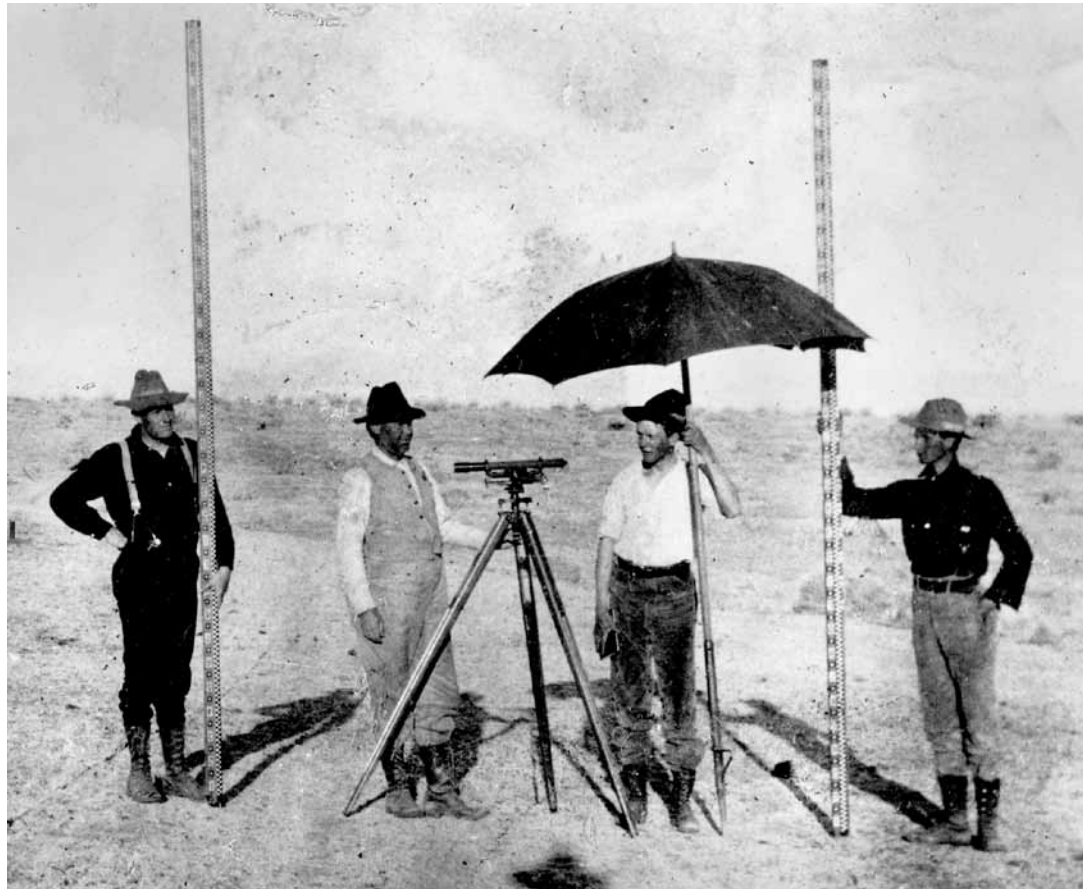


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Instruments, Devices and Architectural Inventions

EDITED BY
 GEOFF MANAUGH

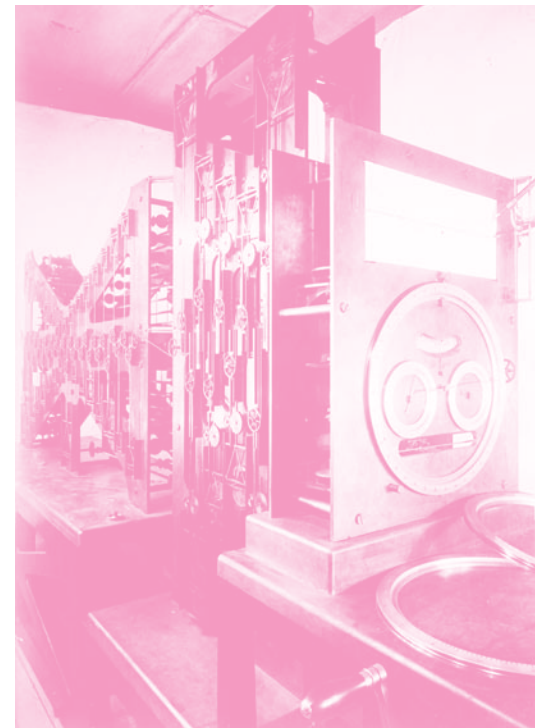
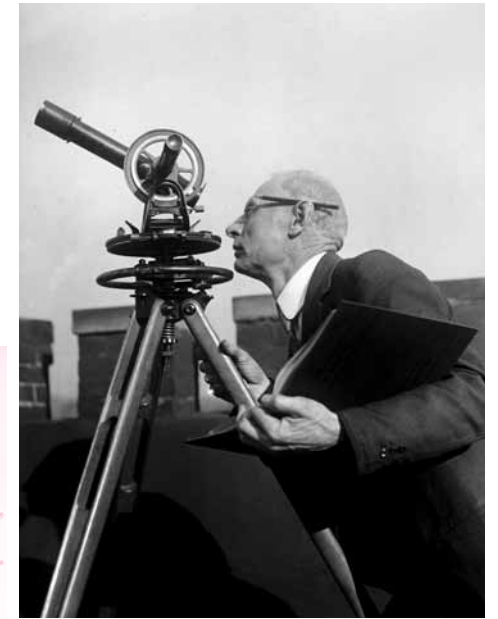


A U.S. Geological Survey "level crew"—pictured above—surveys a line from Mojave to Keeler, California, 1905. Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey. For a speculative project called "Theriomorphous Cyborg" (2011), architect Simone Ferracina proposed a series of intermediary devices, organized in the form of a game, through which humans could alter their perception of the built environment.



LANDSCAPE FUTURES

Instruments, Devices and Architectural Inventions



Edited by Geoff Manaugh

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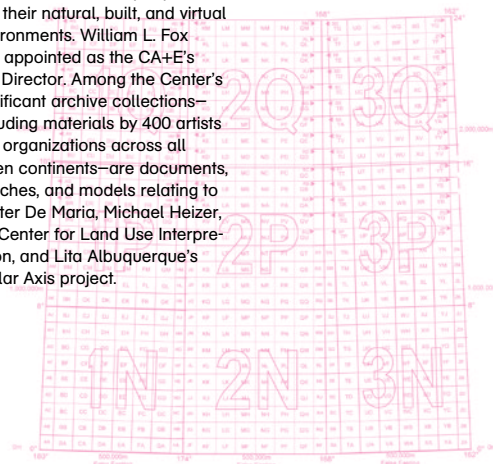
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Art + Environment exhibition se-
ries and a backdrop for the 2011
Art + Environment Conference.

About the Nevada Museum of Art
The Nevada Museum of Art is
the only art museum in the state
of Nevada accredited by the
American Alliance of Museums.
Designed by internationally
renowned architect Will Bruder,
the new museum facility opened
in 2003 and is the heart of Re-
no's downtown cultural district.
The four-level, 60,000 square-
foot building is inspired by
geological formations located
in northern Nevada, a reference
that resonates metaphorically
with the museum's scholarly
focus on art and environments.
The Nevada Museum of Art
is a museum of ideas. While
building upon its founding col-
lections and values, it cultivates
meaningful art and societal
experiences, and fosters new
knowledge in the visual arts by
encouraging interdisciplinary
investigation.

In 2009, the Museum
established the Center for Art
+ Environment (CA+E), an inter-
nationally recognized research
center that supports the practice,
study, and awareness of creative
interactions between people
and their natural, built, and virtual
environments. William L. Fox
was appointed as the CA+E's
first Director. Among the Center's
significant archive collections—
including materials by 400 artists
and organizations across all
seven continents—are documents,
sketches, and models relating to
Walter De Maria, Michael Heizer,
the Center for Land Use Interpre-
tation, and Lita Albuquerque's
Stellar Axis project.



The Nevada Museum of Art
was founded in 1931 by Dr.
James Church and Charles Cutts.
Church was an early climate
scientist who constructed the first
snow survey station to measure
water content on Mount Rose in
the Sierra Nevada. The shared
interdisciplinary interests of
Church and Cutts continue to
shape the ongoing programming
and focus of the Museum and
Center for Art + Environment.
nevadaart.org
nevadaart.org/ae/center

About ACTAR
ACTAR is a Barcelona- and New
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PREVIOUS PAGE

“Man at telescope”–
image top right–
photographed between
1916 and 1919.
A “tide-predicting
machine” (center)
developed by Dr. E.
Lester Jones, Chief
of the U.S. Coast
and Geodetic Survey,
1915. Bottom right,
a radar-scanning
facility at Clear
Air Force Station,
Alaska, photographed
by Gregory Sims in
2001. All photo-
graphs courtesy

of the Library of
Congress Prints and
Photographs Division:
the Harris & Ewing
Collection and
Historic American
Buildings Survey.
Visible right is
a geodetic diagram
plotting the U.S.
national grid.

History's Apparatus



An interview with
David Gissen

GEOFF MANAUGH: Let's start with the idea of *reconstruction*, which is something you and I have talked about at great length and is also a theme that pops up more and more in your work.

DAVID GISSEN: Reconstruction is something I'm increasingly interested in—the role that reconstruction can play within architecture and, more tangentially, within architectural interpretations of nature.

But, first, I should give you a sense of what I mean by “reconstruction.” Within architectural history, when we talk about reconstruction, we're generally describing an activity by which an architect or architectural historian visually reinterprets a building from the past. It could be a building that he or she has seen fragments or ruins of, or it could be a building that he or she has only read about within architectural literature from the past.

In either case, it generally involves some act of visual representation and re-interpretation.

Some relatively early examples of architectural reconstruction are by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, from his history of architecture—also considered the first history of architecture—from the early 18th century. One of the things I find interesting about von Erlach's reconstruction—and von Erlach was an architect reconstructing the buildings of the past for an architectural and, frankly, aristocratic audience—is that, in addition to reconstructing buildings he had never seen but only heard about or, in some cases, that didn't even exist, he was also reconstructing *nature*.

Von Erlach imagines himself as reconstructing, for an architectural audience, a Chinese *landscape* that is itself a reconstruction of earlier natural forms. He's saying that, within the activity of Chinese architecture, there is already a reconstruction of even more ancient *landscapes*.

This idea of reconstructing nature—bringing back a nature that once existed but is lost—is, in a sense, embedded within the history of architecture and, thus, within the potential work of the architect.

More specifically, when we think about reconstruction, we might think about something like Giovanni Battista Piranesi's reconstruction of the Campo Marzio outside Rome. One of the key aspects of this, in addition to illustrating a more antiquarian concept of reconstruction, is that Piranesi introduces the idea of architectural reconstruction as a kind of agitation. In other words, Piranesi's engravings were a statement about what Rome once was—but they were also a statement about what cities might be based upon our selective interpretations of the past.

Piranesi's engravings were a statement about what Rome once was—but they were also a statement about what cities might be based upon our selective interpretations of the past.

One of the key features of the city, as Piranesi depicted it, is that it doesn't really have streets. He imagined the city as just an agglomeration of buildings—of architecture—and streets were simply the peripheral places left open in between. But he was doing that as a form of critique—or I prefer the term *agitation*—as a kind of a pinprick to his contemporary architectural audience.

Now, reconstructions can take on a much more literal form, and they do, especially in the 19th century; but their agitational role continues, and

I think we often lose sight of this. In Paris, for instance, there's the Place Vendôme. The column standing today in the Place Vendôme is a reconstruction of a column built by Napoleon to commemorate his victory at Austerlitz. But that was also a reconstruction, of Trajan's column in Rome.

For anyone who knows Paris, this is like the swanky Madison Avenue of Paris now. It's where you go to shop at Cartier. What's interesting to me is that, in 1871, when the Communards—the neo-Republicans of Paris—wrested the city back from the ownership class and turned Paris into the first real example of revolutionary urbanism—they took over the city, they ended property, they ended work as we know it, and all of this lasted about three months before it was brutally put down—one of their first artistic acts was to bring this column down.

Gustave Courbet, the very famous Pre-Impressionist painter who was also the head of artistic works for the Commune, therefore said, *our first act will be an act of destruction*.

He and his fellow artists and Communards brought the column down and created the *mound* of Vendôme. Courbet said it was the greatest artistic act of the 19th century.

My research on the column and its destruction has revealed the most fascinating bits of data. For instance, I found these old photos of the Commune in the Berkeley library: they actually built a story and a half hill out of hay, and had all the window shutters around the square closed so that when they toppled the column it wouldn't damage the street. The shutters were closed so that all the dust and debris that shot out wouldn't break the glass.

In fact, just to continue this random line of thought, when the Situationists, headed by Guy Debord, began writing about the city, they reclaimed this act. They said it was one of the great revolutionary acts of urbanism—the creating of this mound. The Communards had made a *landscape* in the city out of a militaristic monument.

Anyway, as soon as the Commune revolution was suppressed, one of the first acts of the new public works commission was to rebuild the column—to reconstruct a reconstruction in the Place Vendôme. When you go there today, you are seeing the second iteration of that column, and its real urban history is completely erased to us.

So reconstruction and destruction have an interesting dialectic, one that I think is possible, but not necessarily easy, to recover.

G.M. The theme of reconstructing nature runs throughout much of your work, including the essays in your book *Subnature*. How did you first get interested in the subject?

D.G. When I was a graduate student, for my thesis project I wanted to do some sort of reconstruction. But I didn't want to reconstruct a Greek temple; I didn't want to reconstruct ancient Rome. I was interested in how reconstruction could have an agitational relationship to the present, and I was also—and have been for a very long time—very much interested in ideas of urban nature.

So I decided to reconstruct a building type that existed very briefly on the East River and Hudson River in New York City, called floating

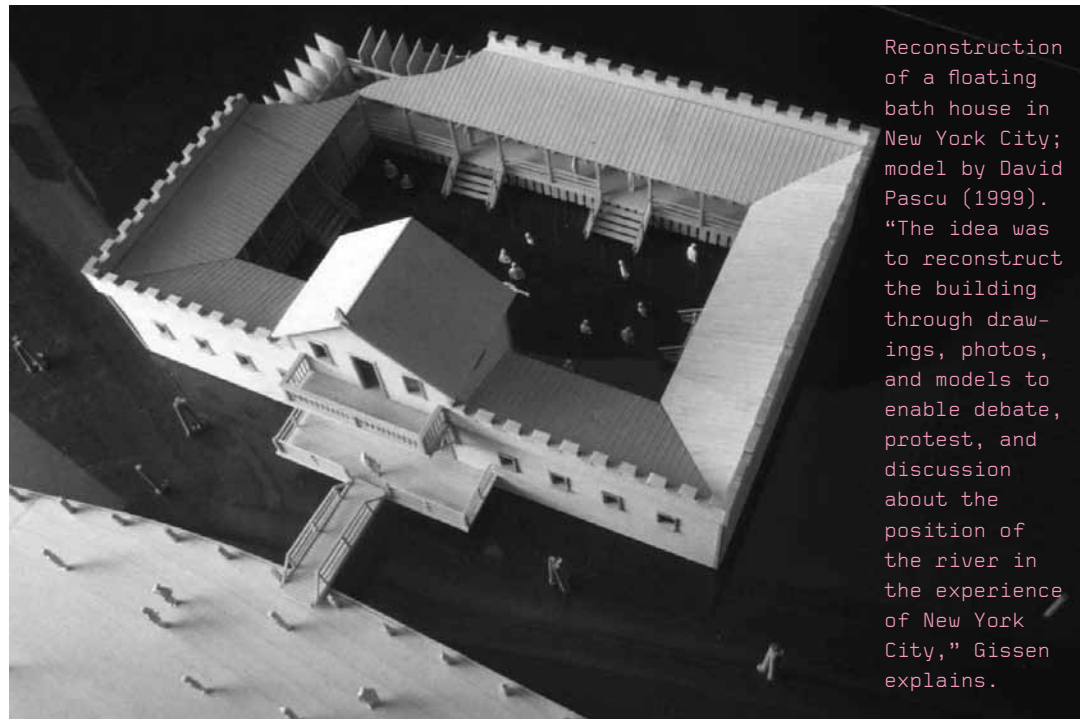
bath houses. These buildings were first built in the late 19th century as a place in which newly arrived immigrants to the city would have a place to wash themselves. To bathe. Bathing in the 19th century had two meanings: it meant to clean or to wash yourself, of course, but it also had a recreational form. To *bathe* was what, today, we'd call *swimming*.

What was so provocative to me in thinking about this, when I was a student in the mid 1990s, is that people once swam in the rivers of New York City, which, at the time, when I was a student, seemed completely disgusting. They still are quite polluted, of course, but, at the time, just the image—the very thought of somebody swimming in the river—was repulsive. When I decided to reconstruct these buildings, I wanted to do it as a provocation about what the river might become. At this time, in the mid '90s, there was only the very beginning of a discussion about creating boulevards so that people in the city could have access to the rivers and enjoy those *landscapes* from a recreational perspective; but I wanted to throw this out there as a way to think about the river could become much more than just something to observe.

So, in 1999, we exhibited a suite of drawings, models, and photographs at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City. What was really kind of exhilarating for me at the time—I was quite young, in my 20s—was the fact that this exhibition, which was very modest and simple, was picked up by the local newspapers, including *The New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, and people really reacted to the exhibition in exactly the way the exhibition was designed to operate.

In other words, the exhibition was designed to produce a certain kind of reaction and I was very happy that it did: it offered a vision of what the East and Hudson Rivers of New York City could be through a reconstruction. Not that we could necessarily realize this today, but it does make us think about what is possible with our bodies in a city and with the *landscape* that surrounds that city.

It was funny, though: after doing that exhibition, everybody was like, “Can you do an exhibition about pools in Central Park? You can reconstruct the pools that Robert Moses once



had there.” And, I thought, I really don’t want to become the reconstructed bath king of Manhattan. [laughter] That sounds like a very limited career.

G.M. New York is a common setting for your early projects and research. For instance, there’s your first Central Park project. Could you describe that briefly, including how it came about?

D.G. A place called the Arsenal Gallery, which is in Central Park, asked if I might be interested in doing an exhibition there about recreation in Central Park’s history. At the time, a very good history of Central Park had just come out in which the authors had uncovered the fact that there was once a village in Central Park. In fact, there were several settlements there, but one village in particular—Seneca Village—was for freed black slaves, which was a history that not many people knew about.

I decided, rather than doing an exhibition on the history of Seneca Village, what if we did something more provocative? As we know,

all of Central Park and New York City was once privately owned; it was land that was once privately held. So my idea was to do a history of Central Park as if it had never existed—to reconstruct Manhattan before Central Park, but to use that reconstruction as a provocation about what the role of urban parks can be.

In the end, I made a very sad image of New York City without Central Park—but Henry Stern, who was Commissioner of Parks at the time, didn’t allow the exhibition to move forward. Really, to be honest, in retrospect it looks quite tame; but I think he and his staff were worried that it would scare people who had just come to see a show about ducks or birds in Central Park or something.

Anyway, after this failure, I became very interested in curation. I kept with it for a while, and I even took a position at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. We were doing an exhibition there about what, today, we’d call the “green” skyscraper—the environmentally friendly skyscraper—to explore how new skyscraper designs could somehow address many of the environmental inequities

that seem embedded within the skyscraper form. Of course, this is now a very familiar and tired tale: the attempt to green the skyscraper.

One of the images I wanted to make for the exhibition was to reconstruct 1970s New York City from the perspective of its energy use. The midtown of Manhattan by 1975 was the most air-conditioned place on Earth. There was more cool air produced there than in any other major city. Even today, Dubai is not even close to New York City in terms of the volume of air-conditioned air.

So I made an air-conditioning map: a bird’s eye view of air-conditioned space from the 1970s, that also explained the general forms of the buildings from that time versus today. The idea was that this is New York City with all the skins of the buildings let loose; all you see is air-conditioned space, giving the public a sense of the magnitude of environmental production that existed inside the city at a particular moment in urban history.

G.M. That brings up some of your more recent work on preserving air itself, including the air inside buildings, as historical artifacts of their era—even reconstructing certain historically specific types of air.

The idea was that this is New York City with all the skins of the buildings let loose; all you see is air-conditioned space, giving the public a sense of the magnitude of environmental production that existed inside the city at a particular moment in urban history.

D.G. Some of my projects have involved the historical milieus in which we understand and experience cities. For instance, I proposed a project for Pittsburgh—and it’s a completely ridiculous project! It’s not a genuine proposal. But Pittsburgh, as you know, at the height of its steel production, was almost completely overlaid with smog.

What I proposed was a kind of reconstruction of the air over Pittsburgh, so that it would match the time of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sort of hovering over the city. It was an image through which we would be able to understand what the 19th century city really was, lest we tend to romanticize that too much. But this was not meant in any kind of serious-

ness. In fact, I sort of meant it as a subtle critique of an artist who, at the time, was trying to declare the air—the entire sky—as a national treasure, or something like that. Or to declare it an international resource.

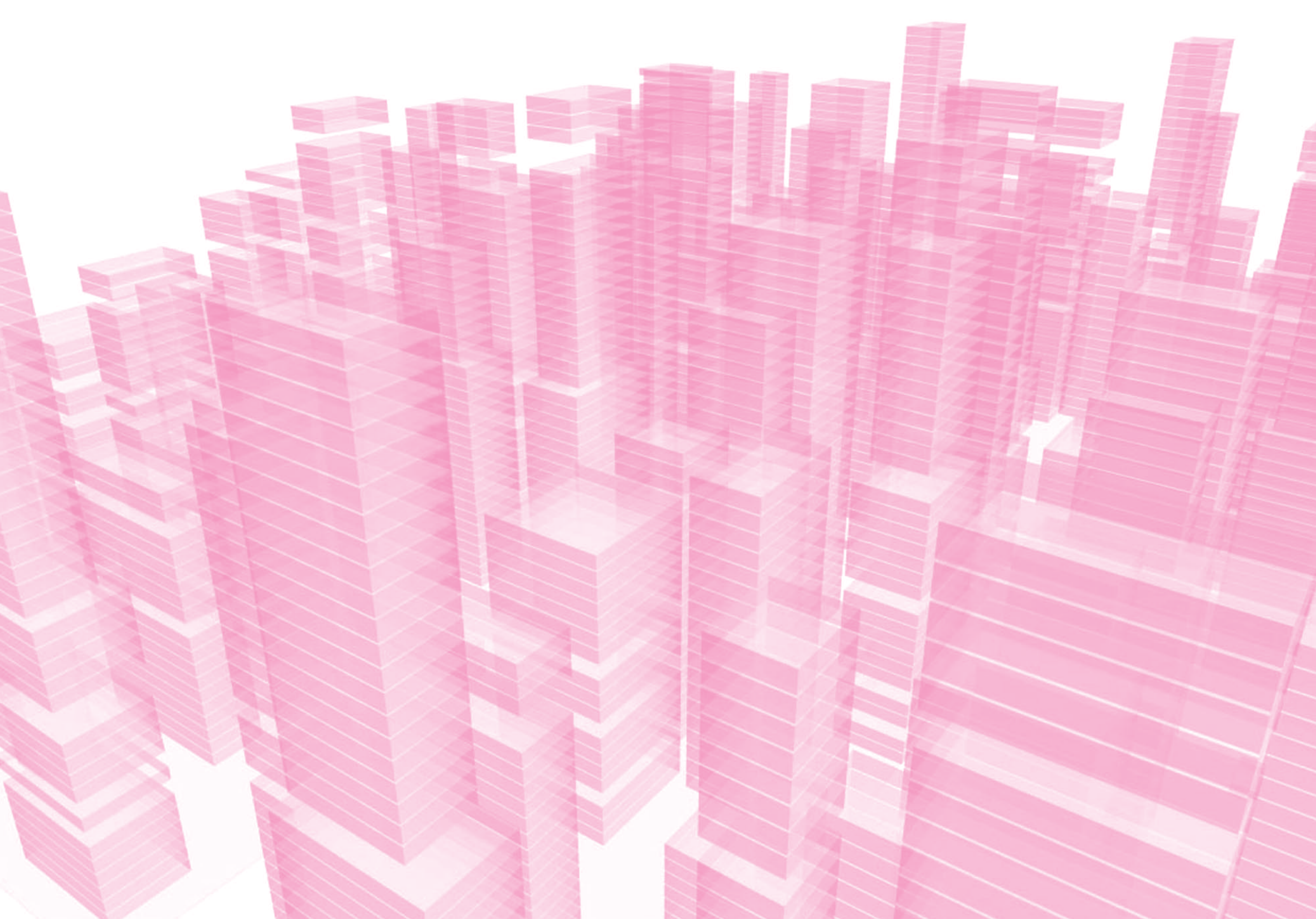
G.M. She wanted to declare it a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

D.G. Yes, exactly! We would declare the air a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Of course, on one level this is great: if we want to say that the heritage of our air is much more complex than we think it is, then we need an equally complex historical perspective running through our discussions of it. Ultimately, that project struck me as using history to create something not properly historical but *ecological* in character.

You know, what’s fascinating, when you look at environmental education and architecture programs today, so much of it is about historical reconstruction. Even if you only look at the mandates of the Kyoto Protocol, they state that we’re meant to reproduce the atmosphere of the late 1980s—in a sense, that’s a project of historical reconstruction. It’s explicitly stated as a project of atmospheric science, but there is reconstruction laced throughout these discussions. In fact, that’s how it’s stated in California now: that we will be at 1990 levels of certain atmospheric pollutants by such and such a date.

Anyway, air is a more complex historical object than we normally think; air is even something that used to frighten people in cities. So my main goal in the Pittsburgh image was to make a project that could talk about that—about how, with gentrification, among other examples, there is a change within the appearance of cities and the demographics of cities, but there is also a transformation in the kinds of residual atmospheres of particular neighborhoods. The air changes with gentrification. We go from the odor of coal to the odor of coal-fired pizza. [laughter]

But, most important of all, the Pittsburgh project made me consider the setting of history. The foul air is, in some sense, the historical environment of the buildings of a particular time. This led to other questions: What are the pre-conditions of an historical mentality toward



objects and **landscapes**—including air—as well as the interpretive systems that enable history to appear as such? In other words, how does history appear *as history* in a city, particularly with **landscapes** and buildings and sites?

There are some things that are really quite obvious here, but just to spell them out: first of all, things are protected. They are held behind glass walls or railings. Even walls and floors are often held with a similar kind of treatment: in a sense, you're held back from both, kept in roped-off areas that differentiate between a preserved historical space and the lived space that you currently occupy, as a person witnessing or touring these things in the present. You can walk *here*—but don't step out of your area or it's a kind of historical violation.

G.M. You risk spatially infringing on the presence of history.

D.G. Also, things are always poorly lit. Have you ever noticed how historical objects and historical **landscapes** are always poorly lit? Art is beautifully and fully lit, for example, but something is only historical when it's lit like crap, quite frankly. In something like a reconstruction of a Greek temple, this is meant to heighten the architecture's historical sensibility, its sense of mystery, and also to make the museum itself fall back into the everyday environment.

But, more to my present point, things often have these *atmospheres*, which surround objects and preserve them. The Dendur Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a place I've written quite a lot about, and it holds the reconstructed Dendur Temple from Egypt. In addition to reconstructing bits of the temple's original Nile **landscape**, including the topography, the room was given a massive size so that, I would argue, you're made aware of the museological atmospheric apparatus that keeps this thing preserved. You see this when you compare it to Central Park, which is right outside—even if you only compare the lights sliding on tracks inside the room versus the diffused light of the park outside.

So, for the *Landscape Futures* exhibition, I wanted to investigate all of this more and give these museological systems a more pronounced urban form—the sign systems, lighting systems,

For the **Landscape Futures** exhibition, I wanted to investigate all of this more and give these museological systems a more pronounced urban form—the sign systems, lighting systems, and air-conditioning systems through which objects become seen as “historical.”

and air-conditioning systems through which objects become seen as “historical.” In a sense, the project was really a way to illustrate some of my ideas about imagining cities where buildings that we understand as historical suddenly appear doubly so, or where things that are not considered historical at all begin to appear historically important and even worth preserving.

My favorite image while I was putting these together didn't actually make it into the exhibition. It was an image of the Place Vendôme, which we were talking about earlier. The idea was that you would see the reconstructed column and that, surrounding the Place Vendôme, would

be this vitrine—or framework—where we'd simply light the ground. We would light nothing. We would encase nothing—but a nothing in which you would have a sense that history had happened here. Actually, at one point, I was also imagining some sort of elevated walkway that might take you through sites of Revolutionary Paris, following the pre-Haussmann streets, and stopping off at places that existed in that earlier version of the city.

In any case, I think that understanding the *spatial apparatus* of history—the vitrine, the frame, the light, the environment—can make one wonder whether what happened in a place is still, in some ways, a loose aspect of its present identity.

G.M. With your Central Park image, then, we're looking at an almost octopus-like intrusion of museological thinking into a natural **landscape**—with things like dehumidifiers, air-conditioning units, and ventilation ducts scattered about amidst the trees and pathways. It's a museology that is as thermal and embodied as it is visual or aesthetic. It's like a climatological Continuous Monument.

D.G. That also came out of working on my dissertation several years ago, when I did a whole

chapter on the Dendur Room. I became very interested in how museums are not just a form of architecture. Museums also have this skein of *stuff* that is very under-theorized, and that begins to articulate objects and spaces. It gives objects a kind of location or history. In other words, when a painting is illuminated by lights and hung on a wall in the Museum of Modern Art, what we're saying is that this is part of our history—not just that it's *art*, but that it is part of the *history* of art.

When I was writing about the air systems, the lighting, etc., in the Dendur Room, I found that there had been enormous debates about it in the 1960s and 70s. I found this one image of the Dendur Room recently, and I felt like it really articulated what the space is about and what the museological mentality is about, more generally. You see NYC in the background, with some lights of the city, and you see the space of the museum; but the way that the photographer did it, you don't really see the museum at all.

In a sense, you know that this is a museum, but you don't *see* a museum. You see lighting;

you see a podium; you see a thin glass wall that separates the polluted, urban air outside from the carefully monitored and controlled atmosphere inside.

In thinking about this space—and thinking about what I wanted to do for the *Landscape Futures* exhibition—I wanted to conduct an experiment and imagine what happens when this skein becomes uncoiled, in a sense, from the museum, when it begins to enter the city at large. Is it possible that, by bringing the apparatus of curation, curatorial objecthood, art museums, art history, and even natural history museums into the city, we can transform spaces of the city into objects of a museological mentality? I wanted to see if that's case. My gut instinct is starting to say that, yes, this does happen.

But, finally, to answer your question, one of the things I was inspired by for this project was Matthew Gandy's point that Central Park is now managed like a museum, both in terms of its physical maintenance and in terms of its organizational structure. For instance, it has a board of trustees now. His point is that there





David Gissen's *Museums of the City*, photographed during installation at the Nevada Museum of Art by Geoff Manaugh.

is very little difference in the way that Central Park is understood in the eyes of its caretakers versus, say, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

So I wanted to create a scene or a situation where the presence of the park's lighting, irrigation, and all the little things that maintain the trees as historical objects is laid bare. The apparatus would be pushed to the foreground, and I was very interested in it *not* looking like a work of architecture; instead, I wanted it to look almost as if this layer, or skin, of "museum" had somehow leaked out into the city.

However, that image could just as easily be seen as a comment on climate anxiety—the idea that maintaining a grove of trees like this, and ensuring that the *landscape* of the park can survive, that it can be preserved, might actually require something extreme. Or, if not *extreme*, at least something that is not necessarily part of what we consider *natural* history. For instance, conserving natural *landscapes* now might really be part of *art* history—it enlists

a different kind of preservation practice with different curatorial tools.

In general, though, I found that, in making these images, all sorts of other things began to happen.

G.M. Such as?

D.G. Well, for instance, the Florence image ended up looking slightly cynical. When you start to put a museological apparatus around things in Florence, you're beginning to say that Florence isn't a real city. You make the city seem more interior. You're basically saying the cathedral is an object of history and antiquity, not an object of the present—which may or may not be true.

But what I also noticed was that, when you have that continuous structure of overhead lights and the glass vitrines and so forth, then you get this really interesting sense that a new kind of public is being formed, a public that's there to look, discuss, and hold its mouth agape at historical spaces and objects. It becomes very much like being in a museum—the same feeling that we're all in this together, that we need to

be quiet, or at least respectful, in terms of giving space for each other's thoughts. We're there to look at everyday things as if they are art, and to have serious thoughts about the world. It's almost utopian.

You know, there's a famous drawing by Karl Friedrich Schinkel of the interior of the Altes Museum in Berlin. It's a guy and, I think, his son, with their arms around each other, and they're looking at a painting. Schinkel was the first, at least in my mind, to articulate the social slant or behavior that is implied by the space of the museum, particularly in the city.

G.M. Right before we started talking this morning, I was driving on Venice Boulevard here in Los Angeles when the street ahead of me began to be redirected by a road crew. They were laying cones out of the back of a moving truck and a sign started flashing, ordering everyone to merge into the left lane. It was this temporary, instant spatial event in the city. I mention this because it would be interesting to imagine what the museological equivalent of that road crew might be: a crew of historical workers who show up, plugging in air conditioners and assembling plinths and lighting, and they temporarily erect a museum—they erect the spatial apparatus of a museum—somewhere in the metropolis. It's instant history, or the museum as public carnival.

D.G. There's actually a project like that, by Renzo Piano and Peter Rice. It's from the late 1970s. They basically did just that in Sicily. It was called the Otranto Project, I think. It was a mobile system—a UNESCO-sponsored preservation workshop—that they set up in the middle of town to offer a place for everyone to discuss what should be preserved and what shouldn't be. I think they even had scaffolds with them. It was a lot like what you just described.

G.M. More abstractly, it's interesting that there are things we preserve inadvertently—such as the waste we bury in landfills or the things we abandon in the attic—and there are other things we deliberately never

preserve, but perhaps should, such as the air-conditioned air of 1970s New York or entire urban expressways. I'm curious how you see the role of the *speculative historian* here to show that these other targets of preservation exist.

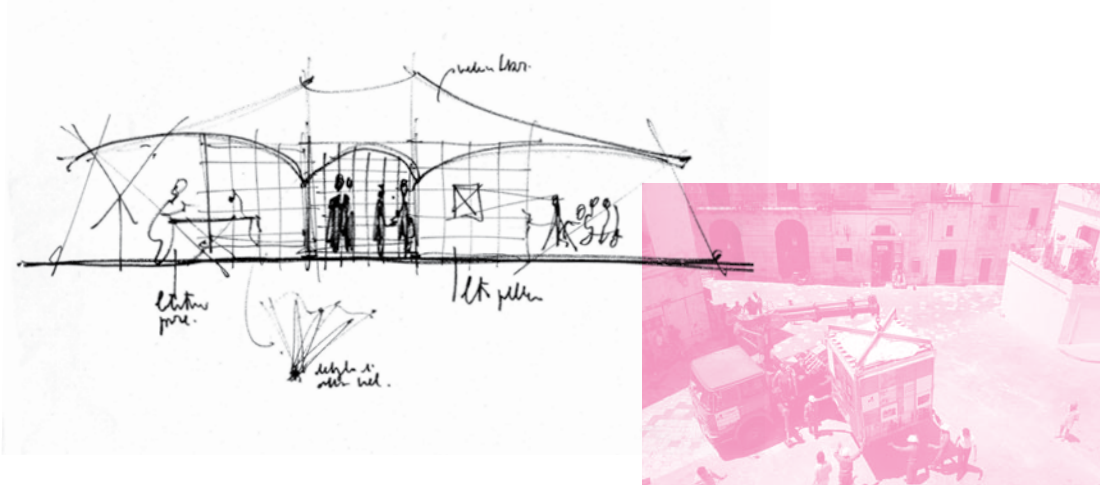
D.G. There's a guy named Michael Caratzas, who was a student at Columbia in the early 2000s. He wrote his thesis on preserving the Cross-Bronx Expressway—and it just blew me away. Something about his approach to preservation, and his demand that the system of the museum extend into urban space, was so startling to me. It really got my head spinning. He went on to work, I think, for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Something about that opened up a whole new way of thinking about preservation, at least for me.

Of course, there are so many other people who influenced this type of thinking, but Michael's work is the most political of these for me, because the Expressway really is part of the history of the Bronx—and it needs to be accepted as part of the history of the Bronx—if we want to understand how folding it back into history could make for a more pleasant experience of the space, which is still seen as a scar on the city. By accepting these peripheral things with a preservation mentality, you begin to accept the world on its own terms, even while also modifying some of its conditions. For example, preserving pollution in the 19th century suggests that pollution is also part of history; it's not something that disappears.

But the danger of this work is that it comes off as a little pretentious. [Laughs] I'm not sure how to make this convincing to the general public.

G.M. In this context, though, surely we could argue that street cleaners and building renovators and the people who preserve historical buildings are, in fact, working *against* the idea of history. They are getting rid of the traces of history—of soot, smoke, and dust.

D.G. My own sense is that preservation is totally dominated by the photographic. It's like we



Otranto Urban Regeneration Workshop, Otranto, Italy (1979), by Studio Renzo Piano & Rice for UNESCO. Photos by Gianni Berengo Gardin; sketch by Renzo Piano. Images courtesy of Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW).



want to turn our buildings into high-contrast objects in the **landscape** by cleaning them—to turn them into crisp and very legible black and white photographs. As if our monuments must glisten white, like they do in archaeological photographs from the 19th and early 20th century. They have to be clean.

G.M. Your descriptions of museological space—with its humidity controls and carefully regulated light levels—brings to mind the work of Keller Easterling. She describes what she calls “formats”—how space is “formatted” in a certain way to allow **future** activities to take place there. She writes about things like tomato farms in Spain as a particular type of **landscape** format, and even golf courses and office parks. It seems, though, that there is also a kind of museological *format*: a particular type of space that can be reproduced and transported elsewhere, defined by often invisible parameters like thermal quality, moisture level, and even barometric pressure.

D.G. In a sense, yes. But, if I could just give a slight retort to Keller’s position: her ideas of programs and formats have a superstructure of the economic behind them. I think her ultimate point is that globalized economies produce spatial conditions that are often surreal; and I would say that, although I obviously accept the fact that there are economic superstructures and substructures, I’m interested in *aesthetics*. My interest isn’t necessarily in seeing the architectural effects of amping up some economic detail of the world 100,000%. It’s more about seeing and revealing the kinds of aesthetic tableaux that speak to how we see and organize the world. In this case, it’s the museum as a system that *looks like something* in specific visual circumstances, and the way that the museum modifies how we see the world. In that way, I think this is quite different from Keller’s project.

That actually leads me to the work of a woman I used to work with, Jasmine Benyamin. She was giving a lecture about Emmanuel Kant, in a course we taught together, and Kant was not someone I had otherwise been very familiar with. Jasmine was saying that the early,

very young Kant claimed there were no such things as objects; he said there were no objects in the world. Instead, everything is contingent and provisional upon what makes it appear as an object in the first place.

One can think about how this idea has been explored in art, by people like Marcel Duchamp or Hans Haacke: that art is simply that which you see upon a podium in a museum. There is no art object in and of itself; there is only art in these very specific conditions. We ourselves are not *things*, in that sense, but we, too, require this entire, explicit, and intense environment to make us who we are and to let us survive. We are contingent upon this environment to make us appear as human beings.

One could say, in a sense, that this project is about wiring Kant in reverse: what happens when we put the apparatus—the provisional apparatus that makes the museum object look like a museum object—in unexpected circumstances? Does it turn highways into natural history museums? Does it turn trees into objects of conservation?

G.M. Do you know Peter Sloterdijk’s book *Terror From The Air*?

D.G. Yes, that’s a very interesting book.

G.M. Sloterdijk suggests that warfare—specifically, chemical warfare—can actually be seen as the removal of humans from an inhabitable environment and the often instantaneous relocation of those same humans into an environment that doesn’t tolerate life. This contextual shift, achieved through the release of malign chemical compounds such as chlorine gas, is the immersive, environmental nature of chemical war. However, in the context of our conversation today, *war* might mean that you have modified the environment in a way that makes something else’s preservation impossible.

D.G. Going back to the example of Dendur, when it was being brought to New York City, and the Met was about to build this very grand, expensive, and monumental space for it, there were critics who said that the concentration of techniques, technologies, and expertise

within this one site in Manhattan, was morally wrong. Their argument was that the extension of the museum's ability to preserve and conserve objects should be more evenly distributed throughout the city.



Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; photographs by Geoff Manaugh. "Within this space and the other additions to the museum," David Gissen writes in his essay "The Architectural Production of Nature, Dendur/New York," "the technologies of preservation were on display as much as the work within."



There was actually a group called the Congress of Racial Equity—CORE—who demanded that the Temple of Dendur, because it was from an African culture, should be housed in a room built in Harlem, thus extending the space and the techniques of the museum into their neighborhood. They thought that this would be just. There were even one or two editorials in *The New York Times* about decentralizing the museum and distributing its spaces—its techniques, its expertise, its

technologies—throughout the city for the maintenance of art. Leon Golub wrote a piece—considered a very seminal piece in Museum Studies—more or less attacking the entirety of the museum's expansions, saying that the museum is actually imperialist and that they were just making excuses for taking objects out of their particular cultures around the world, in the name of environmental maintenance and curatorial expertise, and concentrating them in New York City. Basically, he claimed that the museum was stealing cultural treasures in the name of *maintenance*.

I think that that is very Sloterdijkian, in a sense. Sloterdijk is arguing that the very distinction between an inside and an outside—which he says is the principle of air-conditioning—and he uses a very strong word here, saying that this distinction has residues of violence within it, because something being maintained inside means that something else is left outside literally to perish.

But all of the images we made for *Landscape Futures* are about distributing the museological much more broadly, and—not to use this too lightly—but in a more democratic way. It's democratic in the sense that democracy is something that requires transparency—in the sense that the apparatus of historicization is made self-evident.

G.M. Should there be something like a political right to preservation?

D.G. The right to preservation, or a right to conservation, is a fascinating idea.

If you read newspapers in the 1970s, for example, it would seem that African states really didn't have the right to conservation. The mega-museum that emerged at the time—and that was publicized as maintaining otherwise unmaintainable cultures in the developing world—makes a claim that the West is the place that holds the *future* of culture.

Take the Elgin Marbles. The debates around the Elgin Marbles are absolutely Sloterdijkian. The argument for keeping the Marbles in London is that people in Greece don't know how to take care of their own cultural treasures, so they need to be maintained in their proper environment in London—and when they say

environment, they're not just talking about air, they're talking about the curatorial expertise and the technology of the museum itself.

In reality, the climate and the pollution in London are equally bad for British cultural treasures. I'd love to see if the Athenians could somehow buy St. Paul's and reassemble it in Greece, where the dry heat would presumably be so much better for preserving its marble stones.

In reality, the climate and the pollution in London are equally bad for British cultural treasures. I'd love to see if the Athenians could somehow buy St. Paul's and reassemble it in Greece, where the dry heat would presumably be so much better for preserving its marble stones.

G.M. I want to go back to that idea of democratizing the apparatus of the museum, and to ask about some of the picturesque sites you've chosen for your project—the streets of Florence, the Thames, Central Park. These are all very recognizable, even unique sites. But could something absolutely quotidian—a Wal-Mart, say, or a lawnmower from 2011—also be preserved as an historical object and how?

D.G. The images aren't just about taking things that don't have history and giving them history via this *stuff*. They're about conservation: curatorial mentalities, history, museums, and turning things into objects. They do different kinds of things in different places.

For example, the Cross-Bronx Expressway is definitely quotidian, but it is also a *landscape* that has dramatic, even tragic, history moving through it. And what I think is fascinating about the image of the Thames, is that when you look at these images of the Thames, images usually taken by stock photo services, what you always see are the buildings lit up in the background—historical buildings like Parliament or St. Paul's. But the Thames, as we know, is a space of a really significant kind of history—it's not just a space *of* history, but a space that *holds* history. Archaeologists are constantly bringing things up from the Thames. So the Thames itself is both a space that is worthy of being historicized, but also a space of never-ending history. Putting the museological apparatus in there—literally putting it into the

river—has a nice kind of symmetry with the lit-up Parliament in the background.

On the other hand, I didn't even show you one of the earliest images we made, when we were still beginning to figure this stuff out; it almost made me faint when I saw it. There were floodlights everywhere, and it was like a Nazi rally on the Thames. [*laughter*]

Anyway, the Florence and Central Park images, I agree, are more tricky. Those are taking spaces that are already seen as having these very important histories, but I'm trying to show that different aspects of their history have remained under-articulated. For example, most of the sculptures on the Campanile in Florence are copies; the façade of Santa Maria del Fiore is a 19th century façade. The original sculptures at the bottom of the façade have been dispersed to other European cities. With the removal of sculptures, and through the depiction of vitrines in the Florence image, we're proposing different removals and returns of important historical artifacts there.

G.M. Rem Koolhaas gave a lecture several years ago in which he suggested that preservation is now strangling the life of the present city—"preservation is overtaking us," he said. It's as if the museological becomes more of a threat than a promise under certain circumstances, a threat of impending urban paralysis. We'll simply freeze Central Park—or Florence—in one state, ungrowing and unchanging, forever.

D.G. Koolhaas talked about how he basically wants to apply a barcode to the city—like to Beijing. For the areas within the black stripes, nothing will change, in terms of the built environment; they'll be preserved indefinitely. But areas within the white stripes can be bulldozed and demolished every week, if the people want. They will change constantly. What I think he's saying is that if we create a logic, a system, or a plan for preservation or conservation that it can actually free up other areas of the city to change. It should have boundaries, or limits; it's not supposed to be applied everywhere.

But I don't actually don't agree with Kool-

has that the extension of a museological mentality into the city is such a dangerous thing. Museums are not places where things get frozen for all time; rather, they're sites where things, and the contexts of things, become intensely and endlessly debated. Again, think of the Elgin Marbles.

More to your point, there's a suggestion in your questions that there might be something very dangerous in a curatorial, conservationist, or preservationist agenda being wielded in the city. There's a risk of stagnation. And when you talk about the idea of a *future landscape*—of a *landscape's future*, of *landscape futures*—you might immediately think of a *landscape* saturated with, or filtered through, technology, instead of a *landscape* seen through the mentality of historical preservation.

But the idea of the *future* always implies a present and a past—and we need to think about what the role of the historical might be within some near or immediate concept of the *future*. What is the role of history in quote-unquote *landscape futures*? What is the historian's relationship to the *future*?

Landscape Futures

Work

Landscape Futures travels the shifting terrains of architectural invention, where new spatial devices on a variety of scales—from the inhabitable to the portable—reveal previously inaccessible dimensions of the built and natural environments. The projects on display, and the traces they uncover, suggest that the **landscapes** around us are more like sheet music: an interpretive repository of exhilarating variation made newly sensible through perceptual instruments and recording devices, always open to reinterpretation.

The poetic ensembles of speculative machines seen in *Landscape Futures* include a mix of large-scale installations, technical prototypes, imaginative geographies, and portable instrumentation, each providing unexpected access to invisible streams of data generated by the environments around us.

Further, these **landscapes** are constantly evolving—through climate change and plate tectonics, always becoming **future** versions of themselves—and so, too, must the filters through which we understand the world be adjusted and updated.

From philosophical toys to ironic provocations, these devices are not merely diagnostic but creative, deploying fiction as a means of exploring alternative **futures**: *landscape futures* terrestrial scenarios for which we have no other guide.

David Gissen

Museums of the City



Architectural historian David Gissen offers four provocative images of the city transformed into a museum of itself: often-overlooked **landscapes** from the city's own past literally reframed in complicated ways. If the internal space of the museum can be seen as a device for turning everyday objects into historical artifacts and works of art, what happens when museological devices leak out into the city at large? Gissen writes that “that what we understand to constitute material history is very often the ‘stuff’ (art, objects, nature) that we carefully illuminate in a museum, prohibit people from touching in public space, place in controlled environments in archives, and conserve in often highly visible ways.” So, his project for *Landscape Futures* asks, when plinths, lighting, scaffolds, and high-end air-conditioning sys-

tems take up residence in the streets, alongside urban rivers, even in the trees and plazas of a functioning metropolis, how does their presence transform the way we approach and understand these newly encapsulated scenes? “What matters, as much as the sites I focus on in the city (urban rivers, highways, monuments, verdure),” he suggests, “is the apparatus that transforms urban stuff into objects of our interest.” Gissen’s images thus foreground the interpretive infrastructures through which objects enter official history, giving them a monumental, highly public form.

Funding for Museums of the City provided by the Center for Art + Environment, Nevada Museum of Art, and the Chalsty Fund & Faculty Development Fund, California College of the Arts.

“Central Park, New York City” from Museums of the City (2011), David Gissen (rendered by Victor Hadjikyriacou).

Image background: courtesy of Getty Images [undated].



“Cross-Bronx Expressway, New York City” from Museums of the City (2011), David Gissen (rendered by Victor Hadjikyriacou).

Image background: generously provided by and courtesy of Andrew Moore, photographer, 2006.



"Florence, Italy" from *Museums of the City* (2011), David Gissen (rendered by Victor Hadjikyriacou).

Image background: Maremagnum, Getty Images [undated]. Gallery photo by Jamie Kingham.



"Thames River, London" from *Museums of the City* (2011), David Gissen (rendered by Victor Hadjikyriacou).

Image background: Terra, Corbis Images, 2010. Gallery photo by Jamie Kingham.





A U.S. Geological Survey team member uses a “tellurometer,” a microwave-based distance-measuring device. Its name comes from the Greek word for Earth, tellus.

BACK COVER

Target practice/
range-finding device,
1913; photograph
by Harris & Ewing,
courtesy of the Har-
ris & Ewing Collec-
tion, U.S. Library
of Congress.

ABOUT GEOFF MANAUGH

Geoff Manaugh is the author of BLOGBLOG and The BLOGBLOG Book, former senior editor of Dwell magazine, and a contributing editor at Wired UK. He has taught at Columbia University, the University of Southern California, and the University of Technology, Sydney, and he lectures widely on architectural topics at museums, schools, and other venues around the world.

In addition to curating Landscape Futures for the Nevada Museum of Art, Manaugh co-curated, with Nicola Twilley, Landscapes of Quarantine, an independent design studio and exhibition at Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, exploring the future of medical distancing and the spatial history of quarantine.

Manaugh is also a freelance journalist, writing for, among others, Wired, Popular Science, The New York Times, Volume, Domus, and many websites, and he is currently writing a book on burglary and architecture, to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2014.

Geoff Manaugh lives in New York City where he is co-director of Studio-X NYC, an off-campus event space and urban futures think tank run by the architecture department at Columbia University.

LANDSCAPE FUTURES:
Instruments, Devices and Architectural Inventions, curated by writer Geoff Manaugh for the Nevada Museum of Art, explores the future of landscape studies by way of the technical intermediaries—the instruments, devices and architectural inventions—through which humans have come to understand the built and natural environments. From autonomous tools for remote archaeology to radio telescopes scanning electromagnetic events in space, by way of colorful mechanisms that allow children to experience the “animal superpowers” of other species, *Landscape Futures* looks at the extraordinary scientific machines—and their hypothetical alterna-

tives—that filter, augment, clarify, and transformatively reproduce the world they survey.

Featuring new work specially commissioned for *Landscape Futures*—including ambitious pieces by Smout Allen, David Gissen, Chris Woebken & Kenichi Okada, Liam Young, Lateral Office, and The Living—the book also brings together a series of essays, short stories, and provocative new research agendas by such writers as Sam Jacob, Alexander Trevi, Jan Zalasiewicz, Scott Geiger, James R. Fleming, Elizabeth Ellsworth, Jamie Kruse, and Rob Holmes.

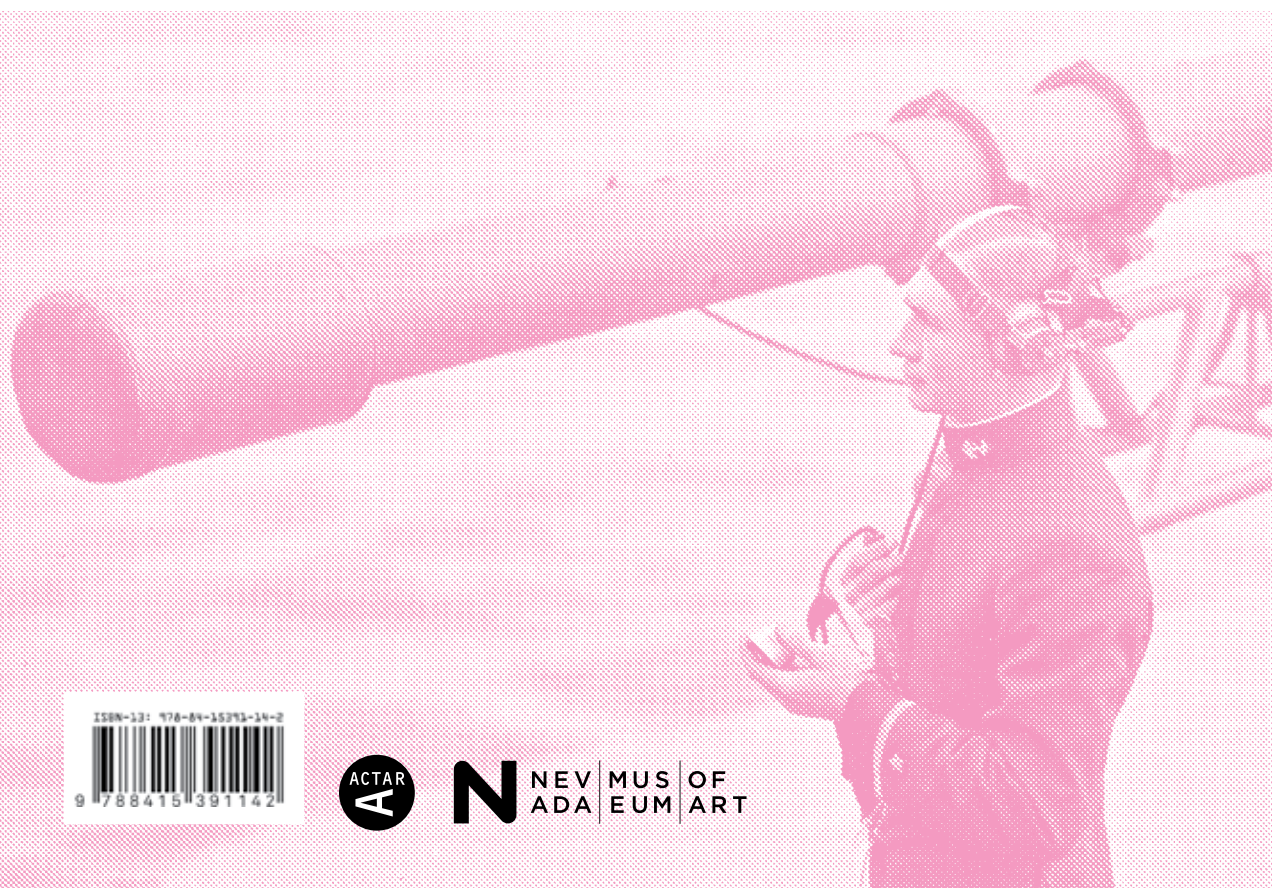
The result is much more than a catalog of projects past. The book, instead, is a manual for invention, a DIY spur for future work-

shops, courses, exhibitions, and essays—for new instruments and spatial devices both practical and imaginative, informed as much by speculative archaeology as by geological narratives of an Earth yet to come.

This is the challenge of worlds unrealized and the perceptual tools through which we’ll invent them: this is the world of *landscape futures*.

“Land art in Nevada is like jazz in New Orleans. When it comes to landscape futurism, this planet has no guide and seer like Geoff Manaugh.”

Bruce Sterling



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