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I, Amanda M. Faehnle, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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Between Margin and Center
Negotiations at the Boundary

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by

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ABSTRACT

Storage/Layering/Doubling: The construction of identity is a product of our memories of place.

Tropes/Shadows/Phantoms: The historical development of place has been derived from a single perspective.

Borders/Surrounds/Penetrations: The border exists between and defines margin and center.

Ruptures/Release/Openings: We must challenge this process of hegemonic place-making.
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* Essay titles have been taken from an essay by J. Yolande Daniels titled “Black Bodies, Black Space,” included in *White Papers, Black Marks*, a book edited by Lesley Naa Norle Lokko.
PREFACE

In my search to understand the foundations of my own identity, I have developed an interest in a series of inverse relationships: margin and center, black-ness and white-ness, individual and collective. I have mediated these relationships throughout my life and continue to negotiate the space of liminality inherent in their constructions. It is this in-between state that acts as the medium through which I view and understand the world, and by placing my experience of this space in the forefront of my practice, I not only give my own experience validity, but I can begin to create spatial experiences that speak to the myriad questions this liminal space undoubtedly inspires.

My document then has become a true reflection of this process — the collection, cataloging, and sorting of knowledge and experience — of the memories I maintain of my own life and the exploration into their relationship to place and the construction of my own identity. And most important, how this process of reflection is then explored on a collective level, where the experiences and memories of the people of cities, neighborhoods, and even streets begin to define a shared identity with regard to place.

In PART ONE. ESSAYS., I will lay out the premise of my thesis: that our identities are inherently tied to our memories of place. I will then explore the implication of this premise: the tendency to perpetuate the master narrative of a white patriarchal society in our approach to creating the built environment. I will then explore the confluence of this thesis and its implications — the ruptures — and the process through which we as architects should enter this progression from place to identity to interrupt, and essentially break, the cycle of hegemonic place making that exists in this country. Lastly, I will present my work, an example of this approach at the boundary between two neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York.
PART ONE. ESSAYS.
**STORAGE/LAYERING/DOUBLING**

STORAGE: how we collect, catalog, arrange, and sort; LAYERING: through the process of cutting, stacking, binding, we begin to witness the cumulative effect of the continuous and enigmatic way memories become powerful and overwhelming influences on the way we see the world; DOUBLING: the sources are never-ending, the stacks continue to build, some remain bound together, linked by some relationship, be it time or place, others exist as single moments, but all contain some part that fortifies and defines the whole.
“We all retain memories of place. They identify who we are as individuals.”1 The
construction of identity through our memories of place(s) is a process whereby the
recollections and images of our lived experiences continuously shift, slide, and convene,
providing the framework for our evolving identities. Our attachments to place can be
explained through a progression where place becomes our experience within it, translated
into emotion, preserved as memory, imagined as a series or collection of images and, for
the architect, used to make manifest our perceptions in the creation of place for others.
These perceptions of place begin to define who we are, our identities as they are tied
to the very notion of place and all that it can represent. And because we cannot define
or describe accurately another’s memories or perceptions of place, there is something
extremely individualized and personal about them — this is what allows them to be such
strong signifiers of identity.

Francis Downing, in her book Remembrance and the Design of Place, discusses the
connection between our memories of place and how we define ourselves. She argues
that this link is characterized by the qualities of memorable places rather than the
specific places themselves and seeks to discover the process through which we as
architects can use our own memories of place to inform the design and creation of
places for others without “resorting to nostalgia or megalomania.”2 To free ourselves
from these tendencies, we must be able to consider what bell hooks describes as a
“remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.”3 We must be open
and seek to explore the varied cultural identities and lived experiences present in our
communities.
PLACE
Place, in its most basic form, serves as the context for our physical existence. In *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan describes place as security, an object, tangibly constructed and given limits, barriers, definition. However, by labeling place solely as object, the definitive but intangible qualities of the specific social, cultural, and political conditions present risk being neglected. It is these conditions that serve to reinforce the notion of place as a cultural production. In *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*, David Glassberg reveals the fallacy of the way in which historians often view place as being interchangeable. This view denies the very real ability of place to hold meaning and to therefore foster those cultural, social, and political conditions that seem to define the character of a place, irrespective of geography. Glassberg goes on to acknowledge the importance of place, in the specific attachments people form in relation to it, as they can serve to help build our ideas of who we are and what the culture we belong to represents. Through the simple process of expressing concern and curiosity for our environments, for places, we identify what is important and holds meaning for us. The concern we express for specific places is how we relay our histories to others, and it is through this process that we connect the memories of our lives to the memorable qualities of place.

EXPERIENCE
From the moment we are born, we begin to take in our surroundings – the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes of the environments in which we live. Tuan describes these sensory experiences as “the various modes through which a person
knows and constructs a reality.” 4 Our experiences are the direct responses we have to these external sensory factors, but our emotional responses are very internal and quite specific to the individual. Both our experience of and emotional responses to place are strongly linked to our cultural and social contexts. These contexts lay the framework for how we interact with our environments and what emotional responses are available to us. As Craig Wilkins remarks, “we are born into preexisting systems of perception and understanding,” where “data [is] filtered through a framework . . . that is largely culturally defined.” It is most certainly our experiences of place that give us a way to sort the memories of our lives; to file, organize, arrange, store, and sometimes purge those memories in order to classify the conditions of their recall. The value we attach, or do not attach, to specific places is a direct result of the quality of our experience with place, a state Glassberg describes as our “[exploration] into the making of place consciousness,” or our “sense of place.” 5 Our “sense of place” is deeply affected by our own individual contexts and social identities. According to bell hooks, they “determine how we see what we see and how we make what we make.” 6

MEMORY
Our memories of place are largely of our homes. The home provides the foundation for the way in which we conceptualize, imagine and relate to space; it defines our social boundaries and, through a “topoanalysis . . . the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives,” allows and encourages the coming out of or emerging from those boundaries into the space of public life. 7 In The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard explains that it is “how we inhabit our vital space, in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, in a ‘corner of the world’,” that characterizes our attachment to place. 8 This attachment is essential to the process through which we construct our identities. By defining how it is we inhabit our “vital space”, our homes, we are better able to engage in conscious place making. Bachelard seems to hint at the universality of our home place attachments, not because we form identical memories of our homes, but because “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.” 9 Downing explains the need to “capture something significant, something that somehow touches us all and refers to our own basic experiences and identities,” something that I would argue involves the basic notions of our homes, in order to engage in the design and making of place. 10 It is important for one to recognize that the values we assign to the places of our public lives are rooted in those memories and daydreams that we have created of our home
lives — those “vital spaces” that have come to define so much of who we are.

I was in eighth grade art class when I was given the assignment to design my dream house. We were given a single sheet of white paper, an awkward 12 1/2 by 19 inches, on which to design and draw a home we could only inhabit in our imaginations. Many of my peers neglected to think practically about this assignment, making their homes up entirely with full size gymnasiums and bowling lanes. I decided to be more practical, and include all of the necessary spaces with a few elaborations. When I look today at the assignment I completed, I see a reflection of friend’s homes, of my experiences away from home — summer riding camp, tennis lessons, and the Y — the values of my upbringing, and my deepest desires to have what I did not. Only the first level of my house fit on the paper we were given in class. When I arrived home after school that afternoon, I drew the second floor on a piece of paper torn from my sketchbook. This was one of my biggest desires — to have a second floor.

bell hooks begins her essay “Black Vernacular” by describing the imagined places she created when assigned to design her dream home as a high school student in the segregated South. Our response to the assignment was quite similar. My dream house became the collected imaginings of the towering DUPLO® constructions and sprawling LEGO® floor plans I had created as a young child, all suited more to a family of ten than to my small clan of three. Swimming pool, manicured lawns, stables and riding rink, two-car garage, and window seats. Walk-in-closets, Jack-and-Jill bathroom, and master bedroom suite with attached sitting room for mom. Sunroom, library, entertainment room, and front porch with swing. These were the spaces I desired and dreamed of arriving home to when the bell rang at the end of the school day. Like bell hooks, “my house exposed and revealed my obsessions,” and preoccupations with what my reality was not.11

The act of designing a dream house, both by bell hooks and myself, showed that “irrespective of our location, irrespective of class, race, and gender, we were . . . capable of inventing, transforming, making space.”12 Though I clearly longed for something more, I made do with what I had. When I was nine, my mother helped me to measure and document the existing space of my bedroom and all the moveable items within — my bed, desk and chair, dresser, night table and rug. Every few months I would pull out the empty plan and construction paper rectangles of furniture and re-arrange,
Bedroom
furniture
Room paper
re-think – but always within the confines of the four walls of my room. Eventually, though, I began to draw upon the space of my room as if it were a blank canvas, manipulating its borders and boundaries to suit my desires for what it could be.

Keith Edmier, an artist from Illinois, is reconstructing, at full scale, the interior rooms of his childhood home. It is Edmier’s interest in the past, in remembering and recollecting what it is that has influenced who he has become, that inspired the project. He is using photographs from his childhood and a copy of the original catalog floor plan from the sub-division developer to supplement his memories and re-imagine the details of the space. Edmier’s exploration of his childhood home space motivated my own interests in the memories I have retained of my own childhood home. I believe that perhaps more so than what we remember of the physical environment is what we have internalized of our experiences within it, of how our memories of the space make us feel.

**IMAGE**

It is clear then that our connections to our environments, and specifically to place, are mediated through our memories. “Memory suspends our past experiences and allows us to draw them rationally to the forefront of our imaginations.”

Our memories are fragmented and divided and, in order to complete the image, we imagine the spaces in between the fragments, we fill in the voids and create a complete picture of the places that define our lives. This continual filling in of the blanks, the voids in between our remembered pasts, makes clear what Bachelard describes as the “psychological elasticity of an image,” — the process whereby an image changes and responds to our continual acquisition of new experiences and the formation of new memories.

Downing too acknowledges this phenomenon stating that, “memories do not represent a record of exact pictures in the mind — they are, instead, symbolic, because they present to us through mental imagery the life we have lived in physical space.”

The work of Emma Kay explores this elasticity by casting memory as subject, and in doing so illustrates a “world view that is simultaneously inaccurate and truthful.” Kay has recreated from memory various familiar texts such as the Bible, Shakespeare’s plays, the history of the world, and the world map. Rather than merely reproduce these texts, Kay narrates in her own words the content of these texts and in doing so, inspires a re-reading of our own worldviews and the subsequent questioning of
the accuracy of our own memories. There is also an initial impulse to compare her works to the actual texts, to legitimate them somehow within a concrete and knowable framework. In her work *The Bible from Memory*, Kay assumes an air of authority in the re-telling and successfully brings the work into the present. The text may not be historically accurate, but is authentic in that it is the visual image of her memory. "The missing parts of history, the warping of time and the lost centuries are as important to the work as the recollections themselves."17 She leaves these missing parts, these holes or voids between what is remembered and what has been forgotten available to the viewer to uncover. It is this opportunity that keeps us intrigued.

In *Right of Inspection*, a series of photographs by Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart concluded by a collection of text by Derrida, these missing parts between what can be seen, or what is shown in the photographs, and the narrative each individual viewer invents to fill in those voids, to construct an understandable story is explored. "All you have is a series of moves. A discrete seriality; everything is presented in squares or, in this case, geometric progression."18 There is a clear questioning of totality versus part — the totality of the narrative is made up of fragments, but it is not just the fragments shown that constitute the totality. It is the sum of our personal memories, individual perceptions, assumptions and inclinations. We bring all these parts together into a whole, however, I would feign from describing anything as a totality — nothing is ever quite whole. "There are visible blanks, charged with potential meaning . . .; but there are also the blanks composed of the empty moments between images, scenes, or squares."19 This is a true reflection of the way in which our memories work — there are always blanks in between those thoughts and memories, those images we have composed in out head to record certain moments spent in particular places, they are composed both of memory and of those holes, or moments between memories, that we have filled in, paved over and constructed in order to narrate or lives, to make sense of what it is we have remembered. In order to give meaning to those memories, they are put into context based on past memories and experiences, then ushered forth to the forefront of our minds as complete and poetic illustrations of who we are and what our life is made of.

IDENTITY
Kay’s series of works from memory act as “personal inventories,” providing us with a picture of the artist herself.20
Her inventories, or memories, begin to describe her values and beliefs; they offer insight into the social and cultural environment of which she is a part, illustrating the intimate relationship between memory and identity. Through the sharing of our personal memories we continuously inform the collective identities of our streets, neighborhoods, cities, states, and ultimately, our country. Just as our personal identities are not static, so too are those collective identities associated with particular places; they continually evolve, shift, and change. The entire process of identity formation — experience, translated into emotion, preserved as memory, imagined as image — is a never-ending process. Just as we continue to acquire new memories, our identities will continue to evolve according to Markus Reisenleitner, “always within, not outside representation . . . object[s] of constant negotiation.”

1 Francis Downing, *Remembrance and the Design of Place*, College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000, p. 3.
2 Ibid.
8 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 4.
9 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 5.
10 Downing, *Remembrance*, p. 3.
12 hooks, *Art on My Mind*, p. 146.
15 Downing, *Remembrance*, p. 11.
17 Kinley, *Abracadabra*, p. 54.
19 Ibid.
20 Kinley, *Abracadabra*, p. 54.
Your fictions become history
TROPES/SHADOWS/PHANTOMS

TROPES: those that have defined place for marginalized populations, SHADOWS: that cling to our daily interactions with others coloring them with hesitancy, judgements, assumptions, causing miscommunication and avoid confronting the omnipresence of their source, PHANTOMS: the ghosts and figments of our imaginations, our social constructions, specifically of race.
The historical development of place, of our existing built environment, has been largely derived from a single perspective— that of power, influence and wealth—and driven by “the predominant Western notion of space that underlies the organization and perception of design and posits that space, as a critical element in the construction of identity and property, is racialized.” Through this process of hegemonic place production there remains a lack of diverse socio-cultural influence by those existing outside of this privileged perspective. Those who do not exist within this dominant body, or more specifically, exist within the body of black-ness, have been relegated to specific spaces within a system that continues to perpetuate “the social production of inequality.” As this history has played out, two distinct spaces have been created— that of the center and that of the margin. These spatial definitions, while often possessing a very real physical dimension, have existed, to a greater extent, within the larger confines of a socio-cultural-political system that perpetuates the division.

In the previous essay, the relationship between our memories of place and how we construct our identities was explored. Through the process of assigning meaning to a space, with our memories as the primary directive, space becomes place. This theory brings with it a very real implication for our built environment, whereby “not acknowledging this connection [between our memories of place, the construction of identity, and the history of the production of space in this country] is to reproduce a body of work that is neocolonial insofar as it violently erases and destroys those subjugated knowledges that can only erupt, disrupt, and serve as acts of resistance if they are visible, remembered.” If our memories are therefore, a record of the spaces and places produced by the motivations of a select few— those who can afford to create— than are we destined to perpetuate their motivations? How do we, as architects, insert ourselves into this cycle of hegemonic place-making and break it? How does one re-claim or re-draw the heritage of black Americans within the existing landscape of our built environment?

In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks introduces the spaces of margin and center to illustrate the overlooked feminist perspective of women of color. As a woman of color, feminist, and cultural theorist, hooks uses her own life experiences to make understandable the constant negotiation many must make at that place in-between, where the space of margin and center meet. The location of their meeting is not necessarily a clear and definitive line, struck between two worlds, a political boundary of sorts, a dashed line with easily identifiable sides. It is often blurry, complicated and
confusing. The following is a poem written by Gloria Anzaldúa where she explores the intersections of the two cultures—Anglo and Mexican—she was raised in along the Texas-Mexico border. She speaks both of her own internal borders and the borders imposed upon her by others. Her poem beautifully illustrates the complexities of this intersection in the way in which she mingles Spanish with English, and the use of oppositional and contradictory descriptors of her position. Individuals often carry these oppositional spaces with them into the midst of the other—bell hooks speaks of carrying the space at the margins into that of the center as she negotiated the world of academia. And Gloria Anzaldúa describes the never-ending negotiation back and forth, between margin and center, Texas and Mexico, Anglo and Mexican she experienced in her everyday life. Engaging the space in-between is necessary to the development of a counter-hegemonic place-making practice.
To live in the Borderlands means you . . .

are neither hispana india negra española ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years, is no longer speaking to you, that mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the Anglo inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

Cuando vives en la fronterá people walk through you, the wind steals your voice, you’re a burra, buey, scapegoat, forerunner of a new race, half and half — both woman and man, neither — a new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to put chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas, speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent; be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle, the pull of the gun barrel, the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;

In the Borderlands you are the battleground where enemies are kin to each other; you are at home, a stranger, the border disputes have been settled the volley of shots have shattered the truce you are wounded, lost in action dead, fighting back;

To live in the Borderlands means the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart pound you pinch you roll you out smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras be a crossroads.

* hispanic, indian (Native American), black, spanish nor white, you are of mixed blood, mulatto
† split
‡ When you live in the borderlands
§ donkey, ox
** immigration officials
†† without borders
James Baldwin, in his collection of essays *Nobody Knows My Name*, argues that “a people deprived of political sovereignty finds it very nearly impossible to recreate for itself, the image of its past, this perpetual recreation being an absolute necessity for, if not, indeed, the definition of a living culture.” Baldwin himself left America for Europe in the late 1940’s as his frustration with segregation and discrimination reached their breaking point. Baldwin realized quickly that although he had separated himself from the physical space of American oppression, he could not separate his identity from his experiences in America. It is this realization that underlies the effects of continued oppression on the psyche of black America, whereby they were denied for over 100 years the opportunity to create for themselves a living culture. Consistently relegated to the edges of a white patriarchal society, black Americans were limited in the way in which they could negotiate the landscape of America’s history. Their continual subjugation reinforced the perception among black and white Americans, that blacks lacked the mental capacity, hence power, to appropriate, imagine, or create space within the framework of Euro-American spatial organizations.

Non-whites were, and still are, forced to navigate a built environment that lacks open-minded public space, “spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently — imagined in such a way that we can witness ourselves dreaming, moving forward and beyond the limits and confines of fixed locations.” Katherine McKittrick summarizes the dangers of this lack of open-minded public space where “the legacy of race, racism, and (in)formal segregation, spatialize difference, thus repeating and renewing the ways in which non-white racial bodies can, or cannot, occupy space.” Baldwin explains that the absence, in Europe, of the social paranoia that remained ever with him in America allowed him to feel as though he could finally “reach out to everyone, . . . [be] accessible to everyone and open to everything.” Baldwin’s European reawakening to himself, to the individual whom he knew himself to be through the lens of his own eyes, through the sum of all his experiences and the contexts of those experiences, is the living embodiment of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. The black American in Europe has “suddenly came out of a dark tunnel and found himself beneath the open sky.”

In *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, Michael D. Harris notes that “blacks were not imagined visually as full participants in society.” The emergence and proliferation of derogatory and stereotypical art and media imagery during the nineteenth century served to create new and reinforce existing racist notions of black
Americans, defining their particular place and accepted social role(s) within the stratified space of burgeoning American culture. Not only did this continued racialization of blacks manifest itself visually, but also politically, with the enactment of Jim Crow laws throughout the country. Placing sanctioned limits on the ways in which blacks could occupy public space forced black Americans to occupy a liminal position in American culture and did much to secure the dominant position of whites. “Race became the ideological medium through which people posed and apprehended basic questions of power and dominance, sovereignty and citizenship, justice and right.”

It is this liminal position that W.E.B. DuBois speaks of when he refers to the idea of a double consciousness. In The Souls of Black Folk he writes: “One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”

White Americans viewed black Americans through the guise of their own assumptions. It was through these assumptions that black Americans were defined by white culture as others and were forced to exist at the margins of society. But it is also what allowed them to negotiate the space at the center. In the art of the nineteenth century, we witness the conditions of their double consciousness – the ability to inhabit the center as the perpetual other when capitulating to the stereotypes held by Euro-America, but existing on the margins, remaining subordinate to whites and essentially “kept in their place.”

Dolores Hayden, author of The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History, asserts that “coming to terms with [this] ethnic history in the landscape requires engaging with such bitter experiences, as well as the indifference and denial surrounding them.” The work of Kara Walker can be read as a prime example of confrontation to this very bitterness and denial Hayden speaks of by illustrating, in cut paper silhouettes, the complicity of the black body in the horrific landscape of slave history. She re-constructs the narratives from a space of both black and white authorial production. By locating the black body at the center with the white body in the space of the slave narrative, she reclaims and redefines this space as accessible (or accessed) by the black body. Her criticism of the system of slavery itself seeks to include not just the slaves or the slave owners, but the relationships between the slaves and owners (and even their relationship to us presently), a relationship that defined the very gruesome institution of slavery.

Kara Walker was born in California and moved to a small town outside of Atlanta, Georgia
when she was thirteen. The town was haunted by its legacy as the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan. It was here that she seems to have encountered the reality of her racial identity. Her struggle with these issues can be read in her work where she begins to relay, or even to overlay, the experiences of her own life on top of the historic struggle and backdrop of American slavery. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw explains this methodology as an attempt by Walker to explore her own relationship to a haunted past, a search for her place within the deficient narratives of slavery. This attempt is clearly shown in the parallels one can draw between the place of Walker’s own struggle that was Georgia and those of the southern plantation shown in her life-sized silhouettes. Walker sources both her own history and that of American slavery and “re-members it in a way that calls forth the ghosts from our collective psyche,” as well as her own.15 Her own experiences then illustrate the present day playing out of a horrific past. Her self-portrait, \textit{Cut} is a manifestation of this search for her place both within her work and within the larger artistic community, and the often conflicted space of their intersection.

Like Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman has also placed her own body into the still, photographic narratives that she has imagined. The notion of exploring identity within a specific context — Walker chose the Civil War era, while Sherman sources various postwar popular culture imagery — makes evident the connections between identity and space. In her work the \textit{Untitled Film Stills} (1977-1980) series, Sherman creates self-portraits of fictional characters in the contexts appropriate to their narratives. She comments that “identity is both inherent and formed.”16 One could argue the same in regard to the production of space. According to Henri Lefebvre, space is constructed by social forces, the political, economic, and cultural productions of our society. He “argues that every society in history has shaped a distinctive social space that meets its intertwined requirements for encouraging production and social reproduction.”17 But what can be said about those members of society who have been historically unable to be a part of this process of shaping and developing the built environment by virtue of their perpetual subjugation and existence at the margin?
In April of 1971, individuals from five Los Angeles area neighborhoods were asked, for a report published by the Los Angeles Planning Department to evaluate and propose corrections to the visual environment of the city, to draw a mental map of the city. The results reflect the institutionalized limits on who can experience what in terms of space and place and raise issues of access and equity in how individuals are able to inhabit public space. Those maps made by residents of Westwood, a wealthy neighborhood nestled between Beverly Hills and Bel Air, showed most of the city including geographical features, major transportation routes, and points of interest. A similarly detailed map was made by residents of Northridge, an upper-middle class neighborhood north of Westwood in the San Fernando Valley. The largest differences occurred between the
maps of the residents from Westwood and Northridge and those from Avalon and Boyle Heights. The maps created by the residents of Avalon, a predominantly black community in south central L.A., illustrated a more limited view of the city. The major streets within the neighborhood and in the immediately surrounding neighborhoods are documented, as well as several points of interest and the location of a few well-known neighborhoods. The maps compiled by the residents of Boyle Heights, a low-income Mexican-American neighborhood at the eastern edge of the city, reflected the most severely limited views of the city. This collection of information makes clear the notion that one’s “place” in society literally does affect their experience of place. Access to and mobility within space afford an increased amount of control over one’s surroundings.
9 Ibid.
13 Harris, *Colored Pictures*, p. 64.
BORDERS/SURROUNDS/PENETRATIONS

BORDERS: that define margin and center, the space in-between and at the edge; SURROUNDS: separate and hold back, or hold in and encompass, our corner of the world from what lies beyond; PENETRATIONS: attempt to open up, to cut through, to let light filter in, air through, and people pass to recover a space of radical openness.
The urban environment is a series or collection of layers — shifting borders, continuous grids, and the perpetual building up of and tearing down of what has been constructed. These layers have been deposited over time, creating a history of places and identities physically rooted in the existing fabric of the urban landscape. As Ronald Lee Fleming writes in *The Art of Placemaking*, “place is not merely what was there, but also the interaction of what is there and what happened there.” In considering the problem — of how to develop a counter-hegemonic place-making methodology, Fleming’s statement encourages one to consider how it is that one can retain and respect this existing, living urban record, or legacy, in the process of re-building in order to create an open-minded public space, one which is “no longer passive, no longer fixed, no longer undialectical.” Is it possible to move forward while retaining an existing urban infrastructure that speaks to a closed process of creation and imagination?

THE BORDER
A border can be defined as the meeting of two distinct places — The United States and Mexico, New York and New Jersey, interior and exterior, inside and outside. There are many types of boundaries and borders and they manifest themselves both tangibly and intangibly. The borders we create — geographic, political, social, cultural, economic, and racial — define and separate, enclose and surround, often defining, whether actively or passively, a sense of place. It is the border that exists between and defines the existence of margin and center, the resultant spaces created through the perpetuation of a hegemonic place-making system. And so it is this condition that I have chosen to address — the space laying between Bedford-Stuyvesant and Clinton Hill in Brooklyn, New York — in order to begin generating practical and actionable ideas in the development of this methodology.

In approaching this border site, I hope to address three primary goals for both the site and for this investigation:

1. Endeavor to link the two neighborhoods — Bedford Stuyvesant and Clinton Hill — together; to bridge a political, economic, social, and cultural divide without sacrificing the unique individual character of the individual neighborhoods.
2. Provide space for three purposes: social exchange and interaction, play, and passive enjoyment, contemplation and rest.
3. Begin to define a methodology for working in order to break a hegemonic place-making cycle.
The existing framework of these two neighborhoods and the nature of the spatial conditions at their meeting is a true reflection of the natural ebb and flow of historical movements and shifts in the urban landscape. The following are excerpts from *Brownstoner: Brooklyn Inside and Out*, a real estate blog, in regard to a newly renovated property at 411 Classon Avenue in November of 2007:

November 26, 2007
House of the Day: 411 Classon Avenue

We'll say this for 411 Classon Avenue—it's a better flip job than you generally see in the area. The four-story brownstone between Lexington and Greene on the Bed Stuy side of Classon changed hands two years ago for $890,000. Given the time that's elapsed and the fact that the kitchens, floors and back yard all look redone, the current asking price of $1,245,000 doesn't sound crazy. Unfortunately, that's not how sales prices are ultimately determined. We suspect that the supply and demand curves may intersect a good bit below this price. After all, while blocks on either side of it keep getting nicer and it has some nice houses, it's hard to see how Classon Avenue as a whole ever really catches up. Agree?

*Looks like a nice house on a sketchy block.*
Posted by: sam at November 26, 2007 1:39 PM

*this really isn't bed stuy either. it needs a name!*
Posted by: guest at November 26, 2007 1:43 PM

*Increasingly, I am hearing Franklin given as the eastern boundary of Clinton Hill.*
Posted by: guest at November 26, 2007 1:48 PM

*it might be interesting for bed stuy to start at bedford.*
Posted by: guest at November 26, 2007 1:53 PM

& end at stuyvesant. & everything else has to sort itself out. the neighborhood already lends itself to this--well except the nice blocks beyond stuyvesant. there is both a variety (light industry) and sameness (type of brownstones) between grand & bedford actually.
Posted by: guest at November 26, 2007 2:00 PM

---from all those people who don't want to be in the Stuy. The border is Classon. East of Classon, you are in the Stuy.
As for the house ---nice job. I think $1.2 might be a little tough in that stretch of Bed Stuy. You can barely get that price for the houses surrounding the heights.
Posted by: guest at November 26, 2007 2:02 PM
This blog discussion makes clear the contentious nature of the border between Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant. Through the creation of what I will henceforth refer to as a PLAYSCAPE, the layering of a new conceptual framework on top of and woven through the existing physical infrastructure of this urban and largely residential site, this project will seek to encompass and nurture not only public memory of the past, but might allude to the creation of a future public memory, or the beginning of a new public identity. It is this new framework that will be able “to support urban residents’ demands for a far more inclusive ‘cultural citizenship.’”

In order to ground this program within the theoretical framework I’ve proposed, we must accept that the experiences and landscapes of our youths and our memories of them, act as the primary defining quality of our identities. “Just as memory can nourish place, so imagination can reinvigorate it and extend its resonance. The designer needs to leave pegs for the imagination to hang on so that each generation can regenerate and reinterpret the meaning for their own time.” In order to accomplish this, the playscape will be approached from a desire to, as bell hooks describes it, create an “open-minded” public space where all are able to form their own unique ideas through their own experiences, providing an open ended space for interaction, exchange, and play, less prescribed and highly user-defined and imagined. Everyone should be able to ask themselves, “What is this?” and “What can I do here?”.

THE PLAYGROUND
Aldo van Eyck began designing playgrounds in 1947 for local governments in the Netherlands, immediately following the end of World War II. There was a new desire to create a “new, playful and informal society.” When one thinks of a traditional city, they might consider the cars, the traffic, the streets and buildings, but it was the people who were often overlooked – those for whom the city was their daily stage. In order to reinvigorate the existing urban framework, van Eyck took advantage of the left over and in-between spaces of the city, often neglected and left to become neighborhood
trash heaps. His playground designs were deceiving simple, but incredibly successful at allowing both children and adults to re-imagine for themselves what they wished public space to be. His structures allowed the people of the city to become the catalyst for the activation of these voids, rather than relying solely on a physical architecture.

Aldo used simple materials — concrete, sand, and steel — to sculpt and create place within the space of the void. This somewhat ‘hands-off’ approach was his way of rebelling against the often presumptive notions about design during the post war period — about the “grandiose, top-down, authoritative systems” design was growing out of.\(^6\) Aldo rejected the idea of standardization within the city structure or urban fabric — the city grid, for example — in favor of a more sensitive use of existing interstitial spaces to create unique places for play — this according to a more polycentric view of the city. He fought against the homogenization of modernism as the “new anonymous, sterile, technocratic, vacuous alternative space,” with a desire to maintain and create “place,” that which could encapsulate the identity of a specific neighborhood or community.\(^7\) His work served to enliven dead, empty spaces with the laughter and shouts of children — re-invigorating and thus re-defining the social life of the urban neighborhoods he contributed his creativity, sensitivity and insight to.

**THE LANDSCAPE**

The concept of insertion, of acknowledging and embracing the interaction between the existing built environment and what we re-imagine for this environment, “engages a space with its surroundings, such that it becomes part of an urban continuum, but also initiates a break in that continuum.”\(^8\) The operation of insertion is inherently a reaction against modernist notions of what public space should be. The process of insertion looks to the existing physical infrastructure’s edges to define its available spaces, and “depends on activating [these] boundaries to construct identity.”\(^9\) Insertion also tends to ignore any demand for historical contextualization whereby the aesthetic of the existing framework be, in essence, reproduced in the new intervention.

The proposed new Shanghai Yang Pu University Hub, otherwise known as the Shanghai Carpet, utilizes a long linear space existing between a series of new high-rise campus buildings to create a new pedestrian street or plaza.
Tom Leader Studio with Michael Duncan from SOM sought to represent the “contrasts and collisions between state-of-the-art digital media and the humble materials of daily life,” in the collaged landscape of this ‘left-over’ site. The site was sunken in order to expose a wealth of existing material that could be re-purposed in the new landscape, creating the carpet for which the project has become known. The project has been described as a kind of ground relief, where the intermingling of past and present – the layering of a new framework over an existing – provides a pedestrian friendly public space necessary for circulation and providing the occasion for rest and relaxation, all while creating a sense of place and identity within a larger campus environment.

3 Ibid.
6 Liane Lefaivre, “Space, Place and Play: or the interstitial/cybernetic/polycentric urban model underlying Aldo van Eyck’s quasi-unknown but, nevertheless, myriad postwar Amsterdam playgrounds,” Aldo van Eyck: the Playground and the City, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2002, p. 27.
7 Lefaivre, “Space, Place and Play,” Aldo van Eyck, p. 25.
9 Ibid.
10 Tom Leader Studio, www.tomleader.comh
RUPTURES/RELEASE/OPENINGS

RUPTURES: the rifts, separations, and divides that have been carved into the landscape by the sharp edge of America’s history; RELEASE: as we approach the past and layer upon it a new framework; OPENINGS: letting in, making public, allowing entry into a landscape re-drawn, re-framed, and re-created — an open-minded public space.
MAPPING: the breaking down of the site immediately surrounding Classon Avenue into its various components, those that constitute the existing urban infrastructure. The following series of maps seek to uncover, or at least begin to uncover, those physically manifested borders and boundaries that exist presently at the site along Classon Avenue. How have these and other elements shifted over time and what patterns might they uncover? Maps of building usage, street (grid) patterns, and unoccupied spaces were generated and then used to identify a series of existing social hubs along Classon Avenue that offered the opportunity for re-invigoration through the creation of a re-imagined public space that might serve to bring people together along the border.
vacant lots

vacant lot stitch

recreation stitch

recreation
THE STITCH: the connection of all existing voids (vacant lots) and recreational spaces (parks and playgrounds) within a block of Classon Avenue. These two stitches are overlaid and, taken together, define the extents of a new public space.
SITE STRATEGIES:

* STREET PARK
* SHARED STREET
* STREET ISLANDS

1. TYPICAL STREET → SEPARATION OF STREET
   (STREET AS BORDER) OR
   STREET SEPARATION OF TRAFFIC

2. SHARED STREET (NO CURB) → STILL ALLOWS FOR CARS
   NO SIGNS OR TRAFFIC SIGNALS - FREE CIRC.

3. SIDEWALK PLAZA → COMBINATION 1/4
   SEPARATION OF TRAFFIC
   STREET-HAND (PENINSULA)
   1-LANE NO PARKING
   BUT MORE SPACE GIVEN TO PEDESTRIAN
   LESS EMPHASIS ON ST.
   NO BORDER

4. STREET PARK → PEDESTRIAN FOCUSED
SHIFTING LANDSCAPE: the sliding back and forth and constant exchange of space from one landscape to another traveling perpendicular to Classon Avenue. The landscape is comprised of eight, five-foot strips with surfaces of grass, plantings, water, sand, and concrete planks, varying in material and elevation from both east to west, along Fulton Street, and north to south, between building facades.
PART TWO. APPENDIX.
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New York City Department of City Planning, Community District Profiles, December 2006,  


ILLUSTRATIONS

Essay 1. Storage/Layering/Doubling

Page 3  paper stacks
       author

Page 5-6  progression text on notecards
          assembled by author with images from (left to right):
          1 - paper stack
              author
          2 - emoticon illustration
          3 - woods
              source unknown
          4 - african museum of art, new york city
              “Cross Cultural Journey,” Architecture, July 1993, p. 67, paul
              warchol

Page 7-8  progression from space/place to identity, index cards on kitchen wall
          by author

Page 9   timeline of memory formation
        author

Page 11  topoanlysis, a mapping of vital spaces
        author

Page 13  envelope, front
        author

Page 14  bedroom furniture and measured room
        author with assistance by her mother

Page 15  re-imagined bedroom
        author

Page 16  envelope, back
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Page 18  the bible from memory, 1997
        emma kay
re-building of home
assembled by author with images from (left to right):
1 - family photographs from the house at Rose Lane
   members of the fort family
2 - keith edmier in his full-size model of his childhood home under
c   construction
   “À la Recherche du Ranch Perdu,” The New York Times T
   Magazine, October 7, 2007, kevin cooley

the bible from memory, 1997
emma kay
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Page 29  stirrup branch plantation, bishopville, south carolina on the 75th birthday of capt. james rembert, june 8, 1857 (front view of house shows capt. rembert and family; rear view of house shows slave families)  
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the visual environment of los angeles, los angeles department of city planning, p. 9-11
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1 - google earth

Page 43  us-mexico border
http://www.spaceandculture.org/2006/06/02/virtual-border-patrol/

Page 45  playground
aldo van eyck
http://playgrounddesigns.blogspot.com/2008/03/playgrounds-of-aldo-van-eyck-amsterdam.html

Page 47  shanghai carpet
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tomleader.com
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Page 51  stitching at the border, cardboard and string
author

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author

Page 54  site mapping — institutional, mixed use, east/west streets (top to bottom)
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Page 55  site mapping — vacant lots, vacant stitch, recreation stitch, recreation (top to bottom)
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Page 56  site stitch overlay with park identifications
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Page 62  section and fulton street park plan
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