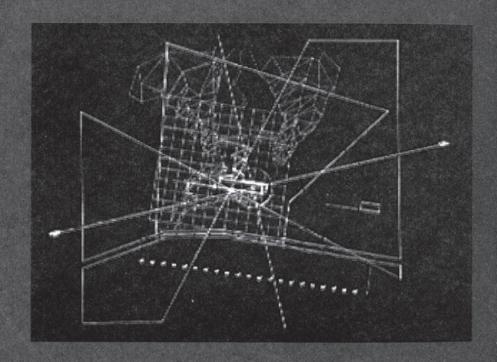


Re-envisioning Landscape/Architecture Catherine Spellman, ed. poki halomiCharlessville 2004

Semper Fidelis: On Numbers in the Night Peter D. Waldman



Semper has haunted me from the start. Ever since my student days I sought to ground the project by reducing the site to an enigmatic shadow line cast at high noon from a certainly more finite object conceived in my imagination. That dark enigmatic shadow line not only served the magnification of the emboldened artifice; it also provided a future ground for seeds awaiting germination in that fertile fissure. In those early days, I sought to compose architecture, not to construct it, and only traced out foundation plans in order to secure a building permit. I had the process backwards: my foundation plans were resultant not generative. It took me years to get over building poorly in my attempt to realize a finished vision rather than acknowledge that building may be about beginning and not finishing. Numbers in the Night are those hidden systems necessary to construct the imagination. These Numbers now haunt mu process, I now take confidence in the utility of my own markings, in numbers as permutations rather than resolutions, and as reading site first in the most visceral of terms. My work now never seems to get beyond the specification of foundations for a garden, a building, or city. Spatial Tales of Origin begin with the site as found, with resources to be mapped initially by Nomads, then revealed as accountable by Surveyors, and transformed by the reflexive permutations of Lunatics. The Garden of Eden, however lost, intentionally preceded the construction of the enduring City of Jerusalem. The circumstantial preconditions of the Site, tensioned by the predictability of the Sun and the Moon, determine the architecture of the lingering construction site. The temporal agenda that serves the genesis of the growth of the garden should also be requisite to the Specifications for Construction for building here on earth. To project the primacy of Specifications for Construction one must begin with the preconditions of the site and define architecture as the collaboration of the Gardener and the Engineer. The project of landscape and architecture is most powerfully manifested in the territories of the construction site, first revealing geological and historical evidence and then the elemental acts of each stage of the building process. Parcel X in North Garden, Virginia, is the subject of the text and trace of a lingering construction site, somewhere between Eden and Jerusalem, an oasis of modest tents and potent volcanoes, where colluvial slopes are mediated by inserted terraces and where enduring foundations and mercurial finishes are proudly displayed as numerous stress cracks, stains, and scars. It is hoped that Semper would be proud of this faithful cabalist in his persistence to attend to this first haunting lesson that resonates now as Numbers in the Night.

Draft Specification No. 1 In the Beginning

In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth, and all was without form.
"Genesis," The Bible, King James Version





On the Precise Responsibilities of Surveyors & Cabalists

1. (In the Beginning) is read routinely herein as a gerund, an ongoing activity to which one returns to trespass again and again throughout the construction process in the anticipation of ruin. 2. (Numbers in the Night) is the specific speculation of an Architect as Surveyor and Cabalist who presupposes two simultaneous conditions necessary to strategize the Construction Site: One Condition (Numbers) presupposes accountability: the meters derived from the precision of the physics. The other condition (in the Night) is the myriad of permutations of orientation associated with evident fragments of several temporal logics resisting in the dark the absolute resolution of Cartesian thinking while making space for the coincidental rush of the nightmare, which others more discretely call the warehouse of the imagination. Subtext (1+2) An architecture may be simultaneously rendered accessible to the Surveyor by the diagrammatic clarity of its authoritative building systems determined by Gravity (Caves/Tents), as well as rendered magical to the Cabalist by the permutations of distinct conjunctive Orientations (the Megaron).

Draft Specification No. 2 Ground Rules

The first architectural act is to break the ground; the second is to raise structure vertically to the sky. Semper





On Repositioning Within Landscapes of Aggression

3. (On Repositioning) begins with a tale of a surrogate instrumental act upon the site: the metamorphic body at the end of the day whose dynamic reorientations of ground rules commencing with one center and one flagellating line go on to retrace patterns of the spiral through the contrast of diurnal and nocturnal postures coming finally to rest in the ruinous condition of dust and ashes. On Repositioning presupposes that every architectural project since Genesis repeats the text of remarkable beginnings by rules first determined by the Sun, and then inverted time and again by the Mirrors of the Moon. On Repositioning presupposes reflectivity, a reflexive predictable cycle that regulates us by day and amazes us by night. Since the labyrinth of Knossos, the role of architecture has not only been to ground us here and now but to take us to terrific realms where no one has been before. 4. (Within Landscapes of Aggression) is projected the construction site over time as the only possible location from which to witness the dual readings of Gravity and Orientation by distinct bodies now repositioning themselves with one another as collaborative and constructive citizens. The additive benchmarks of the Surveyor are always followed by the subtractive excavations of the Cabalist, and through these double crossed territories there is to be found on occasion the meander of the Nomad in search of other oases. Subtext (3+4) The Surveyor and Cabalist establish two distinct yet syncopated meters for the construction site. The Nomad, another kind of structuralist beyond the scope of this essay, reminds them of resources within the earth as evidence of

geological and cultural structures beyond those of the geometry and mathematics of ideal form. There are successive logics projected here requiring first the mapping of a Spatial Tale of Origin and then identifying Landscapes of Aggression as a changing, reflexive repositioning of the construction site that is neither a passive armature nor a singularly linear process. The subject of this subtext is the frictional union of an enduring Syntax of Structure, as a chess game played out through the permutations of a topographic imagination.

Draft Specification No. 3 A Tale of a Gardener and an Engineer





For some time now, ever since my student days, I have been in the habit to return from studio late at night to jot down parti diagrams on a bedside sketchpad wedged between the cold stone floor and an imperfect spring mattress. In that unsupportive condition, I would deceive myself into thinking that structural clarity might be achieved by a few bold lines representing emphatic walls. Or was it rather the Cartesian forest of columns? The dilemma of either/or would haunt me for years. Abandoning sleep early in my adolescence, I tried to sleep recounting both parallel walls as well as the syncopation of grids. Three, no four; six, no seven; thirteen, no seventeen; often sixty-nine or was it ninety-six. To a reborn Cabalist, these numbers, which were supposed to stabilize my day's production, only haunted me by their permutations late into the night. More often than not I would try to clear this minefield shifting bodily orientations. The dynamic body models the construction site: vertical by day, horizontal by night, a spiral fetus in the beginning, decomposed as dust in the end. (Numbers in the Night) haunt those who attempt to appreciate the dynamic character of construction aggressively redefining site over time. The construction site is not about singularity but

multiplicity, not resolution but dynamic negotiation. For almost thirty-nine years now I have been waking up exhausted but welcoming to my relief the bright light of day only to glance down to my horror on last night's intentional diagrams that could only be read as pentimenti, as marks and erasures, lineae occultae remaining unresolved, fragmentary, certainly incomplete and often frictional, blistered and scored into the grit of my pad. I was compelled by this sudden enlightenment to hide the evidence of a topographic imagination in an adjacent closet. But, perversely, I decided at some point to take confidence in the utility of my own night-time markings and now delight in strategizing site in the most visceral of physical terms. I read Specifications for Construction as instructions for alchemy, strategizing the soiling of foundations before burnishing eschatological finishes, defining architecture as the collaboration of both Gardeners and Engineers. Structure as a visceral conjunction of sequential frictions is appreciated most emphatically in terms of the lingering construction site, in revealing first the structure of the site in terms of both geological facts and historical fictions, then appreciating the elemental acts of each stage manifested by the building process, stressing the essential value of incomplete acts of ordinary individuals repeating routin familiar tasks. The construction site as armature meters the spatial realm where citizen and stranger move with distinct rhythms, where light levels are leveraged by Lunatics, and weathering obscures some measures and accentuates others. If the warehouse of the imagination is illuminated by darkness, the armatures of structure, and the inventory of Caves and Tents, then the preconditions of dark labyrinths and shadowy forests provide for an architecture that transposes authoritative orders associated with the bright light of day. Tanazaki's In Praise of Shadows and Picasso's Guernica both identify the light bulb as the phenomenal plague of the preenlightenment imagination where now nothing is hidden, and "terra incognita" is erased from all world maps.

Draft Specification No. 4 Eden then Jerusalem





Structure before enclosure is a precondition to dwelling within Architecture and provides the last evidence of the postoccupation ruin. Building as a verb, as an instrumental deformative act, is manifested through successive territorial transformations, Semperian Landscapes of Aggression, conventionally conceived as the short-term construction site and resistively perceived as the long-term scarred territory of repositioned topographic engagements. Starting with the foundations of Parcel X, a syntax of structure is the festering frictional determinant of a spatial tale of origin negotiating the spatial territory defined by both concentric gravity and eccentric orientation. The initial retaining wall splits to frame a gap as it emerges from the ground to permit the summer solstice morning light to enter the Basement of Parcel X. Then shining steel studs before they are enclosed with the copper skin cast magical shadows for a brief moment in collaboration with the adjacent stand of ancient tulip poplars. This magic is merely represented now by the regular markings of the burnished standing seam sleeves that meter the copper shield from sunrise to sunset. Gravity is invariant, pulling vectors constantly to the center of the earth. Orientation is temporal, yet recurrent, inscribing each day with an arc of three horizons marking variant sunrise, high noon, and sunset. Gravity and Orientation are then the only benchmarks agreed upon by Surveyors and Cabalists who provide the constituent characteristics of an architect. Ever since Genesis, architecture has been conceived as both physical and temporal, metering the space first between heaven and earth, ephemeral vapors and the topographic imagination, ultimately establishing the recurrent paradigms of Eden and Jerusalem, the cyclic garden and the resistive city. It is not the point of this essay to assume that the City and the Garden began as one. Rather, by bracketing the debate with Genesis and then Exodus, I am

suggesting that the world as construction site was the structured place before cities, buildings, or gardens, but that building (as a verb) in its incompleteness was there first in its progressive state. The moment of finish, i.e., Paradise as a walled-in garden, led to prerequisite abandonment as with Sodom and Gomorrah. Structure as Order mediates with the world of nature first. Only then does architecture fix a world within.

Draft Specification No. 5 Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation

On that first terrific night, Crusoe had to choose between a cave or a tent. He chose both. Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe





5. (Specifications for Construction) is the conventional model of directing distinct sequences of trades negotiating foundations, frames, and finishes in order to describe architecture as a process of consequent construction. I have found it useful over the years to teach the reading of architectural artifacts initially through constituent parts—walls and frames, attics and basements, doors and windows—constructed, occupied, and maintained by individuals and groups as Recurrent Dualities that place architecture in the role of the conjunction itself. It is to be argued here that if there is a text to be read, then architecture is the specification of a constructive and frictional process of building up as well as weathering down, of the resistive as well as the vulnerable. 6. (Enumeration of Lessons Learned) is identified as the responsibility to make manifest precedents and ongoing research through this proglomena for a modestly metered dwelling located at the forest edge. Parcel X is an ancient and familiar tale, an architectural primer recounting the enduring codes and components of our discipline, demonstrating a syntax of structure all too forgotten in the current amnesia.

Subtext (5+6) This essay on the useful routine of originating Specifications for Construction is to take delight in both Science and Magic: lessons of structuring site reconsidered by Ariadne and taught to Theseus long, long ago and far, far away. Her probable descendent, Robinson Crusoe knew well how to read both the Sun and the Moon in a recurrent structural covenant with Gravity and Orientation. Their ongoing reading skills demonstrate the still fecund space of syncopated structures to be considered again as required reading, a primer perhaps, for the architectural imagination of their collective descendants.

Draft Specification No. 6 On Noah's Ark





Specifications for Construction are prefaced by a section enumerating the preconditions of the site before construction. The preconditions of Parcel X record a site already full, not empty, of geological fissures and colluvial soil where ancient forests of vertical tulip poplar trees are metered by cattle fences and punctuated by camping sites of Nomadic origin. Then the first eight sections of Specifications for Construction determine the strategic repositioning of dynamic constructional sequences or trades for the material and temporal metering of space. Yet, the final eight sections of Specifications for Construction retreat from this frictional process with provisions for external and internal finishes as if to stabilize or fix the now objectified armature. Building as a verb, as ongoing constructional process, is in crisis if one accepts the notion of substantial completion, with the assemblage of a checklist, which comes from the assumption that structures are invariant and thus should not creak or leak. There are alternatives to an impoverished and pretentious architecture that conventionally values

more the resolution or stabilization of structure over the vitality of stress scars and watermarks. I suggest an architecture that celebrates the instrumentality of construction sites as progressive. 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 an encrusted patina, in fire and in ash, in secret springs and manhole, and finally lightning rods. Conventional wisdom perpetuates the passivity and immutability of architectural structure achieving static resolution rather than celebrating as landscape architecture the ongoing evidence of dynamic and competing loads in the anticipation of growth and change. Conventional wisdom perpetuates constructional paradigms as singular: walls or frames, caves or tents, complete an authoritative onto themselves, rather than as contingent, incomplete, in stress if not in failure, vulnerable and certainly oppositional if not multiple as in the model of the megaron. Conventional wisdom perpetuates the typological notion that architectural structure is externally imposed upon the site by Surveyors implanting benchmarks, leased cranes lifting prefabricated frames and walls of immutable meters kept secret in the dark interiors of Masonic lodges rather than revealing specifically topological notion that structure may be internally quarried first from resources within the site, by Cabalists who generate innumerable permutations determined by the measure of a digit as well as the arc of a crane. The builders of ancient structures used the immediate site as resource to inventory most of their material: the forest for timber, the mountain for stone. The construction methods however were ancient secrets passed down from generation to generation and from other lands and cultures far, far away. In this alternative vision of primitive or archetype construction site the Surveyor takes one's coordinates from the aforementioned three horizons particular to the site; the mason is an alchemist first, at home in the quarry as well as the Lodge; the framer, a journeyman, is equally at home in the forest as well as the bright light of day. The preconditions of alchemical Masonic structures are found in surface clay and transformed in the kiln, while the instrumentalities of the framer are the ax and the sawmill. Geological projections and colluvial faults, Noah's Ark at Mount Ararat are structural paradigms of immediate geologic as well as distant mythic dimensions.

Draft Specification No. 7 The Volcano is Also a Tent

On Enumerating Lessons Learned

1. At Princeton in the 1960s, one generation was taught that modern Architects were obliged to build with light, but precise, structural armatures that hovered above the ground. 2. A decade later, another generation was taught in the same school that the Architect had obligations to reconfirm the order of this world and, as such, should no longer reveal the extension of space with frames but reconfirm the finiteness of rooms with substantial walls. 3. Slow to learn or resistive as a young teacher in the 1970s, I offered an alternative model to the polarized students: wall and frame in frictional and evasive engagement in the model of the megaron, inverted in the basilica, and reappropriated by Le Corbusier distinctly in his early and later works. 4. An earlier project, Maison du Weekend, employs primitive and contemporary structural paradigms of great mass and ephemeral lightness echoed in the north wall diptych of Parcel X as concrete walls and glass block panels within steel frames. These two projects establish a record of strategic repositioning of visceral structures requiring both the conjunction of inviolate frame as well as the shadowy weight of buried foundations, grottoes, and metered cells. 5. The later projects of Le Corbusier, Ronchamp and the Heidi Weber Pavilion coincidentally consider the repositioning of massive and light structures and use the distinct resources of their immediate construction sites. Ronchamp in part is a tent that looks like a cave, part rubble of a former sanctuary, part qunnite over a veiled steel fabric, with a heavy concrete cloud of a roof floating on point supports. The memorial pyramid in front pays tribute as inversion to the enigmatic Sphinx of Gizeh or the Italic Temple of Giove at Terracina. The Heidi Weber Pavilion establishes a memorable horizon through the projection and inversion of the Alps as distant pyramids tensioning the insistent horizon of the park as it meets the Zurich Sea. In addition the light, modular framing of its insistent metering belies the vast grotto bar contained within. These two precedents reconsider their immediate topographic situations in two distinct conjunctions of Caves and Tents as they face one another in frictional engagement from their mountain locations at the edge of a delimitated spatial sea. 6. These two projects serve now as brief references for reconciling terrains through Parcel X. The insistent horizons of the floor and the roof are in contrast to the oblique



Preconditions: Oasis



Day 1: Campsite



Day 2: Palisades and Prism pole



Day 2: Palisades and Plinth



Day 3: Steel Meters



Day 4: Shield



Day 5: Packing Crates



Day 6: New Terrace

section of the site. The copper shield is an unrelenting ruler as well as having the character of a fine tooth-comb. The Volcano is also a Tent encamped once again upon the site. The hearth is a grotto, an outrigger ark beneath the kaleidoscopic box that merely frames the Sun and the Moon. This essay on the visceral choreography of the Construction Site is an apology for Parcel X, a temporal encampment where the steel frame creaks and the rain shields do not leak (too much). 7. This project is part of a generational study of climatic dwellings commenced with the Parasol House for the same clients in Houston more than a decade go. These two campers arrive, one with a ruler, the other with a compass. On the first day, a tent is pitched not far from the pre-existing well. A campfire establishes the ash traces of man's first nightmare. The second morning begins the process of clearing the site as a staging area for construction. The eastern boundary is the first to be surveyed; a prism pole is left to frame the sun, and the first partial palisade is built and braced against the cold north wind. At noon a plinth is extended to the full southern edge of the site. That evening at the western boundary, X-bracing records the setting of the sun in the brittle surface of this first parterre. Between the palisade and the plinth, the now weary nomads rest under the light of a full moon. The third morning begins the process of erecting a steel framework based on a 26-foot meter to give another measure to this now cleared and leveled site. A fireplace is created to the south and a totem somewhere beyond the precinct to the north. On the fourth day, a shield is erected to challenge the southern exposure. Steel studs, lead-coated copper siding, metered Hope's doors become an incessant backdrop. Thereupon, an armature of eye hooks and guide wires with a mind of their own collaborate with wisteria vines to mask this pretentious straightedge. On the fifth day, a trailer arrives with kitchen stuff and household goods. Hidden behind the back of this masque of urban decorum, the trailer is raised up on blocks to serve temporarily as a cookhouse/outhouse. Nearby, another tent is set up to guard the goods. Under the hot noon sun a parasol is stretched to form a framed ground plane hovering above the previous plinth. From this new terrace one can recover the horizon previously denied by this undulating topography. Late in the day, glass curtain walls seal off the east and the west with unsentimental anonymity, while a glass-block panel of equal size makes prismatic the northern exposure. On the sixth day, a manhole reveals the secrets of the cistern beneath a labyrinth of packing crates; a study is perched above; a volcanic lens points to south; and the ground begins to heave. On that sixth night the elderly collaborators find rest in a hammock suspended within this armature of the first campsite and dream now of how similar the first move was to the last. On the seventh day, it is rumored a wall rises to the north where the totemic stake once distinguished within from without. Its iridescent face now contains an extended aperture, some say barbeque, while others whisper funeral pyre. Only the blind arthritic dog knows for sure the destination of this portal. 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 both daydreams and nightmares; ancient flues must guard deep cisterns; household goods must be kept at a distance while the preconditions 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 on the Oasis.

