

DEBAUCHERY & IMPIETY LITERARY PRESERVE

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ESSAY 91/05

ATMOSPHERE

CHIAROSCURO

LITERARY LORE

MATERIALITY

This preservation project investigates a post-industrial building and interior – originally constructed in 1909 as a carriage factory. As part of an ongoing dimensional survey of multiple post-industrial buildings and spaces, the author performs a literary lore in conjunction with an intensely modulated series of site engagements. It is a study that takes into account the situative and performative contexts in effort to preserve the material value, and even virtuosity, manifests in such spatial volumes. The objective of the project is to make visceral our intellectual comprehension of the relationships between self and the atmospheric nature of places and their histories.

Through diverse methodologies and an intense series of modulations, I have developed a highly individualized intellectual pursuit and, consequently, the ability to reconcile the role of the body as the locus of perception and spatial engagement in the interdisciplinary consideration of the post-industrial landscape as a constructed, cultural artifact. As an introduction to dealing with these issues of 'site', each effort involves a careful and multi-scalar examination of environmental phenomena and patterns of use and settlement, revealed and affected by the post-industrial architectural artifact. Active awareness in observation is a valuable tool for design.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of design, in which realization seems to employ decisions that derive from utility, and rejoin obligations of the world of aesthetics, the act of staging (a project) provides an intersession during which revelations particular to what constitutes an experience are formed. In this engagement, we enter into a dialogue with the humanity of place and, thus, are immersed in the visual and perceptual challenges of the inherited material evidence and, consequently, its cultural educe.

METHODS

Using site-adjusted installations as my primary mode of research and practice, I deploy an integrated and focused approach to both theoretical and practical questions pertaining to the nature and impact of materiality specific to the re-occupation of post-industrial spaces. My works provoke a temporal-spatial encounter that reconciles the simultaneous and complex nature of cerebral and corporeal experience. Each inquiry utilizes a range of domains including art, architecture and anthropology as a means of exploring not only what material cultivations can be, but also what they, in fact, do. Based on a series of modulated experimental actions (material modalities), each survey is driven by the nascent possibility of a persistent desire to intercourse with existing material surrounds pursuant a philosophical position that leverages perceptual notions of *chiaroscuro* – the disposition of light and dark. By extension, the conscious and unconscious, the seen and the unseen, focus and open awareness and the made and re-made are factors in the realm of understanding and producing space. It is a full-scale, three-dimensional methodology, concurrent with exploratory drawing, photography and videography that seeks to express the affects (immaterial harmonics) found latent in our post-industrial landscape.

Fig. 1 Peter P. Goché, *Debauchery & Impiety*, 2017, *Pitt Carriage Building* in Des Moines, Iowa. Photograph by Cameron Campbell.



Through diverse methodologies and an intense series of modulations, I have developed a highly individualized intellectual pursuit and, consequently, the ability to reconcile the role of the body as the locus of perception and spatial engagement in the interdisciplinary consideration of the post-industrial landscape as a constructed, cultural artifact. As an introduction to dealing with these issues of 'site', each effort involves a careful and multi-scalar examination of environmental phenomena and patterns of use and settlement, revealed and affected by the post-industrial architectural artifact. Active awareness in observation is a valuable tool for design. With this method, observations are not blindly documented, but rather are actively interpreted, through the filter of the human experience of space. In addition to simple, indirect quantitative analysis, the qualitative exploration and subsequent design of the built environment can be seen as a participatory and immersive endeavor, utilizing direct human experience as a cornerstone.

This research focuses on the process of surveying a vacant post-industrial building. This procedure, leading up to the execution of the rehabilitation of the facility, was conducted over the course of nine months. The site is the interior of a Des Moines warehouse built in 1909 located in the East Side Industrial, Warehousing, and Railroad Historic District.

The *Pitt Carriage Co. Building* made a locally significant contribution to Des Moines history as a rare-surviving carriage works factory building. It was constructed and operated under the leadership of Mabel Pitt – the only woman to own and lead a carriage manufacturing company in the United States¹.

Diffuse in structural order and lack of aperture, the space is unpredictable in its sensorial effects. The quality of its intricate component parts yields an elusive yet all-encompassing phenomena. The climatic conditions of this service-less facility offer a potent site for the creation of atmospheres and affects.

RESULTS

It is in this context the following literary lore, *Debauchery and Impiety*, was developed. It is a material recall entwined with characters, histories and narratives cloaked in an atmosphere of sensorial conditions engendered by a rigorous series of experimental projections and reflections.

Against the tapestry of clay and mortar, we'd enter history and situate ourselves within the belly of this corpse. Some months later, we find ourselves (consecrated occupants) against the tabernacle of pipework, flying wood joists and a ghost stair run. Within, we are immobilized by an incessant inaudible murmur. Aroused by the noxious aromas of our time, we are illuminated by sunlight emanating from a single overhead window as it passes through the array of burnt wood floor joists – the smell, no longer present. Escorted by a cortege of drays, we wade into the collective subconscious, and stand erect amongst an old repertoire of workaday industrial characters and stories and atmosphere. Off in the darkness beneath remnant wood floor, the communicant reads from her diary while our gaze is condemned to wander in search of Miss Mabel Pitt amidst derelict populations.

We crouch beside desperate sensations of longing which are equally acoustic, tactile and imaginative – engendering,

Fig. 2 Peter P. Goché, *Debauchery & Impiety*, 2017, *Pitt Carriage Building* in Des Moines, Iowa. Photograph by Cameron Campbell.



unfolding and participating in fantastical realities. Linger- ing, we ourselves comprise a deep and intimate relationship between patterns of occupation, activity and space. A kind of “combinatory index” , as Bernard Tschumi might suggest (1996), whereby we lay desperately still in effort to invoke and draw out the worlds of and between here and there.

Adjacent a confluence of sewage pipes, I perform my perceptual practice. Amidst a cloak of characters, we position, locate and situate one another. Circumscribed by deteriorated concrete foundation wall, we listen to the volunteer grasses grow and then fall dormant in the winter. The earth encrusted below rises to our nostrils without inhalation. A chromatic spectrum of warmth imbues my breasts. A series of wooden columns march above in soft story. We are derelict beings with saliva assembled at the backs of our throats. In still life, we wade a parallel course akin our impressionistic pasts. We are engulfed in an atmosphere of empty desolation formed in the oral cavity of the communicator.

To those who are not accustomed to it the inner beauty appears as ugliness because humanity in general inclines to the outer and knows nothing of the inner. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Kandinskij, 1912/2000) – we ingest Was- sily Kandinsky and inebriate our naked midsection in the brightness of our boredom. Innerness bulges and tumbles

through the rafters above. Kerosene ignites and emulsifies with our cognition. We abandon utterly all material signifiers and harmonize in abstraction as laughter and toil ooze from her bones. By childish inclination a first encounter with any new phenomenon, he exercises immediately an impression on her soul. The dust accumulates, amasses, collects, gathers, hoards then disperses... as the workaday beneath cowers.

The fine hair of belonging drapes over our eyes foregrounded by the musty aroma of its interior. Some lonesome arrangement of satisfactory time and turmoil. My blood sinks below the earth and the ache rises with the sun as it appears through the east door. Blindly I fall to the ground and laugh with Mabel at my side. Peripheral habits ensue – a nervous twitch, clicking of my teeth, spasm, seizure and an insatiable itch at the crown of my head. In tongue, I speak to posterity. Each utterance reverberates off the masonry walls and impregnate the material ruins with antiquity and a voluminous blur. We drown in a marinade of material dereliction as desperate whispers by Herbert Morrison waft – “oh, the humanity! [...] I’m going to step inside, where I cannot see”² Ibis white, ivory lace, antique white, repose gray, accessible beige, reddened earth, canyon clay, cachet cream, ox-blood red, harvester, torchlight, lusty red iron ore.

This literary lore serves as a type of spatial projection and historical occupation. Each experimental visit provided a new episodic narrative to the survey. The story line, therefore, is intentionally not linear. It has become clear through such obscurations that history and its material leftover does not conform linearly to itself nor contemporary culture and its consequent atmospheric yield.

The following excerpt developed by the Peter P. Goché in coordination with Jennifer James (architectural historian) illuminates the history, context and execution of the rehabilitation of this facility: *Woman Will Head Automobile Shop*, in February 1911. The facility served as carriage factory and warehouse through 1934 at which time it was purchased by the Reichenbach family and served as an ostrich hatchery

Fig. 3 Peter P. Goché, *Debauchery & Impiety*, 2017, *Pitt Carriage Building* in Des Moines, Iowa. Photograph by Cameron Campbell.



until 1951. From 1951-1974, the facility served as warehouse for the *Feed Specialties Company*. The building has sat vacant since. The first floor and second floor each contain 5,280 square feet of space. Just as on the exterior, the interior is unadorned. The structure consists of structural brick walls over a concrete floor, interior structural wood and steel columns, an array of steel I beams, wood girders and remnant wood flooring. Almost all window openings had been filled with concrete masonry units.

The project's long-range impact on the structure is significant given the building has been completely code updated with new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, glazing and sprinkler systems to support more sustainable operational costs and the well-being of its occupancy. The entirety of the building has been rehabilitated to support mixed use tenancy for the coming century. All residential and commercial tenant spaces have been filled. Each of these occupancies contributes significantly to Des Moines' historic East Side Industrial, Warehousing, and Railroad Historic District and East Village neighborhood by preserving the street character by restoring the masonry edifice and reconstructing the carriage door and shop entrances along East 3rd Street.

The architectural effort was to retain the historic building envelope as well as its original window and carriage door openings. All modern CMU window infill and garage doors

were removed and replaced with new recessed mahogany wood storefronts, pedestrian doors, and non-operable carriage doors. New 2/2 wood double-hung windows were installed throughout with thermally-broken, wood-frame windows to replicate the original windows per photographic evidence sourced from *The Des Moines Register* and other vintage imagery from the area³.

A new roof and ceiling assembly was installed. Additionally, there was no level two flooring or ceiling – there was only wood joist. Our goal here was to replace a number of burnt joist from previous fire damage and add a new wood floor and gypsum board ceiling. Wood egress stairs were added on each end of the facility. The street stair was located and installed in the same run location as the original street stair.

CONCLUSION

The architectural effort was to maintain the authenticity and atmospheric quality of this particular space by maintaining it in all aspects. Our goal for the interior was to retain character-defining industrial features – concrete floors, masonry walls, soaring ceilings, and exposed structural steel and plaster wall surfaces. We installed a new steel structural shoring system to stabilize the already shifting upper story which leaned to the south. On west side, we created common restrooms which served a retail business at the rear and a restaurant in the front. The upper level was converted to a single entity office. The existing column line was left exposed and battered along which the new glazing system, offices, conference rooms and restrooms were located.

As architect and artist, the process of surveying vacant constructs tends, for me, to have much less to do with a capitalistic utility and more to do with an immersive occupation of the past. Each architectural conversion centers on the production of space and the articulation of time using an economy of means to satisfy contemporary needs specific to

human behavior, construction methodology and regulatory requirements while making present the materiality, and thereby, spatial disposition of its past. The nature of each site becomes contingent on what might be referred to as depth which is not a dimension as such but rather an embodiment of dimensional matter. It is here that the body is enveloped by space – intuitively perceiving the accumulation of surface and debris established by various past occupations. This set of material conditions are manifestations of discontinuity and difference that yield an atmospheric equilibrium that puts into motion and lays bare the most basic, vital, and dynamic evidence of a defunct industrial terrain.

NOTES

- 1 Jennifer James (Architectural Historian) and Peter P. Goché, *Pitt-Carriage History*, 2016.
- 2 From audio recording of American Radio Journalist Herbert Morrison on the Hindenburg Disaster (real footage), Broadcast, 1937.
- 3 Jennifer James (Architectural Historian) and Peter P. Goché, *Pitt-Carriage History*, 2016.

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