Neo-circus: (the nomadic box) is an Architectural Thesis prepared by Gregory L. Keffer
Neo-circus: (the nomadic box)

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selected readings

(books)

Mojdeh Baratloo
Angst: Cartography

Martin Heidegger
Questions Concerning Technology

Andrea Kahn
Drawing, Building, Text

Stephen Kern
The Culture of Time and Space

Alan Lightman
Einstein's Dreams

David Macaulay
Black and White

Lewis Mumford
The Lewis Mumford Reader

Diller + Scofidio
Back to the Front: Tourisms of War

Bernard Tschumi
Manhattan Transcripts

Bernard Tschumi
Question of Space

Bernard Tschumi
Sequences

Paul Virilio
The Aesthetics of Disappearance
Introduction

(process)

I thought I would take this chance to explain the process through which my thesis was produced over the nine month period, starting in August of 1994.

The formation of a thesis committee that was knowledgeable, creative and patient was vital to the success of the thesis from the beginning. The selection of Gayle Tsern, from the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, as an outside critic posed a set of communication problems that I had not fully considered. Because Gayle lives and works in San Francisco I was forced to relay information by telephone, fax and mail. This distance separation became quite a hurdle when trying to present things such as study models or anything that was three dimensional in nature. Conference calls became an integral part of the critique process as this gave an opportunity for Pam and Gayle to converse about the progress being made.

The approach I took at the beginning of the thesis was not one of a predetermined project type. Rather it was one of exploration of theories and ideas that I felt pertained to the theme of "time". Granted this topic was immense and generic in its particulars, but it was a topic that allowed for great exploration. The real challenge therefore was narrowing down the topics to a possible thesis project. Through weekly meeting with Pam and periodical conversations with Gayle an important guidance and direction was given to the project.
I followed numerous branches and tangents that the theories of time exposed to me. Many times I was criticized for being unfocused or "skipping" around and not pinpointing an idea. But mostly it was my lack of any concrete theory in my educational training at Ball State University which made my search seem so sporadic. Each new tangent taken I found amazingly interesting. At the same time though, I found the branch in front even more interesting; and therefore would depart for the next topic. I am sure this led to much confusion on the part of my advisors, but for myself I found it an exploration of a world I had never really been exposed to.

Slowly an overriding theme of "connection" appeared throughout all of my exploration. This soon became my intensified study. I find it incredibly interesting that I am a person made up of events and memories totally different than anybody else. We are each made up of a set of moments which have occurred since birth. But no two individuals ever have the same moments or memories. A curious question then arises; if I am made up of my past moments and you are made up of your past moments, then what do we share, or how do we intersect.

I hope the following pages of this thesis book answer to some degree the questions I have posed myself.
The body is dynamic. It is of free mind and spirit, but influenced directly by the space and the
time it is contained within.

Space and time are dynamic. Every moment and every atom combine to create a reality that
is in constant flux. The energy created is therefore the most dynamic product of reality.

If these are accepted theories then it must be acknowledged that a body possesses the qualities
for a most dynamic interaction with other bodies. But how do interactions occur. How do
connections or intersections between these energy sources occur.

Body is familiar to all of us. We are encased and bound by it daily. We know no other reality
than this fleshy shell which holds our spirit. But there is a split reality which we do experience.

This reality we like to call our dream state, a mental disconnection from body. Perhaps we
attain it through meditation, REM sleep or even drug use with some individuals; but whatever
the means, it is most exciting that we are capable of another reality through mind. This activity
although rather solitary in nature. We do not formally interact in this disconnected reality
with others. There is no cognitive reactions occurring that we consciously control.
This is where the Neo-circus has led. A reality where conscious interactions with others can occur in a space and time disconnected from the reality of where our bodies rest. To participate in an “event” within a fictitious space where time does not exist. To interact and connect with others whose body may be geographically located thousands of miles away from your own. To allow the bleeding of their culture with your culture. Their space is of another location than your own. Their time is of a different body than your own. You connect within a space disconnected from all.

An infrastructure for connections is in essence what is created through the structure of the nomadic box. By infrastructure, I simply mean any system which allows for an activity to occur. For instance the infrastructure of the city consists of its sewage pipes, telephone lines, roads, etc.; whatever allows ones function to occur.

The infrastructure of the Neo-circus therefore is a system, the built structure and technology, which allows the creation of an “other” space that in reality is nonexistent. This “other” space we will term the effective space, as it is a space whose existence relies on an action to create itself.
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"Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist, on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge."

Strindberg - The Culture of Time and Space
0.0  **history**

*circus* (sur'kəs), n., pl. -cus-es. 1. a large public entertainment featuring performing animals, clowns, feats of skill and daring pageantry, etc. 2. the physical equipment, personnel, etc., necessary for its presentation. 3. the performance itself. 4. uproar, a display of rowdy sport.

cir-cum-navig-ate (sur'kəm navi'gat), v.t., -gated, -gating. 1. to sail around; make the circuit of by navigation.

"What could be more meaningless than a circus act? The pointless somersault in space, the useless juggling of fantastically-shaped objects, the valueless balancing on a high wire... all hopelessly absurd. But then freedom is absurd." - Leibert Woods - *The Cybernetic Circus*
The modern circus, which includes trick riding, juggling, tumbling, and the exhibit of wild animals, can be traced back to Roman origins. But this distinct form of entertainment was not created until Philip Astley brought these then separate acts together in the year 1768. The name “circus” was not used until Charles Hughes, a rival of Astley’s, opened “The Royal Circus” on the outskirts of London.

"What interests me... is the possibility of a pure event, an event that can no longer be manipulated, interpreted, or deciphered by any human subjectivity." - Jean Baudrillard - *Forget Foucault*

2.0 site

(questions)

2.0 Questions of location.

Location is context. It is the root to all influences on body. Where one occupies space it dictates what characteristics they inherit.
0.2 Essentially the circus was a form of entertainment which used animals, cultures and people that were foreign to the context to entertain the audiences. This allowed for brief and impersonal connections between audience and a performer who “did not belong.”

4.0
5.2
6.1

“The old sanctuaries of privilege, power, and holiness were assailed, if not entirely destroyed, by the affirmation of positive negative space.” - Stephen Kern - The Culture of Time and Space

2.1 Questions of size.

Size of site determines functional aspects of the box. It requires a forty square foot area to be properly located within a given context. Is there space within the context to house this connection device without destroying the culture?
0.3 The circus of today, in most cases, has abandoned the traditional big top in trade for large air-conditioned arenas which exist today in most large cities.

2.0
2.3
2.4
5.0

"Each time the circus leaves a city it tears itself down and packs itself on four railroad trains. On arrival at the new town in the early dawn of the next day, it reverses the process so neatly that when the new-town customer arrives on the new lot a few hours later, he feels at home. To him the circus looks exactly as it looked last year. The hardened employee has the same feeling. To him the circus of that moment looks not only as it looked last year, but as it looked last month and last week. It looks also, he has no doubt, just as it will look next week, next month, and next year." - Fortune Magazine, July 1947 - "Circus Logistics"

2.2 Questions of substance.

Substance of site not only deals with soil bearing capacity but also with the substance of the culture. What are the elements which define the culture. What are the elements which define the soil. Does a sudden downpour of rain erode the soil quickly? Does a sudden downpour erode the cultural integrity?
1.0 The neo-circus is not about "architecture" in our traditional sense of the discipline. It is not the structure or the enclosure which allows the presence of the circus into our consciousness, rather it is the event or show.

3.0
3.1
5.0
7.0

"It is a decision coming from commonality that you choose a place out of all places to build, a place where others can also settle. It is a very important decision, of the same importance as the positioning of a Greek temple amongst the hills. Of all the hills, this hill is chosen for the temple, and then all the other hills beckon to it as if bowing to this decision. You do not see the hills now except as respecting the decision of the placing of this eulogizing building, which is remarkable in that it has never been there before." - Andrea Kalin - Between Silence and Light

2.3 The site by a body of water.
The site by a forest
The site by a mountain range.
The site by a desert.
The site by an urban entity.
1.1 If this is acknowledged, then the space in which the event takes place must only exist upon the moment of that particular performance.

3.0
6.0

"Every moment must involve the conscious memory of what came before, otherwise a melody would only sound like a single note in the particular moment. But since this is true, the past moment must be less intense, otherwise the melody would sound like a hopeless jumble." - Edmund Husserl

2.4 The site in a large metropolis.
The site in a city.
The site in a town.
The site in a village.
The site in a rural setting.
1.2. The memory of this event is then not simply through an empty chamber which we call "architecture" but rather through the event directly. This in turn creates a connection of observer to event rather than observer to a stagnant space.

3.0 Silence is an immaterial space. It is a universe or location that does not exist. It's essence is not of object and material, rather it is of body and image.

"To look for the essence of life in space is like trying to look for the path of the stream in the water; it only exists as a memory of the flow of its uninterrupted movement in time."
- Stephen Kern - The Culture of Time and Space
1.3 Secondly the circus is not about machine; it is a celebration of body and time. Therefore a direct connection of body must be formed in structure and event.

"Material, I believe, is spent Light." - Andrea Kahn - Between Silence and Light

3.1 The light pulse is a three dimensional space that has been reduced into a code of numbers translatable only in the mind of a machine. It is a space which has been imploded into a transmission. Upon departing from its home it is airborne in the wind; no constraints bound its form. It is in existence over the Atlantic ocean, the Mediterranean sea and the Appalachian mountains.
1.4 The event must not follow a predetermined routine or schedule for this ignores all laws of body. The player must be the dictator of time.

3.2 Time has little if any bearing upon this transparent space. The distance traveled is of no real concern in that it is relative only to the speed of the radio waves transmitted. Time distance decay does not exist in this universe.

"Abstract time became the new medium of existence. Organic Functions themselves were regulated by it: one ate, not upon feeling hungry but when prompted by the clock; one slept, not when one was tired, but when the clock sanctioned it." - Lewis Mumford - The Lewis Mumford Reader
1.5 The structure must not be stagnated by the laws of time. It is not a structure responsive to permanence on any landscape. It must be directly related again to the body as a device for its survival. The space must be in constant flux with event. The rising and lowering of walls, roof, and floor will directly coincide with the start and stop of event. All of these though will be directly connected to body through the use of the human form to produce this tide.

2.0

5.0

"Like the Englishman in France who thought that bread was the right name for le pain, each culture believes that every other kind of space and time is an approximation to or a perversion of the real space and time in which it lives." - Lewis Mumford - The Lewis Mumford Reader

3.3 Silence space does not age as a material space would. It is a product of several separative realities. These realities, or boxes, transmit the profiles of their environments into the silence. Upon reception they are disconnected to the laws which govern our "real" universe. There is no ground plane: no north, south, east or west. It is all relative to the user.
4.0 place

(foundation)

4.0 How does one create a sense of place which actually does not exist? The space created is defined by the body. It is not a place defined by the cold walls and hard floor; rather it is defined by the animated arm and warm smile. Neither space nor place should rely strictly on built forms to create architecture. The body is the most dynamic structure designers can harness.

5.4

"Spaces are changing perspectives, thoughts, and feelings and suffer the unceasing transformation of things in time." - Stephen Kern - The Culture of Time and Space

5.0 event

(atmosphere)

5.0 The event created is not one of action contained within built space. It is not a memory connected to permanence of site and landscape.
4.1 The capability to form a connection with varying contexts is also essential in place. It allows the audience’s context (site) to be the connection point. It is the transparency though of this site which allows the present to serve as “connection point”.

5.1 The normal elements which make up “event” are fully applicable in this instance. A connection to another person is a prime ingredient in the experience of event. The excitement of the unexpected, the improvisational conversations and movements, and the disconnection from reality of everyday life all add up to the essence of event.

"...the atom is a crossing point for lines of energy radiating through space. Thus each atom occupies the whole space to which gravitation extends, and all atoms are interpenetrating." - Faraday - The Culture of Time and Space
4.2 Through the use of the material foundation system created at each site, the memory of place is created using the residue of built structure. The vernacular system which is constructed for the foundation allows a connection of that particular context to the box itself. It works as a grounding element to that time and space. A marker. A memory.

"...a place without a place. In it, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up potentially beyond its surface; there I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself, allowing me to look at myself where I do not exist: utopia of the mirror." - Michel Foucault

"Other Spaces: The principles of heterotopia"

5.2 This psychological divorce from reality occurs just as a daydream or memory. The body is still very grounded in reality. It still exists in a real space and time, but the mind occupies a reality undefined by that particular space and time. These gaps which occur in everyday life are heightened by the process embodied within this thinking. The body is engaged but the mind is disconnected.
6.0 The human body is the most dynamic and elastic creator of space. The torso forms visual barriers which create enclosure. The head and legs bleed this space into heaven and earth. There is no ceiling created other than the eyes’ cone of vision.

5.3 In order to create event, one must engage the audience. Firstly though the whole concept of audience and performer should be abandoned. Event is not about observing, laughing, and clapping. it is an expansion of these variables, dispersing spectator to activity.
6.1 The body also allows for a familiar point of connection. I know my hand allows me to open my bedroom door. I know my nose allows me to smell the scent of coffee brewing in the morning. I know my ears allow the sound of a cascading stream to enter my body. I know my eyes allow me to see the tall grass sway in the swift summer breeze. This universality of body allows for my connections to occur.

1.3

"Invisible but present, the person to whom we have been wishing to speak, and who, while still sitting at his table, in the town in which he lives... in the midst of circumstances and worries of which we know nothing, but of which he is going to inform us, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles." - Proust -

The Culture of Time and Space

5.4 The event is nomadic. Though this is true, it returns to these previous intersections upon a calendar basis. By the return or reoccurrence of the piece the re-event creates a stronger connection progressively. Even though event is nomadic, the effective space created is not in flux. There has never been a longitude nor a latitude which one can mark it with. It does not belong to the material world which is our reality.
6.2 As the arm raises itself in the effective space, I can react. Jumping high into the air, my head can touch the palm of a hand whose psyche is disconnected. It is an image based reaction action. My body can react visually to your body. Your dance of life is translated to my dance of life through this nonexistent space. This effective space then is simply a sift through which our dances meld and intertwine.

3.1

"The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other." - Michel Foucault - "Other Space: The principles of heterotopia"

7.0 object

7.0 The object of the box is an infrastructure. It is a device which allows an event to occur. It defines the effective space through the use of object space.
6.3 Even though the effective space is generated using real space and time, it is disconnected. My mind is unconscious of my real environment. It is conscious only of the body of the players. The effective space is my mind’s real space and time.

5.2

4.4

"The clock, moreover, is a piece of power-machinery whose product is seconds and minutes: by its essential nature it dissociates time from human events and helped create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences: the special world of science." - Lewis Mumford - *The Lewis Mumford Reader*

7.1 Just as a spotlight in a dark room will indirectly influence a crowd into a ring like pattern around the light, the infrastructure of the box will indirectly allow for connection to occur. The use of structure to allow event to occur is not a new idea by any means. It is the harnessing of the indirect nature of the structure which is being explored.
8.0 Space is the indefinite void created through transmission. It is the constructed environment whose builder is an electric current. But it also is created by an infrastructure of six planes. These planes allow for projection and therefore transmission.

7.2 So the infrastructure is actually related to body in that it allows event to occur by the free will, or chance, of user.
8.1 These planes also have a secondary space which they rely on. That is of course the context of site which the box sits on. The six planes could not exist in a material form without the reality of the context. Therefore a revealing process is essential as it allows the linkages to become deeper than generically "body."

9.0 carrot

9.0 Three boxes will be constructed. Within each of them will be housed six video cameras and six projectors. The boxes will be constructed of stainless steel exteriors and flat white interiors. They will utilize a footing system that can be adapted to a variety of foundation systems.
8.2 The generic "body" contains no contextual differences. It is homogenous in its formation and information. But by revealing its context it metamorphizes into a completely different creature. One whose habits and styles differ greatly from the naked form we would see without context.

9.1 Each of the six cameras within one box will be targeted upon one of the six interior surfaces. The image gathered will then be transmitted to a second box which will then project these images onto its own six surfaces. This step will then repeat itself thereby transmitting the interior images, or bodies, of all three boxes onto each other infinitely.
8.3 It is also of interest as to how a body reacts when immersed into an environment other than its own. If revealing a context in one box pushes its image into the second box, then the user of box two is absorbed into a context foreign to him or her.

How does one react and conform to this exposure?

10.2

9.2 Standing in a dressing room in a department store. The three sided mirror stares back at our gaze and replicates our image infinitely in number. The focus point of our vision is matched by the projection point of the mirror. It resamples our output again and again.

This is the theory applied with the camera and projector.
10.0 Through the use of all previously determined theory, a test was needed. A real life trial to challenge all points of these ideas. This is where the "built" piece comes in to the picture. We will term it wall.

9.3 The four vertical sides of each box will be made of three six foot bays. Each bay will posses venetian blind qualities; The four verticle sides of each box will be made of three six foot bays. Each bay will posses venetian blind qualities in that they are capable of turning and quickly exposing the context in which they sit. Immediate transparency.
10.1 Firstly two walls were constructed back to back with a four foot space between their backs. Twenty-five feet from each wall's exterior surface was placed a video camera and a projector. The two projectors on each side were focused onto the center of each screen, which was fifteen feet long and ten feet tall. The two cameras also were focused onto the center of each of these two screen.

Elevation 1 - Ramp down

9.4 Because of this exposure technique, each context, and the body contained, will then have the capability to transmit itself into another context. A dessert into a rain forest. A mountain top village into a metropolis. A young Australian boy onto an elderly Chinese woman.
10.2 The image of a body in front of camera one was then transported via cable to the projector on the opposing side. The projector then of course projected this image onto that opposing screen and whatever body was within its space. Therefore camera two was capturing not only the body within its space, but also the image of the body in the opposing space because it was being projected onto its backdrop screen. This created an infinite repetition and therefore opened communications with your own image and the image of another individual of another time and space.

9.5 Because of the infinite resampling of the video outputs. Your original image is picked up again and again. What this allows is for others to react to your image. Once it returns to your own box you too can react to your own image. The Utopian Mirror.
10.0 closure

(jack wyman)

MEMORIES

nomadic Everything always changes.

circus Much of life is in the making of good memories

ARCHITECTURE Humans have a common adaptable complex nature where we all connect.

body Space and time are the same.

human Everything visible is 3D.

passive Your existence is confirmed by responses from others.

active Everything is in motion.

memory Life is but a stage.

event Everyone participates.

time I would like to experience a museum with a collection of two hundred of the constructs.

place Each major museum in the world could be a site for an active construct.

chaos

COMPLEXITY

CONNECTION

performance

3D

jack.
11.0 closure²
(Pam Harwood)

This thesis begins to reveal that architecture may communicate not through language as conventionally understood, but through the activities that inform and shape architecture: the inseparable relationship between body, space, and time.
We build with the terror of time, in an open-ended, dialectical, perpetual process of becoming, affirming continual change with no fixed end or goal. A tension exists between what is and what might be. We work within the gap, between two simultaneous acts of architecture, one that we are controlling and one that is unseen. The latter reveals itself only as we work through and dwell within the project. It is this undiscovered act that lies hidden within that we are always searching for. In this way, architecture is found useful. It reveals, appropriates, and engenders life. The nomadic box experiments and projects into a method of design which explores a poetic and active engagement with its “viewer”.

This is the difference between experiencing terror, and experiencing a description of terror. The tension between the fixity of location, physically here and not there, and the fluidity of displacement, traveling there from here, is allowed to coexist. Places and things are not stable. They change with body, space, and time. In order to embrace the rift, and wandering of our being, and the temporal nature of our existence, the nomadic box argues for an architecture of incompletion and temporality. In this ambiguous, contradictory and changing nature of the continual process of construction, the paradox of design is both transitory and whole, temporary and permanent, incomplete and complete.

5.0 event
(Terror of Time)

5.0 The event created is not one of action contained within built space. It is not a memory connected to permanence of site and landscape.
6.0 The human body is the most dynamic and elastic creator of space. The torso forms visual barriers which create enclosure. The head and legs bleed this space into heaven and earth. There is no ceiling created other than the eyes' cone of vision.

In this thesis their is an attempt to recover the corporeal and soulful dimensions of the human body within a material world as we forcefully shape the space that receives us. In the delightful story, Peter Pan, Peter wants more than anything else to have a shadow. The shadow in this regard, is seen as a visible sign of one's presence, for through one's shadow one knows and sees that one is embodied and belongs to this world. As spectator of the world, we have left the body and its shadow behind. In this nomadic box, we become participants within, as our body and our shadow are given a shifting and ambiguous presence.

In the discovery, in 1425, of the technique of linear perspective, the window as boundary and separation between viewer and world is displayed. This paradox of the window as reference plane, portrays the self as artist on this side of the window, looking out at a world on the other side of the window, which has become and object of our distant vision. This detached, measured, highly rational way of viewing the world, elevated and distant, will not allow our embodied self to be in the midst of things.
8.0 space

(To Wander and Wonder)

8.0 Space is the indefinite void created through transmission. It is the constructed environment whose builder is an electric current. But it also is created by an infrastructure of six planes. These planes allow for projection and therefore transmission.

The nomadic box exists as a gesture, a pause, a suspended moment, which can be revealed and celebrated and then removed and abandoned. By capturing a suspended instant and recording movement-in-stasis, we can bring forth a momentary order. A transient coalescence endures and then abandons itself to the wandering movement of the dance. This construct suggests that architectural building moves and is static, that the time-tangled, continually changing, tragic and sublime nature of human life must be continually enacted at every moment of our existence.

Wandering remains the essence of embodied space, as we find ourselves continually lost, and in a constant state of flux. To feel architectural space requires us to walk through it, to feel and become a part of it. It requires us to be in a constant state of in-betweenness as we recognize that the condition of our existence is actually caused by the constant confrontation of being thrown into the world and directing one's relationship to it. Our role is to learn to orient ourselves without fixed landmarks, depending on the shifting relationships of space and time.

This thesis, as an attempt to reveal and give space to these reciprocal and contradictory aspects of its creation, is to be applauded. Thank you Greg.
12.0 bibliography

(books + articles)


Heidegger, Martin. The Question Concerning Technology.

Kahn, Andrea. Drawing, Building, Text.


Tschumi, Bernard. Questions of Space, Lectures on Architecture.

Tschumi, Bernard. Manhattan Transcripts.

Yates, Francis. The Art of Memory.

Vinio, Paul. The Aesthetics of Disappearance.

12.1 credits
(photography)

The images contained within the filmstrips are selected from the following photography books: