Design Epilogues

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PREFACE

For the last ten years, I have been teaching Senior design studios that emphasize authentic self-hood as part of team exploration that can only be lived, not trained. Design discoveries and creations happen not only through perception, but also through intuition, such that the boundary is erased between design as a subject and design as an object. The process of making these posters occurs through both group and individual involvement. This transformational process allows for selective recording to transpire as a way of self-reflection. The Senior posters are born from an act of “making” which in essence reveals a thinking process beyond mere techniques. The posters are rich, complex, mysterious, sensual, and at the same time, they allow us to find the universal in the process itself. In fact, this kind of learning, based on “techne,” offers one a special and privileged stance, a unique knowing. True learning occurs in accepting that inexplicable and authentic architecture exists, as “poesies,” ready to explain.

“Techne” is a term, etymologically derived from the Greek word τέχνη (Ancient Greek: [tékʰnéː], Modern Greek: ἥνε:), that is often translated as “craftsmanship”, “craft”, or “art”.
Epilogues, or summarizing commentaries, happen in many forms on the Bowling Green State campus: from simple interaction between students, faculty, and staff through dialogs between colleagues, friends and guests. This room-sized installation represents an alternative approach to the traditional understanding of a conclusion, using the idea of a visual summary functioning as a design epilogue. It focuses on aspects such as creativity, collaboration, capturing emotions, and learning to challenge the traditional modes of design thinking. All viewers become involved as observers to gain insight into the soul of the design studio - the core hands-on experience in the architectural setting. Something special happens in the studio environment due to the unique group dynamics. This installation tries to capture the generally unrecognized aspect of a studio experience that stitches together the most salient elements of the individual design projects into one coherent narrative. Design epilogue attempts to borrow something from each project that can be used to create something new like this installation. The aspirations for this exhibition were many, key among them: summarize the group experience arising from individual projects, encourage collaborative learning, and de-emphasize the technical process of project execution. The design epilogue room offers a snapshot or even a time-lapse view of the interactive environment of a studio.
Ekphrasis is the figure of speech given to the description of a work of art that, within the flow of narrative, makes a break with time and the logic of actions. The point of view set-aside for a moment, just a moment, on the world created within the work that is now in another work, another story in a story. The pause of ekphrasis is usually not long. A narrator or other character picks up a statuette, stands before a painting, pauses to take in the imposing façade of a building, along with the fictional character’s wandering imagination, the reader wanders off into the speculative possibilities offered up by this small break in the action. The break can’t last long — otherwise the narrative flow would trip and fall.

There is a weird virtuality involved with ekphrasis. Yet if one can involve any of the media of art or any other object of the mind, this virtuality can, but it can be a song, it can even be another book. The point is that ekphrasis is a pivot point of subjectivity. The imagination spins, like a carnival numbers wheel, and where it stops nobody knows — the possibilities are endless — until the main narrative returns the reader to matters at hand. Raymond Roussel, the self-styled playwright and novelist, who literally grew up down the street from Marcel Proust, invented a species of the ekphrasis trick that he called the procédé. The main form of the procédé involved splitting a sentence or phrase into two optional meanings. Thus, les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard ... initiates a story created by changing one letter: billard to pillard. The phrase les bandes du vieux pillard then becomes the horde of the old plunderer. Placing one interpretation at the beginning of a story and the other at the end, Roussel then set to inventing the circumstances that might conceivably connect the two split-off images.

Another application of the idea of the procédé involved a visual-optical method of traveling inside small images. In the poem “La Vue,” a souvenir piece-holder is fitted with a small lens placed over a printed view that could be seen by holding the eye close to the lens. Roussel magnifies the potential of this small lens further, proposing that the viewer is able to journey into the world of the scene and partake in its possibility small details. Mark Ford writes: “Roussel describes not only the promenaders on the beach, but a yacht and various small craft in the offing. We learn of a fisherman who is becalmed out at sea that his jacket is tight under the arms and worn at the cuffs, that his beard is rather untidy and that his left eyebrow is lightly shaggier than his right.”

Ekphrasis is, as one can see, far from being just an opportunity to take a break or introduce new exposition. It makes the step into a trip, from which one returns at different points. This function has been recognized since antiquity, when no less a famous author than Virgil stood his hero, Æneas, at the gates to the underworld, fashioned by the equally famous hero Dædalus, “the first architect.” Dædalus, sentenced him and his son to death; Dædalus, hordes of the old plunderer; Dædalus’s story now resonates within Æneas’s, the architect’s story’s folds and turns will resonate with those in the actual labyrinth of Hades. His ekphrasis was a practice run — for Æneas as well as for the reader.

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It is hard to ignore the role of the frame in the function of these brief imaginary getaways. In the case of a visual work of art such as a painting, the frame is rectangular — a quadrature. Four sides give rise to two competing motions of reading, a left-right and a vertical: One sweeps over and orders the other; the two mesh, providing a kind of GPS for the ordering of enigma. In Giulio Camillo’s “memory theater,” a building described in a book published in 1544, a 7x7 grid of images constituting the auditorium (the user of this ingenious memory stood on a small stage, reversing the usual relationship between audience and show), the ascending rows told the story of the birth of the universe, starting with the seven elemental planets and ending with the inventions of humankind. The columns regulated each sweep of narrative as it repeated the cosmic logic at each level, giving a new twist to the same basic story. Right-left, bottom to top, Camillo claimed
that the user of his memory theater would gain access to not just his own memory but to the collective memory of all who ever lived—or, rather, to the wif of those who had ever lived. Quadration, the cross-calibration of horizontal “situation” with cosmic “birth/death,” amounted to a memory machine, a co-inscription of fate with each tiny moment, a death within life, a dark within light.

This kind of optical access to mnemonic wisdom took, as its model, the idea of the jewel and the jewel’s “impossible geometry” of a small opening leading to a wide panorama in a hyperspace “beyond.” Jewels, when polished and faceted, fascinate. They draw the eye inward and outward at the same time, sometimes creating the phenomenon of asterism—a star image that is both “there and not there.” It is a way to create echoes across the otherwise linear narrative. Some echoes were near-twins: “scrutinized with a microscope” in the first half of “The Purloined Letter” is heard again in the second, as “scrutinizing with a microscope.” But, sometimes the echo is informative. “Made up his mind on a point” in “The Domain of Arnheim” is completed by “fancy a panoramic view.” The upshot of stereognosis is the radical incompatibility between the body’s relation to the world—and that might mean in relation to knowledge as wisdom—is clearly Plato’s main interest. Leigh, whose commitment to the “divine,” whatever that means in relation to knowledge as wisdom, is not clear Plato’s main interest. Leigh, being a Sophist by definition, perhaps cannot help but wish to soften the blow by which Plato dismisses most of what goes on in universals. To find an accommodation that does not bring about thoughts in the audience of the dialogue, rather than that of the Philosopher, whose commitment to the “divine,” whatever that means in relation to knowledge as wisdom, is Plato’s main interest. Leigh, being a Sophist by definition, perhaps cannot help but wish to soften the blow by which Plato dismisses most of what goes on in universals. To find an accommodation that does not bring about thoughts in the audience of the dialogue, rather than that of the Philosopher, whose commitment to the “divine,” whatever that means in relation to knowledge as wisdom, is Plato’s main interest. 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lying beyond the front pages in terms of glyphs and symbols that condensed these future arguments into gestures, personifications, and motifs. The generic term for such advertisements was, as Ernst Curtius tells us, significant: the cipher. "This is the Arabic word sifr. It means 'empty' and in the Arabic system of numerals represents the zero. . . . Now the intellectual history of Germany shows that from Hamann and Winkelman to Novalis and the young Rank the metaphor of the 'cipher writing' of nature, of the world, of history, of the human figure, etc., is extremely prevalent, together with Tyroleanistics' in the same sense." The terms "device," "motto," and "cipher" meant essentially the same thing: a silent speech operating from within ordinary speech; alternatively the metaphor of the 'cipher writing' of nature, the future: the future of work, the future of subjectivity itself. The terms 'device,' 'motto,' and 'cipher' meant essentially the same thing: a silent speech operating from within ordinary speech; alternatively the metaphor of the 'cipher writing' of nature, the future: the future of work, the future of subjectivity itself. The metaphors of the Senior Design Studio attest to the continued awareness of the tradition of the "know thyself" motto, as it was passed down to us by the Socratics and Diderot. Here, the use of the picture plane not as a window opening on to an illusory virtual space behind it but rather a multi-layered thickness of artifacts, traces, pass-codes, and signs. Lacan called attention to the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius to illustrate this difference. In the famous mural-painting contest between the two rival artists of ancient Greece, Zeuxis depicted a bowl of fruit so realistic that a bird flew into the wall, breaking its neck. The judges, impressed to the point of wishing to award the prize to Zeuxis then and there, stood impatiently in front of the curtain at Parrhasius’s part of the wall. “Pull aside the curtain! Show us your painting!” the judges demanded. In reply, after a suitable pause to savor the moment fully, he replied, “The curtain is my painting.” The moral of the story is that Zeuxis had fooled a bird but Parrhasius had fooled judges — who were not just experts at the art of painting but keen to make discerning final calls. He turned his own nature back on to them. Through the curtain they saw themselves — impatient, overconfident, and all too ready to accept any delay challenging their mastery as authentic.

If on one side we could place Zeuxis as representative of the "happy artist," content with reproducing and interpreting, the other, Parrhasius side would be the "idiot artist" who refuses to take part in such quick fixes. This is the back-ground of the emblem tradition. It makes us stop, and think, it confronts us with our own nature and our own desire, not so much to see what we already have seen, as to continue not to see, in ways that artists such as Zeuxis command us for our exemplary blindness. The emblem-cipher turns us toward our necessary incompleteness, toward our subjectivity. Thus, a functional-historical melancholy dominates the methods of em-blem-making. This is the kinship with the planet Saturn and the star within the sapphire. The texts joined to the images of the emblem books did their best to assign meanings and origins but the spirit of the emblem survived in the "myste-ristic" that eluded any consciously applied paraphrase. The point is to get to a point, and then remain silent of its own accord.

In Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, “The Aleph,” a man (“Borges”) is invited by his cousin (“Carlos Argentino”) to see a miracle that has appeared without warning beneath his cellar steps. Lying on the floor, gazing upward, he begins to see in the middle of the dark space a tiny bright orb. It is not a thing, but rather a hole that penetrates space itself, time itself. Beyond this opening, the prone Borges sees all ages, all times, he sees events that are universally known but also personal, secret things that only he could know.

The Aleph’s diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished. Each thing (a mirror’s face, let us say) was infinite things, since I distinctly saw it from every angle of the universe. I saw the world, I saw all time; I saw events that are universally known but also personal, secret things that only he could know.

“GET TO THE POINT”
close up, wringing eyes watching themselves in me as in a mirror; I saw all the mirrors on earth and none of them reflected me; I saw in a backyard of Soler Street the same tiles that thirty years before I’d seen in the entrance of a house in Fray Bentos; I saw bunches of grapes, snow, tobacco, lodes of metal, steam; I saw convex equatorial deserts and each one of their grains of sand; I saw a woman in Inverness whom I shall never forget; I saw her tangled hair, her tall figure; I saw the cancer in her breast; I saw a ring of baked mud in a sidewalk, where before there had been a tree; I saw a summer house in Adrogué and a copy of the first English translation of Pliny — Philemon Holland’s — and all at the same time saw each letter on each page (as a boy, I used to marvel that the letters in a closed book did not get scrambled and lost overnight); I saw a sunset in Querétaro that seemed to reflect the colour of a rose in Bengal; I saw my empty bedroom; I saw in a closed in Alkmaar a terrestrial globe between two mirrors that multiplied it endlessly; I saw horses with flowing manes on a shore of the Caspian Sea at dawn; I saw the delicate bone structure of a hand; I saw the survivors of a battle sending out picture postcards; I saw in a showcase in Mirzapur a pack of Spanish playing cards; I saw the slanting shadows of ferns on a greenhouse floor; I saw tigers, pistons, bison, tides, and armies; I saw all the ants on the planet; I saw in the drawer of a writing table (and the handwriting made me tremble) unbelievable, obscene, detailed letters, which Beatriz had written to Carlos Argentine; I saw a monument I worshipped in the Chacarita cemetery; I saw the rotted dust and bones that had once deliciously been Beatriz Viterbo; I saw the circulation of my own dark blood; I saw the coupling of love and the modification of death; I saw the Aleph from every point and angle, and in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth; I saw my own face and my own bowels; I saw your face; and I felt dizzy and wept, for my eyes had seen that secret and conjectured object whose name is common to all men but which no man has looked upon — the unimaginable universe.

Borges’ visions were magisterial, overwhelming, vertiginous. Carlos’s had been those of a small-minded voyeur. The Aleph seemed to follow the principle summed up in the Italian take on tourists to Rome, “Chi va bestia a Roma, bestia retorna.” What you are is what you get.

The unlimited semiosis of the Aleph is not a fantasy, although it has to be reduced by the dream or fiction to something that can float as an object among objects, something that can, when discovered, produce surprise and wonder. In addition to these “dream-fictions,” however, the Aleph is a Real, as Real as Real can be. It is the evidence that generates, retrocactively, the universe of which it is — and must be — a part. It is not an accidental, in Aristotle’s terms, not a “contingency” of other aspects of reality:1 It is a necessity.

6 As a first-time visitor to Seattle, I was startled to discove how vivid the sight of the far-away peak of Mt. Ranier appeared from the downtown. Before I knew it was Mr. Ranier, I naively asked the cab-driver on my way to the airport what it was, and completely understood what he meant when he replied, like any good Sybil “Evidence.”
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