

clues and buried treasures

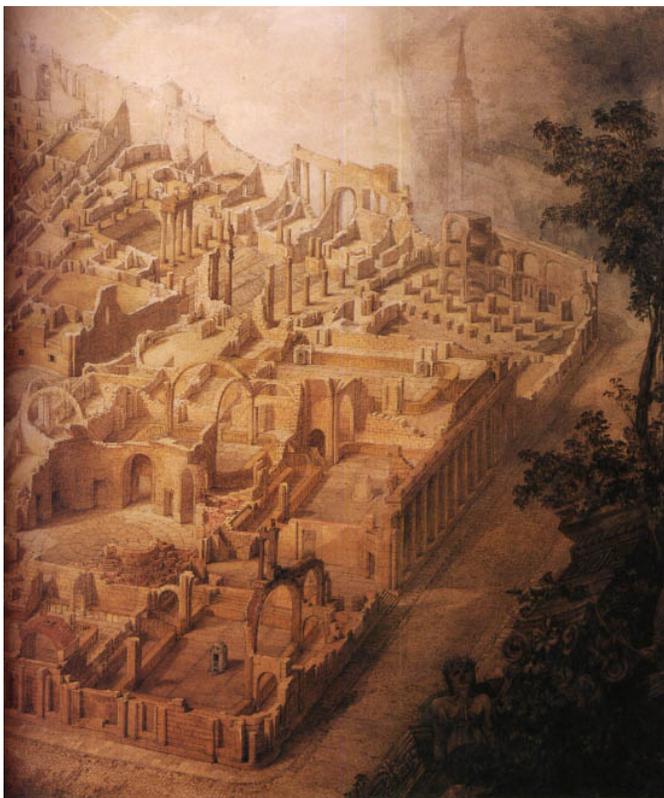
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How does a studio project hold together? Usually, it should be said, it doesn't. There is a 'problem statement' and each member of the studio goes off on a separate direction, defending their choices at a term-end critique. But, the bigger visions require group efforts, so a different concept of a project is needed. First: a strategy that allows us to both individualize and collectivize at the same time. (This will involve 'fictional' designers and design sources.) Second: a different kind of terminus, not the 'jury-style' judgment day of most projects but an event, performance, or demonstration that turns the jury into an audience. Third: work sessions where any creative discoveries ricochet around the studio and produce multiple 'nuclear reactions'. We have to give up the idea that there will be a predictable end to the project, and we have to renounce some ideas of ownership of ideas, but in exchange we adopt a more realistic practice: the kind of project that is covered by the credits at the end of a film, where the director and producer are only symbolic figures for a large group where everyone must do their own composition, rehearsal, and production.



When Katsushika Hokusai (1760 - 1849) created his famous woodcut series 'Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji', possibly with the thought in mind that each landscape is 'informed' by some distant 'antipode' that anchors meaning in a timeless pivotal point. The same universal element could be sought in the extreme variability of the scene in the foreground, a potentiality for timelessness in the midst of radical change.

Sir John Soane (1753-1837) had his chief draughtsman, Gandy, draw his proposed design for the Bank of England as a ruin, to see if it 'stood the test of time'. Every project should be envisioned as a sequence of back-and-forth movements between, generally, the 'vanishing point' of desire/aim/intention and the Real vanishing point, ruin and destruction. As back and forth sequences build up over time, a new construct can emerge by imagining a 'section' that combines the ancient with the present and future.



1. a different way to do a studio project

When Lacan says that our 'real mental life' is like the dream, where the dreamer is blind to the very future his mind is inventing, we have some clues about our own future. In the metaphor of 'Blind Man's Bluff', the Other may wander about, the audience is fixed by one foot. How does this translate to the landscape? Aren't conditions the reverse, where inhabitants wander around more or less freely? This is not such an easy question to answer, and the simplistic model of the landscape's openness is misleading. We have some things that travel with us as we move: the angle of the sun (which changes according to its own schedule), certain distant landscape features (like the constant of Mt. Fuji in the Japanese artist Hokusai's 'Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji'). Pay attention to the number '6'. It's a 'perfect number' in the sense of aliquot: $1+2+3 = 1 \times 2 \times 3$. There are other such numbers, but 6 is the most famous, and 36 is its correlate, just as 7×7 is the 'formula' for Giulio Camillo's 'Theater of Memory'.

Studio projects normally involve having all members come up with independent solutions to a common problem. The competition for the 'best' result is a combination of following the instructor's overt and covert hints, demonstrating cleverness in the 'acceptable' academic ways, and out-producing one's fellow studio members. Cooperation is minimal, results can be abysmal, and no one likes each other very much. The most objectionable part of this, however, is its isolation from real world situations, where the creation of almost any work of art requires cooperation, coordination, and varied concepts of what the final product should be. The proof of success is the public response, which in the commercial world means that people pay to experience your product. What's wrong with this model?

Nothing. What's wrong with the academic model, apart from it being unrealistic and creepy, is that it supports ideological constructs, such as the idea of competing 'inner lights' given to all young children, making them inherently brilliant and in no need of education or even advice. The inner light theory of intelligence has given us a generation of over-confident, under-performing slackers who need parental protection well past the age of 30. They don't make good artists, or much of anything else; their jobs will be taken over by the hard-working immigrants from other places, who believe in meritocracy and support it with their considerable investment of labor and intelligence. The academic model of studio plays into the inner light scheme by pretending to be a mechanism for recognizing inner lights and commending/entitling them. This leads to neotony (extended childhood) and commercialization of education as a 'product'.

The alternative is more fun, as well as productive in a real world sense. It is based on the idea that if you can think of something you can do something about it, and that the ideal project is capable of including all thought on a given matter. How? First, the final aim of the studio is 'put on hold' in favor of a constant demand for productivity and solidarity. We specify the 'end point' generically: the recovery of the idea of a 'Surrealist Garden', based loosely on the work of Raymond Roussel. (We can justify this historically as a return to the 'basics' of modernism, the point where Romanticism gave way to experiment and serious play. The idea of a garden should always be in our thoughts. What IS a garden? Why does the garden constitute a fundamental place where the human subject and the physical environment establish a 'primordially subjective' relationship? How are questions of time, space, and form CHANGED when we raise the question of the garden? All of these are important, all will remain a part of our considerations no matter what direction the studio should take.

The variables allow the studio its flexibility. The ultimate pedagogical aim of the studio is the education of its members as individuals. No member's poor performance should be allowed to deter another member's progress or high aims. So, while there will be a 'cooperative venture', the relation of any one member of the studio to the project must allow for deviation, deflection, and even defection. This is where the idea of 'fictim design' comes in. In brief, fictim design is the quick story-boarding (narrative sketch projection) of an idea, any idea. As soon as you think about something, you should quickly 'realize' it in terms of a series of events in which a fictional 'designer' takes over your role as the 'person supposed to succeed'. You can plot out their progress as a comedy or tragedy, fictionalize their personality, predict chaos or eventual success. But, the key is: you must also create PRODUCTS that are evidence of that narrative.

This degree of detachment allows you to think about the role of incompleteness, failure, idiocy, passion, etc. that permeates every real world project. Nothing is perfect; most projects in fact don't succeed. Why should we pretend that a project will succeed IF certain conditions are met when we have in fact very little idea of what conditions might be active and possibly disastrous? Anticipating failure means that we can not only learn from it without suffering all the consequences, but we can incorporate failure/ruin/reversal in a way

studio procedure

that is consistent with real world experience.

In a normal studio project, a student develops a design, the design is judged and given a grade. In fictim design, a narrative is created involving a student (or someone similar) who develops a design but runs into trouble, changes his/her mind, achieves enlightenment, falls on hard times, takes a trip, etc. The narrative must not only tell the story, but it must produce samples of the work of the fictional student (or whoever the narrative is about). It is not directly representational. It represents some representation process.

There are rules and suggestions for this game. See below.

WHAT EVERY STUDIO NEEDS:

- A strategy board, showing the ongoing activities and projects of the members.
- A clerk of the works who keeps records of personnel (fictive and actual) and coordinates billing.
- Scout teams, to respond quickly to studio needs, such as securing show spaces, screening locations, catering, entertainment.
- A librarian, able to access resources, to store documents, to do small-scale research.
- Musicians, film-makers, print-makers, IT technicians, set-builders, lighting designers, and other technical personnel to facilitate the actualization of real events. (See 'skills sign-up sheet'.)
- Public relation tacticians who remember to write thank-you notes, send out notices, coordinate teams, and keep peace with other studios and the administration.



The cartoonist Saul Steinberg (1914-1999) was famous for his materializations of the artistic 'condition'.

2. tasks and obligations

The role of the studio member shall be that of a semi-independent contractor. The contractors bill (the instructor) for services rendered and products produced. If the service is not adequate or the product damaged or inferior, the bill is in dispute. Generally, billing is based on hourly rates: \$20/hour for basic labor, \$40/hour for professional goods/services; \$1000/day for consulting. Works of art, original narratives, etc. are priced according to the prevailing market. The billing procedure insures that studio members think of what they are doing in terms of potential value as well as actual inputs. Materials can also be billed but should be listed separately.

Projects begin as proposals, reviewed by the instructors and coordinated with other work. The instructors can also solicit services and products. In general, the central project resembles the process of commercial film production. Each studio member, however, may perform multiple tasks, some menial, some managerial/creative. Each member must, to facilitate this, invent and provide a series of at least four pseudonyms, for billing and credits.

3. the first production

Producer/director Kevin Benham has already specified the first project: design of devices to measure the properties of a landscape/site. Following advice given in the marrell on site planning, an exhibition will be on display. A team of site scouts will secure a place and time for the exhibit, another crew will organize the event itself: an 'opening', modeled after the tradition of the *vernissage* (the final varnishing of the painting which, in the days of l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, was a public and very social celebration). The site modeling instruments must be working models, although their results may be fictionalized, even to the point of fantasy. Consulting teams may be organized to develop several competing ideas. Reference to Roussel will be especially apt.

4. the central issue of the subject

So, why have we been watching films? Modernism has taught us a few things about the subject. First, with industrialization, the Western subject over the past 200 years has become alienated (the old cliché, the basis of Marxism). More accurately, the already-alienated subject attached his/her traumatic condition to the structure of consumerism and commodification (also a point made by Marx). The subject has not changed much over the eons (we all have fathers and mothers) but the symbolic systems whose major work is to POSITION the subject have, and it is these systems we, as designers, are destined to influence. Why did Freud at first focus on the issue of 'the uncanny'? Because the uncanny reveals, as no other topic can, the historical place and empirical consequences of the Enlightenment's project to substitute stable systems of opposition (subject/object, inner/outer, mind/body, etc.) in the place of pre-Enlightenment 'blurrings' that were situated within customs of religion, myth, magic, and belief. The blurring still took place, but the Enlightenment dealt with it defensively, attempting to 'explain it' or to characterize it as error or ignorance. The uncanny is the universal key, a means of going back to a key point in history and opening up the past, of digging up ancient civilizations, as it were.

How is the subject known/knowable? Only by other subjects, making the issue of intersubjectivity and self-reference all the more important. No doctor is entirely well, no psychiatrist is free from neurosis or worse. There is no ideal position, no 'subject supposed to know', only fantasy projections of ideal points of view that are sustained through art, imagination, and/or ideology. The artist-architect-designer takes the position that knowing can take place only indirectly, through an investment in the objects created with an esthetic-subjective motive (i.e. ones that involve the idea of an audience). It is here that the idea of the uncanny becomes critical.

This is not a studio about personal development per se. Your personal development will remain your own business. Rather, it is the insistence on a context that can possibly sustain variety and complexity within the superstructure of cooperative efforts leading to a 'single' project. The model for such products is the anthology, the structural basis for the film *Dead of Night*. In this work, we learn how separate parts may be placed through a logic of a linking narrative that itself has discovery capabilities. But, in general, the linking narrative need achieve the minimal status of the Hitchcockian 'MacGuffin' — a (mostly) gratuitous element that satisfies the audience's need to justify its attention and suspension of disbelief. When you learn how to respect the audience, you will have learned much about the human subject in general. Respect is built around the idea of the partial object, the renunciation of control, the parallel re-structuring of space and time around the 'inside frame', and the logic of 'suture' (putting the audience's 'REAL' body inside the work of art — *tuché*).

There is no reason that any studio member's interests cannot be accommodated within the structure of this layered, 'fictive' approach. Each member, however, must regard the studio as the primary audience for individual expressions, and must enter into the barter system to exchange talent for talent, product for product, service for service (or one kind of good for another). An isolated member will run the risk of being treated as source material by the group!

WHAT EVERY STUDIO WANTS:

- Regular screenings of films that entertain and instruct. The screenings could also provide a public service by making available films that are rarely seen in commercial venues.
- Good critics and consultants, who are able to pick up on the idea of the Surrealist garden quickly enough to realize that it is not a 'traditional design project'.
- Money.
- Individual satisfaction, that each member's work is personally creative and important, that the studio can pay off hard work in terms of real enlightenment on many levels.
- Final products, the result of group efforts, that inspire others and create, within this #1 landscape school, the #1 studio.
- Love. Jealousy is not enough. Other studios (especially architecture studios) should want to copy us. LSU should not be the same after this semester. This is only possible if the final event is a simultaneous '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' involving music, performance, and the enjoyment of visual spectacle. (Note: even traditional studio projects can live up to much of this ideal; the only extra requirement is the structure of performance/exhibit.)