APPLIANCE HOUSE

Ben Nicholson
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B. N.
Drawing Towards Building

John Whiteman

Ben Nicholson once told me that he would like to design a window which one did not see through but rather saw into and out more. Inevitably and ironically introductions to and explanations of the work of others also have something of this quality.

For me the work of Ben Nicholson is a constant reminder of both the pleasure and the difficulty of the architectural task: of how in the act of design and specification the interminable burden of careful execution must be set against a flash of insight, a quick prospect of the imagination, that elusive moment when the mind lights upon an object with a glimpse of its potential transfiguration; when a thing is seen both for what it is and also for what otherwise it might be, and when a course of painstaking work is initiated from a first and sudden emotion — an emotion, which is remembered merely by a sketch or a remark in a notebook, and which begins to fade as soon as its presence is registered. In architecture the future of an intuition lies in the hope of being redrawn.

Nicholson's drawings, like his architecture, are a deeply wrought struggle to contain and rework an elusive intuition, and to offer back through the structure of the work itself a sensation which is entirely new and unexpected. By initiating the gesture of collage and through repeated redrawing, Nicholson seeks a reworking of his first intuition. His initial impression of a thing is actually a transfiguration, glimpsed by the imagination as it runs ahead of the world, outstripping the slow time which is demanded by the work of the hand in drawing. In the subsequent and extended time of careful work, in the sequential acts of collage and redrawing, the revision of his first impression emerges from its contact with the prospect of a new thing. This prospect is seen but faintly at first in the unexpected realizations which can be made in the juxtapositions which collage allows. Nicholson says of his own drawing, “When I draw something, I delineate it very carefully. I think I know exactly what I want to draw, but somehow the doing of it is very unpredictable, and, generally, the more unpredictable the actual doing, the better I think the drawing to be.”

Nicholson's drawings and architecture strive to make something new appear: they seek to bring us into contact with a novel sensation without ever showing that sensation through the mediation of a picture or illustration. Their moment comes not directly from any specific element in the drawing itself, but rather from between the pieces of the collage, from their mutual energy together. He has the idea that works of architecture, which he takes to include drawings and models as well as buildings, are unexpected spaces found by the act of collage in overlooked conjunctions. When well worked, a collage possesses, Nicholson believes, an immense force and inevitability, and draws into itself all the ideas and energy available to it.

His drawings and models are indeed such a force field. They concentrate energies, images and juxtapositions from contemporary culture which would otherwise remain diffuse, and make them newly available in the space of an individual configuration. As a force field, each drawing or model produces an emotional complex. In capturing an intense energy, the drawing reworks its originary material to produce a feeling or sensation which is entirely unexpected. This is always the ambition in Nicholson's work.
It follows in the logic of collage that there need not be a determinate object at all: no object of presentation or representation in the drawing itself, no future object that the drawing or project must find, and no specific originary object or set of objects to which it is indebted. Nicholson can and does start with anything: bread tags, tires, crushed cars, can openers, shampoo bottles, shopping and building catalogs, genitalia, whatever. In the final result there is no succession of clearly defined images. Rather the particularity of things and their consequent disruption sets up the force field which presents a novel sensation.

However, in its presentation of the surprise event and in the embrace of overlooked juxtapositions and contrasts, Nicholson's work is not capricious. Nor is it ornamental. Nor is it merely interpretive. Rather it is precise, a term which Nicholson himself uses constantly. His work has the precision of one who is trying to newly awaken the sense of a thing once seen so clearly in the space of the imagination.

This is not a cold precision. If any contradiction between precision and emotion should be sensed in the drawings, then the problem lies largely in the viewer. The key to overcoming such a contradiction is to view the work in such a way that the contradiction does not arise in the first place. This can be achieved when the viewer can recognize that the reality which Nicholson depicts is not the bare scene, not the elusive reality in which he was first moved to draw, but the scene transfigured by his emotion. Furthermore, the emotion is not purely subjective, in the everyday sense of the term, but is a response to a pattern in things which rightly commands this feeling for transfiguration. The direction suggested by the transfiguration must then be followed wherever it leads. The process by which its destination can be found is drawing, redrawing, drawing out, drawing towards; but always and everywhere with great precision.

The result of Nicholson's drawing is not a representation. His drawings do not show things. Nor do they symbolize or express other things, things beyond the drawing itself. Thus Nicholson's drawings do not work as analogy, where the object portrayed symbolizes a deeper reality which is claimed to lie beyond the object of the work itself. And his work is not a form of Expressionism, where the object is claimed to be an epiphanic embodiment of the artist's own emotion. Rather Nicholson's drawings bring energies into our presence, and by the device of the drawing itself makes them operative in our presence.

Indeed energies are not the kind of thing that can be symbolized or expressed. I think this is why Nicholson insists on such a precise, clear and hard edged portrayal of his objects. Nicholson's drawings serve to frame and activate the space of their energy, and so they must stand out distinctly in their full opacity. His drawings arrest our gaze in a terminus at the object of the drawing itself. Don't look beyond the drawing or the model, so the advice to the viewer might read, look into it instead. When we are dealing with a symbolic or an expressive object, we try to look through it, beyond to that which the drawing symbolizes or expresses. But Nicholson's drawing demands that the eye wander only in the juxtapositions and contrasts of its objects, opaquely presented. Looking in this manner the energies of the drawing can be activated within us.

When looking at the work this way, I discern in it a curious combination of epiphany and delay. There is clearly a desire for an epiphany, when the original intuition which prompted the drawing is given over to the revelation of a sensation entirely new and unexpected, the realization of a new world. Yet, understandably, this moment is often delayed, avoided, or it sometimes remains unfound. Perhaps also the very structure of care, so evident in the drawing, works against the desire for an epiphanic revelation, since the presence of a mortal hand may undo such divine aspirations.

It seems to me however that Nicholson is somewhat aware that his self-appointed task cannot ever succeed; that there is indeed an uncertain sadness in the task of drawing new worlds from fading impressions. In Nicholson's detailed and drawn out practices, the long, careful course of each of his drawings or buildings, the extended distances of memory are set against the forlorn expectations of the ever new. This contrast can only be managed by sustaining the immediacy of impression, artificially kept alive in every line of drawing. Thus, in his work the manic care and surgical skill, which seeks to preserve the ephemerality of life even as it is destined to die in the drawing, is also a gloss, a mask on a deeper sadness: that each drawing, like every word, is also an elegy for its own lost moment. Nicholson's virtue, as a singular draftsman and architect, is not to give in at the moment of this realization, but to persist all the more.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There is a man who lives on the streets of London and each week he visits St. Martin’s crypt on Trafalgar Square to eat and talk. He relates how he knows Queen Elizabeth very well and that they do many things together. When asked how he came to know her, and whether she was in fact the Queen of England, he answered that he knew she was the Queen because she showed him where she kept the crown. It was placed on top of the wardrobe in her bedroom, he said. The story told by this man has had a profound effect upon the rationale behind the making of the Appliance House. For his tale has become the benchmark of the House’s credibility.

The story nudges the poetic, but somehow falls just short of conviction. It is the hollow substantiation that lingers beyond the storyteller’s first hunch that makes the story falter.
The Appliance House is a project which shifts the mildly incredible into something which is difficult to discount. By assembling frail and barely recognizable traits of urban existence into firm gestures, the Appliance House is formed into a Sub-Urban Home. Anonymous mundane details of livelihood are rescued from careless anonymity by successive coaxing and polishing. Hunches about the Appliance House and its components are given names. These names are then reinforced by drawing and collage to permit the proposal to abandon the realm of shadowed idiocy that haunts an initial idea. The idiot shadow, and the figure that throws it, are fused into a single entity capable of shedding its form to reveal a house.

Once the intention of making a house has been confirmed, the conditions of everyday life are investigated. The pervasiveness of mechanical objects and appliances that apparently nurture homeliness are taken at face value. To make a house, a house for appliances, it makes sense to absorb pictures and images of fridges, can openers and bread tags. Two fat catalogs were chosen as the raw material for the synthesis of an appliance and a suburban home: the Sears Catalog and the Sweets Catalog. The American institution for store bought articles and the encyclopedic collection of brochures aimed at the building industry were delved into, cut up, reconstituted and congenitally united with the help of the collagist’s knife. The resultant collages are then ordained with names of house parts.

Giving a drawing a name that is not necessarily, nor even typically, associated with the things depicted in it can be jarring. Yet the act of naming is a kind of ordination and helps to make an unfamiliar thing or event seem more familiar and more plausible. By being called something an object can be somewhat tamed. For example, when a collage is named “Side Panel of Appliance House,” the collage (made of scraps of paper) can be considered a representation of a wall, however difficult it may be to believe. Once the hunches, catalyzed by collages, have been given names, they are then spurred on to be confirmed by drawing and building.
Appliance Etymology

The Appliance House is the direct heir to the house endangered by scores of big and little devices scattered throughout. The appliance is examined for its potential self-worth and its unquantifiable values are installed into its constitution.

Sears Roebuck, a business synonymous with appliances, has a sign in one of its machine repair centers describing the mythological impact Sears has upon the modern home: “Over 50,000,000 times a day someone depends on a Kenmore. During the last fifty years Kenmore appliances have built quite a reputation for reliability. So much so, in fact, that today more people depend on Kenmore than any other brand in America. Of course, it’s partly because we always insist that our products be as close to immortality as human hands can make them.” It is this claim to immortality which is of interest. Surely any object that is immortal must be worth incorporating into a home, particularly if its immortality is put to the rest 50,000,000 times each and every day.

Despite the omnipotence of the manufacturer implied by this claim, the appliance has peculiar characteristics that simultaneously promote and defy its immortality. A skin is stretched around every device that intentionally obscures the inner workings of the appliance. This skin is vital to the mythical credibility of the object for it separates two modes of comprehension: from without and from within.

When an appliance fails, we tap and jiggle it, expecting the mechanism to correct itself. This is done without any knowledge of what actually occurs. Yet the owner often knows how to nurse a much-loved appliance back to life: a well placed jolt from the right direction invariably sets it in motion once again. The owner’s skills are similar to those of the chiropractor who mysteriously bends and manipulates the body whilst the addicted (or skeptical) patient smiles in the aggravating knowledge that the charm is working.

An appliance repairman views a malfunction quite differently. He sees a mechanism without its veil. Because he has extensive knowledge of what really goes on beneath the surface, he does not invoke the genie, but simply replaces a worn lever. Thus, on the one hand, a machine is fixed by its owner using semidivine interventions, and, on the other hand, there is the plain-truth mechanic who attends to the appliance without prejudice or romance.

The owner dares not remove the panel to inspect its inners for fear of being struck down by the voodoo wisdom held over the appliance by the manufacturer. Because the manufacturer and mechanic retain the secret rites of the appliance, the uninstructed owner will always use the device out of harmony with what drives the activity from the underside of the panel. The comprehension of methods of repair are thus separated by the opacity of the sheet of steel or plastic: the methods are incongruous, leading to a tearing of the two ways of thinking about an appliance which in turn leads to the separation of the senses. It is seemingly irrelevant events such as these that surround the intangible panel which gives rise to the life of the Telamon Cupboard, one of the components of the Appliance House.

The panels covering the chaotic mechanisms of an appliance have a mystique of their own. Because they are skin they reflect our current obsessions: the wish for a perpetually youthful look and an eternally flawless complexion. The materials used to cover appliances are immensely vulnerable to mishandling. They are chosen to age ungracefully, to deteriorate as soon as they are made. It is worth noting how porcelain enamel and plastic age. Porcelain either scratches or chips and is impossible to fill or repair. Plastic scuffs with ease or melts into a horrible disfigurement. Neither material has an inkling of patina, permitting the material to get better with wear rather than worse. Marble, metal, wood and fabric thrive when they are continuously touched. Their pores and fibers absorb sweat oil and they glow when handled. Enamel and plastic fare better when they are kept in pristine condition and deteriorate rapidly once they are handled. The immortality of appliances described by Sears Roebuck seems more than ever to require shoring up by the rhetorical wizardry of the copywriter’s pen.
Half-lives

A blind act of faith has permitted the Appliance House to be drawn up and built. Its stated purpose, a nagging doubt, exists only as a name. During the construction, its name has been allowed to mull around in the head, and it has become more defined at each fresh pass of drawing or making. Parallel to its assembly, the Appliance House has undergone a series of programmatic half-lives. Each time its program changes, its life is split, reconfigured. The measurements of each half-life are shortened with ever increasing speed until the length of the half-life is shorter than the spoken word that describes it. When this moment arrives, rather than opting for inertia, the program of the building is decided upon by using a name that is reinforced by the constructed material enclosing it.

The most recent half-life of the Kleptoman Cell, one of the chambers of the Appliance House, called for a place to store orphaned objects possessing beauty that had been discarded through senselessness. Its current, but always penultimate, half-life suggests that it hold objects that refuse to reveal their contents: a clock case, a well-loved travelling bundle, a sealed funerary vase or a black garbage bag.

Thus the drawing and manufacture of the House slide forward with the same hesitancy as does the incremental half-life of the building’s purpose. The entirety of the project remains in a constant frenzy. The drawing, the making and the refinement of its program meet at a common point where the work sheds its chimera of making and thinking and has the chance of standing on its own two feet. As the half-life of the program accelerates towards an irrevocable solution of what the House might become, decisions are made to determine how each wall and floor of the House is to appear when built. The structure of the House will require every part to be of intrinsic value, exposing the dwelling to extraordinary consequences when a component is subjected to stress. Its workings will be candidly exposed, but designed so as to frustrate minute scrutiny from self-pronounced aestheticians.

The Appliance House extends itself beyond the immediate confines of the actual structure and substance of the six chambers that compose it. The half-lives that prompted successive descriptions of what the chambers enclose pivot out of the immediacy of the House and migrate towards the city. During the first period of half-lives the project exists in the drawings and construction of the Shelter for Sub-Urbanity. In the second period, the half-lives vacate the shelter and run for the city. At this point the musing Appliance House leaves its corner and confronts architectural certainty, testing its viability on the street.
Collage Thinking

Amongst the arsenal of thinking methods, the process of collage making, though pervasive, occupies a disruptive position by using trash and deadness to form beauty. Collage is part of everyone's experience and, however well it is understood, it seems to refer to a group of ephemeral things brought together by a logic that disturbs, or negates, the status of the individual elements. Throughout the passage of each day, millions of manufactured objects are encountered whose sheer quantity and variety threatens to outclass nature for diversity. Collage permits a silent rapport between the collagist and those objects whose purpose is often too difficult to comprehend. Collage making allows anyone to hold a view on any subject. It counters monopoly and it terrorizes guilds of knowledge. Every professional academy, institution or organization is vulnerable to collage, as orders of logic are broken apart by the collagist. Access is gained to information which is then reordered so that it 'sits right' into the collagist system of thinking, oblivious of the accepted status quo.
A trained collagist requires the act of collage making to be contemplative. He knows that there is something within the soul that longs to come forward, so he engages in collage making to advance it. To express this longing all the printed ephemera, forming the mirror world of modern existence, is mustered for use. Thousands of pictures of things varying in scale and perspective are conscripted to trigger trains of thought, comprehensible or not. Bibliomanic safaris, considered off limits in respectable scholarship, are taken through trashy magazines, high-brow periodicals or well-loved books. The knife-toting traveller performs transgressive voyeurism that is wholly satisfying and rarely sanctified. Profanities can be quarried that the intellect ought not touch. Pictures are snipped without care for their actual context. Now they are readied for action. Pages are severed from publications just because, and all these acts are done to readjust the pictorial world to suit the viewer a little better.

Then the splicing together of this unique selection of things can begin. Acts are turned against pictorial depictions, recognizable or not. Things are done to pictures that have always wanted to be done but, because of circumstances, they never took place. Fifteen handles can be attached to a frying pan with a few deft strokes of a scalpel. Fingers can be repositioned so that they grow out of ears. Then, depending on interest, skill and the dexterity of the fingers, thoughts can be articulated. When the work is complete, a map of hunches exists and, due entirely to the act of making, the soul is temporarily exorcized of what appeared to be coagulating within. Like all maps, collage can exist as a guide to what exists on the ground or it can prompt a new set of thoughts suggested by interconnections of terrain and cities. When considered from this angle, the collage becomes a transcription that can accelerate the way one understands the everyday world and how it comes together, without necessarily being an expert of any particular field of knowledge.
Collage Tradition

If collage is described as the placement of a fragment next to a similar fragment and then the two are spliced together in such a way that the net result is greater than the sum of the parts, one might wonder how this differs from any other artistic activity. An investigation of sixteenth or seventeenth-century painterly techniques reveals a picture-perfect world that challenges the veracity of Fuji film and the Pentax camera. A close examination of the assembly of a painting shows that the apparent reality of the work is wholly premeditated. No arm or leg can be moved without upsetting the balance of the entire composition. Study sketches of paintings can reveal that a figure might be a composite of different parts from different people and various fragments of sculpture drawn from antiquity.

Conceptually, a collage is an aggregation of various pieces which create an irresistible spectacle in the eye of the maker. Artists of the pre-printing age mentally transferred items from other sources through drawing. In this way the artist himself became his own fund for observation. Similarly, the printed page has become a fertile ground for the collagist of the printing era where the source of pictorial and ephemeral views of the world, his picture plane, can be compared to the draftsman's glance at the world, when he draws it daily, as it appears in all its dimension.

It is necessary for an artist to use raw material that is directly associated with the age in which he lives. It is senseless for a modern city dweller to perform cave painting using wood dyes and ground rocks as pigments. Drawing, upheld as the fastest and most direct way to transfer thought, is a questionable form of representation given the mounting schism between electronic simulation and the tactile world which we walk amongst and touch each day. This schism is fast coming to a crisis as enhanced mechanical senses, independent of each other, appear to work better than the natural senses that are a part of the body itself.

The printed page, with its panoply of images of implied moments of activity, is still the most formidable depiction of Western life. Correspondingly, the preferred method of shopping in the U.S.A., since the introduction of the Sears Catalog in the nineteenth century, is to leaf through scores of magazines illustrating objects earmarked for purchase. Catalog shopping is preferred to sense handling in judging objects' comparative worth. If this is the contemporary way of producing and conceiving, then is it not wholly correct for the thinker-maker to use these very same devices, printed catalogs, as the medium and raw material for an undertaking?

Once pieces are assembled from one source or another, collage permits extraordinary juxtapositions to occur. Initially, the activity calls for something to be done. Picture a lavatory seat that is photographed from an oblique angle. (See p. 17) Then a flurry of cutting and adjusting dictates that the only object that looks right with the lavatory is a pair of red scissor handles, half-obscured by the sleeve of a woolly sweater, all jammed between the seat and its hinged lid. Then a bigger pair of scissors is stuck between the seat and the side of an iron. The scissor handles and seat are then covered with a nicely done rasher of bacon.
Collage Scrutiny

The activity of collage, like every visual activity, can profoundly alter the way things and places are viewed. Initially, a collage may be captured by the eye of the observer and then reduced in consequence by being categorized amongst things that have the appearance of collage. But if the observer looks beyond this appearance, the collage suggests a method of scrutinizing things that is identical to the disposition within a collage. In one of his collages, Max Ernst depicted a human-sized slug spread out on a couch in front of which are distracted musicians. After one has seen this collage it is never again possible to see someone reclining on a couch without a slimy afterimage.

In collage the appearance of a subject may be severely altered, so much so that the individual characteristics of each component are only barely recognizable through conventional means. If a collage is constructed of pieces of paper that combine an unlimited number of perspective angles and scales produced by the lens of a camera or the hand of the draftsman, the observer (and certainly the maker) will find it difficult to look at familiar things in quite the same manner.

Why does this particular juxtaposition seem to be at the same moment correct and haunting? The production of something that is unintentionally both haunting and surprising may be the very thing that collage makes possible which other media of expression cannot because of their techniques. Painting and drawing require every mark on the canvas to pass through the fingers of the artist. Collage making, on the other hand, cannot fully control what occurs in the juxtapositions because it uses readymade components. Unlike the pencil user, the collagist is introduced to further sets of ideas which simultaneously transcend the merely contemplative and go beyond traditional instruments of artistic expression.

A component of an artist’s work is to reveal ways of comprehending things that are often difficult to assimilate. These depictions, however abrasive to the eye, reform the actual appearance of things. It is well to remember here Picasso’s response to critics who condemned his painting on the grounds that the portrait of Gertrude Stein did not resemble the subject: “In time, she will.”

Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye reveals how the painter’s eye, activated by Cubism, can make a piece of architecture in the same way that a painting is assembled. When viewed from the outside, the long window on the middle level frames a bundle of odd, planar shapes. When these shapes are encountered inside the building the space initially worked out through painting is then projected onto the flat frame of the window and finally realized in three full dimensions on the inside of the house. The collagist-architect has the same access to the spatial possibilities as does the Cubist painter and can induce space in the manner that it is experienced through collage making.

The Activity of Collage Making

Collage making can be a very exacting activity requiring a steady hand to locate the smallest whiffs of paper in the right position. The collagist’s tools are simple: a scalpel used in tandem with a probe or a pair of tweezers and small tabs to keep things in the right place prior to the gluing operation. Whilst the activity takes place the collagist’s table has the same suspense as the surgeon’s theater. Cutting, implanting, temporary clamping and adhesion all play a role in the procedure for making a new being. Certain pieces may have to be spliced in and then covered over by a complex layer of interconnecting components. The fingers have to move deftly to prevent the glue from drying too fast. The activity requires that the work concentrates on the tip of the knife and the practitioner must have the skill to free the weight of the body, so that it can pirouette about the scalpel blade whilst constant direction and pressure is applied to its point.

During the construction of a collage a small voice within quips: “scalpel... probe... sutures... swab the glue, nurse!” The analogy with the surgeon reminds us of the alchemist’s act of blowing life into inert substance. After the surgeon operates on a supine body, it rises and staggers away in a half-drugged state with its lease on life temporarily extended. The collagist operates to reassemble a flat being and, as with the great collagist Dr. Frankenstein, something is brought to the quick that did not live before. The collagist holds the secret to making things out of thin paper. Things that formally existed in some other state are subsequently transmuted.

The procedure of collage making, the very way that the collage is put together, takes place as a series of passes, each one forming a layer or varnish that must be carried out in a certain order for the effect to work correctly. The first act, book rape, is the most violent because it ruffles the status quo that is embedded within us. Book rape involves the deliberate procurement of a document representing a major part of an author’s life then slashing it into little pieces, a method reminiscent of the voodooer sticking pins into a wax effigy. The book is quarried for parts, its original order revamped into a pile of paper rounds that have the potential of being reordered. Once there is a sheaf of ephemeral devices the grand fidget begins. This reforms the pieces into something that amounts to more than their torn edges alone can effect.

The placement of paper pieces is a desperate act. Unless the first association works, all subsequent layers of activity will do little to hide the inadequacy of the first move, its prime flourishing. A piece of a picture is set down and then another is squinched under, over or spliced into it. Imagine a pair of door-like forms next to each other. (See Sagittal Name Collage, p. 27) For them to be complete they require a squiggle on their kick plates. There is only one spot on the doors where the squiggle can go that is mutually acceptable to both doors. Each portal force the squiggle around until it nestsles into the tightest spot. It is possible to watch the squiggle on the end of the scalpel move until it finds the best location. The hands become tools to aid and abet its movement, they do not cause it. What determines their correct positioning is a question difficult to answer. If found, the answer would instill a terror-knowledge akin to hubris.

Collage making allows for a myriad of yes/no decisions (it is a binary process) to determine where the fragments should go. Because this method involves working with papery objects, rather than pencil, countless irrevocable moments occur: moments when it must be decided if a piece of paper has to be glued either here or there.

The speed of decisions regarding the correct juxtaposition of the paper pieces will be slowed by the contemplative mechanical process of splicing the papers into
each other, so as to make their conjunctions read more effectively. Then the process of placing things next to each other becomes more akin to the drawing process, for the two pieces of paper slowly approach and nudge each other until they fit in with aplomb.

Once the fragments find their rightful places, the collage can appear to be so correct that it becomes bland. It has lost its spirit, since all the tensions are pushing and pulling with equal force. When this occurs the pieces have to be minutely calibrated, taken off-center, to recharge the vitality that surrounds their mutual conjunction. The process of placement of two unlikely objects next to each other causes a pain equal to the sigh of relief released by their new found proximity. The ability of the hands to make nonsensical judgements and the irrationality of these adjustments point to the existence of moments of unerring correctness in matters that are not clearly understood.

A collage cannot be ghosted into existence as a drawing. The activity of drawing often lays down spines on paper which are slowly covered by further, more decisive lines until the likeness of the drawing is formed. Collage, instead, might form islands of material which could be covered over with other pieces, sometimes translucent, permitting the temporal layers to be simultaneously revealed. Collage can be assembled in a manner that reflects the sense of coexistence of urban living. A fragment of marked paper can rely upon its neighbor for conversation, its neighbor’s neighbor and its neighbor’s neighbor’s neighbor, happy in the knowledge that they’re there.
The Technique of Collage

Placing a tiny bit of paper next to another in a sequence implies that once it is placed in a particular spot it will not move. The associations are so dependent on slight movement that 1/64 inch will account for its rightness or wrongness. Prior to gluing, each piece of paper is held in place by homemade tabs of drafting tape measuring 1/8 by 3/32 inch. These sutures are continually lifted and replaced permitting other components to be spliced into each other.

How do six pieces of paper that weave into each other at a common spot get glued? If one piece is unequivocally glued, then it is not possible to slide a piece under it to link up with something else. But despite all this the pieces do get glued. Consciously gluing something in the wrong order is done out of desperation to make an inroad into a mat of impossibilities. It is an activity that requires the collagist to glue anything that seems to not rely upon something else, a muddled anarchy. Once the illogical moves are made the gluing continues as if nothing had happened at all. Making requires living with something that is knowingly incorrect. It is this anti-idealistic incorrectness which mysteriously permits the work to advance.

If any moment of the collage making process constitutes spontaneous combustion, it is this. The quick drying glue sets the pace, hands and tools whistling along without stopping until it is completed. The procedure can be likened to a dental assistant’s act of swapping probe for drill, without exchange of words. It is the choreographic interchange in a work of art — whether between one’s own hands or between a collection of hands — that proves its self-worth.

Once this battle has been played out, the terrain of a collage appears exhausted. Pieces of paper bear crease marks where they have been contorted, their edges are scuffed. The knife-edge precision of the work, prior to gluing, is dulled and must now be restored.

Critics have condemned the recent process of cleaning the Sistine Ceiling, arguing that Michelangelo’s touch-up brush strokes have been obliterated by the restoration. What appears in the restored ceiling is the work without the discretionary adjustments of the artist that trim out the work, adjustments that are not possible to include in the frantic immediacy of the making. So that it speaks with a clear voice, collage, as with all endeavors, requires this final pass of cosmetic adjustment.

Collage: The Implications Beyond Itself

The moment after collage making is filled with anticipation. One sort of closure is confirmed, for the work is done, but a further activity enforced by self-critical distance lingers on. Tactile thoughts are articulated that formerly existed only in the shape of grunts and gestures. When finished, it is possible to see what issues need to be addressed which were invisible before the making. Only by the continued repetition of the act of making can the initial doubts raised by the work be dissipated.

Collage is an intersubjective state: neither flat nor round, neither identifiable nor chaotic. When objects snipped from magazines are reformed into an ephemeral collage they transcend their former pictorial candor. The identity of a frying pan might be lost but its associated smells still linger. The task of collage is to regurgitate the frying pan enough times so that the metal is worn away but its patina is left intact.

Gazing at a collage, in a shadow-filled light, immediately lifts the work from flatness. Because paper has thickness, albeit paper thin, the collage is a relief. Drawing, the activity which exists within a sheet of paper, does not build up layers of graphite on the surface. The weight of the pencil stroke overwhelms the graphite and the pencil line is scored in the surface of the paper. In a work of art, relief is the very first glimpse of roundness. Whilst shadows are drawn in drawings, they are cast in three dimensions in collage relief. Because of the thinness of paper collage relief also permits translucence. Light is reflected off a surface that is apparently hidden beneath a covering surface. Thus, a collage is the first hint at a condition of fullness that can exist after the substance of artistic intent has removed itself from the flattened surface of the canvas. The relief created by superimposition can be read as a talisman, as an indication of three-dimensional qualities. Were the collage to become an object in space, its structure would inform the way it is to be built.

The collage method used to form the Appliance House adopts a pungent chopping technique and asks that every junction be highly considered, that each round of collaging, each pass, involves a pictorial dissolution of the depicted object as well as structural reassembly. With this obfuscation in mind, it is possible to take the collage, challenge its status once again and cut it up providing material for a new collage, a new work. The process is then repeated to ma
a third collage. In the third state of obluscation the original objects depicted are virtually unrecognizable. Instead, the increasingly complicated junctions between paper fragments take precedence over the images depicted on the paper. The status quo of the frying pan is abandoned. It is emptied of pictorial content. It wishes to stake out the perimeter of its own rim without touching its edge or seeing a reflection within it.

This desire to locate something that is not known can be confused with the expectation of creating something that eludes forewarning or prediction. Ultimately, both intentions — the unpredictable and the hankering after the elusive status quo of the heart strings — fold into a single cause which collage understands intimately. By peeling itself off the paper surface, collage can be brought into relief, the round, the hollow, and on into the construction of a building.
A loaf of bread, whether white plastic sliced or a crusty brown, will always touch a line of sympathy in humanity. Bread that is disguised by manufacture is immune to ridicule on account of its noble and cherished past. It does not matter that it now lives in a long, slightly oily, plastic, sock-like bag and is so malleable that the sectioned slices can just retain their loaf form when the bag is held by its tail. When a loaf is squeezed, a muffled crackle of the slightly nauseating, bland, plastic bag is heard, not the crispness of the bread's crust. Bread has become of secondary importance to its wrapping. Its taste is subservient to the onastic mystique of the sockbag, a form of packaging now taken for granted. We forgive all the blemishes of packaging because bread is vital. It is so central to our lives that we eat it because its name is bread. It might be disgusting, but that is not the bread's fault. Bread's modern guise of disgustingness is the fault of its maker and for this reason it is forgiven.
The struggle between the ingredients of a loaf of bread and its wrapping is naked to the eye. Advertisers clearly display their seductive acumen all over the bag's skin. It is fair game to print sheaves of nineteenth-century wheat on its surface for it is reassuring to see through the caper for we are familiar with its true pedigree. The eater must be reassured that the $.04 worth of powdered grain is worth the $1.69 we pay, despite the fact that there is a frightful discrepancy between the grain's worth and its cost. Bread is forgiving and the interlopers know it. They place strategies of marketing between wheat and the eater on the understanding that the word "bread" will seal the possible rift that they may induce.

Established bread rules exist which take a lifetime to learn and are invisible to those not conversant with American bread lineage. Apart from the names and sizes of loaves there are minute indicators that are Braille-ridden in breads. When choosing a loaf, the hand clutches and the side fingers automatically grip the loaf's back. Bread is apparently squeezed as if it were a ripe fruit, but actually it is a test to verify the existence of the imaginary exoskeleton. Modern bread is always neutered and deboned before it is eaten. We know from bread history that bread bones did exist, making us now hesitate before swallowing.

Bread and its package are a sham. The marginally acceptable eating of it and the sometimes reusable plastic sock-bag barely make up for the half-truths that surround the entire pantheon of bread manufacture. Is there any part of the stuff that can tell a straight tale without forfeiting the dignity of its past? Bread buyers have always had a distrust of the miller and his cohorts. The miller was forever putting things into flour, sometimes rancid wheat or a little chalk, to stretch the profits. Today, bags of vitamins are exchanged for chalk and bran dumping is practiced. The wheat-for-bread barrier seems to be as distant as it ever was.

However, beyond the act of eating there now exists a new grain of redemption. Pinched around the throat of each bag is the bread tag. Like all tags or ties it is perceived to have a measure of respectability. The modern bread tag acts as a sentinel surveying the absurdities of current salesmanship. Gone from the shelves is the wire twist tie where the paper shell — after too much fingering, twisting and rerusting — was reduced to a matted paper ball hindered by dampness and the hunger of buttered fingers.

The tag, a flat plastic section the size of a quarter, press-fits into the untidy folds of the neck of the bag and grips onto it for dear life. The plastic closure tag sets itself apart from the nonsense of bread selling. Its flatness, inedibility and practical honesty is antithetical to the charade of salesmanship and confusion of eating. If it were to get stuck in the throat, its plastic fangs might turn outwards and latch onto the epiglottis. By all reason, the tag should not be anywhere near a loaf of bread. It is dangerous and unwanted.
Russians watching the film *Dirty Harry* probably think the shoot-out in the supermarket is not as interesting as the thirty types of bread on the shelf. They might prefer to observe the events which occur at the edge of the screen. The bread tag thus assumes the role of voyeur.

The manufacture of objects has a fairly uneasy history. In a general attack against mechanical manufacture Ruskin blasted the possibility for any sort of artful expressiveness in the mechanical process. In his view an object was viable only if the entire weight of the maker could be everted through the thousands of blows wrought on a piece of iron. A wrought-iron leaf speaks of life itself when it has within it the multitude of hurts and caresses. A melt-metal cast-iron leaf has, by comparison, a manufactured nothingness. It's gone, dead before working, and is discounted as the disease and decay of the love of objects.

Within the past one hundred years attitudes towards manufacturing have changed radically. The honesty of metal beating has been relegated to cuteness. That venue for creative expression has evaporated, its lineage parented by dogmatic, rural expressionists who craft things for the sake of materials alone. The manufactured object, such as the aeroplane, was deified in the 1930s for the virality of its design and the process of mass production in the factory. Since then the glory of manufacture has been usurped by machines that design machines that make machines for us to use. In this divorced state, the maker has become usurped and his works trivialized. He has been pushed towards an indefinite state of unmotivated redundancy.

Boredom is the final pass in every process. When everything is worked out and the activity is no longer a struggle, the maker's frame slumps foreword. Boredom is vital to making. However, boredom itself can not improve the product, it can only lay waste its previous virality and fortitude. In the insistent repetitiveness of mass production the skill required to stamp out a metal sheet is very quickly forgotten. Whilst the sheets fly past the operator, he is lulled into a daydream and through projective imagination he becomes his own master again. As long as there are moments of reverted tabula rasa, there is hope that the maker can empty his soul once more into the object.

A bread package maker, for example, works out and over-choreographs the sheaves of wheat on the loaf package. It is a job which is riddled with justifications: "this is why it looks like this and that is why it looks like that!" But this is constipated death to intelligence for it is reasonable. Every variable is considered by the clever designer and, accordingly, the recipient or the object is put in a perceptual straightjacket where every move has been masticated and there is nothing left to invent. In this instance the overly conscious designer prefigures every move and leaves one smothered in pregurgitated excellence. There is another sort of designer whose marginal task it is to figure out the bread tag.

At first glance bread tags appear perfectly sensible. The plastic tag has printed upon it the curriculum vitae of the bread within: how much it costs, when it is going to be stale, who made it, and where. The tag also doubles as something to hold when the bread bag is pressed between the fangs of the snap, making them open askance and letting the folds of the bag crowd into the hole provided. The hole may have teeth set into the sides to prevent the oily bag of bread from slipping through. Each tag design has marginally different quirks. In some there are no teeth, in others there might be a pronounced entry slot. Each design is slightly dissimilar.

If a row of bread tags are balanced on their entry holes they become figural. A city comes into existence and it is populated by blocks of white glassine masonry accessed through a lower passage. Sometimes a room is smooth and rounded. At other times it is complex, full of curves and indentations, and a string of anthropomorphic associations is recalled. In this context a bread tag becomes a talisman, a little map which can be kept in the pocket to savor the very movement of life itself.
Bread tags can be categorized into various types. Take all collections of things that outwardly appear to be similar to the uninitiated, such as Greek vases or baseball cards, each has its own characteristics, common or rare. A bread tag is evaluated according to following criteria: the overall department of the tag, the proportion of the aperture system in relation to its shape, and the organization of the aperture system.

Bread tags can be categorized by the shape of the aperture: undentured, mono-dentured or tri-dentured.

Within each of these three types they can be either single-height, double-height or colossal. Bread tags have other variables, such as the flare of the triangle at the base or the size of the corner truncations of the tab and spore legs, should they exist.

The un-dentured tag appears best when it sits in a rectangular truncated frame and has a generous flare to the entry triangle to prevent it from seeming pinched.

The mono-dentured tag can be spoken of in much the same light as the undentured tag. One difference is that the small aperture is surrounded by a wide or narrow tab. The latter suffers from being too narrow and this makes the hole ungainly, whereas the side walls of the former are too wide and the tag is thus heavy.

While the hole of this pair look identical, the curve of the latter is continuous while the former has at its mid-section a straight line that interrupts the clarity of the curve.

This recent design has lost the elegance of the early tag. It appears simplistic, crude and devoid of purpose. It is a copy of a tag, not a tag driven with inner substance.
The tri-dentured tag is the most handsome and purposeful for its projections are set so as to hold onto the plastic bag which will be pressed into it.

It is interesting to note that the identical hole is harmonious with either the single-height or double-height shapes alike.

The giant order of has a spectacular silhouette for it nearly suggests a house with short walls, a sloping roof and maybe a front garden set in perspective. The pictorial heart-shaped hole is secondary to its provocative Rorschach-like form which permits the mind to wander.

Ruskin could not have seen this dimension of the mechanically manufactured world, nor would he have believed in the explosive proliferation of objects whose implications threaten the descriptive quality of mother nature. Now a whole generation of objects has come into being which perform mundane tasks but which are imbued with a life that has drained the extremities of the maker. The maker seems to have performed an act of self-hypnosis, brought about by boredom, the results of which have produced objects of penetrating brilliance. The mundane, profuse world has become, once more, impregnated with thought. Objects are designed in a trance state. Banal specifications written for objects are imbued with the life experience of the maker. This experience enters the task unannounced. It is objects such as these, that are produced in millions and discarded in exactly the same number, that will be kept safe in the Appliance House.
CONFIGURATION OF THE APPLIANCE HOUSE

Call the Appliance House a sub-urban home turned into a shelter from every kind of consumptive adversity the city is able to muster.

The House is simply composed of three pairs of small rooms facing onto a hall whose doors to the street and garden are pierced at either end. Each room encloses an accentuated state of normal, everyday, sub-urban living, but the rooms have all changed their ceramic nameplates.

Where there used to be the cosy nook with an open fireplace, there is a furnace to suit the pyromaniac within us all. Where there was once a study, in which the Toby Jug collection and family sports trophies were displayed, there now exists the Kleptomaniac Cell, a room given over to the face-to-face confrontation of what it means to have in one's possession any object gleaned by any means, fair or foul. These worded descriptions mark the point in time when given names are assigned to the components of the House. They are not yet substantiated by any structure that can make the collection of names any more viable than the frailty of their written form. It now remains for this moment to be catalyzed.
The Kleptomaniac Cell

Having gone through the door of the Appliance House the first room on the right is the Kleptomaniac Cell. It is here that the occupant engages in the sanctified task of collecting. The occupant can bring to this room things of considerable beauty culled from their marginally disinterested owners. When the objects are redefined and delineated with architectural intent they are coerced to form the cupboard in which they are held. These found objects, shed scales of ourselves, are secreted away in the Cell's walls.

The suburban homestead always includes a house in which a carefully calculated display of utilitarian, artistic and sentimental artifacts is assembled. There are unwritten rules of engagement that a guest to the house must be aware of. Cupboards should not be opened, as there are unconfessed excesses of rampant collecting within them better not admitted to. The garage, a necessary component of the suburban homestead into which the family car is inserted, contains an uncharted collection of objects whose density and corresponding value far outstrips the value of the objects kept in the house. Likewise, the basement or attic holds similar secrets. It is debatable which collection best reflects the homemaker. At the very least they are of parallel importance.

Artifacts are gleaned in all sorts of ways. A book might be lent to someone for a week, but borrowed for an indefinite period. In the book a forgotten love letter might be found, one that was written by a former lover of the borrower of the book. The letter is hidden and the book is placed on an open shelf by the borrower who, professing not to have finished reading it, prevents the owner from reclaiming it. The borrower's real intention is to keep the book as a fetish. The book, soiled with the bodily concentrations of the lender's hands, provokes the tryst enjoyed by the borrower, the lender and their shared lover. The book's words will become effaced from the pages, and the book will become a talisman for purposes other than reading. The Kleptomaniac Cell is the perfect sanctuary for an object such as this. If the borrower had other letters from the lover then the shelf configuration of the Cell's walls could amply accommodate the artifactual tryst. The Cell can now project tryst space, providing an atmosphere of acute danger and blunt passion cradled within a triangulation of the marginally ridiculous.

When a room is seen from outside, it either appears as a hollow formed by walls an inch thick or as a solid cube of concrete. Between these two states
architectural intent lies. A hollow room, when inhabited, can attain such density that a visitor’s perceptions become muffled by its fullness. Objects appear carved out, but still attached by stony shews to the same cube of matter that forms the walls. The Kleptoman Cell is conceived as a vacated room which has pilastered its intent and intrigue. The collector’s bricole is pressed out from the center of the Cell and the artifacts, now redefined, are cajoled into the walls.

The Cell exists as a ruptured cube 22 feet long, 13 feet high and 11 feet wide. At the entrance of the room stands the Telamon Cupboard to the left and right of which are the Flank Walls. The Telamon Cupboard receives and releases, in a disquieting way, items procured through kleptomaniac activity. Between the Flank Walls and the Telamon Cupboard stand a pair of short stairs that lead the visitor into the body of the room.

From this point the Cell and its collection unfolds. At the far end of the room is the Rear Window, set in tension with the Telamon Cupboard at the entrance. The Rear Window harbors a secondary compression of all the objects in the walls. The Window is a frame to look into, not out of. It will be lined with the after-image of the entirety of the room that has just been inhabited. The head of the Window acts as a pivot to a 13 foot needle that gyrates above the head, pointing back towards the Telamon Cupboard.

The Telamon Cupboard

The Telamon Cupboard began its life as a paper collage in the guise of a mirrored bathroom cabinet with an entrance turnstile adhered to its front and numerous other appendages dangling from its sides. The collage was nurtured, through drawing, to reinvent itself into a giant wooden cabinet of immense roundness, stability and gravitational force. Constructed as if it were a liberated kitchen appliance, it has finally come to terms with the mechanisms enclosed by the skin-tight panels that surround and imprison it. The Cupboard permits the appliance’s pristine skin to be handled, yet it protects its mechanical workings. The ubiquitous inspection panel, or lid, exists in the form of forty sliding panels that are placed deep in its center. All of the workings of an appliance are reconstituted in the design of the Telamon Cupboard in order to expose the consumptive fallacy of the appliance. Instead the Telamon Cupboard accentuates those aspects of appliance lore that possess dignitas.

Objects are stored in forty 9 by 9 inch boxes, 20 inches deep. Each box contains a sliding door. Attached to the door is a counterbalance which works the same way as a garage door. Instead of the doors rolling up inside the ceiling, the doors to the boxes rise directly through the base of the box above. This provides a second door to the box above, thus doubly obscuring what lies behind. When half of the forty boxes have their doors lifted, the Kleptoman can only ever see half of his collection, whatever the permutation of the open doors happens to be.

The construction of the Cupboard requires that its detailing directly confronts the way appliances are assembled. Every component is visible but its structural elements are intertwined with the non-structural elements. It is unclear which component performs what function in the Cupboard. This leads to an atmosphere of immanent inward collapse. To aid and abet the principle of imminent collapse, the Cupboard is assembled by layers of pegs that make it bulge at the edges. It is so full of contradictory tensions and compressions that it pulls and pushes itself into complete stasis.

Thought of as a place to store things, the Telamon Cupboard is quite conventional. When the doors to the Cupboard’s boxes drop down, there is no indication as to what is behind them. The Cupboard acts as a conventional cabinet in that it restores its outward appearance each time the doors are shut, giving no evidence of the fullness or bareness of the Cupboard’s inner realm.
STAGES IN THE LIFE OF THE TELAMON CUPBOARD
Collage of mirrored bathroom cabinet, elevation, collage section, maquette, full-scale construction
Cell Walls

The Cell Walls are designed to contain the collected objects in a manner that respects and furthers their value. The Kleptomahn Cell is engineered in such a way that the Walls’ role as container overwhelms their conventional loadbearing nature. The tenuous relationship between an enclosing wall and the objects placed within it is appraised. They are designed to confront the conventional rapport between a wall, a cupboard and the objects within.

The Walls intensify the will of the Kleptomahn and provide sanctuary for the gleaned objects by legitimating the often complex methods through which he came by the object. The drawers and cupboards compound in three dimensions the owner’s affair with the objects.

Let us imagine that the Kleptomahn stops his car whilst driving through the city because there is a chair leg in the middle of the road that he likes the look of. After a couple of hundred feet down the road he stops again to pick up another chair leg. A little further on he notices a pickup truck with its tailgate down and the driver standing at the back lamenting the loss of two legs of his favorite chair. Rather than stop his car and return the legs, he speeds on choosing to accept the rationale that the legs were found in the street, so surely they must have been discarded. The man standing by the pickup truck looking at the two-legged chair was a pure coincidence. (He had lived through many coincidences and this was just one more.) In the Kleptomahn’s mind his dishonesty had been assuaged by the prevailing city street lore of finders keepers.

The two chair legs appropriated by the Kleptomahn require a very particular type of display. He is comfortable in the knowledge that he did not steal them because, as everybody knows, if you find something in the street it is up for grabs. But the ownership of the legs will forever be tainted by the look of despair on the former owner’s face as he lamented the accidental loss. The Cell Walls will have to reflect the anger of procurement. It might be expressed by having the two legs actually support the weight of the Walls. Or the structure supporting the legs might be spread out along the length of the Wall in three parts recalling the three moments of acquisition: picking up the first leg, picking up the second leg and seeing the sad man. Memory of the object’s acquisition and any subsequent tales surrounding it are wound into the process of designing the structure of the Cell Walls.

The modern wall is nothing like its stony counterpart. It is now composed of many layers, some hidden and some revealed. Most walls have within them a mass of mechanical veins that permit water, gas, air, electricity and excrement to pass through them, sight unseen. If one has knowledge of these things, or if one listens to their activities – clicks, trickles and airy woofings – then the surfaces of the wall become marginally distasteful. The surface appears to hang in front of something as if it were a screen to hide a life that is better left untold, due to the wish to present a mirage of something more socially palatable. The telltale clicks and trickles of the modern wall expediently circumvent the candor of the traditional wall which it pathetically tries to imitate. In this respect the modern wall is similar to the skin of the appliance, for it presents a facade that is supported by severing the sense of structure that it purports to represent.

The sheetrock world of aggravated deception that encloses the modern home will be embraced and accentuated in the Cell Walls to draw out its potentially engaging qualities. The Cell Walls open themselves up and hover in front of and behind their original designated surface while simultaneously bathing in the mechanics of their structure without shame. Into this, and with this, the objects settle in the Kleptomahn Cell.

When the moment arrives for the Kleptomahn to design the walls according to his specific needs, all that will exist of the Kleptomahn Cell is the set of drawings of the Telamon Cupboard and the latent desire to build walls to form a room behind the Cupboard. To make the room, a method of drawing has to be invented that will correspond to his needs. To do this two short Flank Walls are set 2 feet to the left and right of the Telamon Cupboard. This ensemble of Walls and Cupboard are conceived as a large chest of drawers, 12 feet high, 11 feet wide and 5 feet deep. Conceptually, the drawers of this imaginary chest are pulled out. The volume that the drawers displace forms the space of the room. To make this principle visible, the Walls are drawn as if they were the billows of a concertina stretched out and then relaxed.
Drawing the Cell Walls

The Telamon Cupboard drawing is composed of front, back and side views. (See p. 42) It is sliced eight times to reveal how the Cupboard works inside. Because there is no indication in the drawings as to what should go into the Cupboard, collages describing what might be secreted into it are made. (See top row of pp. 44, 45 and 49) To bring this about a cardboard frame is made around the perimeter of each drawn section. Each frame is then carefully filled up with collaged pieces of paper taken from consumer goods catalogs. The little collages, having in them machinations of frying pans and tennis balls, now show what might be put into the Cupboard. Having decided how the Cupboard is to be conceptually filled, it remains to decide what should go into it.

Sorties are made into the imagination, calling for specific things to occur in the House. For example, the company of a dog is desired by the occupant. A dog is included in a collage amidst a tangle of cords and wooden sticks attached to axe heads. (See plan sections, pp. 53-56) The dog collage is then xeroxed ten times and recomposed by extending it over the drawn length of the Wall. Now a likeness of the dog has been grafted into the Walls. What began as an imaginary invitation to the dog to enter the House has now been taken to the brink of artificial certainty. The pictorial novelty of a partly hidden dog has been transfigured by means of a gradual dismemberment of the animal. Dissolution continues until the graphic description of the dog includes only its woofs, licks and bounds, but no evidence of fur or paws.

Making the plans and elevations of the Cell Walls by recognizing the integrity of the objects permits a strategy of construction. The drawings allow for building a gradual accretion of shelves and closets that keep pace with the Kleptomman's assembly of objects. The drawings are not made for a one-shot construction session, but act as a fund from which the builder can pick and choose without disturbing the whole. The plans are made as suggestions of what could be done incrementally over time. The seven horizontal slices cut through the Wall at 18 inch intervals do nothing more than permit and prompt things to be visualized. They intone the nebulous crust space formed where the three planes intersect.

The drawings of the Cell Walls include an interior elevation (pp. 60, 62) and an exterior elevation (pp. 61, 63) of both Walls. To do this, the drawing of the interior is first mirrored, and then the mirrored image is xeroxed seven times. The xeroxed sheets, a further generation of images, are spliced into the outside Wall. When the exterior elevation is placed face to face against the interior elevation, a likeness of what the built Wall might be is then given while the seven sections provide the third dimension.

Flank Walls

The Flank Walls are composed by collapsing the stretching action that took place to form the Cell Walls. The Flank Wall results from the compression of the Wall into approximately one-third of its total length, forming a reversed anamorphosis of the Wall. (See p. 64) This method of drawing, made into building, causes the Kleptomman, who walks between the Flank Wall and the Telamon Cupboard, to be brought up short. On his left is the Flank Wall designed to compress his footfall into a fraction of what he is about to experience when he enters the body of the Cell. On his right is the roundness of the Telamon Cupboard that begat the collages, that begat the Cell Walls, that begat the Flank Walls. The Kleptomman's body will be torqued by sensing the generating object, the Telamon Cupboard, and its three subsequent transfigurations. Spatially, the Kleptomman will have entered the Cell before he has even stepped inside, because the Cell's substance is recoded and presented to him bodily at the threshold.
FOUR PLAN SECTIONS OF THE KLEPTOMAN CELL
INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS OF CELL WALL AND FLANK WALL
The Kleptomaniac Plans to Build

Once the drawings and collages have been completed, it remains for them to be coerced into construction. The collages are precisely constructed yet they permit ambiguous interpretation. Not instruments of dogma, the drawings allow for changes to occur. This places the onus of interpretation on the maker, therefore re-engaging his sense of integrity in deciding how things are made. The architect's drawings no longer dictate a method of making and thinking, they permit decisions to be made that embrace the entirety of the maker, leaving the architect to direct the drift of the drawings.

As soon as the Kleptomaniac has selected an object to be excluded in the Wall, and the cathartic tale of the thing is known, an appropriate place to insert the object within the Wall is chosen. To help choose the right spot, the original collages can be reinspected. By referring to depictions of the object in the collages, or representations of things similar in size or scale, a suitable place to insert the piece can be found. Then the neighboring sections, perhaps as many as five, may pass through the object and provide datum lines, planes and points for working drawings of the Walls which can drift about these markers until the right place is struck. Designing and building in this way engages only a small part of the drawings at any one time. There will always be enough left over for use at another time.
The Armature

The drawings for the Cell Walls signal collapse. If they were built as drawn, they would shimmy about and fall in a naked heap upon the ground. To prevent this, they are rigged in such a way that all the parts are fixed and wedged onto an armature made up of seven pylons forming each wall.

The object-laden Walls are in constant flux. They do not have quite the fortitude to openly declare that their surface is a truly flat plane, nor an articulated cupboard-scape. The seven pylons are spaced one foot apart and their surfaces are polished hard to give the semblance of a continuum. The Walls then begin their encroachment and whittle away the straightness of the pylons. If the Walls had their way they would dissolve the structure and replace it with their own. They would sever the pylons and surreptitiously hold up the internalized wall weight, respecting the random, inherent failures.

To retard encroachments into the walls, the pylons are split sideways to permit the impending wall substance to infiltrate the structure. The pylons, composed of a facing pair of C and I-shaped panels separated by a 3 inch void, perpetrate the dissolution of the Walls. The pylons of the Walls cannot stand up by themselves. They require devices to give them stability. They must invent a structure that they can call their own. A structure that might even lift the walls off the ground whilst retaining vertical rigidity is desired. This requires the structural moments of the wooden channels to be internalized.

The 13 foot high pylons are formed by mating a C-channel with an I-channel within a rectangular plan. A pair of channels is attached at the top and bottom to 8 foot long, scythe shaped, circular segments. These segments, dubbed boners, intersect their counterparts on the facing wall, joined by single pins at their point of intersection. This action fixes the Armature. It then remains for it to be fine-tuned.

The seven pairs of pylon structures are joined together by two 14 foot pins, 3/4 inch in diameter, that run through holes drilled in the upper and lower boners. The pin that joins the lower boners rests in seven oarlocks set into the tips of wooden cones placed beneath each pylon structure. The oarlocks form the fulcrum for the Armature defining the Kleptoman Cell. Now the structure is tensed so that the walls rise off the ground and the entire weight of the Cell rests on seven cones.

Similarly, a mechanism in the upper boners allow the structure to be tensed. A rope is passed over the snouts of adjacent boners and then tightened by a turnbuckle in the shape of an axe handle. When the rope begins to draw the two snouts together a double-scissor action takes effect.
With each successive twist of the turnbuckle, more of the Cell's load is transferred directly onto the cones placed on axis between the two walls. Less and less weight is carried by the base of the Walls until, finally, upon the penultimate twist, the Walls begin to rise off the ground and the Cell teeter-totters upon the seven cones. The structure of the Walls is inward acting, creating an envelope that is sensitive to pressure and tuned to bursting point. The Walls, when subjected to the turnbuckle, flex outwards creating entasis over their entire surface. In this manner they appear to partially buckle under their internalized forces.

The Floor

The Floor is raised 2 feet 8 inches above the base of the cones and is reached by steps. There is no bolted connection between the Floor and the pylons. It is designed to suspend and dangle from the upper Wall structure, thus becoming an independent plane of matter.

The weight of the Floor rests upon the upper pin in the same way as the Cell's weight rests upon the lower pin. It is attached by ropes to flexible ribs placed inside the upper bones. As weight is set down onto the Floor, the rope tugs at the rib effecting a controlled partner as the rib tugs each flange in the boner. The irritating squeak let out by a conventional wooden floor has become accepted and bound into the essential detailing of the structure.

The Floor Joists are formed by a pair of wooden plates straddling the sides of the pylons. They are fixed together firmly by large dowels, with hangers at both ends joining them to the ropes dangling from the ribs above. When set in place, and weight is applied, the Floor Joists give an inch. The resulting spring in the Floor is counteracted by a second set of ropes tied to the underside of the joint and connected to a proboscis which projects under the Floor. Each proboscis has a controlled spring which does not permit the Floor to whiplash. The Floor is thus caught between two counterspring ropes pulling from opposite directions, causing sciss, unless, of course, it is jostled by the Kleptoman moving about.

The Floor Joists are set wide enough apart to form a long box that runs the entire width of the Cell. A skinny void in the box forms a subfloor into which things might possibly be hidden. Two hatch doors are built at either end of the long box which, when opened, reveal a loop of netting. Flat epi-mental objects can be placed upon the net and wound, using the cranks attached to the rollers, under the diaphragm of the Floor. The Floor then becomes a protective vessel underneath which the Kleptoman conceals letters and favored articles of clothing.

Between the two floor hatches lies a 3 foot wide band of flooring that is temporarily formed of parallel boards. The boards will eventually be replaced with an intarsia whose woven shapes give the illusion of rising and falling above and below the datum line of the Floor. The intarsia will be assembled once the Walls and Rear Window have been set in place. It will be designed to reflect the conjunctions of the surfaces of the Cell with adjustments that allow them to be read with greater clarity.
The Rear Window

At the far end of the Kleptoman Cell, opposite to the Telamon Cupboard, is the Rear Window. (See pp. 74-81) The short End Walls, to either side of the Rear Window, are completely blank. The only blank elements of the Cell, they are positioned directly opposite the staircases located on either side of the Telamon Cupboard.

The Rear Window operates in the same way as a triptych. A large triptych, such as Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece, is composed of a box. The front of the box is made of a pair of side-hinged panels painted with a religious scene. When opened they reveal another set of doors, also painted with a Biblical scene, which in turn is flanked by two paintings on the reverse sides of the first set of doors. This pair of painted panels opens out in exactly the same manner revealing an inner sanctum with a carved cross with two saints. The versos of the opened doors reveal the Cross and are also painted. A triptych of this sort serves as both a painting of a sequence of events and a box into which the Cross is buried. The Rear Window is likewise composed of pieces that help the viewer to look into something, rather than to look through it.

The Rear Window is the Telamon Cupboard’s counterpart. They possess similar dimensions and their activities are approximate. From inside, the Window will be watched rather than looked through. Light trickles through the Shudders and Talismans within the Window Casement. The eye senses the light and sees that it reflects off the Shudders. It might even appear that the Shudders themselves are responsible for the light.

By looking into the Rear Window the Kleptoman sees the substance of the Cell squeezed in, through and out of the casement. The design of the Window takes its cue from the structure of the Walls. These cues are then compressed into the Shudders, that are set on edge. This reduces the figurative drawing on the sides of the Shudders to a thin line when they are obliquely viewed. When viewed frontally, the figure is completely concealed. Thus the drawing on the Shudders reveals itself in various stages of anamorphic projection.
The Window Casement

The Window Casement, divided into the upper and lower cases, is packed with the contents of the Cell. The rectangular casement is corroborated by a flattened version of what is in the Walls. The objects are not literally transferred into it. Instead, their wistful intention is transfigured in the form of codified maps and wooden Talismans. The Window reduces the Cell to frigidity, disrupting the full roundness of the Telamon Cupboard.

The thirteen Shudders of the upper case of the Window are 4 feet high and are alternately 2 feet 6 inches or 7 inches wide. They stand vertically and pivot to the left or right. The lower case has two sets of batons, called Talismans, set into sixteen slots, measuring 2 feet 9 inches in height and 2 feet in width. An axle penetrates each series of Talismans and permits them to rotate out towards the shins of the Kleptomman. The Talismans and the Shudders are then used as markers to recall the whereabouts of particular places in the Cell. Each one is a map scored with the authoritative quirks of favored crevices in the Cell Walls. The Talismans serve a second purpose. When at rest in their slots, they prevent light and gazes from passing through the Window. When they swing open, each moving independently, an oblique light is thrown into the Cell for use by the Kleptomman.
**Upper Case Shudders**

The Shudders are placed at the height of the Kleptomans torso. They are constructed in a similar manner to vertically hinged display cases which usually contain stamp collections, drawings or ephemera of all varieties. The Kleptomans appropriates their likenes. But instead of placing objects in these papery frames, he inserts codes that point to the whereabouts of his collection.

These maps are drawn on the Shudders and, like all maps, are a cryptic reworking. The map-making process begins by removing from the two sets of wall drawings the entire band of information that exists at torso height, from both the front and rear elevation. Each of these four bands is then divided into seven parts, corresponding to the seven pylons, and six parts corresponding to the interstices between the pylons. From the collection of twenty-six collage pieces, seven pairs generate the large Shudders, and six pairs generate the small Shudders.

The collages of the Upper Case Shudders are recoded through frottage. This recoding is pressed onto the front and rear of each Shudder. Overlaying a piece of paper on a collage and rubbing it with a pencil creates the embossed articulations. The resulting embossed frottage is entirely innocent of the graphic marks on the collage. Instead, a new configuration is formed by the impression of the ridges of the paper junctions. In this way, the intentions of the material substance on the collage is transferred irrespective of its printed images.

The slightly embossed surface of the frottage gives an indication as to how the materials of the Shudder are to be layered when constructed out of wood or metal. The transfer of collage into frottage provokes an automatic evaluation of the potential use of materials. The mechanics of the drawing process informs the mechanics of the building process.

The establishment and use of a process such as this presents difficulties because the process appears to be completely irrational and so full of contradictions that it challenges codified principles of architectural design. If the process by which we make selections in our ordinary everyday life is the same as that by which design decisions are made, then there is a case for its reliability and appropriateness, however erratic it may seem. However, the rationale corresponds to a gleaning of the world as lived.
The Pin

The Pin and the Pendulum are placed in the Cell so as to permit very small objects to waiver about above the head of the Kleptomman. The horizontally displaced Pin, with a shaft that pierces the entire length of the Cell, projects from a fulcrum point above the Window Casement. The Pin is a very slim, conical, overhead locker, 6 inches in diameter at the window end of the Cell, that tapers to a point just behind the nape of the Telamon Cupboard. It is counterbalanced by the vertical Pendulum that reaches to the ground outside of the Cell. All along the length of the Pin little doors are positioned whose curve follows the contour of the Pin’s shank. The Pendulum dangles down from the head of the casement and is weighted so as to keep the Pin balanced in the horizontal position. The stability of the Pendulum is vulnerable to touch and breaths of wind that in turn effect the movement of the wandering Pin.

The Pin assembly is an adjusting mechanism that permits the fine-tuning of the Kleptomman Cell’s planes which have been constantly stretched and compressed. Through erosive substitution, the Telamon Cupboard has replaced the four-square walls with planes of continuous interstices which have come to compose the Kleptomman Cell. The Telamon Cupboard becomes the object of an ominous pointing from the tip of the Pin, as if it were beckoned and then held accountable for what it has done. This final act of realignment clean-sweeps the fidgeting Cell. The Pin gathers together all that which cannot be talked about in the Cell, restoring it to the Telamon Cupboard, the final repository as well as the initial cradle of the Kleptomman Cell’s unfolding.
(im)measurability: an (after)math

Stanley Tigerman

In a time when architecture has been trivialized by marketing, self-serving career husbanding, a rush to computerize, and a general repugnance to "supervise" construction (fearing litigation as a rationale so as to avoid the deeper fear of the responsibilities of being a generalist), Ben Nicholson is a throwback — a curiosity out of sorts from today's seamless professional. One of the few authentic zealots of his day, the fierce look of determination in his eyes tells you all that you need to know about his devotion to his craft. This is an honest-to-God, old fashioned hands-on architect, a Renaissance man out of place (perhaps even out of time). His Appliance House project, which is the ostensible purpose of presenting this book, in some ways suggests that architecture may be out of time as well. Certainly Nicholson inhere that it is either he, or architecture, or both, that are out of step with each other.

Throughout his architectural education he clearly learned that architecture is not simply a passive pursuit engaged in at the behest of others wherein the response (or riposte) is the seminal move in this discipline, but that aggressive initiation specifically, to say nothing of subversive acts generally, may well be architecture's most threatening, perhaps even its most innovative, operation. It seems ages ago that Bernard Tschumi said that "you may have to commit murder in order to have children." The Appliance House project is nothing if not subversive, though it is so brilliantly wrought (and crafted) that suggestions of overturning are in turn displaced by the project's apparently straightforward inventiveness. One is almost put off by the seductive drawing style that Nicholson lovingly puts before one, until the (awe)ful realization sets in that the sensuousness of what is present is itself displaced by the very content of the handsome vessel into which it has been poured. Ultimately, the acidity of the idea disrupts not only the heaviness of the mass of precedent that binds architecture to itself, but the acidity also melts down the container conventionalizing it such that the fluidity of the idea is self-containing. Which is precisely what this project is all about.

So it is with Nicholson: what you see is not at all what you get. I first met this extraordinary man during his first, unnecessarily short, tour of Chicago. It seemed such a waste that this architecturally historic, but ultimately modern, city could not find a place for the intensity of modernist abstraction proposed by Nicholson. I next came across him just after he had motivated University of Houston architecture students to build a full-scale maquette of Bramante's Tempietto in Rome, which coincided with his being released from his teaching position at that school. I was shocked. Could he have been so threatening so as to cause such a dramatic response from the academy?

I thought I would try to test the academy myself: after all, it was Robert Maxwell who once proposed that the better the school, the more that it encourages its own overturning. Only the lesser institution stands on the ceremony of regulatory statutes. As Director of the School of Architecture of the University of Illinois at Chicago I thought that bringing Nicholson back to Chicago was the least that one could do (for the students [and the necessity of encouraging their belief in craft] specifically, to say nothing of the city [and its desperate need to rethink its public spaces] generally). Sure enough, Nicholson's sure belief in the value of craft itself has managed to polarize architecture faculties by causing a debate of some substance to be brought to the table: in this case, the value of "making" in contradistinction to the conceit of "design." By collapsing the distance between thought and act, between design and building, Nicholson creates a situation that has stimulated argumentation in what I believe to be ultimately important ways. Such is the value of Nicholson the educator, for here is a man convinced that there is value in architectural production, and unafraid to present that discourse without the benefit of accommodation.

It is in this context that I would like to propose Nicholson the revolutionary maker — or in this case, Nicholson the "unmaker," for if nothing else, his Appliance House project unmake even as it unmasks architecture for what it is the fabrication of cultural containers. This project presents the process by whi
architectural (de)constructs a condition by which it dismantles itself inventing the conventional situation by which society presumes to bring it (architecture) into existence. The gall to think that architecture can bring about its own dissemblance! The Appliance House project actually proposes a system whereby its envelope is (un)sealed revealing disposable cultural artifacts which amazingly, then, hold up (or [uphold]) the structure that the envelope formerly supported. Magically, Nicholson proposes the end of the need for architecture to contain, support, secure, the necessities of life!

None of this would be particularly shocking if Nicholson were like his colleagues from Cranbrook (or, for that matter, were he like the alumni of the parent institution, Cooper Union), a conceptualizer bereft of the passion to build. But nothing could be further from the truth, because Nicholson is a builder par excellence, and therefore, his Appliance House project is far more threatening since it will, I am absolutely sure, get built. Then, and only then, will the full impact of the threat to undermine architecture as it is traditionally perceived, be felt. Thus, this book becomes the Genesis of what may well become a revolution in the fullest of the Vitruvian sense, a challenge to perceptions of “firmness, commodity and delight.”

It is ultimately fitting that this should occur in Chicago through the vehicle of the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism, the Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Foundation, since this is a city, and the Foundation was given birth by an architectural firm, both of whose commitment is nothing if not rooted firmly in the built environment. That Ben Nicholson should seek his commitment to the craft of architecture in Chicago is inevitable, for only in a place like Chicago would there exist a situation wherein physicality is ennobled in quite the way that Nicholson’s work infers, since the quality of his drawing and modeling remain unfilled in and of themselves, clearly as markers along a way toward the constructing of projects such as the Appliance House. One can only imagine (and gleefully anticipate) the commotion that the actual construction will stimulate.

But Nicholson is not simply an architectural enfant terrible. He envisages an architecture that has about it the ring of truth, albeit not a truth particularly desired, particularly by a culture whose amnesia about society’s fringe elements is notorious. The architecturally terrifying concept that the artifacts of culture are all that is necessary to “uphold” the structures that are more normally perceived of as the result of conventional physics presents the possibility that architecture as we know it, is actually unnecessary. But is that concept any more daring than the one presented early in the twentieth century by the eccentric German architect Rudolf Schwartz, when in his brilliant book The Church Incarnate he posited that the people, the congregation, is actually the church itself, not the structure that only incidentally contains it?

Nicholson’s project is only slightly more absurd in that he proposes that it is the disposable and the dispensable in society that can potentially support a world that has consciously thrown them away. It is an idea that wreaks havoc with our preconceptions of “support,” since it calls into question conventions about gravity, dimensionality, i.e., all of those physical facts which provide security from the levitational potentialities in architecture.

Finally, the project, indeed Nicholson himself, conveys a sense of the ethical, the moral, potential implicit in architecture, for without those characteristics architecture becomes... why, it becomes what we know it to otherwise be: a civilizing discipline burdened and blessed by the authority of cultural precedent.

Nicholson opens discussion about the Appliance House with an essay entitled “What’s in a Name?” I would like to bracket this project by suggesting that through the vehicle of a bit of naughty mis(reading) that Nicholson’s title can be slightly modified to read “What Sin a Name,” which in turn might well be addressed to the nomination “architecture” itself: after all, Nicholson is proposing nothing less than the (dis)mantling of the very discipline under scrutiny here. With Nicholson and his visions of a time where privilege is absent from inhabitation, one is presented with the troubling notion that there is as much grit for design strategy from Ten Topy as there is from the Hellenic mythical numerical ratios (the golden section, etc.). It could just well be that Nicholson is jousting the architectural canon which is itself privileged through the device of self validation, by exploiting history as its rationale. Though it is an uncomfortable proposition to re-evaluate dislocated canonical thought, it is imperative to do so, particularly in a time marked by disjunction.

We are fortunate indeed to have so ethical a proponent of a discipline in desperate need of such support. I suspect that the Appliance House is only the beginning of a series of projects that, among its other attributes, will flesh out the (sub)text of the ethical aspects of architecture — and only just in the nick of time. I would at once prophesize, as well as advocate, that this wondrous project be constructed since each and every aspect of this tome (including this presentation) is otherwise (un)conclusive. It screams out to be built.
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