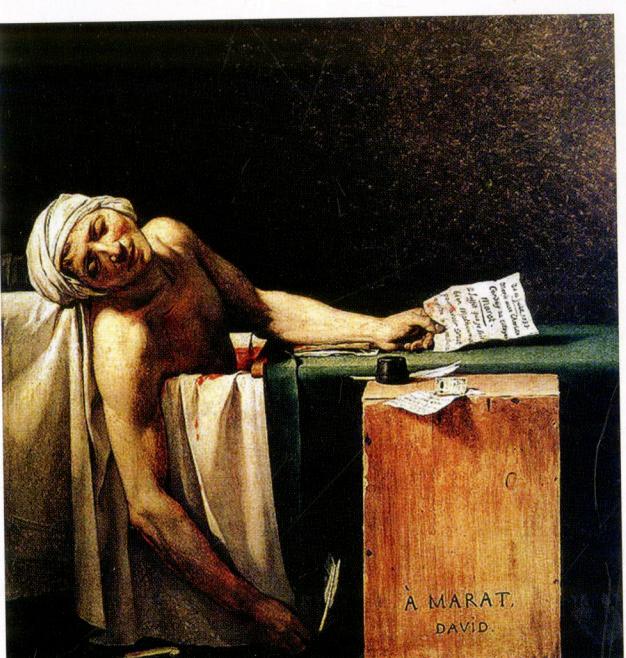


## Spatial Tales of Origin as Specifications for Construction: (2010)

In the Name of The Surveyor, The Nomad, & The Lunatic



David, Jacques Louis, Death of Marat, 1793  
Serlio, Sebastiano, Composite Satyric Stage Set / Nativity Scene, Bologna, 1540

"To break the ground is the first architectural act.  
- Semper, G. Der Stil in *Den Technischen und Theoretischen Aesthetik*

In the camp of the surveyor, the nomad, and the  
recounted in the *Measures of the Unfinished City*,  
temporal collage growing from the collaboration  
project *landscapes of aggression* in the hope of

In II *Secondo Libro di Prospettiva* (1540), Sebastiano Serlio sets for yet another urban theater: the tragic (rational) and the satyric (bestial). The first two are familiar and revealed the instrumental not objective pre-condition of the city. Here Satyrs camp out beneath a canopy of trees and to level the ground, and second to stockpile stone. Sabine Frommel (Serlio, Electra, 1998) attributes this painting of the same era revealing a similar collage of characters. Serlio posits similar collages of sources the profane city as well as the sacred space of a beast and a beast.

The nomadic condition of the late 20th Century and the new world have been the concerns of my work for almost four decades now. Surveyors are enlisting the ground, and with the magic of lunatics, all three parts of inaugural events. The chorus of the recurrent temporal collage growing from the collaborative efforts of those who build as we discipline.

My work today is clearly focused on the coincident agenda of "The Word Made Flesh" with semperian architecture as both poetic friction and transformative act for humanity. Humanities are my models of collaged context and still seem useful starts. New world explorations of the world prove to be common-sense primers reading architecture as the world. My practice and pedagogy have been four Tales of Origin" beginning with Genesis and Exodus returning to another beginning: approximating. Though these pedagogic projects have evolved over years, it is only recently that they mutated in the form of new testaments.

"To break the ground is the first architectural act."  
- Semper, G. Der Stil in *Den Technischen und Tektonischen Kunsten Praktische Aesthetik*

In the camp of the surveyor, the nomad, and the lunatic under a new Moon are recounted in the *Measures of the Unfinished City*.<sup>15</sup> These enduring texts recount a temporal collage growing from the collaboration of a gardener and an engineer to project *landscapes of aggression* in the hope of grounding their territorial origins.

In *Il Secondo Libro di Prospettiva* (1540), Sebastiano Serlio projected three stage sets for yet another urban theater: the tragic (rational), the comic (circumstantial) and the satyric (bestial). The first two are familiar models, but in the latter is revealed the instrumental not objective pre-condition for the construction of the city. Here Satyrs camp out beneath a canopy of trees; first to clear the forest and to level the ground, and second to stockpile timber and to quarry building stone. Sabine Frommel (Serlio, Electra, 1998) attributes to Serlio the *Nativita* painting of the same era revealing a similar collage of a didactic setting and cast of characters. Serlio posits similar collages of source materials for the construction of the profane city as well as the sacred space of a new world occupied by both man and beast.

The nomadic condition of the late 20th Century and the satyric dimension of the new world have been the concerns of my work, my practice as pedagogy for almost four decades now. Surveyors are enlisted in the preparation of the ground, and with the magic of lunatics, all three prepare as collage a sequence of inaugural events. The chorus of the recurrent texts of humanism provides the most instrumental pre-condition for the construction of the city and touches on the collaborative efforts of those who build as well as teach the foundations of our discipline.

My work today is clearly focused on the coincidence of the enduring Humanist agenda of "The Word Made Flesh" with semperian specifications for construction as both poetic friction and transformative act for here and now. Texts from the Humanities are my models of collaged context and strategy: Genesis and Aeneid still seem useful starts. New world explorations of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Walden* prove to be common-sense primers reading architecture as a *covenant with the world*. My practice and pedagogy have been founded on the invention of "Spatial Tales of Origin" beginning with Genesis and Exodus onto Numbers, certainly Acts returning to another beginning: approximating Stonehenge in recent years. Though these pedagogic projects have evolved over, perhaps, significantly 28 years, it is only recently that they mutated in the frictional condition as both old and new testaments.

## Genesis

at the scale of the Garden before the dwelling:  
The Parasol House revisits the pre-condition of Eden before traveling onto Jerusalem (1981);

## Exodus

at the scale of the collaboration of the Limbourg Brothers for the Duc de Berry:  
Sewers, Sibyls, and Stylobates provide specifications for construction for Times Square (1984);

## Numbers & Acts

at the scale of radical displacement; Noah's Ark and the World Re-cited:  
Parcel X, North Garden, Virginia (1995);

and

## Approximating Stonehenge

at the scale of citizens & strangers; approximating North in the Public Realm:  
Eric Goodwin Memorial Passage, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia (2004)

These four projects all witness distinct generations assessing strategies for the construction of site as incremental and ongoing. The notion of architecture as a covenant with the world, again, is an explicit ethical commitment to the Humanities as resonant culture to be sung aloud for every new generation echoing equally in Ise's Shinto Shrine as well as the smoldering ashes of the vestal virgins in eternal Rome.



## GENESIS

at the scale of the Garden before the Dwelling:  
The Parasol House revisits the pre-condition of Eden before traveling onto  
Jerusalem

A Tale of Two Gardens and the challenge of Serlio's Satyric setting

*Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, Lewis, 1865) provides us with a narrative of seeing both fantasy and familiarity in a world without scale or gravity. The story is both liberating for a summer's slumbering imagination and terrifying when one awakens to find oneself still on the ground beneath the cooling shade of a tree. Within our landscapes, time never seems to stop, but history is made anew ever so frequently with the invention of pedagogic looking glasses. The Parasol House is a speculation on the necessity of shade in the prismatic light of late 20th-century urbanism in Arcadian America. The project recalls Boccaccio's *Decameron* where flight from urban chaos to a villa's emancipation transforms nature from wilderness into generative landscapes and accessible gardens.

Professor Seymour Hinge, his Peruvian partner, and their two "Izod"-tattooed<sup>16</sup> daughters have recently moved from a large prairie-style home in Cincinnati to a small Cape Cod in the heart of Houston. The Hinges have asked their architect to develop a strategy for the transformation of their New England house type into a reconsidered encampment that is responsive to the climate, flora, and fauna of hot, humid Houston. The genesis of the proposition corresponds to the progressive stages of an implementation schedule: the backyard turns into a dwelling; while the front house turns into an oasis for the dog who is the only resident alien, full-time on site, rain or shine. For these nomads, one from the north and the other from the south, together with their hybrid children, Houston shimmers as a mirage of a sub-tropical paradise with terrains gushing black gold beneath a majestic date palm within easy reach out front, and a vacated gumbo clay pit out back in need of shade.

Eleven years later, when they leave for Virginia, endlessly in search of Arcadia-in-America, their relationship to nature through the lens of this curious city would be haunted by a resonant space between Genesis and Exodus, between Troy and Rome, between Crusoe's isle and Thoreau's cabin.

The first project (1981) was a plan strategy of inverted subtractions as specifications articulating the character of the figures without specifying the spatial pre-conditions of the field.

In the second project (1983), a course change, or revision, became evident when the section of the thin topsoil was mined to yield *mirrors for the moon*.

## Postscript: A Tale of Two Gardens

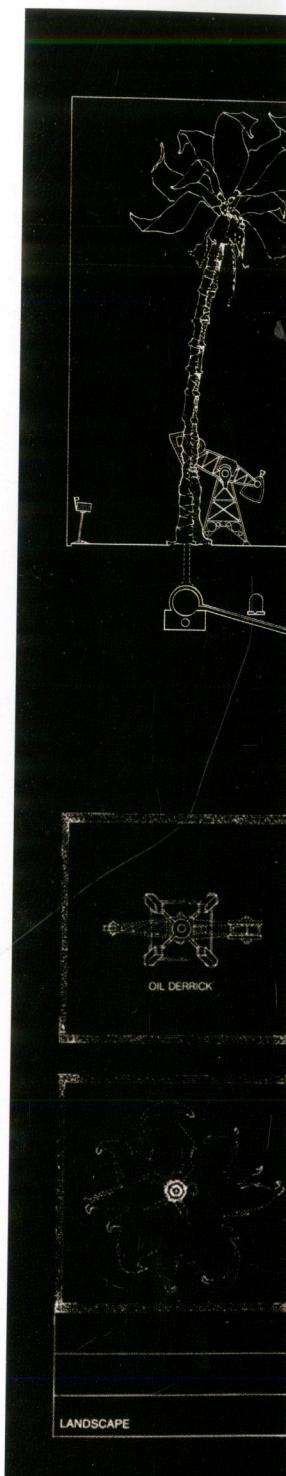
Two years have now passed since this project was conceived and a reconsideration of the landscape has taken place. The previous conception projected two abstract voids between buildings: a lawn in the sun, and a pool in the shade both connected by a metered yet scale-less sea of concrete. The new landscapes are now particular not generic, intimate and monumental rather than scale-less and are the stuff of fairy tales rather than diagrams. The following Tale of Two Gardens is related to family friends by the Hinge children to explain the efforts of their architect, now turned miner of mica, and the influence of his young student on all of them.

Once upon a time, a puppy came to stay with the Hinge family. With family members away at school and at work all day, the poor puppy had no alternative but to wander in concentric circles at various staked places in the garden. The intense heat of this concrete ground and of the ever so neatly trimmed lawn was enough to cause extreme dehydration in late spring, followed by debilitating drenching during the summer monsoons. The surrogate day dweller, a dog, would whimper under the hot unrelenting sun.

Praising shadows, a landscape was projected for the life cycle of the surrogate day dweller, a dog, in place of the empty void made to satisfy the measures of men. The dog has been given not a tethered stake but "free run" of the former plan. Gathering on occasion by the former hearth or in the shade of the old kitchen porch, dog and family alike settle down to share a meal within the hedges.

While one landscape for the daytime has been cultivated above ground for the dog, family, and friends, another more turbulent one has been constructed in a grotto fashioned by the "Izod" alligator below grade. A cistern is constructed to catch the acid rain produced from nearby refineries: this water is neutralized by a constant addition of calcium carbonate as base from infertile alligator eggs. This neutralized ground water is then pumped up during the cool of the early morning to refresh the dog's house, which is indeed the garden.

With a grin and a giggle, the Hinge children turn full circle and point to the palm tree and oil pump proudly displayed on their front lawn to complete this vision of paradise and plenty in a land without pretense and a garden without guilt.



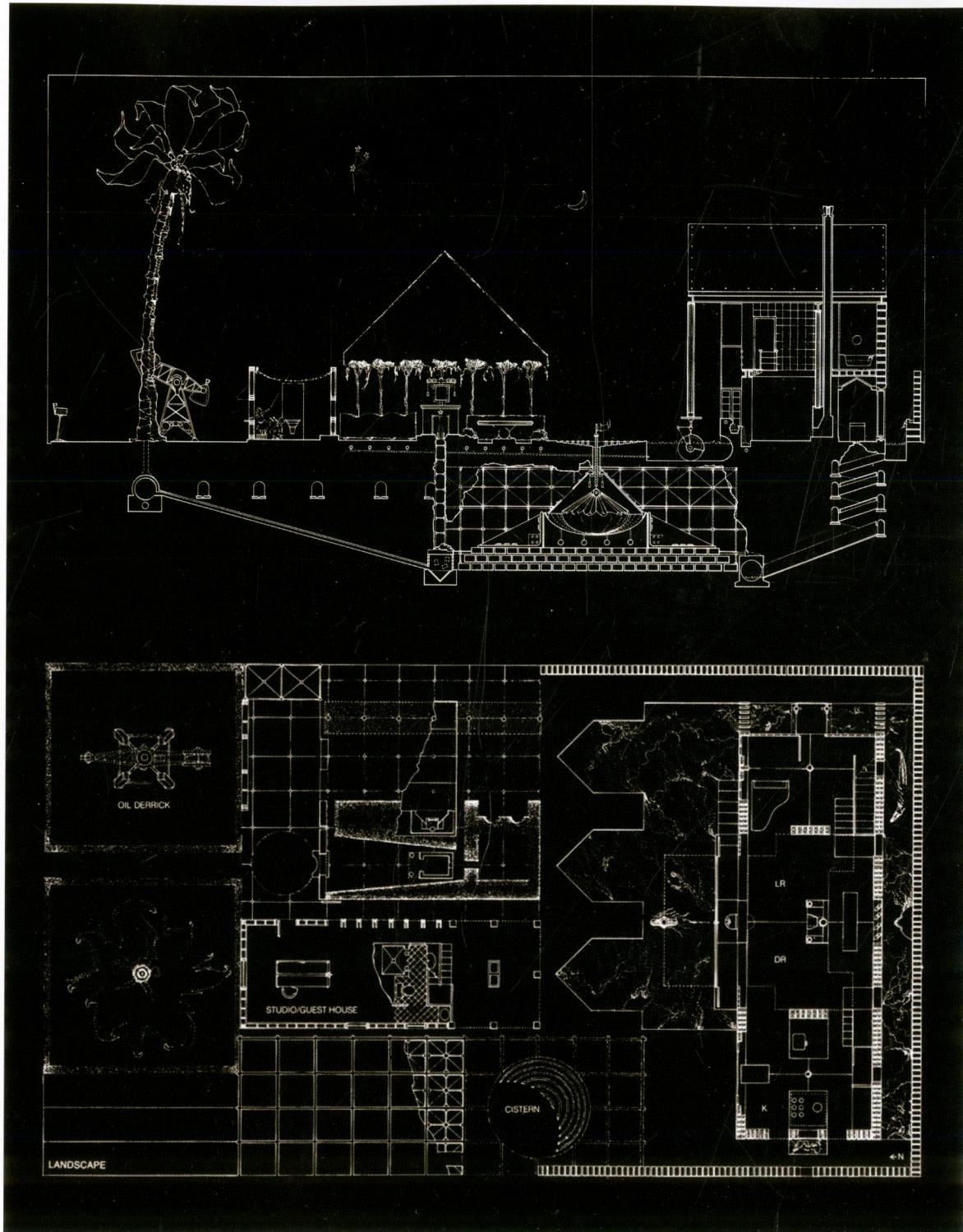
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The Parasol House  
Houston, Texas 1981/1983

## EXODUS

Scheherazade's Specifications for Construction on Times Square:  
On Sewers, Sibyls, and Stylobates

A sewer purification system is proposed to transform Times Square incrementally into a new landscape for the ritual of the most routine: the passage of time.

The depths of the city are mined to construct a new mountain from which time will rise every new year as purified waters are released to cleanse the city.

Take a toss at stolen chances.  
Place your bets and dream of dances.

To enter the crossroads, one may first walk into a garden along 42nd street. It has been said that in the garden, there is a man who opens gates, and indeed I recall a distant relative on my mother's side telling me of such a man.

I expect that this relative was accurate, when in confidence; she told me that in the garden there are never more than two gates. Indeed, she led me to believe that if you told the old gentleman which of the two gates was to take your fancy, that he would obligingly open it for you. But, I understand it is first customary to praise him on his flowers, even in winter, for he takes great pride in them.

It's my impression from this relative's account that in the garden nothing was to be taken for granted. If you have misbehaved, you will never get to meet the gatekeeper and you will certainly never encounter any of the gates. There is a good chance you might remain in a lamentable place.

All of this my relative told me with great satisfaction in her voice. She concluded that Time Squared<sup>17</sup> should logically become a quiet place, a place to engage the circle of time.

If you like, I can take you through this garden. I cannot promise a meeting with its genteel keeper; sometimes he is not home. In his absence, you will find other tales to be told. That is the nice thing about Time Squared.

One of the gates is closed and is very large. The other is always left slightly ajar and appears at first glance to be substantially smaller; you might peek in, if you can.

The keeper opens the gates by operating a spring-release mechanism, of his own invention, too complicated to describe here. Suffice it to say that it is no small undertaking to operate those great doors. One must be very patient as their hinges and bolts grind slowly into gear.

No matter which of the gates you have chosen, tread softly as you walk through. If you are very attentive you may hear the trickling of water and the ringing of bells from beneath your feet. If you are clever, you might guess that there could well be subterranean chambers. Perhaps, some could be large enough to swallow trains. Go through the gate. When you have crossed its threshold, say thank you to its keeper. As you are now in his realm, tipping is no longer necessary.

All in all, the promises we make have much to do with the chances we take, and the difference between the places each of the gates may lead you can be no less than the difference between a mountain and a valley. This I tell you in strictest confidence and would advise you to choose carefully to which place you would rather go. But I digress.

In the mountain, you will follow many chambers, each leading to the next. Please use the railing, as the floors are sometimes slippery and there is never much light. Walking up through the chambers will, perhaps, take you a minute, perhaps 365 days, so make sure you have plenty of time on your hands. Perhaps, you should come during the weekend.

This is what the inside of the mountain looks like. Follow this map and you will not get lost. There may be sudden corners. These only occur along Broadway. Don't be put off; some people like them. Anyway, you should know by now that the illusion of the mountain is nothing more than a modest wall.

Periodically, you will be flushed from the chambers by smelly stuff, and will be required to start your journey again from 42nd Street. Next time, you will inquire as to when these floodings take place before you start. Ask anyone; everyone in New York senses when these wet surges might arise.

Time after time, official time cannot be trusted; it has been known to be inaccurate. So follow the rising steps along 7th Avenue. Make sure you have change before you go up; looking at midnight between the stars and the Moon will cost you a dime.

And rejoice, for it is the New Year! Write on walls, if you like. Their surfaces are now clean and await your mark. Carve a secret of your own invention, your own incantation. I'll not tell what they mean. There will always be enough room, even if, at times, you will have to use shorthand.

The gates are open now and a silent flush rises through the ageless walls with the tide of the Moon.

New virgin water sparkles and joyfully glistens in its marble channels. Look, the Clock has risen in the Universe.

In paradise, a blanket of warm water soothes your tired winter feet. Take a seat and chat with a new friend. It's been a long night.

Not far remains to go in this garden. It is best you come and see for yourself the pool rising to your ankles, and people joyfully wading.

It is best we part now as the gentle vapors overflow onto the morning streets. Don't be alarmed; Manhattan will welcome the infinite purity of time's waters.

Yes, you can go home, if you like. There has been plenty of water for all on this special night. Sibyls will give you a flask on your way out. Treasure it for it must last you one year.

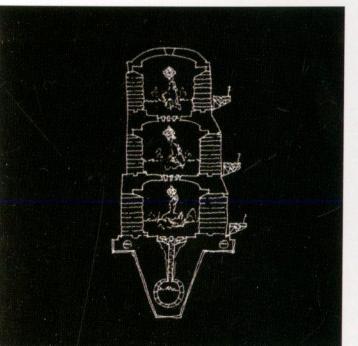
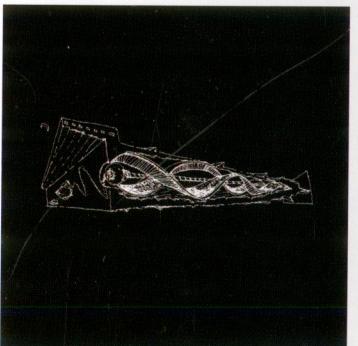
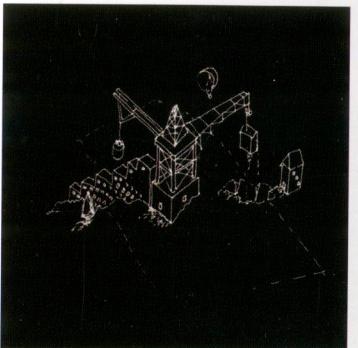
Dawn has quietly come.

The streets have been cleansed by purifying time flows.

Your pace is lighter; your heart beats faster.

The final gate opens. In front of you you'll see words made flesh.

Indeed, time squared is a circle.



much to do with the chances we take, and  
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Times Square Competition  
New York City, 1984

NUMBERS & ACTS

1/2/4/256

Numbers recounts spatial encampments in the wilderness. Old Testament Acts constructs the labors of Peter as a foundation builder. New Testament

**On Landscapes Within and Without**

Parcel X, North Garden, Virginia, 1994

Architecture as a *covenant with the world* is a particularly North American pre-occupation regarding the cultivation of barren ground without a viable root system upon which to graft new life. Noah's Ark is a spatial and temporal metaphor for starting out afresh with a myriad of collaborators making sure to have two of each kind. The role of the Humanities is such an indispensable library for my work and teaching. These are the pre-conditions of the site offered by the surveyor to professor Seymour Hinge en route to Virginia after 11 years in Texas:

A parcel is a modest but actual fragment of a much larger, if not pretentious, fiction.

Parcel X, a 3.84-acre remnant, sits at the margin of a still vast pastoral landscape. Parcel X is an abandoned site, too steep for agricultural use, dominated by an ancient poplar forest of little commercial value, only the granite fissures have proffered a crystalline cistern for the Long Arm Valley.<sup>18</sup>

Parcel X was already marked long-before map-makers, surveyors, or soil-samplers ever came to project their scars upon this surface. Geological origins were substantially recorded in massive oblique granite ridges rhythmically cracked by palisades of virgin poplar shafts. A second slender dimension of under-story dogwoods blurs the zone where tall trunks emerge from granite ravines. These ravines are the source of one of the most generous wells in Albemarle County, fed by a constellation of cisterns slowly being revealed within and without.

This is the spatial tale of origin inspired by the Incan settlement of Arequipa signifying: a remarkable place to pause in the midst of a journey from the mountains to the sea.

In the nomadic North American condition, one can never tell if your next move is to be your last. Precautions should be taken to secure daydreams and nightmares; ancient flues must guard deep cisterns; household goods should be kept at a distance while the pre-conditions of the site punctuate this campsite from within. This genesis of revelation is the ancient rite of all nomads who know that the city and the garden have origins in the oasis.

APPROXIMATING STONEHENGE

On Specifications for Construction: North Porch, Campbell Hall

On the Collaboration of Allied Concrete and A Swarm of Spiders

On the Utility and Transformative Qualities of Tilt Slab Construction

On Sequential Markings of the Memorable Horizon and the Totemic Vertex

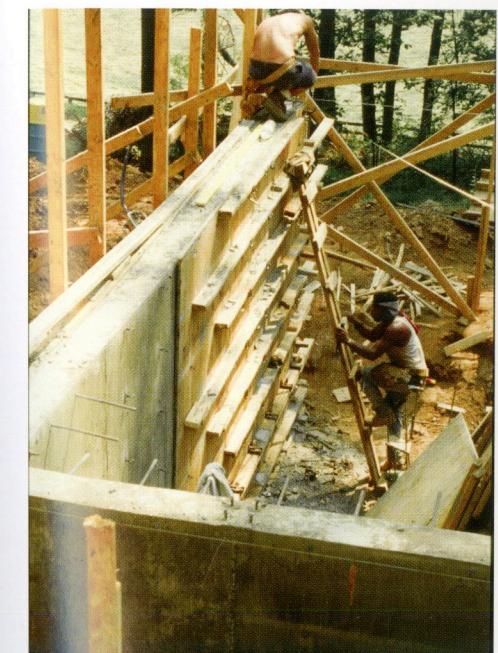
On the Strategic Responsibilities of Surveyors, Nomads, and Occasional Lunatics

Eric Goodwin Memorial Passage at The University of Virginia 2004

A remarkable architecture student passed away suddenly before graduation; his peers rose up to erect a memorial at the thickened edge between architecture and landscape. These outdoor classrooms were a student/faculty design build operation to be used routinely to mark time for seminars and studios and to celebrate the annual ritual of commencement.

Our site, the north face of Carr's Hill, might not be easily described as level ground. A review of the archive of maps of Carr's Hill since Jefferson's inception reveals numerous fictions as to the location of true north. Thus with Eric's passing and his peers scattering to the winds shortly thereafter, we citizens of Campbell Hall who remained were not certain where north might be precisely located.

We needed to use the strategies of construction to orient ourselves. That summer, we proposed to construct one by one with each new Moon concrete slabs determined by the meter of the structure of Campbell Hall. The first slab became the formwork for the next as one proceeds from east to west. With each sequential pour the previous one was tilted to the sky; then each totem braced. Shadows danced, implying a village of tee-pees.



Porch, Campbell Hall  
and A Swarm of Spiders  
of Tilt Slab Construction  
the Horizon and the Totemic Vertex  
yours, Nomads, and Occasional Lunatics  
University of Virginia 2004

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Parcel X  
North Garden, Virginia 1994

## INTRODUCTION: THE WORD MADE FLESH

First, we used both enduring concrete markers as well as ephemeral strings to give measure to this difficult topographic condition.

Second, we used the same fixed points as concrete benchmarks, tables in the broadest sense, together with a system of dynamic approximations to help citizens and strangers alike to find true north as the one requirement of anticipated graduation.

The ethical responsibility of architecture as orientation is the first and only lesson of this north porch.

Third, nomads were to project experimental theaters and landscapes for a tent, a table or two, and a myriad of commemorative and transformative tablets at the scales of both bricks as well as civic mirages.

Fourth, surveyors constructed concrete markers to measure the horizon first from ground to mountain ridge.

Fifth, lunatics provide upon these foundation plinths additional pours of progressive dimensions now to give measure to the hill as they are then tilted vertically to frame a window to the sky.

Sixth, with time, the tilt slab panels will be incised with the names of departed students and faculty, generous donors and legendary caretakers alike as a pre-requisite of citizenship.

Seventh, upon these window plinths a swarm of spiders insert telescoping poles and cables as stanchions for the eventful tent reliably erected by a band of meandering nomads in the midst of May.

Eighth, it is rumored that another lunatic in the ruins of an ancient fraternity site has supervised a deep casting pit that is quarried as formwork for incubating groundhogs to sustain the stress of tent-induced wind loads.

Ninth, a forest of pylons and correspondent water runnels syncopate the hill.

Tenth, Fires burn.

Eleventh, columns begin to dance.

## CONNECTIVE TISSUE: LANDSCAPES OF AGGRESSION

All these projects are ancient and familiar tales, which have served as an architectural primer for students/speculators, all recounting the enduring codes and components of our discipline. They share a connective tissue, collage, demonstrating a syntax of structure all too often forgotten by many, in the current amnesia where nothing endures for the contemporary. The pre-conditions record sites already full, not empty: of geological fissures and resistive soils, where ancient forests are metered by pastoral fences and punctuated by camping sites of nomadic origins.

Building as a verb, as an on-going phenomenal process, is in crisis if one also accepts the notion of substantial completion, with the assemblage of a checklist, with the assumption that structures are invariant and thus should not creak or leak. These texts are alternatives to an impoverished and pretentious architecture that conventionally values more the resolution, as the stabilization of structure, over the vitality of stress scars and watermarks some call collage. Herein, is an argument for an architecture that celebrates the instrumentality of the word made flesh in landscapes of progressive aggressions. The spatial tales of origin recounted in specifications for construction should begin and end with yet another eschatological beginning, always found in water and watermarks, soil and stain, in darkness and encrusted patina, in fire and in ash, in secret springs as well as manholes, and, finally, lightening rods. These projects serve as an apology for the temporary encampment of those in search of a New World Arcadia where steel frames audibly creak in the wind; concrete displays stress cracks seasonally, and rain shields do not leak (too much).

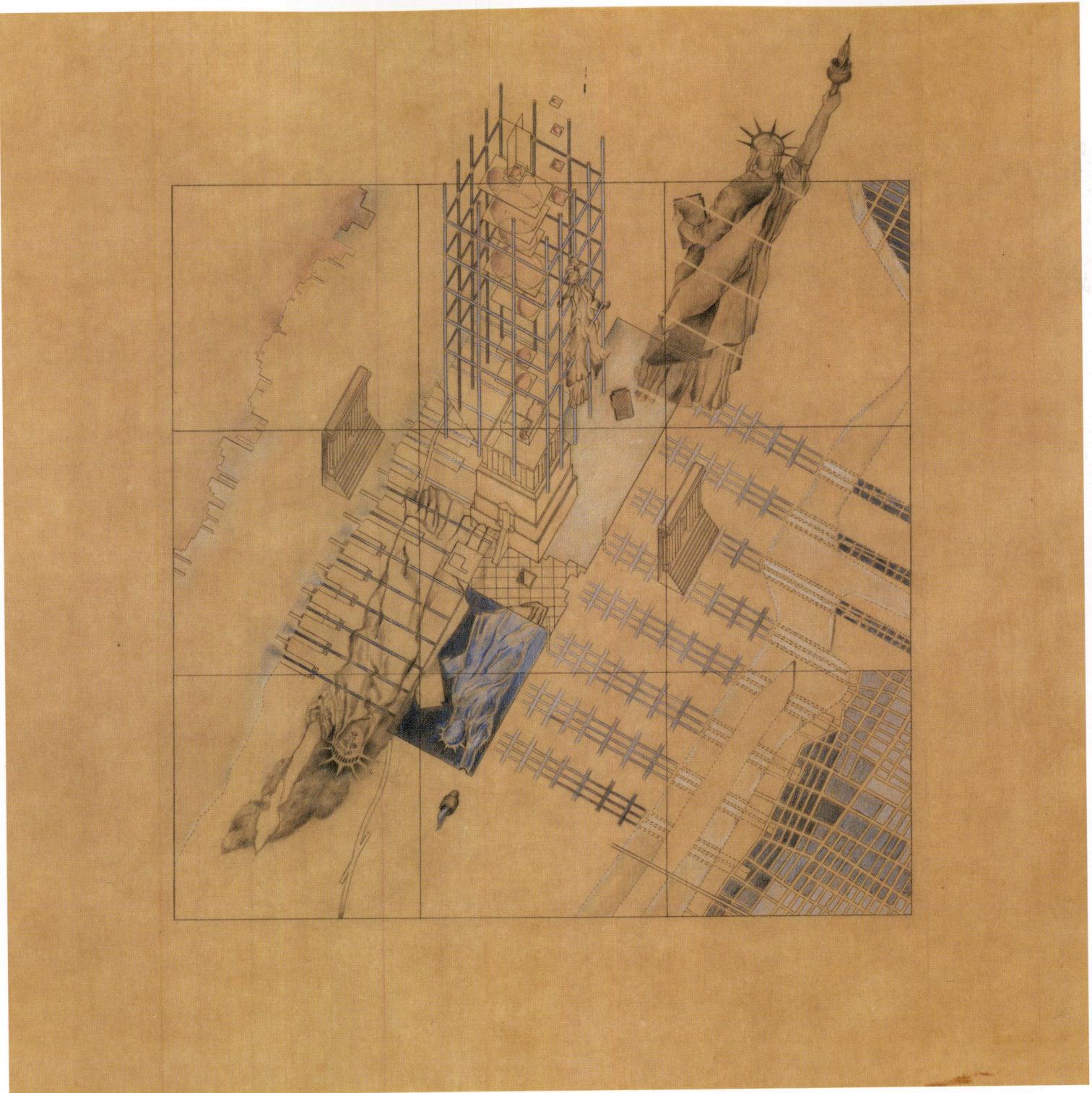
The Parasol House fleshes out a familiar garden in a strange city; Times Square envisions a public domain revealed on an annual basis by a ritual of citizenship; Parcel X reveals a nomadic encampment in North Garden metered by the routines of daily life, and *The Goodwin Passage*<sup>19</sup> is the secret oasis of the next generation, yet another collaboration with young fresh faced students, lunatics all, perhaps, as we strive to polish mirrors for the moon.

## S OF AGGRESSION

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Peter Waldman with Jon Maruszak, *Schemes and Dreams; Wishful Thinking for Urban New York*,  
exhibited at Cooper Hewitt Museum (1979)