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by LILIANE WONG

5th century B.C. Greek philosopher Empedocles posited a world composed of a combination of fire, earth, air, and water. Half a century later, Plato, in his dialogue Timeou, termed these as elements and associated them with forms now referred to as the Platonic solids. Fire is associated with the tetrahedron, earth with the cube, air with the octahedron, and water with the twenty-sided icosahedron. Ostensibly, these volumetric associations related to identifying traits of each element; the sharp points of the tetrahedron conjuring the heat of fire, the cloffid quality of the cube to clumps of earth and the smoothness of the many-sided icosahedron to spherical droplets of water. From sustenance to survival, inspiration, memory and power, the many aspects of and about water justify its designation as the Platonic solid with the greatest number of faces.

In Volume III, our contributing authors corroborate Plato’s multifaceted depiction and provide a complex picture of this element as a catalyst for design and adaptation. Through adaptive reuse, the temporal nature of infrastructure/structures of and about water is revealed as they are brought forward in time with renewed purpose, or, in the case of Eritat, Iraq, returned in time to resuscitate an important socio-cultural function. Memory and memorial of water-related events past reveal distant histories of the United States through the properties of water in its many states and its coining with other substances. Outside the U.S., water is portrayed as a catalyst for urban development in Spain, agro-tourism for Albania and a trigger for environmental policy in Brazil. The life within the waters, too, inspire and remind us of the force of nature and the strength of water’s role in climate change. They offer new interpretations of what it means to “live with water” — but also remind us that design has served and can continue to serve as a catalyst for political ideology. On the other hand, acknowledging the immensity of water as power, one authorpondersthe unique approach for the future in which we accept mortality and design for failure.

Our authors and their representation of the many faces of water in this issue of Int|AR speak to a changing world in which water plays a pivotal role. In the Department of Interior Architecture at RISD, where the focus is on the practice of adaptive reuse, we also look to understanding the changing face of reusing existing structures at the water’s edge. Thanks to the generosity of the van Beunin Charitable Foundation and the Newport Restoration Foundation, graduate students of our post-professional Master of Arts (MA) in Adaptive Reuse program are focusing this spring on the changing face of heritage in Newport, RI. In this 378-year old city on the water are embodied many issues of American historic buildings and cities today, including the impact of sea level rise. With 33% of the U.S. population living on the water’s edge, this is of particular relevance at Easton’s Point, a 17th century settlement along the western shoreline. While this area has historically experienced extreme storms, high tides and storm surge, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) model adopted in 2016 by the RI Coastal Resources Management Council predicts 1 foot of sea level rise by 2035. For this historic community, built on grade, the possibility of inundation is far from remote.

This year’s cohort of MA graduate students will undertake to “project change,” literally and figuratively, onto Easton’s Point. Co-taught by Markus Berger, Michaell Ngaal and me, the project addresses Bridge Street in the Point Neighborhood and extends the work begun in the Keeping 74 Bridge Street Above Water project of our co-sponsor, Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF). Where NRF’s project focused on immediate and tangible solutions for a single historic house combating sea level rise in the next decade, the RISD project, Projecting Change, instead focuses on raising public awareness of the effects of sea level rise on cultural heritage.

The students are conducting their investigations on issues of preservation in historic neighborhoods seriously threatened by rising sea water levels through the use of new data acquisition technology, together with state of the art visualization and processing technology such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). The objective in using these digital tools with virtual building models is to engage a general public, at times skeptical and inured to the dangers of climate change for waterfront heritage. The visualization of these objections and existing through Mixed Reality tools will allow for the creation of an immersive and interactive built environment that enables the public to ‘see’ in situ, the physical effects of rising sea levels on a threatened area of Easton’s Point. Through a mobile device, the citizen will experience a neighborhood transformed in the future through proposed, virtual design interventions.

Embracing the impermanence enabled by such technology, the studio endeavors to intervene on the heritage of Newport, without encroaching upon its authenticity. Through a projection of temporary imagery directly onto buildings, this project aims to pose questions of the not-too-distant future of such heritage. One can ‘try on’ an inundated Bridge Street in 2035 with the luxury of retreating to the Bridge Street of today. For a heritage-laden Newport threatened by sea level rise, realization, and perhaps even a call to action, may eventually come with exposure to small glimpses of the future. These glimpses will perhaps convince the public that design interventions to heritage are no longer simply part of a privileged conversation but, rather, a new and urgent discussion that will push the boundaries of preservation and adaptive reuse. On May 26, we will host an event on Bridge Street in which Google Cardboard viewers and mixed reality markers will offer five glimpses into the possible future of this historic community. The projects — Walking on Water, Grey-Blue, Memory Trace, Up-Struct and The Game — are catalysts. They offer new interpretations of what it means to “protect, accommodate, retreat.” We offer the same augmented reality opportunity for our readers, with directions on the following page.

In this vibrant city, more than a decade after devastation by water, we spoke with members of the architectural firm of Waggoner and Ball who spearheaded the multi-layered efforts for “living with water,” post-Katrina. While they have worked tirelessly since 2006, there is only now talk of the implementation of the schemes arising from their work. This inertia is evident in Governor John Bel Edwards April 19th official declaration of a state of emergency for Louisiana’s coastal land loss, “a move he hopes will expedite a host of restoration projects mired in federal permitting. In his declaration, the governor said that “The Louisiana coast is in a state of crisis that demands immediate and urgent action to avert further damage to one of our most vital resources.”

While many now engage in designing for the effects of water, the implications of the long time efforts of Waggoner and Ball speak to the need for not only design but collaboration, economic initiatives, community engagement, education and, most of all, endurance.

Late one afternoon we drove away from New Orleans through inundated landscapes of semi-submerged roads to Venice, marked simply by a sign that read, “you have reached the southernmost point in Louisiana.” The last community down the Mississippi River that is accessible by car, Venice (population of 200+ inhabitants) was entirely destroyed by Katrina but has since rebuilt itself as a floating community on stilts. Here, as buildings elevated high up above the water’s reach, we delighted in the visible evidence of resilience, borne of water as catalyst.

Today, in a world shifting beneath our feet, the need for positive adaptation is not exclusive. Through Int|AR — the RISD studio and this publication on adaptive reuse — we embrace these challenges through projecting our hopes for change.

Spring 2017
The five projects, herein, of the RISD Master of Arts in Adaptive Reuse students offer uniquely different views for an historic community threatened by sea level rise in the next 75 years. These projects were shared with the Newport community in an augmented reality event in May 2017. The students have created virtual and augmented reality experiences for this edition of the IntAR Journal on Water as Catalyst. To learn more about the project ‘Projecting Change’ and to access and activate this experience on your mobile device, please go to http://www.vbcf-risd.com.
Introduction
The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen growing interest in how industrial heritage is considered — its contribution to our understanding of the past and its place in the evolution of landscapes and societies. Waterside architecture has a special place in cultural heritage, and in industrial heritage in particular. It offers an entry point to the waterways that fuelled both production and early mass transportation, as well as essential infrastructure to support the growth of urban populations through the provision of drinking water, sewage disposal and human-nature ecosystems. Buildings that originated as mills, pumping stations and factories have been gradually transformed into studios for artists, designers and digital industries, into arts centres and museums, as well as private residences, waterside restaurants and leisure facilities, as these previously ‘private’ industrial waterways open up for recreation, dwelling and commercial use.

The phenomenon of waterfront architecture has, since the 1980s, focused on high profile port, dock and lakeside cities — from Barcelona, Liverpool, London and Venice, to Boston, Baltimore, Toronto and Montreal, whilst these and cities such as ‘Guggenheim Bilbao’ also look to iconic new buildings to reimagine their post-industrial futures. More prosaic and everyday waterside sites seldom attract this attention and investment, as either visitor attractions or as ‘aesthetic anchors’ to larger redevelopment projects, whether commercial, housing or culture-based. However, huge tracts of riverside industrial sites lay largely undeveloped and/or under-appreciated — from central and...
eastern Europe, North America, mainland China, to the ‘hidden’ rivers and canals which serve major cities such as London. However, continued population growth and demand for land and brownfield development for housing have started to make the waterfronts usable and attractive, and the ebb of the Thames, offering a glimpse of London’s pasts, presents and possible futures. How might we identify an after-life for this strange environment? And what narratives can be suggested through the adaptive re-use of the waterfront architecture that persists? Water provides a medium for land and buildings, and mediates both as it flows over time and space, eroding and reshaping the built and natural environment as it goes.

Rewriting cultural identity

If an original building is considered as a first discourse that conditions future formal discourses to be inscribed upon it, then remodeling can be conceived as rewriting... as writing over, as underlining, as partial erasing, as interstitial writing (writing between the lines), as a way of qualifying, accentuating, quoting, commenting upon, as digression, interlude, or interval, as a way of writing parenthetically, of setting off by punctuation, as a new form for an old story. In the context of urban regeneration and re-use it is useful to understand the Lee Valley as a palimpsest landscape both in terms of its topography and with regards to the architectural heritage that punctuates it... palimpsest landscapes... are not only the material expressions of physical and human processes at work over different spatial and temporal scales, they also capture aspects of the non-material expressions of cultural identity and sense-of-place.5

This intersection of landscape and architecture creates a complex and layered environment that is obsolete as a space of industry, yet vibrant as a place. The watery nature of this peculiar urbanity sustains it in a desirable continuum between past and present. The three sites that we encounter here all demonstrate a capacity to be rewritten, offering themselves up as spaces of intervention and re-use. Engaging with the material condition of the architecture, is it possible to isolate fragments that persist into the next iterations of use and inhabitation? The remnants of the past, which are still visible here as traces, become clues — evidence perhaps of existing or passing design precedents; or clues to more traces as yet un-covered. In engaging with these sites forensically we operate as detectives, revealing the extraordinary instability, and potency of spaces and things.

Defining the Edge Condition

The River Lee, also known as London’s ‘hidden’ or ‘second river’, originates in Marsh Farm in the Chiltern Hills north of London and flows for 50 miles south where it meets the River Thames at Bow Creek. With tributaries such as the ‘New River’ (constructed in 1613) 20 miles in length, or the Lee Navigation Canal a further 28 miles, the river feeds into 13 major reservoirs, which provide drinking water for a catchment area that extends over 500 square miles of flood plain. Several of these man-made reservoir areas are in the process of conversion to wetland ‘nature’ reserves incorporating visitor and interpretation education centres, making them open to the public for the first time.

The River Lee also provides a litmus test of London’s industrial history and growth. Much of the City’s manufacturing history is located here, plus agricultural production, which still serves London’s population today. Industries such as gravel and mineral extraction, metalworking, ordnance (weaponry, e.g. Lee-Enfield rifle), early TV set production, the first plastic (Parkene), brewing, sweets factories, furniture-manufacturing, textiles, were all served by the working river transport system, the legacy of which is visible in wharf, mill and dockside buildings.3 The Lee Valley has therefore been a source of innovation and industrial production throughout this time, now represented by creative industries, new housing and leisure developments on the revalorised waterfronts. Since the 1980s, an increasing number of artists have worked from studios along the river, attracted by their low cost, large loft style spaces and the promise of an alternative lifestyle/environment, as well as the inspiration derived from this watery post-industrial landscape.

The Lee Valley is also significant within the topography of London. Once the border between Viking and Saxon Kingdoms, today borough boundaries are drawn down the middle of the river with the soft bank in a separate jurisdiction from the right. As a flaw in the urban landscape it separates and divides much of the
eastern reaches of the city from the rest of London. As an extended threshold, the Lee Valley is a place of otherness, where the water operates as an acoustic buffer zone, softening the edges of urbanity, and operating as a portal into another world. This liminal landscape represents what Sola-Morales describes as ‘terrain vague’—‘strange places (that) exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures’—a concept that Barron and Mariani extend—‘terrain vague is a buffer zone, softening the edges of urbanity, and operating as a portal into another world. This liminal landscape represents what Sola-Morales describes as ‘terrain vague’—‘strange places (that) exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures’—a concept that Barron and Mariani extend.”

As Norberg-Schulz describes the genius loci as the sense that people have for a place, while he considers the traditional form of buildings and cities as the basis for understanding this symbolic value. As he later observes, “the structure of a place is not a fixed, eternal state. As a rule places change, sometimes rapidly. Any place ought to have the ‘capacity’ of receiving different ‘contents’.” A place which is only fitted for one particular purpose would soon become useless.” Indeed the meaning of places should not reside with professionals alone, but with the people who have used, occupied, and constructed their own meanings from them. As Bluestone maintains, “we need a system for taking measure of and working with the reception side of cultural heritage. conservators can take an active role, however they also need to be open to the possibility that the places they conserve for one purpose may take on very different meanings over time.”

In The Secret Lives of Buildings, Hollis suggests that “The life of [a] building is both perpetuated and transformed by the repeated act of alteration and re-use.” In practice, this alteration can be gradual or punctuate long periods of sustained single use (e.g. milling, pumping). In the waterside architectural re-use.

case studies reviewed here, the intermediate and planned adaptations have been conceived and executed with the input of former workers, such as retired dock-workers, millwrights (originally a specialized carpenter with knowledge of gear ratios, driveshaft speeds etc.), local historians, water utility workers and heritage volunteers who act as the stewards of, and interface with, the public over access to the sites. New occupants, notably practicing artists and architects, have also played an important role in the adaptation and usage of these buildings, particularly in the ‘meanwhile’ and self-build stage of their reincarnation and in the reinterpretation of their past. Students of Interior Architecture also provide a speculative insight into the possibilities of context-driven design projects, and this article incorporates schemes developed as part of final year work sited in those waterside heritage buildings.

Speculative Interventions
Using the lower Lee Valley as a site-specific context for a year-long study of the edge condition, a design brief looked to explore the complex social needs of incoming populations, and long-term inhabitants and businesses. Testing and exploring the potentially divergent needs of these groups, the proposals sought to accommodate either a duality of purpose through meantime projects, or to reconfigure differing modes of occupancy and use through more permanent interventions. Testing the potential for new spatial typologies in this rapidly changing part of London, their attempts to address the edge condition revealed themselves through a range of interventions that often looked to exploit water, either as the focus of the project narrative, or as a contingent part of the urban landscape into which these narratives were inserted.

The three buildings that we focus on here all represent examples of spaces that have endured and experienced intensive historic industrial (including water utility) use, and change of use, followed by significant periods of redundancy and decline, and today, reoccupation and adaptation. And our reading of these places engages the slow look, utilizing peripheral vision to attend to the lost details of these environments. As Pallasmaa suggests, “the very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral, unfocussed vision. Focussed vision confronts us with the world, whereas peripheral vision envelops us in the flesh of the world.”

Situated within an emergent forensic sensibility, an object-oriented juridical culture immersed in matter and materialities, our analyses encounter the Lee Valley through the following buildings:
- The Marine Engine House at Walthamstow Reservoirs, ‘Wetlands’
- The White Building on the Lee Navigation Canal, Hackney Wick
- Three Mills at Bromley-by-Bow on the River Lee
Adaptive Practices

The Marine Engine House, located between several Reservoirs at Walthamstow, is an example of Victorian industrial architecture. Constructed in 1894 as the Ferry Lane Pumping Station, it was designed by East London Waterworks Company’s Architect, H. Tooley and Chief Engineer, Sir William Booth Bryan. The building is no longer in use and has been derelict for several years.

Consisting primarily of a two-storey building — the Engine House — and a single-storey building attached to its northern side, there is a further parallel single-storey building to the west, which includes the base of a new demolished chimney stack.

Constructed in brick, the Engine House was designed in the simplified Italianate style much used for Victorian industrial buildings, with semi-circular heads to all of the principal door and window openings. There is also a relatively elaborate string course at mid-height and a highly detailed cornice to the two-storey section, with less elaborate details to the single-storey adjacent structures.

The roof of the Engine House is finished in plain clay tiles with extensive use of painted glazed rooflights and ridge lights in the single storey sections, and pitched at around 45 degrees, half-tipped at its northern and southern ends. Doors and window frames are in painted softwood. Despite the missing chimney, and some external alterations, the building is still an imposing piece of Victorian industrial architecture. The Engine House, and the Pump Room at the extreme northern end of the building, both have interesting interiors — in the latter case this authenticity has been enhanced by the remnants of its utilitarian past, with derelict equipment surviving redundancy prior to conversion.

These silent artefacts represent an important feature of industrial heritage: “consisting of remains of industrial culture which are of historical, technological, social, cultural, architectural or scientific value, including machinery, workshops, sites, mines, warehouses, stores.” The renovation of the Marine Engine House plans to open up this abandoned estate for the public and other uses of the waters, transforming the Triple Engine Room, the Boiler House and the Turbine Room into a visitor centre, with exhibition spaces, education facilities and a café. The Marine Engine House is located at the centre of a new network of path and walks and the existing reed bed areas are being extended to form a larger wetland reserve.

Water as a medium and mediator

In the three examples of adaptive re-use described, actual and speculative, water is both a medium — historically drawn to pump clean water for consumption, to drive millstones and transport raw materials for manufacture — and also a mediator between land and water, between territories or ‘edges’, and between time and space. On the one hand, the sense of place that these architectural representations evoke offers an insight to their utilitarian past, whilst their adaptability — pragmatic, functional and speculative — opens up to engage with present and future uses, and the values attached to these waterside structures. These buildings and their loci can be seen as heterotopias, rather than understood in terms of a dichotomous utopian/dystopian conflict between nostalgia and sentimentality, and decline through redundancy, neglect and gentrification.

In the case of heritage landscapes, where water again defines their re-use through wetlands nature reserve, mill heritage centre, or post-industrial creative and industrial workspace, reveal their palimpsest nature, but this layering leaves enough in each case to detect the traces and meanings from their past purport and heritage.

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Creative building in existing fabric

Liliane Wong

Adaptive Reuse
Extending the Lives of Buildings

264 pages | 300 Figures (c)

Building in existing fabric requires more than practical solutions and stylistic skills. The adaptive reuse of buildings, where changes in the structure go along with new programs and functions, poses the fundamental question of how the past should be included in the design for the future.

On the background of long years of teaching and publishing, and using vivid imagery from Frankenstein to Rem Koolhaas and beyond, the author provides a comprehensive introduction to architectural design for adaptive reuse projects. History and theory, building typology, questions of materials and construction, aspects of preservation, urban as well as interior design are dealt with in ways that allow to approach adaptive reuse as a design practice field of its own right.

Liliane Wong, Head of Interior Architecture Dept., Rhode Island School of Design

Fundamental introduction to an important field of architectural design

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