\[44^\circ \text{ 01'} \text{ N, 118^\circ \text{ 29'}} \text{ W}\]

John Muir School, Santa Monica, California

Reyner Banham, urbane Englishman, spent most of the 1980s in the woods. Little is known about Banham’s seven years on the forested hillside campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz. There are no iconic photographs of Banham ambling among the trees, like there are of him traversing the Mojave Desert on a Bickerton or rumbling through the concrete jungle of Los Angeles by car. Banham seemed to prefer the state’s arid flatlands to its damp filly forests, and when given the opportunity to pose among the foliage, he did so — prim and proper — in front of a mural of the redwoods adjacent to a busy LA intersection. The fully bearded critic dons a full chino suit, striped shirt, and bolo tie, his buckaroo hat casting a shadow over a stone-faced expression. Banham favored artifice over naturalness, but knew — any sartorialist does — that timeless style was the effective combination of the two. Only trees painted on stuccoed walls and an aging face adorned with mirrored aviator sunglasses — acrylics and plastics — can convey cool in perpetuity.
If I can take a ride in a driverless car on a public street, then I see no reason why my building can’t wiggle a little

PETER EISENMAN: Greg, I have three questions for you. One is the nature of your project, the second is what you feel about consensus, and the third deals with mechanisms, i.e., robots, etc. I want to start with project. About 15 years ago, your two books were a new idea of where architecture could be after postmodernism, not just heralding the digital but framing the digital in an architectural context. Part of that heralding involved an idea that this was something new. And precisely because of this — what I consider to be the fatal flaw of any theory that postulates itself as new — it isn’t new anymore. Tell me about your project, then, today and tomorrow.

GREG LYNN: Anything associated with the digital starts with the claim, “In the future” — in the future we’ll be doing this, in the future we’ll be printing buildings, in the future we’ll be paperless. It’s always in the future. There are still too many claims of “in the future” attached to discussions of digital technology. I think now it’s very interesting to say, “In the past” — in the ’70s and ’80s — and look at what was going on then with the digital. Having done that, I think a lot of history is repeating itself, in terms of how architecture is being designed and how buildings are being built. And in terms of taking stock, I would not put a huge amount of energy into the digital paradigm right now, because it’s here. There’s no sense in trying to run the same experiments or looking for the same happy accidents all over again. I think
most of that innovation has been done and it's time to think about things in a slightly different way.

PE: That means a project. Not thinking about the new or innovative future, just project.

GL: By the way, I never would have said that my project was about the new. I was looking at [Étienne-Jules] Marey, I was looking at [Eadweard] Muybridge, I was looking at Borromini. My personal histories and passions have always been about techniques of geometric description and drafting. I love to draft. The computer came along and I loved the computer as a drafting tool. I didn't like it as a computer. My project has changed in that I'm tending to look back, more than forward, for new things and innovation. I do believe in the new.

PE: What we were doing together, and what your show at the CCA, “Archaeology of the Digital,” is about, had no premonition of what has happened. It wasn't looking to promote Patrik Schumacher, Hernan Diaz Alonso, and all of that work. So what went off the track?

GL: I wouldn't necessarily say that it went off the track. If anything has gone off the track, it's architectural discourse and its audience. It's like a broken record to ask who's going to do the next Delirious New York or what is the next treatise going to be. I'm not totally sure that our field is equipped to produce a young person – I mean somebody in their thirties – who is going to make a treatise like that.

PE: Pier Vittorio Aureli is not one of those people who could do that?

GL: Is he a young person? He certainly has the ambition to write a treatise but I associate him more closely with the revisiting of the neorationalists and Tafuri. I have always found PV to be cynical.

PE: Rem [Koolhaas] is more cynical. Listen, you were there 15 years ago. That's the question: what has happened to your project?

GL: It was a vibrant time to be in conversation with my colleagues and my mentors. There were any conferences annually. There were museums and institutions looking to sponsor thoughtful shows, like the FRAC and MoMA. Those shows were meant to take what was happening between a small number of architects and find its intellectual and popular audience. The possibility of
getting into discussions with other architects, and the possibility of addressing a different kind of audience to change the way people thought about architecture, was tangible. You could see how to do it. It was very clear who the interesting people were and which institutions were doing the work. As these events have disappeared, in the last several years I have become accustomed to and content with working with a higher degree of isolation, and I am therefore less polemical. I find the current situation to be more vacuous than those halcyon days of discourse when positions were being formulated.

GL: Common sense would say that when the times are unstable the architects provide stability, and when the times are stable architects shake things up. You could not say that there is consensus in America right now. I can’t think of a time when there has been less consensus in the States. I think the future of the country — finance, cultural values, race relations, everything — has never been worse off. Never. The government right now is bananas — every two months there is some manufactured crisis. When people are in that milieu, they look to architecture for cute, happy, artificially stable values. Nobody wants to do Wexner Center right now. Everybody wants to do a countrified museum. So if there’s a consensus in architecture it’s probably because it’s trying to be ameliorative rather than representing what is going on in the culture right now.

GL: Nicolai [Ouroussoff] and I are trying to do the US Pavilion right now with [Richard] Koshalck. To do that pavilion, we’re going to have to raise our own money, and the subject and intellectual agenda for the show are in response to this fact to some degree. We had to find our own institutional partner, and thankfully there is Richard at the Hirshhorn. All these critical decisions regarding institution-building needed to be made before we could even start curating the show. Nobody is interested in the US Pavilion anymore because it poses a massive institution-building project. That’s where we’re at. Before, it was Philip’s project, or it was Marshall Cogan’s project, people interested in ideas and interested in architecture.

GL: No. You’re asking about the architectural landscape, not my project.

PE: Let’s get to the second question. The last theme of the Biennale was “Common Ground.” Bob Stern, quoted two weeks ago
PE: But you're saying there is no discourse. How do we change that? Because you could argue capital is under duress. That's the real problem: we can't support social services, we can't afford security, we can't afford welfare, we can't afford all the things that capital promises. That's what is under stress.

GL: No, I just think it's more work. Look, will we get the US Pavilion? I don't know. But it was easier to focus on the content of the pavilion 20 years ago. Now, one not only has to provide the content and make sure the thing shows up in Venice but also organize institutional partners, travel to Washington, and all this other stuff. If you have to do all that other stuff it means something else is suffering.

PE: What is interesting is you would be curating your own show. Frank and I didn't curate our show. Philip was the curator. Why curate? Why do you want to curate your own show? It's not your project.

GL: It is my project, and Nicolai's.

PE: Well that's why I ask about consensus.

GL: I'm interested in all the people with CNC routers cutting the walls that are in all the hotel lobbies I go to, if they've ever even seen a Frank Lloyd Wright block house. And if they've even thought about how, if you had a robot, you would make a Frank Lloyd Wright block house. That's why I'm curating. It helps me to think about my own work to put the contemporary design world in discussion with recent history.

PE: What does the robot have to do with the idea of making, not the process of making? How does the robot change what Frank Lloyd Wright was doing with cutting blocks, the idea of cutting blocks, not the cutting? What would the robot have done for Frank Lloyd Wright?

GL: I would not describe him as being surrounded by the sharpest tools in the shed. He really liked to be surrounded by automatons. So, would Frank Lloyd Wright love a robot? Of course he would. Robots are exactly what Frank Lloyd Wright would love, because he put a high value on the labor visible in an object, and he loved decoration and pattern. All that stuff you get free with a machine. Now, if you are asking what's the difference between ornamental grotesquery facilitated by digital tools and Louis Sullivan or Frank Lloyd Wright, I would say, very much; the former is mannerist and the later was the end of the 19th century coming into contact with paradigms of modern space and the free plan. One is looking backward to justify itself, the other was dragging its history into the present.
GL: For me, now, robots move stuff. And that's why I'm interested in robots.

PE: You mean as in, move this chair to there?

GL: Yeah. Or roll this room over.

PE: Roll the room over. You can roll a room over on the computer. You can take a drawing of the room and roll it over. You don't need a robot to do that.

GL: But if you're going to build the room to roll over you're going to need a robot.

PE: Build the room to roll over. Here we go again.

GL: When you say, "Here we go again," do you mean here we go again with you and me, or here we go again with architecture rolling things over? Where do you think I got the idea to roll houses over anyway? You spent the better part of your life rolling houses over, tracing their
position and rolling them over again. I am just interested in doing it literally and phenomenally.

PE: It's architecture rolling things over. So, what robots do for you is easily roll things over?

GL: No. They make movement possible.

PE: Tell me: why would I want my house to move?

GL: Take Nike, for example, as I was just in Beaverton last week. Instead of making things in Southeast Asia they have developed robots that knit the tops of the shoes; there's no waste from cutting shapes out of rolls of cloth and every shoe can have its own knots and shape if they like. The soles are being printed with 3D printers. Like the Russian cosmonaut program did previously, they test, measure, scan, and analyze the motion of athletes not only to customize apparel and shoes but to create training regimes, glasses, and clothing that modifies how a person moves. They have a micro-factory in their store in Portland so they can dispense with inventory and shipping. They are the best example of a revolution in manufacturing, communication, and design that I know of. They want to inform you what to eat, when to train, and when to wake up, as the shirt and the beanie you sleep in have sensors that record your activity even while you're not moving. Your phone, your watch, and your shoes are all recording motion and speed and communicating data back to a service. This isn't some future plan; this is what they are doing currently. That's the world they see.

PE: That's neopositivism.

GL: I'm not making judgments about the shoe world. I'm just saying that's where they are. And I'm asking myself where the architectural corollary is. Where is the architecture that addresses that contemporary fact? And who are the architects who are thinking like that?

PE: Or even, should it be represented?

GL: Well, some architects are comfortable having a disconnected relationship to culture in their architecture. I want to be in the contemporary world, thinking at today's level in architecture. If you want to do that, I don't know how you could not think about robots, and how you couldn't think about moving buildings. It's a mandate as far as I'm concerned.

PE: But you haven't written or proposed the architectural analogue for that world, not Delirious New York, not Absolute Architecture, not the five points of Le Corbusier. You have not made a specific notation that says what that architecture has to be in order to be critical in that milieu.

GL: No, but it's what I'm working on.

PE: Working on it in what sense?

GL: The treatise on motion, robots, architecture, and this new manufacturing and information paradigm; for me, I have to work that through with my own work initially, and then theorize it.

PE: Architecture and motion, for example, seem to me like all those people in the '60s who were talking about what it was going to be like to live on the moon or in a spaceship. What is the difference between the architects who were envisioning things for moon living and space travel and, today, the house moving and the hamster running around? What, conceptually, is the difference?
corollary is. Where is the area that addresses that contemporary architecture? Are the architects who are doing that?

Could it be represented?

Our architects are comfortable with the relationship to culture in the sense that I want to be in the world, thinking at today’s culture. If you want to do that, you can not think about what you couldn’t think about things. It’s a mandate as far as

I haven’t written or proposed the analogue for that world, not York, not Absolute Architecture, but Le Corbusier. You have rigorous notation that says what has to be in order to be an architect.

I’m working on.

Can it in what sense?

These on motion, robots, architects new manufacturing and experience; for me, I have to align my own work with these.

And motion, for example, all those people in the 60s and 50s were envisioning things and space travel and, today, the user and the hamster run that, conceptually, is the

GL: Today there are cars driving themselves around California without a driver. If I can take a ride in a driverless car on a public street, then I see no reason my building can’t wiggle a little. You used to be an advocate for wiggling buildings. Well, the automobile, television, all of that stuff in the ’60s and ’70s, made architecture go a little bit crazy trying to figure out how to engage that. I think now is a time like that. I don’t believe there are a lot of people who agree with me, but I see today as a time of crisis — a crisis of ideas, a crisis of consensus, a crisis of occupying space — not as a time of consensus.

PE: Asking people what they want is the crisis.

GL: That’s never a good idea. You tell people what they need, you don’t ask them what they want.

PE: Let’s say the robots are going to exist, that there is going to be the technology that allows you to do anything with them. How is that going to change what this office is going to be like in the future?

GL: Let’s say every Yale faculty member gets an office robot. What are you going to do with it?

PE: Have it do my bibliography. I would have the robot do a task that I don’t think is fit for a human. If you give me another one, I would find tasks for the robot to do that do not require thought processes. It is not valuable to me in the sense that you were when we worked together. You understood what the thought processes were and were able to expand those horizons.

GL: What I’m saying is, all that stuff is around and is not being used for architectural means. It’s just totally rote, functional replacements for things we already know how to do. That kind of stuff is everywhere. But if you could have it change the space just for the qualities of the space...
PE: Well it's a different story if you could think the difference in the space. I think that at the stage that robots are going to be working, you're still going to need the Greg Lynns of this world to ideate the discourse that could use them. What we're saying is that robots are another technology. How are the kids in your class going to being able to transpose their thinking from algorithms, or from what Hernan is doing, to what you're doing, and produce critical work? That's what they have to be doing. Otherwise they're wasting their time.

GL: In my teaching I stress discourse and addressing problems with "headlines"; clear succinct ideas that a nonarchitect can understand as a problem with enough cultural relevance that it is worth thinking about. I think Hernan is interesting, but so far he has not addressed a broader culture with a claim like "The Helsinki Library has the civic role in the city of an alien ship because information today is . . ." That's something you have, that's something Rem has, that's something Frank has. I think it's because in writing a treatise, in less than a sentence you're able to say, "Today architecture is showing up in the city in this way because it's relevant for the following reasons." I think Hernan does everything else. I think he establishes a paradigm that he can talk to other architects about.

PE: So, to sum up, you say that there is a crisis, and the world, when it's in crisis, responds to things that are easy. And yet, what you're trying to do is to say that the crisis is because we don't understand how to use the potential of digital technologies, i.e., provided by robots and others, to help us to ameliorate crisis. And that's what your project is right now. It's very different from blobs.

GL: Yeah, that was very geometrical. That work has been done. I don't need to do it a second time.

PE: What would this new thesis look like?

GL: So far it's being a hamster in a ball.