Alternate Americanisms

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

Route 66 exists as an American invention, cultural manifestation, and now, ruin. What and who's “America” are the objects on the route defining?

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. Can these objects be used to react to the complex power networks that built them to speculate possible futures?
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, 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. In some cases they present romanticized, idealized versions of the past that conflates the American landscape into an iconographic self-referential image, 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.

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Chapter 1

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 the 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
giraffe rock style motel
bar motel + l motel

building as sign.

cottage style motel
u motel

motor courts
swiss + chalet style motels

roadhouses
diners

'spanish pueblo revival'
drive-ins

castle
decorated sheds

Chapter 2

food

muffler men

object as sign.

cataloging

world's largest + tallest + sunk
water tower

animal

'teepees'

food

sign as sign.

signs of signs + letters only

food

arrows

misc 3d sign motel

western theme motel

barns

sign as sign.
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

Route Research: Selected Sample

1. Phillips 66 Station #473, Tulsa, OK.
2. Standard Oil Gas Station, Odell, IL.
3. CONOCO Station, Shamrock, TX.
4. El Vado Motel, Albuquerque, NM.
5. Blue Swallow Motel, Tucumcari, NM.
6. Twin Arrows Trading Post, Flagstaff, AZ.
7. Rock Fountain Court, Springfield, MO.
8. Munger Moss Motel, Lebanon, MO.
9. Wigwam Motel 7, San Bernadino, CA.
10. Catsup Water Tower, Collinsville, IL.
11. 66 drive-in theater, Carthage, MO.
12. McDonald’s golden arches, Upland, CA.
13. Muffler Man with hotdog, Atlanta, IL.
14. Blue Whale of Catoosa, Catoosa, OK.
15. The Biggest Cross in Texas, Groom, TX.
16. Welcome to McCook Sign, McCook, IL.
Chapter 2

1

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!”

2

Route Research: Object Profiles

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!”

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

“Don’t forget me!”

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
- “This is an important part of American history.”

**Blue Swallow Motel**  
Tucumcari, NM.

- Built in Southwest vernacular style in 1939
- “Experience the Southwest by car!”
- 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
- “Come stay and feel at home!”
Chapter 2

Twin Arrows Trading Post
Flagstaff, AZ.

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

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

“We are in Native American territory, come check us out!”
'cottage style' tourist court opened around 1945, frame construction with masonry vencer 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
Chapter 2

**Munger Moss Motel**
Lebanon, MO.

*built 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!”

**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!”

*typical cabins expanding until overlapping*
made of wood frame construction covered with stucco

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

“Have you slept in a Wigwam lately?”

“Get Your Kicks on Route 66”

“We’re American!”

28’

32’
Chapter 2

Route Research: Object Profiles

Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower Collinsville, IL.

“I’m a ketchup bottle. Ketchup is important here!”

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

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

WigWam “Village” layout
“Authentic layout!”
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 “M”.

“Come through the Golden Arches!”

drive-thru added later

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 Hotsdogs 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 and enlarging pond.
Closed in 1988, restored in 2000s by locals!

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

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!”

80’?
Chapter 2

Route Research: Object Profiles

Welcome to McCook Sign
McCook, IL.

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.
Chapter 3

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.
collage tracing narratives of architectural objects on Route 66
chapter 4

ALTERNATE AMERICANISM

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*. 

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**rules**

A. OBJECTIVE: have the most points at the end of the game!
B. SET UP: select your characters (2 total)

In a clockwise order, select one character

roll to see who goes first

roll dice and find corresponding character

after last player selects first character, they select their second character and order reverses until everyone has 2 characters
C. PLAY:  
i) build initial road

Begin playing in a clockwise direction

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

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)

(78 tiles total)
resource collected when # rolled
9 possible spots
road

yellow = Objects  must be placed in field
blue = Buildings  must be placed in field
red = Signs  must be placed on road

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)

\[ \text{total = number required to collect specific resources depending on the tile your pieces sit on.} \]

\[ \text{number of spaces signs and ads can move along roads} \]

if 12 is rolled, an event card gets played!

- --- > can trade with other players for resources

- --- > buy places

- --- > re-form character

\[ \text{break apart = x2 of any resource --- then break piece apart and place on adjacent spot} \]

\[ \text{add pieces = x2 of any resource --- then add piece to your character} \]

- --- > 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. 
Alternatively, you can put 3 resources to challenging player to avoid giving up your piece. You can only capture a part, not the entire piece. 

\[ \text{can only challenge once per round} \]
Chapter 4

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 2

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**buy places** -- once built they may be immediately played on the tile drawn, or may be held until player wishes to play. Once placed, they collect resources when corresponding number rolled.

- **infrastructure** =
- **shelter** =
- **energy plant** =
- Converting your energy source =

**action cards** =

**character** = look at character card for cost, cost varies.

**signs** = x2 of resource it will sit on.

---

**D. EVENT CARDS:** play every other round

- **organize deck** so it is chronological from 1-17

- **when played:** first player rolls dice, that number of cards will be turned over from event card deck. Action card will immediately play out.

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**E. GAME ENDS:** when there are no more tiles throughout game

- **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**

**F. SCORING:**

- **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**
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.
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.
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.*
**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 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 connects 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 Bernardino, 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

Alternate Americanisms: The Game - Take 3

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

Phillip's 66 Station #473, Historic Rock Fountain Court, Springfield, MO.
Tulsa, OK.
El Vado Motel, Albuquerque, NM.


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.*