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BLACK & WHITE

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Levi Bedall

Cover Design by Jessica Sprankle
Ink Blots by Levi Bedall & Sam Fudala
While researching topics for this black and white issue, we thought to look at the Rorschach test. Named for its Swiss inventor, Hermann Rorschach, the test famously exposes its subject to ten inkblot images. (Having never been tested ourselves, we assumed that all of the images are black ink on white paper. In fact, only five are black and white; two inkblots are of black and red ink and three are multicolored.) The subject’s responses to those images are recorded and subsequently analyzed by a psychologist. In this way, the psychologist hopes to gain insight into the subject’s personality characteristics and emotional functioning.

The Rorschach test is an example of what psychologists call a projective test. It is designed to let an individual respond to ambiguous stimuli rather than explicit questions. The ambiguity of the stimuli is crucial to the effectiveness of the test. It is thought to allow the subject to express thoughts that originate on a deeper level, one that more explicit questions would fail to access.

Although ambiguous, the ten inkblots used in the test are not random or chance designs. Rorschach meticulously designed each of the inkblots that he selected for his test to be as vague as possible. Thus each image can be said to represent a very specific ambiguity. Critics of the test have pointed out its failure to deliver results that are empirically verified. Yet, many psychologists continue to administer it, and the idea of the inkblot lives on as an icon of psychology in the popular imagination.

We think it’s interesting to consider these paradoxes in the context of architecture. When architects work in black and white, it tends to be in the production of the most rigorous, measured drawings. But, as Rorschach’s inkblots remind us, the two colors present richer possibilities: ambiguity, sensuality, mystery. We’ve seen recent work at the KSA push the bounds of black and white, and, with this issue of One:Twelve, we hope to push them further.

The Editors
PART II: MASQUE
Marcus Meyerholtz

In 1919, on the heels of the Great War, there was to be a ball. Organized by the exclusive Chelsea Arts Club in London, the ball was to take place, as it had since 1908, at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The title: The Dazzle Ball.
Artifice becomes more useful than ever in defining a new sensibility. The clothes make the man—at least on one level.

Clothing is a mode of communication. The artifice so loathed and hated by modernists can be re-appropriated as yet another costume. The New York Five did it so well, long after the “achromatic” abstract forms of heroic modernism had fallen out of favor with the general public. Philip Johnson, the prime architectural sartorialist, and by extension, his used artifice to hide, to provoke, to nostalgise, to tell a story. The strength of artifice lies in its mystifying nature.

In the 1980s John Hejduk and The Memphis group were producing two completely separate projects. Hejduk was making characters for a masquerade, while the Memphis group were creating strange and beautiful objects, from teapots, to furniture, to unrealized architectural designs. For Memphis, artifice was a necessity. The various patterns and cacophonous colors both articulate various parts of the objects and negate any clear sense of precedent. In this way, they recall both banal high-design and the cheap, colorful consumer products of post-war America. In the same way that dazzle had come to obfuscate the Modern individual, so did the modern conglomerations of Memphis help to both show and hide the Post-Modern individual. Karl Lagerfeld, a collector of Memphis objects, once commented:

“There is no beauty without strangeness.”

By January of 1994, Memphis had disbanded, and John Hejduk sketched his “Architectures in Love”. The strange architecture of Hejduk simultaneously becomes a complex emotional entity, and adorns itself in a variety of patterns and clothing. The monochromatic participants of the masque in the previous decade had matured, and grown fixed of one another. Feeling naked in their unadorned and vaguely human forms, they adorned themselves in colors and patterns, and, finding the artifice as equally abstracting as their forms, began their search for company, love, and affection.

The costume becomes the character.
White is recognized as the purest color in architecture. The color usually describes the qualities of the ideal forms of modernism. The classical orders and the pilotis of Le Corbusier are understood as being on opposite ends of the spectrum; they could never be similar. The meaning behind classical architecture, however, was just as pure as the ideas driving the modernist movement. Though different, both were based around the customs of their specific world. The impurities within architecture occur when the architecture no longer responds to its time. Beauty is used as a substitute for meaning. In order for architecture to regain its purity, architects must evaluate the effectiveness of the current style. Adolf Loos is praised for making a radical argument against the ‘style of the time’. His essay Ornament and Crime created a pivotal moment in the history of architecture, taking a stance against what was conventional in favor of a more meaningful, honest architecture.

Form Follows Precedent

Defined in the historicist style, buildings became idealized versions of historical precedents, in which the façade represented the attitude the building was to possess. This method is no more distinct than in the Ringstrasse of Vienna, where over the second half of the 19th century, civic buildings were erected to fill in the void left from the former city wall. The Parliament was built in the Hellenistic style, in the belief that classical Athens gave birth to democracy. A church was dressed in the gothic, a university was to be renaissance, and the imperial forum was to be modeled after Roman architecture. Architecture was simplified to the image it generated; the ornamentation applied was superficial to the building. The statue of Athena stood in front of Parliament, but no sacrifices were made to her. Loos described the artifacts of his time as “prototypical 19th-century inventions, accoutrements of modern life dressed in traditional forms and so, peculiarly anachronistic.” Loos concluded that ornament represented only wasted labor and material, adding no value to the architecture.
Form Follows Function

Modernity brought clarity back to architecture. Pure architecture is honest to the craft and function. It restored the necessary bond between mason and architecture. A quality Loos felt was lost when “architectural forms were no longer created by the craftsman’s tools, but by the pencil.” In other words, the architect returned to the role of master builder with his hand touching every aspect of a project. Loos was interested in the spatial and experiential qualities of the rooms created by his architecture. Aspects of materials, scale, and light would determine the mood given to a space. Architects were once again thinking critically about what they produced and what qualities their architecture would embody.

Form Follows Branding

The reasoning for Loos’s argument in 1908 can be applied to the architecture of the present. The form of a building is assigned based on the image it wants to generate, having nothing to do with the interior function of the building. We live in the world of the icon or monument, a world where attention is placed on facades and first impressions. Form has become the new means of ornamentation, full of excess cantilevers and eccentric curtain walls. The purity of the ideal glass tower of Mies becomes tainted, with no value added. Miriam Gusevich comments: “Even in his own time, Loos recognized the transformation of the everyday object into a fetish; he criticized the pursuit of stylistic obsolescence as a way to generate business, and condemned the business strategy of transforming common artifacts into art objects as a way of making the object more fetching.” Buildings are reduced to sculptural objects with the possibility of being plopped anywhere. The forms become more complex, more expensive material is needed, but the interiors are the same. The cost is higher, but there is little to show for it. The need to appear current in the digital age drives this cycle. Loos analyzed the loss of culture in his own time: “Until then culture developed in a steady flow. People responded to the demands of the moment and looked neither forward nor back.” Meaning was lost when architecture replicated the past, whereas the architecture of today is striving to be with the future; it no longer responds to the needs of its individuals.

Notes
As discovered by the Architectural group Superimpossible:

Star-date: 4396.5

//Official Crewman’s Log . SD 4218.9: It’s not entirely clear who made the final decision. At some point it wasn’t a decision to be made, just the only thought we could hold long enough to simulate conviction. We abandoned ship. Not we, I mean, yes we; but by ‘we’ I mean everyone at once, but all separately, such that ‘we’ seems a bit anachronistic now (the second most outdated word in the dictionary). A firework-explosion of escape pods in three hundred and sixty degrees, Architecture’s insides becoming its outsides all in an instant. We figured it was no use staying onboard Architecture, in retrospect an all-too reasonable thought perhaps, nothing seemed black and white anymore, stuck so long in the glittering interstellar dust until it was no longer clear whether we were moving or standing still. Come to think of it, I’m not sure I remember the difference. My memories of the ship appear now in degraded stils, isolated instances with nothing in between, fragmented to the point that I’m not entirely sure I ever actually saw architecture at all, maybe just the atomized escape mechanisms launched to leave it behind… [RECORDING INDECIFERABLE]\]

//Personal Log . SD 4220.2: The strangest thing about cabin fever in the post-Architectural dust isn’t that there’s nothing to see out the window, but precisely too much and all at once. I woke up with a dry mouth and a headache; not relevant I know, but it’s a lead-in to say that the operating manual I found aboard my Class-6 Escape Pod when I woke up here has a section on basic navigation; it says the key to proper navigation is to draw a perfect line in deep space between the architectures receding in your rear view mirror and that shimmering field up ahead. We’ve always had a perpetual faith in shimmering fields, whether we’re prepared to admit it or not, it’s practically
The manual’s author, a lieutenant B., claims that the proper management of precedents is the key to any really good expedition, something which allows for supervision, for the active sponsorship of certain trajectories over others, a straightforward way to evaluate things. He says this was part of architecture’s modernity from the very beginning, or something along those lines. I can’t recall his exact words. The manual seems a bit dated now that objects have been deliriously multiplied until there’s no way of judging the difference between one and the next. Particle after particle ad infinitum. I read once that all the colors in the universe add up to beige. Or maybe I didn’t, my memory isn’t what it was. Anyway I guess if B. made it out alive, he’s on his own escape pod, 180 degrees from me rewriting the manual on liquid-based navigation as I speak, or be gave up, who’s to say?

//Official Crewman’s Log, SD 4223.9: I saw another C6 escape pod in passing today (or was it tonight?), for hours I could barely make it out in the dust but it was there alright. We made brief radio contact but I couldn’t really understand anything they were saying. Sounded like some kind of crisis though.

//Personal Log, SD 4225.4: I sometimes wonder what life was like back onboard Architecture. Sounds miserable. Endless debate over which navigational precedents to follow. By the time each of our possible pasts were fully disassembled, ground down into this infinitesimal dust which surrounds us now, most were already trying to set course for position zero, “start at the beginning” someone said (can’t recall who), but no one could agree exactly where this trip all started, whether semantic grey shooters, syntactic white grids or Germanic wilderness tectonics. Turns out nothing was ever solid, only a kind of optical effect produced by the unquestioned assumption of forward motion. By the time we realized we might not be moving at all, the younger members of the crew were already considering abandoning ship. They felt it was better on their own, in their defense, these escape pods do seem much more nimble, in my defense, it’s boring as hell and they’ve done nothing to solve the problem of trajectory.

//Official Crewman’s Log, SD 4228.5: I picked up another sporadic distress communication from an escape pod, the third one in as many nights. Without visual contact I was no help though, this galactic dust seems to be useless in evaluating position, no way to tell if they’re a mile away or a light-year. The static makes it difficult to tell if it’s communication or just feedback, but I get the sense it may be some kind of strange collective ritual from the remnants of Architecture’s crew. Where the only thing that renders us a crew in the former sense of the term is our collective disorientation.
Someone once said that today “we’re not only more aware of our deficiencies; we don’t feel like real subjects without them.” Can’t remember who. Someone wrote books about disease and died of edema. Seems like madness to me. One other important thing… [RECORDING INDECIPHERABLE]

// Personal Log. SD 4231.3: I heard rumors some of the escapees are attempting to break back into Architecture, or I didn’t, I don’t know, rumors work like that. Regardless, it must nearly be a ghost ship by now, cobwebs and dimmed lights and so on, but at least going nowhere would give us something to argue over, an intellectual endeavor of sorts. The onboard operating manual says people lose it if they’re stuck in the dust too long. All kinds of strange paranoia develop, from an obsession over the pink/purple glittering effects of the nebula to an overconfidence in the technology of the escape pod, or worst of all, a kind of compulsion to mistake one’s escape pod for their destination. Means and ends reversed and so on. It’s exhausting… It seems if anything is pressing it would be the question of how to live with the cloud of dust formerly known as Architecture with neither the nostalgia of its coherent whole nor the complacency of its contemporary malaise. I can’t find anything in the operating manual about how to overcome boredom, so I hashed out a rough outline, if you’re receiving this communication, tell me what you think:

Class-6 Escape Pod Operations Manual Edits:
**Star-date: 4233.4**

We need to learn to make jokes about the impossibility of living in the historical dust of Architecture’s former self. Rather than wishfully construing it as a coherent succession of precedents articulating a collective project, nor stripping it of the historic politics which once rendered it meaningful, thereby mistaking its means as ends, useful only for the construction of individual imperatives, architecture might instead employ the logic of comedy; where the only meaningful connection between two irreconcilable realities (between the ghost of Architecture’s past and our contemporary escape devices), is the very cut between them (Charlie says, “give me a break”, Big Jim pulls a brake from his pocket, laughter ensues). To treat the now-paralyzing weight of architecture’s history as the set-up for comedic inventions not only engenders a collective enthusiasm about the strange circumstances contemporary post-Architecture currently finds itself in, but reconstitutes the architectural act as precisely the impossible cut between discrete things: past/present, real/virtual, representation/reality and autonomy/agency.

Because aren’t we operating today precisely in the punch-line of a classically structured joke? Where, for a hundred or so years, we expected one thing (the avant-garde, the radical sixties, the neo avant-garde) and yet were given another (the avant-huh? the irony of postures masquerading as positions, or best, Architecture’s individualized escape mechanisms).

Perhaps architects could learn to make jokes by first realizing we’re not the only ones who can only remember our own disciplinary dust. In parallel contemporary cultural practices we can witness a new structure of work being produced, an attitude which operates in the complex space between attempting to articulate the discipline’s historic imperatives despite the knowing-impossibility of their fulfillment. Entirely un-unified, these practices operate under such diverse movements as Stuckism, the New Sincerity, the New Weird Generation, or Romantic Conceptualism. What unifies these diverse practices, ranging from the self-doubting sincerity of David Foster Wallace, the neurotic realism of Charlie (and Donald) Kauffman, or the hilarious modernisms of Dunne and Raby, is an attempt to short circuit the seemingly irreconcilable gap between fanaticism and doubt within their own respective disciplines (literature, film and industrial design respectively). Exhausted after both the collapse of the modern project and decades of post-modern cynicism and ironic posturing, these creative practices attempt to formulate the possibilities of re-connecting to their own histories’ broken narratives. Working simultaneously between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, oscillating between irreconcilable positions, this alternative structure attempts to formulate a different ontology for their work, characterized by an ‘as-if’ relationship with their own creative histories.

Informed by both a modern naïveté and a post-modern skepticism, this alternative ontology acknowledges the impossibility of the fulfillment of modern history’s project and yet nevertheless consciously commits itself to these very impossibilities. Drawn from Curtis Peter’s appropriation of Kant’s negative idealism, this ontology works from the supposition that, “we may view human history as if mankind had a life narrative which describes its self-movement toward its full rational/social potential… to view history as if it were the story of mankind’s
development.” Or better, in the words of art theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker this work “attempts in spite of its inevitable failures; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find… [these practices] thus willfully adopt a kind of donkey-and-carrot double-bind. Like a donkey they chase a carrot that they never manage to eat because the carrot is always just beyond their reach. But precisely because they never manage to eat the carrot, they never end their chase, setting foot in moral realms the modern donkey (having eaten its carrot elsewhere) will never encounter, entering political domains the postmodern donkey (having abandoned the chase) will never come across.”

// Personal Log. SD 4234.5: Actually this is rubbish. I can’t seem to convince myself to believe what I’m saying long enough to write it down. Wasn’t movement for movement’s sake precisely the imperative which lead to us being stuck out here in these escape pods in the first place? I wonder…

Class-6 Escape Pod Operations Manual Edits of Edits:

Star-date: 4235.1

The comedic cut, as a methodological disposition towards living within Architecture’s dust argues for taking the compromised position of architecture seriously. Comedy, on the most fundamental level confronts our dependence on reality’s necessities with an absurd other realm, neither real nor virtual, comedy engenders an anti-reality in which claims of seriousness and relevance can be effectively questioned. By embracing this as-if ontology, a comedic reenactment of disciplinary histories allows us to act as-if other political trajectories were available to us, as-if we were an already future’s past, and in so believing, we just might be.

By recasting the architectural act as the production of the comedic cut, that almost indescribable operation whereby one reality swerves into a laughter inducing alternative, architecture takes on a new disposition towards the paralysis of its past. Neither a rejection of architectural history nor an evisceration of it, the comedic cut both acknowledges the impossibility of overcoming the weight of history while simultaneously transforming contemporary impossibilities into the grounds for new architectural pleasures.
The cut derives its power from an alternative way to reconstitute Architecture’s dust. No longer a perfect trajectory, nor a friction-free collection of techniques, the cut works through the power of the architectural archive. Someone once said that the archive “points to a change in thinking whereby the symbolic order no longer operates through apparent totalities.” It assumes fragmentation as its starting condition and proposes new orders of affective association. The archive attempts to take advantage of the proposition that the past is neither merely a clear lineage nor an incomprehensible cloud, but an always-incomplete collection of possible futures.

And it’s here that we arrive again at the archive, and its relationship to what I think is a particular generational frustration, despite the absurdity the task, I want the possibilities of new collective architectural conversations… conversations in a moment in which we’ve been told the age of large narratives and stable positions is now definitely, finally, absolutely over. In fact, it was over long before most of us even began making architecture, such that there’s now no memory in our generation of a lost-coherence to be nostalgic for.

So if there’s one thing we can learn from giving gifts (in) sincerely, attacking alligators or hugging mushroom clouds, it’s that the affective associations of simulated histories are often more persuasive than the real thing. So might we imagine the archive’s return? Not as an instrument for destabilizing knowledge but precisely as a means of both representing the generational predicament of post-Architectural existence, and as a medium for working through it.

The archive allows us to simulate architectural conversations which never took place, as in a particular type of historic imagination which can work to re-shuffle the relational possibilities of existing historic narratives. Or in other words the archive might be considered a tool for simulating the possibility of new collective architectural memories, provisional and unstable as those memories might be. The archive is a device for constructing alternate disciplinary worlds within which we can test the stunted politics of architecture’s other narratives, its lost causes, its bad endings and its impossible projects.

But this would also require us to think through architectural discourse on slightly different terms, establishing architecture’s relationship to multiple histories through the collective enthusiasm of competing fan bases, cult collectives organized around irreconcilable readings of the dust itself, incompatible worlds within which architecture’s historic impossibilities become the Superimpossible.

End Manual Edits: Star-date: 4238.9

//Personal Log . SD 4240.2: This may be pointless, but anyway I don’t care anymore, at least it somehow acknowledges this peculiar sensation I’ve been having the last few years, the one that tells me that no matter how much I learn about Architecture I’m still left with the nagging feeling that I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing, but somehow I do it anyway. We all do. [End Transmission] \A

Notes
Kant’s Philosophy of Hope, Curtis Peters, New York: Peter Lang, 1993
While on the topic of black and white, it seemed fitting to talk to Justin Diles about his recent project: Eigenforms. Diles taught at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna before he was named the 2012-2013 LeFevre Fellow at the KSA. Eigenforms appeared in the KSA’s Banvard Gallery last spring. It is a wall, but not a simple one. Its design is based on the structural failure of buckling. The project’s placement and form offer different readings and ambiguities. But I was curious about its color: why is Eigenforms black and white?
I see black and white as colors, and I see color as a material. Architects traditionally use materials to emphasize particular surfaces and to underscore what is going on in a work. Fiberglass, a material that is novel to architecture, has a different relationship to color: one, because the material itself doesn't have a long history in architecture, and two, the thinness of the material makes it seem more like a structural paint than a real material. As a result, color combines with the plastic in a unique way. The question for me wasn't whether to use color or not, in a way like you may use wood for the natural beauty of its grain. It was more of a question of what color the piece would become and what would best underscore the principles and ideas of the work.

What does black and white mean to you?

In many cases structure isn’t celebrated with color. Did the work become black and white based on its structural performance?

I would say it underscores the performance in the way that it calls attention to the “piecey-ness” of it; the fact that it’s made of these weird interlocking, dimensional surfaces. A richer use of color might have undermined the piecey-ness of the work by focusing too much attention on structural gradients moving through the wall. I didn’t want to use color to record how forces move, rather, I wanted to use color to emphasize how the project was put together and how color worked as a way to create special effects from the pieces. In other words, color could be used as a way to record the process of design, or color could be a way to let the pieces perform perceptually in the moment.

Did you use black and white to make the pieces more neutral and whole work more congruent?

On one hand it was a way of emphasizing the interconnection of the pieces. From a process standpoint it revealed that there were two surfaces used to produce the tectonics of the work. I think the color scheme (black and white) became important in the design not just as a way to record how the pieces were working, but also as a way to see if the process was producing interesting effects. The full scale wall that I installed in the Banvard gallery creates the sensation of rising or falling; you can read and feel diagonal directionality in the overall surface. That reading would have been impossible without the color.

Segueing off your comment on directionality, I’m curious if this a section of a larger wall? The way it is framed and the way it touches the ground makes it seem like it could extend into space or into the ground. Normally you think of structure meeting with another member or the ground as a black and white standard (e.g. a beam resting on a column) but you are using the failure of structure to design, which to me, is a more colorful approach. I wonder if it’s supposed to touch the ground in a more colorful way.

I would say the 3D prints undermine the idea of the perfect frame because it’s easier to push them apart, to see how they are assembled, and to experiment with configurations in which the wall is less closed and more incomplete. The fact that it’s constructed from pieces and that those pieces can be completely assembled or partially assembled is important. While the larger wall was not shown incomplete during the exhibition; it could be exhibited various stages of completeness. It might even be better to show it this way…
BLACK BOX/WHITE WINGS: A COLORFUL MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF TRASH
Ian Mackay

The Black Box

In the lexicon of science and engineering, a “black box” is a device, system, or object that is essentially opaque: it can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs, but its inner workings remain unknown. Urban theorists use this concept to explain how people in western cities tend to understand the infrastructural networks that serve and sustain them:

Indeed, when infrastructure networks work best, and succeed in reaching mass adoption as the basis for styles of urban life, they tend to become progressively both more “ordinary” and less noticed… In the language of the sociology of technology, such infrastructures become “black boxed” by their users.¹

Consider the infrastructure of municipal solid waste management. Few individuals put much thought into what happens to their trash after they drop it in a garbage can and roll it to the curb. From there it might be buried, burned, recycled, or reused. But the man at the curb has little insight into the sophisticated technologies that collect, transport, and distribute it—or the real conditions of its final resting place. And why should he? Nothing compels him to care much about it. As long as his trash doesn’t pile up and cause him problems, he’s happy to leave its management to the sanitary engineers and technicians who make a living of it.

Before the Black Box: Black Streets

Municipal solid waste was not always black boxed. There was a time when one could not escape it. New York City’s legislature created a Department of Street-Cleaning in 1881. But it was riddled with the corruption of Tammany Hall, and evidence of its failings were everywhere:

Before 1895 the streets [of New York City] were almost universally in a filthy state. In wet weather they were covered with slime, and in dry weather the air was filled with dust. Artificial sprinkling in summer converted this dust into mud, and the drying winds changed the mud to powder. Rubbish of all kinds, garbage, and ashes lay neglected in the streets, and in the hot weather the city

Figure 1: The “black rottenness” of a New York City street and one of the White Wings drafted to clean it up. He was outfitted in a suit of white duck, a white pith helmet, and equipped with a white bucket.
The department’s street sweepers were a rag tag bunch of men clad in brownish suits and grayish-brown caps that matched the muck of the streets around them: “they were the objects of ridicule and scorn, and they knew it. They did such work as they were compelled to do, and, as a rule, they did no more. Nominally, they wore a uniform, but they were not distinguished by it.”

The first commissioner of the department noted that merchants and householders seemed blind to the city’s attempts to clean the streets, and that their ignorance hampered his efforts:

It has frequently happened that the street-sweeping machine has passed down the street, and before it has reached the nearest corner men and women have been seen deliberately emptying receptacles full of refuse and rubbish from their shops or residences upon the pavements just swept. Handbills and other printed matter distributed to pedestrians were thrown on the sidewalk or street… Such things were not done, perhaps, because the offenders had resolved to be blameworthy and contemptuous, but because they were imbued with the spirit of indifference to the public welfare and had long been accustomed to do such things without fear of the law.

Enter the Colonel

Appointed Street-Cleaning Commissioner in 1895 by the newly elected Mayor William L. Strong, Colonel George E. Waring, Jr. was charged with reforming the corrupt department and ensuring that it functioned properly. His qualifications included the design of the separate sewer system that helped rid Memphis of Yellow Fever and a stint as the drainage engineer of Central Park.

Waring brought a healthy dose of gusto to the Commissioner’s desk: he was known as “an unabashed self-promoter” with a taste for flamboyance. Before the Civil War, he assisted Central Park’s first engineer, Egbert Ludvikus Viele. To the great annoyance of his superior, Waring took to trotting his splendid pair of white horses around the park roads each morning. His subsequent service in the Civil War only heightened his taste for military pomp and spectacle. He attained the rank of colonel, which he maintained as an honorific throughout his life.

As commissioner, Waring introduced a completely new and unprecedented program. It included a number of the best methods that had been attempted piecemeal in other cities around the nation: primary separation of trash at the household level (garbage, rubbish, and ashes); the first municipal rubbish-sorting
plant; a garbage reduction plant on Barren Island; and a land reclamation program on Rikers Island. But before implementing any of these technological reforms, Waring put on a show.

**White Wings**

The ‘White Wings’ are by no means white angels, but they are a splendid body of men, a body on which the people of New York can depend for any needed service, without regard to hours or personal comfort. Before Waring’s appointment, street sweeping was done mostly by machines and almost universally in the black of night. The colonel changed that. Under his command, street sweeping was done entirely by hand during daylight hours. He crafted a new corps of sweepers especially for the task: the White Wings. Unlike their dun-colored predecessors, Waring’s men were outfitted in brilliant white suits topped with white pith helmets. They deposited their sweepings in white, wheeled buckets designed by the colonel’s wife, Emily.

The whiteness of the corps was in some ways impractical for its cleaning duties, but that was exactly the point. Arrayed against the grimy blackness of the streets, they would shine as beacons of sanitation—allied with white-clad doctors and nurses in the fight for good health. At the same moment in domestic architecture, white porcelain fixtures were emerging from formerly dark, wooden enclosures in kitchens and bathrooms. The hard, white surfaces rendered dust and grime immediately visible, prompting an urge to clean them. Whiteness thus provoked a sanitary paranoia that invaded both the private and public realm: “it cannot be doubted that in New York the fact that the sweepers stare the public in the face in every street has had much effect in securing popular approbation and assistance.”

But Waring was not content with approbation—he demanded celebration. One of his first actions as commissioner was to orchestrate a parade of the men in their new gear down Fifth Avenue. The colonel, of course, led the charge, resplendent on a white stallion. Mayor Strong viewed such showy displays as a distraction from the real work of the department. He gave Waring a public reprimand only six weeks into the job for failing to quickly clear the filthy snow that obstructed city streets.

But the mayor was mistaken. Waring’s antics were not a sideshow. The public spectacle he created with the White Wings was crucial to the effectiveness of the rest of his program. By successfully branding the newly clean streets with the strong, simple image of the White Wings, Waring made it easy for the citizenry and the local papers to extend their enthusiasm to his efforts to develop solutions to the question of final disposition of trash. His popularity allowed him room to experiment with both new and old techniques like rubbish-sorting, garbage reduction, and land reclamation.
Waring’s genius lay in his recognition that the infrastructure of municipal waste management was abundant in humanity: not only its workers, but potentially the entire body of trash-producing citizenry. To energize and educate those human resources, he drew from experience; people like a good show; and, what’s more, they remember it:

Their white uniforms, once so derided, have been a great help to them, and they know it; and the recognition of the people has done still more for them.

Indeed, the parade of 1896 marked an era in their history. It introduced them to the prime favor of a public by which, one short year before, they had been contempted [sic]; and the public saw that these men were proud of their positions, were self-respecting, and were the object of pride on the part of their friends and relatives who clustered along their line of march.\textsuperscript{14}

The colonel’s vision was inclusive: he drafted the city’s children into the ranks of sanitarians with the creation of Juvenile Street Cleaning Leagues. His department decided that children of immigrant families could educate their parents more effectively than its inspectors. Every child was encouraged to speak to adults and other children about keeping the city “tidy and neat” and earn a badge by reporting “the number of bonfires which he has succeeded in stopping; the number of skins which he has kicked into the gutter from the sidewalk; the number of papers he has induced others to put in the barrel instead of on the pavement; and various things of a similar nature.”\textsuperscript{15} Many children seemed to respond quite enthusiastically.

Post 1898: Towards a Black Box

Waring’s tenure as Street-Cleaning Commissioner ended in 1898, and he died later that year. He was killed, ironically, by yellow fever—the disease he had worked to eradicate in Memphis. By that time, his work in New York had generated considerable local and national attention and similar programs were developed in many other cities. Juvenile street cleaning clubs were reported in Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, Utica, and Denver.\textsuperscript{16}

After Waring, municipal engineers became the dominant figures in refuse collection and disposal. But like the mayor who reprimanded Waring after his first parade, they misjudged the value of public spectacle in the development of successful municipal infrastructure:

Figure 5: Waring made it easy for New Yorkers to pin the success of the newly cleaned streets to the image of the White Wings.
Thus began the trudge towards the black box. Sanitary engineers tested and developed new practices in the ensuing decades, but they were focused on finding “a single, technical panacea” to rid the city of its solid waste. The invention of the modern sanitary landfill in the 1930s came closest to realizing that goal. It became the first universally accepted disposal option in the US; after World War II, many cities adopted its use. The basic principle of the sanitary landfill is to dispose of all forms of waste simultaneously, burying them beneath layers of earth. Usually located at the margins of urbanity, the sanitary landfill is quite literally a black box. Most Americans are happy to keep a lid on it. Urban theorist Stephen Graham notes the implications of that mindset:

Cultures of normalized and taken-for-granted infrastructure use sustain widespread assumptions that urban infrastructure is somehow a material and utterly fixed assemblage of hard technologies embedded stably in pace, and which is characterized by perfect order, completeness immanence, and internal homogeneity rather than leaky, partial, and heterogeneous entities.

Colonel Waring’s short stint in New York City offers an alternative vision. He produced a moment of intense imagination in the development of urban infrastructures because he understood that they extend beyond their engineered technologies to include human users and servicers. They are not merely technical, they are not stable, they are not apolitical, and they do not have to be boring.

Notes
3. ibid., p. 15.
4. ibid., p. 2.
7. At that time, the term garbage described organic waste like food scraps, whereas rubbish described more stable castoffs like old shoes.
9. “As a rule, the suits are changed on Thursday and on Monday, but if soiled from any cause they must be changed more frequently.” Waring, p. 39.
12. Miller, p. 76.
13. ibid.
15. ibid., p. 180.
16. ibid., p. 179.
17. Melosi, p. 194.
18. Melosi, p. 263.

Figure Sources

Fig. 1: Waring, p. 8, 40.
Fig. 2: ibid., p. vii.
Fig. 3: ibid., p. 3.
Fig. 4: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print. Accessed 01/14/2014.
Fig. 5: Waring, 6.
FACES IV: PROFILING

Stephen Turk with KSA students, Riley Cruttenden, Clay Ellerbrook, Christian Golden, Josh Heinen, Kyle Hoehnen, Brad Hosfeld, Julie Klosterman, Devin Lazor, Carly Maggio, Stephen McNamara, Dustin Page, Kevin Schildwaster, Rob Smith-Waters, Natalie Snyder

Faces IV: Profiling focuses on the recognition of iconography, specifically building profiles. It applies different levels of abstraction: fuzziness, monstrosities, and situations. The profiles begin to take on new readings as recognition is interrupted and replaced with interpretation.
I was freed from a prison in 34 BC. Over two thousand years and my muscles are still flexing; I am still inches away from being strangled by serpents. My form hasn’t changed. But my soul, what I am, was lost long ago. I was a human. Yellow paint was skin, blue paint was iris, teal paint was serpent, brown paint was hair. Now I am an object, sitting in a museum, separated from the people. Paint was my skin which resembled the humans who created me. I was real. But my life left with the paint.

I love remembering the days when I lived with my makers. I stood with robed figures who moved around the plaza, creating dust clouds. People told me their troubles, they sat on my plinth, and stared at me. People felt comforted by my battle with the serpents, I both show the temporality of life and allow people to make their troubles seem small. Once, an outsider came around the corner and was shocked because he thought I was a real person, about to be strangled by serpents, on the brink of death. I am marble, and in those times I thought I was better than humans with their susceptible flesh. My sculptors made me as a legend, a sort of God, forever immortal. And immortality has changed me, it’s made me less human.

In the wake of invasion, I witnessed buildings, sculptures, and monuments being destroyed. I knew humans were weak, but I did not know that society was susceptible to death as well. The village burned amber, and in the chaos of the battles I was knocked off my plinth. In that moment the serpents seemed to be moving closer.

After society fell around me, many years passed and, slowly, dirt from the wind built up around me. I saw a new horizon as my eyes leveled with the ground. (Dirt is a beautiful brown up close.) As I was buried, my finger, gripping the snake, stayed out of the ground. It was exposed to hundreds of harsh winters. Decades. Centuries. Darkness. I sat through endless time. (Dirt became a horrible black.) The occasional worm sensation, or stray anthill tunnel, or nestling mole baby was so warm, so full of life. I don’t know if it was the loss of paint or being trapped for centuries, but I decayed to form. In the darkness I lost memory of my color. But I could feel the serpents, still inches away.

A grid of ropes. Archaeologists’ brushed dirt away as carefully as Polydorus who carved me. Each day more of my form was exposed. My form glowed against the murky world I stood in. The sun was blinding. The people were unfamiliar. I felt an intense déjà-vu. A new glow radiated from my being; I always knew I was marble, but this glow was new to me. I was naked. I no longer resembled man, colorful with his flesh and skin and hair, instead I was pure form. I was studied, copied, and exhibited. My copies were perfect replicas, but they were never able to have my memory of being equal to man. My essence used to be on my pain, on my morals, but now my essence is on my stone. I stand for something different. I stand for my sculptors, not for myself. I stand for the form of a human, not for the death of one.

They have placed me in the Vatican, and again, I stand among humans. I used to love the Vatican; oh how long I’ve been here. I am with other sculptures from Greece. I am with my people and I can remember the better days easily, but they are more of a mirage than a clear picture. Tourists pass me all day long. The days turn into weeks. Into years. Into centuries. People turn into a blur of color. My creators, who made me with the most careful of hands, knew I would last to eternity. And this is my story: a stone being traveling through time. But time is a prisoner. I am valued for what I am not: form. I am not form. I am a human. I am life. I am in a battle with serpents, inches away from death, a battle to the end of time, but they have stopped trying to kill me. Like me, they have given-up on the fight, and now both the serpents and I sit waiting to be reburied, rediscovered, and revalued again by another culture.
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Thanks, One:Twelve
The Issue Image

300,000 Dollars Later...

Photo by: Levi Bedall