UC Berkeley

Room One Thousand

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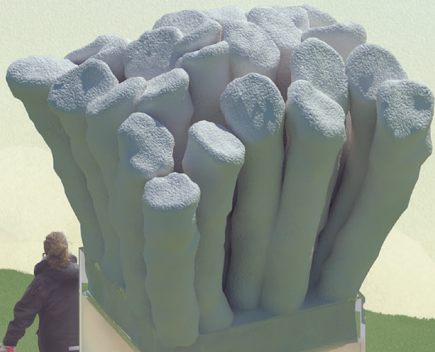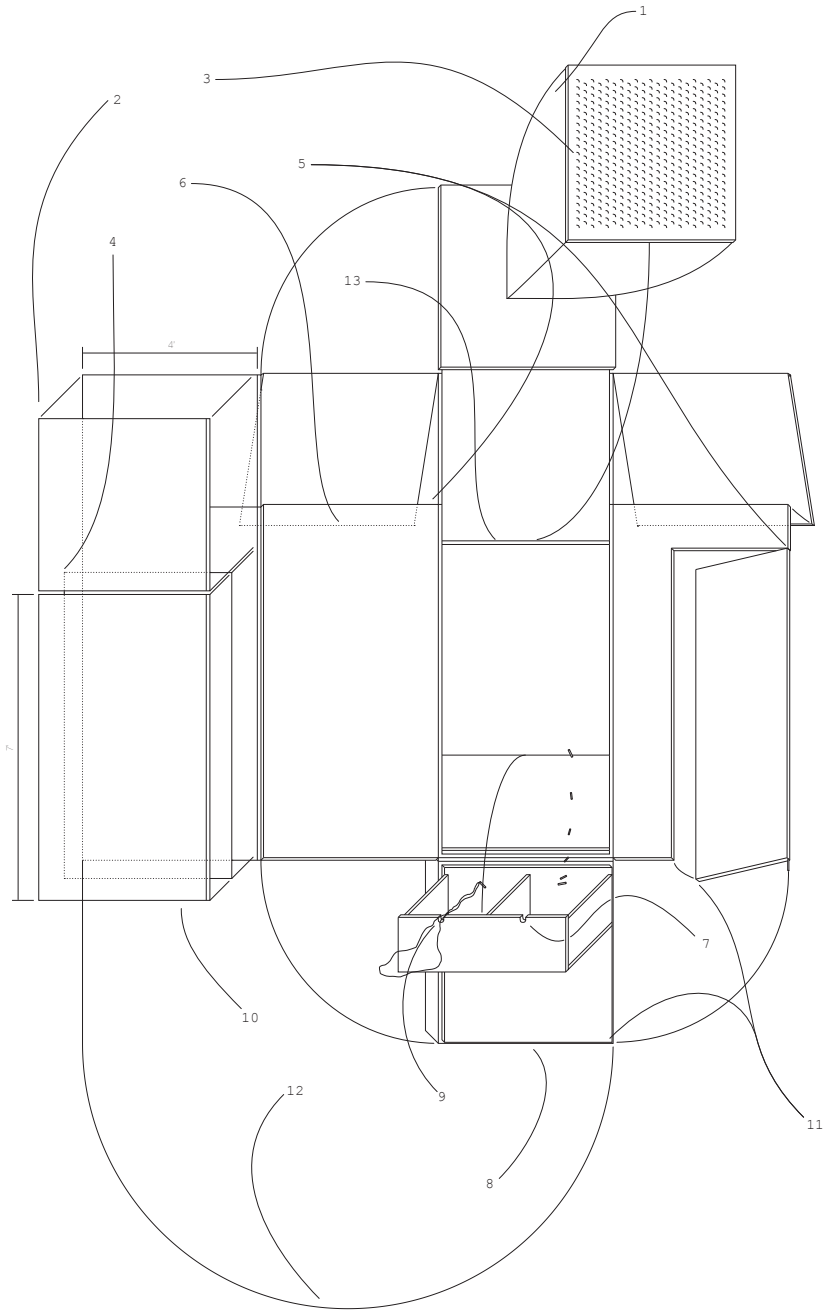
Apparent Folly No. 1

Made by me for bringing Peter and Christopher back together again, to smoke or not. For this booth is a mistake, an architecture in action. One which begs your response to a smoky question.

Luring you through hazy abstractions of space, time, matter and nonsense to draw your own conclusions. Just as Erasmus's Folly herself seduces us with its *goofy grin* and *eyes of idiocy*. Does it (She) provide a meaning. Perhaps an answer to Follies' past, *hedonistic indifference*? Or, is it just a place, a space in which we might begin to question the hazier parts of our collective yearning.

To smoke or not, that is its *question*?

The Note

I once heard a story about a note.
The note said "add more lines for credibility." An oddity, an oversight, a remnant left behind, and perhaps a fiction. We may never know whether Eisenman intentionally planned to leave these clues for the historians, and perhaps this is best. The sentiment is simple. The architect's job is to convince. To justify the validity of a work. Unlike a builder or a business person, the architect's job is to cause others to believe in something that has never existed before. To procure the future through a drawing, obliquely drawing on the future as some would say.

Was the contractor convinced?

A Myth

We're left wondering, and it's better this way. This story may have originated with a certain historian who will go unnamed for now. If it was you, please never tell. It's a myth and we don't often get new ones anymore. We need more myths. I want to believe in this note. To believe that there is power in a representation. Power enough to convince someone to build; to believe in an idea. One which might not be possible.

This myth is powerful because it calls into question our purpose as architects, the notion of *expertise*.[1] Perhaps our expertise is not, as it is so often told, to be generalists. Perhaps we are magicians, or clerics, or mystics like Plato's Socrates – asking seemingly mundane questions, engaging others in the apparently irrelevant.

If our expertise is telling the future – in convincing others to do what has not been done – we also have a great responsibility. To decide what and how to question. And that might just stand squarely in the face of our pesky, nearly universally agreeable and evaluative criterion

ambiguity.[2]

1 Architects as different from builders. See Robin Evans's "Translations from Drawings to Buildings," for a description of how architects in not working directly through medium of buildings must instead rely upon drawings and other languages of architecture to design (Evans 1997).

2 Michael Meredith's recent essay "Towards the Body of Work" takes on a serious contemporary problem by asking what our evaluative criterion are now (Meredith 2015)? He is adamant that there are "no objective standards on which to base a discussion of buildings other than, perhaps, the pervasive Wölfflinian art-historical method of simple comparison." Instead he provides the notion of the body work which incorporates the full array of artifacts into one difficult whole, a purposeful misreading of Venturi's 'difficult whole' from *Complexity and Contradiction* (Venturi 1966). This is important to Meredith as it reasserts the agency of the architect, the voice of the author.

Ambiguity

It is so pervasive, so dominating, that it hasn't been questioned properly. The processes of abstraction are so deeply ingrained in pedagogy, technique, and method that they serve as a basis for nearly all architectural innovation.[3] One perspective suggests that through abstraction we discover that which we could not see before. The idea that through the resulting ambiguous artifacts – writing, modeling, and drawing – practitioners make something and through it discover something else, something entirely novel to them. It is a tested process. It works. And it depends on the artifact not having a clear, or intended, or *directed message*. These would occlude the ambiguity necessary to find something new. *It* also leads to a strange desire for things, objects and drawings, and buildings that are abstract. Who are ambiguous.[4] The results of abstraction are now an *aesthetic of ambiguity*, separate from the processes of abstraction which are so valuable to thinking.

Ambiguity as an aesthetic has a purpose.[5] It disguises authorship. It is a secret expertise with a determined purpose. Aesthetic ambiguity provides the capacity to project meanings into a work, built or presentational.[6] When one asks, "what is that building about?" *it* secretly smiles, knowing that's exactly what *it* wants. *It* wants to provoke interest, enough to allow one to project their own meanings into a work. *It*'s searching for the perfection of things which say nothing and can be sold.

Ambiguity resolves the inherent contradictions between the many parties involved in a project, allowing *it* to be about nothing. The contractors, engineers, developers, marking agents, photographers, and range of technical specialists all engage in providing a layered multi authored construction. *It*'s far easier to get everyone on board working simultaneously together, yet apart, when the message is up to them. *It*'s not lying, it's just making use of the multiple meanings which linger within any work. *It* is productive.

3 I am purposefully naive.

4 I don't take these words lightly, and meaningly confuse them for the sake of ambiguity at this point in this essay. For a thorough investigation into the uses of ambiguity in literature and poetry see William Epson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Epson defines ambiguity as a quality we recognize when there could be a puzzle to what the author meant, intended, and that the alternative views can be taken without relying upon intentionally misreading their work (Epson 1949, p.X).

5 As an aesthetic, valued for its look and feel, ambiguity has become an object surmounting its use as an operative tool. Jacques Rancière's notions of 'sayable' and 'visible' from the *Future of the Image* is relevant here (Rancière 2007). See book review (Vermeulen 2010) and for an introduction to Rancière's thinking see Slavoj Zizek writing under the pseudonym Eugene Wolters (Wolters 2013). In an aesthetic image, the sayable is subsumed by what is visible in the image. That is to say, that the message, what is being said, or the sayable, is overwhelmed by what is actually in the image, what we see. What is being said is lost amongst what is seen. One could relate this to being in a crowded restaurant, our friend trying to convey their desire to start a yogurt company (*boring*) and you not being able to hear them, the restaurant too loud, the noise, the setting overwhelming the discourse, what is trying to be said. In this case quite literally. The aesthetic of the dining room numbing us to our own dismal conversation.

6 Presentation as opposed to representation as opposed to re-presentation. I digress.

But who cares. Is ambiguity a problem? Aren't the only metrics of value the pseudo environmental ones – the "performance" of a building? Shouldn't this be a good thing?. If architecture believes in plurality, in many voices, one where everyone can imagine different meanings, has architecture has done its social duty. Provided the containers necessary for the longevity of discussions, perpetuating conversation. A kind of timelessness not based in materiality, but rather in the discipline's conversational underpinnings.

A timelessness that's not forever, but endlessly engaging.[7]

Ambiguity allows designers to read into their own work, discovering something new as a artist might in the process of sculpting beyond the *non finito* of their work. For the astute aficionados the *non finito* presents a plurality of options – each, perhaps, worthy of contemplation. But there is a downside. In an aesthetic of ambiguity we loose the ability to imbue a specific, directed meaning into a work. Its meaning becomes neutral, assailable by anyone, convertible to any purpose.

7 This is the timelessness of Eisenman, a timelessness he would reject for the connotations the term provokes. See Eisenman's discussion of timelessness in "The End of the Classical …" (Eisenman 1984). It is not one based on ideals, forms, or analogical references to the past. Rather this is a *timelessness* of conversation. About the texts, buildings, models, drawings, lectures, and personas forming the difficult whole of architecture as a cultural production. This body of work perpetuates conversations between architects and other architects, and occasionally those outside the field. Columbia University's 2014 "The Building" conference offers a fascinating discussion of the roles which buildings play in the context of architecture.

Allegory

If architecture is thought of as a conduit for conversation, who is it in dialogue with? Ambiguity is positioned as a productive means for architects to engage other architects. But for those outside the profession this conversation through artifacts remains opaque.

What are those Libeskind window cuts about anyways?[8]

Allegorical images contain obscured meanings. Often these messages are veiled behind a slew of symbolic clues and markers which simultaneously offer two intentions requiring an interpretation to dismantle and understand. In this way allegory is partially ambiguous as it offers a clear meaning to those who decipher it. Making the message ambiguous through symbols lures the viewer into constructing the embedded meaning of a work which provides a use of ambiguity very different from an aesthetic of ambiguity. An aesthetic which does not attempt to embed specific meaning into a work.[9]

Architectural historians and theorists such as Christina Whitehead and Penelope Haralambidou have written on the subject of allegory in medieval and contemporary periods, respectively. Both authors use allegorical theorizations from literature to posit narrative as a means towards understanding the allegorical features of architecture and perhaps its creation.

Haralambidou focuses on a series of unbuilt paper-architecture projects by Johnathan Hill, Rem Koolhaas, Ben Nicholson, and Mike Webb. Each project is an attempt, through allegorical drawings, to critique the social, cultural, and disciplinary structures in which the architecture acts. Haralambidou's examples are explicitly about allegory working within an architectural discourse, occurring in the presentation rather than the built artifact.

8 Jeffrey Kipnis explains these windows for a general interest lecture, providing a means of understanding their symbolic purpose in the Berlin Holocaust museum. The legibility of the window's cut is limited. On the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, or ROM, in Ontario what do these windows reference? Perhaps in their relocation from Berlin to Toronto they have become merely an extension of the architect's *esquisse*. The signature which makes the icon. (Kipnis 2008, 8m:30s)

9 Bainard Cowan describes this process as a "transformation of things into signs" that is "both what allegory does – its technique – and what it is about – its content." The transformation of things into signs obscure meaning. This quote has been previously been ambiguously attributed to Walter Benjamin in both West 2008, Haralambidou 2007. Bainard Cowan uses a collection of notes and Benjamin's life long interest in Baudelaire in an attempt to reconstruction Benjamin's theory of allegory. (Bainard 1984, p110)

What if one attempted to build an allegorical architecture. Is this possible? What would it look like?

One recent example is FAT's final work, A House for Essex.[10] A project for philosopher Alain de Botton's Living Architecture project done in collaboration with the artist Grayson Perry. The seventh holiday rental home, built for a continuing series of high style architectural "houses" allowing anyone to experience the finest in contemporary architecture for not much more than the price of a BnB. FAT and Perry's "pilgrimage chapel," as described by the Living Architecture foundation, contains a narrative about a fictionalized Essex Everywoman, Julie May Cope, who was born on Canvey Island in 1953, raised in social housing until her eventual death at the fender of a pizza delivery moped. Her life's narrative forms the allegorical core of this secular chapel.[11] The events of her life – crafted by Perry – line every aspect of the home, from its Matryoshka doll formal arrangement to the 1,924 hand made terra-cotta tiles which veneer its exterior. Continuing the narrative is a series of bath, body and life products: tote bags, cotton tea towels mapping the timeline of Julie's life, colourful cushions with a variety of iconic Cope family "crests", and two plates which show Julie in butter cream silhouette – in one feeding her two children in and in the other visiting the Taj Mahal.[12] These allegorical products commodify the experience and allow the chapel to extend its reach beyond the confines of the Essex site. Each day we can eat off the plate where Julie feeds her children and are reminded of her story, her allegory – asked to digest her lesson, the lesson of "The House for Essex."

Continuing what Adam Miller suggests is a *mimetic* architecture of surface, FAT's final project works through the layering of a variety of surface tiles along with intricate tapestries to tell her story.[13] But the home also works on another level. A close inspection of its plans reveals that the closets in each of the two bedrooms have a second door in the rear,

10 Fashion Architecture Taste, or FAT, closed their doors in the summer of 2014, which was announced by them in December of 2013. Their final work, A House for Essex, could be see as a planned exit, a final hooray in their attempt to challenge the orthodoxy of modernist good taste.

11 The mainstream media have called this a secular chapel. (Jodelka 2015)

12 Which can be purchased through Wrabness Community Shop (a local vendor in Essex) and globally through the *Tate Shop* <http://shop.tate.org.uk/page/

13 See Adam Miller's article "Saturated FAT" in this very issue for a discussion of FAT's use of surface in architecture and its relation to the "mimesis of architecture." (Miller 2016)

opening onto balconies which look over the double height living room. A spatial-symbolic which claims the dressing room as a stage. One where we might dress while performing, being watched in our own *domus essex* – a stage for the spectacle of the domestic.

But what is its allegorical message? Perry suggests that the house is a monument to "thwarted female intelligence."[14] Is the home valorizing the feminized domestic of the many Essex women who have led lives resembling parts of Julie's own?
One way to probe the allegorical meaning further is to ponder what the house asks of us. What does it question? Perhaps it asks what it means to be a domestic Essex house-person in the 21st century? It does so by depicting the life of a fictionalized 20th century Essex Everywoman through the architecture, the space, the surface, and the *accouterment décor*. Are Julie and Claire, Grayson's own constructed cross dressing alter ego, two sides a the same coin? His life story the substance of this allegory?

Expertise

Whether buildings should be a medium for cultural, behavioral, and social critiques is at the core of architecture's existential crisis to define itself. [15] Whatever one's answer there will always be those who desire to imbue their architectural work with cultural critique. If one believes in Eisenman's myth, that representations are powerful enough to convince others to do the seemingly impossible, then there is a duty to take built allegories seriously.

Allegory abstracts its meanings through symbolic cues, creating tension requiring interpretation. The allegories in architectural drawings are mostly inaccessible to the broader public. A built allegory which asks a clear question such as that of FAT's House for Essex attempts to make its allegory legible to a wider audience, but it relies conspicuously on narrative, the authorship of an artist.[16]

How should architects begin to address building allegories? What tools would one need to create

14 Jodelka 2015

15 This perennial question takes on many forms and is perhaps most directly articulated by the 1982 Eisenman v. Alexander debate at Harvard entitled "Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture." In this debate Eisenman critiques Alexander for promoting an architecture which does nothing to comment on our contemporary cultural condition. Alexander's response is simple. He cannot imagine having to make a table that is booth a good table while also making a table which comments on the state of nuclear warfare (Teyssot 1983).

16 Is Grayson Perry's authorship necessary, or could FAT have authored this narrative themselves?

17 Apparent because unlike most follies these have a clear purpose, and are also simultaneously filled with the errors in my ways, the folly of the builder. Folly as a metaphorical creature is extensively considered in In Praise of Folly by Desiderius Erasmus, 1511. The book was illustrated by Hans Holbein the Younger, and recently used by Sam Jacob, formerly of FAT, to praise folly once more in "Dumb and Dumber: In Praise of Follies." (Jacob 2014)

18 I would accept sponsorship from either company.

19 The UC campuses, including Berkeley's, went tobacco free on January 1st, 2014. This slight technicality means that other forms of smoking, such as marijuana fall into some kind of grey area. E-cigarettes and other smokeless tobacco products were also banned to the lament of researchers such as Igor Burstyn a professor of public health at Drexel who suggested that the FDA's silence on e-cigarettes should not be considered an indictment (Guzman 2013). Furthermore some medical practitioners are now suggesting that nicotine could be good for some people, helping them lead happier lives (Fels 2016). Of course the ban has much to do with the image of smoking, and the image of university in condemning the act. It is a public relations marketing move just as much as it is motivated by health of campus community.

20 CBS 2013

21 One could begin to debate the various merits of disguising between negative and positive notions of freedom as made by Isaiah Berlin in his 1958 lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty". But lets spare this digression and remain on this hazy avenue.

22 Smoking booths such as those in Frankfurt's international airpot are of this variety, one which enable the technical requirements of air filtration, natural light, views, and other basic comforts. They resemble slightly enlarged telephone booths and are arranged at regular intervals along the concourse. Each is walled in with glass on at least 2-3 sides, enabling
the spectacle of being seen and also so they're not as claustrophobic.

them? Are there non-narrative means to producing allegorical Architecture?

The notion of asking questions containing many answers provides an opportunity to build allegories. Recently I have attempted to design a series of *Apparent Follies*, each tasked with asking a question about some aspect of our contemporary lives.[17] One of these follies, or secular chapels, began by questioning our ethical and moral obligations towards smoking.

The answer created some *room to smoke.*

Smoking Room

The ads littering the pages of this issue depict this hazy experiment, which presents an allegorical architecture operating within a clear ethical and moral framework.

To be constructed from 4 ft x 8 ft plexiglass sheets commonly available at Home Depot or Lowes, this smoking room provides a space and an object in which one might smoke without second hand effects.[18] In doing so it removes certain social stigmas conjured by smoking – placing the consequences in the hands of the would be smoker. In a way it reasserts the choice to smoke by providing the opportunity. Simultaneously it becomes a reflective window to question the very act.

The room was designed as a response to a decision to make all University of California campuses smoke free by 2014.[19] Making an entire environment smoke free has implications for the future of architectural design. In the not–to–distant future, entire municipalities will begin to ban smoking in their communities.[20] Yet as prohibition in 1920s Progressive America clearly shows, outright prohibition of substances tends to result in a domino effect of ever worsening societal consequences. Some members of Berkeley's campus lamented the ban and suggested that students would simply find secret places to smoke out of sight, in the shadows.

Society's base responsibility to protect us from one another will eventually lead to a ban on smoking in all outdoors locations, yet there will always be smokers.[21] And so, as with Berkeley's campus, our future will demand that architects begin to consider the design of spaces dedicated to smoking beyond the mere technical requirements of ventilation and basic comfort.[22] These spaces help to resolve the ethical duty of government to protect us from one another while allowing the moral choice to remain in the hands of an individual. This distinction enhances our plural society and necessitates an architectural intervention beyond the mere technical requirements.

If prompted to design a smoking room one would encounter a strange moral dilemma. The architecture should neither encourage nor discourage smoking. It should remain morally neutral. Yet the room should actively engage people in the smoking question. It must become a didactic tool, both raising our awareness of smoking while enabling the smoking society of the spectacle.[23]

A glass box might seem like the last place one would want to smoke, yet some smoke simply to be seen. Two shoji screens adorn opposite walls, sandwiched between a double plexiglass layer which provides structural support to the top plate holding the filter.[24] These smoked transparencies create a booth in which we are seen and occluded – perhaps by the very smoke which engulfs us. Its form and arrangement are symbolic and functional references to the filter of a cigarette, inverting the smoke's flow towards the opposite direction.

Over time the booth would darken – its pristine white interior stained, as an instrument, a measure of past acts within. The seat for butts – of more than one variety – furthers the instrumental quality of this folly by collecting the smoker's refuse.

The booth is ethically sound in that it resolves part of the social problem.[25] It relieves our physical environment of the smoke, second hand and

23 Guy Debord was an avid pipe smoker, clear from the many staged portraits of him in which nearly all he is smoking a pipe or occasionally a cigarette. He is listed as a pipe smoker on the pipe smoking enthusiast site (Fumeurs) <http://www.fumeursdepipe.net/personnalites16.htm>. And is also claimed as a mascot of sorts for the "Pro Smoking Blog" (Guy 2009) <http://ineedsmokes.blogspot.com/2009/04/guy-debord.html>.

24 These Shoji screens could curate slogans from tobacco company advertisements and simultaneously slogans from antismoking campaigns. Adding another layer of mediation, one enabled through words much like early Las Vegas where many signs used words instead of symbols. Check out Stanford's School of Medicine site about the impact of tobacco advertising where many of these historic slogans have been curated. (Stanford)

25 By removing second hand smoke the direct effects of smoking are stopped. Smoking adds heavily to the social cost of health care for those who choose to smoke, a cost we end up all sharing. Additionally, smoking effects the environment through big-agri-tobacco farming and the litter of cigarette butts, which is the only socially acceptable forms of littering left according to The Tobacco Atlas. These secondary effects are no less important but offer an ethical grey area. (Tobacco 2015). For details on tobacco control policies see Donley Studlar's 2002 book which examines their politics and history in the USA and Canada (Studlar 2002).

otherwise. Creating a place in which we might choose to smoke, or not, is its job. We might choose to stare into it, or not. We might choose to comment to our friend, or a stranger, about the moral correctness of smoking. And in this way the booth is still ambiguous. The smoking booth is neither positive nor negative about the act it attempts to contain, but it is specific in its positioning – morally directed towards the issue of smoking. If architecture should be critical of our political, social, and cultural collectivity then we as practitioners have a duty to find ways to do so. Perhaps this is all architects can attempt to provide for our pluralistic society. Allegory and the process of asking questions without proving answers is one means.

The advertisements in this journal are an architecture in themselves, some allegorical representations and others exercises in adding more lines. Each ad is attempting to lure a different group capable of funding its construction. It would be best if they all did so simultaneously as the room's inherent contradictions would extend into its financing. A single room with two agendas and multiple readings. If ever built it would be yet another contradiction. The smoking room[26] a place to ask The Question:

To smoke, or not?

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Ortho Chicken No.13, from the series Just Drawn which investigates the potential of just drawing things flat which then aren't – 2D controls manifesting as a rendering, extending the ortho beyond the graphite. Nostalgia for something that never was.

"'A *smoking booth* is the perfect type of pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied...'"

Oskar Wylde

A *room* for your

nly yours to smoke

What more could one ask for?