsuperscript{26} Here
\phantom{.} language is a switching mechanism, a time machine. Re-
\phantom{.} gardless of how such creative scholarship and the ends to
\phantom{.} which it is applied might be judged, the fact remains that
\phantom{.} these kinds of moves, which treat words almost as material
constructions themselves, suggest a methodology for assembling architectural material.

For an inhabitant of the Hellenistic world, the words 'Doric,' 'echinus,' or 'Ionic fascia,' in Greek, did not have the purely workaday associations they have for us. They suggested bound and decorated victims, ribboned exuviae set on high, gods, cults, ancestors, colonies. Temples were read as concretions of sacrificial matter, of the things that were put into graves and laid on walls and stelai [written]. This sense of architectural ornament is very different from the urge to beauty. But indeed the word ornament, in origin, has little to do with beauty. It means something or someone that has been equipped or prepared, like a hunter, soldier, or priest [or a woman, through fashion, makeup, jewelry, manners].

Classical ornaments, for Hersey, are thus trophies/tropes of sacrifice. The assemblage of details in our project mimics this operation, but indulges in tropes of the tropes, letting them slide from their origins in classicism to become allegorical and richly undecidable (for instance, elements here both do and do not adhere to the ideas of the classical temple in Hersey's terms).

This exploration of and play in the territory between the sacred and the profane, sanctity and sensuality, links the project to baroque art and architecture. A historical assemblage of the use of the word baroque serves as an approximate description of the aesthetic milieu in which it is situated:

The word baroque appeared in current speech in France at the end of the sixteenth century, to designate something unusual, bizarre, even badly made. Montaigne uses it in this sense in his Essais. It is still used by jewellers to describe those irregular pearls known . . . in Portuguese as barroco; in the mannerist and baroque periods these odd shapes were used . . . in precious settings to form figures of sirens, centaurs and other fabulous creatures.

The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt characterized the baroque as “wild” and “barbarous” (think of Loos) when compared to the ideal beauty of the Renaissance. Quatremère de Quincy called it “bizarre to a degree,” a definition that Francesco Milizia repeated. In the Dictionnaire de la Musique, Jean-Jacques Rousseau used it to suggest a “confused harmony.” In the twentieth century, Benedetto Croce called it “the art of bad taste.” But it is the project’s generative tie to baroque tragic drama, the Trauerspiel, the subject of Walter Benjamin’s Habilitationsschrift, that is most profound:

The Trauerspiel . . . is not rooted in myth but in history. Historicity, with every implication of political-social texture and reference, generates both content and style . . . . The baroque dramatist clings fervently to the world. The Trauerspiel is countertranscendental; it celebrates the immanence of existence even where this existence is passed in torment. It is emphatically ‘mundane,’ earth-bound, corporeal.

THE PROJECT

The project encompasses a constellation of barnaclike corner structures — sites for an exploration of the ornament/structure pair. This investigation enters into two significant territories. First, these structures are constituted as parasitical and habitable and are therefore, by conventional definition, both ornamental and structural; they exist in a realm of blurred boundaries. Second, they are constituted as structures of significance; that is, they convey messages. They serve dual functions: as places for people who might otherwise be out on the street to rest or take shelter from bad weather and as signs of the condition of rampant homelessness in the city (at the most general level, they signify the presence of alterity to the status quo).

This project is figured as Louis Sullivan’s revenge, a Louis Sullivan who serves as trope of the alter. Sullivan and “Dora,” both of whose “unconscious” homosexual tendencies were treated — Dora’s by Freud, Sullivan’s by a herd of architectural historians — become tropes for each other. They are connected as well through their given names, both of which allude to gold. The project of joyous revenge is also a twisted delivery of Adolf Loos’s promise to the world, given when his entry to the Chicago Tribune Competition, an enormous black Doric column, failed to win: “The great, Greek Doric column will one day be built. If not in Chicago, then in another city. If not for the Chicago Tribune, then for someone else. If not by me, then by another architect.”

This Greek gift, this (now) disseminated rage of Louis/Dora, this other Doric colon, by other architects, appears, mapped onto Chicago as a great mantle of Tabbles Bower. The center of this maelstrom is the site of the Chicago Tribune Building.
The Structure of the Project

The generating structure of this collection of proposed constructions is a web with five major interconnecting nodes: colony, fire, cow, temple, and Dora. In this temporally perceived text it is impossible to denote sufficiently the flows among the nodes of the nonlinear structure. These flows are suggested below by lists of generative facts and ideas that adhere to each node and begin to build conduits among them—a process by which the (disordered) metaphoric is projected onto the metonymic structure of the project.

Colon

Colon, French for “column” or “order,” is the surname of Cristobal Colon, or Cristoforo Columbo, or Christopher Columbus, who “discovered” “America” in 1492. The colonization of the North American continent by Europeans, with its corollary displacement and murder of the human communities that occupied it, was the result of this “discovery,” which was commemorated in 1893 by the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

The root of the word columba is suggestive of color: kel, “blackness” or “grayness,” and umbra, “shade”; thus the columba, the dove, is named by its color. Color is an omnipresent coding device of difference in this culture. Blondes. Mulattoes. Pink is for girls; blue is for boys.

The first thing a person who is not an architect notices about a building is what color it is.
Craig Saper, Assistant Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Chicago was first settled (in 1779) by Jean-Baptiste Pointe DuSable, a black man from Jamaica, who married a Native American woman after his arrival. At the World’s Columbian Exposition, no reference was made to the contributions of African-Americans to the history of this country. Black women were not represented at the Women’s Congresses. In reaction to this slight, Ida B. Wells founded the first Black Women’s Club in Chicago in 1894.

The root kel also branches into words suggestive of “hill” or “prominence” (to stick out or project), producing “column,” and “excel.” George Hersey notes that the Greek coria connotes “hill, mound, blood clot, or altar.”

In Hersey’s terms, we might also note that the caryatid both is and represents the colonization, or ordering, of the female.

Colony and bucolic share the same Indo-European root, -kwel, which suggests circling (of humans, on the one hand, of cows, on the other). Thus the Greek -kolos, “herd,” and the Latin colere, “to cultivate” or “to inhabit.” The Latin colonus is a farmer, for which the German word is Bauer. Bau, in the same language, is a building or construction.

In 1900, a full two decades before Loos conceived his Doric column, a monument commemorating the bicentenary of the founding of Detroit was in the works: a “proper” expression of Detroit, an erection, “the largest in the world,” of a gigantic Doric column, from the top of which would spew a “great flame of natural gas, so characteristic of the West, and impossible elsewhere.” “As though,” Sullivan adds with derisive scatological humor, “there were not ‘natural gas’ enough in this Doric column itself.”

Dora died from cancer of the colon.

Fire

The balloon frame is one of two construction techniques to bracket the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871. To whom the credit for the invention of the balloon frame belongs seems open to question, but there is no doubt that it originated in Chicago. Called “Chicago construction” before the fire, it was praised as a significant technological event, allowing for the mass production of parts that unskilled labor could assemble into inexpensive housing. In this context, Siegfried Giedion deduces its invention in 1832 by one George W. Snow, a building contractor educated in civil engineering who owned the local lumber yard as well as a real estate business. But the balloon frame, being light timber construction surrounded by lots of oxygen, is highly ignitable, as the Great Fire proved. In this context, its invention has been credited to a Mrs. Albertine Taylor in 1837, the year of Chicago’s official founding.
A second, more infamous woman is faulted with the fire’s destruction: Mrs. Patrick O’Leary left a burning lantern in the shed that housed Mr. O’Leary’s other dull-witted, and clumsy, domestic animal.

In the multitude of etchings that document the horror of the fire, it is virtually impossible to find a black face among the fleeing crowds, although this was the decade following the mass exodus of former slaves from the South to Chicago.

After the fire, a hundred thousand people were living on the streets. Wooden shanties were quickly thrown up in the corners of what had been cellars (providing two ready-made walls). In 1871 in Chicago, homelessness was an impetus to build.

Grotesquely shaped pieces of glass and iron, relics of the fire, were sold by children as a means of livelihood.

“Whether or not a cow did indeed kick over a lantern in the barn is impossible to say, but there were a cow and a lantern in the shed where the blaze started.”

Cow

All history looks pretty much the same to cows.

John Irving

The cow represents a crucial joint, a turning of the corner, between the two American construction methods that originated in Chicago: balloon-frame construction and skeleton construction.

The Indo-European root of corner is ker, “horn,” with derivatives that refer to horned animals, horn-shaped objects, and projecting parts. From ker come “cervix,” “carrot,” “rhinoceros,” and “cerebrum.” The corner, then, has intimate associations with grotesque body parts.

Cow O’Leary is but one among the many bovines important to Chicago’s history: the millions that have populated the stockyards and made the transmogrifying journey through the slaughterhouses.

The Greek bous is an ox or cow. A trinity of bovinity underlies the Chicago Tribune and its site, smack in the middle of the black zone of the Great Fire.

The cow is a domesticated animal, used as a form of currency, an object of exchange. The cow is a gift, source, of milk or meat.

The verb cow comes from an Old Norse word meaning “to oppress.” The verb is active, the noun the passive recipient. Through punning, the metonymic figure of the cow, her “udderiness,” oscillates to metaphor.

Everyone knows that cows are stupid, placid, contented, but sometimes stubborn.

The American Heritage Dictionary tells us that a cow is “a fat and slovenly woman.” Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes,

The wild cow is a female. She has healthy calves, and milk enough for them. And that is all the femininity she needs. Otherwise than that she is bovine rather than feminine. She is a light, strong, swift, sinewy creature, able to run, jump, and fight, if necessary. We, for economic uses, have artificially developed the cow’s capacity for producing milk. She has become a walking milk-machine, bred and tended to that express end, her value measured in quarts.

Louis Sullivan himself offers a final insult to cows, when he uses them as metaphors for architects:

The Roman temple can no more exist in fact on Monroe Street, Chicago, U.S.A., than can Roman civilization exist there. Such a structure must of necessity be a simulacrum, a ghost. Of course you and I know well enough that the reason why the bank building is an imitation Roman temple is because it is easy and cheap to make that sort of thing — but the people at large do not know it. They do not know how easy it is for the architect to turn to a book of plates, pick out what he wants, and pass it on to a draughtsman who will chew this particular architectural cud for a stipend.

In a declaration that underlines his personal penchant for simplicity without self-denial, Adolf Loos juxtaposed himself to those who would opt for decorated gourmet concoctions: “I eat roast beef.”

Temple

Temple comes from the Latin templum, which comes from a root meaning “to cut.” Templum suggests both a place cut out (a special, sacred place) and a small piece of wood cut
out from a larger one. Thus the manifestations of the English word temple as a container of the sacred and as the mundane device in a loom that keeps the cloth stretched to a consistent width are related.

My body is the temple of the Lord.
   Shirley Cothran, former Miss America

The metaphor of the body has persisted as a ruling paradigm throughout the history of Western architecture, but generally this has involved the image or figure of the (male) body, not an analogue of the body as a messy assemblage of flows, both material and immaterial.43

Consider the balloon frame of Mrs. Albertine Taylor. How easy it might be to see the economical beauty of the balloon frame as a construction while cleaning and gutting a chicken for Sunday dinner. Balloon-frame construction is a metonymy of the body: not the image of the body, but the stuff of the body. The economy, the oikos, of the body. This is neither the Renaissance body nor the Corbusian body.

In Moby Dick, Melville described a temple, “a Bower in the Arsacides,” presided over by “my royal friend Tranquo, being gifted with a devout love for all matters of barbaric virtue.” This temple was formed of the skeleton of a great sperm whale all woven over with the vines, . . . with his head against a cocoanut tree, whose plumage-like, tufted droppings seemed his verdant jet. . . . The ribs were hung with trophies; the vertebrae were carved with Arsacidan annals in strange hieroglyphics; in the skull, the priests kept up an unextinguished aromatic flame, so that the mystic head again sent forth its vapory spout; while, suspended from a bough, the terrific lower jaw vibrated over all the devotees, like the hair-hung sword that so affrighted Damocles. . . . Life folded Death; Death trellised Life.44

Sullivan wrote of the Roman temple, “And so the temple was created by its own people; blood of their blood, flesh of their flesh, bone of their bone, and gold of their gold.”45

The chrysalis, a body enclosure formed from the body’s own secretions, receives its name from the Greek khrusos, “gold.”

**Interlude: Helen of Troy**

One day, when this project was beginning, we chanced to find a very fat caterpillar in our herb garden. My husband thought it would be a fine lesson for nine-year-old Sarah to watch the caterpillar do what comes naturally and put it in a large glass jar in our kitchen window. The skin of the caterpillar was so beautifully variegated with subtle spots of color that we named her Helen of Troy. Over the next few weeks, Helen of Troy consumed all of our garden’s dill (her herb of choice), generously placed bit by bit in the jar by her human servants, and she grew even more enormous. One afternoon, I returned home from an out-of-town trip to discover Helen missing from the jar, in a distressed state, I called my husband to report this wretched fact. “Look more closely,” he advised. I returned to the kitchen window and, after puzzling over the clearly caterpillarless jar for a moment, discovered, eight inches above, just on the corner of the window frame, adhering to the intricacies of the wooden molding, a magnificent construction: a symmetrical, grotesque golden-grey figure, the head piece bowing out vertiginously from the frame, but held in place by a gossamer cable suspended from above. The chrysalis of Helen of Troy. A barnacelike corner construction with a body inside. And two weeks later, the wet, messy emergence of the imago.

**Dora/Doric/D’or**

Dora, like the original Helen of Troy, was treated by her father as an object of exchange, as a gift, as gold.46 In 1900 Freud was treating her hysterical symptoms, including respiratory problems and “unconscious lesbian tendencies”:

The hysterical symptom arises as a compromise between two opposing affects or instinctual trends, of which one is attempting to express a partial impulse or component of the sexual constitution, while the other tries to suppress it.47

“Dora” was the pseudonym for a young woman whose real name was Ida Bauer. The Middle English bour means a “dwelling” or “inner apartment.” A bower is an inner chamber, locked up, where family secrets are encrypted. When the chamber gets too full, it moves around; this is the classical cause of hysteria, or “wandering womb.” A bower is also “a shaded, leafy recess, an arbor,” and “a private chamber, a boudoir.”48

Dora’s mother suffered from what Freud termed “housewife’s psychosis,” an obsession with keeping things clean so
absolute that she ignored the “needs” and behavior of her husband and the plight of her daughter. (It was her fault.)

Doric is the adjectival form of Dora. Loos’s great Doric column, now readable as Dora’s missing phallus, becomes Sullivan’s return of the repressed. This project takes up Louis’s beef with classicism and, through Hersey, meets it on its own terms in a doubling, reversing move.

As Dora’s death returns us to colon. Hersey notes the positions of women’s arms in the caryatis dance: “The women raised their arms during the dance, just as women at sacrifices raised theirs when the god came into their presence.”

He goes on to show the connection between the raised arms of the dancers and the body motion of supporting weight. (In another story, the origin of the caryatid lies in the depiction of the punishment inflicted by the Caryan men on the Caryan women, who took rape over death when given the choice by invading troops: they were pilloried and forced to hold heavy weights over their heads for extended periods of time in the public gathering place.) In this context, it is intriguing to note Freud’s interpretation of one of the symptoms of the “hysterical attack”:

For instance, in an hysterical attack an embrace may be represented by the arms being drawn back convulsively until the hands meet above the spinal column. Possibly the well-known arc de cercle of major hysterical attacks is nothing but an energetic disavowal of this kind, by antagonistic innervation of the position suitable for sexual intercourse.

Parts of the Project

Amulets

The stone is the conventional emblem of the allegorist; its ponderous inertia is associated with melancholy, the allegorist’s temperamental attribute. With its grand tradition of stone piling, architecture is thus always already an allegorical enterprise. In the generation of this project, stones (bits of material from which architecture is made) take the form of amulets called fascini. The fascinus is defined as an amulet made in the shape of a phallus, whose power is directed toward holding motionless (like a stone) under a spell. (This is the root of the word fascinate. Fascination is traditionally held as the province of a
3. Exploratory drawing, after Sullivan

4. Construction studies

5. "Dirty" drawing of elevation (colored pencil, gouache, and metallic ink on mulberry paper)
woman—or other beautiful object—and often associated with evil: bewitchment. A fascinator is a woman’s head covering made of net or lace.)

The fascini serve as tiny generative models for the project, bits of three-dimensional research that explore the possibilities of barnacle construction that emerge from Sullivan’s work. These amulets are shaped with thought not to form, but technique. The techniques derive from Sullivan: symmetrical placement of parts, interweaving, swirling, overlay, repetitious alternation, use of organic material. The materials come from the everyday domestic sphere, much having to do with ornamenting the body: copper and brass wire, buttons, beads, baubles, hooks, eyes, straps, false fingernails, makeup, hair, ribbons, lace, thread, shells, feathers, and bones. The amulets are fetishes, beautiful ornamental objects, and they are connected to the fetishism of architectural representation.

Drawings

Three kinds of drawings are at work in the project. Two are tools: sketchbook drawings, which examine and document construction techniques, signification of material, and form; and “shop” drawings, from which a full-scale construction was built. The third, “dirty” drawings, document the project ex post facto. The dirty drawing aims both to exploit the power of the pornographic image and to mark the connection between it and the conventions of architectural representation. It occupies the territory between a working drawing and a pornographic photograph (I have in mind that famous, lush image of the flesh of Marilyn Monroe dished up on red satin). Thus it is both technically correct and “improperly” ornamental. In its oscillation between poles that might be considered those of sanctity and sensuality, and in its bizarre and emphatic mundaneness, the dirty drawing is baroque. The dirty drawing addresses architectural representation by colliding the rendering with the working drawing (the sacred with the profane), while at the same time pointing to the fetishistic role of the image in architecture. It comments as well on the contemporary phenomenon of the architectural drawing as art commodity.
**Full-Scale Construction**

The full-scale demonstrative construction is an assemblage of thirteen allegorical details that together form a laboratory condition of the project as a whole. The thirteen parts are the residual of an exploration of techniques of blurring the ornament/structure boundary that would be used in building the corner barnacles. In their assemblage, they serve as an exhibitional armature for models and drawings, as well as an allegorical emblem of the Tabbles of Bower.

**Thirteen Parts of the Construction**

**Cowslab**

The cowslab constitutes the floor of the construction. It is a two-and-a-half-inch-thick concrete slab in the shape of two cows placed nose-to-nose, miming the symmetrical form of Louis Sullivan’s seedpod motif and recalling his use of paired animals at the corners of buildings. The figure of the cows comes from a photograph that appeared on the front page of the Gainesville (Florida) Sun, depicting the plight of two cows that had fallen into a sinkhole, a ubiquitous local geological condition. Each cow has been divided into four sections, suggestive of the drawings that demonstrate how cows become cuts of beef. Their bellies have been incised with slits to receive the door posts. The cows are gilded, for they are golden calves. The undulatory orifice between them is filled with red seed.

Hersey writes, “Let us note that many of these myths about reconstructed victims are foundation myths for religious rituals; in other words, they are a precondition for the erection of temples.”

**Cowhide**

A map of the project has been “drawn” on a cowhide suspended belly out and down from a lacy steel frame before and above the opening into the construction. The frame, welded together from short lengths of #2 rebar, then wrapped in treated muslin and coated in shellac, is modeled on a hybrid of bustle and steel-bridge construction (back-to-back camelback trusses triangulated so as to accommodate the bending
moment of swinging bridges). It bears traces of Sullivan’s tympana, mammalian skeletons, and the imago, the ultimate state of the chrysalis. It is bound in the position of a vertiginous canopy by a steel centerline, which is stabilized laterally by tension cables emerging from the bases of two concrete (tabby) columns, and from which suspends a great, ornamental plumb bob that maintains the steel frame in tension.

The cowhide map connects simultaneously to the traditional drawing medium of parchment (the skin of a sheep or goat) and to the “ribboned” exuviae to which Hersey refers. It merges as well with one of the famous constructions of Daedalus, “the first architect,” the hollow cow that he made for Pasiphae to facilitate her copulation with the father of the Minotaur. 56

The cowhide was a weapon of braided leather, related to the cat-o’-nine-tails, used to beat disobedient slaves during the considerable portion of the history of this continent given over to slavery’s exploitation.

Upon the cowhide are superimposed three maps of different scales:

First, a map of the earth, cut as a globe’s surface must be in order to render it flat (as well as the skin of the cow, which, after all, is not a two-dimensional animal). 57 This map, however, is “cut” so that all the oceans remain intact as one body of water, reconfiguring the continents so as to fling them, unfamiliar, to the edges of the map. The oceans are depicted as flows painted into the twisted cow hair in gold. On the now marginal scraps of land are mapped, in their correct locations, the origins of all the stony fragments embedded in the base of the Chicago Tribune Building. Each origin is denoted by a gold map tack punched through the hide and secured on the back by an earring post.

Second, a map of the Chicago Loop, North Michigan Avenue, and the surrounds as far north as Lincoln Park. This map consists of the points of the street intersections marked by brass fishhooks. Particular historical sites germane to the project (the locations of Sullivan’s buildings both extant and demolished, for example) are noted by amulets suspended from the hooks. The remainder of the hooks are embedded in “Cretan skirts,” small corks coated in sea-green wax and wrapped and knotted with delicate brass wire: lures. The whorl from which the hair pattern originates locates the Tribune Building. The longer white hair that occurs on the hide at what was the back of the cow indicates the flow of the Chicago River. Its length is exaggerated by being twisted and braided into a large fascinus full of signifying accretions, at once bringing the Chicago River into identity with the feminine figure of Finnegans Wake, Anna Livia Plurabelle, the River Liffey, and all others, 58 and underlining Freud’s explanation for women’s one contribution to the industry of civilization, weaving. 59

Third, a map of a Sullivanian tympanum woven in brass wire as an exoskeleton over the entire belly of the hide.

When we first went to Mr. L’s, they had a cowhide which she used to inflict on a little slave girl she previously owned, nearly every night. . . . As they stinted us for food my mother roasted the cowhide. It was rather poor picking, but it was the last cowhide my mother ever had an opportunity to cook while we remained in his family.

Mattie Jackson 56
Cornerstone

The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.

*Psalms 118.20–22*

The steel cornerstone, which forms the common nose of the two cows of the cowslab (or the germ of Sullivan’s seed-pod), takes the shape of an extruded plan of a *vesica piscis*, the fish’s bladder, a Euclidean device for the generation of an equilateral triangle. One side of the *vesica* extrudes more than the other. The cornerstone was lined inside with small copper tubes to receive the warp of the interior mantle; it was then filled with Portland cement and topped off with plaster carved in significant relief and encrusted with gilded seeds.

No house worth living in has for its cornerstone the hunger of those who built it.

Ursula LeGuin

Maple Frame

The framing condition that occurs at the corner is suggestive of a balloon frame, but clearly is not. Maple members of graduated sizes that have been planed, beveled, sanded, and given nine coats of tung oil form the L-shaped frame, which is assembled with cross-lapped joints and with perforated end-lap joints at the corner, where it is suspended above the center point of the cornerstone. The vertical members, on the interior, are ten feet eight and a half inches tall; the horizontal members, on the exterior, are five feet two inches long. The geometry of the structure derives from the layers of a local geological catastrophe called the Devil’s Millhopper, a sinkhole that has fallen thirteen times and has as many distinct layers. The cross-lapped joints are bound by nylon and cotton cord dyed scarlet, evocative of flayed flesh, tied with surgeon’s knots, and wrapped with brass wire. These bindings provide points of attachment for the armature of the interior mantle.

Tabby Columns

This first of two pairs of *colon* is described by a word, *tabby*, that refers at the primary level to the material from which
the columns are built. Tabby is a type of concrete that has long been used in domestic construction in the southeastern coastal regions of the United States, a concrete the aggregate of which comprises oyster shells. The surfaces of tabby walls have a sensuous texture and a faintly pearlescent glow in dim light. Tabby also means “a rich watered silk,” “a plain weave fabric,” “a striped or brindled domestic cat,” “a female domestic cat,” “an old maid,” and “a prying woman,” “a gossip” (who chatters or babbles). In a word, then: material, pattern, weave, domestic animal, derogatory female stereotype referring to domestic animal. The domestic animal is Louis Sullivan’s cat. Tabby houses are cat houses.

Each column is in plan an irregular segment of a circle and consists of seven segments of reinforced concrete of varying sinkhole-derived heights. It was poured into a horizontal Sonotube with six particle board dividers and styrofoam ribs laid in to create the slots and ledges into/onto which the maple frame members and bony ribs rest. The tabby column is a receiver of ribs. Before the pour, the tube was prepared by smearing on a three-eighths-inch layer of clay into which the ornamental aggregate was laid (crisscrossing lines of buttons with intersections marked by alligator vertebrae and thirteen layers of aggregate representative of the constituents of the Millhopper’s geological layers — coal, bone, terra-cotta, phosphorescent marbles, glass, shell). Over this a coating of ground graphite was distributed in a tabby pattern. The segments were then reinforced with chicken wire and the concrete poured. As it began to set up, a quarter-inch layer of cement and plaster pigmented grey was poured onto the concrete, to create a smooth drawing surface on one side of each column.

The heavy concrete column is the least stable part of the construction; because of its slender proportions, it relies on structural bracing by other parts (the cowhide map frame, the maple frame, and the door) for its stability. Its seven segments are strung, like beads, on a threaded posttensioning rod, which fits into a steel base through whose slots it is tightened. The base is filled with grotesquerie (“base” objects). The cap of the rod emerges from a flat perforated steel top plate, from which also spring seven bound #2 rebars. Some provide lateral bracing for the cowhide map frame, the others simply quiver and tremble in space, like insect antennae.
assemblage 17

**Tower of Babel, or Lallypop, Columns**

The base of each of these columns is a steel disc to which has been welded, on the one side, a short steel post that may be inserted into any one of the belly slits of the cowlab and, on the other, a threaded steel tube that receives a large eye screw. Onto the eye screw are bound eighteen lengths of twisted copper wire that have been threaded up through the shaft of a seven-foot Lally column. From six trios of wire are suspended, at intervals corresponding to the ribs of the door, six steel rings with protruding double ribs. Like all the steel elements, the column shafts and rings have been ground and polished, rubbed with asphaltum in a tabby pattern, and given three coats of polyurethane. The result is a staged pole festooned with decreasing densities of wire, formally suggestive in many directions.

The Tower of Babel emblematizes the relationship among architecture, language, the sacred, and the profane.

Remember Loos's dictum: “The urge to decorate one’s face and everything in reach . . . is the babbling of painting. All art is erotic.”

**Column Capitals**

The column capitals function as pads over which the tension wires traverse the verges of the shafts. Their undecidability is clear: udders, Medusas, fingers, sea anemones, the feeders of the barnacle, Vitruvius’s tale of the origin of the Corinthian column, hysterical catalepsies. Fashioned from pink lycra spandex using a newspaper pattern cut from the stock market page, stitched, and stuffed with quilt batting, the capitals were then reinforced with steel wire and beeswax and bound to the lallypops with lead fillets. The “fingers” are covered with gold reinforcing rings.

**Dory Door**

Although he claimed to call “un chat un chat,” Freud made much of the metaphor of door and key as displacements of
certain gendered body parts. In this project, the door, which opens onto Dora, Doric, and D'or, is figured as an unsullied object of exchange: a figure in white on the outside that, once entered, shifts to living color. This door is assembled from the sides of a dory, a boat with deep sides and a V-shaped transom; only, not having access to a dory, we have salvaged a cast-off flat-bottomed boat and rendered it a dory otherwise.

Fiberglass resin reinforces the sides of the boat. All barnacles have been lovingly retained. Ribs and straps attach to the structural ribs of the boat; the steel footing of each side, fitted with a rolling caster to allow the door to move, is bolted in place. The exterior of each side has been coated with two layers of fine papier-mâché, sanded down to reveal the barest top layer of the bare boat, then covered with an elegant lace pattern of a ghostly grey. An astute observer will recognize this pattern as that of the “bad ornament” of Louis Sullivan, the pattern on the soffits of the arches at the National Farmers’ Bank at Owatonna, Minnesota.

This door swings both ways.

**V-Shaped Transom**

The addition of the transom makes the boat a proper dory and the door a proper door. The transom is a pink triangle of lace stretched and bound within a V-shaped portion of the steel frame from which the cowhide map is suspended.

**Ribs and Straps**

Two series of bonelike ribs, one long and one short, secure the sides of the dory to the bavel columns on one side and to the tabby columns on the other. The ribs are constructed from flat steel plates to which wood strips have been epoxied, smoothed over with joint compound, wrapped in gauze soaked in wood glue, then slathered with alternating layers of a fine but strong papier-mâché and amber shellac. They have been sanded, incised, and wrapped in “Hot Mama Pink” cord triangles. The steel plates protrude slightly from each end and are here perforated for receiving bolts and hinges. The ribs are kept in place by “Hot Mama Pink” resin-reinforced canvas sleeves held in suspension by “Hot Mama Pink” nylon straps bolted to the boat structure and secured with rows of aluminum angles — a brassiere-inspired detail.

---

14. Steel frame (cowhideless), V-shaped transom, and centerline

**Mantle**

The mantle forms the interior lining of the construction. It suggests the mantle of the barnacle, the middle of its three layers, which generates the outer shell. Related etymologically to mantilla, it is a lace-like textile: “Lace: . . . [Middle English lace, laas, las, ornamental braid, cord, from Old French laz, las, from Vulgar Latin lae[um] (unattested), from Latin laqueus, noose, trap, probably related to lacere, to allure. See delight].”

An interior frame of bustle-like construction supports this diaphanous cocoon of white organza; wrapped aluminum ribs tie into three vertical wrapped wooden busks from which the swaths, “laced with gill,” radiate.

“Freud’s project was to dismantle Dora’s anger.”

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

**Plumb Bob**

This large and heavy amulet serves as the counterweight to the cowhide in its bony steel frame. It is formed of sea detritus — an ancient buoy filled with concrete and sea glass — and petrified mammoth bones, held together by a crocheted mantle of brass wire and glass beads from which hang other small accretions. Referring both to the cathetos, the invention of Daedalus, and to the “dead man” of conventional construction, it is also a bower, the heaviest anchor on a sea-
15. View of construction
going vessel. Cantilevered and suspended away from the corner of the construction, it is a lure and a lodestone.

Guided by the wondrous North Star, that blessed lodestone of a slave people, my mother finally reached Chicago.

Lucy A. Delaney

Centerline

Swerving out of the center of the steel frame, a twenty-foot-long bundle of gilded steel pipe and #2 rebar marks the centerline of the construction. It rests on a wooden cradle-shaped acroterion atop the corner of the maple frame and projects, tail-like, behind to support the plumb bob. This counterweighting assemblage keeps the cowhide’s steel frame, through which it is threaded, in place. The repetitive bindings of brass wire that hold it together consist formally of short and long segments (dots and dashes) that both identify it as the centerline and encode half of the key to the project.75

Postface. The building, or any other artifact of the creative impulse seen as offspring, as childbearing surrogate, is clean, whole, and ordered. It appears, complete and full-blown, at the end of an uncertain period of gestation. The “real thing” is not only a triumphant production of a complete, but still-developing project at the end of nine months, but a messy, bloody, erotic event. An other architecture is an architecture of abjection (the thrown away). At the moment of birth, the body gives forth excrement, vomit, blood, mucous, as well as a human being. Abjact offerings, gifts, they are the products of flows. The abject products of the body might be metaphorized in the abject products of the body politic — detritus of street and home — toward a project of positive fetishizing, supplementing excrement, vomit, and blood to the phallus.

P.S. On 8 April 1991 Laura Barrett Bloomer-Segrest emerged, wet and messy, fearless and hungry.76 Both projects continue in ever-unfolding collaborations.

Notes

I have borrowed the phrase “theory and flesh” from Jane Gallop, who closes her essay “Keys to Dora” with it (see Jane Gallop, The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], 132-50. This text is an expanded version of the 1990 Swanson Fund Lecture given at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in December 1990 and to be published as a monograph by Cranbrook. The work was made possible in large part by a fellowship granted in 1989-90 by the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism. I would like to express special appreciation to John Whiteman, former Director of the CIAU, for his support and criticism. Under the terms of my fellowship, I was given the benefit of an intern, Nina Hofer, then a graduate student at the University of Florida and now an assistant professor there, in whose debt I remain for her substantial and vital contributions. Mikesch Muecke, formerly a graduate student at the University of Florida and now my colleague at Iowa State University, has been an essential collaborator, the breadth of whose talent, patience, and generosity seems endless.

Acknowledgements must also be made to Bob Heilman and Jimmie Harrison for considerable collaborative assistance and buckets of sweat; to my graduate students at the University of Florida — Wendy Landry, Julio LaRosa, Judy Birdsong, and Dave Karpook — for the camaraderie of tangential and supportive research; to Michael Peyton for good advice and criticism and for stretching the rules of the wood shop to allow us creative latitude; to Whitey Markle for his disciplined tolerance of a very pregnant beginning welder in his domain; to Liza Karpook for allowing us access to her vast collections of junk; to Ann Bergren, Francesca Hughes, Catherine Ingraham, Jeff Kipnis, Amy Landesberg, and Pat Potter for stimulating and useful critiques; to my daughter Sarah Elizabeth for cheerfully giving over her basketball court to serve as a construction site in Florida.

When we and the work moved from Florida to Iowa, further debts accrued: to Deans David Topel of the College of Agriculture and Tom Galloway and Rabindra Mukerjea of the College of Design, Iowa State University, for securing a storage and construction site; to Harold Jewell, Lynn Henn, and the CAD Warehouse staff for their gracious and good-humored hospitality in the seed warehouse; to Richard Sommer and Jennifer Mumford for brute labor to which professors of design are unaccustomed; to Claire Robinson of Carleton University for her beautiful touches and heavy labor, donated in sub-zero temperatures.

Finally, there is the one who has given the most for the least thanks: Robert Segrest, architect and husband, for contributions above and beyond.

2. The words of Aldo Rossi, now well-worn by a generation of architecture students.

3. I have been criticized for using the word project on the basis of its "phallocentrism." Although I prefer the words construction and assemblage to refer to complex inventions of various media, I have chosen here to remain within the convention of architecture that maintains a distinction between a project (unbuilt) and a construction (built).

4. I am grateful to Laura Ann Segrest, my mother-in-law, for the story of Mr. Bishop and his furs.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


10. Adolf Loos, "Ladies' Fashion" (1898), in Spoken Into the Void, 103. Note that this passage reiterates the gendering of the ornament/structure pair.


12. Ibid.

13. Schor, Reading in Detail, 61.


15. In the present context, it is interesting to note the closing of Nietzsche's preface to the 1887 edition of On the Genealogy of Morals, where he writes of the need to decipher, not simply to read, his work: "To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an art in this way, something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays — and therefore it will be some time before my writings are 'readable' — something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case not a 'modern man': rumination" (Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Vintage Books, 1969], 23).


21. Ibid.


23. Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, 177. Benjamin is here quoting Carl Horst.

24. Ibid., 175.

25. Ibid.


27. Ibid., 149 (emphasis mine).

28. Although Walter Benjamin's text on baroque drama articulates the notions of allegory that have informed my work over the last seven years, it took Laura Ann Segrest's sharp eye to bring to my attention the "baroqueness" of this project, and, once again, I am grateful to her.


30. Ibid., 15–17. It seems significant to the context of the work that Eugenio d'Ors was (along with Heinrich Wölfflin) one of the twentieth-century redeemers of the aesthetics of the baroque.

31. George Steiner, introduction to Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, 16.

32. Dora is the pseudonym of the subject of Freud's Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria of 1905.


34. Hersey, The Last Meaning of Classical Architecture, 71.

35. Louis H. Sullivan, "A Doric Column," in Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings (1918; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 58. All citations but the last are Sullivan quoting the report of the architect of the Detroit monument.


37. This remarkable fact was unearthed by Nina Holer.


44. Herman Melville, Moby Dick (1851; New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 441–43.

45. Sullivan, "A Roman Temple (1)," in Kindergarten Chats, 36.

46. At its simplest level, the story of Dora is one of an adolescent daughter being given to a man by her father in exchange for the man's wife. See Sigmund Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905; New York: Macmillan, 1963).
James Joyce; it is also the generator and subject of Desiring Architecture (forthcoming from Yale University Press) in which I lay out the territory from which this material project emerges.

54. Freud’s explanation was that woman invented weaving to mask what she lacks — plaiting her pubic hair into a masking phallus.

55. It is important to note that the major component of steel is iron, and this is all I shall have to say on that subject. Decoders will find here a secret as proper as the name of the father, J'appelle un chatter un chatterer.

56. Note that the placing of a foundation stone is called “fixing the warp.”


58. The Devil’s Millhopper also plays a large structuring role in “Greg Ulmer Reads Reading on TV,” 1988, a videotape from Paper Tiger. The Millhopper is present in the project as a structurally suggestive “other” to the Great Doric Column.


60. Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” 100.


62. In editing this text, Alicia Kennedy has added another layer of brocade. She notes that the progenitrix of dory is a Mosquito word for “dugout,” a tree or log from which a section has been removed. Dory thus connects to colon and to temple — and, as significantly, to my collaborator Mikesch Muecke, whose surname is German for “mosquito.”

63. This is the appraisal of George Elmslie, Sullivan’s assistant and chief draftsman, who designed all the ornament for the National Farmers’ Bank except this particular motif. The motif, significantly, involves a repetition of an OXOXOXOX pattern. The bank is also notable in this context for its large mural, which Sullivan commissioned from a Viennese painter named Oskar Gross; the mural depicts a herd of cows grazing. I am grateful to Amy Landesberg for bringing this cowart to my attention. See Larry Millett, The Curve of the Arch: The Story of Louis Sullivan’s Owatonna Bank (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), 80, 98.

64. The American Heritage Dictionary.

65. A busk is a thin strip of bone, wood, or metal that stiffens a woman’s undergarments so that her body is held in its proper place.


68. Six Women’s Slave Narratives, 22.

69. The Morse Code centerline appears in one other location (on the door, in red, where it bisects the OXOXOXOX ornament) and there provides the other half of the key.

70. I thank Herb Gottfried for this perfect phrase.

Figure Credits

6, 7, 11, 15. Photographs by King Au.

All other photographs and drawings by Jennifer Bloomer.