Lessons of the Labyrinth

Thesis

Laura Amrhein
Lessons
of the Labyrinth

Architecture within the Landscape

Thesis 1988

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To
Mom,
Dad,
Michael,
and Jim.
This Thesis Document is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for Architectural Thesis ARCH 406 and the requirements for the degree: Bachelor of Architecture.

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Architecture within the Landscape

Professor Alfredo Missair, Thesis Committee Chairman.

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To my parents,
for their love and support, both economically and emotionally.

To Barb and Angie,
for laughing with me when we most needed to.

To Professor Alfredo Missair,
for his wisdom and honest criticism.

And especially to Jim,
for his love, his sense of humor, and his incredible patience!

Thank-you.
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The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
The silent communication between the environment and ourselves provokes emotions that are not always easily identified. However, this dialogue has a soft and steady effect upon us through everyday experience. Then it seems that as the art so intimately connected with man's daily life, architecture may be understood through the emotions that it evokes within ourselves. Thus, the designer sets the stage and provides the atmosphere to be interpreted.

There are traditional, historic ways of using landscape and architecture with complex simplicity, ordered aesthetic, and visual splendor. Whether an elaborately gilded palace was built to impress, or a neat, picturesque cottage was built for simple comfort, each hold a certain satisfaction and intrigue. The intricate details and extensive vistas challenge our imagination. Grand colonades and intimate niches invite us to explore and dream.

Far from being frivolous exercises as the name implies, these follies have always been fragments that do not depend upon decoration, but follow the principles of good building and allow the imagination to elaborate on the simplest forms - the column, the path, the grotto. Even objects we recognize may be used in subtle variations, like the imagery of a dream, to create a dialogue with or expression of something inside ourselves.
Elements
are
the essential constituents; the simplest parts
in the landscape.

Form
is
the contour and structure
given to the elements.

Orders
are
the comprehensible arrangement
among the forms.

Space
is
the three-dimensional field of everyday experience
and its infinite extension.
Senses
are
sensations which provide
physical, emotional, and intellectual gratification.

Perspective
states the facts, but also stimulates the imagination;
enables one to see not only what is, but also
what was and what might be.

Images
are
the vehicle for memory;
the world as a collection of pieces and layering of objects.

Essence
is
the timeless quality of a space
characterized by imprecise properties.
III

Orders
IV

Space
V

A Literary Inspiration:
Follies - Architecture for the Late-Twentieth-Century Landscape
For you
architecture
was the stage
for a play,
a place
for the enjoyment
of the senses
and the mind.

To Carlo Scarpa
From Emilio Embasz
This generation of architects is the first to know the Modern Movement as history, not dogma. Finally, it becomes possible to ask for the invention of an architectural fragment that would have violated the tenets of the architect in the recent past. (Archer, p.8)

Our own thesis situations seem suspiciously favorable to this line of thought. The new level of awareness of our intellectual and emotional climate shows we are willing to investigate the "history of the art... free of the fear to employ signs and allusions that do not denote progress." At best sublime and at worst frivolous, "follies have proven to be a vehicle for commenting upon evolving ideas about architecture and urbanism, for advancing strongly held beliefs about systems of building, for incorporating narrative and fantasy, irony and wit. Yet, all this is secondary to their originality- to the willingness of the architects to interpret the typology anew." (Archer, p. 9)

Follies - Architecture for the Late-Twentieth-Century Landscape is an exclamation of this newfound freedom of design. A folly may be defined as "an act or instance of foolishness." The word is meant to be "ironical, playing with the concepts of uselessness and excess and even madness." As examined by Anthony Vidler, the history of the folly first began as that of a vehicle for explaining away necessary evils through a museum of meditative objects. "Thus, within a tamed space, the folly closeted such difficult and nonbourgeois ideas as horror, terror, and decay." (Archer, p.10) Regarded amidst the nightmare, the monster, the savage, the criminal and the insane, the folly acted architecturally and mentally to establish a state of calm and undisturbed reason.

The folly then became an experimental object.
"What was not permitted in 'serious' building was, by definition, permitted in the folly. A mere plaything, the folly could exhibit the dimensions of play." Follies became "emblems of eroticism," the "retreat of lovers, allegorized as fauns, cupids, and nymphs." (Archer, p. 11) Next, through copying, satirizing, and fragmenting, follies as ruins, or as imitations of ruins, became the vehicles for instant nostalgia.

"The positive emblem of the greatest horror, of the most extreme cruelty, of the absolute decay, of the most decadent eroticism, of the furthest reaches of the exotic-these agonistic qualities were virtues to the Romantic imagination." (Archer, p. 12)

It finally took an age of reason for us to discover the marvelous properties of the folly. Despite our formal network of technical analysis and definition, we still cannot explain everything. In the "cold utopias of Modernism, there is still a desire for a transparent language of forms that will at once convey structure, substance, and feeling." Thus, follies may act as the "asylum for the forbidden, for the repressed, for the denied and the absolutely impossible." (Archer, p. 13)

The notion of the "Folly" is the subject for Architecture III, the 1983 exhibition that appears in conjunction with this volume. B.J. Archer, coordinator and designer, specified very few actual conditions for this particular charrette. The program given to the architects was purposefully vague, for it seemed the form and the site for the folly must be as much a product of design as the structure itself. After inspired rambles through the gardens of Stourhead and West Green House in England, Archer conceived the idea of architecture and nature for this design competition. In the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, he found a "fictional version of the conditions which might give rise to a folly." (Archer, p. 7) An impressive list of architects submitted a brief narrative and graphic series illustrating a variety of designs ranging from abstract expressions, to classical
historical contexts, to definite geometric twentieth-century usage. Some of these nineteen prominent architects and teams include: Peter Cook, Quinlan Terry, Emilio Ambasz, Bernard Tschumi, Joseph Rykwert, Frank Gehry, Eisenman and Robertson, Ricardo Bofill, Arata Isozaki, Hans Hollein, Michael Graves, Raimund Abraham, and Christian Hubert. In answer to imperatives outlined by Archer, the exhibition presents drawings and models which elicit displays of style and theory, as opposed to the creation of real buildings that respond to prevalent functional ideals.

Because it is a more creative approach of illustrating ideas and opinions, instead of only a technically, subjective analysis of a problem, Follies is essential to nearly any design study. Aside from the exciting design approaches of each architect, Follies provides a variety of insights we should mirror in our own research goals.

First, the competition is a method of empirical evaluation in itself. It is an inspiration of one responded to by the inspiration of many. The role of the "folly" was that of a "critical laboratory for architecture."

Secondly, the non-functional, non-programatic approach encourages an unrestricted freedom of response. The folly allows one to explore the extremes and imagine the impossible. Some solutions became a support of an historicist or private commentary, while others were an immediate and contemporary ideal. In either case, the charrette provides "a public place of experiment where theoretical issues, incompletely explored in texts and drawings, could be tested with real materials, real spaces, and real actors." (Archer, p. 8)

Next, Follies calls upon us to look at our memories and past experiences and realize their value. Because the project specified no client, each folliest was essentially designing for himself. Through the projection of ourselves into our design, we may become aware of the
reality of our influence on the environment. For example, Christian Hubert places himself within the spatial narrative of a video arcade game. The "architectural" features force him to make choices, handle confrontations, and finally, to leave a memento. The "folly," like our thesis, is a very personal exploration of our own feelings and beliefs.

In addition to our own experience, and traditional analytical research methods, Follies reinforces the importance of looking into other related art fields for inspiration. Painting, sculpture, poetry, and literature are only a few arts which provide the complexity of emotional appeal. The Landscape Garden, by Edgar Allan Poe is introduced as a "literary parallel to the task of the architect" as he attempts to impose order upon nature. (Archer, p. 14)

Closely related to this, the exciting variety of drawings, sketches, paintings, and models of the Folly architects not only stimulates the desire to use twodimensional mediums, but it also encourages threedimensional exploration. Although, these twodimensional mediums offer the least resistance to imaginative vision, three-dimensional architecture needs to adopt this freedom of expression. "That certain individuals are led to possess the image alone is an indication that architectural illustrations can be a source of meaning and an object of contemplation in and of itself." (Archer, p. 9)

In fact, the book layout as a whole is a folly in itself, for following the introduction and history is an eccentric collage of design opinions and approaches of the architects. Ranging from classical temples, to surrealist mountains, to simple huts, some illustration and quotations of selected works follow. In the end, there are brief resumes of each architect giving date and location of birth, educational background, prominent award status, and a current work progress report.

We are left with a somewhat ambiguous link between architecture and landscape architecture. The
book does not allow us to read it straight through from front to back, but requires a constant rereading of parts, for the elements and ideas and principles may constantly be rearranged and rediscovered to form new connections, relationships, and levels of meaning.

As an excellent example of the freedom allowed in design, Follies opens our minds to the incredible importance of conceptual thinking and abstract imagery in the birth and growth of an idea. As architects, the notion of the Folly places an inevitable challenge. An occasional "act or instance of foolishness" may be refreshing in our own works. Such playful extravagance demands attention.
Passages from "Seven Misunderstandings About Classical Architecture,"

The truth is it does express the society that uses it, just as a man's face expresses what is in their heart, but this does not mean that it takes sides. Historically, it has been the expression of such diverse political and religious systems as the fascism of Mussolini, the Baroque spiritualism of Michelangelo... Although the spiritual, political, material, and temporal influences are crystallised in wood and stone, and expressed in classical form, the classical grammar remains neutral, like the paint on an artist's palette.

"West Green House"
Quinlan Terry
as for a Suite House under the Terraces at West Green House, probably having for the level. Original.
It came to me as an image-
full-fledged, clear and
irreducible, like a vision. I
felt as if this place had always
existed.

The entrance... a three-
column baldachino supporting
a lemon tree... triangular
earthen plane... a large,
square, sunken courtyard...
half earth, half water... a
rocky mass... a barge made of
logs... cove-like shore
illuminated by a zenithal
opening... an L-shaped
cloister... undulating planes...
alcove-like spaces... diagonal
axis... man-height tunnel... an
open pit filled with a fresh
mist...

...it never failed to produce a
rainbow.

"Emilio’s Folly:
Man is an Island"
Emilio Ambasz
Of stalactite stone, high-polish steel mirror plate, faced with marble slabs, a metal dome finished with leaves... to produce a kaleidoscopic effect,

This folly-grotto attempts to be both jolly and morbid.

"Janus with his Head in the Clouds"
Joseph Rykwert