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Fadi Abou-Rihan
Border/Lines Magazine
183 Bathurst Street
Suite No. 301
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 2R7

416-360-5249

Peircian theory of abduction on the one hand, and by the positive presence, i.e. the "positivity," of the text itself? Are we really facing the "hermeneutic circle" in such a dilemma?

It seems to me that we can answer these questions by considering the idea that the distance created by interpretation is required not as much by the text as "object," than by the "object the text," something which is encompassed in the text, but whose meaning transcends the text, even though it is the text that mediates it. The most recent developments in hermeneutic theory have stressed either that it is precisely in elucidating the conditions that make possible the understanding of the remote object of a text which constitutes the task of interpretation, or that interpretation takes place between the origin (*arché*) and the goal (*télos*) of the text, understood in their past and present contexts. The simple "invention" of an hypothesis, following a Peircian approach, and its "application" to a specific case, in the more positivistic trade, do not agree with any of these hermeneutic principles, or rather they do not reveal that the process of interpretation, according to hermeneutics, is deeply engaged in the *mise à jour* of the context of the object, as well as in the very relation of the interpreter to it. It is within this (theoretical as well as existential) process that interpretation takes shape for hermeneutics, since it deals primarily with the historicity of meaning, that is, the narrated distance taken between the object of the text and its actual interpreter.

Hermeneutics is always reflexively-oriented, and acknowledges the contribution of its own very act of understanding in the process of interpretation. Such an understanding of the process of interpretation stands in clear opposition to Peirce's theory of semiotics and of his theory of knowledge and abduction, since Peirce, however fully acknowledging the genetic process of meaning in terms of the succession of signs' interpretations through what he called semiosis, never agreed with the synthetic character of what we can call the historicity implied in interpretation. For him, indeed, the synthetic aspect of the semiosis process

belonged to a future community of interpretation, and was for this reason essentially of a prospective nature; it could not be achieved retrospectively by a single and actual "interpreter." So much, then, for the possibility of matching the "hermeneutic circle" with a pragmatist perspective - and without doubt, with a positivistic approach of any other kind.

Is Eco's hesitation, or even duplicity, in the choice of interpretive strategy, not responsible for the more frustrating aspect of his work: namely, its ambivalent treatment of narrative either as history or as "story" (i.e., fiction). Everything that Eco has developed in his very impressive intellectual career, from his theoretical works in the field of semiotics (*A Theory of Semiotics, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*) to his two novels (*The Name of the Rose*, and *Foucault's Pendulum*), without forgetting his "mid-range" essays of cultural critique (*Travels in Hyperreality*), can be retrieved in a sort of microcosm in this book. But can we mix together in one book what makes a theoretical work valuable and what makes a novel so brilliant, without falling into an awkward confusion of genres?

For Eco to take a position here he would have to acknowledge that there really are some things which have to be opposed, such as history and stories, theory and fiction, communication and hermeneutics, even if we acknowledge the very active part played by interpretation, according to its various modalities, in these fields. This positioning does not require one to dismiss one or the other side of the oppositions. 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 the exact position into which Eco will settle.

Jean-François Coté is a member of
CIADEST (Interuniversity Center for
Discourse Analysis and Text
Sociocriticism, Montréal)

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

BY Sophie Thomas

Semiotext(e)/Architecture, ed. Hraztan,
Zeitlian, New York: *Semiotext(e)*, 1992.

Looking for the perfect reviewer for this volume seems, to this author at least, to have exposed an interesting problem: for whom, precisely, was it produced? Architects? Anarchitects? Mixed-media junkies? Concrete poets? Graphic artists? This apparent problem of audience, however, conceals the more interesting (and perhaps greater) problem of the volume's precise intent: is architecture the invited guest, or just the occasion for another interdisciplinary rendez-vous? But first things first.

Acting on an initial (and, finally, naive) assumption that this issue of *Semiotext(e)* would speak most clearly to architects, or at least to architectural theorists - since it clearly challenges (indeed, threatens) the designated limits of "architecture" - members of the *Border/Lines* collective sought out a potential reviewer at the School of Architecture at the University of Toronto. There, it seemed, the volume hopped from hand to hand. The over-riding response was suspicion of the volume's pretensions, and a profound reluctance to express such sentiments publicly. I imagine the reasons for this recalcitrance were complex: respect for at least some of the volume's contributors and its more imaginative aims, a certain amount of political wariness, but perhaps, above all, an unwillingness to assume a too-easy reactionary stance toward a project which situates itself so provocatively on the edge of architectural discourse.

The criticisms that emerged were, however, telling. The most common complaint was about the sheer difficulty of making out the "contents" of the text, because of its literal opacity. (In most cases the print is minuscule, and overlaid or in collision with either more print or visuals - or both.) This impenetrability was felt to be an affront to a discourse (or at least, a practice) that retains its faith in clear communication, and depends on that clarity for the realization of its designs as

physical structures. Such an affront was surely confirmed by the opening pages (numbered IN(Y)ERFACE1 and IN(Y)ERFACE2) which effectively conceal essential information such as the table of contents, production credits and editorial, behind Brian Boigon's irrelevant but vacuous Architecture Stickers (for example, "THIS IS JUST ONE BIG BUILDING FUCKING ANOTHER" and "YES! BELIEVE IT OR NOT THIS IS THE FRONT DOOR TO THIS BUILDING," etc.).

Such obscurity, further typified by a project such as Arthur Kroker's and David Carson's which mounts a graphic representation of/called "The Architecture of Sound" Saint Skinheads," perhaps flies too much in the face of the material communicability of the building project. This would, however, suggest an artificial opposition between "paper" architects who build drawings and "real" architects who draw buildings, and thus between theorists and practitioners. But the other main criticism from the architects' camp, namely that the volume contributed little, if at all, to cutting-edge architectural theory - which always pushes "building" to its conceptual limits - indicates that the grounds for resistance may lie elsewhere.

The issue seems, rather, to be the appropriation of "architecture" into an interdisciplinary arts discourse that uses it chiefly as an experimental metaphor for the assembling or disassembling of the image/text, and as an occasion for a media experience that re-combines these elements into what one person I spoke with (a media theorist) called a "logocentric fantasy" standing in for written experience. In spite of the extensive layering of texts and 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 signifiers, the ideal particularity of each site (and citation) is rendered homologous. For many, this new conjunction is finally superficial, and worse - irrelevant and, thus, irresponsible. The text becomes decidedly evasive: operating on the level of pure pronouncement, it resists critical reading - indeed, repels both reading and criticism. All this despite the volume's implicit claim to make architectural operations and environments broader and more inclusive.

This discrepancy is only emphasized by the inclusion of Felix Guattari's



piece on space and "corporeity," which suggests that it is the task of architecture and urban programming to reterritorialize the modern, deterritorialized human subject - and to keep pace with the wild growth of a techno-scientific world where "interactions b/w the body & constructed space unfold through a field of virtuality whose complexity verges on chaos." The projects in *Semiotext(e)/Architecture* attempt, in Guattari's terms, "to think both the complexity and the chaos along new lines," but ultimately they represent such an attempt, or some of the conditions for its possibility, rather than enact it. In this sense, the volume lacks the new praxis demanded by its premises. Guattari's call for the return to architecture of an "animist" conception of the world is nowhere (else) in evidence.

Although it may seem that *Semiotext(e)/Architecture* speaks only obliquely to "real" architects, it must be pointed out that the intent of the volume is to enlarge the list of concerns proper to "architecture," to push architecture beyond the limits of the built project. This effects a critique of current architectural theory/practice at the same time as it appropriates architectural models for other domains and discourses. It is the palpable and unresolved tension between these two aims - which of these, after all, has priority? - which generates confusion and raises hackles.

Because of this double movement, however, there is much here of interest - occasioned of course by architecture - to the theorist-at-large. For at stake is the age-old problem of representation, returning in the essentially Derridean question of the *writing* of architecture. The conventions and assumptions governing the presentation of architectural and design projects are explored and exploded, and why not? Deconstructive architectural strategies, looking more like the liberal tradition it ought to have devastated, suggests that this should be a creative process. This issue's editor, Hraztan Zeitlian, writes that the representational modes of architecture and design are "contaminating," "infecting," and, in keeping with new movements in the technology of the image, the projects in *Semiotext(e)/Architecture* are said to be "less representative & more manipulated in a positive sense." Indeed, the point pursued throughout this volume is the exploitation of new possibilities for design presented by technology. I imagine that, from the

point of view of the contributors to *Semiotext(e)/Architecture*, most current design practice - and certainly its conceptualization of its task and its limits - lags far behind in this respect.

A rather obvious example of this positive manipulation in action is "x...stasis," a project directed by Catherine Ingraham, which stages mutations of the line - occasioning an "ex-siting" of the line from straight (orthos), into another realm. It charts the progress of a simple, "figural conceit": x,X, as mathematical symbol, as turnstyle, as chiasmus, as sign of erasure, as indicator on a map. Pithy "cites" - quotations, reflections - are arranged in boxes along with CADD-generated images ("x"s turned on three axes) against a backdrop of line formations progressively blown-up and focussed into greater and greater surface detail. The implied aim is to relax "oppressive" linearity which, in terms borrowed from Derrida, "is not loss or absence but the repression of pluri-dimensional thought." Architectural design ought not to be linear in a repressive sense, but must be able to represent pluri-dimensional spatial conceptions. Since this is already what architectural renderings are supposed to accomplish (despite their paradoxical dependence on line and detail), this does not seem to be such a radical program for architecture *per se*.

Part of the difficulty *Semiotext(e)/Architecture* sets out to engage is with the term "design." As Avital Ronell and Albert Liu point out in "The Inexact Essence of Design," an inessential piece at the end of the volume (its brevity thinly disguised by twice repeating it in various states of overlay and compression), design is not object or function, but a morphological process (formation rather than form). As such, it demands a theory of *morphogenesis* - but in "a non-romantic, non-absolutist mode of self-production." One of their topics is technological self-representation ("cybernetic corporeality") in which the prototype exemplifies the design process (and its necessary relationship to "testing"). The prototype is a "singular simulacrum" before the existence of the original: it allows the beginning to begin. Neither then, a medium of agency nor communication, "the prototype serves as a pure medium...." The importance of design as experimental and inexact - its status as medium rather than matter - is clearly underscored by the positioning of such reflections in a volume whose success depends on the viability

and currency of these very ideas.

In *Semiotext(e)/Architecture*, the problematics of the representation of architecture - the movement from building to (written) image - are often suggestively articulated by analogy with another discipline. Two pieces, for example, deal with film. In an interview with Atom Egoyan, Deborah Esch discusses his interest in the transition from room to screen in film - a passage formulated as "the moment of mediation, of the medium." Eve Laure Morse investigates the films of Maria Brooke Dammkoehler for the construction of "woman" in classic Hollywood cinema. Other moments, other media engage with the architecture of the image. James Derderian's video essay on the Gulf War and another short piece by Ronell (also on the Gulf War) foreground the problematics of technology: Virtual Reality, Baudrillard's simulations, and so forth. Architecture, technology and design theory must "commingle."

It would be easy to criticise this volume for its casual borrowings from "other" disciplines - especially philosophy and critical theory. Although such borrowings are often used effectively to shed new light on old problems (and indeed to create some new ones), they usually offer little in return. Daniel Tiffany's "Unbridled Space" (thoughts on architecture, mass media and death - on cryptic spaces, dwelling and memory) infects architecture with a provocative, if opportunistic, conflation of Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno et al., but, from the point of view of the specialist, perhaps finesses crucial issues in those authors' relevant works. The point is clearly to enhance the concerns proper to architecture rather than the other way around.

Oddly enough, then, for the general reader (by now as fictional a figure as the architect-reader invoked here at the outset), the most successful projects are finally those which are the most architectural - that is, those which engage most fully with the problematics of the representation and design of "building," and those which extend architecture to reach other strata of human habitation - those which attempt, in a meaningful way, to force open the whole package.

Sophie Thomas is a member of the Border/Lines collective.

Deconstructing Nature

BY Richard Ashby

Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*
Toronto: Between The Lines, 1991.

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 - and especially the nature-human nexus - has always been an important, if ever-shifting, fragmentary and often contested, site of social and cultural articulation. Neither fully a positive entity nor an unmediated object of knowledge and experience, "nature," notwithstanding its noumenal substrate, is first and foremost a political and epistemological category, a vector for interpenetrating regimes of power/knowledge: science, religion, economics and industry, technology, morality, gender, nation and so on. It is, moreover, neither simple nor single but a multiplicity of objects, a multiplicity of sites: body, earth, other-than-human life, environment, or a less material (but no less materially effective) natural order of things. Generally speaking, the power to name and define nature (and by extension what is and what is not natural) has always been more or less coextensive with the power to define how things ought to be. As construct or plurality of constructs, however, both "nature" and nature are always the products of particular cultural and social formations, serving at once to legitimate certain social relations over others, and to normalize what could loosely be termed an attendant environmental praxis.

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 the result of an encounter with two natures: the real one, so to speak, and the culturally constructed one. On the one hand, there

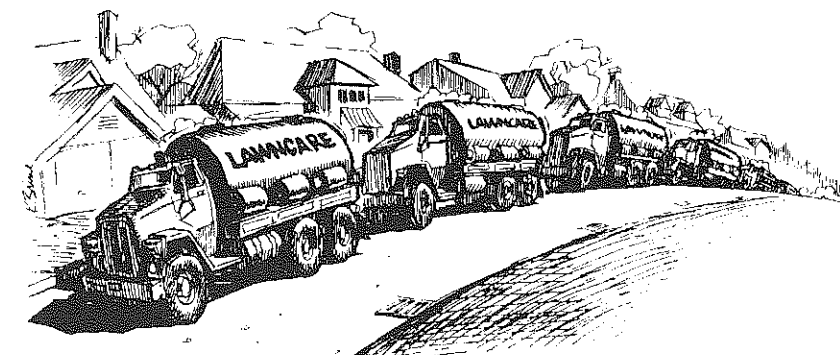


Illustration from *The Culture of Nature*.

was an alarming realization that nature's continued capacity to sustain life as we know it can no long be taken for granted, that, in effect, we are in the throes of an ecological crisis of no small proportions. On the other, many began to recognize that 1) "nature" is indeed a cultural construct; and 2) the conceptual vocabularies with which we apprehend and inscribe 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 rupturing the mutually nurturing 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 inert object of manipulation and an expendable trove of resources existing for the satisfaction of human wants and needs. This conception legitimates and encourages exploitive 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 for nature, to recuperate and reconceive it as a moral subject, and to reintegrate humans into nature, and to promote an environmental praxis predicated on ecologically harmonious cohabitation.

It is against this hastily sketched background that *The Culture of Nature* should be read. It is a cultural history of nature in twentieth-century 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. On the other hand, Wilson is acutely aware that nature is not a positive entity preceding representation; it is and always will 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 economies 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 nature 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 with this kind of understanding that we can "be mobilized to restore nature and to assure it, and ourselves, a future" (291).

Though informed by environmentalism's recognition that our various ideas about nature operate to circumscribe and normalize particular appropriate and/or exploitive practices, Wilson's discussion largely surpasses by now familiar ideographical analyses of modern discourse on nature. (They are one point of departure for an illuminating account of industrial technologies of representation and knowledge of nature in contemporary North America.) Moreover, he extends his examination of representational