Installation:

Residue of Inhabitation, Jennifer Addison
Knowing and Dwelling, Vaughan Howard

Projects:

City as Soundscape Laboratory, Michael Fowler
Atomistic Constructions, Greg More

Essays:

Notions of Space, Rochus Urban Hinkel
Synthetic Making, Designing Across Media, Tim Schork

Contributors:

Michael Fowler is an internationally active musician, researcher and a Doctor of Musical Arts from University of Cincinnati. He has been involved in highly acclaimed performances of contemporary classical keyboard music over the last 10 years working with such composers as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Milton Babbitt and Steve Reich. He has also published on a variety of topics that include acoustic ecology, digital form generation and graphic music scores of the 20th century.

Hélène Frichot is a senior lecturer in the Program of Architecture, RMIT University. While her first discipline is architecture, she also holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Sydney. Hélène is co-curator of the Architecture and Philosophy Public Lecture Series (http://www.architecturephilosophy.rmit.edu.au). Her transdisciplinary research is broadly published as book chapters, in scholarly and professional journals.

Rochus Urban Hinkel is a practising architect, academic and curator. His practice, which ranges from small scale furniture to urban design schemes, has won a number of awards and has been published and exhibited in Europe, Asia and Australia. Rochus’s research and practice investigates the nexus between interior, architecture and the urban field. He is a founding member of the interdisciplinary research group Urban Interior at RMIT University and a PhD candidate in the School of Architecture.

Greg More is a Lecturer of Architecture + Design at RMIT University, operating within RMIT’s Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory (SIAL). His design work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art New York and featured in a range of international architecture and design biennales and publications. Greg More is also Director of OOM CREATIVE, a digital environments / design + consultancy firm.

Tim Schork is a PhD candidate at the Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory (SIAL), School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University and Director of the design studio MESNE. His work explores the nexus between architecture and computation through the use of computer programming and speculates on its repercussion on creative design practice. Tim is currently a recipient of an Australia Postgraduate Award.
In short, spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.

Georges Perec [1]

The projects and essays collected here under the title, Notions of Space, explore approaches to space formation that are intertwined with the effects and affects of temporality, ephemeralism, and the poetic and sensory potential of new digital technologies. We want to conceive of space as something that is not framed in advance of inhabitation, as an a priori conceptual category. Notions of Space is intended to suggest instead a more elusive environment that unfolds co-productively with our daily modes of expression. That is to say, we are interested in how we might explore space beyond the habitual approaches to design and inhabitation that require an excess of program and formal and material fixity. Part of what this publication wants to challenge is the assumption that design can only deal with the hardware of a situation; with the extensive qualities of a given space, such as the material palette and the way one material meets another; the associated set of construction details, requisite dimensions, issues of composition, proportion, and so forth.

We are interested then in how design can manage the software of spaces, by which we mean all of those qualities that are so difficult to capture: the shifting of light, the aural feedback of a room, the haptic qualities of materials, as well as the complex layering of memories and perception, both voluntary and involuntary, that individuals and collectives carry with them. Many of the projects presented here engage in an interplay between hard and soft qualities, extensive and intensive aspects of space conceived as ever in formation. Finally, we are also keen to understand what it is that happens between the private and the public sphere, especially in a contemporary world where the rights and choices of the individual seem to carry more weight than collective modes of expression. The German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, uses the analogy of foam to discuss the contemporary condition of the supremacy of the individual. While every individual is insular, an island unto themselves, they still reside alongside other individuals, much like the multitudinous bubbles that amass to form foam. [2] What happens across the cell walls that divide one unit, one individual off from the next? Is there still a way of even imagining a public like the public that gathered in the old Greek agora? 

[3] These final questions concerning the relation between publicity and privacy will have to remain open-ended, even if they do continue to inform some of the underlying meditations that have contributed to the work that is gathered in this volume.


The body of work exhibited in A Notion of Space at Craft Victoria developed out of the design research explorations conducted within the pedagogical context of The Spaces We Live In, a design studio I led in early 2008 as part of the Program of Interior Design at RMIT University. Three student projects in particular have been highlighted in this publication: those of Jennifer Addison, Vaughan Howard, and Carrie Tjandinegara. Jennifer explored the way in which, as Walter Benjamin put it, to live is to love traces. Her small, reconfigurable, and relocatable enclosure for one individual carries the smudges, imprints and stains left behind by the wear and tear of the body. Her proposal folds up and then unfolds, responding to changes in light and seasonal variations of temperature. The balance of his tree-house pods become more or less translucent as environmental conditions vary. Carrie’s project, resembling a mechanical ‘kaleidoscope’ of possible uses in the form of a reconfigurable barrel, was also designed for a single inhabitant. It has a thick envelope, parts of which can hinge open and closed creating accommodation for bathing, sleeping, lounging, depending on the needs of the user. All of these private spaces are exposed in various ways to an environment, and subsequently transform in response. But what is the relationship between these semi-private capsule-like spaces and the public sphere? What are the implications for new conceptions of spaces of gathering? How can we learn from the cellular automatism of these discrete units of inhabitation the three student projects explore?

For the exhibition A Notion of Space we collaborated to create a folded field of red and grey felt that emphasized the liminal qualities of this space of display and its function as a visual threshold between the public street front along Flanders Lane and the basement level retail space and reception of Craft Victoria. Here we were interested in exploring what sort of life can be imagined within the folds. To generate the custom-built folded structure we used parametric design principles and simulated new fabrication technologies. In addition to the three student projects outlined above, this volume contains a series of essays by academics and researchers in the field. Tim Schork’s Synthetic Making: Designing Across Media, describes the impact of new fabrication technologies on design and the design process. Schork was also involved in the Spaces We Live In Studio, and collaborated on the exhibition installation for Craft Victoria. Michael Fowler’s essay, The City as Soundscape Laboratory examines the relationship between sound and space. Fowler not only traces a brief history of the interconnections between sound, music and architecture, but imagines a future foraural environments experienced in the public sphere. Greg Mora’s, Atomistic Constructions, presents projects composed in virtual, immersive space. The projects have been created within Second Life, used throughout the design process as a virtual context for design collaboration and communication. Helène Frichot’s, The Erasure of the Object that is Architecture, is a philosophical confrontation with the discrete, designed object that we isolate in order to identify what we believe constitutes architecture. Frichot argues that we habitually forget the extent to which designed objects are caught within networks of actors and in the midst of events. All of these essays explore different notions of space that challenge the idea of the design artefact as being separated out from a life world or environment of affect, whether virtual or actual. In different ways the essays explore complex combinations of what I have described at the opening of this essay as design hardware and design software.
Design research is often most promising when it leads to further research projects. The pedagogical context of the design studio needs to be distinguished from the research undertaken beyond that milieu, by the emerging or established researcher. I have also included here then images of my own research work and collaborations, including: Strangely Familiar, a group exhibition, curated by Gini Lee, at the University of South Australia; Have You Seen It? a State of Design Festival project, produced by a small group called Team Z; and Urban Interior Occupation, a group exhibition at Craft Victoria undertaken with my peers from the research collective UI [Urban Interior]. A range of media have been explored across these three design research exercises, including photography (Strangely Familiar); the appropriation of traffic signage (Have You Seen It?) and the use of meticulously choreographed and framed slide projections (Urban Interior Occupation).

In ‘Foam City’, Sloterdijk discusses the notion of refunctioning spaces, an artistic strategy that he takes from the playwright, Bertolt Brecht via the writer Walter Benjamin. [4] In my contribution to the UI Occupation exhibition (in collaboration with Ian de Gruchy, Ramesh Ayyar, and Michael Fowler), I turned the interior of the gallery space inside-out to reveal hidden layers of an external world; creating an exterior experience in an interior. Onto the gallery wall, some twenty metres long, I projected a carefully stitched together image of an otherwise obscured laneway façade. As the old glass slides in four projectors shuffled through their carousels, the projected image of an outside arose out of the dawn light into day, and descended again into the evening. In this exercise of refunctioning I was aided by a realtime soundscape generated by Fowler, and a video-loop of Flinders Lane projected onto the far wall of the gallery space, by Ayyar, which also depicted the passing of a day. My aim in all of the above explorations has been to question our habitual perception of spaces of daily habituation and to delve into the difficult line that demarcates the private from the public at a range of scales, and media, and across a number of different contexts. Having manufactured an external urban atmosphere within the confines of an interior gallery space, the next challenge is to compose an interior space in an urban setting, or an ‘urban room’. This would be distinct from a public space or city square in that it should achieve the kind intimacy and mood we might associate with a private place. It is with this speculative thought of what an urban room might be, what its intensive and extensive qualities might amount to, that I shall conclude this essay.

Have You Seen It?, State of Design Festival, Melbourne 2008. Through a number of different insertions into the public sphere over the duration of the event the installation created an awareness of temporal, ephemeral, intangible elements and sensations.

Urban Ephemeral Room, Urban Interior Occupation at Craft Victoria, September 2009. A milieu of experience that conjoins the individual and the collective with an activated space that is animated in duration.

My Places, Strangely Familiar Exhibition, Adelaide, 2006. The series of photographs explores our experience of daily places and how we contextualize them. Explanatory signs are used to supplement the photographic images. A city, place, season, and time of the day are given for each image. The text shapes our first impression, and manufactures a certain expectation.
Residue
of
Inhabitation

Jennifer Addison
Our movements, actions leave traces. I explored the idea of 'trace' as residue of our inhabitation, coffee stains on the counter, moldy food in the fridge, creases in the mattress; these traces reveal aspects of us that we imprint on our surroundings.

'How Can The Residue Of Our Inhabitation Through Traces Provide Impetus For Further Performance In Space?'

When living in various spaces through renting, one pardons the privilege of personalizing the home in the same way one may have done growing up in the family home. This design responds to this lack by providing a personal space that collects traces. This fibreglass felt structure unfolds so that it can be moved to different places with you.

The Interior is composed of layers of compressed felts, fabrics and papers. The materiality allows weathering overtime, as the space collects and absorbs traces from the inhabitant, the interior responds to the occupancy through revealing layers below. Therefore one is inspired to further participate in the space in a dynamic creative manner. Thus the space performs overtime.

Our experience of the auditory environment, and its connection to the urban condition, has evolved in parallel with social, cultural, and technological advancements. Sound and space are indelibly linked, and for Western culture, the relationship of sonic art forms to the spaces in which they were conceived, show an intimate relationship of cause and effect. Western Classical music's stylistic evolution is connected to the change in architectural scale found in the spaces for the creation of music. The progression from the Gothic cathedral to the late 18th Century palace ballroom had profound effects on the thematic materials of music and the means to which these materials were organised. In fact music-space has now come full circle. Western secular music was firstly an outdoor phenomenon of troubadours that eventually found enough popularity and influence to infiltrate the sacred forms that occurred 'in doors.' With the rise of technologies in the 20th Century for the projection of sound, outdoor events have become commonplace, to which the projection of sound creates outdoor rooms capable of housing thousands rather than hundreds of people.

But this transformation has also affected our modes of listening, and indeed our 'notion of space.' In 1973, R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer, led a group of researchers to investigate the aesthetic, scientific and sociological conditions extant within the city of Vancouver, with the goal of better understanding the factors that have led to the construction of the auditory environment. The Vancouver Soundscape Project initiated a new field of inquiry—aoustic ecology. [1] The use of traditional acoustic methodologies of observation, together with the mapping of sound phenomena and social interactions, led the research group to an understanding of the built environment as a system of acoustic communities and acoustic horizons. The city had become an interior, a laboratory, an urban room in which the dynamic nature of its acoustic boundaries and auditory zones allow for numerous experiments and design interventions. The Acoustic Ecology Movement sought to draw attention to the inter-balance between the auditory and ocular articulations of spaces prevalent particularly within the urban environment.

Though there has been a considerable rise since the 1970s of pervasive computing within public art and sound-based urban installations, the nature of urban design and architecture to most prominently bias our ocular sense in new design propositions means that our auditory environment continues on as a result of design decisions that are not multi-modal in conception. With the exception of concert hall design, or electro-acoustic music studies, the importance of balanced soundscapes design in creating a 'notion of space,' or as Charles Fox would argue a 'a notion of place' remains an issue for acoustic ecology and its attempt to infiltrate the sacred forms of architectural practice. But things must change. In 2007 the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs [2] announced that for the first time in history, more people live in urban areas than in rural areas. This monumental shift in population densities will have obvious effects for the nature of the urban environment and the urban condition.

Iconoclast and Zen thinker-composer John Cage's argument against the need to balance the urban soundscape is a simple embracing of any sounds, including noise, as the elements of an urban music. [3]. The composer sought to negate the use of value judgments by accepting that all sounds constitute an acceptable content for a musical composition—whether they be intended or unintended, in the urban realm or concert hall. Though this is at odds with the main concern of the acoustic ecology movement to allow for a greater aesthetic balance to our senses within the built environment, Cage's understanding of sound as containing its own program, may enable an approach to resolving urban soundscape design.

There is obviously a wealth of sound sources within the built environment, though there is an unusual proliferation of static, unchanging sources such as air conditioning units and other fan noise. The uniformity of such sounds, and their often limited bandwidth and spectral range do little to curate a sensory response, producing more of a limited space in auditory terms.

An approach that has recently been proposed by the Teimu Research Group [4] for developing an ontology of aural design for the future built environment uses an aesthetic and design response that combines compositional systems from Western music and the acoustic ecology movement with the predilections of traditional Japanese garden design. As a model for soundscape practices, the Japanese garden has shown itself to be an exemplar in aural design. Traditionally known for its expert manipulation of viewing space, subtle texture flux and dynamic seasonal states, the aural spaces of Japanese gardens are equally attenuated and considered. As a yet to be explored paradigm, the Japanese garden may offer a host of new spatial strategies for the urban soundscape, where the ocular and auditory realms find a nexus that produces rich experiences for the urban condition.

The future sound of cities need not be a distant projection. Though urban populations will be ever-increasing, the city as a laboratory for testing aural design strategies remains open. The slow increase in urban loudspeaker systems for content delivery (currently 5 within Melbourne) provide an infrastructure for auditory design testing within public space that may enable a catalyst moment for new design in architecture. By initiating a greater public awareness in the auditory environment within the urban context may similarly initiate a transformation in the use of public space. Highlighting the aural environment as an ephemeral object with the ability to construct a notion of space based on a Japanese garden, a Gothic Cathedral or an 18th Century chamber, may create a future built environment in which architecture becomes a multi-sensory composition strategy with tangible and intangible materials. Such an 'aural architecture' [5] may enable a new thinking in design to which the notion of space as an articulation of forms that create definite boundaries of containment, of inside and outside, are subsumed into acoustic communities operated via acoustic horizons. Perhaps the extension of urban design and architecture will ultimately (through necessity) find an end-point in the coalescence and coherence of multi-sensory stimuli in the urban environment. Increased population densities will generate new definitions of public and private space, interior and exterior, and likewise cause new patterns of mobility and movement. Future design systems must enable an ontology that seamlessly connects, responds and identifies our senses in ever-increasingly dense information spaces.


[4] This research group includes Professor Peter Downtow, Lawrence Harvey, Dr. Michael Fowler (RMIT University), Dr. Greg Musgrove, Dr. Alex Salentinsch (University of Melbourne), and was formed through an ARC Discovery Grant [Teimu (the garden of dreams: aural and aesthetic attributes of Japanese gardens as models for spatial environments)].

Data-set visualisation of audio captured from Tokyo’s Kyu Furukawa Teien garden. This mapping technique uses the audio software Pure Data to visualise sound-scape events (through transients) by describing frequencies, relative amplitude and raw spectrum.
The use of computer technology within contemporary architectural design practice is shifting its role from a tool to aid design towards being the predominant design environment. While this shift partially offers a certain degree of freedom for design exploration, it also increasingly leads to a technologically driven divide between the digital and physical world. Digital fabrication technologies such as Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAM), laser and plasma cutters, or Rapid Manufacturing (RM), seems to offer the potential to seamlessly cross this divide and possibly re-unify these two poles. But as the term ‘digital fabrication’ implies, this technology only addresses the fabrication end of architectural production and does not engage with the initial problem that the digital and the physical should not be regarded as two opposite poles in the first place.

An alternative method for overcoming this dichotomy is to develop digital design processes that try to establish a design logic that aims for a synthesis of the two media. Such a synthesis can be achieved through the incorporation of structural and fabrication constraints of the physical world into the geometric description of a digital model and making them active parants in the design process. Instead of regarding the digital and the physical as being mutually exclusive, this method approaches the convergence of design, engineering and fabrication as a field for expanded architectural investigation. This convergence allows for the creation and use of generative design models that overlay architectural design intentions with performance, material and fabrication parameters. By establishing a synergistic feedback loop that allows for a reciprocal exchange between the digital and the physical, a new compositional, organisational and explorative design logic emerges. In this trans-medial working method the digital (virtual) and the physical (material) are intrinsically interwoven and mutually inform and complement each other.

The prototype illustrates how computer technology allows for the integration of performance, material and fabrication criteria within the design process and how this integration allows for a synthesis between the digital (virtual) and the physical (concrete). It demonstrates how synergistic feedback loops between and across media open up new possibilities for the design and fabrication of architecture. The implications of these feedback loops are a new design paradigm, which is being facilitated by, but not completely dependent upon the use of computer and digital fabrication technology. It is through this transition from a practical application to a conceptual tool that computer technology becomes a creative design media that directly influences our design thinking and informs our design processes. [1]With this conceptual framework in mind, a new design logic emerges whose possibilities and aesthetic not only impacts on our ‘notion of space’ but extends our ‘notion of form’.

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[1] In his book Tools for Ideas, Christian Gaenshirt illustrates how tools have the potential to not only change the way we work, but also the way we think about design.
The exhibition *A Notion of Space*, January 21- February 10, 2008, had the subtitle: *an interior which adopts our ideas of life (inhabitation)*. The exhibition involved making and installing a 1-1 prototype of a design in the Craft Victoria window space, enCounter. The 3D digital model was ‘unfolded’ using the modelling program Rhino and traced at 1-1 scale onto sheets of cardboard with the use of a data projector. The pattern was then cut out, lined with felt, ‘refolded’ and installed at the site.

Project Team: Rochus Urban Hinkel & Tim Schork
with Jen Addison, Natassya Arief, Thomas House, Vaughan Howard, Anna Semenova & Carrie Tjandinegara
In recent years we have been running digital design studios using Linden Lab's Second Life as a design context for interior design and architecture students. Second Life presents a persistent digital world where inhabitants create, exchange and even sell objects. Although Second Life looks like a videogame it is designed as a complete synthetic world that mirrors real world models of economy and real-estate.

For designers Second Life presents a shared social and collaborative design space. Learning design within Second Life is a precursor to new emerging forms of spatial practice where designers work collectively - within a singular digital environment - in real-time. In these environments design ideas develop concurrently in the physical and digital realms.

Within Second Life designers use a set of tools to create their designs directly in the environment. These tools are limited when compared to typical architectural software, but guarantee that all modelling is compatible with the online networked environment. Objects that are created are called “prims” (short for primitives), and through a combination of prims designers can assemble complicated spatial compositions. Second Life embraces the concept of atomistic construction for user generated content, where simple, easy to generate, objects can be used in combination to create complexity.

In our design studios we promote that spatial design within these environments needs to be hybrid condition of cinema, architecture and videogames. Participants of these studios inhabit RMIT University’s Francis Ormond Island. During a semester a series of projects are tested. For example one project is to design a Space of Refuge, where participants create an intimate space on the edge of the island for 2 to 3 inhabitants inspired by Borges’ short story Rigor in Science; examining the tension between the map and the territory. Another project is A Museum of Performative Architecture, which considers the future of museum spaces within Second Life, and contrasted ideas of interactivity and performance with concepts of design collection and presentation.

After two years of development the Island presents a collection of distinctive designs that have emerged from a unique design culture. With each iteration of the studio the level of complexity grows, and the compositional experimentation expands. Since our studios are not trying to recreate a physical world reality these design experiments present new notions of space through the digital realm: spaces that are informational and atmospheric, constructed from the atoms of logic.

Studio Team: Greg More, Andrew Burrow, Edmund Carter, Louis Wong  
all images: RMIT University’s Ormond Island in Second Life
How do we know trees? How might we dwell in trees?

Trees harbour our childhood memories, our collective memories as a species. This project envisioned a return to trees.

The tree house is above all a dream-space, a space in which to descend into a reverie. The translucent shell gathers the light, filtering through the canopy, capturing and amplifying subtle shifts in condition.

Time spent in the tree is defined by cycles of sunrise and sunset, rain and cloud, light and shadow.

Vaughan Howard
Concerning the question of the erasure of the object that is architecture we could begin with a tale: There, by D.H. Lawrence, which describes the somewhat desultory travels of an American couple, the Melvilles. The idealistic Mr. and Mrs. Melville are in pursuit of what they have very vaguely, and in a rather abstract fashion, described as “freedom” and “beauty.” Along the way, by happenstance, they collect some things. Object or art, knick-knacks; eclectic items of furniture, a “Bologna cupboard,” a “Venetian bookcase,” Sienna curtains and bronze. They arrange all their “things” in one apartment after another, dwellings that provide a suitable backdrop or setting for their collected things, all of which are suffused with significance. Having finally decided that there is nothing left for them in Europe, they return to America, their place of birth, with all their things. Meanwhile, their life circumstances change and they discover that they have not quite enough money for the lease of a sufficiently voluminous residence in which they might curate an arrangement of their fine things; they are obliged to store their worldly possessions in a warehouse for fifty dollars a month. The moral of this tale would appear to be that objects, or “things” entrance us only to become a burden that inhibits us, especially when we invest them with some weighted meaning. Mr. Melville, by the conclusion of Lawrence’s tale, has taken on the sinister demeanour of a rat watching over its things with selfish anxiety. This unflattering metamorphosis suggests that the accumulation of things also threatens to transform us in disturbing ways. Our relations with things will burden us, unless, that is, we discover ways of participating in more sustainable, relational networks of things. While the object we call architecture might be seen to dissolve through series of erasures, as this essay will argue, what kinds of new relations with architectural surrounds might be seen to dissolve through series of erasures, as this essay will show, what kinds of new relations with architectural surrounds might be said to subsequently emerge?

The thing, as Elizabeth Grosz explains in Architecture From the Outside, “goes by many names. Indeed the very label ‘the thing’ is only a recent incarnation of a series of terms which have an illustrious philosophical history: the object, matter, substance, the world, noumena, reality, appearance, and so on.” [1] Here Grosz creates a rather loosely bound cluster of things that can be called things. It might seem at first that architecture, on account of its more impressive scale, could not be considered a thing as such, nor even quite an object, for an object would appear to deny entry or internal circulation. Things, we assume, need a suitable setting, and that setting itself can also be seen as an object or a thing, even a collection of things. Can we, for instance, say we inhabit an object? And yet, the way that architecture is habitually treated as a bounded form to be designed, or an object or thing upon which discourse finds its point of focus, it very often emerges with an object or thing-like character. Architecture becomes an object in a field especially when we distinguish it from its context or else when we focus on its sensible form as a primary motivation in the design process. So, the object that is architecture comes into focus as something that might be discussed and in turn something that might be questioned. This essay will argue that the erasure of the object that is architecture can be discerned in its effects as well as positive. That is to say, we will find that there are both productive and dissipative erasures of the architectural object. Below I will outline an open list that accounts for some of the erasures of the object we call architecture that can be witnessed today.

At the outset it will be necessary to ask, what is an object? And whether this is the same thing as asking, as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger asked, “What is a thing?” [2] Grammatically, the object appears in every complete sentence we construct and sets itself up in distinction to the subject. It riddles our language, which reflects the way we divide the world into subjects circulating amidst objects, undertaking actions that we typically assume that objects are mute, and ready to be handled at will. Though, as Heidegger argues, “sentence structure does not provide the pattern of thing-structure, nor is the latter merely mirrored in the former.” [3] Throughout a history of philosophy and the sciences also, the thing has been defined negatively by what we, as humans, are not. [4] According to what is known as Heidegger’s “tool analysis”, the object withdraws from the subject’s immediate apprehension in that it is ready-to-hand through our habitual use of it, that is to say, the object or tool “disappears into uselessness.” [5] Likewise, in our quotidian inhabitation of a built environment we tend not to reflect on the places in which we are immersed. We (as the subject who handles the object) only think about the object as such when the object breaks down or draws attention to itself in some way, then we pay heed to how we rely on the object as something of use in the world. Mrs Melville, for instance, thinks to herself: “‘Things’ are all very well to look at, but it’s awful handling them, even when they’re beautiful. To be a slave of hideous things, to keep a stove going, cook meals, wash dishes.” [6] Heidegger himself is a little dangerous with regard to useful objects or things, for we soon see that subjects can also be considered as things in a negative sense, as he writes: “A man is not a thing. It is true that we speak of a young girl who is faced with a task too difficult for her as being a young thing, still too young for it, but only because we feel that being human is in a certain way missing here.” Heidegger continues, “we hesitate to call the deer in the forest clearing, the beetle in the grass, the blade of grass a thing”, though a “cloud of earth, a piece of wood” can be considered mere things. [7] In this distinction he appears to be attempting to draw a line between animate and inanimate objects; what is suffused with some form of life, and what is not. In the world, so to speak, and in seeming alignment with language (though the priority of neither the world nor language can be assumed here), we imagine human actors interacting with inanimate things, making them ‘work’, but we also see, following Heidegger’s account, that a human who is somehow lacking a productive force of life risks becoming a mere thing, a mere part of the furniture and fittings.

A standard account of things allows us to suggest that architecture, as an inanimate material surround, can be said to be a thing or object we manipulate. Does this view of inanimate material diffuse some of the complexity of material and immaterial, human and non-human, organic and non-organic admixtures? As Graham Harman points out, we must not forget the secret life of things and how they quietly intermingle with our daily lives, potentially transforming us. [8] As Harman further argues in relation to Heidegger, where at first the relation between the subject and the object remains secure, later on in his career Heidegger turns simply to things. Bruno Latour points out that while Heidegger is happy to render an analysis of the rustic peasant shoe as exemplary thing he implicitly suggests that “Being cannot reside in ordinary things.” [9] Latour argues that such philosophers as Heidegger attempt to purify an otherwise messy world according to subjects and objects, things that pertain to nature, and things
To discover aspects of the architectural that have become dissimulated by the impositions of meaning it is often necessary to take a detour around ascriptions of sense (common sense) and return to a simple apprehension of the sensuous as well as an immediate affective response, which always happens in the midst of a constellation of diverse relations.

that pertain to culture and society, but things are far more complicated and interwoven than this. If we were to begin with the multiplicity of accounts of things, if we mobilise them, rather than letting them sit about in a warehouse as so many things to be looked at and not engaged with, as the Melvilles seem to prefer, we can place ourselves in contact with what Latour has called the parliament of things. A parliament suggests a setting in which all those assembled come together to discuss pertinent matters. Latour’s radical move is to introduce apparently inanimate things into such a gathering. The things so clustered by Latour are admixtures of all sorts that constitute as networks of hybrids of the living and the non-living, which is not to say that we should avoid all attempts to classify the things that compose a world. Grosz also is after such ambiguous things that defy our attempts to purify the world into inflexible categories or camps. She argues, “the thing is the provocation of the non-living, the half-living, or that which has no life, to the living, to the potential of and for life.” Grosz, like Harman, goes so far as to suggest that the thing has a life and history of its own. [10] Before we turn to the parliament of things, which Latour has described as a kind of common dwelling that shelters and accommodates what he conjunctively calls ‘natures-societies’, and all manner of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects, humans and non-humans, [11] we will assemble an open list of erasures of the object that is architecture, as promised above.

The erasures I enumerate below will provide just the briefest of accounts, a rapid survey of a smudging out of the certainties associated with architectural form: First is the ascription of meaning as an act of erasure; second is the insistence of the spatio-temporality of the event in which architecture inevitably finds (and loses) itself; third is the occasional obfuscation created by theory when it becomes wayward and jargon-laden, and the fourth erasure is that enabled through the increasing sophistication of digital software dedicated not only to new modes of representation, but the very act of design itself, seemingly promising design a new mode of intelligence.

An age-old response to the architectural edifice is the ascription of meaning. The proverbial mound we stumble upon in the woods is read as a sacred burial place and from this assumption all the monumental impulses of architecture unfold. Meaning can be considered a first erasure of the architectural object. The desire to look beyond the form for a set of incipient ideas that have facilitated its formation places the architectural object into dissolve, and allows us to forget its quiddity, its thinness and specificity and its given network of relations at a contemporary juncture. The Melvilles gloat over the significance of their things, their curtains that remind Mrs Melville of Chartres; Mr Melville’s sixteenth century Venetian bookshelf displaying a choice selection of books less for erudition than to impress visitors. These things after which the Melvilles avidly hunt separate them out from their everyday and singular existences and close off their possible relations in a world. Whether it is an external logic of significance to which meaning appeals or else the assumption that an internal essence can be retrieved from an object, including built forms, architecture risks becoming masked by semiotic over-coding to the detriment of its very real impact on those – human and non-human actants – who circulate amidst its walls. Andrew Benjamin, philosopher of the architectural, puts it this way, “meaning is privileged and thus the specificity of the architectural object – the being of the object qua object – remains unaddressed.” [12] We can go further than this confrontation of the object qua object and invest in the types of relations that promise to open up in the midst of diversely populated networks. This is a methodology that Sanford Kwinter has described as “working back from the object toward a system of mutual implications”. [13] To discover aspects of the architectural that have become dissimulated by the impositions of meaning it is often necessary to take a detour around ascriptions of sense (common sense) and return to a simple apprehension of the sensuous as well as an immediate affective response, which always happens in the midst of a constellation of diverse relations. Through much of the history of the discipline of architecture theories of architecture have entered into circulation with the concatenated objects and events of architecture. [15] Theory also enacts an erasure of the architectural object, but in different registers according to how it is applied. Theory can be seen to both follow meekly after the designed object as a form of commentary, a statement after the fact of the built form, and then, when it performs a strong role, as a crucial contribution to the possibility of the process of architecture’s conception. Theory, on the one hand, can seem neutral or disengaged from the matter at hand offering a position of observation only after the fact of an event. On the other hand, theory does not have to be a shadowy double that represents, in a disinterested manner, the ‘thing’ but can seem neutral or disengaged from the matter at hand offering a position of observation only after the fact of an event. On the other hand, theory does not have to be a shadowy double that represents, in a disinterested manner, an architectural edifice. Theory can be a productively violent force engaged in the creation of an architectural event. As Claire Colebrook suggests, “we only divorce ‘theory’ from the world and practice when our ideas have begun to mask rather than enhance life.” [16] When put to use inventively, theory develops an intimate rapport with practice. Architectural theory is one of the modes by which architecture attempts to make sense of itself through the interpretation of its present and past forms, but also by speculating on its possible futures. When theory plays a strong role it can be discovered at any point in the process of architectural design. What’s more, according to
the architectural theorist Ignasi de Solà-Morales, “the relationship between theory and practice in architecture is so inexhaustible that what is necessary now can contribute to the erasure of the architectural object by demanding that we search for a static object that constitutes the architectural, but where it entirely leaves all material considerations behind it may well find it can no longer support itself. The architectural theorist, Jennifer Bloomer suggests that “architecture pines over and woos this haughty technology, whose necessary desire is the obviation of the building.” [20] Beyond a delight in the digitally generated skin of digital architecture, she asks: what about the material, or the ‘fat’ of a building? The growing fascination in digitally generated architecture has opened up many questions concerning the stasis, fixity, and identity that have traditionally informed an understanding of architecture as thing. Should we search for a static object that constitutes the architectural, we would have missed the point. What’s more, nothing is achieved in searching after a singular response to questions concerning the architectural. What has become clear in the latter part of the twentieth century is that theory and practice in the discipline of architecture can be mutally supportive and equally contribute to what can be called the architectural event. [21] As Deleuze intimates, the status of the object, let us say specifically the architectural object, has profoundly changed. We are asked to appreciate that “the great Pyramid is an event, and its duration of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes,” forges a passage through time as it organizes a little bit of chaos and arranges in a certain vicinity a conglomeration of affects and percepts. [22] It is no longer a simple Aristotelian, hylomorphic formula of biassed matter, nor a straightforward distinction between forms of expression and forms of content, but material undergoing continuous modulation as it succumbs to duration. Immediately we can hear complaints. How can that very concrete structure, the architectural edifice prove so elusive? Deleuze concedes that the great pyramid is an eternal object, but only in so far as it has also entered the flux of events, it has installed its permanence in paradoxical response to a temporal flux. Bernard Cache, an architect known for both his theoretical work in connection with Deleuze, but also for his creation of non-standard architectures that reduce the mediating distance between design and manufacture arguments, objects, which are those solid parts of our actions (the knife we use to cut with), are but a moment of a densification in the folds of our behaviour that is itself fluctuating.” [23] With regard to digital design practices the specificity of the behaviour of different materials increasingly becomes a factor that software packages are able to test so that design might even commence by following the material at hand, rather than imposing a ready-made form in a more traditional hylomorphic manner. As Deleuze describes “the new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold – in other words to a relation of form-matter – but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form.” [24] Instead, the closing distance between digital design and manufacture facilitates the ease of producing objects and ejecting them into the world. Bloomer’s question about fat risks becoming an issue of design obesity, but that would be another essay. Cache continues with the suggestion that “The question today is: what is an object? And this question only makes sense with respect to our daily objectivity, which is to say that set of things that industry conceives and fabricates and that we buy because they create use effects.” [25] How, finally, do we move from the object that is architecture through an understanding that this object is merely the temporary – though sufficiently durable – densification of an event, thence into circulation with Latour’s parliament of things? It used to be, explains Cache, “that the object was simply what we saw in front of us; it was generally contrasted with the variations that are thought to take place within the subject.” [26] Instead the object is seen to have a life of its own, transforming over time both in contact with human use, but also in contact with other objects. It is not a matter of giving up the object altogether, though it would appear that the thingness of things is more promising than an object that always already presupposes a generally fixed subject position. Interpretative ascriptions of meaning erase immanent experiences of the architectural object, prescriptive theories erase the architectural object to similar effect, digital processes of random immaterialization erase the object that is architecture, but something remains. The object under consideration has itself transformed and what we have not realized is that it also transforms us (whomever we might be). Both Cache and Latour use the term ‘quasi-object’ to designate a new understanding of objects or things as meta-stable, or open to transformation with just the smallest provocation. [27] Cache’s emphasis remains on the designed object, while Latour introduces the object more fully to social and cultural forces and how these combine with technological forces (presumably including the act of design itself). Latour argues that quasi-objects, which do not fit neatly into categories that divide the world according to the two poles of nature and culture, continue to proliferate the more we attempt to suppress or purify them into one camp or the other.

The Malfrays want things to remain in their next categories; they speak with largesse of terms like ‘freedom’ and ‘beauty’, but by no means do they practice what they profess to admire. Lawrence’s tale shows us a couple entrapped by their things, and reduced to limited subjectivities that remain
very much distinct from inanimate objects. Latour’s parliament of things, by contrast, assumes far more flexible relations between human and the non-human actants, such that erasure promises to open up new kinds of hybrid thing or ‘quasi-objects’, which proliferate whether we want them to or not. These quasi-objects oblige us to think anew about how both social and natural collectives form and intermingle and become confused. By extension the architectural object can be conceived as neither mate form, nor over-laden with meaning, but perhaps both and neither. As a quasi-object it also works upon us as quasi-subjects rather than merely being that which we manipulate to suit our purposes. The most productive erasure of the architectural object is the one that allows us finally to open up new relations between all the actants involved in an architectural event, and to see how we follow the material at hand it will have some impact upon us. Despite himself, Mr Melville, by increments transforms into a rat, or at least Lawrence describes his eyes, as the “queer, sharp eyes of a rat” and explains that “one almost expected to see rat’s whiskers twitching at the sides of the sharp nose”. [28] Even if we resist, the ever-transforming architectural object will have some impact upon us, and the unwritten tale of how objects also construct the subject will have to be told. [29]

[1] For a discussion of the ‘thingness’ of architecture, the quiddity of an (architectural) object, or that which makes a thing what it is, or is on the way to becoming, see Elizabeth Grosz: “The thing and the space it inscribes and produces are inaugurated at the same moment, the moment that movement is arrested, frozen, or dissected to reveal its momentary aspects, the moment that the thing and the space that surrounds it are differentiated conceptually or perceptually.” Elizabeth Grosz, Architecture From the Outside, Essays on Virtual and Real Space, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 167.


[18] It can be argued that the architect has nearly always remained some at remove from the material product of his or her labour—whether computer generated or hand drafted—these conventional architectural drawings that constitute the greater part of the work of the architect can be considered an intervening medium. Though the architect might supervise the building in progress, they are effectively hands off. Robin Evans’ writings further elucidate this argument. See Robin Evans, ‘Translations from Drawing to Building’; Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays (London: Architectural Association, 1997), p. 153 – 193. As described by Lazarato, immaterial labour can be loosely defined as labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity. ‘The use of computer graphics programs can be given as an example. Mauricio Lazarato, ‘Immaterial Labor’, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds, Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics, Theory Out of Bounds, vol. 7 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 133.

[19] ‘The topological turn entails a shift in the very object of the architectural design process. Traditionally, form was thought of as both the raw material and end product of architecture, its origin and telos. Form bracketed design. approached topologically, the architect’s raw material is no longer form but deformation.’ Brian Massumi, ‘Sensing the Virtual: Building the insensible’, Architectural Design: Hyper Surface Architecture, vol. 68, no. 5/6 (May, June 1998), p. 16. Such architects as Ben Van Berkel and Caroline Bos was lyrical with respect to computer technology describing, ‘The tantalizing new spatial conditions suggested on every computer screen result in a general familiarity with the potential of a multidimensional spatial experience … spatial arrangements that follow the diving, swooping, zooming, slicing folding motions … a delight in exploitive spatial conditions.’ BenVan Berkel and Caroline Bos, ‘A Capacity for Endlessness’, The Virtual Dimension: Architecture, Representation, and Crash Culture, ed. John Beckman (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), pp. 258-259. This architect was inspired by the French architect and theorist Christian Girard: Personal communication, Paris, 25.03.03.


[21] In contemporary architecture and architectural discourse, especially stemming from the late 1980’s, it would be possible to create quite a detailed taxonomy of the concept of the event as it has been taken up by such architects as Bernard Tschumi. Peter Eisenman, and Greg Lynn, just to name a few. On the philosophical concept of the event see especially Deleuze’s chapter in The Fold: “What is an Event”, also Deleuze’s chapters in The Logic of Sense,”Twenty-First Series of the Event” and “Twenty-Fourth Series of the Community of Events.” Bernard Tschumi, architect and architectural theorist, is well known for his discussions concerning the conceptualization of architecture by way of the event. For example in The Manhattan Transcripts, Architecture and Disjunction, and in his completed architectural project in Paris, Parc de la Villette. For the theoretical accomplishment to this park, in which Tschumi collaborated with Jacques Derrida, see Bernard Tschumi, La Casa Vida La Vidaite 1985 (London: Architectural Association, 1986). Tschumi, The Manhattan Transcripts (London: Academy Editions, 1981) Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996) Tschumi’s notion of ‘event-space’ was developed as a critique of practices that had ‘turned architecture into a passive object of contemplation instead of a place that confronts spaces and actions.” Tschumi is cited in Pelkmans, which also makes a comparison between Tschumi and Deleuze’s different approaches to the notion of the event. Enns Lisa Pelkmans, “Bernard Tschumi’s Event Space,” Daidalos 67 (March, 1998), p. 84. More recently on the event and architecture, see Sanford Kwinter, Architectures of Time Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture, op. cit.


[27] Bernard Cache, Earth Moves, pp. 95, 96. Cache also develops an argument about what he names ‘objecticles’ and ‘subjecticles’; “we call variable objects created from surfaces ‘subjecticles’, and variable objects created from volumes ‘objecticles’”, which appear to make Cache’s subjects and objects quite other then subjects and objects conventionally described. The projective action of the objecticle and subjecticle (like项目的行) are based on the idea of the variable and deformational modulation of surfaces and volumes over time, or along a series of iterations, p. 88. Deleuze further comments on Cache’s treatment of objecticles and subjecticles in The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque, where he writes that “fluctuation of the norm replaces permanence of the law; where the object assumes a place in the continuum by variation” and explores that the point of view of the subject (a point or place to which the subject arrives) is always a point of view of the object undergoing variation, thus both object and subject, and their relation must be considered anew Deleuze, The Fold, p. 19.


[29] Latour argues that while we have many accounts of how subjects have transformed objects, we do not yet have an account of “how objects construct the subject”. Latour: We Have Never Been Modern, p. 80.
An interactive space that responds and adjusts to the way of inhabitation through the exterior (wind movements and light) and interior (people’s inhabitation and circulation) changing aspects.

The dynamism of the structure allows interactions between interior and exterior, and also provides the qualities that are required for daily activities.

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