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TO BE ADVENTUROUS: ON FREE LOVE AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE 1960s

BY JACK MURPHY

‘There was no contradiction in being married and being free.’

—John Lobell 1

Sex was everywhere in the late 1960s. The sexual revolution, enabled by an increasingly permissive culture, questioned and reconfigured traditional structures of relationships. With an emphasis on its casual enjoyment outside of marriage, sex became an important matter of public debate and radical individual activity. Assuming its primary location fronting the stereotypical trinity of 'sex, drugs and rock & roll', sex was one subject among others—political activism, social justice, experimental art and religious experience—that described the concerns of the counterculture.**2** Architecture, at the time, seems to have been hesitant to fully address this radical expression. In surveying the era, Kenneth Frampton notes architecture's ambivalence to engage with key issues, writing in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* that 'many of its more intellectual members … abandoned traditional practice, either to resort to direct social action or to indulge in the projection of architecture as a form of art'.**3** Frampton's tone suggests that those interested in such alternative themes found little support in mainstream practice. The more radical of the architecturally inclined, escaped to communities like Drop City that allowed joint experiments in self-built expression and lifestyle simultaneously. Historically, little (with some exceptions) has been said about the relationship between architecture and sex. Pythagoras' love of geometry was matched by his love of copulation. In Modern examples, the romantic lives of architects are notable, though usually unmentionable, counterpoints to the work they realized: consider the arson of Frank Lloyd's Wright's original Taliesin or the sex room at Philip Johnson's Glass House. A remarkable case study is found in the lives of John and Mimi Lobell, a couple—both architects—who openly chronicled their sex life in 1972's *John & Mimi: A Free Marriage*, and whose architectural philosophies are intimately connected to their amorous openness.

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'He was, in his own estimation, the only architecture student at Penn to smoke marijuana'

The Lobells met while studying at the University of Pennsylvania during the early 1960s. The school was then a nexus of architectural activity, employing a long list of notable professors. While the visionary status of some of Penn's instructors is appreciated now (among them Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi and Ian McHarg) the pedagogy at the time, according to the Lobells, was disciplined, matching theoretical study with professional education related to making buildings.**4** This skills-based education combined with theoretical discourse resonated with John Lobell, a Long Island native and life-long New Yorker. John remembers Penn's mood as intellectually conservative,**5** with no students—save himself, of course—being attuned to the integration of architecture into a wider cultural context or even responding to the growing countercul-

1 (Previous page) John Lobell and Mimi Lobell, *John & Mimi, A Free Marriage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p.176.

2 A useful resource on the era is Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture*, first published in 1969.

3 Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 4th ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p.280.

4 See the Lobells' cowritten manuscript on their time at Penn: John Lobell and Mimi Lobell, 'The Philadelphia School' (unpublished manuscript, 1980), PDF file, http://creativitydiscourse.com/wdp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/PHILADELPHIA-SCHOOL.pdf.

5 John Lobell, in discussion with the author, August 2012.

GIVING ARCHITECTURE

Aleksandr Bierig

Art is both a gift and gifted. It is the product of a gifted spirit and, when successful, it gives (space, time, inspiration) to those who subsequently witness it. A piece of art is inexhaustible. It is always the same and never the same. Lewis Hyde wrote a whole book on this called *The Gift*: 'If the artist is gifted, the gift increases in its passage through the self. The artist makes something higher than what he has been given, and this, the finished work, is the one offered to the world in general'.

Architecture is not art, but many of us wish it could be. Architecture is too tied up with the world. It is not the product of a single self, but innumerable authors, each mediated by exterior forces (money, power, politics, function, zoning…). Buildings must also be logical, and 'logic is the money of the mind', writes Marx, 'logic is alienated thinking and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man'. It is the building's job, literally, to abstract the human from nature, to place her in a room of her mind's own making.

Perhaps, as architecture becomes less strict, as it veers closer to the art object, it can become gift-like. A memorable piece of architecture creates space—real space, of course, but also new space in our memory. The space created by seeing something beautiful, or interesting, or strange. Great architecture is effusive, like art, though it often has to work much harder to give much less.

And there is also the literal way in which a building is a gift. We give a building to the future, where we know it will be (for a while, at least). Those after us can come to it and see the things we did well and the things we got wrong. The Ise Shrine, in Japan, was first built around the year 692. It is built again every twenty years, according to the exact same materials and dimensions.

EXTENDING PRACTICE BEYOND OBJECT FORM—AN INTERVIEW WITH KELLER EASTERLING

BY E. SEAN BAILEY

In Keller Easterling's first two major publications, *Organization Space* and *Enduring Innocence*, she presents readers with an exhaustive body of evidence cataloging dynamic spatial products, or what she terms *active forms*—'resorts, information technology campuses, retail chains, golf courses, ports and other enclave formations'.[1] These are products that are not only objects in the landscape, buildings in the traditional sense of bricks and mortar, or what Keller terms *object forms*, but are also plugged into and influence larger political, economic and cultural systems. They are architecture as information. While the rich, and often times mythical, narratives that surround these spatial products implicate the built environment, Keller rightly acknowledges that 'architects often treat them as banal or unresponsive to recognized systems of architectural language'.[2] While 'rogue nations, cults, diplomats and other impresarios'[3] have up until now been the protagonists within these *active form* narratives, Keller, in her upcoming publication, *Extrastatecraft: the Powers of Matrix Space*, aims to gift this role to the professionals that already know so much about space: architects.

1 Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence - Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), p.1.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

Toward this end, Keller would like to extend the powers of architects beyond *object form* and into the register of *active form*, essentially freeing them from the accepted limits of contemporary practice. But what is the qualitative distinction between *object form* and *active form*? In *The Action is the Form: Victor Hugo's TED Talk*, Keller distinguishes between these two types of practice through the analogy of the stone in the water: 'If architects are often making a stone in the water while the world makes the water, the stone is an *object form* while the water is what might be called the *active form*'.[4] While architects are very well versed at using all of the tools of architecture—geometric manipulation, volume, materiality—to shape the stone, they are less adept at getting that stone to part the water, to control its flow or to alter its currents. Keller would like architects to get better at that.

4 Keller Easterling, *The Action is the Form: Victor Hugo's TED Talk* (Moscow: Strelka Press, 2012).

E. Sean Bailey: What are some of the difficulties in communicating the concepts of *object form* and *active form*?

Keller Easterling: Recently I gave the first two lectures for a course called 'Globalization Space', at Yale, and they seemed to go well. The idea that there is some kind of matrix space—an infrastructural matrix of spatial products—was well understood by all kinds of students from different parts of the university.

The social and political sciences are now looking to spatial studies—to the special knowledge of architecture and urbanism. I usually present a long strobe through all of the spaces that we are swimming in—things like turning radii, parking spaces, skyscrapers, malls, suburbs or resorts. That soupy space of repeatable details is our test bed.

Still, just a few days after these lectures, I went to Croatia

DIGITAL IMMANENCE

James D. Graham

As I sit at my computer setting up Google Drive—embracing this digital convenience that further dissolves the spatial boundaries of my laptop's contents—I'm reminded of how the term 'cloud computing' is as much an aesthetic category as a technical one. If the aether of virtual space has always been metaphorically atmospheric, the Cloud implies a meteorological array of information, imbued with uncertainty as much as it is mappable by fronts and isotherms. It is a way of capturing our own digital mystification, a casually vague gesture aimed at corralling the imagined nowhere-and-everywhere of the Internet. It implies an environment.

And, like any environment, we lose sight of its extents. John Cage delivered lessons in how to freshly perceive an otherwise backgrounded environment by bracketing off a space and temporal duration in which to listen. The art historian Branden Joseph called it 'acoustic immanence'—the heightening of those often less immediate aspects of our experience. Likewise, Brian Eno's use of the term 'ambient' describes an admixture of that which is already there and that which is layered over it: 'an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint'. His pieces pass in and out of direct consciousness, famously stipulated to be 'as ignorable as they are interesting'.

This line of thought offers possibilities for highlighting our own relationship to the digital aether that tints our everyday milieu. After all, despite the interest we lavish on the technologies we carry in our pockets, this 'surrounding influence' is often ignored outright. The Cloud has not been rendered explicit, even as we glimpse its traces and by-products. Debates about the so-called 'New Aesthetic', a curatorial practice that brought attention to the proliferation of technologically mediated vision, offer one possibility for seeing the Cloud anew, as a thoroughly material manifestation. But the representational (and often metaphorical) languages of pixelation, low-fidelity, QR codes, glitches and surveillance only go so far. There are more ways in which to see the concrete implications of an ambience that is consistently represented as an abstraction—an act introducing a kind of 'digital immanence'. As our experience of the urban is further suffused by data and mediated by technovisuality, we could use more Cages of the information economy, or Enos of the Cloud.