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PRISON TALK: A NEW LEXICON

JOLANDA DEVALLE / M. ARCH II, 2018

In response to the New Yorker article by Bill Keller, "Reimagining Prisons with Frank Gehry" published on December 21, 2017.

"As students laid out their cardboard models for inspection and pinned up their master plans, it was clear that most had ignored the part about "men convicted of serious, primarily violent offenses." They presented prison as a university campus, prison as a health and wellness facility, prison as a monastery, prison as a communal apartment complex, prison as a summer camp, prison as a textile workshop (Complete with a mulberry orchard to feed the silkworms). Virtually every student incorporated classrooms, open space and fresh air, and spaces for family visits and therapy."

Last semester, as part of the travel and research for the Gehry studio, we learnt many things about the reality of prisons in America.

We learnt that nowadays a person can be legally shut away in a segregated unit, with no human contact, for decades. A standard "cell" is a cupboard with an open-air toilet at the foot of the bed. Abuse from officers is not unusual, overcrowding is typical, it is normal to have to sleep at night with a bright neon light merely a few inches from one's face. We looked into the eyes of women who had just stepped out into the free world after thirty-five years, and we met twenty-year-olds sentenced for life. We paced down corridors with no daylight, no ventilation, just a turquoise linoleum floor with a yellow line in the middle separating the flow of those that are incarcerated from those that are free.

When we came back to the studio, we knew that we could not design a "prison", at least not in the traditional sense. Prison architecture in America is essentially mean — these lifeless buildings of concrete and metal are built to separate, control, and punish. Therefore, in order to present a thorough critique of the architecture of American prisons today, it became imperative to completely reassess the typology. For most of us, this meant fundamentally rewriting the idea of incarceration. What did a restorative facility look like? What new way of framing the issue could lead to a more positive and more productive time in prison? What was possible? These were a few of the questions we asked ourselves, especially after visiting alternative prison systems in Finland and Norway. These systems had offered us tangible proof that it was possible to dream of "another way," with more rewarding results from pragmatic, financial, and humanistic perspectives.

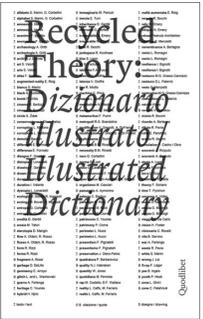
Each of us chose to focus on a particular issue in incarceration. One student, for example, tackled the issue of illiteracy among the prison population; another, the problem of mental health. As a result, many projects appropriated themes and ideas pertaining to other typologies — schools, for example, or clinics — in an attempt to rethink the prison as a more restorative and productive institution, aimed towards betterment rather than punishment. We chose specific words like "park," "path," "college," "house," "dorm," and "commune" to frame our projects in a way that broadened the idea of what a prison building could be, allowing us to reimagine this institution in a more progressive way.

This semantic reconceptualization was not limited to our individual projects, but extended to all our discussions regarding the topic of incarceration: we called inmates "residents", guards were "correctional officers", cells were "rooms," etc. It was a collective exercise in reformulating the lexicon of prison architecture in an attempt to assert a sense of humanity and of compassion — an enterprise strongly supported by Frank, who exhorted us throughout the whole semester to be empathetic, and to use emotion as the guiding light of our designs.

In this sense, Bill Keller's account of our end-of-semester presentation seems to have misunderstood the fundamental idea behind our intentional — albeit idealistic — projection of prisons into other dimensions of existence, be these of educational establishments, health facilities, communal apartments, or workshops. Sticking to the notion of "prison as prison" would have constituted failure on our part to properly re-evaluate the issue at hand. In addition, doing so would have meant accepting a two-century-long roster of crippling projects, stretching from the terrifying notions of isolation and repentance found in the Quaker prototypes—the Eastern State and Auburn Penitentiaries—to the obsession over control in Bentham's Panopticon. The history of prison architecture is rife with alarming connotations. In order to move the discussion on incarceration forward, it was necessary for us break from old habits. A "prison as prison" simply could not, and would not, do. ■

1/29 Uneventful.

1/20 Phil Bernstein wants to go to the "hell" his gonna hit the fan" in his presentation titled "Employment Strategy and Opportunities in the 21st Century" during lunch as part of the Career Development Workshop. "Don't worry though, not for another three years". First year a unemployed.



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SWEET HOME TENAYUCA: JOSEF ALBERS AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF MEANING

SURRY SCHLABS / PH.D, 2018

In the late 1930s, while on sabbatical from Black Mountain College, Josef Albers embarked on a series of projects exploring the problem of "permanent change"¹ in visual art, a course of research and production interrogating the ambiguity of linear construction and the relational nature of color, and signaling a major transition in his work, one that would culminate, in 1947, with the first of Albers's major post-war color studies, the *Variation* series. While the earliest of these works exhibited the same radically abstract approach to composition associated with both that series and Albers's later *Homage to the Square*, it was given a far more curious and evocative title, "Tenayuca," in reference to the pre-Columbian settlement of the same name, with its great pyramid, situated on the northern edge of what is now Mexico City. (Fig. 1)

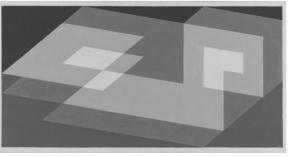


FIG.1 Josef Albers, "Tenayuca" (1943)

An early study for "Tenayuca," from 1938, demonstrates the rigor with which Albers constructed the linear framework underlying his later painting. (Fig. 2) The work itself is both fixed and flat, self-conscious in its construction as a two-dimensional graphic composition. Yet its use of parallel, oblique lines suggests an illusionistic space beyond the plane of the picture, albeit one that continually contradicts itself, as the viewer's eye passes from left to right and back again, the composition fluctuating between intimations of surface and depth, plane and volume. Suffice it to say, these concerns appear at first glance to have very little to do with the architectural monuments of ancient Mesoamerica. So why "Tenayuca"? What did Albers, as tireless an advocate of modernist abstraction as any, intend to communicate with this highly referential, historically and culturally loaded title?

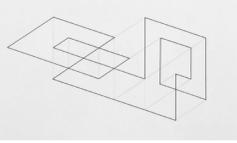


FIG. 2 Josef Albers, Study for "Tenayuca" (1938)

The group of remarkable photomontages assembled by Albers during his many trips to Mexico and Latin America may help shed some light on this question, as they provide a number of clues regarding the manner in which these forms may have been put to use in his work.

His montage of the pyramid at Tenayuca is made up of some thirty-one small pictures, arranged in a loose grid across two facing pages, nearly a dozen of which focus on the striation of the pyramid's great stair. (Fig. 3) Others emphasize the play of shadows across its many facets. And all are tightly framed, presenting the pyramid not as a total, unified form, but as a series of discrete fragments, whose assembly into a whole occurs not in the visual field, but in the eye—or mind—of the viewer. In these montages, Albers is not concerned with what these forms are, necessarily, but with how we experience them, how we see them, how we come to know them.

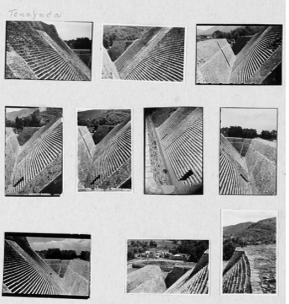


fig. 3 Josef Albers, Photomontage "Tenayuca" (detail, undated)

When presented with a form as large and complex as that of the pyramid at Tenayuca, it is indeed impossible to see more than two if its sides at once. Its form is only ever completed in the mind of the viewer, based on prior knowledge, or experience, of how such forms are situated in space. The eye, then, is constantly engaged in a dynamic process of imaginative construction, by which two-dimensional impressions of the world are interpreted, and ever-re-interpreted, in terms of implied, or projected, three-dimensional complexity. This fluctuation between two and three dimensions—sparked not by a modernist retreat to formal abstraction, as one might assume, but

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book review / bŌok rə'vyŌo /

RAY WU / M. ARCH I, 2019

Noun: [Old English boc "book, writing, written document," generally referred (despite phonetic difficulties) to Proto-Germanic *bōkiz "bookch."¹ "Review, mid-15c., "an inspection of military forces," from Middle French *revue* "a reviewing, review," noun use of *rev.* past participle of *revivre* "to see again, go to see again," from Latin *revīdere*, from *re-*"again" + *videre* "to see."] 1 1. An article or talk in which a book, especially a new book, is discussed and critically analyzed

Recycled Theory
Dizionario illustrato / Illustrated Dictionary
 Edited by Sara Marini and Giovanni Corbellini

At 658 pages, this dense paperback is a collection of bilingual essays, drawings, and quotes based on a selection of assigned terms, paired with definitions and organized alphabetically in a dictionary format. It is also the third and final publication of a "disjointed triptych,"¹ following an atlas (*Re-cycle Atlante*) and a collection of regulatory and economic proposals (*Re-cycle Agenda*) as a part of the research project "Re-cycle Italy: New Cycles for Architecture and Infrastructure of City and Landscape," a collaboration between eleven research units from eleven Italian universities.

A beautifully designed book—or in this case, dictionary—whose format materializes "as an expression of cultural maturity and combines the operational agility

by visual engagement with the ancient monuments of Mexico's cultural and historical landscape—comprises a major facet of Albers's broader theory of human perception, whose exploration in line and color would become a hallmark of his work, if not its primary preoccupation, from the late 1930s onward.

The space between optical or visual experience and the mind's corresponding intellectualization of the formal or spatial concept undergirding the work of art or architecture as *idea* was a common theme in the critical writing of Colin Rowe, whose

two essays on "transparency" were co-authored with a former student of Albers, Robert Slutzky. Indeed, both Rowe and Albers were greatly concerned throughout their respective careers with the various "ways of seeing" characterizing aesthetic experience.² Where Rowe's neo-Kantian brand of criticism found a privileged place for language—and, thereby, for the critic—between "impressions [made] upon the eye" and the work of art or architect's "transcendental aesthetic attributes,"³ between the otherwise irreconcilable notions of the perceptual and the conceptual, for Albers, these two modes of experience were understood to be mutually inclusive, participating equally, and simultaneously, in the active construction of aesthetic experience in the world. A piece like "Tenayuca" compels a certain recognition on the part of the viewer of precisely this sort of ambiguity in its composition. In doing so, it serves as a veritable proof for the fundamentally ambiguous nature of all aesthetic experience, and for the inescapable uncertainty of perception, in general.

For Albers, who often referred to art's capacity to embody more than one idea, "one plus one [can] equal three or more"),⁴ the ambiguity of meaning inherent in art speaks to its essentially social nature. What is more, it speaks to the communitarian role played by art in the context of democracy, understood not as an "aggregation of opinions," but as "an organic whole in which there is reciprocal dependence between the individual and the general order."⁵ In this view, which Albers shared with John Dewey, working in and on art prepares the individual for the responsibility of choice and accountability for consequence in a socially intensive setting. By demonstrating the multiplicity of meanings inherent in any object of human inquiry—not only art—it necessarily positions the individual in relation to a broader community, in which context common concerns, considered from a range of distinct, individual perspectives, may be transformed into common goals through engagement in a constant exchange of ideas with a range of essentially different others. In this way, art — the creative act of making, imbued with order through disciplined and practiced engagement with medium—reveals itself to be an essentially *communal* activity. This further echoes John Dewey's view of art—"the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man ... in a world full of gulfs and walls."⁶—as a fundamental element of any democratic community.

What is more, it resonates with a distinctly Deweyan understanding of *history*, defined not as a documentary record of past events and deeds, but as an exploratory method of study—an archaeology, perhaps—whose potential to "lay bare" society's "process of becoming and ... mode of organization" informs our common capacity, in the present, to build a harmonious future.⁷ So, what's in a name? Maybe everything. Maybe not. ■

all images courtesy of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT

¹ Liesbrock, Heinz, "Introduction," *Latin American Journeys*, p. 14
² Forty, Adrian, *Words and Buildings*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) p. 24
³ *Ibid.*, p. 27
⁴ Albers, Josef, *Search Versus Re-Search*, p. 17-23 - For another, equally *extensive* discussion of formal abstraction from Albers, see his brief essay, "Abstract ---- Presentational," in Harry Holtzman, Charles G. Shaw, et al. eds., *American Abstract Artists: Three Yearbooks*, 1938, 1939, 1946), (New York: Arno Press, 1969)
⁵ Albers, Josef, "Aims of Black Mountain College," undated manuscript (after 1941) — Josef Albers Papers - Box 38, folder 36 - Josef and Anni Albers Foundation
⁶ Dewey, John, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Parigree, 1980 [1934]) p. 105
⁷ Dewey, John, *School and Society*, 13th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932 [1899]) p. 150-151

of multiple access with a form of authoritative—and often authoritarian—solidity in the selection, classification, and cataloguing of the disciplinary foundations."² Essays in English and their Italian counterparts are sparsely interjected with exquisite drawings by the likes of Fabio Alessandro Fusco and heavyweight quotes from Žižek to Koolhaas.

All in all a book difficult to criticize apart from, of course, its title.

As dictionaries are already recycled assemblages of lexicons, the book recycles far more than the title assumes. It is a recycled lexicographical collection of recycled terms accompanied by recycled essays of recycled theories based on recycled research named "Re-cycle Italy" subtitled "New Cycles" from a recycled exhibition also named "Re-cycle" doubled by recycled English entries with recycled English quotes.

Recommended for those interested in architectural theory, or teoria dell'architettura.
Available from the stacks of Haas Arts library or Quodlibet, \$35. ■

¹ Marini, Sara, and Giovanni Corbellini, editors, *Recycled Theory: Dizionario illustrato / Illustrated Dictionary* (Quodlibet, 2016), 18.
² *Ibid.*, 20

article.TITLE
WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As a customary, and indeed, necessary expression of language, names are a familiar aspect of human communication, a way to create and understand meaning in the world. Not only can they make the unknown identifiable, but also furnish comfort in the familiar. Sometimes descriptive and sometimes determining the idea of an entity by virtue of being associated descriptions, names can be both rigid and casual designators. But is nomenclature simply the result of a need to classify and order the knowledge we produce?

"All seagulls look as though their name is Emma", declared the German poet Christian Morgenstern. Though Morgenstern was known for his nonsense poetry, there was sincerity in his suggestion that some linguistic labels are perfectly suited to the concepts they signify, indicating that words have the power to communicate emblematic ideas beyond their meaning. As soon as a concept is labeled, the way people perceive that concept is altered. It is difficult to imagine a truly neutral label, because words, by their nature, evoke images.

Juliet: | play_NAME

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
 Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
 Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
 And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

article.TITLE | article.BYLINE
THE NAMED AND THE UNNAMED

ELISA ITURBE / CRITIC, YALE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE | M. ARCH I, 2015

As architects, we try and make sense of the world through image, word, and form. But what does it mean to *make sense*?

Sense is the root of *sensual, sensory, and sensation*. In French, *sentir* refers to olfactory perception, while in Spanish, it means to feel.

Yet *making sense* is an attribute of reason and a crucial component of language. In romance languages the sense of a word is its meaning: *el sentido de la palabra*. The act of *making sense*, then, occurs between the sensorial and the linguistic, or more precisely, between perception and cognition.

Patterns of media consumption have shown to favor perception over cognition. Take, for example, a race between word and image:

Speech, text, and language are slow because they unfold in time—word by word, sound by sound. And they are slower still because those signifiers combine and compel a second unfolding: interpretation.

Image, on the other hand, is fast because of the quickness of the human eye, because of the simultaneity of color, line, and form taken in all at once by the perceiving subject. Image wins the race because perception occurs before the process of interpretation can begin.

Perception, then, has the advantage of a temporal gap. A strong sensorial experience can prolong this advantage, this gap, indefinitely: cognition is not

In this issue of *Paprika*, we explore nominative codification in architecture — the relationships between signifiers (words) and the signified (architectural ideas), in the semantics and syntax of names that elicit the poetic imagery of *Fallingwater* and the clinical objectivity of *House II*. As a medium of projects, both real and speculative, architectural discourse and practice is ever-christening its subject matter. Like the image, the name represents distillations of our work, ideas, and perhaps by extension, ourselves. The words we use to label our projects, our practices, and treatises are as deliberate and designed a portrayal as the images we use to illustrate them. Not only do they serve as a title, but as expressions of our understanding of that subject matter and the connotations we wish to elicit. So at a time when the making and dissemination of images is so prolific, and the consumption of information so visually oriented, we ask: *what's in a name?* ■

Romeo: | play_NAME
 Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?
 | play_BODY

Alan Rickes's advanced studio begs the question: how do we put these things together. Rather than being hungover, they are now immune to Typhoid and armed with malaria pills. Symposium guest speaker Will Hunter seems to have lost his shoes during the round table discussion.

*Eisenman, Stern... oh my god all we just kill to be shot... * - Bob Stern. After the Modern Movement
 Career Development and Equality in Design
 hosts a workshop on "Salary Negotiation" featuring speakers Amy Wrzesniewski (200), a surrogittious Shih-Fu Peng.

naturalize social values to the point of obscurity. These values can become invisible through the strength of their purported self-evidence, relying on *ex-nominatio* to generate and sustain myth, ideology, and structures of power.

Ex-nomination favors perception over cognition, and prolongs that temporal gap before interpretation kicks in. So if Barthes is right about *ex-nomination*, then wherever subjective perception is fuel for the fire of spectacle, and whenever sensorial excess is deployed to dull the senses, the importance of naming should not be underestimated. Here lies the relevance for architecture, a discipline that communicates as much through media, image, and drawing as through building, form, and material. Architecture has the capacity to generate immersive environments and powerful images that arrest interpretation. Architecture has the capacity to perpetuate processes of *ex-nomination*. Yet architecture has the equal capacity to materialize and make visible that which has been *ex-nominated*. What's in a name? The balancing between perception and cognition, and the secret to a critical mode of taking in the world. Architecture gives form. Architecture names. ■

So much for the named. But what about the unnamed? According to Roland Barthes, the unnamed, or the *ex-nominated*, as he calls it, is left vulnerable to appropriation by ideology and the language of mass culture. In other words, society has the tendency to

ON THE GROUND After eluding away in the studio pit until early hours of the morning, first-years have their first review monster model, giving them their first taste of working in groups. There is a pitfall on the 4th floor and on what it's filled with though.

