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Myth, Logic, and the Monster

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Abstract

How do humans mediate themselves with the natural world? This is the unexplainable phenomenon which architecture seeks to answer. Humans appeal to both myth and logic in a built discourse, architecture. There are objects that challenge this discourse as monsters, the tree house being one. These are creatures undermining normal expectations by suggesting new myth and new logic. Determining a method for analyzing myth will be developed from the mythologists, Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. The creation of monstrous collages will be explored from the perspective of the Surrealist artists, the self-proclaimed “myth makers.” Finally, a site will become a subject of this discourse in an experiment.

The myth I would hope to create would be an evolving building, constantly changing, and overlapping. The logic would be that if people are engaged in the form of their environment, that that environment would have social value and hence permanence.
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PART I: ENCOUNTERING THE TREEHOUSE
It is a Sunday afternoon in Fall. I am driving down a country road I know very well. It bends sharply to the right, almost ninety degrees, but I drive straight onto an unseen single-lane road, Beehive Lane. I pass my grandparents’ house on the left, but continue on - the blacktop gives way to gravel which gives way to two brown ruts in the grass. There is an open gate with barbed wire coiled around the top. The car slows to a gentle crawl as it passes this threshold onto the farm, my uncle’s farm. There is a field on the right filled with flowers no longer in bloom while a wall of woods creates an alley from the left side – a second stand of trees encloses the far side of the field.

The tree house first appears as a shanty tower above the far canopy with a nest of old boards on the top. This nest is Uncle Horace’s rendition of the crown of thorns, and the tower houses bells made of old metal canisters. It soon fills the whole field of vision as a massive grey undulating structure through which the trees poke their limbs seeking sun. They are shedding bright leaves, and the tree house will soon be exposed for the winter approach. There are already five cars parked in front, which have discharged passengers with picnics and small children. The license plates show several states.

I exit the car, and stand for a moment looking at the front. It reminds me of something, maybe an old southern house – wrap-a-round porches denote layer after layer of floors. “Nine floors,” I have heard though not counted. It is worn. The wood is the dark grey of all the old sheds and barns that have been absorbed into its construction. There is a lot of stuff waiting – old washers, sinks, windows, tires, boards – waiting for Uncle Horace to see the potential and build them into something. It is sobering because all of it cannot find a
place, yet so much has. How can any ever be thrown out? People bring Uncle Horace their junk; I think it makes them feel good not to throw it out. He uses some of it, but a lot is just waiting.

I always go to the same part of the tree house. I walk up the staircase that wraps around the largest and first tree, a living Oak. The stairs tilt slightly as they spiral upwards giving me a slight sense of vertigo, which I combat by running my fingers along the bark of the tree. The stair opens onto a floor, a tilted platform suspended about 50 feet up in the tree canopy. I duck under the thick branch of the tree, and begin to look for a way to enter the chapel. I probably go a different way every time, but eventually I find it. It is hard to miss because it occupies a three-storey space in the middle of the tree house. Balconies now wrap the inside, undulating around trees like they did on the outside. It is enclosed with a roof of translucent plastic board that glows far above. A basketball hoop occupies a wall opposite a dead tree shaped like a cross. Next to the cross is the speaker’s podium; Uncle Horace found a tree root whose top he carved to look like an open book. People have gotten married in this place by my Uncle. He became an official minister through some mail-in thing. People also have lived there. There is an apartment where Terry used to live; he passed away in the tree house, and, then, no one lived there. A while later, an American Indian who had been living out of his old Chevy van with his teacup Chihuahua came to the farm. Uncle Horace built him a teepee because he didn’t like living in houses. His dog bit my hand when I tried to pet it. I meet a woman who tells me about “a crazy man” who was sitting in a rocking chair yelling at a broken television set the last time she was there. I am not surprised. Most people just pass through the tree house – they sometimes
write bad things, but mostly they just mark it with their names and a date, or they leave no mark at all. I don’t mark it, but I always read what they write.

This tree house challenges my understanding of architecture. It is both awesome and threatening – the qualities of a monster. It undermines what I see as normal begging the questions of what could exist were our expectations not there, or were we at liberty to manipulate them. In pursuit of answers, the theoretical essay of this thesis will explore our myths, our logics, the art of manipulating the normal (collage), and our monsters.
PART II: MYTH, LOGIC, AND THE MONSTER
Definitions:

Architecture  the practice of designing the built environment with regards for site-specific aesthetic, social, economic, and environmental purposes

Logic  1. (Plato) “falsifiable speech.”
2. the “science of inference.” There are two types of logic: deductive logic and inductive logic. Deductive logic introduces a set of premises. If the premises are true, then following the strict rules of logic, the conclusion is true. With inductive logic, if the premises are true, then the conclusion may be either true or false.

Monster  the familiar other; a hybrid creation of normal parts

Myth  1. (Plato) “unfalsifiable speech”
2. a world view conveyed through traditional story, art, or architecture. Myths usually relate to the religion and rituals of the society that created them.
3. “Sigmund Freud viewed myth as an expression of repressed ideas.” Carl Gustav Jung expanded this into his theory of the “collective unconscious.”

References:
1 Luc Brisson, Plato the Myth Maker, 89-90
4 Luc Brisson, Plato the Myth Maker, 89-90
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sign</td>
<td>a combination of signified and signifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>the study of signs within a system, and how they can be reordered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semantic</td>
<td>pertaining to the meaning or multiple meanings of a word</td>
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2.1 Mythos and Logos

Mythos (μῦθος in ancient Greek) generally meant “something one says.”6 The meanings of logos and mythos appear synonymously prior to Plato. He set them at odds, mythos meaning “unfalsifiable speech” while logos was “falsifiable speech.” The assimilation of the two terms encompasses “discourse.” Separately, mythos is the realm of story and logos is the realm of argument.7

Mythos and Logos become polar methods of expressing the unexplainable. Myth, the story, derives understanding from cultural systems, religion, and gods for what is beyond comprehension. The world views of a culture become interpreted into literature, art, and architecture. These recordings rely on the signs and the systems of their constituent culture to dilute the phenomena of existence into a relatable construct. Logic, the argument, bases new understanding on that which is understood. Logic establishes the known premises, and then seeks to find answers for that which is unknown using the known.

How do humans mediate themselves with the natural world? This is the unexplainable phenomenon which architecture seeks to answer. Humans appeal to both myth and logic in a built discourse, architecture. There are objects that challenge this discourse as monsters, the tree house being one. These are creatures undermining normal suggesting new myth and new logic. Determining a method for analyzing myth will be developed from the mythologists, Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. The creation monstrous

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6 Gerard Naddaf, Introduction to Plato the Myth Maker, Luc Brisson vii
7 Luc Brisson, Plato the Myth Maker, 89-90

objects will be explored from the perspective of the Surrealist artists, the self-proclaimed “myth makers.” Finally, a site will become a subject of this discourse in an experiment.
2.2 Mythos – Signs and Systems

“[M]yth is speech stolen and restored. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place. It is the brief act of larceny, this moment taken for surreptitious faking, which gives mythical speech it benumbed look.”

Language is comprised of signs which society commonly recognizes. Roland Barthes identifies two components to every sign, the signified and the signifier. “House,” as a word, is a signifier. House, as an object of our experience, is the signified. Together the word and the object comprise a sign that can be used in language. Barthes next notes that myth operates within a remote level where that sign becomes yet another signifier. “House” as a concept becomes a signifier, and on this level, the signified could be the nuclear family. Consider “the House of Parliament” or “the House of Representatives” these names perform a mythical operation. They associate government with the inner sanctum of family.

The experiences from which people derive meanings for words, “empty signifiers” may take two forms - semantic or syntactic. The semantic meaning

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8 Roland Barthes, Myth Today
9 Roland Barthes, Myth Today
compiles every meaning that has ever been given to a word. “House” has meant many things from a house of prostitution to a house of lords to a house as a zodiac sign. All of these meanings and their historical connections to each other comprise the semantic meaning of the word “house.”

The syntactic meaning refers to the word within its context. Le Corbusier famously said “a house is a machine for living in.” This statement offered a new meaning to house by likening it to a machine - it implied efficiency, streamlined production, and readable accessibility to the general public. This sentence imbues house with purpose and aesthetic in a realm outside of any previous semantic meaning.

A myth exploits a common perception whether semantic or syntactic through a sign which is legible beyond the literal meaning in the realm of myth.

Barthes suggests a three part method of analyzing the myth:

1) Look at the empty signifier, and analyze it. Record its form.
2) Look at the full signifier distinguishing the form from the signification. Undoing the myth.
3) Look at the two empty/full signifier putting the myth back together as both.10

Roland Barthe’s method of analyzing the myth intends to preserve the myth in its intact form. If either the empty signifier or the full signifier were left alone, 10 Roland Barthes, Myth Today
the myth would become unraveled. Therefore, if we look at this image of a house, first, it is noted that it is a wooden A-frame house, built on a foundation of stones. It has two stories, and the openings are bisymmetrically located on the facade. Second, this image is signifier of a family dwelling. A simple home that shelters the domestic activities of related individuals. The most private and most intimate structure of society. Thirdly, how does this structure signify those things. Why is this form legible as having that meaning? This form is capable of operating as a sign - the sign is “house.”

Alternatively, the anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, researched mythology with the premise that myths have an underlying structure. This structure could be determined through a series of analytical questions. He offers an example of two versions of the same myth between the Heiltsuk and Kwakiutl Indians of the Northern Pacific. These cultures use two similar myths about how a young child was captured by an ogress and by some method escapes. The outcome, the potlatch, results when the wealth of the ogress is divided among the villagers. That wealth and the method of escape used by the child were different in the two versions of the story. The symbols of the different constituent societies were substituted into the same narrative. He poses three questions for analyzing this myth:

1) Looking at the sequence of characters, which parts are reversible or irreversible?
2) Which characters appear with which other characters? What is interchangeable?

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9. often House A family line including ancestors and descendants, especially a royal or noble family: the House of Orange.
10. a. One of the 12 parts into which the heavens are divided in astrology.
    b. The sign of the zodiac indicating the seat or station of a planet in the heavens. Also called mansion.
11. House music.

v. (houz) housed, hous·ing, hous·es
v. tr.
1. To provide living quarters for; lodge: The cottage housed ten students.
2. To shelter, keep, or store in or as if in a house: a library housing rare books.
3. To contain; harbor.
4. To fit into a socket or mortise.
5. Nautical To secure or stow safely.

v. intr.
1. To reside; dwell.
2. To take shelter.

[Middle English hous, from Old English hūs.]


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11 Claude Levi-Strauss, The View from Afar, 105 - 108
3) Compare the sequence of the myth or “thought ritual” to the sequence of actual rituals.\textsuperscript{12}

Applying this analytical model to architecture, we look for repetitive forms and sequential forms from which we can decipher underlying ordering schemes or “structures.” We could look again at a house from the perspective of the American house, and contrast it to the Japanese house. First, we find analogous forms - a threshold into an American house is the front door, but in a traditional Japanese house it begins when someone enters the garden gate. Between the two cultures there is the same inherent structure of a threshold between the private realm of the family versus the public realm of the community, yet the event “entrance” occurs at a different moment in the house. Second, Levi-Strauss would question if the event “entrance” could be rearranged. Would it be possible to enter after taking tea? No. There is a structure, and it is consistent between cultures within a common understanding of house. Would it be possible to enter after being greeted? Maybe. This event sequence could probably be reversed. The final analysis Levi-Strauss would conduct would be to look at the rituals surrounding house. The Japanese house relies on an understanding of religious practices. In particular, the Shinto religion which finds deities that reside in natural objects. The connection between the dwelling and the natural environment is very important in the traditional Japanese house, and the assimilation of the garden space as the house space seems analogous to the religious beliefs of its fabricators.

From this series of questions, the Levi-Strauss method produces a very different

understanding of the mythical meaning of “house” than does Roland Barthes. Levi-Strauss’s argument would suggest that from culture to culture there exists some underlying structure that is the essential form of “house.” By analyzing between cultures, this true form emerges. Roland Barthes’s intention is to preserve the myth within the analysis of it. His analytic method reproduces the myth unjoined and then rejoined. Synthesizing the two methods into a usable formula for architectural analysis, the following criteria of analysis are proposed for capturing and communicating myth and universal structures within architecture:

1) Identify signs being used on the level of myth
   a. identify empty signifier
   b. identify full signifier
   c. identify sign
2) Look for patterns and sequences
   a. what is reversible, interchangeable
3) Compare to historical uses, cross-cultural uses, rituals of habitation

Three myths of architecture, operating at various points in history, utilize the terminology and systems of thought from other subjects. These borrowed pieces become interpreted in the medium of architecture as mythologies. In the simplest form, they are metaphors, but have mythical implications about the potential of architecture. They will be examined and culled for potential fragments to incorporate in future analytical work: architecture as body, architecture as machine, and architecture as organism within an ecosystem.
Myth 1: Architecture as Body

There are multiple metaphors to be found within this myth. Each of these contribute to a larger understanding of the myth. We will consider architecture as a functional extension of the body and as an aesthetic derivative of the body, but there are other manifestations of this myth in jointing and relationships between parts.

Architecture begins with a need for shelter. Our body is designed to mediate itself with the natural world, but it cannot always do this easily or at all, in some conditions. Our architecture performs this mediation when our bodies are unable. We expect it to be impervious to rain, insulate us from cold, protect us from wild animals, and to create comfortable environments within an unpredictable natural environment. The pattern, the body, is admired for its efficient use of materials and the formal complexity necessary for the systems working within it. Its functions are copied often along with physiological terminologies to describe them (skin, circulation, etc.). Charles Jencks describes architecture as a giant “prosthesis” that surrounds the body. He sees humans as “cyborgs” in our dependence on architectural prosthetics. He would further
suggest that the ideal prosthetic is capable of responding to its user’s input.\textsuperscript{13} What began with shelter has become a bodily extension.

Beyond a functional architectural body, the aesthetics of body are communicated in architecture. The proportions of the body are translated into the proportions of a Greek column or through use of the Modular of Le Corbusier. Spatial relationships of the body and the building are studied through “ergonomics” which quantifies bodily dimensions into responsive building forms. That which is aesthetic and that which is functional relative to the body become the formal manifestation of the architecture of the body.

Marco Frascari laments current ways in which “architectural bodies” are assembled with misunderstanding of the inherent body languages which they speak: “These are miserable figures without proper body images. These patched-together atrocities are lifeless forms bringing together fragmentary body parts in a kind of anatomical Lego game.”\textsuperscript{14} Like Levi-Strauss saw for myths, Frascari sees an underlying structure or language to which the ornamentation of architecture refers, and this language references the corporeal. Disregarding the language, yields “pathetic expressions as Mary Shelley’s ogre”\textsuperscript{15} while beauty is achieved through a respectful and understood assemblage.

It is in this understood ability to manipulate and pervert the language of not only this myth, but also other subsequent architectural mythologies that the monstrous potential of our common architectural mythologies can be found.

\textsuperscript{13} Charles Jencks, \textit{New Paradigm in Architecture}, 223
\textsuperscript{14} Marco Frascari, \textit{A Tradition of Architectural Figures: A Search for Vita Beata}, \textit{Body and Building}, 259
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
We will extend this ability to also include accepted logical arguments for architecture as well. Unlike Frascari, I see these deviations as a potential and not necessarily the result of a disastrous misunderstanding.


Myth 2: Architecture as Machine

Le Corbusier said, “the house is a machine for living in.” The architecture of modernism idealized the beauty and efficiency of engineered objects. Bridges, steamships, airplanes, and, ultimately, automobiles became inspiration to the architect. They found in these objects that utilitarian requirements made artistry obsolete. The engineer used the minimum amount of steel required to span the river, and used those best qualities of steel (tension) in tandem with the best qualities of concrete (compression). Yet, the ultimate form of the bridge was admirable. It was beautiful. The natural forces acting on the bridge when considered with the natural properties of the steel and concrete created a perfect form, the expressive form, of the bridge. In the automobile industry, Henry Ford created, what he considered, a most appealing form, the Model T, and mass produced it.16 Walter Gropius, observed this and wrote,

“Standardization is not an impediment to the development of civilization, but, on the contrary one of its immediate prerequisites. A standard may be defined as that simplified practical exemplar of anything in general use which embodies a fusion of the best of its anterior forms - a fusion preceded by the elimination of the personal content of their designers and all otherwise ungeneric or non-


image 2.2.3 Tatlin’s Monument to the Third International
image available online <http://newsfeed.kosmograd.com/kosmograd/2008/04/juxtaposed-tatl.html>
essential features.”

The modern architects compared the architecture they knew to these objects of engineering, and found many excesses. Buildings were not engineered efficiently. Stone and concrete was used, not for its strength, but for its aesthetic. Buildings were ornamented with sculpture and plaster molding, while they saw the engineering beneath it as the potential ornament. Out of these observations and desires came the international style - a style that eliminated excesses and could be found in South America, China, India, or France. It attempted to deny previous cultural markings, and express the tectonic qualities of construction.

The myth that underlies the analogy of architecture as machine is that there is a natural form. There is a perfectly utilitarian, engineered form that can be exploited. It is the only and best answer to any problem of architecture. This is paired with the formal manifestation of the International Style to create a complete visual myth.

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17 Quoted in Ford, Edward R. *Introduction: Details of Modern Architecture, Vol. 2*
Myth 3: Architecture as Organism within Ecosystem

Reacting to the sameness of the globalization of architecture, McDonough and Braungart in their book, Cradle to Cradle, call out for “diversity.” They note that an ecological system with no diversity is more vulnerable than one comprised of many different species. They posit that architecture must have diversity in order for the system to be healthy. Using universal parts creates universal problems; forests are clear cut to harvest the perfect lumber to create identical houses in all parts of the world, “monstrous” products such as carpet will never entirely decompose making all the embodied materials trash. The ease of throwing things away wins over the complications of repurposing them. A building, thrown away after twenty years of service, resides forever in a landfill. The parts are unsalvageable, and the embodied energy is lost.

The architecture that McDonough and Braungart idealize is one which becomes a vital member of an ecosystem. It would feed on the waste of other organisms, and its own waste would become the fuel of another. It would exist harmoniously with nature, patterning the relationship of organisms coexisting. Each part of this system would be a vital member to the whole. “Waste equals
"Food" is the elusive potential of this architecture, the mythical implications.

We imagine the formal expression of this mythology as buildings which are grown, and actually are organisms within our natural system. We imagine that, while given a genetic code, the circumstances into which this architecture is produced could generate very different formal arrangements. The complexity of natural patterns overlaid onto specific conditions would cultivate an architecture that is more like the mounds of ants varying from region to region, soil type to soil type, but utilizing the same principles - what is available, the structural properties of those materials, and the universally understood patterns of life. Fecundity is the goal of nature - the desire to produce as many offspring as possible through exuberant production and not through economical production.18

18 **Tom Bible

image 2.2.5 The Fab Tree Hab (M.I.T.)
The various myths of architecture tenuously coexist in our discourse. There are others, but these three are prevalent historically and contemporarily in our arguments. Their architectural implications may appear similar at times, but ultimately do not yield the same symbolic result. Our logics, to be studied in the next section, overlap with our myths, but they make a different type of argument. Applying multiple myths or logics into one body of work yields collage architecture which may be more or less successful. Collage architecture does, however, have monstrous potential.
2.3 Logos

Logic, as Plato’s counterpart to myth, may create an argument identical to one presented through a myth. However, the logical argument relies on “falsifiable speech” or those things that are considered factual. Logic, the “science of inference,”\(^{19}\) can be classified as deductive logic or inductive logic. Deductive logic introduces a set of premises. If the premises are true, then the conclusion is true. Deductive reasoning resides primarily within the mathematical world of calculus and algebra. With inductive logic, if the premises are true, then the conclusion may be either true or false.\(^{20}\) Inductive logic may use observations or experiences to make conclusions. These conclusions assume universal truths from phenomenal observations.

Logic, utilizing the accepted premises (either through the observations of inductive logic or the absolute truth of deductive logic), generates argument. Within the realm of architecture, there are premises that we accept. Two of these will be analyzed for their relevance to this thesis. They arise out of a desire for efficiency and the desire to correct problems that we see in our physical and social environment through diversity.

\(^{19}\) Philosophy Dictionary: Logic, http://www.answers.com/topic/logic

2.3.1 Premise of Efficiency

All around the world, there are people fabricating buildings, which they will then use. The user and the maker are the same person. These people gather materials directly available, mud, grass, trash, concrete, cinder blocks, and create buildings that are richly and closely relevant to their way of life. They may utilize methods of building that have been developed over centuries of trial and error, and very subtle perfecting of techniques – a vernacular tradition. These builders have not reached the conclusion that it would be more efficient to specialize their built endeavors.

The Renaissance brought the idea of the “Master Builder.” In Kieran and Timberlake’s book, Refabricating Architecture, they reference Filippo Brunelleschi and his work on the dome of S. Maria del Fiore in Florence. This illustrates a historical divorce of the maker from the user by asserting that there are “makers” who possess a mastery of the craft, and who should be employed for this particular task. It is the beginning of specialization, though at this point in time he served in all roles of our contemporary building industry. He was the designer, the engineer, the contractor, and the materials scientist. 21

The role of the master builder was further split when the École des Beaux-Arts and the École Polytechnique divided architecture students from structural engineering students. This allowed greater specialization within the split field. Subdividing yet again, our modern architectural industry is comprised of engineers, architects, material scientists, and contractors. Collaboration between the professions results in architecture. Yet another industry has

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21 Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake, Refabricating Architecture: How Manufacturing Methodologies are poised to Transform Building Construction, 27
been created to support this collaboration – the information-sharing software industry creating products such as computer aided design and building information modeling. There are now many makers and many life experiences that become woven into the fabric of one architecture all because of the premise that specialization offered the greatest efficiency. (I don’t disagree).

The specialization of one particular function of the "Master Builder," materials scientist, has removed the materials of buildings from their local context to a global context. There is another premise underlying mass production: there are certain units within a building that are globally useful. This premise combined with the economic benefit of producing many similar objects has resulted in an almost complete reinvention of the field of architecture. The architect no longer coordinates craftsmen, but instead coordinates installers. One contractor installs the plumbing, another the sheathing, another the electrical systems, another the flooring, another the drywall. Each contractor specializing in the installation of one very specific product.

efficiency argument 1: If focusing one's individual efforts on a specific (specialized) task generates a better or cheaper part, then architecture should be broken down into as many individual tasks as possible in order to achieve the best array of parts.

Under the premise of efficiency, the logical architecture is comprised of universal parts, and universal ideas. As it multiplies itself over and over, it creates what McDonough refers to as “monoculture.” Thus, our industries of mass production add this new premise to the old. Logically following are
the ideas of “mass customization” and permutative architecture. Certain components have a variety of options and may be customized through the selection of the user. The user is re-engaged with the design, and a plethora of different variations occur in an architecture of permutation.

Efficiency argument 2: If focusing one’s individual efforts on a specific (specialized) task generates a better or cheaper part and if those parts could be interchangeable, then architecture could be the permutative result of the possible arrangements of its parts.

This type of architecture has positive potential, but can also be exploited negatively. The home building industry has particularly capitalized this type of design. An architect or designer will produce a series of designs, and those designs are then customized by the client for finishes and upgrades. The result is a neighborhood of similar houses that
2.3.2 Premise of Diversity

Problems arise from the globalization of architecture. Universal parts necessitate that certain natural resources have become depleted. Wood framing, for example, could previously be found only in places that had timber resources. Now, it can be exported to any part of the world, and those forests supporting the industry have been exhausted. Farmers may grow trees specifically to harvest on land that might have previously been rain forest, and now all the species that were once supported by that land have been destroyed to make one specific product - lumber. Universal needs create universal problems. Those resources that are valuable in this system can be both depleted and displace other resources that are not considered as valuable.

*diversity argument 1*: If our building industry uses local material excesses, then the universal problems might be eliminated.

Looking back to vernacular craft traditions, structures are crafted from the simple materials available. Mud can be baked into bricks or applied directly to a surface to make stucco. Rocks can be carved into caves. Straw can make a thatched roof. Timbers can be lain on the side and stacked to form a wall. These materials are quickly returned to their natural state when the building is no longer needed, or reconsumed into a new building.

The universal construction of a suburban office park, however, cannot be easily reconsumed. These vacated buildings trap moisture inside cavity walls growing mold, and they contain materials like asbestos that only decades later
is recognized as toxic. The problem with contemporary construction is that it
does not have the centuries of experimentation and improvement that is found
in a vernacular architecture. The cavity wall is an idea of the 1920’s, and the
implications of it are still being discovered. We have wasted the construction
materials if we don’t understand how to make buildings last longer than twenty
years, and how to make their construction materials reusable.

*diversity argument 2*: If waste equals food, then we must develop building
practices and material practices that allow waste to be food.
From our logics and myths, we develop a sense of what is normal. We accept certain arrangements or explanations for architecture and not others based on their adherence to our contemporary discourse. In the next section, we will look at some of the ways these accepted normals can be manipulated through a process of collage to produce monsters.
2.4 Collage, the art of manipulating the normal

“I believe in the future resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, of surreality, so to speak. I look forward to its consummation, certain that I shall never share in it but too indifferent to my death not to taste, at least slightly, the joys of such possession.”

The creation of new myth and new logic have both been cited as objectives for the artists of the “surreal.” Dalibor Veseley, in an introduction to a series of articles entitled Surrealism and Architecture, writes that the “demiurg (alchemist and magician) ... is able to create a world which has its own logic - the logic of dreams and the fantastic.” This world creates new myth through the exploitation of the “collective unconscious.” These artists used a variety of methods to unlock their minds. Collage was one of these tools. Collage, however, was not the original invention of the surrealists or even the Dadaists before them. Collage can be found in a medieval document that has been scraped and rewritten (the palimpsest), the Renaissance fresco of Michelangelo of the Final Judgement, or in the epic Iliad’s account of the chimaera. Collage is a visual tool that has assisted artists of all ages to create images that previously, could exist only in dream.

Collage is a process of decontextualizing and recontextualizing. The artist cuts or removes an object from a particular setting or syntax. The object, independent of context, retains its semantic meaning. It is then recontextualized into a new product, the collage. The process of collaging allows objects that do not belong

together to find new meaning through their joining. This meaning may appeal to our senses of myth or logic. For example, Man Ray takes a photograph of a woman, and superimposes the motif of a cello on her nude back. This image could be a simple likening of a women to a musical instrument, however, like a myth it operates in a plane beyond just the analogy. The experience of playing a musical instrument is likened to the experience the photographer might have taking this sensual photograph. By remotely appealing to an emotional understanding of the cello and the nude female, this image operates as a myth. It is the visual arts equivalent of the literary myth, and it was created through a process of collage.

Ray Johnson, among his many works, leaves an interesting anecdotal art piece that appeals to our sense of logic. This story is recounted first hand in the movie, How to Draw a Bunny:

*Ray Johnson approached an acquaintance and asked to make his portrait. The man agreed and Ray came over to house and spent a couple hours making drawings of his profile. Later Ray returned to this man to show him the series of portraits, in each of the portraits the profile of this man can be found amid newspaper clippings, scraps from magazines, photographs, etc. The man really liked the portraits and asked Ray Johnson how much it would cost to purchase the series of collage portraits of himself. Ray replies that he will think about it, and send him a letter. A couple weeks later the man receives the letter from Ray that breaks down the price of the collage based upon the images that are included within it. One picture might cost more because it contains an image of something that Ray considers more valuable. The man decides that he does not*
want to pay the price that Ray has offered him, and begins to bargain with Ray in the price. A couple weeks later Ray responds that he has removed a certain image from a portrait, and thus the portrait can be bought at a bargain price. However, he has added an additional image to another portrait and that portrait is now worth more. The man decides that he will buy only certain portraits based on the prices. Ray then responds that he has cut a piece out of a portrait, and that percentage is directly equated to the value of that portrait hence making it affordable. Ultimately, the process of negotiating the price determined the final product of the collage.

Ray Johnson applied a logic to art. The effectiveness of this logic, however, is that it is not normal logic. It is the accounting of a madman.

Logic and myth both become the subject of a visual commentary in the collage. Things that do not belong together are reordered in a way that those myths and those logics that are accepted are called into question.

Homer’s chimaera well illustrates the product of collage, and also distinguishes the monstrous as a type of collage. The chimaera was a creature that had the head of a lion, the body of a goat and the tail of serpent. Each part was chosen to make this super creature the most extraordinary and terrifying opponent for Bellerophon. A collage is comprised of distinct parts which, when joined, comprise something that becomes other. The monstrous subcategory of collage is a hybrid creation of normal parts that assumes a challenging role to what is normal. The monstrous collage is both attractive and scary.

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24 How to Draw a Bunny
2.5 Monsters

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mold Me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?

-Paradise Lost X.743-5

Dr. Frankenstein created a monster in Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus. Assembled of lifeless parts collected from robbing graves, he stitched it together and in one fantastic moment it became vitally charged, and alive! Dr. Frankenstein was a gifted student of science, and manipulated his knowledge to produce a monster. The monstrous embodies both myth and logic as a deviation of nature.

In developing an understanding of “monster,” many philosophers have offered insight. “Kant [defines] the ‘monstrous’ as anything incalculable and incomparable whose size ‘defeats the end that forms its concept.’ ... Derrida [...] notes the basic ambivalence of the monstrous ... as a double moment of attraction/recoil.”

“We know from Freud that monsters and creatures from horror tales are embodiments of the id... expressions of the collective unconscious [and] fascinations with human potentiality for dark wishes and deeds.” In all cases, there is what Timothy Beal identifies as an “otherness within sameness” about the monster. Beal continues that the monster is what threatens our world at the very center, the home. It is a product of everything

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25 Quoted in Timothy K. Beal, Religion and Its Monsters, 3
26 Richard Kearney, Strangers, Gods and Monsters
27 Diane Johnson. Introduction to Frankenstein, vii-xix.
that is normal yet it is disturbingly different, and its proximity to our person destabilizes our sense of self.28

“Middle English monstre, from Old French, from Latin monstrum, portent, monster, from monre, to warn; see men in Indo-European roots”29

The word monster, in a study of semantics, is associated with the Indo-European word meaning ‘men.’ Cicero’s Latin associates monstrum with monere meaning ‘to warn’ in the form of portent or omen. Augustine associates monstrare, ‘to show,’ with monster suggesting that by being out of the ordinary, the monster shows or demonstrates something. Aristotle sees the monster as a deviant from its parents. Aristotle’s definition includes biological deviations such as conjoined twins, dwarfism, gigantism, and extra digits. Monsters are recognizable because there are those things that we accept as normal, and we measure the deviations against the normalcies.30

Designing an architecture of monstrous hybrids, French architect, Francois Roche, introduces his biological machinery. He creates images of an aquatic building that randomly builds itself into a formal arrangement, or a train made of grass that moves across the landscape. His architecture blends the discourse of the machine and efficiency with the discourse of the organism and diversity. Here we find a monstrous hybrid that seems to warn anyone who would consider those two discourses separately.
The tree house, likewise, is a monstrous hybrid. The direct connection to a stream of waste materials appeals to a logical argument of “waste equals food,” but it also appeals to the mythical argument of a building trying to be an organism. It tries to be a tree, and approximate the form of a tree while each individual part is a standardized timber product reconfigured in the pattern of a tree. It references motifs that we understand as being the fabric of a house, but pairs them with the organic patterns of nature. What is building? What is nature? The tree house challenges the threshold between nature and man. Simultaneously, it challenges the way we discard of things. Here the objects of waste are displayed, and memorialized. These same objects could be found in any dump, decomposing ignominiously. Why were they saved? The reconciliation of multiple logics and multiple myths, with a disregard for those normal practices of construction, yields the tree house as monster.

Seeing the monster, we can now see the fallacies of what is normal. When a child is born with six functioning digits on each hand, we compare that child to thousands of other humans that have only five digits on each hand. We inductively conclude that nature has deviated for the one child, instead of concluding, that those thousands of other individuals are actually the deviants. From this observation, we now understand five digits to be the “normal,” and six digits to be the “monstrous.” While this particular deviation could actually be extremely beneficial to the child, society does not often accept such differences. Through anecdote we hear of children that grow up to become famous piano players because of their additional digits, or master of other dextrous endeavors. Our sense of what is normal, based on a simple logic, is challenged: that which is monstrous may actually be an advancement of that
which is normal.

Monstrous architectural experiments may be disastrous, or an evolution of the practices of building. They are essentially disruptive pieces in the discourse of architecture.
PART III : A MONSTER IN WALNUT HILLS
3.1 A History of Walnut Hills

*Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake.*

- Robert Penn Warren

Located Northeast of downtown Cincinnati, is Walnut Hills, a neighborhood with a history that created the collage of the present. Walnut Hills presents itself as a palimpsest; a wall of stones indicates the former location of a church, an old school building converted into lofts, an historic Ford Motor Manufacturing building reinvisioned as office space and a solitary church tower devoid of church. The main business district of McMillan shows signs of troubled economic conditions through empty buildings and boarded windows, yet, there are vital moments with the familiar Beck’s hardware store, Building Value which has a wide selection of architectural salvage, Gimetti’s sandwich shop, and the Jamison & Jamison Funeral Home. Several community aid organizations permanently reside within the neighborhood, the Talbert House which helps ex-offenders reintegrate themselves into the community, Easter Seals Work Resource Center and the First Step Home to help women overcome addiction and domestic abuse are just a few. Old gray churches can be found scattered all throughout the neighborhood. Down any smaller street brick row houses, brand new vinyl clad houses, estates and brick apartment complexes house people from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. Each of these homes, churches, businesses, non profits, reclamations, and fragments

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31 Robert Penn Warren, Quoted in Ferenc M. Szasz “Quotes about History”
are signs; they are legible as a myth of Walnut Hills which will be more greatly understood when combined with its history.

Walnut Hills comes into historical focus with the arrival of the Rev. James Kemper in late October of 1791. He was the first ordained Presbyterian minister in the area, and commuted between congregations in Columbia and Cincinnati. He bought 130 acres of farmland from John Cleves Symmes naming it Walnut Hills. The Kemper family endowed the Walnut Hills area with a legacy founded in faith, in freedom and in education. He became minister to the Walnut Hills Presbyterian Church established in 1819 at the corner of Gilbert Avenue and Locust Avenue (presently called William Howard Taft). The Lane Theological Seminary was established ten years later, in 1829, by his sons. Dr. Lyman Beecher was recruited as President bringing the respect and financial support of the East with him. Dr. Calvin Stowe was also brought to the faculty, and would later marry the daughter of Dr. Lyman Beecher, Harriet. The importance of Lane to the abolitionist cause came in a series of debates among the students. The debates centered around two anti-slavery views, “immediate emancipation versus African colonization.” Immediate emancipation was the victorious argument prompting the school’s board to pass ordinances forbidding debate and disbanding student groups. “By the end of 1834, 95 out of 103 students were gone, 75 as the direct result of the ordinances.” The “Lane Rebels” gained national publicity, and these events are considered to be essential in the history of the abolition of slavery in the United States. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s experiences in Walnut Hills living among free blacks and

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32 “Transportation,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
33 Definitive Works, “History of Walnut Hills,” Cincinnati 45206, Template for Tomorrow
34 Sister Irene Telhester, “Lane Theological Seminary and Lyman Beecher,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
35 Ibid.
escaped slaves, enhanced by discussions of abolitionists, became the substance of her 1850 novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. A book that President Lincoln himself read, responding to Harriet later, “So you’re that little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!” The close of the Civil War with General Lee’s surrender at the Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865 brought the abolition of slavery to a preserved Union. Six days later, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln foreshadowed a national struggle toward social equality.

The Lane Theological Seminary merged with the McCormick Theological Seminary of Chicago in 1932. The campus was slowly dismantled and the land sold for development of houses and businesses. The Thompson-McConnel Cadillac agency, which today occupies a central piece of the former campus, was recently recognized by the Ohio Historic Society with a placard that reads, “The Lane Seminary debates marked the shift in American antislavery efforts from colonization to abolition, and the ‘Lane Rebels’ became ministers, abolitionists and social reformers across the country.” Other than this marker, the only indication today that the campus was there is an extra large city block amid much smaller blocks. The house of the Stowe family, one block to the North, has been preserved as a museum, and its architecture suggests what the school might have looked like many years earlier.

The neighborhood’s first elementary school was established by Rev. Kemper’s sons contemporary to Lane Seminary. Another elementary school was formed in 1858 which the Rev. Dangerfield Early operated out of his home for the growing black population. This school fell into the jurisdiction of the Cincinnati Colored

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36 Ibid.
School System, and a new building, the Elm Street School, was constructed in 1872 as its permanent home. The Brown-Arnett Bill of 1887 intended to phase out segregated schools. The Elm Street School families were concerned for the safety of their children in a desegregated classroom and for the black teachers losing employment, and attempted to keep the school segregated by changing the name. The Elm Street School was renamed in 1902, Douglass Elementary, after the writer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. This was the only all black public school in the city of Cincinnati, but it had counterparts in other cities where school district lines were drawn to create such demographics. Douglass, though, became a magnet school for black students offering some of the best black educators to its students. Notable people of this school include the first black Olympic gold medalist, Dehart Hubbard, and the founder of a second black elementary school, Harriet Beecher Stowe School, Jennie D. Porter. In 1954, after the Supreme Court’s Brown vs. the Board of Education decision, the Elm Street School was made into a district school. The school is still in operation today within the Cincinnati Public Schools system, and, in 2007, moved again to new facility which is located on a block bounded by William Howard Taft, Kemper, Yale and Park. A fence with gray stone piers along the Southern boundary of the site recall a church that was previously there.

The Walnut Hills High School opened in 1895 housed in a classical Romanesque building designed by the firm Anderson and Siter. The school became focused on college preparation after the opening of Withrow High School, and brought a headmaster with seventeen years experience from the East to make it competitive with some of the very best college preparatory schools. The school

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37 Definitive Works, “History of Walnut Hills,” Cincinnati 45206: Template for Tomorrow
relocated in 1931 to its present campus on Victory Parkway, and the Burdette Elementary School occupied the former high school until 1979. In 2005, after being vacant since the early 1980’s, the schoolhouse was redeveloped into condos, the “Schoolhouse Lofts.” The original roof was taken off, and new units were constructed on the top qualifying the project for a tax abatement to encourage new construction. Walnut Hills High School continues to excel in education, and remains one of the top college preparatory schools in the country.  

Transportation is essential to a neighborhood located 300 feet above the city center. In the time of Rev. James Kemper, there were two roads, Kemper Lane and Montgomery Pike. McMillan Street was constructed in 1855 to connect Squire McMillan’s farm on Auburn to Walnut Hills. Gilbert Avenue was dedicated in 1868 connecting downtown from Court Street to Montgomery Pike. However, with only these roads, the people capable of commuting to the hilltop farmland was limited to the wealthy. Changes in transportation have greatly impacted the neighborhood and its economic viability throughout its history.

In 1872, horsecars began servicing Walnut Hills. They offered a slow commute up the steep hills from the downtown area. The horsecars were replaced by cable cars in 1885 and those by the faster electric street cars ultimately connecting downtown to Madison, Oakley, Madisonville, Mariemont, and

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39 “Transportation,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
40 Richard Rhoda, “Urban Transport and the Expansion of Cincinnati, 1858 to 1920,” Cincinnati Historical Society, 130 - 143
Milford all through Walnut Hills via a Gilbert - McMillan - Woodburn - Madison route. Six streetcar lines intersected at McMillan and Gilbert by the end of the 19th century, supporting a regional shopping hub. The corner of Gilbert and McMillan was the location of Peeble's Grocery store, and is still known as Peeble's corner though the store is gone. Peeble supposedly paid the streetcar drivers in cigars to call out the name “Peeble’s Corner” instead of “end of the line.” In the 1925 master plan, the intersection was identified as one of the most significant in the city. It foreshadowed future events by suggesting the only thing that could harm the vitality of Peeble's Corner would an “expressway bypass” or “alternative route” for the commuter traffic.

Streetcars serviced the area until the 1950's when the network was dismantled. The business districts, Peeble's Corner, McMillan Avenue, Gilbert Avenue, and Woodburn Avenue, endowed with Italianate, Victorian and Art Deco storefronts, theaters, and department stores suffered with the loss of street car traffic.

The post World War II era brought significant change to many cities across the United States with swift “neighborhood depletion.”

The interstate system brought further devastation to Walnut Hills between 1962 and 1974. “311 buildings, housing 727 families and 39 businesses

41 Sister Margaret Anne Molitor, “Peebles Corner,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
42 Cissie Dore Hill, “Epilogue; Part 1,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
were demolished to construct the stretch of I-71 between Wilkinson and Victory Parkway." Aside from the physical disruption of the neighborhood, the "expressway bypass" severed the artery of the downtown commuters. It also allowed for the easy development of suburbs further from the city center exacerbating the loss in population. Cissie Dore Hill notes the paradox, "transportation innovations of the 1870s spurred Walnut Hills' growth; now transportation in the form of the automobile created population loss." A 1975 urban design plan for Walnut Hills implemented "the large parking lots in the Peebles Corner area" and the Kroger in response to the changing traffic patterns. As of 2009, this Kroger is expected to close within the next two years marking a painful failure of city planning, and offering a warning to those who seek to "improve" the neighborhood. A present interest in streetcars and lightrail systems for Cincinnati could potentially restore some of the original traffic of people through the neighborhood, and have economic benefit for Walnut Hills.

In 1999, Walnut Hills and East Walnut Hills were selected to participate in comprehensive community development receiving funding through the CIP (Community Investment Partners), a group of Cincinnati's four leading investors. This called for holistic development of the community and resulted in a partnership, The '06 Alliance, between the historically divided Walnut Hills. They created a comprehensive plan for the community called the '06 Vision 2010. This plan categorically addresses economic development; housing; land use/zoning; arts, entertainment, recreation and leisure; education; public

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45 Ibid.
46 Cissie Dore Hill, “Epilogue; Part I,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
47 Cissie Dore Hill, “Epilogue; Part II,” Walnut Hills, City Neighborhood
safety; transportation; and health and human services and civic engagement. 

Recent investments have brought galleries such as the Manifest and Essex Galleries into some of the empty storefronts on Woodburn Avenue, the office renovation of the Ford Motor Factory on Lincoln, the conversion of the former Walnut Hills High School into the Schoolhouse Lofts, the renovation of some older apartment buildings into condos, the "mixed-use" development of DeSales intersection, and the demolition of the Walnut Hills Presbyterian Church and subsequent preservation of the Tower.

After writing this history, I hope that I have positively contributed to the mythology of Walnut Hills. I have chosen parts to include and parts to disclude from the information that someone else had already selectively recorded for posterity. I have made my own observations, and present them in a way that they illustrate larger themes. I have made certain parts more or less important, and have tried to envision history in a way that will be valuable to my purposes. I am a mythmaker.

However mythical my portrayal, I hope it will be adequate to support the idea of the neighborhood as monster, the otherness within sameness. Through history, we see that normal parts were subjected to normal process of change - recombination, dissection, demolition, and reclamation - these procedures were logically applied by the neighborhood's desire to improve itself. Deductive logics of how to wholly effect positive change in the community led to systemic solutions and comprehensive planning. This logic is paired with the inductive logic of how people individually inhabit a neighborhood, the result is a complex

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48 Definitive Works, “History of Walnut Hills,” Cincinnati 45206; Template for Tomorrow
pattern of habitation. This pattern is overlaid on top of past patterns again and again. The palimpsest of the site emerges, an un-orchestrable arrangement of community desire. All that we can hope to do for this site is contribute to it a vision of how to inhabit, and I believe that is through an endorsement of its monstrosity.
3.2 Design Case Study:

Three monsters were selected to be templates in this experiment of architecture. They are the classical Chimera, Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, and Tim Burton’s Edward Scissorhands. These literary characters were selected because they are all composite creatures of normal parts. The chimera is a mythical creature grafting together a lion, snake, and goat. It was a challenge to Bellerophon in Homer’s Illiad because it possessed all of the best skills of each of the animals. Dr. Frankenstein’s monster was comprised of readily accessible and similar parts, combined to create a beautiful human which when vitalized became horrific. Edward Scissorhands was a human that was never finished by his creator and instead of hands possessed shears. He temporarily joined society standing out in sharp contrast to the suburbanites finding interesting markets for his extraordinary talents, but was ultimately rejected by their fear. Each of these monsters can be logically extrapolated into architecture, and for the purposes of this project have helped to make some critical decisions about monstrosities.

These monsters were considered for spacial, programmatic, and material implications:

**Spacial:**

*Novel Composite Type (Chimera)* - The Chimera was not a standard creature, but was instead comprised of multiple creatures. The spacial typology for this type of architectural monstrosity would be novel, and not necessarily standardizable. A shopping mall is a recognizable type, but like this chimerical spacial typology varies depending on what represents the most economic viability.
Completion of Standard Type (Frankenstein) - The Frankenstein was a composite man. It was a familiar type of creature, but it was in the assemblage of this man where the monstrousness was found. The spacial typology for architecture would something familiar.

Incompletion of Standard Type ultimately yeilding Novel Type (Edward Scissorhands) - The Edward Scissorhands was left an incomplete man by his creator. A contrasting part was grafted into the standard type of man making it a novel type of monster. An architectural monster like this would be the addition to the University of Cincinnati’s school of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning by Peter Eisenman.

Programmatic:

Multiple Programs existing autonomously adjacent (Chimera) - Within the Chimera, each of the parts was capable of acting semi-independently. They are related only because they are assembled into one body, but more than one part might serve the same function (for example, multiple heads each functioning as a head). They are chosen for their independent strengths, however. The lion, snake, and goat when combined, possessed greater strength than they did apart. The architectural equivalent would combine strong programs that become more viable when placed adjacent. This program would be most like a shopping mall.

Multiple Programs existing together symbiotically (Frankenstein) - The Frankenstein, unlike the Chimera, would have a symbiotic relationship between the parts. They would function together as one unit, and would not have unnecessary
multiples of any part. The Frankenstein program is most like a church that keeps building additions to accommodate growing functions, and programs. All parts compliment the common goal of accessing the people of a community.

**Multiple Programs existing in symbiotic contrast (Edward Scissorhands)**
- The Edward Scissorhands is closely allied to the Frankenstein. The Programs work together to make the man whole, but they exist in contrast to each other. The Edward Scissorhands architecture likewise would house contradictory functions that become symbiotic.

**Material:**

*All the best parts combined (Chimera)* - The parts of the Chimera were chosen because of a valuable skill they possessed. Likewise, the parts of Materially Chimeric Architecture would value the materials though not necessarily their origin. This architecture would be like the English homes that were fabricated of the marble columns pillaged from the classic ruins of ancient civilizations, decorated with tapestries and rugs from Persia, and other sorts of assimilated items of inherent value from all sources.

*Similar Parts Recombined (Frankenstein)* - The parts of Dr. Frankenstein’s monster were what was available to the maker of the type of man. The Materially Frankenstein Architecture would take all old parts of one type, and bind them together.

Unsimilar Parts Combined (Edward Scissorhands) - Edward Scissorhands...
was composed of two opposite types of parts. In his case it was biological parts and mechanical parts. A dichotomy is established within the system of the whole body. The Edward Scissorhands architecture is reflected in the work of Francois Roche who also works across this boundary between man and machine.

With these operations in mind, we can return to the myths and logics of our discourse and begin assembling monsters.

What warning is this monster trying to make? What is my ultimate agenda? My agenda is to undermine formal architecture, to expose how a city changes in the scale of architecture, and to inexorably connect people to the building of their habitat. I hope that in so doing that a building could become a vital entity capable of evolving and responding to multiple ideas and programs, and that through coexistence new relationships and new building types would evolve. The myth I would hope to create would be an evolving building, constantly changing, and overlapping. The logic would be that if people are engaged in the form of their environment, that that environment would have social value and hence, permanence.
A. Literature :
   i. Theory & Philosophy


   ii. Architectural Theory


iii. Architectural Pragmatic


**iv. Site**


“History of Walnut Hills.” Cincinnati 45206; Template for Tomorrow. Definitive Works


v. Other


How to Draw a Bunny, dir. John W. Walter. 90 min. 2002. DVD.

B. People and Places

