

Games of Skill and Chance

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An introductory note

The theme of the Forum, University of Sheffield, November 2006 and of this inaugural issue of *field: Architecture and Indeterminacy*, gave me the opportunity to reflect on games, stories and experiments as alternative ways of thinking architecture. This paper was originally presented along with a three-screen digital video work: *l'hombre*. The video stems from my work in exploring film in relation to the architectural imaginary. I do this through writing, teaching and researching as well as through making: both digital and 16mm, (the work can't be neatly summarised but has evolved into what I term the aphoristic documentary – 'aphodoc', and the experimental home movie – 'expovie').

Some of the themes presented in this paper are new, some are old, and some are current obsessions. They are presented in this paper as 'same-text stories' not privileging any particular discourse. If I have not kept within disciplinary boundaries it is because I do not see them; if I have not prioritised architecture enough in the discussion it is because I didn't notice. Architecture to me is about the stuff of life and the glimpses we have of it; it is as indeterminate as the next thing.

One more thing to add.

This paper is in part constructed from my notes and in part from the transcript of the recording of my presentation at Architecture and Indeterminacy. It is an unfinished experiment in academic writing as an analogue, companion or subtext to the presented 'Games of Skill and Chance': where the game of skill involved the composed, crafted and referenced notes and that of chance, what I actually ended up saying. The purpose of the paper was not to specify or promote a way of writing or doing things according to skill or chance, but to explore indeterminacy as the basis for thinking and learning that extends through to architectural discourse and practice. Games of skill and chance concern architecture, its paradoxes and entanglements.

It takes one minute to read this story.

A composer friend of mine
 who spent some time in a mental
 rehabilitation center
 was
 encouraged to do a good deal of
 bridge playing.

After one game,
 his
 partner was criticizing his play
 of an ace
 on a trick
 which had
 already been
 won.

My friend stood up
 and said,
 “If you
 think I came to the loony bin
 to learn
 to play bridge,
 you’re crazy.”¹

¹ John Cage, transcript of story 56 from *Indeterminacy*, <http://www.ledf.org/indeterminacy>. The site contains 186 stories taken from two of Cage’s books: *Silence* and *A Year from Monday* and from the Folkways recording of Cage reading 90 of his stories in 90 minutes accompanied by David Tudor on piano: John Cage and David Tudor, *Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music* (1959), (Smithsonian: Folkways Recordings, 1992), 55’00” to 56’00”. For this story see also ‘Indeterminacy’ in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 56.

Puzzles and Stories

I often think of architecture as a game of skill and chance, party to certain rules (and rule bending), prone to subterfuge, conceit, the thrilling and the unexpected. And you can't tell architects – who by turns accept chance and deploy skill, to different degrees and in different ways – how to play the game. With architecture, it seems, chance is never alone, demanding always the gloss of its more stringent bedfellow. Indeterminacy has a different allure. But its place in relation to architecture needs to be approached carefully, remembering what has been referred to as the contemporary *Zeitgeist* which, with 'a generalised vocabulary of contingency, unpredictability, chance effects and indeterminacy', parades itself as a kind of rebellion against the 'excesses' of 'the modern'.²

² Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 116.

When I first presented these thoughts I started by playing a few minutes of John Cage's stories, recordings from *Indeterminacy*; (the door in the corridor was banging, I shuffled my papers, someone was whispering; we heard the one about the... the one that... and the one where...)³ Cage's stories deal with the unplanned and the complexity of being. At the same time they call up the ambivalence of telling tales and the double or contested meaning of fiction. Cage explains:

[In oral delivery of this lecture] I tell one story a minute. If it's a short one, I have to spread it out; when I come to a long one, I have to speak as rapidly as I can. The continuity of the stories as recorded was not planned ... my intention in putting the stories together in an unplanned way was to suggest that all things – stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension beings – are related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind.⁴

³ I played the first six minutes of Part 1, John Cage and David Tudor, *Indeterminacy* (Recordings, 1992). These stories included the one about Isamu Noguchi's visit, followed by the one that began 'You probably know the one about the two monks but I'll tell it anyway [...]', then the one about 'several of us driving up to Boston [...]', about Christian Wolff playing the piano, about the mechanised pen on Hollywood Boulevard; and then I stopped the disc playing after the one about the anechoic chamber.

⁴ 'Indeterminacy' in Cage, *Silence*, p. 260. John Cage introduced 'Indeterminacy' into musical vocabulary in the 1950's, using it as a compositional dimension with regard to performance.

Puzzles and stories. I turned to Cage's writings and recordings when I was beginning to think about what I could present at *Architecture and Indeterminacy*. I was trying to think of something that would both explain my understanding of indeterminacy and something of what I do – or what architecture does, and that was difficult and puzzling. But then I started to see indeterminacy everywhere. Perhaps it's obvious really, but it took me some time to realise that I could turn the tables on the received wisdom, where the indeterminate bits, 'the general ontological uncertainty' are either not there, or at best, a fiction. Indeterminacy is ontologically pervasive (in fact): what it is possible to realise is that it is the fully determinate, the permanent or the discrete that has problematic ontological status, because these are idealised abstractions or definitions and not ontological ultimates. Determinations are there with effort, but indeterminacy, simply *is*. And so it is with architecture too, where the language (or jargon) itself is indicative of an obsession with determination:

- ⁵ 'Experimental Music' in Cage, *Silence*, p. 8.
- ⁶ John Cage did a series of drawings, 'Garden of Emptiness' (1991) of the Ryoanhi monastery garden dating from 1499. See Corinna Thieroff, 'Sudden Images: The Ryoanhi Drawings of John Cage' in Joachim Kaak and Corinna Thieroff, *Hanne Darboven, John Cage: A Dialogue of Artworks* (Munich: Hatje Kantz Publishers, 2000). Cage developed 'indeterminate' processes and graphic notation systems for his music that were influenced by his adherence to the principles of I Ching. See also Yeoryia Manolopoulou, 'Drawing on Chance: extracts from *Drafting Pier 40*' in *The Journal of Architecture* Volume 11 (5): 303–314; pp. 304–305.
- ⁷ Cage's interest in duration and the experimental as the continual elaboration of the new, and the coexistence of past and present, ties in to Bergson's notion of time as 'indetermination itself'. See Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Adison (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), p. 193.
- ⁸ For an account of the space/time tension and the tendency to characterise 'postmodern' times as 'spatial rather than temporal', see Massey, *For Space*. pp. 147 ff., where she cites Bruno Latour: 'I have a feeling that we are slowly shifting from an obsession with time to an obsession with space.' *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 14. She discusses her reservations with this formulation and argues instead for a temporality integral to the spatial, a heterogeneity of practices and processes, and a relational politics of the spatial.
- ⁹ As Massey says, 'It is popular today to revel in the glorious random mixity of it all.' She is speaking about the compensatory tendencies for the determinist 'excesses' of 'the modern'. *Ibid.* p. 111; and, she continues, (p. 12) 'The language of order and chance has become loose and problematical.'

we have projects, models, specifications, details, efficiency: all is determined, but nevertheless indeterminacy is.

What Cage draws attention to is, not only that there are related things that cannot be expressed in words or images but that this indeterminacy itself should not be understood as empty: '[T]here is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to hear. In fact try as we may, to make a silence we cannot.'⁵ In both the drawn 'Garden of Emptiness'⁶ and the performed 'empty' or 'Silent Piece', (4'33'), Cage explored found environments, their potential for chance occurrences, as well as their possible expression or notation. What is interesting to note, however, is that for Cage indeterminacy alluded to a particular kind of performative compositional practice that was distinct from either improvisation, which relied on taste and habit, or the chance operations which he often deployed to determine his compositions. Cage's 'indeterminate' pieces asked the composer or designer to take responsibility for, or engage with, a situation not under their control. For Cage indeterminacy always happened in duration, in both his stories and performances, and not in momentary episodes, a throw of the dice, discrete slices of time or a succession of 'nows'.⁷ His work thus suggests an understanding of the indeterminate as neither a silent void nor a tragic hiatus (that would feed those jarring and troubled space/time dualisms), but instead as an open field of possibilities and potentialities with no need for distinctions or competition for space or time.⁸ This then, I thought, might provide a good, or more appropriate start for thinking about architecture; a move away from formalist approaches to 'occupying' space and time – filling their supposed 'emptiness'. Following Cage then, perhaps the complexity and relatedness of 'all things' that pertains also to architecture, could be more evident when 'not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind'. In other words to determine architecture, could mean losing it and its creative possibilities. How much more rewarding it might be to complicate things a bit, not for the 'glorious random mixity of it all'⁹, nor for the sake of muddying the waters, but to provoke a rethinking of categories, terms and assumptions. If indeterminacy is difficult to pin down, that might not be such a bad thing.

[...] for it is claimed that any experiments that are made precede the steps that are finally taken with determination, and that this determination is knowing, having, in fact, a particular, if unconventional ordering of the elements used in view. These objections are clearly justifiable but only where, [as among contemporary evidences in serial music], it remains a question of making a thing upon the boundaries, structure, and expression of which attention is focused. Where on the other hand, attention moves towards the observation and audition of many things at once, including those that are environmental

¹⁰ 'Experimental Music: Doctrine' in Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, p. 13.

– becomes, that is, inclusive rather than exclusive – no question of making, in the sense of forming understandable structures, can arise (one is tourist), and here the word 'experimental' is apt, providing it is understood not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as of an act the outcome of which is unknown. What has been determined?¹⁰

This brings me to experiment. The word experimental is sometimes misconstrued as to do with the causal or procedural, but what Cage suggests is an interpretation of the experimental where it defies understandable structures by being about unknown outcomes and 'many things at once'. Could there be an experimental architecture whereby inclusive might mean inventing ever-shifting categories, thus including the known with the unknown, the useful with the non-useful? It would suggest openness to experimental process in architecture, which could not be fixed, as this would reduce its multiplicity and heterogeneity. However hard we try, however good our foresight, our risk-aversion strategies, it is not possible to make a list of all the things we might consider in a design and then to 'deal with them'. Architecture is not an exhaustive project (and nor is it sustainable); instead, recourse to the experimental suggests a recognition of this difficulty and ambivalence, and challenges the prevalent determinism in architectural thinking. What can be determined? (If anything?) Cage approaches this question through his stories – stories that are suggestive of both puzzling cases and second-hand fables (thought experiments and re-tellings).¹¹ Cage's approach to indeterminacy and his ambition to take stock of, to relate 'stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension beings' parallels the potential for ethical engagement in any story. And after all is not the 'fruitful fable' also the ground for invention, for experimentation?

¹¹ I have explored thought experiments and their relation to architecture in 'The Laboratory and the Imaginary: How Real is that?' in Renata Tyszczyk (ed.) *Architecture and Interdependence: Mappings and Explorations by Studio Six* (Cambridge: Shed, 2007).

To leave an enormous amount open seems to belong to the essence of a *fruitful fable* and to myth. Precisely thanks to its own indeterminacy myth is able to produce constant new invention from within itself with the thematic horizon continuously shifting in different directions.¹²

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward 1989) p. 454.

Architectural discourse and expression however, tends to avoid indeterminacy, bar one or two oft-cited examples such as Tschumi's 'undecidable' *Folies* or Van Eyck's spaces of 'labyrinthine clarity'.¹³ This is not surprising; how could one – in rhetorically convincing ways – make 'indeterminate' areas appear in the design and be understood as indeterminate without losing the authority of the designer or the control/command of the interlocutor? For the most part designs that confront indeterminacy or chance have resorted to convoluted formal combinations that are meant to speak of complexity or have simply left 'room' – an allocated space – for the unexpected (where is the surprise in that?). It is similarly difficult to give an account of indeterminacy *per se*. How can anything remain as indeterminate once it has been explained, coerced into

¹³ The relation of architecture to indeterminacy has been the subject of renewed interest. For example, Doreen Massey describes a number of instances where indeterminacy has been used as a 'device' in an approach to architecture, (*For Space*, pp. 112–114). She refers to Tschumi, Van Eyck and the influence of the French Situationists. It is not my intention to pursue this inquiry here with extensive examples from architectural design; what is important to note is that in architecture's meeting with indeterminacy designs have tended either to mimic the 'chaotic' or act as a taming.

¹⁴ Cage's stories can be explained as an example of poetic invention: presentation of a self in terms of another *ethos* (character, the ethical argument) with appropriate *lexis* (diction) and *melopeoia* (rhythm and song).

¹⁵ A term I used to explore the eighteenth century attraction to the story with reference to the utopian discourse of the period. See Renata Tyszczyk, 'in *spem melioris aevi*: The Architecture and Writings of Stanislas Leszczynski, roi bienfaisant, 1737–1766' (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1998); published as *The Story of an Architect King: Stanislas Leszczynski in Lorraine 1737–1766* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz' discussion of utopian discourse also draws attention to this admixture of fantasy and theory, what she calls the theoretical doubling of utopic texts: 'texts with composites, amalgams, with a self-contained fictional representation, which is explained and justified through a theoretical addendum, commonly a text written after the more speculative and fanciful account.' She writes that the philosopher Michele Le Doeuff's explanation of this 'awkward but prevalent coupling of theory and vision [...] is that the theoretical or analytical doublet is written in part to contain the ambiguity or as she calls it, the polysemic quality, of the visionary text in an attempt to fix its meaning, to provide it a guaranteed reading,' Elizabeth Grosz, Chapter 15, 'The Time of Architecture' in Bingaman, Sanders and Zorach (eds.) *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change and the Modern Metropolis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) pp. 265–278; p. 270.

¹⁷ 'It was the nature of the common "imaginative project" that guaranteed the close affinity of eighteenth century art, architecture and science. That modern aesthetics could be a science of artistic experience was conceivable only in this imaginative project.' See Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004) p. 443, note 49.

neat lines, an ordered delivery, a written paper? The problem occurs in attempting to render, draw out, the unrepresentable. I struggled to write this down at all – and it works much better as a conversation, a play with words, or a game. This brings me (back) to the notion of *lexis*. The capacity to place some past event or person vividly before the reader's mind was identified by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* as *lexis*, or locution (usually translated as diction or 'style', but more precisely a way of saying things to do with a particular situation), a way of making things visible *as if* they were present.¹⁴ Evidently this is what designers also attempt to do when communicating projects: they try to place their audience *as if* they were there. It is not surprising therefore that they are attracted to stories. The *as-if* is the essential component of any story, as Cage demonstrates (so we can be on Hollywood Boulevard and in the mental institution with him). However, stories are, after all, where indeterminacy is allowed to coexist with the determined and even enhance and validate it. In stories, villains and the grubby, unexpected, tangential and inconclusive, rub shoulders with heroes and fairy-tale endings.

This attraction to the *as-if*, to the story, is by no means new, but what is interesting is how since the seventeenth century this attraction has transpired as a *fictional contingency*¹⁵, an urge or compulsion to resort to, or to harness the experience of life – as you get in any story – to reconfigure or to compensate for the vacuity of an appropriated temporal/spatial vision such as the utopia. When reality, as is so often the case, is considered uncertain, contingent, ridden with accidents, unexplainable, stories harness those rogue or chance elements. This has transpired in many different areas of culture – the storyteller saving the case for the scientist or engineer (and often being one and the same) whether in the writing of utopias or in the construction of gated communities.¹⁶ Architects continue to sneak stories in, with considerable skill, and often by the back door, in a kind of 'smuggling-in of experience', a legacy of the 'common 'imaginative project' that arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷

Invariably it works. Shifting between fact and fiction, the domain of the *as-if* has acquired the character of an exchange between the conceptual order of theory/practice and the experiential order of the 'inner life'.¹⁸ In a world understood as contingent, 'experience' is drawn upon in order to either substantiate or to counter the claims of the theory, project or scientific experiment. It is then considered a skill – and 'proof', that one is after all, 'experienced'. Good or bad, self-reflexive or not, such a conflation of experience and rational thought has often been capable of provoking an inevitable, if unexpected, engagement with the world, in all its hazy reality and indeterminacy. The key element of any story is that the modes of discourse, reasoning and experience, whether analysis, conversation,

¹⁸ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 163.

witnessing or evidence, memory, imagination, skill or chance, impinge on each other. Here we have come full circle: 'dealing' with our aversion to or confusion with indeterminacy and ambivalence requires the reassurances of storytelling; and stories, lead us back, by way of imaginative and resolute detours, to indeterminacy.



Fig. 1. Film stills from *Remote Worlds in Four Parts* (R. Tyszczyk, dv, 12 mins, 2004). In Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi; Life a User's Manual: Fictions*, trans. David Bellos (London: Vintage, 2003), the main character Percival Bartlebooth spends his life making and unmaking puzzles.

Aphodoc and Expovie

I'll try a different way in to the question of *Architecture and Indeterminacy*. I have started to explore the relationship between story, experiment and play in a series of experimental films and writings. The aim of this work has been to develop a way of thinking and communicating architectural ideas that are difficult to describe in either words or images. It suggests the mutability of film as a way of exploring the situational and relational nature of architecture. Conventional architectural representation attempts to describe reality uniformly and consistently. Working through the medium of film suggests an alternative approach to the poetics of praxis where design imagination and poetic thinking can intersect with the mutuality of necessity and chance. The work falls into two new 'categories': the 'aphodoc' - the aphoristic documentary or the 'expovie' - the experimental home movie, (and thus an exposure of life). These are modes of description that defy their own logic (documentaries aren't usually 'in brief'; home movies aren't meant to be more than that).¹⁹

¹⁹ This is part of ongoing work that explores the architectural imaginary in relation to documentary and film. See for example, Renata Tyszczyk 'we don't know when it's coming in' (www.interdependance.co.uk), an essay which describes the video piece of the same title (Tyszczyk, Guy Greaves, dv, 10 mins, 2006).

²⁰ 'Aphorism is the most paradoxical mode of discourse, and, like any paradox, it is a formulation of a partial or ostensible contradiction that originates from a particular experience and elicits an abundant range of further insights. The paradoxical nature of aphorism has its source in life situations, from which it also receives its meaning.' Vesely, *The Question of Creativity*, p. 453, note 10.

²¹ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense (Logique du Sens)* ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 3–5; on the relation of paradox to Stoic thought, where it was 'used both as an instrument for analysing language and as a means of synthesising events', see pp. 10 – 11.

The films are used as quick sketches, short-lived experiments that share characteristics with aphorisms and their exploration of paradoxical relationships. The essence of an aphorism is paradox.²⁰ The power of the paradox, or why I find the notion of it compelling, is in its ability to affirm all the directions of sense at the same time: good sense, common sense, best sense and nonsense.²¹ In other words the paradox can be a short story where the 'many things at once' take place, not simply in a synthesising mode however, but in one that engages and questions. This kind of story is the ground for rethinking categories, of adding complications to oversimplified frameworks; it offers respite from theoretically elaborate concepts where thought is considered to be already grounded. Paradoxes pull the ground from under your feet. The aphodoc and the expovie are necessarily open-ended in their presentation of life situations: they resist the fixation of meaning; they do not function as illustrations to their own conceptualisation. I prefer to think of them in relation to the notion of a story at its limiting case, (if not exact limits) or at its most concise. This story won't take a long time to tell.

The film *l'hombre* is one of a series of 'expovies' I have made that explore the real and imagined territories present in a simple domestic setting. *L'hombre* began as an accidental fragment of moving image, or 'found

footage', which could not have been predicted in the planning of the piece. The relationship between what can be said in a verbal presentation, and the visual and spatial installation of the film work is understood as complementary but indeterminate. I did not attempt to legitimate the visual work with the words – (this would simply have rehearsed the problem of theory and practice as a single planned set of relations, that is, a theory set up as a blueprint that seeks to govern the practice). Instead I prefer to think of the making, speaking, listening and watching as a layering or assemblage of different interpretations and approaches in imaginative variations. I have borrowed the phrase 'imaginative variations' from Ricoeur, which he explains as 'the deployment of an imaginary space for thought experiments that allows the *play* of fantasy and praxis.'²² The *play* emphasises movement as a thinking mode for architectural variations: as thought experiments or puzzles analogous to the stories, always negotiating the discord between the actual and the possible. Playing here means not simply revelling in the commonplace but paying attention to what is conventionally hidden. It is not about aesthetics – a distant view, but about taking note and an engagement with the world. Thinking about indeterminacy suggests alternative ways of encountering the world neither defined by a specific set of skills, techniques and actions, nor privileging a certain kind of discourse. Instead it suggests an inventive or experimental relation with the world that fosters potentialities and possibilities.

²² The phrase 'imaginative variations' is from Paul Ricoeur's discussion of literary narrative in *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 159; (my emphasis). Ricoeur's orientation is to writing but I would argue that the recourse to the *as-if*, to mimetics as a constant negotiation between the dramatic *as-if* and the 'hypothetical *as-if*' is not confined to literature or narrative.

²³ John Cage, cf. D. Campana 'Interview with Cage' 'Form and Structure in the Music of John Cage, (PhD, Northwestern University Evanston, 1985), p. 109.

Bringing about indeterminacy is bringing about a situation in which things could happen that are not under my control. Chance operations can guide me to a specific result, like the *Music of Changes*. An example of indeterminacy is any one of the pieces in a series called *Variations* which resemble cameras that don't tell you what picture to take but enable you to take a picture [...]²³



Fig. 2. 16mm film reel returned by Soho Images; photo: R. Tyszczyk.

Games and Shadows

²⁴ ‘Comme le plaisir du jeu de l’homme consiste dans une certaine suspension mêlée de curiosité des trois événements qui peuvent arriver, la partie pouvant être gagnée, remise, ou perdue codille; ainsi, dans nos pièces de théâtre, nous sommes tellement suspendus et incertains, que nous ne savons ce qui arrivera; et tel est l’effet de notre imagination.’ Montesquieu, ‘Essai sur le Goût’ in *Oeuvres Complètes*, II, ed. Roger Caillois (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Éditions Gallimard, 1951) p. 1263; (my translation).

²⁵ The game of *l’homme* was developed in Spain in the early seventeenth century and was originally called ‘Hombre Renegado’. In England it was called ‘Ombre’.

²⁶ For studies on games and play see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: 1949); Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes, Le masque et le vertige* (Paris: 1967).

²⁷ ‘One might say that the concept “game” is a concept with blurred edges.—“But is a blurred concept a concept at all?”— Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need?’ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 71, p. 34; for his discussion of games see 66–71, pp. 31–34.

²⁸ For studies of gambling in the eighteenth century, which was *toléré mais non permis* and permeated all sections of society, see John Dunkley, *Gambling in France: a social and moral problem in France, 1685–1792*, SVEC 235 (Oxford, 1985); Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth Century France* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²⁹ ‘Le monde est la maison du plus fort: je ne saurai qu’à la fin ce que j’aurai perdu ou gagné dans ce vaste tripot, où j’aurai passé une soixantaine d’années le cornet à la main *tesseractes agitants*.’ Diderot, ‘Eléments de physiologie’, in *Oeuvres*, Tome I: Philosophie, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Laffont, 1994) p. 1317; (my translation).

Just as the pleasure derived from a game of *l’homme* consists in a kind of suspension mixed with curiosity of the three possible outcomes – winning, placing another bet, or losing; in the theatre we are left hanging and uncertain not knowing what is about to happen and such is the effect of our imagination.²⁴

The game of *l’homme*²⁵ was a game of skill and chance. It was extremely popular in the eighteenth century where life was considered a game of the imagination – a ‘suspension mixed with curiosity’ and thus also compared to the experience of theatre. Montesquieu’s *Essai sur le Goût* expresses the essential parity between theatre and game playing. The meaningful difference between play in the theatre and in the game, however, was the autotelic nature of the game; where in effect, the significant audience was that of the player himself. Game playing provided the arena for the irresolvable differences of the self and of the imagination, (the dichotomies of the Enlightenment) to be both revealed and explored. Game playing has a far-reaching history where it has been understood as an essential element of human beings’ ontological make-up, a basic existential phenomenon often expressed as ‘life is a game’.²⁶ It is not surprising therefore that Wittgenstein chose the example of a ‘game’ when trying to explain what he meant by a ‘concept with blurred edges’.²⁷ Life has blurred edges. The play of the world is inevitably blurred.

In the eighteenth century, *l’homme* was a three-handed trick-taking card game with its own terminology and one of the first games to introduce bidding. One player was the declarer or *l’homme* and the other players cooperated to prevent this player from making a contract. It thus demonstrated a considerable element of both skill and chance. The most popular games in those days tended to be divided between the *jeux de commerce* (games of skill such as chess, draughts, and billiards), and the *jeux de hasard* (games involving chance such as the majority of card games). In practice, however the distinction was irrelevant: and in any case the games of skill usually served as a cover for the games of chance that attracted most players to the *academies des jeux* or *tripots*, the venues for gambling and games.²⁸ The following remark from Diderot indicates what was at stake with the world itself taken as a gambling den and life as a game:

The world is the domain of the strongest: I won’t know until the end what I have lost or won in this vast gambling house, where I have spent sixty years, cup in hand shaking dice.²⁹

The prevailing attitude towards *le hazard* or ‘chance’ understood it as a function of ignorance, or as a ‘fiction’.³⁰ Recognition of the presence of

³⁰ See the article 'Jeu' in Diderot et D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie: où Dictionnaire raisonne des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: Chez Briasson, 1761–1772); Facsimile edition, 5 vols (New York: Readex, 1969), pp. 531–532.

³¹ On *Fortuna* as simultaneously a symbol of the iterability of all occurrence and of the incommensurable, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1985) pp. 117–119.

³² Deleuze's writing on cinema sought to abolish the distinction between the physical world of movement and the psychological world of the image. 'All things considered, movement-images divide into three sorts of images, when they are related to a centre of indetermination as to a special image: perception images, action-images and affection-images. And each one of us, the special image or the contingent centre, is nothing but an assemblage of three images, a consolidation of perception images, action-images and affection-images.' Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

³³ 'Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible.' Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 109.

chance implied an inability to reason toward, and become part of any natural order or determination; thus indicating the limits of reason as a faculty that ultimately reflected its own presuppositions. Game playing, with its permissive attitude to superstition and luck, reflected the area of mystery or domain of ambiguity diffused through life in general that was being culturally and institutionally silenced. The reduction of the world to a series of abstract phenomena in a didactic space, as presented for example, in the entries of the *Encyclopédie*, induced a situation where one could all too easily find oneself having to deal with 'too many in the hand at one time'. Chance came to be understood as corresponding simply to the unsettling nature of life and reality, and was no longer the domain of *Fortuna*, which had stood for indeterminacy, the incommensurable and the endlessly iterable.³¹ Chance was to be controlled and this is where skill in a confusing array of method, deft movements, manoeuvres, and trickery came in.

The experimental video *l'homme* re-presents both the play of a card game and a play on the words *l'homme* (man) and *l'ombre* (shadow). *L'homme* is an experiment with the use of both negative and positive images and the correlation of light and movement inherent within the mechanics of film. Movement, image and time coalesce.³² In this work the failing light entering the 16mm film camera has determined the erratic motion of the game on film, expressing human gestures as an exchange between the mechanical and the ephemeral. A game of cards with its distinctive and repetitive actions was shot at home at dusk on a single reel of colour film stock. The game had involved two card players sitting at a table (and a third player with a camera). The film was returned by the lab as a negative, its processing incomplete. It looked like a mistake to the technicians. The card game, which had been just visible in the half-light, had been captured as a fluttering of shadows that duplicated the exaggerated mechanical movements of the two players (laying down cards and regaining others). The 'found' footage of retrieved chance images, like Cage's found environments, was not fully designed; the fledgling structure allowed for the unexpected.

The enigma of the work is partly created by the fragility of the medium (and partly by the cranky 16mm *Krasnogorsk* camera). The film endured chance exposure, projection and digitisation, where the matter of the film itself was eroded and reformulated (from three-handed trick taking into three-screened digital trickery). It suggests a world of luminous and virtual matter as well as the phantasmagoria of the new magic lantern shows. Equally, it calls up an undefinable place that has lost its contours but remains vivid – what Deleuze named 'any-space-whatever'.³³ Chance is about shadows. The history of probability (*verisimile* – the appearance

³⁴ The history of ‘probability’ demonstrates the ambivalence in the change of meaning of *verisimile*. Originally, the ‘appearance of the apparently true’ is entirely appearance as the pale reflection of the proximity of truth. For Descartes ‘appearance’ means possible deception; the apparently true (probable) is only something that looks like the true and must therefore be methodologically ‘bracketed’. Until an object can be confirmed by *clare et distincte percipere*, it is without significance for truth. The idea that one could hit upon the truth by ‘chance’ is a previously unthinkable thought. From this time ‘method’ takes the annoying element of chance by the hand and puts it at man’s disposal.

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 155-156; cf. Beatriz Colomina, ‘The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism’ in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 74.

³⁶ The film has been presented in a number of different ways: as a three part film that tracks the digital transformation of the original 16mm projection from negative to positive, as a simultaneous digital play across three screens that lasts just over 2 minutes; as an installation which includes the original 16mm reel, the three part film, a table covered in green baize, and the play of shadows; and finally as the backdrop and topic of this paper. Previously screened at Cambridge Arts Picturehouse, April 2006, Experimental Video Art Workshop funded by Arts Council and Kettles Yard Gallery, Cambridge.

of the apparently true) is inextricably linked with that of the metaphors of light.³⁴ In the film, the play of interfering images and shadows which are always there and not quite, of figure and ground, merge in confused perspectives, amidst the doubling of the documentary surface and the shallow screen. The shadows are all characters or players but you can’t quite make them out; strangely familiar, they dwell in an unspecified room and an open time. Shadows are made in the process of habitation – ‘to live is to leave shadows’ (in a paraphrase of Benjamin’s ‘to live is to leave traces’³⁵). And yet the ambiguity of the shadow, *l’ombre* – the trace that leaves no trace – and its relation to chance occurrences and fleeting memories provokes a play of variations that resist representation. The shadow is neither coincidence nor estrangement: it is both familiar and other, suggestive of unacknowledged worlds and indeterminacy.

The digital reworking of the original material (from 16mm –ve to digital and +ve) reinforces the repetitiveness of the original game. Negative and positive are revealed to be of equal importance as the figures and the space merge ambiguously with the moving shadows. Although the viewer’s perception is challenged and brought into play, the briefest sketch of a room and table along with the to-and-fro movement of almost-bodies provoke some kind of recognition: we fill out the story according to experience. The film reveals a past that cannot be captured but only glimpsed at random, and in unpredictable intervals in an exchange of scattered references between memory and home movies. It is an expovie: an exposure of life and experimental tinkering – a game of life. The presence of the game of cards and its blurred setting becomes more discernible the longer one stays with the work; and the experience depends also on repetition and presentation.³⁶ Yet the experimental nature of the work mitigates against the usually determined and directed interventions of the film, video, or documentary maker and their construction of scenarios and scenes. Instead, the expovie builds on the accidental, barely noticeable images of cardplay and the paradoxical interplay of possible references.

I showed the work, not for the sake of illustration, nor to fix its meaning but as a visual analogue for speaking about games of skill and chance, and also about indeterminacy. The game with its recourse to chance and indeterminacy can be construed as a laboratory for probing the meanings of the relations of the world, the self, to things, to others and shadows. Yet games readily caricature or act as a counterpart to all those activities (like architecture) that adhere to principles, from rules, via hypotheses (what if?) to distribution and results:

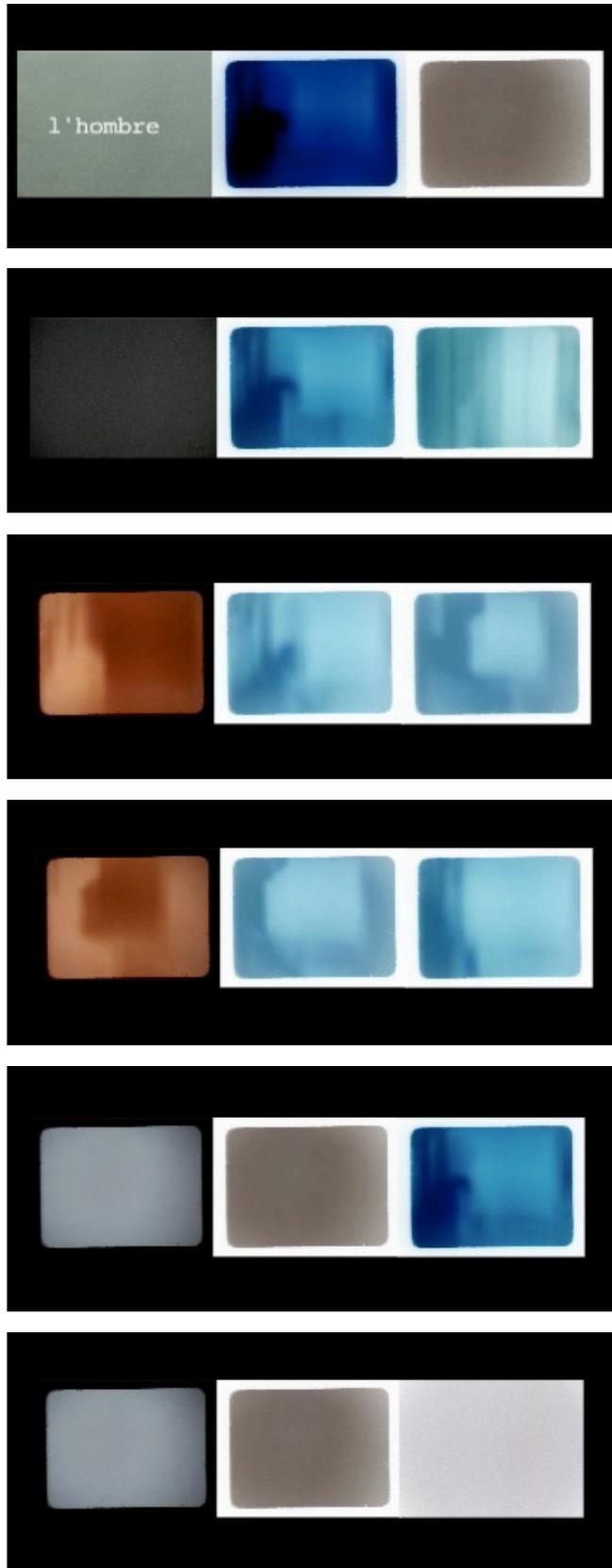


Fig. 3. Film stills from *l'hombre* (R. Tysczuk, 16mm/dv, (3 x) >2 mins, 2006).

³⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 70.

Whether it be Pascal's gambling man or Leibniz's chess-playing God, the game is explicitly taken as a model only because it has implicit models which are not games: the moral model of the Good or the Best, the economic model of causes and effects, or of means and ends.³⁷

Riddles and Questions

Today's games of skill and chance tend to propping up those coercive environments where the motives and rewards are decided by the designers or the players themselves, and yet it is impossible to create a game or a story, or for that matter architecture, in which the possibilities for success or failure are as unpredictable as real life. We can still see the same fictional contingency at work: the need to deliver palpable stories to cope with the world's systemic contradictions. Bauman following George Steiner, describes the current mode of being-in-the-world as '*casino culture*: each game is short, games replace each other in quick succession, the stakes of the game change with a lightning speed and often devalue before the game is over.'³⁸ Each game is a self-enclosed episode such that 'life patched together by a casino culture reads as a collection of short stories, not a novel.'³⁹

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, 'As Seen on TV'; <http://www.politeia-conferentie.be/viewpic.php?LAN=E&TABLE+DOCS&ID+120>.

³⁹ 'The casino culture of instantaneity and episodicity portends the end of 'politics as we know it'. Loc. cit.

⁴⁰ See Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley, *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (New York and Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001).

Before we get carried away with the metaphor, forever consigned to see the world as a gambling den of suspense or iniquity – is this supposed to be a win or lose situation? Or should architecture succumb to the interplay between the aesthetics of order and near chaos as in Constant's ludic New Babylon.⁴⁰ Architecture is too frequently seen simply as a game of episodic quick starts and restarts, an aesthetic or technological achievement, as the object or container for cultural, political, economic aspirations, as the carrier of function over meaning, as an end in itself. Surely it cannot be enough to simply ask questions about success or failure in architecture? To begin to ask more or less, or rather differently of architecture, it is time to ask a riddle:

Which of all things in the world is at once the longest and the shortest, the quickest and the slowest, the most divisible and the most continuous, the most squandered and the most regretted, something about which nothing can be done, which obliterates what is small and gives life to what is great?

⁴¹ Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson (London: Everyman, 1992); *Zadig*, p. 179. The scene of contests and riddles in the Babylonian court of Voltaire's *Zadig* reveals the ludic activities of the eighteenth century as a play with the socialised perfection of court life.

[...] Some said the answer to the riddle was fortune, some said the earth, and others light. Zadig said it was time.⁴¹

The answer is obvious (or is it – given that there were other possible answers: fortune, earth, light –?) and it only makes sense *in the story* – in another Babylon – as told in *Zadig* – not in abstraction (not space for the sake of space, nor time for the sake of time). Indeterminacy? – Maybe,

but not for the sake of indeterminacy, that is, not when used as a device or a formal construct. Indeterminacy *is*. Indeterminacy is space *and* time, regardless of space and time, as perhaps understood best in a narrative imagination, in the telling of stories and in their capacity for the complex interweavings of an unfinished world. In a narrative imagination, the relationship between ethics and poetics can converge. It is in stories that the imagination can be both more provisional and more approximate; and the conviction of theory and efficiency can be dissolved in favour of indeterminacy and experimental openness. The play, the meeting-up of different stories, the ‘many things at once’, and the experiment, are characteristics that make art or architecture at once real, and at the same time capable of challenging presuppositions about the world:

This game is reserved then for thought and art. In it there is nothing but victories for those who know how to play, that is how to affirm and ramify chance, instead of dividing it *in order to* dominate it, *in order to* wager, *in order to* win. This game which can only exist in thought and which has no other result than the work of art, is also that by which thought and art are real and disturbing reality, morality, and the economy of the world.⁴²

⁴² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 71.

Affirming chance here suggests thinking through indeterminacy. My own design strategy for architecture, melding storytelling and experiment, and occasionally involving some ‘indeterminate-non-linear-indistinct-moving-image-time-based-spatial-sketches’, is necessarily inconclusive. It is one of inexact explanations and roughly drawn boundaries. And to borrow Wittgenstein’s words again, ‘Yes: why shouldn’t we call it “inexact”?’⁴³ In one sense this design practice contests pre-determined notions of time/space/sound etc. and the uniform and consistent descriptions of architecture, as well as the all too frequent calls for authenticity, style, technological prowess. At the same time it is all too aware of the irony of doing so. Games of skill and chance inevitably go together; they are in need of each other, they are games that are familiar yet apprehensive in each others company. Likewise with games of skill and chance, distinction is difficult only the rules differ. The rules occasionally require a more disciplined more coherent more exacting path, but even then, ‘it is not everywhere circumscribed by rules.’⁴⁴ The same tension (of skill and chance) is present in the elements of architectural discourse and practice, with an underlying hope and assumption (which therefore constantly needs to be questioned), that skill, audacity and daring can win and that the element of chance can be harnessed and enjoyed critically and aesthetically. In this context chance seems doomed to be forever methodologically bracketed. Indeterminacy however, *is*. It does not reside in an ideal nor can it simply be a mode of operating in the world. In a sense *thinking indeterminacy* provides its own guarantee, which prevents the reduction of reality to what is then privileged as stable, real or representable. It obliges us to keep questioning. What I am suggesting

⁴³ Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* 88, p. 41) ‘If I tell someone “stand roughly here” – may not this explanation work perfectly? And cannot every other one fail too? But isn’t it an inexact explanation? – Yes; why shouldn’t we call it “inexact”?’

⁴⁴ (Ibid 68, p. 33) “‘But then the use of the word is unregulated, the ‘game’ we play with it is unregulated.” – It is not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too.’

therefore is that the task for architecture may well be that of experiment.

In the words of Elizabeth Grosz:

[T]he radical role of the architect is best developed in architectural exploration and invention, in recognition of architecture's and knowledge's roles as experimental practices. Philosophy, architecture, science are not disciplines which produce answers or solutions, but fields which pose questions, and whose questions never yield the solutions they seek but which lead to the production of ever more inventive questions. Architecture, along with life itself, moves alongside of, is the ongoing process of negotiating, habitable spaces.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Grosz, 'The Time of Architecture', pp. 275-276.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Embodied Utopias, The Time of Architecture', in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Real and Virtual Space* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 130.

⁴⁷ This is only scratching the surface, as what I would include in the term 'architectural practice' is purposefully heterogeneous. See, for example, Doina Petrescu (ed.) *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space* (London: Routledge, 2007); and the *Alternate Currents* Symposium at the University of Sheffield, 2007, *field* (2) 1, 2008 (forthcoming).

Grosz asks many questions: 'what are the possibilities of inhabiting otherwise?'⁴⁶ Interrogating architecture suggests a recognition of the kinds of experimental practices and processes that allow for a rethinking of how 'architecture' is 'constructed' and 'produced' as well as 'inhabited'. There are many practices that draw on indeterminacy, or might be described as having an indeterminate approach to architecture that need to be acknowledged. These range from types of critique that open up alternatives within normative architectural practice, to inventive modes of participatory action that cultivate change by working directly with people to disclose new potentialities, to the deployment of alternative imaginations of the economic that play the part of anomalies within the privileged macroeconomic structure.⁴⁷ Architectural practice could also refer to the unfinished and the unknown. Experiments in architecture are not about presenting completed pieces of work but about encouraging the possible paths that lead beyond the text, the work, the story. With an awareness however, that the moment your attention slips from the task at hand, or the demands of the project and the particular skills it requires, just as if momentarily distracted from the text in front of you, the rest of the world uncontrollably and inevitably comes flooding back in. Indeterminacy is.



Fig. 4. Film still from *Remote Worlds in Four Parts* (R.Tyszczyk, dv, 12 mins, 2004).

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