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Theatre for a New Theater: A Play on Architecture

Alexander Coulombe

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Be All You Can Be!

(then two steps to the left)

the new military theatre

Alex Coulombe
2009-2010
Syracuse University
School of Architecture
Advisors: Jon Yoder & Clare Olsen
How to Engage this Book

As you may have already noticed, this book is divided into two halves. A freak gardening accident? Quite no! A defining characteristic of the design methodology at play in this thesis is the recombinant effects of disparate parts. In other words, sometimes crazy different things work great together!

The author/narrator wishes you the opportunity to actively engage in this process. To read the book in sequence, simply match top page numbers with the same bottom page numbers and read as though there was no divide at all.

Or, for a more dynamic and participatory experience, match different top and bottom pages, and you might find something interesting! Sometimes not. But sometimes yes. More on bottom-page 3.

Note: a Double-Page-Flip-O-Matic has been included for your convenience. Start by removing it from the binding. Holding the labeled end, place the Double-Page-Flip-O-Matic under the desired pages you wish to turn. With a single smooth wrist motion, pull the pages up, and settle them back down on the other side. You're done!

KEY

I hear...and I forget
I see...and I remember
I do...and I understand
-Ancient Chinese Proverb
Be All You Can Be! (then two steps to the left)
the new military theatre
a project in progress
by Alex Coulombe
directed by Jon Yoder and Clare Olsen

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MATERIAL INTERMISSION

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THEATRE_ live performance of a story.

GOOD THEATRE _ challenges values.
THEATER_ a venue for theatre.

GOOD THEATERS _ are a character.
MILITANT_ aggressive pursuit of a clear goal.

GOOD MILITANCE _ succeeds by being bold and enterprising
THEATRICAL SPACE - a physical location that provides the occupant with the sense of a different world than the one they associate with their everyday lives.

GOOD THEATRICAL SPACE - compels awareness of the world.
MILITANT SPACE_ a physical location that provides the occupant with the sense that its use is strictly disciplined.

GOOD MILITANT SPACE _ does not allow us to deviate.
MILITARY THEATER_ the location of militant action bordered by areas of inactivity. May refer to scales as small as a building or as large as a continent.

GOOD MILITARY THEATERS _ are active at multiple scales.
MILITARY THEATRE_ a strictly controlled, actively engaging live performance.

GOOD MILITARY THEATRE _ provides opportunities for us both to follow orders and to make choices.
SCENE 1

Spotlight in the center of an empty stage. After a moment, ALEX enters from SL, dressed in black. He surveys the audience.

ALEX (still)
This thesis contends that the strategic amplification of the elements of a building strongly designed for one specific program will allow for an architecture that serves the needs of a different program after relatively minor distortion.

(He pauses, then ruffles his hair.)

ALEX
There’s my sentence. Now. Listen:
What I am proposing is a new method of renovation. Of revision. A method with ingredients as straightforward as lemonade.

Step 1: identify an existing ‘program’ and ‘manifestation’ (read: ‘intention’ and ‘form’).
Step 2: take that intention and with it, push the form to what it really wants to be, uncensored. Like Tyler Durden holding a gun to a convenience clerk’s head, asking him what he wanted to be when he grew up, I want to put a wrecking ball to a stagnant historic building and ask it the same question.

(From the darkness, he produces a pot of tea, a cup, and a chair.)

Step 3: Take a step back and look at what it’s become. Freed from building codes and niceties, free from financial obligations and developer contracts, free and in a complete state of (architectural) nature, examine it.

(He sits down and squints into the distance)
From the perspective of its previous inhabitants, it might seem monstrous. That’s okay. What was a quaint specialty restaurant may become a monument to unsustainable, gluttonous, gazelle slaughter. What was a private middle school may become a malevolent, brainwashing dictatorship!

(He pours the tea. He stirs it for a moment.)

Step 4: Now take another step back, and rather than immediately labeling certain properties of your god-forsaken mutation ‘bad’, try shifting its program. Maybe the cross-continental network you had to design for gazelle importation along with the massive amounts of storage space you required works just as well for an Art Gallery. Maybe the strict regimentation and routine you designed for that school could be the next ideal prison.

(He takes a sip.)

Step 5: Finally, take a couple steps forward and, finding yourself in the real world, apply whatever minor alterations necessary to make it acceptable to society. And you’re done!

(ALEX gulps the rest of the tea and hurls his cup behind him, shattering it on the wall. He approaches the audience with a new energy.)

What I’ve realized is that some of these programs, or rather, these typologies naturally compliment each other, and have for a very long time. Tonight you will bear witness to my arrival on Governor’s Island and then Fort Jay, a historic icon originally built for the War of 1812. Whilst there, I imagined the great battles that might have taken place around it, the soldiers on the hillside, the ships circling it, the prisoners being taken to the nearby Fort Williams. A hypothesis was confirmed for me. I thought about what
dictated the design of this fort, what guided the construction around it, and what it means for it to be so close to New York City. A hypothesis formed.

(ALEX sits on the floor, close to and staring at someone in the front row.)

Design strategies that go into military structures, from forts to prisons to trenches to bunkers, happen to share a large number of qualities with the thinking that goes into theatrical structures. Heck, look at the Roman Colosseum! If that doesn’t show a natural intersection between a military program and a theatrical one, I don’t know what does!

(ALEX rubs his hands together.)

It wouldn’t be difficult at all to modify ancient theatres to become better suited for military scenarios!

Everything from material considerations, to sight lines, to light penetration, acoustic insulation, temporal occupancy, it’s all so ripe for revision!

(He stands up suddenly.)

And so this is how I plan to test my thesis! But not just with a simple building in the round that in its formal elements alone clearly calls out ‘theater’! My investigation goes deeper than that, and so I have chosen a far less apparent military structure to demonstrate my thesis that I believe will yield equally valid results. Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER PLANT

Ah, so, I’m just a layman and I think I’m following pretty well, but I’m not sure I get exactly how you’ll set up your rubric to gauge how successful the design is...

ALEX

I was getting to that. The criteria for which I

Gladiator

Theatre or War? Can it be both?

Epidaurus, a theater. Audience members sit in the stands and watch the performance in the center. Or they watch each other. The acoustics are superb.

Epidaurus, a brainwashing facility. (roof removed) Victims are sorted into sections then have their sightlines narrowed to a small portion of the stage, where their focus must endure until their values are changed and they are freed. The acoustics are superb.
would ask to be evaluated include three essential categories, all relating back to how well I have modified Fort Jay to be a theater within its context. First, I would like to be judged by how well I exploit the latent theatrical opportunities of the site, both on urban and local scales. Second, I would like it to be considered how well the design would function as a performance venue, especially when compared to a conventional design. Finally, I would like my critiquers to judge the theater from a purely experiential standpoint. Would they like to attend a theater like this one? Is it a compelling alternative to Broadway?

AUDIENCE MEMBER PLANT

Thank you.

ALEX

(briskly)

You’re welcome. In short, I would like to be judged on contextual value, functional value, and experiential value. Later you will see a rubric I used to judge these criteria for various case studies. Furthermore, I would like to--

AUDIENCE MEMBER PLANT #2

So what’s your design process looking like?

ALEX

Let me breathe! Erm, as of now, that is, December 13th 2009, I have already ventured into the realm of design. I began by making a couple of simple passes at my site, Fort Jay, making a straightforward effort to make it even more 'fort-like,' then seeing how that could work to theatrical effect. The most valuable design decision that came out of that first pass was allowing soldiers to enter and exit the fort without ever being out in the open; egress by sub. Currently I am trying to imagine the most scintillating sequence from Manhattan to Port Jay, treating the moment you leave New York City as the start of the

Raymond weeps and says nothing. Tyler COCKS the gun. Raymond GASPS.

TYLER

The question, Raymond, was "what did you want to be?"

A beat.

JACK

Answer him!

RAYMOND

A veterinarian!

TYLER

Animals.

RAYMOND

Yeah ... animals and s-s-s ----

TYLER

Stuff. Yeah, I get it. That means you have to get more schooling.

RAYMOND

Too much school.

Tyler shoves Raymond’s wallet back into Raymond’s pocket.

TYLER

Would you rather be dead?

RAYMOND

No, please, no, God, no!

Tyler moves the gun right between Raymond’s eyes.

TYLER

I’m keeping your license. I know where you live. I’m going to check on you. If you aren’t back in school and on your way to being a veterinarian in six weeks, you will be dead. Get the hell out of here.

Raymond staggers to his feet, heads down an alleyway. Jack and Tyler watch Raymond flee, then Tyler looks at Jack.

JACK

I feel sick.

TYLER

Imagine how he feels.

Tyler brings the gun to his own head, pulls the trigger -- CLICK. Empty.

JACK

I don’t care, that was horrible.

Tyler walks away.

TYLER

Tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of Raymond K. Hessell’s life.

Jack watches Tyler go.

TYLER

His breakfast will taste better than any meal he has ever eaten.

Jack turns to look the direction Raymond ran. He finally turns back, following after Tyler.
performance. Thus, I am currently designing a submarine, which you can find early plans of toward the back of this book. Once I am satisfied with the sub as the catalyst for what happens once the theater is reached, I will return to producing iterations of intervention on Fort Jay, studying how various approaches might promote or hinder live performance. Using standard theater program as convention, I will then deviate (or rather, distort) appropriately to allow performances to express themselves most effectively.

(ALEX takes a breath.)

Knowing myself, I’ll probably begin making much larger interventions than necessary—though toward grand goals of a scintillating performance venue—followed by carving away at the ‘fluff’ to the point where only the essentials remain. These iterations will be compared and contrasted for their values based on the above specified criteria.

AUDIENCE MEMBER PLANT #2

Alright. And what are you hoping to have by the end?

ALEX

Well, by the end I would love to feel like I’ve established the idea seed of a strong alternative theater district to Broadway. Similar to the differences between London’s West End and the South Bank, I would like to feel like I worked well within West 8’s design proposal, Foster and Partner’s design for a New Globe Theater at Castle Williams, and the already seething opportunities inherent to Governor’s Island. I am hoping that investigations into the opportunities of Fort Jay help organically to create a fresh notion of what it means to be a theater in New York City in the 21st century.
All through this methodology of pushing a program to its extreme then slightly altering it?

ALEX

Certainly! I’m trying to let that serve as design parameters that guide my entire process. Even this book that I present to you-

(He gestures to the audience)

-I hold to the same design considerations. I asked it what it really wanted to be, and it told me it wanted to be a play. And what makes a play even more theatrical?

Interactivity. Picking your own path. Mixing and matching elements to find meanings you never would discover with a linear narrative. And so I implore you, dear audience member, don’t feel bound to the page!

(Lights down.

End of Act 1)
SITE ANALYSIS

ACT II: SETTING

THE STORMING OF FORT JAY
Two overlapping maps of Governor’s Island and its context. The first, from 1898, is before the southern landfill was constructed. The second is from 2000. Courtesy of the UNH Dimond Library.
Lights up on the bow of a large ferry with the capacity to carry approximately 500 people. On the second level, frontmost, stands ALEX, looking off into SL as winds blow in all directions. The ferry slows on approach to GOVERNOR’S ISLAND and ALEX slowly begins to make his way down the stairs, already intoxicated by the otherworldliness of this so recently deserted, mysterious island. In a few moments, the ferry comes to a complete stop. ALEX exits and looks around, seemingly alone. He shivers, then zips his coat all the way up and puts on his gloves. He looks back at New York City, small enough at this distance to absorb as a single entity, but still intimidating in its stature. Finally in the distance a waving hand catches his eye and he spots what he thought was an oak tree, but turns out to be a young woman, bright and enthusiastic, bundled up much less than himself. He approaches her.

ELIZABETH RAPUANO

“Hi Alex, glad you could make it.”

ALEX

“Me too. Again, thanks so much for getting me permission to come over.”

ELIZABETH RAPUANO

“My pleasure.

The island is really beautiful, all history, all empty. Some buildings are undergoing construction for future tenants that are coming in over the next several years like the New York Harbor School and the New York City Public High School, which is going in this building, 550, that used to be a public clinic. And this building 110 will be home to artist studios all open later this year. So then there’s Water Taxi Beach, another tenant that’s in this parking lot. All of these buildings are in pretty good shape, they’re being stabilized. They’re historic, you’ll see them as you walk around. Everything from Division Road, south, is not historic. So you’ll notice as you walk through, that there are hills in the historic district and natural topography. The island used to only be this big, when Christopher Columbus was here generations and generations ago. (ALEX laughs obsequiously.)

When the American Indians were here, it was just this big. Everything from Division Road, south, is landfill from the Lexington Avenue subway, so it’s entirely flat. You’ll see it’s entirely flat. All of these decrepit buildings are slated for DEMOLITION. Some of them were demolished already. It’s no longer a clinic. It is Picnic Point. It was once called Views of the Statue of Liberty. And it’s 80% green space. These buildings were all demolished. These buildings will eventually be demolished in future years to make way for future parking, future development. Which will be on that part of the island. And then again, all the buildings in the historic district are available for ADAPTIVE REUSE. So when you’re on the non-historic part of the island, south of Division Road, be sure to stay on the promenade because these buildings are not safe to go near.”
be open, but be careful if you go inside, make sure you leave the door open because people go around locking them, and you don't want to get locked inside. There's also a phone number on here for security in case god forbid something happens and you get stuck somewhere on the island."

ALEX (grimly)
"Ha ha."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Call someone, call me."

ALEX (slyly)
"Sure."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Either way, yeah, but you know, you're welcome to walk around, the boats go back on the hour every hour until 5. So just make sure you're on a boat by 5."

ALEX
"Okay."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Okay."

ALEX
"There's also a food truck. He's here till 2 if you get hungry."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"There's also a food truck. He's here till 2 if you get hungry."

ALEX (impressed)
"Ooooh."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"There's actually-"

ALEX
"Okay."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"We wouldn't want one of these buildings to fall on you."

ALEX (obsequiously)
"Hahaha."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Bricks fall off all the time."

ALEX (morbid sigh)
"Ugggh."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"They're actually fenced off but just make sure you stay on the exterior promenade. The bathrooms are in there."

ALEX (taking note)
"Mm."

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Here, I'm going to give you this map."

ALEX (impressed)
"Ha ha ha!"

ELIZABETH RAPUONO
"Yeah. If you walk around this part of the island, it's 2.2 miles all the way around. And if you were to walk from here to here, it's about a mile, which is sort of the area that people think of as Governor's Island, because this is the area that's usually opened to the public where people picnic and give tours and things in the summer. And this is the site of future development and things like that. Also, all of the buildings are numbered as you'll see on the back. Some of the buildings in the historic district might"
ALEX: “Ah.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “Good question. So the island was a military base from 1800 until 1966.”

ALEX: “Right.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “1966 it turned into a Coast Guard Base until 1997. After they left, nobody knew what to do with Governor’s Island. They were like ‘we don’t know, it’s really great, it’s in the middle of the Harbor, fantastic.’ So in 2003 when the federal government sold the land back to the city and the state for a dollar, there is a balanced budget amendment that says that if the federal government sells something, they have to get the exact amount of money for it that it’s actually worth. So land in the middle of New York Harbor in one of the biggest real estate markets in the world is not worth a dollar.”

ALEX: (capriciously) “Hahaha, right.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “So they essentially had to make it worthless. So the way they did that, to make the land that Governor’s Island sits on worthless, is to put a ban on residential housing, which is the most obvious way to make money, or a casino. So those are the two things that are banned on Governor’s Island for at least for 50 years. So in 2053, it could be a different conversation.”

ALEX: (impressed) “Hehe. Wow.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “When you really think about it, there are. There are affirmative things in the deed, so for example one of the affirmative points in the deed, and you can find all this online, is that there has to be a New Park plan on Governor’s Island at least 28 acres of which is contiguous. So we’re in this process of designing a new park and public spaces with a team led by West 8, which is a landscape architecture firm from the Netherlands. Actually, somebody from West 8 is here today, you’ll see her walking around with her parents, she wanted to take her parents to see Governor’s Island.”

ALEX: (adoringly) “Haha.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “So that’s part of the deed, and the other part is that you could have housing here if it’s connected to an education or health/hospitality purpose. So you could imagine dorms, you could imagine faculty housing connected to some kind of a university, you could imagine some kind of thinktank conference center, health center that would be connected to some kind of purpose like that. So there are loopholes, but in terms of, like, Battery Park City on Governor’s Island, it wouldn’t be like that.”

ALEX: (comprehendingly) “Right.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “Yeah.”

ALEX: (mindlessly) “Hahahaha.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “I know, it’s a unique place! So really, just walk around, call if you need anything, enjoy the atmosphere and talk to security before you leave.”

ALEX: “Cool, erm, last question.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO: “Yeah?”

ALEX: “Do you know anything about the New Globe Theater? I know it’s having a little trouble getting off the ground, but...”
ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Yeah, so that is actually a Park Service question, but you can actually go online and look at it. In the Park Service manages Castle Lane. Castle Lane is what the New Globe Theater Project wants to turn into the New Globe Theater. So they have lobbied the island, and if you’ve seen their website they have a billion supporters. And the park service chose not to include that in their general management plan. That is a document that every national park in the country has to come up with. And they did their’s last year, and it basically comes up with short term/long term goals and things like that for the park. You can look on the national park service website and actually see their general management plan. And I do think that in it they actually address it, because the Globe Theatre came to every public meeting that they had, and they’re very passionate about it. But I do know that the Park Service chose not to include that in their general management plan. But I think that it’s still an ongoing process, and I’m not positive, it’s a good question, if the general management plan needs to be approved by Washington DC and I’m not positive if it has yet been approved.”

ALEX

“Wow. Huh. Ah, and I’m sorry, one more question.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“That’s okay.”

ALEX

“That giant vent thing I saw when I came in…what was that?”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“It’s the vent shaft for the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. So you can see it if you look over right now. It’s actually not on Governor’s Island, we don’t own it.”

ALEX

(beat.)

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“It’s connected by a causeway and the MTA owns it. So we own about half of the causeway, and the MTA owns the rest of it. It’s the ventilation shaft for the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. The electricity and water comes through the Battery Tunnel. So when something breaks, they got to go in there. Hahaha.”

ALEX

(agreeing)

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“No, ha.”

ALEX

“But it’s not actually part of the island.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

(agreeing)

ALEX

“Yeah.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Yeah.”

ALEX

“And walk around!”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Great!”

ALEX

“The weather should be pretty good for the rest of the day.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Which is good.”

ALEX

“Yeah, well thank you for all of your help.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Absolutely, my pleasure.”

ALEX

“Ha ha ha.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“But that’s how workers for the MTA access the tunnel. That’s where all of our electricity and water comes through, from Battery Tunnel. So when something breaks, they got to go in there. Hahaha.”

ALEX

(beat.)

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“So a lot of people think it’s an icon of the island, and people see it everywhere and it’s so unbelievably ugly.”

ALEX

(disagreeing)

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Yeah?”

ALEX

“And walk around!”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Great!”

ALEX

“The weather should be pretty good for the rest of the day.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Which is good.”

ALEX

“Yeah, well thank you for all of your help.”

ELIZABETH RAPUONO

“Absolutely, my pleasure.”

ALEX

“Ha ha ha.”
“I got nervous when I heard that island is closed to the public, and realized I just missed it!”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO

“Yeah, oh no!”

ALEX

“So really, thanks.”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO

“Oh, we’re just happy to have people back on the island.”

ALEX

“Thank you!”

ELIZABETH RAPUNO (exiting SL up toward the house)

“Thank you!”

(Beat. ALEX suddenly finds himself with an endless expanse of landscape and empty historic buildings in front of him.)

ALEX (softly to himself)

“It’s like Armageddon here.”

(Lights down.)
(Lights up where we left ALEX, near the ferry. ALEX is now alone on the island. He walks and speaks to himself.)

ALEX
Alright. Let’s explore this abandoned, utopian netherworld. I’m walking on the main path now. Here’s a sign that tells me some different directions I could go. Looks like the path is indeed a promenade around the island, and especially for the opening section it highlights interest in Fort Jay. Not only am I orbiting it right now, but it’s up on the highest point of the island, yet sunken down enough that I can barely see the roof from where I am. Well I’m continuing to walk east, and if I’m thinking about forces, I continue to be interested in Fort Jay, but almost of equal weight on me right now is the occasional view of New York City that I see when a building isn’t blocking my view. Each time I see it I feel an incredibly stark contrast to this whole island. It’s like being on the moon and looking back at Earth. Or maybe at Mars. New York City never quite feels real unless you’re actually in it. From here it may as well be a cardboard cut out. I continue along the path veering east, and another focal points begins to draw my attention: Castle Williams.

(ALEX approaches Castle Williams, touching the walls.)

The first thing I notice about this fort is the size of its bricks. Brick is by far the most common material language on this island. Here it provides a monolithic quality, giving the building an impression of extreme mass and weight. Though I am unable to access the interior, openings in the walls that have become home to plants and birds alike allow me to estimate the thickness of the walls at about eight feet. As I continue to circle the fort, which acts as a sort of pivot for the promenade around the island’s perimeter, the Statue of Liberty suddenly comes into view. Here I am reminded of its symbolism as a beacon for those entering America that this is a land of opportunity and freedom. For a moment I consider the countless individuals (my great grandfather included) who approached Ellis Island from their many distant lands and upon finally seeing the Statue of Liberty, felt their spirits lift, endless possibilities ahead of them in this strange new land.

(ALEX reaches the “corner” of the island and attempts to see as far as he can to the other points.)

I do not find it difficult to imagine Governor’s Island becoming just as strange and new a land to citizens of New York City. An urban existence of density, sheekness, and routine contrasted with a wide open landscape surrounded by water, populated by an enormous variety of trees and buildings all over a century old must be a jarring experience to say the least. And there’s an x-factor too. Something you can’t put your finger on, but tells you that, if done right, this island truly could be an experience entirely unique in
its vision and scope. If only I can amplify the qualities already inherent to the island, the theatrical nature already present...we’ll be on our way.

(ALEX pulls open the locked front doors just enough to peer into the courtyard)

Looking in here really does remind me of the Globe Theater. Taller, and certainly ‘heavier’, but it’s easy to imagine an experience in here similar to mine in London, an active grounding, feeling full part of the performance, watching a minimalist stage completely transport me to another world. Hm. Which gets me thinking: I basically want my theater to be a world of its own within another world of its own, that is Governor’s Island. Where can that ‘conflict’ resolve into something complementary?

(ALEX looks back toward Fort Jay)

I had no idea how direct the sitelines are between Fort Jay and here. I don’t know if it means anything, but isn’t it interesting that we have several instances of adaptive reuse of forts all so close to each other. Castle Williams as the New Globe, Fort Jay as my venue, and then the Statue of Liberty, which used to be another star-fort similar to Fort Jay. Perhaps there’s something to be said for the opportunities directly afforded by military constructions...hm. Anyway, if Foster’s Globe is already fostering—ahem—one alternative theatrical experience to the one found on Broadway, there’s certainly opportunity to build off that with my theater or ‘performance venue’, both as an alternative theater in itself and as something directly complementary to Castle Williams. I could certainly imagine a scenario where after enjoying a performance at Castle Williams, audience members have reason to then go over to Fort Jay for a ‘part 2’ or ‘more in depth look at’ kind of thing. Or maybe vice versa. The major point of entry for the island could be an experience in Fort Jay, which then leads into something at Castle Williams/the New Globe.

(ALEX walks through the parking lot and then the grass towards Fort Jay, noticing how slow a process it is for the building to reveal more of itself, even while increasing in elevation. The only sounds he hears are wind and the leaves crunching beneath his feet. Then a helicopter suddenly flies overhead.)

This really is a completely different world. All alone on this sublime, deserted island, and then a sharp reminder of modern technology and the existence of other people. I remember in London how jarring it would be when caught up in the amazing minimal performances given at Shakespeare’s Globe to suddenly have a plane roar above you. Hm, well I imagine under the right circumstances, such a juxtaposition could be an opportunity instead of an obstacle...

(ALEX finally reaches a point where he can see...
an entire elevation of Fort Jay.)

Ah. Here we are. Well it certainly does look like a fort. Between that nine foot deep moat and the imposing walls, I imagine this would be quite a formidable opponent to storm.

(He notices the cannons on the edges of all the moats.)

Goodness! That’s a lot of canons. Fascinating arrangement. I imagine the intention would have been to allow for the attack of any target from two separate angles to make sure there’s no ‘dead zones’. Hm. Now as a theater, wouldn’t it be interesting if the canons were substituted with spotlights? Or better yet, performers? What instead of being in danger of being ‘attacked at’ from two sides, you were always in ‘danger’ of being ‘performed at’ from two sides?

(ALEX puzzles this.)

Hm. And that immediately starts to set up some interesting internal/external relationships. If each of these star points becomes its own stage focused on performing out to the surrounding context, then naturally there’s an intrinsic condition once you get inside the courtyard...

(ALEX proceeds down a set of stairs then walks up a ramp under a tunnel into the center of the fort. He examines his approximately symmetrical surroundings.)

Well. That was easy. Yes...yes...

If the outer points are stages performing out—or maybe even down into the moat—then that already starts to set up various opportunities for performing into the courtyard. The audience could be located in the middle of the courtyard, being ‘performance attacked’ from all sides of the buildings.

(Beat.)

Or, the opposite could occur. The performers could be located in the courtyard, and the audience could be on these surrounding balconies. Ah, well yes, I guess that’s a more standard theater in the round...though this would truly be in the round, well, square, but yes...standard theater considerations like backstage, entrances, exits, wings, lighting would all need to be optimized so that the audience could be on all four sides. I suppose backstage could be those corner ramps that lead to the star points...which could potentially lead to a very dynamic internal/external relationship. People on the outside would only receive the slightest hint of what was occurring inside when a performer from the inside comes to the outside. Hm. Fascinating.

(ALEX continues to pace the courtyard, examining the various brick, wood, pavement, and trees.)

And not to be different for the sake of being different, but wouldn’t it be interesting to play with the older theater conventions—ones that were in place when these forts were built—where going to the theater was...
all about the class structure, going not just to see but to be seen. Hm, I think about some of the West End theaters I was in in London where the box seats didn’t even face the stage, but the orchestra sections where the ‘lesser’ classes would sit so that they could be watched. What if these residences were transformed into special ‘box seat’ apartments, where people would pay extra not to have special seats to watch the performance, but to actually be a part of it, as background cast or otherwise.

(ALEX proceeds to look into some of the windows.) Wow, these are still livable space. Geez, people who pay for these seats could actually stay here overnight... or contribute to some kind of performance indoors.

(ALEX paces a balcony, looking down) OR, this could become like a Shakespeare Acting Troupe, where actors in residence literally live in the theater as their residence. Depending on the performance, there could be some kind of stipulation where the actors need to be in the theater because they need to always be performing, or ready to perform on a moment’s notice. What happens when a commute is no longer an issue?

(ALEX examines various ancillary structures) Alright, sheds. Natural storage for props, scenery. Heck, its right in between the stages... scene changes could even occur right here. It’s certainly close enough. And wow, look at these great basement spaces. Man, all sorts of things could happen down here. Nevermind the fact that the casual audience member would never think these were actual spaces, this really makes me wonder how deep the structure actually goes. I mean from a distance it seems so sunk down and-

(ALEX proceeds out another tunnel of the fort to the outside) Yes, some the windows don’t even fully protrude. Huh. I could completely imagine this only being the tip of an iceberg, and that the building, being so high up in elevation already has a vast underground infrastructure that extends into the water, or even below! Haha, now wouldn’t that be an amplification of the fort’s original intention: making it so that no soldiers ever had to leave or enter the fort out in the open, they could do everything by submarine using some secret subterranean tunnel that goes through Governor’s Island! Oh crap, five o’clock.

(Beat.) Suddenly taking the ferry back seems incredibly boring...Oh well, I guess until someone discovers that hidden subterranean tunnel, this is all I get...

(ALEX exits on the ferry, SR, as though saying goodbye to a childhood friend he may never see again. He gives a last look to the audience as the light fade to black...)
GOVERNOR’s ISLAND
DIGITAL MODEL
In an effort to determine what qualities I want my own theater to design to possess, I studied the designs of a variety of other theatrical infrastructures; not just theatres, but also museums, rides, and even theories. Remember, I’m approaching the definition of ‘theatrical’ as any experience that displaces you from your ordinary routine, letting you step into another world of hyperreality. I ranked them subjectively on a rubric I wish to apply to my own design, which covers aesthetics, experience, and pragmatism.

This led to a more in depth study of the Panopticon as a theatrical space, detailed in the next Act.
Serlio is enthralled by the notion of 'theatre as spectacle', and is most concerned with suspending the audience’s disbelief in the most effective manner possible. He enjoys thinking of theatre as a magic show. The audience clearly knows that the colored lights are a trick, the lightning isn’t real, the cutout people are not alive, and the stage doesn’t really extend back into a city in a different world, but when the audience is unaware of how such a realistic effect is being achieved, that carried illusion is his satisfaction. He was following conventions of verisimilitude of the time, but his concepts of presenting just enough info to suspend disbelief carry on today. His methods for creating stage illusion are fascinating and could serve as spectacle in themselves if revealed properly.

Serlio is wholeheartedly concerned with practicality. For staging he outlines a how-to manual of efficient strategies for stage design following well-known conventions. Serlio is most interested in the emblematic opportunities of Renaissance perspective theory. Serlio follows Marcus Vitruvius’ rules without much desire for modification. However, he misreads Vitruvius. In Book Five of De Architectura he states:

“There are three sorts of scenes, the Tragic, the Comic, and the Satyric. The decorations of these are different from each other. The tragic scenes are ornamented with columns, pediments, statues, and of the royal decorations. The comic scene represents private buildings and galleries, with windows similar to those in ordinary dwellings. The satyric scene is ornamented with trees, caves, hills, and of the rural objects in imitation of nature.”

(English translation by Joseph Gwilt, 1826)

I says:
-Serlio is enthralled by the notion of ‘theatre as spectacle’, and is most concerned with suspending the audience’s disbelief in the most effective manner possible.

-He enjoys thinking of theatre as a magic show. The audience clearly knows that the colored lights are a trick, the lightning isn’t real, the cutout people are not alive, and the stage doesn’t really extend back into a city in a different world, but when the audience is unaware of how such a realistic effect is being achieved, that carried illusion is his satisfaction.

-He was following conventions of verisimilitude of the time, but his concepts of presenting just enough info to suspend disbelief carry on today.

- His methods for creating stage illusion are fascinating and could serve as spectacle in themselves if revealed properly.
“From its early formation, character theory in architecture demonstrated some close affinities with the art of theatre, including themes of acting, the personification of characters, and stage set design.” — Le Camus

“Pleasure from a theatrical performance is not caused by the illusion. It is when we become aware of the working of the illusions and can appreciate the work a second time.” — Du Bos

“What emotions do we not feel in the contrast between deep shadows and limpid light, or between the delights of calm weather and the confusion of winds and tempest?” — Servandoni

“...each is a doorway framing the next scene like a proscenium.”

“I SAYS:

Previous character theory was very rigid. Le Camus advocated for a temporal progression similar to the dramatic unfolding of a play, and gradations in ornamentation throughout the interior of a building resembled a succession of stage sets in a theatrical performance. His narrative theories influenced John Soane to Frank Lloyd Wright, and have great potential in dictating the progression of a play.
“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes, back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man”

-Joseph Campbell

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**Aesthetics**

**Experience**

**Pragmatism**

**Campbell Monomyth**
The New Globe Theater, also to be located on Governor’s Island in a vacant fort, serves both as a precedent and potential context. Just as the Globe Theater in London serves as an alternative to the West End experience, the New Globe (though incorporating modern technology) will also serve as an alternative to the Broadway experience. It is not difficult to imagine an explicit relationship between events that might occur here and events that might occur at the revisioned Fort Jay.
THEATRICAL ELEMENTS
- spatially focused
- context specific
- powerfully simple
- adaptive building, though not space

optimized memory
Aesthetics

Experience

Pragmatism

Wyly Theatre

**THEATRICAL ELEMENTS**
- rethinks the idea 'theatre as internal world'
- engages the context and public sphere due to verticality.
- dynamic spatial form changes thereby affect mood primary space (not unlike Serlio's conventions)

urban conflict
PNEUMATIC RELEASE

confined, looking down at climax with new eyes
new heights squeeze you...
then release you into a grand view of your entire experience
and a new route returns you, now with a fresh outlook

Aesthetics
Pragmatism
St. Peter's Basilica

rising action
climax, but not the only!
looking up into a new goal

THEATRICAL ELEMENTS
- linear structure
- trick climax
- compression
- sequence reflection
PERPETUAL SUSPENSE

- multiple genres
- guided structure
- progressive stakes
- foreshadowing

small scale
colorless focus

medium scale
some color
wander

large scale
more color
anticipate

incredible scale
miraculous color
awed enrapture
THEATRICAL ELEMENTS
- horizontal counterpoint to context
- open but clear sequential opportunities
- clear accessibility distinctions
- microcosms: climax spaces within climax spaces

SCINTILLATING SEQUENCE
entering the world
familiar gate
beautiful side of things
increasing in size...
...brightness...
...and openness

until a broken fence hints at impending danger
we hear the t-rex and see hints at its power...
a boat like ours has been destroyed by small predators
amidst eerie sounds and darkness, we enter a dark corridor
silence at first gives a false sense of security

suddenly out of the darkness, a wandering t-rex head appears
and it sees us, lunging for attack
until without warning we're dropped, enhancing our terror but bringing us safety back in broad daylight...

THEATRICAL ELEMENTS
-linear structure
-pansense engagement
-reversal of fortune
-deus ex machina
-shared experience
-complete world
-musical undertones
-proximity cues
-crisis uncertainty
THEATRICAL ELEMENTS
- queue line outside draws you into the world by introducing you to the story (dramatized exposition)
- exhaustive detailing throughout
- an original story in a familiar 'hero' world
- ride itself uses light to great effect
- provides illusion of choice for multiple ride experiences

perceived volition
THEATRICAL foreign or exaggerated, often beyond believability.

GOOD THEATRICALITY _ serves as metaphor for our essential life truths.
Just as London’s South Bank provides a theatrical alternative to the West End, my design, in tandem with Foster’s New Globe Theater, will create an alternative to New York City’s Broadway.

Among the elements of London’s South Bank that will seek to be established are:

- experimental performance
- new spatial experiences
- creative use of derelict space
- art centers are linked by the river promenade
- a center for modern culture

Notable facts about London’s South Bank:
- post World War II urban regeneration project
- currently the fastest growing part of London
- unofficial center of British Street Skating

The following pages recount some brief thoughts based on my personal experiences in these wonderfully diverse and complementary spaces.
SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE
The classic. The original. Built to the exact specifications of the original Globe, and only a few hundred yards away, this pure theatrical adventure subsists without any modern construction or technology, including electric light, air conditioning, or even a roof to keep the weather out. The experience of a Groundling (center audience) was far more engaging and personal than any other theatre experience in my life. This was accomplished primarily by making us stand. What would have happened if we had to walk around?
Herzog and de Meuron took this derelict, deserted power station and transformed it into a world-class hall of modern art. What struck me most in the space was how despite its modern technology and complete transformation of program, it still felt like a power station. It’s grandness allowed me to perfectly imagine the enormous turbines that once required the space.
Denys Lasdun’s 1970s Brutalist work wove three entirely different theaters into one cohesive complex. I saw performances in all three theatres, and deeply admired the formal specificity with each to its intended staging, audience, and aesthetics.

The Cottesloe is a small, flexible space full of catwalks and instantly reconfigurable seats and stage. The Lyttelton takes advantage of unidirectional audience sightlines, allowing for visual tricks that would be uneffective in the Olivier, its enormous theater in the round (seen in plan above).
Though also possessing an incredible auditorium that provided me with the most powerful symphony experience of my life, what I actually found most engaging about the Royal Festival Hall was its circulation. Never with a building so large and complex was I able to so quickly orient myself and know exactly where I was at any given time. The building works with a system of folds that allows for the occupant to clearly understand their sequence linearly no matter where they are in the building.
What can I say? It’s a giant ferris wheel in the heart of London. How theatrical is that?

Beyond an excellent wayfinder due to its height, and quite distinct appearance, this device allows for the most spectacular views in all of London for anyone willing to pay the thirty pound fee. First proposed in the 1970s by architect Cedric Price, it was just built at the turn of the millennium. Oh, and it has almost complete functional transparency, which I like.
Scene 1

Lights up on Arnhem Koepel Prison. It is a grim place, built in 1880 on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon principle. It consists of an open, domed space surrounded by jail cells with a small hut in the center, previously a looming tower. The building has been condemned since 1958. REM KOOLHAAS enters.

REM KOOLHAAS
(grumbling under his breath)
Ugh. Another totalitarian, hypermonumental, space-wasting, failed ideal. What could possibly be done to make this useful as anything beyond a historic artifact?

(ALEX slides down the rail of a nearby spiral staircase.)

ALEX
Why not push it to its extreme and then re-examine its potential uses?

REM KOOLHAAS
You mean make it even more isolated and inhuman than it already—hey! How did you get past security!?

ALEX
Never mind that Remmy.
(Beat. REM KOOLHAAS paces, not making eye contact with ALEX.)

ALEX
Don’t mind me. I’m just watching you think.

REM KOOLHAAS
Don’t.

ALEX
Let’s just talk about it. How would you approach this design problem?

REM KOOLHAAS
(shrugs)
Can I have a question a little less pedestrian?

ALEX
Hm. You’re grumpy. What goals might you set for a project like this?

REM KOOLHAAS
Certainly to improve the living condition of prisoners and—
ALEX
Isn’t that just the current ‘ideal’?

REM KOOLHAAS
Do you want to hear me speak or not?

ALEX
Sorry.

REM KOOLHAAS
(gruffly)
If we accept that all ideals, especially prison ideals, are destined to fail eventually, or even that today a new ideal is obsolete before it can be built, then we can give a raison d’être with the process of revision.

ALEX
You mean renovation?

REM KOOLHAAS
No, revision. Re-vision from where there was once vision.

ALEX
Ohhh...

REM KOOLHAAS
But we must preserve memory. Destroying a structure is destroying a memory.

ALEX
I don’t get it.

REM KOOLHAAS
See the image in the right.

ALEX
Oh. Now I get it.

REM KOOLHAAS
(Leaving the main structure for the outside)
Then, rather than these parasitic sheds, created only to serve the programmatic needs of today’s humane prison model in the most mediocre of ways, we instead build program-specific buildings to cater to every activity, from exercise, to reading. All of this is constructed under the current ground level, thereby disturbing the existing structure as little as possible and maintaining iconography.
Alex

(going back inside, Rem reluctantly following)
Um, alright. That’s a lot to break down. But simple question first: what exactly
is wrong with the prison as is? It’s an enormous, intimidating, rather sublime
space, don’t you think? Just saying, if I was a prisoner here, I’d do what I was
told.

Rem Koolhaas

(irked)
That’s not the point. The point is that current trends view that surveillance
culture as simply barbaric, rendering prisoners as unfit to return to society.
It’s structured entirely on the fear of being watched. It’s completely
isolationist.

Alex

But we know that it doesn’t work?

Rem Koolhaas

(wondering why he is here)
Look what happened here! They tore down the tower! Now it’s just a little room
for the guards to sip coffee in full view of all the prisoners! If anything, the
surveillance culture has reversed. It’s now completely decentralized, and all of
this space, this margin that was meant to serve as an intimidating gap is used
regularly.

Alex

So you’re saying that the building doesn’t really need an intervention.

Rem Koolhaas

“Changes in regime and ideology are more powerful than the most radical
architecture,” yes.

Alex

Indeed.

Rem Koolhaas

But architecture can embrace those spontaneously developed cultures...
decentralized surveillance, humane treatment of prisoners, exterior
circulation...all of it, and designing elements that more specifically meet those
needs.

Alex

But you recognize that this current ‘ideal’ is destined to be seen as outdated
even, well, today?
REM KOOLHAAS

Certainly. That is why we create additional margin for the creation of future ideals. The design itself is guided by the idea of the prison culture as a "system of continuously revised paradigms".

ALEX

But you'll still insist that the iconography of this one remain intact along with the two other failed ideals?

REM KOOLHAAS

Yes.

ALEX

Doesn't that become absurd after five or six? Like some weird museum exhibit or Vegas Luxor kinda thing?

REM KOOLHAAS

(fumbling in his back pocket)

Hoho, I don't see that many revisions taking place.

ALEX

(checking his watch)

Maybe you're right.

REM KOOLHAAS

(showing ALEX some drawings)

Flexibility is the creation of margin.

ALEX

Ah, so flexibility exists in the span of multiple renovations, not in the potential reconfigurations of one?

REM KOOLHAAS

Yes.

ALEX

Well I'm all for that. I mean, we definitely see eye to eye on this idea of revision and unexpected adaptability.

REM KOOLHAAS

Ah, yes, you're referencing my definition of margin, that I call "excess capacity that enables different and even opposite interpretations and uses."
ALEX
Are they quotation marks because that’s something you’ve actually said and--

REM KOOLHAAS
--not words you’re just putting in my mouth? That is correct.

ALEX
(looking from the drawings to the space)
Wait. But how does your design take advantage of the fact that you still have prisoners for a significant amount of time staring into this central space?

REM KOOLHAAS
It doesn’t need to be taken advantage of. It’s an outdated principle and completely in--

ALEX
Yes, inhumane, I know, you’ve said that.

REM KOOLHAAS
You might say that I’m putting “new layers of civilization on old layers of supervision.”

ALEX
Or you might say that.

REM KOOLHAAS
Right. The point is, that this way, for the first time in prison ideals, we’re not claiming to have the be all, end all solution. We recognize that something is bound to come after this that is thought of as better, and we make room for it, but we are adding our own modern layer nevertheless.

ALEX
Yeah, but I still think that your design doesn’t take into account the fact that even though you’re embracing the spontaneous culture that has developed, you’re ignoring the fact that you’re still left with cells all facing into everything going on in the middle. Why can’t you explore that?

REM KOOLHAAS
It doesn’t need to be explored--

ALEX
Why do you have to label this typology so bluntly as an obsolete poison on society?

REM KOOLHAAS
It no longer meets--
ALEX
That’s Foucault talking. Not you.

(Beat.)

REM KOOLHAAS
(taken aback)
You don’t even know him. Or me.

ALEX
I’m don’t mean to assume. But I’m worried you’re accepting his position of
‘panopticon = bad’ without question.

REM KOOLHAAS
Well, no, that approach is just--

ALEX
You’re exploiting a natural social culture for your design, which, believe me, is
great, but you’re not taking advantage of any of the opportunities already set up
by the architecture in place. The crux of your design relies on building in the
open space--

REM KOOLHAAS
Yes the margin--

ALEX
And finding the best way to escape from what’s here! Why not embrace it! Why not
see what happens when you really push it to its limit?!

REM KOOLHAAS
I’m losing patience. What are you getting at?

ALEX
I’m working with a design principle of ‘revision’ that begins by pushing the
original intent of a design completely to its extreme, completely uninhibited,
then examining the result. From there, the result is most likely completely
unsuited for its current program, so I then consider what it might be suited for,
make any necessary, minor distortions, and voila!

REM KOOLHAAS
Hm. I don’t think you know the first thing about my design

ALEX
Sure I do, I made a model of it. Check out the right hand page!
SPECTACLE_ magnificent display on a grand scale

GOOD SPECTACLE _ inspires and connects us.
REM KOOLHAAS
Alright Mr. so-sure student. How would you approach a project like this?

ALEX
(reaching into his pocket)
Me? You’re asking me? Little ol’ me? Why, oh, I don’t know, I couldn’t possibly think up something on the spot—
(He hands REM KOOLHAAS drawings)
--but if you insist.

(REM KOOLHAAS looks at them for a moment, his expression unreadable.)

ALEX
So I begin by thinking: what are the driving intentions behind the Panopticon principle? Reform. Intimidation. Isolation.

REM KOOLHAAS
Surveillance.

ALEX
Ah, I would say that’s a means to an end, not the end itself.

REM KOOLHAAS
(Hopping to the next drawing)
Alright. What the heck is this?

ALEX
But the architectural realities of the space are still highly considered. Oh, right. So again, completely uninhibited, I imagine that what this space really wants to be. The floor was never meant to be occupied anyway, so I say take that out completely. Make it a bottomless pit. Maybe snakes are at the bottom, I don’t know. Also, there’s a certain security in being enclosed in a space. A certain level of safety. Therefore I say take the bars out, and the balcony.

REM KOOLHAAS
What, so a prisoner can fall over the edge into your endless abyss?

ALEX
I’d call that pretty intimidating.

REM KOOLHAAS
(turning to the next drawing)
But how do the prisoners receive food? Water? What about punishment? What kind of egress is there?
ALEX
Well I wasn’t thinking of those things in my ‘uninhibited’ stage, but now that you mention it, that’s what this bridge is for.

REM KOOLHAAS
Bridge?

ALEX
(miming the experience)
Of sorts. See whenever a single prisoner needs that extra bit of special attention, this catwalk, draw-bridge kind of thing can be lowered to any one of the cells and the guards can go deal with the prisoner personally. How frightening would that be, knowing that if you misbehave, you’re not just listening for the footsteps of the guards coming from the side, but you see their direct approach path to you?

REM KOOLHAAS
Okay. But that’s completely unrealistic—

ALEX
As a prison model. Yes I know. So then I take a step back and think, what COULD this be, if not a prison? How could these seemingly negative qualities actually become positive? Hm, what about a rock concert venue?

REM KOOLHAAS
(snorting with laughter)
You’re kidding.

ALEX
Not at all. Rock stars are already held up as gods of sorts by many fans. Why not add to that image by making them virtually untouchable across an endless abyss, separating the world of mortal and immortals? There’s the audience, all contained within the different cells. There’s the performers, in the center on what could be a rotating, height-shifting stage. And can you imagine the light show that could take place in a space like this?

REM KOOLHAAS
And that bridge?

ALEX
(gesturing wildly in the space)
A way to reward fans who are showing the most enthusiasm. Who’s rocking out their cell the most? Ah, block 326C! Lower the bridge, let them on stage to
dance with the band. Or better yet, maybe the band approaches them for a song
and leaves the center. I saw Aerosmith do something like that once, they were
lowered into--

REM KOOLHAAS

Anything else?

ALEX

Sure. Back in the real world, slightly more practical architectural concerns
would need to be addressed, so minor distortions, modifications, interventions
would be made. Railings to stop people from falling into the abyss. The back
walls of all the cells knocked out with a complete circulation system on the
outside would make sense for entering and exiting the show. If I were to
study this with further iterations, other concerns certainly would need to be
addressed, but as a starting point...

REM KOOLHAAS

Is that it?

ALEX

(having expected a stronger reaction)
Yeah. For now.

REM KOOLHAAS

Okay. But it’s a prison.

ALEX

And it could be...a rock concert!

REM KOOLHAAS

Alright...but we were asked to make this prison functional for another 50 years.

ALEX

Yeah. Why not functional...as a rock concert?? PanROCKticon!!

REM KOOLHAAS

(nonplussed)

ALEX

Right.

I mean it could have been an interesting direction to come from at least.

REM KOOLHAAS

(taking his drawings back)
Sure.

ALEX

There’s just a lot of missed opportunities in a loaded space like this.

REM KOOLHAAS

begins to walk away. Beat.)

REM KOOLHAAS

This was a long time ago. I would do it quite differently today. Quite
differently.
(REM KOOLHAAS slams the central hut door in ALEX'S face, leaving his time-space coordinates in question.)

ALEX
I’m sure you would, Rem. I’m sure you would.

(Lights down.)
ACT VI: YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE RULES IF

CONVENTIONS AND CRAFTINESS
These charts have served as my reference as I have begun to think about the more practical considerations of designing a theater. I have approximately 70,000 square feet to program, if I take the site as it is. Basic program I know I will need include:

- box office
- coat room/lobby
- stages
- scene shop
- costume shop
- backstage
- storage
- mechanical room
- lighting grids
- restrooms
- clear egress

I am less certain about the necessity of some other programs, and will consider them as necessary:

- cafeteria
- flytowers
- rehearsal spaces
- shops
- offices
- accommodations
- HVAC
My first design instinct was to design the whole darn building. I figured that would at least give me a rough idea of the issues I was going to need to confront in more detail at a later date. My first design pass focused on designing for a specific plotline instead of a performer/audience relationship. Multiple stages, each specifically designed for a plot event, would then progress the play and the mobile audience through the stages of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth. The results of this study can be seen on the next page.

What came out of this was an understanding that Governor's Island and Fort Jay already had a number of latent theatrical opportunities and I should focus on exploiting those instead of designing for a tabula rasa. Studying Koolhaas led me to my 'amplify, distort' methodology and the results can be seen on subsequent pages of that first pass of taking the natural qualities of the fort and pushing it to an extreme, then using the result for theater instead of the military.
CARADHRAS
MORDOR
MANHATTAN?

SIGHT LINES views to spaces enhance anticipation

SERENITY TO MYSTERY light decrease, fog increase

INTIMACY TO DANGER vent decrease, fire increase
STAGE 1 - NEW WORLD THRESHOLD
Governor’s Island, a world unto itself, will attack/perform at New York City, New Jersey, Brooklyn, the Statue of Liberty, & all near ships and helicopters

STAGE 2 - ALLIES, ENEMIES, OBJECTIVES

STAGE 3 - ROAD TO INNER SANCTUM

STAGE 4 - CLIMAX
After a transitional experience with the island, you’re in a new world

FORT JAY

AMPLIFY
In this iteration, I contend that Fort Jay’s hidden desires are:
1) to be a fortress [larger and stronger]
2) to take advantage of the harbor’s proximity
3) to never have its soldiers circulate out in the open

Thus, the following steps are taken:
1) provide a shell around the residence and courtyard using modern technology to completely enclose its inhabitants
2) directly link the fort to the harbor by filling the moat, and using the above shell as a discrete lookout
3) make the primary circulation in and out of the fort underwater on a direct line, allowing the above shell to be completely enclosing

DISTORT
at this point, it is clear that Fort Jay possesses a number of inherently theatrical qualities.

They include:
1) the star layout for ‘attacking at’ has qualities suited for ‘performing at’
2) the points become outdoor stages
3) the shell creates a geode-esque interior space naturally fit for a journey’s end
4) the interior becomes an indoor stage
5) potential role substitution for actors as defenders and audience as attackers

Goals for this design include:
1) inclusion of the approach to the fort as part of the theatrical experience
2) clear, but obstacle-oriented sequence
3) design that facilitates for an ‘aggressive’ audience experience

Thus, the following steps are taken:

1) take full advantage of modern materials while working in the regional language
2) let the shell’s height allow for a modern ‘Shakespeare Globe flag’
3) let the shell’s stature allude to another nearby renovated fort on Liberty Island...

DISTortion becomes:
1) using Litracon with traditional brick to create a strong yet potentially ethereal shell
2) adding a less discrete globe at the top
3) replacing canons with lights
HYPERREALITY_ a world created among a branding that provides the illusion of a reality that does not and cannot exist. Defined by Umberto Eco.

GOOD HYPERREALITY _ is indistinguishable from reality.
HYPERFANTASY_ a world created among a branding that transparently provides a fantasy world while intentionally exposing how that world does not and cannot exist.

GOOD HYPERFANTASY _ is even more intriguing than the fantasy.
Dear Diary,

I apologize for writing so late at night; I only just returned home! What I thought was going to be a simple night of theatre turned out to be...well...so much more. Diary, I don't even know where to begin! To be honest, I only got my ticket in the first place because I thought I might see Max there...shh! Don’t tell anyone! I heard him talking to Meddling Molly at work, saying that he might go this weekend. I think he likes Molly. I think he wanted Molly to go with him. I don’t like Molly. But you know all about that, Diary, don’t you.

Anyway, the ticket was only forty two dollars on the theatre’s website, which is like ten dollars back in 2009, so I figured it’s a cheaper night out than dinner and a movie. To be fair, I did have a few gin and tonics before I left my apartment. The theater is on Governor’s Island, which I hadn’t been before, but I knew had a lot of hype since West 8 and Foster and Partners and a whole bunch of other starchitects had a go at it. So I guess suspected the trip would be a bit of a hassle but lo and behold, getting there (at least to the ferry terminal...) was pretty simple: I was able to take the Green Line all the way to South Station, the very southern tip of Manhattan. It was only half an hour from Grand Central. Once at South Station, I found signs for the Battery Ferry Terminal.

Inside, along about two hundred other people, I was surprised when I was given the option to ride the ferry, or to take part in ‘sub_mission’, which was free. Well, the Ferry Ride was an extra thirty four dollars, so I figured what the hay and volunteered for ‘sub_mission’, whatever it may be. There were some waivers I had to sign, but I didn’t bother reading them...my eye was already caught by a cute guy with beautiful black hair. He also seemed ready for ‘sub_mission’. Thinking back, if I had read the waivers, I bet I would have been very surprised by the risks of this simple night to the theatre!

Soon, we were let outside. It was just starting to darken outside and there was a steady light breeze coming off the water that smelled, well, like New York Harbor. I saw a ferry on one dock, then made an audible gasp when I looked to the second dock. Hanging in midair like some kind of bizarre gondola or tram was this massive metal and glass ship thing that looked like half a starfruit! I heard someone behind me call it the ‘starship’ which seemed fitting enough. For a moment I wondered if we were going out to space, but last I heard those trips still cost about three grand. On approach, I examined the ‘starship’ closer. It seemed surprisingly smooth and unencumbered by outside equipment, almost like some kind of bizarre gondola or tram. It was this massive metal and glass ship thing that looked like half a starfruit! I heard someone behind me call it the ‘starship’ which seemed fitting enough. For a moment I wondered if we were going out to space, but last I heard those trips still cost about three grand. On approach, I examined the ‘starship’ closer. It seemed surprisingly smooth and unencumbered by outside equipment, almost like some kind of bizarre gondola or tram. It was this massive metal and glass ship thing that looked like half a starfruit! I heard someone behind me call it the ‘starship’ which seemed fitting enough. For a moment I wondered if we were going out to space, but last I heard those trips still cost about three grand.

In 1776, right here off the coast of Governor’s Island, David Bushnell (with help from Ben Franklin) designed the first submarine. Its mission was to plant a bomb under a large British ship blockading New York Harbor by drilling a hole under the hull. Moving at the speed of less than one knot, it was a slow mission, which ultimately failed, the bomb exploding harmlessly in the harbor to the confusion of all.

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Upon entry, I immediately felt like I had walked into a factory. Despite a few windows, one almost completely interrupted room greeted me with a cacophony of gears! I don’t think I used that word correct, Diary, but I don’t care! Gear everywhere! All shapes and sizes, the smallest ones tinier than my hand and the biggest ones spanning most of the ceiling! It was such a strange room to be in (could I even call it a room?)! I instantly became more aware of all of my surroundings, like a I had never seen a wall or a seat before. We were led down a center aisle and asked to take our seats wherever we pleased, smaller people at the front, bigger people in the back. I, dainty as I am, of course sat towards the front. 3rd row. My seat appeared to be on some kind of swivel, almost like the kind of thing you would find on a ferris wheel, and most everything seemed to be made out of grated metal. I stubbed my toe at first because I didn’t realize there were pedals at my feet. Pedals? What is this, some kind of giant paddle boat? Like my cat trying to eat bubbles, I was thoroughly confused. I had just looked up to notice a very large, seemingly flexible tube in the center of the room when someone sat down next to me.

I couldn’t believe it! It was the cute guy with the black hair I met—well, saw—when signing up! He smiled as he sat himself down beside me, and introduced himself as Sam. I stuttered over my name, and he chuckled kindly. He asked if this was my first time. I said it was, and he said that he was a ‘seasoned veteran’. I wasn’t quite sure how you could be a ‘seasoned veteran’ at watching a play, but I guess the pedals were already making me very suspicious of the rest of the night. Soon someone began to speak...I couldn’t tell from where...was there a speaker somewhere? No...they were right at the front of the room. What bizarre acoustics...I could hear them clearly but there was some kind of metallic echo in the room that also amplified the speech.

I was thinking about how close Sam was sitting next to me so I didn’t hear all of what was said, but basically I remember something about embarking on the adventure of our lives, and to pedal as if our lives depended on it, and life vests under our seats. Whateva’. Next thing I knew everyone was strapping themselves into their seat with these bizarre seatbelty things, a horn sounded, and everyone began pedaling. The man at the front of the room, now sitting down facing us (kind of intimidating...) commanded us to pedal as fast as we could. I had no idea what was going on.
Quickly, I became aware of the gears all around us, turning and grinding away as though we had just woken a sleeping giant. Though my pedals were already turning for me (apparently attached to all the others in my row), I decided to help with the effort, still pretty clueless to what was happening. Would this be like a watercraft, propelling us across the gap to Governor’s Island? I thought that seemed like a lot of waste...

Then, just as all hundred of us seemed to be reaching a standard bicycle speed, I noticed the lights suddenly get brighter. Were we creating electricity for the ship? Surely it has a power source of its own? Realizing I hadn’t exercised in a while and that it was pretty warm in here, I found myself wondering why I wasn’t uncomfortable. Was there air conditioning in here? Next to Sam at the end of the row, I realized there was actually a fan, being turned right along with the gears as we pedaled. Hmm. I wondered if it would be possible to turn it up or turn it down.

Suddenly a buzzer sounded and the whole vessel rocked forward, leaning in towards the water like we were about to take the first plunge on a roller coaster. I looked around to see if something was wrong. Some people looked concerned like me, but others seemed perfectly placid, some even smiling with excitement. Assuming this was standard protocol I continued to pedal. Next thing I knew, whatever was holding us at the terminal was released and we were zipping down toward the water, almost in freefall! A lot of us screamed as we crashed into the water’s surface. I screamed. I also closed my eyes.

When I opened them I felt like I was in a completely different world. Still pedaling, now more out of habit than consciously, I looked toward the front window to see, well, nothing at first but black water, when suddenly the ‘starship’ seemed to stabilize and bounce back up towards the surface. For a moment we seemed to be fully above water again, but we were quickly sinking. A fairly loud squelching sound was coming from somewhere, almost as though we were taking on water... I panicked and began to breathe kind of hard.

Sam asked if I was okay, and told me not to be worried. He explained that the reason we went back up to the surface at first had something to do with weight ratios and how ‘buoyant’ we still were. He pointed to several locations and I realized that due to the location of some of the glass, we could actually see the water rushing in and filling the outer cavity of the ship with water. Still pedaling we...
continued forward and looking straight ahead it almost felt like we were doing something wrong. It's hard to explain, but the fact that we could see Governor's Island straight ahead and for a few minutes it kept fading in and out of view of the front window made the final plunge feel almost like we were in a sinking ship instead of a submarine, ah, sub, mission. Okay, I think I get it now...something to do with us submitting to the experience, but also actively participating in a sort of mission involving a sub. Hm.

Sounds were all becoming very interesting. As the last light disappeared from the water's surface and we could no longer see Governor's Island (though we knew we were headed straight toward it), I became very aware of a sound like a very long lawnmower cord being revved. Still pedaling, I realized that the large flexible looking tube that I was just noticing before Sam sat down next to me seemed to be pulling a large steel cable as well as some water through it. Was it made from glass? That wouldn't make sense. I was almost sure at that point that it could bend. Looking up, I realized there was also a cable system above our heads that was circulating, also due to our pedaling. Various items hung from it as well as buckets holding things. I saw everything from notes being passed to people in other parts of the sub, to water bottles and food for sale, to t-shirts and other merchandise.

A few more minutes continued of window blackness that allowed me to focus on the sounds around, eerily and blindly making our way toward our destination. It was very strange, making our way toward a theater I knew nothing about, but working with all those other people who would normally be nothing more to me than single serving friends who I had a quick chat with during intermission at a bar. But here we were, all working together toward a common goal. And it just made sense to get to know each other here. I found out that Sam is a biochemical geologist and that he has two dogs and one cat. And I'm pretty sure he's single!

There were moments when I guess people behind me were slowing down, and you heard people around them encouraging ‘go on, keep it up, you can do it!’ Part of me felt like we were in a platoon together on something. All the while, we, these tiny people are driving this enormous behemoth of a ship forward, our little feet cycles eventually causing those giant gears and giant propellers to spin. It reminds me of the first time I saw a live band and suddenly understood so much better how they were making the sounds they were! And here we are, performing away...

Anyway, after about half an hour I really had to use the rest room. In retrospect I probably shouldn't have had those gin and tonics as I was told several times to stop swinging my body so...
much when I was pedaling, but that’s neither here nor there. I got up to go the bathroom. As soon as I got up, though, my row seemed to start struggling with pedaling. I sat back down. Suddenly Sam touched me. He touched me, he actually touched me! He pushed me back up and said something flirtatious like ‘you go right ahead there, sweetie’. He called me sweetie! And he touched me! I felt butterflies in my stomach. I saw him reach over and pull a lever, and everyone in the row seemed to relax a little and start pedaling a little faster. ‘It’s just a like a giant bicycle, see?’ he said. ‘Really?’ I said. ‘Yeah,’ he said, ‘We just went from gear 50 to gear 42. There’s a prize for any row that can stay above gear 40 for the whole trip!’ ‘Wow’, I said, leaving the row, ‘that sounds swell!’

I made my way to the bathroom following signs to a lower level. A spiral staircase took me down one flight. The acoustics of the entire sub were different down here...softer resonances. I spied what appeared to be some kind of a kitchen, as well as another giant gear that looked like it was hooked up to a large battery. There was also a lot of storage. Everything from spare parts to spray cans full of god only knows what. Everything seemed to be so transparent, I was worried the bathrooms wouldn’t have any privacy! But they did.

Back to pedaling, Sam asked the other people in our row if they thought we could handle pedaling at 55. We said we could do it, and though it was harder, we enjoyed the challenge. The men seemed to be trying to one up each other with how easy they could make everything look, while the women in my row seemed to be quite content to show when they were struggling as well as when things were getting easier. Personally, I was enjoying the exercise.

Soon some lights came on in the front of the starship, and we began to see some pretty bizarre forms. We must have been fairly close to the bottom of the harbor...that or the things we were looking at must have been pretty big. I remember at least two shipwrecks, cars, lots of trees, some very strange-looking fish, and a lot of forms that could have been anything from skeletons to pipes. Sometimes the sub would tip up a little bit and we couldn’t even see a hint of the surface of the water. Soon I spied something very large coming up ahead of us. It looked large and rough and like we were going to crash into it!

Suddenly we pulled down a little more and didn’t crash, but continued to go straight. We appeared to have gone through a narrow opening of some kind. But they have to drill a hole through some mariner ship or something? I asked Sam, and felt silly afterward. He explained we had just entered
Governor’s Island. Geezum crow, I guess I had assumed we would still dock with the ferry or something straightforward like that, but of course I should have guessed that this trip had to get even more out there and we would find ourselves doing something like literally going into the island. Geez Louis people, what is this?

After what felt like an hour, I was starting to wonder when we would arrive at the submarine port or wherever we were going, when I noticed us slowing down. The man at the front asked us all to make sure we were securely fastened to our chair, and just as I was about to ask him why, I felt something I didn’t expect. The entire submarine was rotating up! I thought it would just be a momentary occurrence, but my goodness it just kept rotating and next thing I knew, the sub was turned completely upright, like the Titanic or something right before it sank. However, our chairs being ‘ferris wheel’ esque managed to keep us upright, though the space looked completely different now since I was looking at the floor. There were a few tiny windows, but now I wished I had chosen one of the few seats facing backwards, since these people clearly had the best view now, looking straight ahead toward what was previously our ceiling of giant gears. I said that to Sam, and he said that they’re reserved. What does that mean? He started to say something about ‘rank’ when I felt the pressure on the pedals change significantly. The room also felt slightly brighter, and I looked up toward what used to be the front window and saw faint glimmers of light rippling through the glass, casting a pretty beautiful effect on me and all of my co-pilots, stacked so neatly on top of each other.

Everyone seemed to feel a collective rush of excitement and we pedaled harder, the anticipation of the experience to come in the theater almost unbearable. If this was just us getting there, what would the actual show have in store for us?? Suddenly I heard a screeching metal sound and felt the whole sub jerk forward for a moment. We could all suddenly feel more pressure against us, as though we were no longer pushing through water, but something more viscous, like mud or even snow. Sam turned his head to me and asked what had just happened, but people in the back of the Starship were already pointing. Following their fingers, I realized that it was no longer steel cable and water passing through the center tube, but something much more complex. Squinting, I couldn’t be sure, but realized that it looked an awful lot like the spiral staircase I had used to go to the bathroom.

Our suspense building, a new sound was heard reminiscent of a fire extinguisher. Sam explained that almost the entire top of the star is filled with compressed air, which has to help force the water out of the outer cavity so that we can rise to the surface more easily. He’s so good at explaining things! We pedaled harder and the light got brighter. We were almost there! Little by little we found...
we needed pedaled less and less and that the starship was doing a lot of the rising on its own. Good ol’ starship! Breaking the water, we saw a cavity with a form that seemed to be such an accurate representation of the outside of the starship that it could have been a cast for it. It twisted a little, and it was like plugging in to a wall outlet, we even felt some kind of suction. I heard someone mutter something about magnets, which would be pretty neat I suppose.

Finally we stopped. We all cheered and congratulated each other. I felt so accomplished! Little did I know how much more was yet to happen on this little theatrical adventure. A sliding door opened up in the tube and people proceeded up the spiral staircase to the outside world. It was only in that moment that I realized we were most likely under the actual theater, not at a separate dock! Ha, so we don’t see any of Governor’s Island until we’re in the theater? Kind of control freaks, aren’t these people?

Climbing up the spiral staircase I felt like Dorothy entering munchkin land, and indeed, when I came out it was like nothing I had ever seen before. The color had truly been turned on. Bright lights everywhere and a single figure stood in front of all of us and oh, oh it was, oh—

Oh Diary...it's getting late. I have to get up for church tomorrow, so I'll finish you off afterward. All I’ll say now, Diary, is that I won! Tell you more soon? Isolates! Ha ha ha ha ha!

Love,
Master Emily


GLOSSARY

ACT X: THEATRICON:

JARGON YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS- bibliography

AUDIENCE-
1. those who watch a performance
2. those who are intended to occupy a building.

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE- audience members who have no choice but to watch.

CAST- the performers. Here it references the various precedents that play a role in shaping the final product

EXPOSITION- narrative elements in place for the sole purpose of providing the audience with information or backstory. Unless dramatized, does not advance the story further.

HYPERFANTASY- the fake authentic. Appears to keep you in a fantasy world when really it is exposing the entire structure of it (being on a movie set, backstage at a play, working in McDonalds) GOOD- is even more scintillating than the fantasy.

HYPERREALITY- coined by Umberto Eko. The authentic fake. An experience that appears to bring you into a real world when in reality that world does not exist. (an engaging movie, Disneyland, McDonalds) GOOD- never lets you know its not reality.

JARGON- glossary

LOBBY- where an audience waits to be let into a show. Often lobbies are decorated with images of the performance, or simply evocative of certain moods.

MILITANT- aggressive pursuit of a clear goal. GOOD- succeeds by being bold and enterprising.

MILITANT SPACE- a physical location that provides the occupant with the sense of a different world than the one they associate with their everyday lives. GOOD- compels awareness of the world in us.

MILITARY THEATER- the location of military action bordered by areas of inactivity. GOOD- is active at multiple scales.

MILITARY THEATRE- strictly controlled, actively engaging live performance. GOOD- provides opportunities for us to both follow orders and to make choices.

PLAYBILL- Table of Contents.

PROP- an element that aids in the clarity of action

SETTING- site

SPECTACLE- magnificent display on a grand scale. GOOD- inspires and connects us.

STAGE- 1. a period or step in a process, activity, or development.
2. the location of a performance.

STORY- a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.

STOREY- one level of a building.

STRUCTURE- what holds a story/storey together.

SYNOPSIS- contention

THEATER- a venue for theatre. GOOD- is a character.

THEATRE- live performance of a story. GOOD- challenges values.

THEATRICAL- foregin or exaggerated, often beyond believability. GOOD- serves as metaphor for our essential truths.

THEATRICAL SPACE- a physical location that provides the occupant with the sense of a different world than the ones they associate with their everyday lives. GOOD- compels awareness of the world in us.