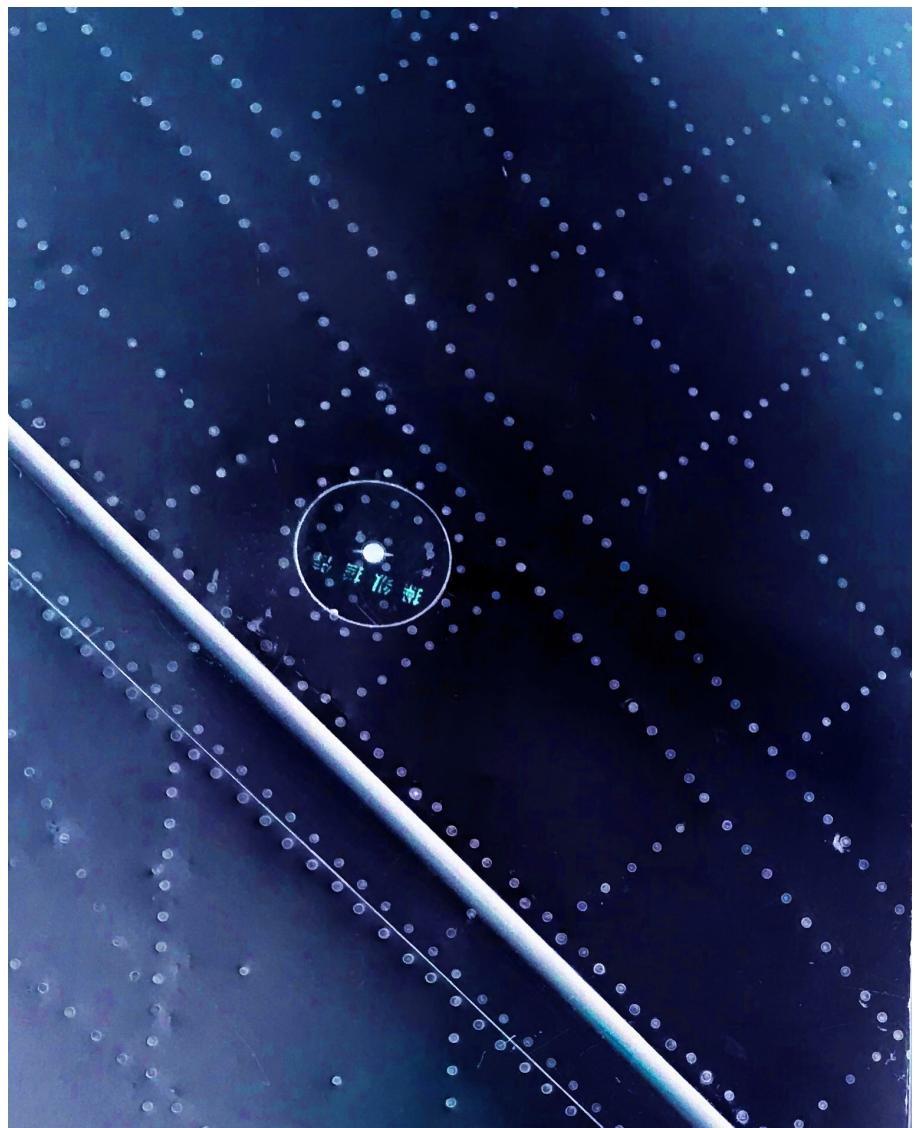




SPRING 2020 PRETHESIS BOOK

TYP.



J.SCHUBACH



TYP.

abstract

In the words of the identically named Reddit thread, “we live in a boring dystopia.” How can this condition of monotony be transfigured into one of possibility?

We can work with, not against, the realities of uniformity by transforming the banal into the beautiful: by using cheap and industrial materials to generate the unfamiliar.

A study of the work of architects and artists who have sought to inspire wonder and awe reveals six categories of formal and structural techniques that can be used to create a sense of wonder and vastness.

This thesis will work within the condition of boring dystopia to make work that inspires wonder from what is ordinary: to cheaply and economically create a sense of wonder in a school today.

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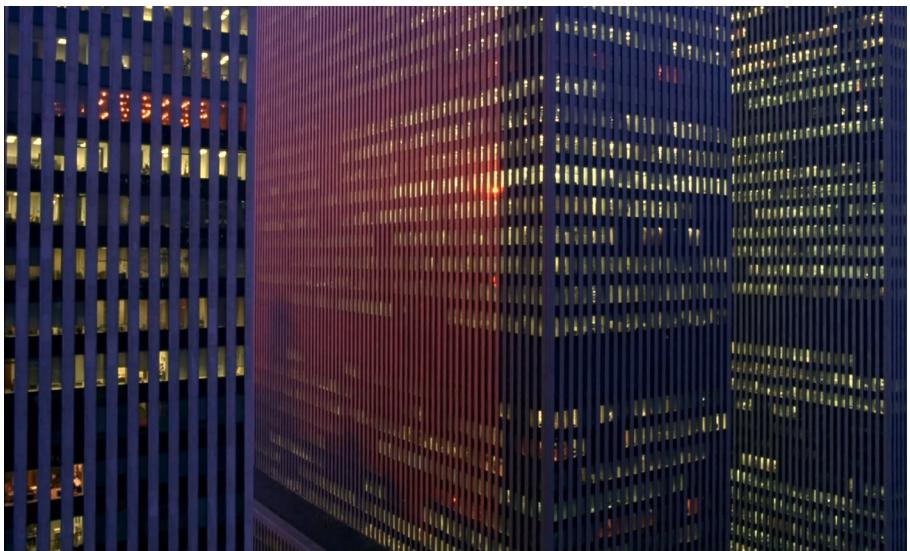
TYP.

I a boring dystopia

In the words of the identically named Reddit thread, today “we live in a boring dystopia.” We are surrounded by skyscrapers, parking lots, ports, trash, big-box stores, and housing developments—all of which are symptomatic of environmental degradation, bland urbanism, and cultural monotony. How can this condition of monotony be transformed into a condition of possibility?



TYP.



Still from "Koyaanisqatsi," R. Fricke (Cinematography), G. Reggio (Director), P. Glass (Score)

6

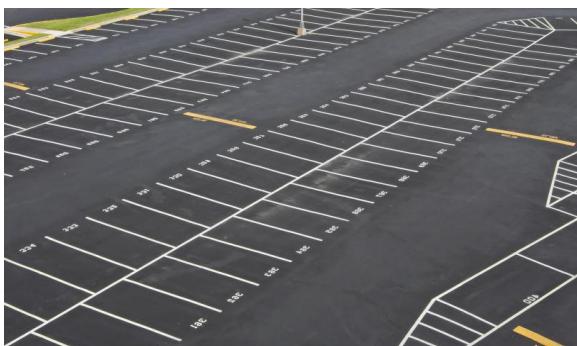


Alex Maclean, "Housing Development, Arizona" 2005



Andreas Gursky, "99 Cent Store II"

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Parking lots, stock photo



TYP.

II

cheap materials, unfamiliar details

The categories identified and explained here extend
the examples catalogued in the second booklet
Cheap Materials, Unfamiliar Details.

How is it possible to work with this reality? We can
transform the banal into the beautiful by using cheap
materials to create unfamiliarity.

cheapness

thrify glamour

ornamental infrastructures

incremental costs

perfect imperfections

celebrated reveals

unfamiliarity

abstractions

foreigners

distortions

novel forms that perform

paradoxes



TYP.

cheapness

thrify glamour

An inexpensive material that is typically understood to be “cheap,” or low in quality and used for prosaic applications, is treated or detailed in a way that makes it feel elegant. Cheap materials that look nice are often slightly shiny, matte, or have a level of texture, detail, or craft.



El Anatsui, *When I Last Wrote to You*

The scale, extents, and method of installation of the pieces makes us see the framments as a regal printed tapestry, not as trash. One obvious requirement of this work is ample labor to stitch many pieces together. This gives us a clue about the economic context that supports the creation of this kind of work: there must be many people available to help with the laborious stitching required and that labor must have a relatively low economic value that makes it financially feasible to produce such a work. How could this level of care and complexity be achieved in a different context?

CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding of material qualities and properties. Sensibility for how to express the “nature” of the material.

REQUIREMENTS

Amplifying of a quality in a material to make it feel richer often seems to lead to a field project. This means these ideas will work best with source material for which there is already a lot in the budget of the project.

HAZARDS

High costs of labor or effort that might be necessary to make the detailing of the “cheap” element elegant. If this use of the material requires multiplication, this category can also become wasteful from a material and energy standpoint.

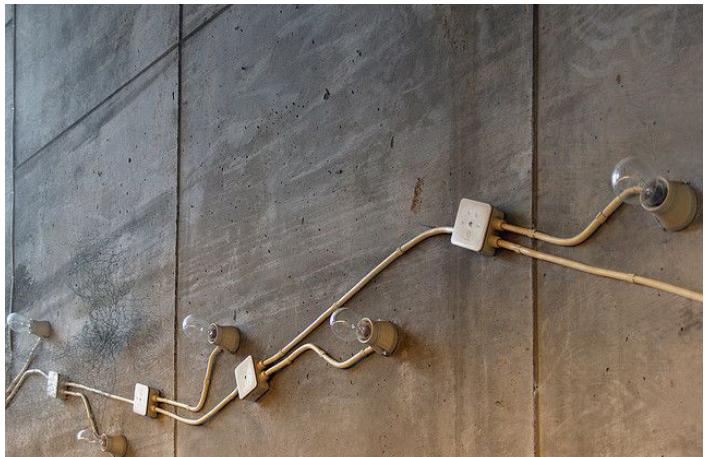


TYP.

cheapness

ornamental infrastructures

An element that is essential to the function of the building is used as ornament (therefore incremental cost is only the “price” of the planning or relocating of this element).



Sigurd Lewerentz, *Flower Shop*

The use of electrical conduit as an expressive element, a doodle on the wall, is a tradition continued by Enric Miralles, Tom de Paor, and Eric Lapierre. There is a slight increase in the cost of electrical labor, but the use of a prosaic element for added formal or syntactical benefit or ornament justifies itself.

CONSIDERATIONS

Most successful when the celebrated element gives both expression and quality to the project.

REQUIREMENTS

Understanding of necessary building systems (structure, mechanical, signage?)

HAZARDS

(1) interfering with the function of the infrastructure by making it ornament and (2) becoming involved in an uphill battle of effort to control the design of an element driven by other factors.



TYP.

cheapness

incremental costs

The modification or design of an element integral to a system that is essential to its functioning. The cost of this element is then only the “price” of modifying or customizing the essential system.



Rogerio Salmona, *University Cultural Center*

The detailing of the formwork for a cylindrical space requires only an incremental cost in labor because formwork and a way of breaking a planimetric circle into straight panels is already required. The resulting solution is to evenly fan rectangular board form clusters around the cylinder, creating the radial geometry and using the means by which this is done to add ornament.

CONSIDERATIONS

Related to understanding what is essential and will be present in the project without any argument for it from the architect.

REQUIREMENTS

Requires an understanding of construction and industrial processes. Requires seeing the inevitable and absolutely necessary ingredients in a project.

HAZARDS

Occur when the incremental cost becomes so large or the benefits become so unconvincing that it is evident it is an “add-on” and not essential to the functioning of the building.



TYP.

cheapness

perfect imperfections

The “cheap” qualities of a material are celebrated such that they become a formative and dignified condition. These projects work with inevitable processes and exacerbate and harness them to make them formative.



Alvar Aalto, *Finlandia Concert Hall*

In the harsh climate of Finland the rain-screen of thin marble shinks and expands in reaction to the extreme changes in temperature and begins to slump and peel from the substructure. The shadow lines unintentionally created by the use of this material in this climate create shadow lines that make the “damaged” surface more beautiful than it would be if they were flush.

CONSIDERATIONS

Related to seeing and understanding beauty in the reality of imperfection.

REQUIREMENTS

Requires the understanding of how to repeat the inevitable enough times such that it becomes a quality and an expression.

HAZARDS

Lack of control on the part of the designer means the detail just ends up looking cheap, or that it conveys a certain elitism that the person who owns or made the thing can afford to allow its condition to be permanently flawed.





TYP.

cheapness celebrated reveals

A material is left raw or minimally finished, making it “cheap” because less money has been put into its treatment or finishing. These projects are good when they support other functionalities.



Enric Miralles, *Casa en La Clota*

The use of ladrillo perforado on the exterior of a house exposes a material that would conventionally be hidden by rendered plaster. The use of plaster at the edges and in an intermittent patch indicates that this material is what would ordinarily be covered.

CONSIDERATIONS

Related to understanding expected norms of both culture and construction.
(typical details, courses of action, what is often overlooked)

REQUIREMENTS

To be good, these projects must have spillover benefits besides novelty: examples include saving time, money, material; supporting re-use; supporting flexibilities of use; or resonating with context in a profound way.

HAZARDS

Potential wealth and elitism implied by not having to concern oneself with a material's durability or endurance because the tendency to spend money on something that is “not nice-looking,” “not durable,” or “looks cheap” is more likely to be celebrated by those who can afford to buy or build the opposite.



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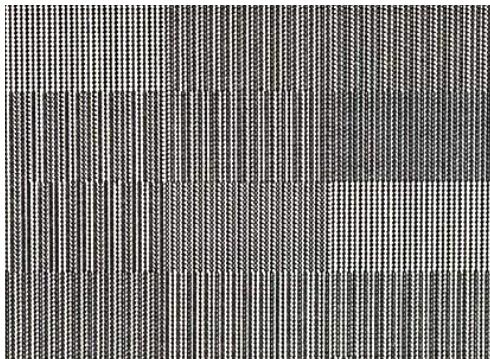
unfamiliarity

abstractions (repetition or reduction)

The multiplication and repetition of the material, or the suppression of its module, makes us read it differently when there is a lot of it. Granular things are multiplied enough to become surfaces, or big surfaces that would ordinarily be covered in expansion joints are left unmarked.

Two subcategories exist: abstraction through repetition, and abstraction through reduction. The first is the same operative principle that makes us wonder when we spell a word too many times or look at it for too long whether or not we have actually spelled it correctly; somehow our over-exposure to the word makes it look foreign to us.

The way in which this makes objects simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to us can inspire disbelief and wonder.



Carl Andre, *Poems*, Cover Image

The multiplication of letters of text makes them appear not as individual letters but as a texture or textile.





TYP.

unfamiliarity foreigners

An element that is typically used in one way is used in a foreign context or application. It is crucial that this context then gives the element a new significance or makes us see something we couldn't discern before.



Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Multiband)*

The use of road-marking paint in Mary Corse's paintings means that they appear and disappear as you move around them and they reveal themselves only as you move through the room. In comparison to the field paintings of Mark Rothko, Corse's paintings use an exotic material in the context of the gallery.





TYP.

unfamiliarity distortions

The shape or proportion of an element is manipulated to create new opportunities for use and perception. These projects are best when they offer other affordances, for example new flexibilities of function or new opportunities for noticing.



Go Hasegawa, *Sakuradi House*

A wooden horizontal surface is raised above the level of the surrounding rooms and deployed at the scale of an entire room. Is it a work surface or a room? Taking a desk and scaling it to an entire room gives it an unfamiliar proportion that in the most conservative case will generate a sense of unfamiliar proportions and in the most extreme case will generate novel scenarios of use. Is this more or less flexible than a desk?





TYP.

unfamiliarity novel forms that perform

The shape or proportion of the sub-elements that make up an element are manipulated to make it interesting and noticeable. These examples are mutually exclusive from the “unfamiliarity of proportion” examples which require the element to register as formally normal so that its scalar strangeness can be seen, but they can also be “ornamental infrastructures.” Instead of reversing dominant qualities to create unfamiliarity, they work within these intrinsic qualities to make new forms.



Manthey Kula, Akkarvik Roadside Rest Room

The web of an I-beam is twisted such that it becomes a kind of structural ornament. The novelty of the form is clear, but this must be evaluated against the additional cost of manufacturing this custom-I beam (essentially a fussy plate girder) and how the form performs (maybe this increases the rigidity or it may get light into a space than a deep web?).



TYP.

unfamiliar paradoxes

A quality we take for granted, a fundamental or defining property of something (e.g. that mirrors are reflective, pins are prickly, or windows have a fixed place on the facade) is reversed in a way that makes us remember that there might be other ways of making and being.



Doris Salcedo, *Disremembered*

Pins imply sharpness, violence, and injury, but instead of being used to convey this in an obvious or typical way, they render a delicate and complicated version of violence that is wearable; they make us wonder if the pin's defining feature is its sharpness or its delicacy and grace (in addition to making us wonder if injury is wearable and if a delicate garment can be dangerous).





TYP.

unfamiliar v. gimmicky

avoiding the one-liner



gimmicky (1):

an obvious detail that takes a material and puts it in an unfamiliar context such that it becomes obvious instead of strange, as well as ignorant of its implications

(2)

a detail that seems to ignore the tectonic realities of a material instead of using them as fuel for beauty

(3)

a detail that is too obvious and literal

(4)

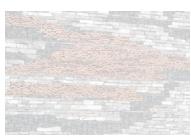
a detail that is too weird to be related to the conditions in a meaningful way



the one liner (1\):

something with a punch line that has nothing more meaningful or provocative to it beyond the immediate impact

it may be novel but it does not resonate with anything else, or make us rethink



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The more translated a conceptual intent is into architectural elements (or the less literal it is), the better it is.



TYP.

III wonder in architecture

Architects and artists in the past have used these six formal techniques to create a sense of wonder and vastness:

replication
expansion
diffusion
proliferation
recursion
combination





TYP.

IV brief

This thesis will work within the condition of boring dystopia and draw on the formal techniques of others who have sought to inspire wonder and a sense of vastness in order to cheaply and economically create a sense of wonder out of the ordinary in architecture today.

program
pedagogy
material system
site selection
research questions



TYP.

program (the spaces of the school)

A growing middle and/or high school with roughly 500 students that is expected to expand. The school experience is defined by boredom, by the pressure to conform, and thus the program for the thesis is the opportunity to create wonder out of the potential moments for boredom that define the school experience.



<u>PLANNING AREAS</u>	
1000 sfe.a.	CLASSROOMS
4000 sf	LIBRARY
80sf/student	LUNCHROOM
6000 sf	GYM
8000sf	AUDITORIUM
20 percent	CIRCULATION SPACE
8000 sf	SITE RECREATION
60-80,000 sf	TOTAL ESTIMATED AREA



TYP.

pedagogy (criteria for selection)

The thesis will pick an existing public school for middle or high-school aged kids in a district that expects growth over the next 15 years.

The thesis will use the pedagogy of the existing school as a springboard for a proposal which has two parts: the first will be a component of moderate intervention in its existing buildings and the second will be the construction of a new building to provide classroom and recreation spaces for the growing body of students.

material system (criteria for selection)

The material system of the proposal should read as familiar to the construction of a school in order for its ultimate unfamiliarity to be registered against the index of the familiar.

site selection (criteria for selection)

The site itself should be in a “boring” area that provides monotony as part of the existing urban condition to be transformed.

The selection of the school in a growing area will inform the site.

research questions (next steps)

Questions for further research to begin to generate ideas about the spatial system of the project:

SPATIAL SYSTEM

- 1 Which scales, orientations, qualities are nice in educational spaces?
- 2 What are the typological schemes of schools?
- 3 What can I come up with if I consider the typological material first?
- 4 How to get light into the hallways and have an efficient plan?

PRECEDENT

- 1 What proposals has Rossi done for schools?
- 2 How to generate abstract spatial precedents to share?
- 3 What are the site and topological plans of Kere?

PSYCHOLOGY

- 1 What do kids need to learn, spatially and perceptually?
- 2 What kinds of ventilation? Exposure to the outdoors? Proportions?
- 3 What is the psychology of boredom? How can this generate wonder?
- 4 Is there any relevant scientific literature on boredom/wonder?