Closing the Envelope, Opening the Package: On Reviewing Semiotext(e)/Architecture

BY SOPHIE TERRAI
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Looking for the perfect reviewer for this volume seems, to that at least, to have exposed an internal problem; for whom, precisely, was it produced? Architects? Semioticians? Radical graphic artists? Concrete poets? Graphic artists?

This apparent problem of evidence, however, conceals the most interesting fact: if perhaps greater in number than the volume of precise intent, architecture or the invited party of graphically-oriented cultural rendezvous? But first things first.

acting on an initial land, firstly, the assumption that this issue of Semiotext(e) would speak most clearly to those least in touch with the humus of interpretation, especially since it clearly challenges (indeed, in the) the designated limits of "architectural" limits: the essayist's contribution to a potential reviewer at the essays of the School of Architecture at the University of California. Thus, it seemed, the volume hoping from hand to hand. The over-riding response was suspicion of the volume in general, and the very act of partiality expressed by interpretation, according to its various modalities, in those fields. This position does not require one to dismiss one or the other side of the opposition. Rather, it is through such oppositions, through their differences, that mutual identities can be established. In the meantime it still remains an "open work" to define how the so-called "limits of interpretation" define those positions into which Eco will settle.

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INVIABLE 1992 effectively conceal essential information in the table of contents, gradually creating a sense of anxiety, in the absence of Brian Boder's biographical notes, a huge chunk of text, which reads:

"THIS IS JUST ONE BIG REPUTATION FUCKING ANOTHER" AND "YES, I BELIEVE IT TO BE THIS IS THE FRONT DOOR TO THE BUILDING, ETC.

Such obscurity, further propelled by a project such as Arthur Kroko's and David Carson's which mounts a graphic representation of itself called "The Architecture of Sound" Saint Skinkendes," perhaps flagging too much in the face of the material immutability of the building project, this space, however, suggest an important position between "paper" constructs and "real" buildings, existing between theoretical frameworks and their practical forms. But the other main crux is that the architects' camp, namely that the volume contributed little, if at all, to curricular architectural theory, which also subsumes "building" to its conceptualizing, and that it provided few grounds for engagement to them elsewhere. As such as such, perhaps, rather to be the appropriation of "structure" into an interpretative arts discourse that uses it only as an experimental device for the assembling or disassembly of image/idea/text, and as an occasion for media experience that re-combines (or dis-enables) into one person I spoke to who works within a media (theoretical) called a "logocentric" lauding in written expression of the extended layering of layers of images (or perhaps because of it), the component voices in this volume seem to speak more to themselves than to each other. As an accumulation of isolated thinkers, the ideal particularity of each (and citizen) is rendered hopeless. For many, this new conjunction is infused with a sense of the self/literacy and the self/identity of the experience and, in turn, of intellectualism and the self/identity of the experience in which this volume's implicit goal is to make architectural opera
tion an even broader and more inclusive.

The hypertextuality is only emphasized by the conclusion of Félix Guattari's
Deconstructing Nature
By Richard Ashley

Alexander Wilson, The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Diciocy to the Exxon Valdez

Over the past thirty-five years, nature has come to occupy an increasingly important place on public agendas and in the popular imagination throughout the world. Though its current manifestation is peculiar to our times, there is nothing particularly unique about interest in nature as such. As analytic concept and regulative principle, nature is an essential category of thought of the nature-human nexus - has always been an important, if ever-fluctuating, fragmentary and often contested, site of social and cultural articulation. Neither fully a positive entity nor an immediate object of knowledge and experience, "nature," notwithstanding its numinous substrate, is first and foremost a political and epistemic category, a vector for interpretative regimes of power/knowledge: science, religion, economics, politics, and morality, gender, nation and so on. It is, moreover, neither simple nor single but a multicultural, multivalent, complex and interrelated fabric of things: body, other-than-human life, environment, or a less material that no less insidious and impactful ingredients of nature. Generally speaking, the power to name and define nature (and by extension naturalness, or what is not natural) has always been more or less coextensive with the power to define what things ought to be. As construct or plurality of constructs, however, both "nature" and culture are always the product of particular cultural and social formations, serving at once to legitimate certain social relations over others, and to normalize what shall become an attendant environmental practice.

Interestingly, the increasingly widespread acceptance of the foregoing remarks is itself due in good measure to the specificity of current preoccupations with nature. It is not simply an encounter with two natures: the real one, so to speak, and the culturally constructing one. On the one hand, there was an alarming realization that nature's continued capacity to sustain life as we know it is no longer taken for granted that, in effect, we are in the throes of an ecological crisis of no small proportion. On the other, many began to recognize that "nature" is indeed a cultural construct; and 2) the conceptual vocabulary to be used in the contest and incribe nature are intimately bound up with the way we treat it. Not surprisingly, both nature and "nature" quickly emerged as focal points for an environmentally informed social and cultural critique.

Crudely stated, and without reference to their many differences, advocates of this critique argue that Western societies have placed themselves outside of and above nature, thereby nurturing the mutually constitutive relations with nature characteristic of agrarian and hunter-gatherer societies. The vocabulary of nature is saturated with the language of conquest, domination and mastery. It has been constructed as an ever-increasing object of manipulation and an expendable trove of resources existing for the satisfaction of human wants and needs. This conception legitimizes and encourages exploitative environmental practices, strips nature of any intrinsic worth, and assigns it value only for and in the service of human beings. This critique's project is to speak about nature in and against nature and to promote an environmental ethics predicated on ecologically harmonious coexistence.

It is against this hastily sketched background that The Culture of Nature should be read. It is a cultural history of nature in various sites, framed within the historical context of North America that is not only situated within environmentalism, but also attempts to move beyond what Wilson views as the tendency to reduce the nature-civilization relation to a simple good versus evil opposition. By strategically placed references to aboriginal peoples and rural agrarian societies, Wilson's rhetoric constantly seeks to evoke a pastoral sense of nature which has all but disappeared in North America. Thus, Wilson is acutely aware that nature is not a positive entity preceding representations; it is always and will always be a cultural construct. As such, nature is lived and fashioned as, say, parks, roads, farms, backyards, indoor gardens, cities, etc., in effect, nature is a collection of landscapes. In the context of his discussion, these are treated as historical texts structured and inscribed by the discursive economics of industrial capitalism. His project is to deconstruct nature-as-landscape, to put it at the centre of cultural debate, and to urge an aesthetics of natures which would allow us to live on and with the land - that is, to intervene in nature without dominating it. Such a project can yield an understanding of what our constructed landscapes have to do with the 'nature' of environmental crisis. It is only by this kind of understanding that we can "be restored to nature and to ensure it, and ourselves, a future" (291).

Though informed by environmentalism's recognition that our worldviews constitute a comprehensive and normative particular and socio-ecological perspective, Wilson's discussion largely surpasses by now familiar ideological analyses of modern discourse on nature. (They are one point of departure for an illuminating account of industrial technologies of representation and knowledge/ways of knowing in contemporary North America.) Moreover, he extends his examination of representational

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