

transtension

a theory of (a/A)rchitecture predicated on the third thing

"The sad truth is that man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites - day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, that joy will defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be; and if it were not so, existence would come to an end."

Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* p.85 (1964)

intro

'they ask, 'if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around, does it even make a sound ?'' well, the question is not whether it makes a sound; the question is whether the tree exists at all.

transtension is a fell tree i came upon in the forest that is this existence. this thesis is an accumulation of branches i've gathered from that tree, then aggregated and arranged in (no) particular order, so as to share with others as proof of its existence. one day , maybe we can go visit that tree, together. but for now, i can only share these fragments arranged in (some) particular order.'

This thesis is a mirrored window. Depending up.on the angle of approach, as well as the viewing perspective, spectators will either be faced with a reflection of themselves, a reflection of their surroundings, or a mediated view of my.self. Said another way, by inter.acting with this thesis, subjects will either be inter.facing with them.selves, specular reflections of/on the world, or a mimetic version of my.self. Theoretically, the aim is something akin to conceptual anamorphism, where.in a disjointed outward appearance comes together [in time], up.on accretion - think of lorenz attractors, wherein the formulaic inputs can be changed ever.so.slightly, leading to drastically different, often.times unexpected trajectories, but trajectories which never.the.less converge up.on the same general shape. And depending up.on the axis along which the attractor is oriented, as well as the construction plane along which the subject is oriented, this shape may appear flat or fluid, mute or motionless, two-dimensional, three-, or four-.

Motivation for this anamorphic approach primarily has to do with the nature of the times: inundations of information without any throughline or meaning. The argument here, if there is one, is that human relations are the way through, dancing on the line. At a time when individualism runs rampant

and ‘objective’ priorities are leading to actions and existence predicated on fear, this thesis takes solace in the notion that subjectivity (read: consciousness) is all that can be known; there is power in vulnerability, and the only important throughline is that of the relation between me and you, you and i.

The relation(ship) can be understood in whichever way you prefer. For the purposes of this thesis, the relation(ship) is architecture.

overview

This existence is *tensive*. That is to say, predicated upon opposites. (In the context of western philosophy, think ‘the dialectic’.)

In order to address this *tension*, **transtension** is developing as a theory and methodology of (a/A)rchitecture predicated on sincerity, Love, and subjectivity. In literal terms, **transtension** can be contrived as working ‘across, through, and/or beyond the relation((s)hips) between opposites, i.e. mental and/or emotional and/or physical and/or spiritual strain.’ Subsequently, it must be understood that **transtension** is offered as an alternative to/in opposition to/in place of ‘the bottom line’.¹

Formally, the thesis is composed of (nine) + (three) distinct components arrayed across 22 ‘books’.², following an ad.hoc fractallic pattern wherein certain elements branch into further (dis).arrays.

hypo.thesis

hypo.thesis exists as the undercurrent to **transtension** wherein an assumed position will be taken in order to jump off from a starting point. The aim is to float around independent and dependent variables, in this case subjects and objects (respectively), in a manner similar to that of Hegel’s dialectic or Deleuze & Guattari’s (de/re)territorialization or Ettinger’s matrixial transsubjectivity or Barad’s intra-action or Husserl’s transcendental intersubjectivity or **transtension**’s sub.subjectivity. As such, for hypo.thesis I will address Vitruvius’ *de Architectura*, specifically looking at the now anachronous “firmness, commodity, delight”. Additionally, I will ground the notion of architecture as the mediatic *third thing* with respect to sincerity, Love, and subjectivity, as well as efficiency, Capital, and objectivity.

¹ ‘the bottom line’ refers to that which has eviscerated (a/A)rchitecture of all sincerity; namely objectivity, efficiency, and capital.

² a bound set of “blank sheets” for writing or keeping records in.

proto.thesis

proto.thesis is one of many “jumping-off” points, which allow a way into the thesis without being entirely subsumed by the thesis. A two-part project comprised of speculative Architectural drawings and a visionary Architectural project, proto.thesis really is a primitive or original version of the thesis predicated on a fictitious character, ‘the architect’, who occupies the decorated sheds so prevalent in america, liberating them from time and space and subsequently the constraints/impositions/eviscerations of ‘the bottom line’.

40 ADA o4 . a series of 40 drawings carried out over the course of 40 days. comprised of three actors, ‘the architects’, ‘‘the architect’ next-in-line’, and ‘the architecture’, this series of drawings takes its namesake from the Americans with Disabilities Act and ‘american developmental architecture’.
completed in anticipation of r40r^4*

r40r^4* . a visionary Architecture project sited on the main strip/route near where the author grew up: route 40 in ellicott city, md. this project re.imagines a stroad in a mundane american suburb as re.(vitalized, imagined, novated, stored, paired, etc. ad infinitum)

para.thesis

The third (not final or cumulative, but adjacent and supporting) part of the *theses* is an alternate development proposal, but really a reposal, for the former site of Pruitt Igoe, the ‘failed’ modernist housing block in St. Louis, MO. This project aims to fulfill the requirements of a stereo.typical MIT M.Arch thesis, which is to say *a building*. Or more specifically, a well-researched, well-sited, *realistic* building aimed at addressing and responding to the ‘real-world’ constraints of (a/A)rchitecture, as imposed by ‘the bottom line’.

17 rfps . these ‘rote fragmental photoshops’ exist as digital collages of the images i took while surveying the former site of Pruitt Igoe and the surrounding neighbourhood. each image is accompanied by a line of an extended hermeneutic poem such that

the images can be read forward and/or backwards, entered in.to at any point so as to parallel a stereo.typical development plan.

93rd ts . a series of 9 models aimed at amending mundane urban[e] elements so as to provide spaces for those who have none. typical urban infrastructures are designed wrt 'the bottom line', meaning they are designed as bare minimum structures so as to efficiently meet minimum requirements, i.e. the 'bare necessities'. 9 3rd things aim to elevate the minimum requirements by re.designing these structures in a sincere and subjective way, with Love as the underlying minimum.

9s^2 . a series of 9 site studies drafted through so as to better understand the relationship between the former site of Pruitt Igoe, the new site of the Air Force's National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and the surrounding neighborhoods. the studies cover roads, buildings, landscaping, churches and half.way houses, parking lots and parks, (pedestrian) pathways and paths, all of which are re.iterated upon with respect to the varying temporal contexts of the a.forementioned sites and neighborhoods.

9 psps . these proposed site processes exist as sentences and diagrams of sentences in a sketchbook as 9 individual discrete site proposals. however, when re.ordered, they point to a possible plan or path.way of re.development for the former Pruitt Igoe site. additionally, when read hermeneutically, the processes can exist as an endless circular loop, or a cycle of processes which can rise and fall since, as we all know, in the beginning there was no.thing, and in the end there will be no.thing.

reposal . a reposal is an act of placing something, especially confidence or trust, in a person or thing. to repose is to lie at rest, or to lie dead. this reposal can be thought of as the placing of trust in architecture, a dead and dying discipline. it is not intended to amend the 'failures' of modernism qua Pruitt Igoe, but rather to offer space for others to amend their own failures. furthermore, 'reposal' is used in opposition/relation to proposal, as this was not necessarily designed for any.one other than my.self.

r(earch) s(urvey) a(nalysis)

A vital part of operating across, through, and beyond a theory and methodology such as **transtension** has to do with under.standing the ‘self’, both in relation to one’s environment at large but also in relation to the other ‘self’s. In the context of (a/A)rchitecture, this entails under.standing the forces at play which drive and are driven by (a/A)rchitecture, as well as each of the different ‘self’s which inter.act with and/or are (a/e)ffected by said (a/A)rchitecture. In order to begin to grasp such a poly.valent thing which we refer to as a ‘self’, **transtension** re.quires its practitioners to constantly, continuously, and circuitously carry out, exist through, and embody (endure?) periods [or ‘rounds’ or cycles or circuits] of **research/survey/analysis (rsa)** work.³ Important to note is that in the (greater/lesser) context of **transtension** as an m.Arch thesis coming out of MIT, **rsa** exists as a tri.logic three of nine ‘book’s, with **research** itself branching into yet another trilogy.

The **rsa** of **transtension** will be carried out over the course of several excursions out of the bubble that is MIT. However, a large chunk will be completed over the course of a two-part, (sub/trans).continental drive across, through, and beyond the United States of America. I will bring along acp43 in order to mediate the (inter; trans; sub).subjectivity experienced along the route.

research

Research for **research** will be carried out through/mediated by three devices of (inter; trans; sub).subjectivity:

i . the variable-edged coin [v E c]

a device for a single subject (myself), the coin serves as a physical, tactile, emotional, mental, (ir).rational reminder of non.duality and (my) initial intentions. think totems from inception or sentimental family keepsakes and heirlooms

ii . loveseats for 2 fingers [ls42]

a device which places two subjects in intimate physical and psychic proximity, as close as sensually possible, without ever actually letting them touch. sub.sequently, one’s (sensual) focus fixates upon the loveseat itself. given that all of the ‘a loveseat for 2 fingers’

³ here, work is *italicized* in order to emphasize the activity, or lack of passivity, which **rsa** requires - *intentional, sincere, Loving* work.

were *crafted* out of offcuts, scraps, and ‘junk’ found across, through(out), and beyond the world, subjects are able to (sub/un).consciously develop a greater, more intimate understanding of the materials that make up their world (or at least their built environment. ideal for ‘breaking the ice’ with acquaintances.

iii . a conversation peace for 3 [acp 43]

a device which situates three subjects around and confronting the same thing : that which is no.thing. each are faced with and backed by a mirror such that they are simultaneously/concurrently transfixed by a singular infinite regression which places them in the exact same position/situation/state-of-being as their tri.partite counterparts; however, try as they might, they can never quite see (beyond their own face), or ‘reach’, the singularity at the termination of the infinite regression. left with no.where to look, subjects will lock eyes with *one* of their counterparts. incredibly important to note is the tripartite basis of the device – even if two subjects are able to break out of their own isolated regressions of infinity, the third subject will inevitably be left to her own device(s).

survey

The American built environment, and more specifically ‘american developmental architecture’⁴, will be documented via a modified dslr camera equipped with an infra.red cut filter. This technique allows for humans and vegetation to ‘explosively radiate’⁵, while buildings and ‘american developmental architecture’ at large are reduced to monotonous masses of light and shadow, form and space, ∴ re.presented, pro.jected through, ‘de.concealed and brought forth’ in such a way so as to corroborate the notion of a soul.less, eviscerated, homogenized architecture which has been wrought of all sincerity. However, humans and vegetation will be fore.grounded, the images will be compelling and beautiful, and all will be contained with(in/out) a red leather

⁴ ‘american developmental architecture’ refers to a typology of (a/A)rchitecture born/representative of American society, namely: stripmalls, 5-over-1s, office buildings, rowhouses, housing developments, warehouses, data centers, offices, etc. *developmental* is a tongue-in-cheek entendre.

⁵ the reasons for this ‘explosive radiation’ is because above ~720 nanometers, foliage and certain synthetic fibers (and hair dyes) are transparent, such that only pure light is being reflected off the water inside the leaves and the fibers inside the clothes/hair

bound book⁶ filled with jet black pages and infra.red photo.graphic images.

analysis

analysis will occur via the recording of thoughts, feelings, emotions, observations, assumptions, conclusions, etc. on a Roaring Springtm Paper Products Recycled Legal Pad, 8.5" x 11.75", 40 Sheets/Pad, Canary Yellow (x3). There is no intention with this analysis. Only the extraction and sub.sequent distancing of thoughts, and by/thru extension biases which inhibit **transtension**,

∴ sincere (a/A)rchitecture.

Additionally, a second (read: mirrored) version will exist as a log book for those who sat down with and actively participated in a *conversation peace for 3*.

⁶the book, titled, 'a trans.continental survey of developmental american architecture', will also include a fold out map of the trip's trajectory (as illustrated by the author), in addition to a soundtrack of albums listened to throughout the course of **rsa**. the drawings will be footnoted and annotated, but not necessarily narrativized. rather, the photographs will be organized according to type, with location, date, time, and weather being reported in addition to any out.standing, in.teresting contextual information, but (perhaps) not in any specific order.

abstract

A two-part, one accordion and one flip, book contained within a simple blue leather-bound cover. Essentially what you are reading right now, printed onto a Japanese watercolor album-style unfolding single-page book. Additionally, the visual version of the abstract will be appended to the end as a flip-book. If someone wants to know what I did for my thesis, I can simply hand them this and walk away.

bibliography

The bibliography which makes this thesis possible while simultaneously acting as a nested looking in.to // bird's-eye view out.of the context with.in which the thesis is rooted. Each source will be listed, with exceptionally relevant sources being annotated so as to highlight their heightened relevance.

ephemera

The ephemera are comprised of all the tangents, outtakes, cut-aways, b-sides, di.gressions, re.gressions, and asides that are at once completely (un).necessary yet entirely (in).extricable from what it is that is at play here. They aren't necessary to understand **transtension**, but they do help. Provided below are brief overviews with one-sentence descriptions for each aspect of ephemera.

memos (audio.book) . a 'book' of iPhone voice memos (recorded throughout the 9 month process) collated and burned onto a cd, which can be listened to at will.

poetics (sketch.book) . a classic Sakura sketchbook populated with poetry, spaced at four poems (perhaps stanzas) per spread, interspersed with forms, spectra, matrices, and ruled surface geometries.

ada [architect's definitions of architecture (collective sketch.book)] . a classic Sakura sketchbook populated by fellow MIT colleagues. participants are asked to define, either visually or verbally, (a/A)rchitecture and Love; opening up a medium both universal to all yet particular to me.

behind the seen [bts] (annotated photo.book) . an MIT Copytech-printed book full of quick photos of behind-the-scenes ephemera, in chronological order; think visual timeline.

transtension

a theory/methodology/polemic of (a/A)rchitecture
predicated on sincerity, Love, and (inter; trans; sub).subjectivity

sonics (audio.book) . all of the music i have made throughout grad school, thought of as inherently architectural given the structure, organization, and context.

glossary . if you're unsure about a word, or something is confusing you, or isn't quite clicking in relation to something else, chances are it was picked up on and defined in the appendix. (thanks cristina)

notes (screenshot book) . an iPhone sized book full of screenshots of passing thoughts, feelings, and observations as recorded in the Notes app (dark mode background).

love letters (hand.made sketchbook from Sam) . handwritten and dedicated to whoever comes to mind , starting with god , allah , the universe , moving towards family , friends , people involved with the thesis, including all those i never got to say anything to - at least until i run out of pages.

analogies , aphorisms , axioms , adages , apothegms (scroll [type.written]) . just ideas and thoughts that provide extraneous context to the thesis.

anti.thesis

transtension

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Calling back to the Hegelian dialectic which serves as one of several inception points for **transtension**, the anti.thesis will be completed as a standing.on point, as a reflecting pool for the hypo.thesis. As such, it will be completed after the presentation of the thesis and aim to respond to each of the points raised in the initial hypo.thesis, with close attention paid to and intention pointed at how each point might be approached from 'the other side'.

reflection

A long-form letter written in a similar style to that of **analysis**, i.e. by hand on legal paper, directed to no.one in particular but perhaps (a/A)rchitecture herself and/or each person who has come into contact with any aspect of transtension, as well as a former/past version of the author. The aim will be to see which aspects stick out in true hind.sight and project with intention where they could go and to what ends.

syn.thesis

One 'final' diagram and shortform paper, a eulogistic act, if you will, taking into account all previous versions of the hypothesis, looking back over each aspect of **transtension**, and trying to understand exactly what it is that occurred, why it is that it occurred, and what it could point to and stand for, in relation to the author, (a/A)rchitecture, and this existence at large. Important to take into account here is the intended objective and de.contextualized approach, as if one were looking through a window or sitting as a fly on the wall or a spider under the floorboard, relaying the information at a later date with the only intention being to convey exactly what was perceived, as it was written, un.adulterated and pre.tense.less, so as to allow one to begin again.⁷

⁷ this is also the script for the final presentation.