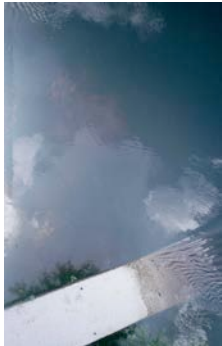


## READING THE BODY LITTORALLY: WET AREAS

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V1-4: "Love is lak de sea.  
V2-4: It's a movin thing,  
V3-4: but still and all it takes its shape from de shore it meets,  
V4: and it's different with every shore."

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

### **V1: A conversation between Mary Catherine Bateson and her father, Gregory Bateson:**

V1: Daughter:

V3: Daddy, why do things have outlines?

V1: Father:

V2: Do they: I don't know. What sort of things do you mean?

V3: I mean when I draw things, why do they have outlines?

V2: Well, what about other sorts of things--a flock of sheep? or a conversation? Do they have outlines?

V3: Don't be silly. I can't draw a conversation. I mean *things*.

V2: Yes--I was trying to find out just what you meant. Do you mean "Why do we give things outlines when we draw them?" or do you mean that the things *have* outlines whether we draw them or not?

V3: I don't know, Daddy. You tell me. Which do I mean?<sup>1</sup>

V2: Objects are solid

V3: Subjects are fluid

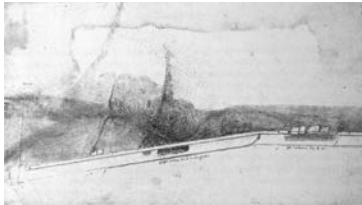


V1: In 1675 Isaac Newton wrote:

"For nature is a perpetual circulatory worker, generating fluids out of solids, and solids out of fluids; fixed things out of volatile, and volatile out of fixed; subtle out of gross, and gross out of subtle; some things to ascend, and make the upper terrestrial juices, rivers, and the atmosphere, and by consequence others to descend for a requital to the former."<sup>2</sup>

V1: The condition of the human body in architectural discourse is fluid. Like water, multiple roles of multiple bodies perpetually jostle and realign. They resist the development of a ground--theoretical or practical--not with force but with flux. Their very multiplicity works to erode the institutional rationales of architecture for a number of reasons: Each bodily experience is subjective; some are hard to talk about. The body is un-intellectual. Each one is different. They all die. Architecture, acting precisely to resist this fluidity is intellectual, standardizing, objective, and frequently aspires to be eternal.

This paper proposes to position human bodies within architectural discourse littorally, that is, by mapping the shape of the shore where fluidity meets solidity. It is written in four voices like water poured into water, to avoid the paradox of singular authorship in a text dedicated to multiplicity. Referring to three Masters Research Projects, the paper's organization celebrates the inevitability of fluid relations. The nature of this shore line, and its refiguration through erosion or deposition, will be explored.



V1: erosion: wearing away surface -  
V3: fe  
V2: male  
V3: wo  
V4: man  
V1: deposition: a layer on a surface +  
V2: male  
V4: man  
V2: man  
V4: made  
V2: mail  
V4: man  
V2: man  
V3: maid

#### **V1: Gendered bodies.**

V2: It is impossible to think, much less to speak, of body without *gender*. While it is neither possible nor desirable to replace or invert the so-called neutral "he" that permeates architectural discourse, it can be returned to a state of flow.

Sex is biologically determined; its boundaries are traditionally fixed and solid. A hard line distinguishes man and woman. But gender is culturally determined; its boundaries are pliable and fluid, a flexible membrane replaces the distinguishing member. In written form, the politically correct he/she is mediated by the solidus, an oblique mark (/) between the gendered figures. Although the mark claims neutrality between switching alternatives, it has a slant. A solidus opposes a fluid us. Its absence proposes a hermaphrodite, named for the bi-sexed body of Hermaphrodites, son of Hermes and Aphrodite.

*Chorus: Gender is not at issue in architecture. Gender is neutral and neutral is gendered male for the sake of convenience.*

V1: In an interview, Peter Blake asked Philip Johnson, "What is all this I keep hearing about you having been a Nazi, or a whore, or gay, or a modernist, or a very naughty boy? Why do you keep saying these things about yourself?" Johnson responded,



"Search me. Doesn't have anything to do with architecture, does it?"<sup>3</sup>

V2: The wet wall of the public bathroom in Venice can be seen as a physical and formal manifestation of the solidus, rendered translucent....a private screening. Looking one way and acting another, identities are in flux. The wet wall leaks, the cavity is scene, anxieties come to surface as one sees one's own body and another.

A vanity mirror is housed within the wall. Women open boxes to see themselves. They see another. They make-up. A privacy screen and mirror switch places, male and female bodies are conflated onto an unstable surface. An American Standard provides the datum.

*Chorus: Why the display? I want privacy, not stage fright!*

### **V1: Womb-full of water.**

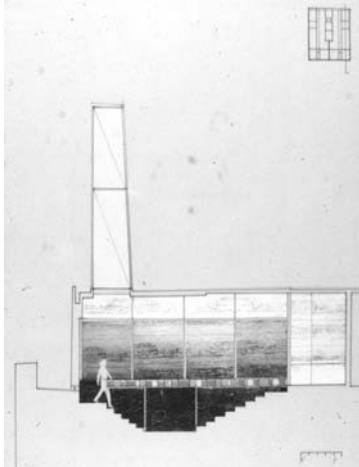


V3: Water is symbolic of life (birth) and of death. "When a person submerges himself (*sic*) in a ritual Jewish bath, a Mikvah, he (*sic*) momentarily enters the realm of the non living, so that when he (*sic*) emerges, he (*sic*) is like one reborn."<sup>4</sup>

The Mikvah is generally used by orthodox Jewish women, who ritually bathe to purify themselves at the end of their menstrual cycles. However, it is also used for the act of conversion. In both cases a transformation occurs, impure to pure, Non-Jew to Jew. Prescribing the use of the Mikvah, the Torah says, 'He (*sic*) shall wash all his (*sic*) flesh in the water."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, one's entire body must come in contact with the spiritual water. While the size of the Mikvah is standard, the size of the body is not, and one size does not fit all.

In this project a sandblasted glass partition disguises the entrance to the ritual bath, a mirror and three flooded steps. The mirror is a required component of the bathing ritual. A woman must completely examine herself for adequate cleanliness before entering the water. The medical examination is usually performed separately from the spiritual immersion. Therefore an uncomfortable, clinical act must precede the spiritual ablution. This design attempts to link rather than separate the clinical and spiritual, bringing ease to both experiences.

*Chorus: People do not want to discuss women's cycles. Why must you design (and why must we critique) an architectural space for women's cycles? Can't you assume these acts occur in the privacy of women's homes?*



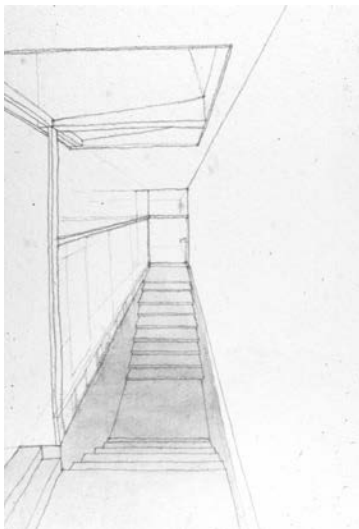
The actual immersion must occur after sundown, the beginning of the Jewish day. Custom dictates that "after the appearance of three small stars she should perform the Tvilah (immersion)."<sup>6</sup> Directly above the three flooded steps is a tall cone shaped sky light, or view finder. As a woman takes her first step into the water, she may throw her head back to peer up through the sky light searching for three small stars, verifying ritual laws. However in this position she cannot watch her step. Like leading the blind, the architecture must guide the motion of the body rather than the eyes.

*Chorus: Consider the legal ramification of this design. Avoid liability for injury at all costs.*

The water level of the bath begins at the first step. A person must immerse her entire body as quickly as possible, plunging into the water, as if in the womb. Another set of stairs lead her out of the water. The two sets of stairs create a vessel. Like in the womb, her body is engulfed in the vessel's fluids.

V2: (A womb with a view!)

*Chorus: Water symbolizes change and instability, yet the design of the Mikvah is so rigid and strict.*



V3: When the Jewish woman submerges her body under the water, she places herself in an environment where she literally cannot live. Her action, momentarily sinking into the realm of the non-living, hints at her potential death. Therefore she disappears quickly into the blessed water and emerges gracefully, a reborn and renewed presence.

According to ritual law, a Mikvah must be built directly into the ground. This requirement presents the analogy of a coffin, a receptacle for the body within the ground. The womb and the grave are two sites of non-breathing. They are also the starting and ending points of the life cycle. The cycle of immersion and emergence in the bath takes a person from death back to life, to a spiritually purer life. The major cycle of life is displaced into the local ritual event, connecting the individual to a larger realm of religious custom.

*Chorus: Let's talk about life. Why bring death into this?*

V1: Freud defined the modern paradox binding life to death (eros to thanatos)<sup>7</sup>. To verify his theory's continued relevance, one need only observe the tension present in an academic discussion about death: He got this one right.

V3: In the Mikvah, architecture is a necessary compliment to ritual. It choreographs the movement of the body. Reciprocally,

the action of the ritual creates form. This very particular form commemorates the action of birth and death through bathing.

*Chorus: You are bound by the ritual. Where is your hand as a designer?*

V3: While the dimensions of the volume of water contained are standard, the water's form is kinetic. *This* form is a response to the active body.

### **V1: Improper bodies.**

V2: The body leaks. Architectural sites that carry away bodily fluids are called wet areas, the walls, wet walls. The bathroom is often a locus of anxiety, within the house, within architectural discourse. "The aim of ablution is to remove, not dirt, but the invisible stains contracted by touching the dead, by contact with childbirth, murder, person of inferior caste, madness or disease."<sup>8</sup>

The domestic bathroom in Western culture accumulates familial anxiety. The public W.C., on the other hand, seeks economy. The fixtures are back to back, the floor plans standardized and nearly mirrored. The male/female boundary is denoted with graphic symbols.<sup>9</sup> But men use the public facility differently, and faster. While women wait in line, men use urinals. This difference agitates the reflection in plans.

In this public lavatory, light, carefully directed, renders the translucent glass opaque to the users. Moreover, the image of the body, seen through running water, is distorted, increasing the penumbra. Routine use of the facility marks secure territory. Which is more threatening: the females or the gayze?

*Chorus: I can play too! What about sound? Adam may overhear Eve's dropping.*

The leaks expose secret(ion)s. "Your body speaks its mind."<sup>10</sup>

*Chorus: We are proper people. We do not speak of such subjects. Besides, this is not architecture.*

V3: Objects are hard

V2: Subjects are soft

V1: Fifty five years later, in 1730, Isaac Newton changed hi/s/tory: "(I)t seems probable to me that God in the beginning formed matter in solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, movable particles, of such sizes and figures, and with such other properties and in such proportion to space as most conduced to the end for which he formed them....And therefore, that nature may be lasting, the

changes of corporeal things are to be placed only in the various separations and new associations and motions of these permanent particles...."<sup>11</sup>

V2: pile: a heavy beam driven vertically into the bed of a river to support the foundations of a superstructure. (under)

V3: pile: the soft projecting surface on velvet, plush, etc. (over)

*Chorus: Modernist inversion, post-structuralist word play, this common ground is already saturated!*

V2: The upper body is privileged, it is the head. The lower body is ignoble, it is an ass: Upper body/lower body. Upper class/lower class. Proper body/improper body.

V3: "The arse crosses all boundaries playfully, unlike the head, to which borders and possessions mean alot."<sup>12</sup>

V4: "When the famous Arletty was accused of having had sexual relations with members of the German occupational forces, her answer is said to have been: "My heart is French, but my backside is international."<sup>13</sup>

Venezia. The formation of Venice:

Add piles to make a foundation. Add layers to make terra firma, a surface. Subtract terra firma to make canals. Piles and canals construct an unstable foundation, a fluid infrastructure.

The Grand Canal, a solidus, inflects. Venice: Looking one way and acting another. A split between image and action, seeing and doing. One contradicts the other: a heavy soft.

Inside the canal the internal edges are hard facades, from within I sea walls: A fluid uprising. At high tide, the boundaries are crossed and the piazza floods. The toilet elegantly overflows.

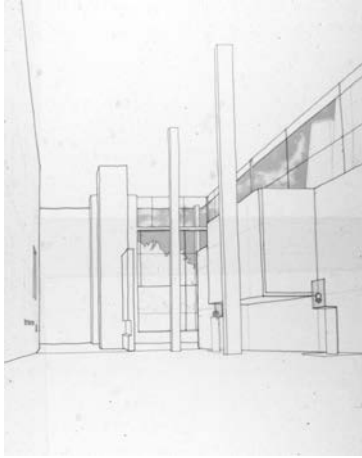
*Chorus: You've taken the plunge. I seek higher ground.*

Occupy the campanile. See the map. The Venetian body is split by a Grand canal, its form suggests a yin and yang, Mother Earth and Heavenly Father. The reflective surface of the canal turns the table.

### **V1: Body remembering.**

V3: Architecture has the ability to displace ritual performance from one sacred setting to another. This displacement channels the collective memory of past experiences and habits into the present, allowing people to connect through time and with history. Most sacred rituals include a kinetic performance and therefore create habitual embodied memory.

The diaspora denied the possibility of direct connections to place. In the absence of fixed locations, Jewish rituals evolved into



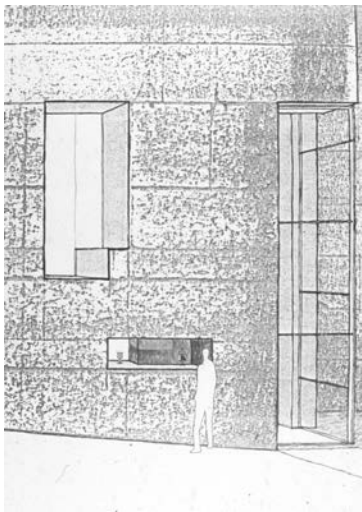
physical and mental choreographies. These choreographies often attached themselves to ritual objects. Thus religious customs and icons were imported to a neutral zone, a place where anyone could experience the same rituals, thus crossing cultures and collapsing time.

*Chorus: Architecture is universal. Why design architecture for one particular group of people--you are excluding people. In fact, you are excluding us. We are not Jewish, so we may not understand these choreographies.*

This project connects people with the traditions of a culture, rather than just a religion. A sacred connection is made between people in common time, through shared ancestry.

*Chorus: This is so idealistic. Architecture has nothing to do with people's ancestry.*

While the bath house program is completely controlled by a prescribed intimate ritual, it is wrapped in an invented public program. A gallery displays a revolving collection of Jewish artifacts including photographs, mementos, and oral histories. This public space both holds and hides the Mikvah. The gallery is designed to reach out to the public to communicate the history of the Jewish culture. Through the choreography of intersected (sacred and secular) rituals and the presentation of intertwined symbols, an intimate ritual and a public function combine.



The gallery contains three exhibition spaces. The main gallery space is a large rectangular volume enclosed by a large stone wall on one side and the Mikvah on the other. Various pieces of the collection are held within this 40' high wall. At the threshold of the gallery, a large wooden floor slopes toward the opposite end of the space, reminiscent of a synagogue's floor sloping toward the altar. A column-like piece of the wall is conceptually displaced from its original position, leaving a void. This 40' high column occupies the center of the gallery space.

The Ark is a cabinet, originally movable, which houses the Torah, the most sacred text in Judaism. Within a synagogue, the Ark has become the architectural focal point and the holiest object outside of the Torah itself. Like a typical Ark, the displaced piece of the wall is a receptacle for the Torah. An allegorical fragment, the column/Ark/displaced wall sits like an altar holding the Torah at the end of the large gallery space.

The high ceiling of the gallery lifts one's eye toward the sky, while the sloping floor moves one's body toward the blessed entity, the Torah. The Torah does not, however, face the large volume but rather faces the stone wall to the west. To view the Torah, according to Jewish custom, one must turn and face east, thus

facing Jerusalem. With this action the main gallery space becomes a conceptual synagogue.

*Chorus: How will people know they are facing east and therefore Jerusalem?*

In *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates quotes Quintillian who describes this displacement of action in time saying, "when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we do not merely recognize the place itself, but remember things that we did there."<sup>14</sup> In the gallery, as for Quintillian, bodily memory, is carried in the muscles. By tracing the design of a synagogue, a person may return to a past event through memory. The gallery constructs a mental topography through choreography. The emptiness of this 'sanctuary' allows the ghosts of pews and worshipers to dwell within.

*Chorus: We don't want to listen to words. We don't want to invest in imagining. Can't you show your ideas in drawings or a model?*

The displacement of an event from a sacred setting (synagogue or church) into a profane context (museum, assembly hall) may be considered uncustomary or sacrilegious. This transfer challenges the separation of sacred and profane, but it mends the separation of culture and time, through memory. It channels a collective memory of past experiences and allows the inhabitants to connect to a time and history that are sacred.

### **V1: Practicing bodies.**

*Chorus: The AIA Statement of the Architect's Services asserts, "the Architect does not supervise construction. The contractor, and not the Architect is solely responsible for construction means, methods, techniques, sequences, and procedures....in connection with the work."<sup>15</sup>*

V3: Erector sets are objects

V2: Dolls are subjects



V4: The Architecture Clinic, based on similar models initiated by both the University of Florida Medical and Law Schools, offers participating students a hybrid experience. Operating simultaneously as both an architectural office and a classroom, the Clinic is engaged in the practice of architecture and in the business of educating future architects in the basic skills of their profession.

The fundamental intent of architecture is to act as a collaboration of both the mind and body; theory and practice. Architecture constantly reexamines the position of the body, juxtaposing the intellectual (the act of theorizing) with the manual (the act of



making). Although the difficulties inherent in unifying these seemingly opposite forces have troubled architecture throughout history, at no time has this task been more discussed than within modern discourse.

V1: Arthur and Marilouise Kroker argue in "Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition" that today's obsession with the body indicates not its centrality but its marginality in contemporary life.<sup>16</sup>



V4: The architectural profession has sought to solidify the flow between theory and practice. The difficulties of this connection lie in the differences between *manual and intellectual labor*. Hannah Arendt contends, "...thinking and working are two different activities which never quite coincide; the thinker who wants the world to know the 'content' of his thoughts must first of all stop thinking..."<sup>17</sup>

V1: Isadora Duncan, considered the founder of modern dance, said "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it." This comment has often been taken as an expression of her frustration with her inability to find the words to say what she wanted. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson understood the statement differently. He suggested that words were unable to convey meaning lodged within her movements, that they offered an intelligence of a different sort. He believed movement and the language of the body was much more than an inadequate interpretation of verbal thought. This embodied intelligence, known to movement theorists including Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Rolf is exercised and expanded through action.<sup>18</sup>

V4: Classes are offered in the Clinic according to one of two criteria. Full scale constructions are made, requiring embodied intelligence to play a primary role in design and evaluation. The "window" and bunk beds addition are two examples of projects at this scale. In both, students learn about the difficult act of making while thinking through their bodies. The projects' successes are judged by their usefulness to other people, by clients' ability literally to incorporate the projects into their lives.



*Chorus: Leon Battista Alberti says, "To make is not the job of the architect, but the workman."<sup>19</sup>*

The second criterion involves working with real clients (actual, embodied people) on projects with an altruistic component, typically housing. Here students confront often compromised living situations, along with the detritus of lives lived. The projects are complicated and unstable. Fixing on the goal is impossible as cost, legal constraints, construction difficulties and lived desires clash.

V2: Objects are physical  
V4: Subjects are situational

V4: The practice of architecture, by definition, is a direct collaboration between thinking and working (theory and practice) that occurs simultaneously. The body, both intellectual and physical, acts as a mediating device. The thinking body might enrich the construction process through more innovative design solutions while the embodied mind might improve the constructability of future designs by more clearly envisioning the realities of inhabitable space.

By bridging theory and practice, the Clinic is an experimental medium in which to analyze the profession at two scales simultaneously: 1) the practice, procedures and performance of the individual architect, during the continuous design and construction processes and 2) the profession as an institution, relative to its context in post-Enlightenment culture.

V1: Father:

V2: Yes, we were talking about flamingos. The point is that the man who wrote Alice was thinking about the same things that we are. And he amused himself with little Alice by imagining a game of croquet that would be all a muddle, just an absolute muddle. So he said they should use flamingos as mallets because the flamingos would bend their necks so the player wouldn't know even whether his mallet would hit the ball or how it would hit the ball.

V2: Daughter:

V3: Anyhow the ball might walk away of its own accord because it was a hedgehog.

V2: That's right. So that it's all so muddled that nobody can tell at all what's going to happen...

V3: Did everything have to be alive so as to make a complete muddle?

V2: No--he could have made it a muddle by...no, I suppose you're right. That's interesting. Yes, it had to be that way. Wait a minute. It's curious but you're right. Because if he'd muddled things any other way, the players could have learned how to deal with the muddling details. I mean, suppose the croquet lawn was bumpy, or the balls were a funny shape, or the heads of the mallets just wobbly instead of being alive, then the people could still learn and the game would only be more difficult--it wouldn't be impossible. But once you bring live things into it, it becomes impossible. I wouldn't have expected that.

V3: Wouldn't you, Daddy? I would have. That seems natural to me.<sup>20</sup>



V1: A Zen saying:

V1, 2: "If you want to understand the

V1, 2, 3: teachings of water,

V1-4: just drink."

Yoko Ono: The human body is 98% water.

END

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory Bateson, "Metatalk: Why Do Things Have Outlines?" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Blake, "Magic Johnson," *New York Magazine* June 1996, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Aryeh Kaplan, *Waters of Eden. The Mystery of the Mikvah* (New York: National Conference of Synagogue Youth Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, 1982) p. 58.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Rabbi Mordechai Rabinowitz, *Daughter of Israel. Concerning the Purity Laws of Jewish Family Life* (New York: Shulsinger Bros., 1949) p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>See Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death, The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middleton Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959) for a thorough cultural development of Freud's theory.

<sup>8</sup>Wright, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>See Ann Bergren, "Gold's Gym" and Catherine Ingraham, "Initial Proprieties: Architecture and the Space of the Line" in *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992) pgs. 255-272.

<sup>10</sup>Stanley Keleman, *Somatic Reality* (Berkeley: Center Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup>Berman, p. 115

<sup>12</sup>Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*: (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 148.

<sup>13</sup>Sloterdijk, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup>Quintillian, *Institutio Oratorio*, XI, ii.17-22, quoted in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 37.

<sup>15</sup>American Institute of Architects, Statement of the Architect's Services, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition," in *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, edited by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987).

<sup>17</sup>Arrendt, Hannah, "The Labour of Our Body and Work of Our Hands", *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 90.

<sup>18</sup>Bateson, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup>Alberti, Leon Battista, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, transl. by Joseph Rykwert, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>20</sup>Bateson, p. 30-31.