Alternate Americanisms

Ella Arne
Syracuse university

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/architecture_tpreps

Part of the Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation
https://surface.syr.edu/architecture_tpreps/383

This Thesis Prep is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture Dissertations and Theses at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Thesis Prep by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
ALTERNATE AMERICANISMS!
Ella Arne | Fall 2019

Thesis Prep Document  Advisors Matthew Celmer & Abingo Wu
Architecture is actively crafting reality, culture, and identity. It is simultaneously constructed from and constructing meaning.

Route 66 exists as an American invention, cultural manifestation, and now, ruin.

Today, the objects on the route sit innocently on the landscape, covering their complex histories and power networks that lead back to the dominant government administration.

How are roadside American architectures on Route 66 active players in telling American narratives and identities?

What and who’s “America” are the objects on the route defining?

Can these objects be used to react to the complex power networks that built them to speculate possible futures?
chapter 1

the beginnings

Objects on Route 66 embody mediated histories that are simultaneously constructed from and in turn constructing American identity. The objects on the route are built to represent an idea or place, and in turn contribute to the idea and identity of the place they created. This loop of meaning, to architecture, back to meaning shows the agency of architectural objects in crafting our realities, histories, and collective identities.

The route exists as an American invention, expression, and now, ruin. It represents a specific America built on pseudo-events\(^1\), which expects ever more illusions and fantasy. An America which glorifies the freedom of the open road. An America defined by the boom of the mass culture industry in the 19th and 20th centuries which ushered in scenic spectacles along American landscapes. These sites capitalize on “natural” or constructed novelty to overwrite culture and history in favor of exotic fantasies\(^2\). In some cases they present romanticized, idealized versions of the past that conflates the American landscape into an iconographic self-referential image\(^3\), the places become meaningful because they say the are and become repeated and believed to be. In other ways they celebrate everyday object to give a visual and physical identity to a place.

The built environment determines much of history through physical reality. The sites preserved today are owned by those who have vested interests in them physically, economically, historically, or culturally. Oil, cars, and road infrastructure continue to define an auto-centric culture as people become ever more dependent on cars. Today, these architectural objects sit innocently on the landscape, covering their complex histories and power networks that lead back to the power relations of the dominant government administration. With the current administration, what will the future of the objects on the American landscape be? Can these objects be used to react to the complex power networks that built them?

In a game which reflects reality and the systems at play, the architectural objects become the characters, and the players act through these characters to understand the impact of one decision on the entire physical landscape. It produces endless alternate histories and futures to critically reflect on the American narrative through Route 66. This reveals the tangible agency of architectural characters in crafting our environment through meaning, culture, and identity, and speculates on the ways we can operate within these Alternate Americanisms.

---


Groundwork for the Route begins in the 1910s and is officially established in 1926 as the fastest route from Chicago to Los Angeles, though would take more than a decade to be complete. This linear sequence strung together pieces of the American landscape to create one uniquely “American” experience. During the Dust Bowl era, some 210,000 people migrated to California along the route, though many would return. Many military training bases were created in West during WWII, and the route became a major artery of transportation.

Route 66 reached its cultural peak in postwar 40s, 50s, and into 60s. The route contains objects of similar necessities (motels, gas stations, food, entertainment) all delivered in exoticized, adventurous, idiosyncratic ways (primitive, vernacular, iconographic architectural motifs). They break up the monotony of the vast road with spectacles that differentiate this place from that place. The popularity can be explained by the intensified mass consumer culture following the war, and the autoboom of the early 20th century, which spread the population from the city to the suburbs. American car culture was both a result and propagator of the oil powers of the 20th century.

By unpacking the power and the relationships they have had with the U.S. Government it is clear they are responsible for the way oil and cars are perceived today. Their capitalist agenda has created an America that sees cars at the center of national identity for our security, well being, and their profit.

The Route’s demise leads back to Eisenhower’s Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. The public works program, inspired by the German Autobahn, proposed building 40,000 miles of Interstates and by 1970 most of the road was bypassed by 4 lane highways thus rendering the road obsolete and decommissioned in 1985. The Route was not forgotten, in 1999 the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program was established. Since then, the National Register of Historic Places, which is under the National Parks Service, which is under the Department of the Interior, has been listing to preserve property which have significantly contributed to major patterns of American history. This begs the question, who are these sites really being preserved for. How can we investigate American identity through the built American landscape of Route 66 and speculate on the future?
Architectural objects are signs which signify meaning for someone, and thus meaning does not exist in itself, but rather through systems of interpreted relationships.

The objects on the route were cataloged and organized by signifying their meaning as a building, object, or sign.

all images are screenshots from google street view along Route 66
16 objects on the route were selected as key players and examined to look at what they were saying through their physical presence and history. The objects are numbered in chronological order.
Chapter 2

**Phillips 66 Station #473**

*Tulsa, OK.*

original ‘tudor cottage’ signature style of Phillips Petroleum to blend into domestic surroundings

brick with gabled roof, cross-gable over door, brick chimney, originally multicolored

“I’m a small cottage, you can feel at home!”

 adopts Route 66 sign as Logo in 1959 shield remained until Nov 2019 as Bar 473...

“Don’t forget me!”

**Route 66**

**Phillips 66**

**fold out --- >**

**Standard Oil Gasoline Station**

*Odell, IL.*

closed in 70s, restored in 90s, currently on National Register of Historic Places

“This is the America we are proud of.”

garage service bays added in late 30s

“Come drive your car in, we’ll fix you up!”

**typical ‘house with canopy’ gas station style**

built in early 1930s based on 1916 Standard Oil of Ohio ‘house and canopy’

“You can trust me, I look just like home!”

**typical garage addition**
CONOCO Tower Station
Shamrock, TX.

unique example of art deco used on commercial roadside architecture built in 1936

“Over here! We’re modern and flashy, come get your CONOCO gas!”

inspired Ramone’s House of Body Art in Pixar’s “Cars” in 2006

“Route 66’s history isn’t forgotten.”

closed in 1990s, the building appeared on National Register for Historic Places in 1997 and subsequently bought by bank and given to the city of Shamrock!

“This is an important part of American history.”

“and don’t forget to eat!”
**El Vado Motel**
Albuquerque, NM.

- Built in Spanish pueblo revival style in 1937, imitating nearby Pueblo motifs.
- “Explore exoticism and mystique of Southwest America in comfort!”
- “Come experience local history!”
- Listed on National Register of Historic Places 1993

**Blue Swallow Motel**
Tucumcari, NM.

- Built in Southwest vernacular style in 1939
- “Experience the Southwest by car!”
- “Come stay and feel at home!”
- Sign added in 50s
- Swallow symbolism (hope of coming home safely, love, and family)
- Listed on National Register of Historic Places 1993
- Motel has been in operation since its opening.
Chapter 2

Twin Arrows Trading Post
Flagstaff, AZ.

built in 1940s, thename change was inspired by nearby town of Two Guns, arrows built to attract visitors to trading post land currently owned by Twin Arrows Navajo Casino, who restored the arrows in 2009

“Come get souvenirs and exotic goods!”
abandoned in 1995 buildings in ruined state

“We are in Native American territory, come check us out!”
Chapter 2

Rock Fountain Tourist Court
Springfield, MO.

‘cottage style’ tourist court opened around 1945,
frame construction with masonry veneer of various
types of vernacular Ozark sandstone construction

“Your home away from home!”

Listed on National Register of Historic
Places in 2003
today they are Melinda Court Apartments, a
long-term rental property
build in 1946, continuously operating
built by owners of Munger-Moss Sandwich Shop
in Devil’s Elbow down the road with a gas station
sign original and restored

“Come stay at a mom and pop motel with a rich American history!”

Munger Moss Motel
Lebanon, MO.

Wigwam Village Motel no. 7
San Bernadino, CA.

building patented by Frank Redford,
constructed in Kentucky in 1937.
Chester Lewis bought rights and built in the West, this was the last village built.

“Come experience part of American history!”
Chapter 2

“WigWam” because it sounded better than teepee...

“Have you slept in a Wigwam lately?”

“We’re American!”

made of wood frame construction covered with stucco

28’

32’
Chapter 2

Route Research: Object Profiles

Brooks Catsup Bottle
Water Tower
Collinsville, IL.

WigWam “Village” layout
“Authentic layout!”

“Tangy” ketchup bottle.
Ketchup is important here!

restored to original condition
in 1995 by preservation group!

water tower for Brooks Catsup
Bottling Plant built in 1949,
and remained after the plant
moved in 1971

holds 640,000
(regular) bottles
worth of ketchup!

170’!
Chapter 2

66 Drive-In Theatre
Carthage, MO.

opened 1949 in the post-war, auto-centric boom
“I am a Drive-In Theatre on Route 66, come watch a movie!”

closed 1985 due to unpopularity, reopened in 1997, listed on National Register of Historic Places in 2003
“50s Nostalgia”
Chapter 2

McDonald's Golden Arches
Upland, CA.

The building was designed with the idea of arches to attract customers to the McDonald brothers revolutionary “speedee service system” (fast food). The 25’ parabolic “golden arches” were born in the 50s, eliminated from buildings in 1960s, and now mainly survive in the logo's 'M'.

“Come through the Golden Arches!”

drive-thru added later

Route Research: Object Profiles

Muffler Man with Hotdog
Atlanta, IL.

“not Paul Bunyan for copyright purposes
Fiberglass structure modeled after
folklore giant, usually replacing his axe
with mufflers, here he holds a hot dog.
Many “Muffler Men” appear across the
U.S. selling various things.

“I’m an courageous strong
American!” - Paul Bunyon*

formerly located in Cicero, IL outside
Bunyon's Hotdogs before closing in 2003
“The best hotdogs!”

19'!
Blue Whale of Catoosa
Catoosa, OK.

Originally private, however due to popularity it was opened to public, adding sand to an enlarging pond. Closed in 1988, restored in 2000s by locals!

Former Tulsa zoo director built this whale as a gift to his wife for their 34th wedding anniversary. The couple ran an alligator farm, and his Acoma Indian Brother-in-law's Indian trading post.

“Come play!”

The Biggest Cross in Texas,
The Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Groom, TX.

scaled cross

80’?

190’?
originally intended to be a spiritual billboard (because upset by the surrounding "adult entertainment" ads), the cross ministries ended up building the largest cross in Texas in 1995. “RELIGION!”

built in 2013 in a town of 200 to draw on route 66 history and associate itself with the Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas Sign. “Welcome to our fabulous city!”

“Don’t forget...Route 66!” says Welcome on both sides...
chapter 3

tracing histories
The history of U.S. Route 66 and general history of the United States since the Industrial Revolution was researched to create a connected network of relationships between dates, events, and actors.
The histories of these seemingly innocent objects on U.S. Route 66 were traced to create an interconnected network of relationships between dates, events, and actors.
Chapter 3

Tracing Histories: 2 Examples


1929: Phillips 66 Station #473 built

1931: First Drive-in + fast food

1933: First Shopping Mall

1934: First Motel

1938: Route 66 fully paved

1941: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1949: WigWam Village #7 built

1951: Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program


1970: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1985: Route 66 De-Comissioned


John Deere

Henry Ford

Levitt & Sons

General Motors

Phillips Petroleum

ConocoPhillips

National City Lines

Department of the Interior

National Parks Service

U.S. Government

U.S. Government

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Car Fetishism through marketing

automotive class structure

image > engineering

suburb population > city population!

Auto sales boom!

Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 public works program

to build 40,000 miles of Interstates (based on German Autobahn)

1916: Phillips Petroleum

1917: Franklin Delano Roosevelt


1921: First Drive-in + fast food

1922: First Shopping Mall

1925: First Motel

1929: Phillips 66 Station #473 built

1931: First Drive-in + fast food

1933: First suburban shopping center in Tulsa, Whittier Square est.

1938: Route 66 fully paved

1941: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1949: WigWam Village #7 built

1951: Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program


1970: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1985: Route 66 De-Comissioned


Chapter 3

Tracing Histories: 2 Examples


1929: Phillips 66 Station #473 built

1931: First Drive-in + fast food

1933: Frank Redford started developing WigWam "Villages" modeled after teepees

1938: Route 66 fully paved

1941: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1949: WigWam Village #7 built

1951: Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program


1970: Route 66 De-Comissioned

1985: Route 66 De-Comissioned


collage tracing narratives of architectural objects on Route 66
chapter 4

ALTERNATE AMERICANISMS

The Game

TAKE 1

TAKE 2

TAKE 3

PARTS

RULES
How does rearranging and recombining objects change their meaning?

The play began with making six different architectural objects on the route. The six pieces were made with pegs to be recombined, removed, and reset to create various scenes and scenarios of the landscape. Different backdrops were tested to explore both the range of geographies the route has and the different effects they produce.
The goal of the game was to show the agency of architectural objects in creating new realities, identities, and histories.

Each game would play out differently, and would parallel the frameworks of our reality to create endless *Alternate Americanisms*. 

---

**rules**

A. OBJECTIVE: have the most points at the end of the game!

B. SET UP: select your characters (2 total)

1. In a clockwise order, select one character

2. Roll to see who goes first

3. Roll dice and find corresponding character

4. After last player selects first character, they select their second character and order reverses until everyone has 2 characters
Chapter 4

C. PLAY: i) build initial road

Begin playing in a clockwise direction

1 → 2

shuffle 8 initial tiles (with #s 1-8 on back)
(if more than 4 playing, add number of tiles from bag so that each player gets 2 tiles)

1

player 1 draws first tile, flips, and starts board

player 2 draws next tile and places it - roads must touch roads - corresponding fields must touch matching fields unless a fence exists on edge

place character if you wish

resource collected when # rolled
9 possible spots
road

(78 tiles total)

Field
Water
Road
Fence

dice roll

= Objects must be placed in field
= Buildings must be placed in field
= Signs must be placed on road

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 2
Chapter 4

C. PLAY:  

i) build initial road

place first road, next player repeats
must place on either end of the road
no U-turns!
continue until each player has played 2 tiles

ii) collect initial resources: every player collects 2 of each resource:
C. PLAY:  iii) begin play!

- draw a tile from bag and place, may play piece if you wish
- roll dice (red and blue)

  total = number required to collect specific resources depending on the tile your pieces sit on.

  number of spaces signs and ads can move along roads

if 12 is rolled, an event card gets played!
- can trade with other players for resources
- buy places
- re-form character
  break apart = x2 of any resource --- then break piece apart and place on adjacent spot
  add pieces = x2 of any resource --- then add piece to your character
- stealing a piece from another player
  if you move a piece adjacent to the same spot as the piece you wish to steal, you challenge the character, you both roll a die, whoever is higher gets the other piece. Alternately, you can put 3 resources to challenging player to avoid giving up your piece. You can only capture a part, not the entire piece.
  can only challenge once per round
Chapter 4

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 2

D. EVENT CARDS: play every other round
- organize deck so it is chronological from 1 - 17
- when played: first player roll dice, that number of cards will be turned over from event card deck, action on card will immediately play out

E. GAME ENDS:
F. SCORING:
- Buying new Character: 6
- Building shelter or energy plant: 4
- Converting your energy source: 3
- Adding or stealing character pieces: 3
- Building infrastructure: 2
- Building signs: 2
- Car = 1

when there are no more tiles throughout game

- Building piece = 10
- Object piece = 10
- Sign piece = 5
- Player on most fields = 10
- Player with most signs on roads = 10
- Player with most shelters and person with most energy plants = 5
Testing prototyping

Start game: initial 8 tiles

Play begins!

Pieces made reconfigurable with magnets. The color indicates if they are a building (yellow), an object (red), or a sign (blue). Text was written on pieces to create new mixed narratives with new mixed pieces.
Chapter 4

The game explores how every single decision changes the entire built landscape.

It reflects and translates alternate histories to speculate alternate futures.

The game examines the relationship between meaning and architecture, identity and the built environment.

The result tells the history of objects in the built landscape and allows for understanding and speculation.
Chapter 4

**translating**

First, important actors/interest groups, and events from tracing the objects’ histories are translated into the world of the game.
Interest groups were identified...

**GOVT**
- United States Govt.
- United States Military

**CAR**
- Ford Motor Comp.
- Henry Ford

**PRESERVATION**
- National Parks Service
- National Register of Historic Places
- Route 66

**SYRUP**
- United Syrup Group
- United Syrup Manufacturers

**CORN**
- Fritolay
- Henry Frito

**PEANUT**
- National Peanut Service
- National Rescued Historic Peanuts
- Reese’s 66 Cups

**HIGHWAY**
- Levittown
- Dwight D. Eisenhower

**GOVT**
- Dept. of Interior
- Dept. of Energy
- Global Climate Coalition

**CANDY**
- Dr. Twinkie

**CHIPS**
- Lays
- Dorito Enterprise

**CONSUMPTION**
- Dept. of Indulgence
- Dept. of Eating
- Great Consumption Coalition

**OIL & GAS**
- Continental Oil
- Phillips Petroleum
- War Emergency Pipelines Company
- Exxon Mobile

**DRINKS**
- COCACOLA
- PEPSICO
- Water Emergency Pop Company
- Energy Drink

These icons become patterns on test pieces to show interest groups of each character...
1) Receive Box with characters. Shuffle question answer tiles. Draw an event card from its shuffled pile.

2) Place on board and surround with Y (yes) and N (no) tiles.

3) Choose answer to question (yes or no) by placing 1-2 pieces on a tile. Play out action!

4) Next player draws and places question tile 2 segments away from previous question.

5) Surround with Y and N tiles and repeat step 3. It’s possible to return to an earlier question.*

*play continues until no more event tiles
event samples

**Question:** CORN BOOM?
- yes
Move all peanut pieces to edges of the board.
- no
Arrange peanuts in a row on the ground, can extend past past tile.

**Question:** FRITO MASS PRODUCES CHEAP CORN CHIPS?
- yes
Everyone with corn chips on board adds 2 chip pieces to those tiles.
- no
Everyone removes 1 soda piece, corn pieces steal soda piece if adjacent.

**Question:** FOOD FIGHT?
- yes
Soda added to top of syrup pieces, for every 1 water, soda gets 1 piece added.
- no
Everyone connect adjacent pieces linearly.

**Question:** DID ICING REVOLUTION HAPPEN?
- yes
Add 1 piece to all corn pieces on board.
- no
No corn pieces may be played this round.

**Question:** SCHWEPPES SODA ESTABLISHED?
- yes
Accumulate adjacent soda pieces if your piece has more soda sides showing.
- no
Each player loses a syrup piece.

**Question:** EXTREME FLAVORS COME?
- yes
Replace 1 soda for 1 water.
- no
Swap 1 tile with person sitting to your left.

---

test pieces

Abstracted volumes representing characters are cut into 4 pieces in the X, Y, and Z direction. Pieces are connected with magnets.

Blue = Sign
- Interest groups: syrup & soda

Red = Object
- Interest groups: corn & chips

Yellow = Building
- Interest groups: chips & corn
Chapter 4

Based on: Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower, Collinsville, IL. Wigwam Village #7, San Bernadino, CA.

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 3

Muffler Man with Hotdog, Twins Arrows Trading Post, Blue Whale of Catoosa, Atlanta, IL. Flagstaff, AZ. Catoosa, OK.
Chapter 4

Standard Oil Gas Station, Odell, IL.
CONOCO Station (U Drop Inn), Shamrock, TX. Upland, CA.

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 3
Phillip's 66 Station #473, Tulsa, OK.
Historic Rock Fountain Court, Springfield, MO.
El Vado Motel, Albuquerque, NM.
Chapter 4
Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 3

Welcome to McCook Sign, Munger Moss Motel, McCook, IL.
Munger Moss Motel, Lebanon, MO.
66 Drive In Theatre, Carthage, MO.

Blue Swallow Motel, Tucumcari, NM.
Biggest Cross in Texas, Groom, TX.


Horn, Melanie van der, Brick & Balloons: Architecture in comic strip form, (010 Publishers, 2012)


Scott, Quinta. Route 66: The highway and its people.


Architecture is actively crafting reality, culture, and identity. It is simultaneously constructed from and constructing meaning. Route 66 exists as an American invention, ruin, and manifestation of American Identity. The objects on the route sit innocently on the landscape, covering their complex histories and power networks that lead back to the dominant government administration.

*Alternate Americanisms* shows the agency of architectural objects in creating new realities, identities, and histories.

The game explores how every single decision changes the entire built landscape. It reflects and translates alternate histories to project alternate versions. It examines the relationship between meaning and architecture, identity and the built environment. It tells the history of objects in the built landscape and allows for understanding and speculation. Each game plays out differently, and parallels the frameworks of our reality to create endless *Alternate Americanisms.*