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Introduction

The theme of this issue of *JAЕ* solicited articles that investigated ideas and practices of recycling in architecture. The call for papers invited designers to think big, in larger-scale studies of infrastructure, industrial sites, landfill, terrain vague, neighborhoods, malls, and housing.

The word *recycling* has a direct connection to the 1960s and that ruminative “spaceship earth” trope, a metaphorical by-product of National Aeronautics and Space Administration adventuring, and how it marked a revised point of view nearly as significant as the one Galileo advanced and had to retract under persecution by the church that the world was not the center of the universe but in fact revolved around the sun. Thus, in two steps separated by some four hundred years, humankind had to realize first that they were not the center of the universe (or even the solar system for that matter) and next that earth was pretty much a closed system: its supplies were not infinite but limited. Thus did R. Buckminster Fuller, the efficiency guru and hero to the now aged of Aquarius, lay the foundation for a world view of life inside a closed system where the task set before us was to recycle resources into newer- and higher-value products whose technically sophisticated designs required less material.

Most people would not see it in such high-flying terms. Recycling begins at the scale of the household, and homey examples abound, from “Hints from Heloise” (the thousands of things you can do with an empty gallon plastic container) to municipal campaigns and programs to collect and process glass, tin cans, paper, and plastic for new uses. Recycling is also big business. To entrepreneurs dealing in used goods, be they old buildings, or retro clothing, recycling is about value added. Old and antiquated things become icons; their former owners can no longer afford them. Run-down property where rents are low can be recycled back into the market; old buildings, trading on their latent charms, can be reborn as soft lofts for affluent urban pioneers. Recycling is a natural part of the urban dynamic. Buckminster Fuller, registering another flash of analogical insight, once

described the modern city as a continually evolving, recycling process of evaluations, demolitions, renewals, temporary vacant lots, and rebuilding, comparable, he wrote, to the rotation of crops in farm acreage: plowing, planting the new seed, harvesting, plowing under, and putting in another crop.

Recycling is one of the principles of sustainable architecture. When the Texas Medical Center in Houston built a new building for their School of Nursing, they used bricks from a nineteenth-century warehouse in San Antonio, wood siding made of sinker cypress from the bottom of the Mississippi River, panels of recycled aluminum, and columns made of flyash (a recycled by-product of coal burning). Designed by Lake/Flato architects, this is an architecture of *bricolage*, an aesthetic for which we were prepared by the recycled fragments of genres and styles in postmodernism.

Recycling has become commonplace, yet oddly, since it is certainly not central to the capitalist ethos that relies on planned obsolescence and new product lust to drive economic prosperity. In less prosperous or less privileged situations, one does not discard things so readily because new ones are expensive or difficult to obtain. Under a patriotic banner, recycling along with rationing was an important part of homeland support for the war effort during World War II. Recycling would seem to be the most pragmatic of activities: When you can utilize something, do not throw it away. But recycling can also engender creativity, inventiveness, and even symbolism.

That was the case with Napoleon’s practice of melting down the captured weapons of his enemies and using them to create monuments to his victories—a slight misreading of the admonition to recycle swords into plowshares. Among his grand projects, Napoleon planned to build a giant elephant on the Champs-Élysées near the Étoile to be cast from recycled bronze for captured Spanish cannons. But recycling is also a case of supply and demand; when the war in Spain failed to supply a sufficient number of captured cannons, the pachyderm had to be constructed out of wood and painted cardboard.

Symbolic interpretations are the theme of “Wireless Teahouse,” by Steven Mankouche, a project that makes a trope from two diverging vectors of fabrication—the cell phone (new, refined, technical construction) and the primitive hut (recycled, ad hoc, unselfconscious)—objects as dissimilar as the ball bearing and the rude spring house photographed by Michael Heiser that Philip Johnson used to illustrate his dialectical narrative in the catalog to the Museum of Modern Art’s *Deconstructivist Architecture* show of 1988. The cell phone encapsulates all the technology one needs, while the hut is made entirely of refuse—28 pallets retrieved from the municipal dump. The pallets are analogous to the tatami mat used to lay out a traditional Japanese house. Because the shelter appears so makeshift and unintentional (a pile of refuse), it does not attract attention. Referencing Kobo Abe’s surreal novel, *The Box Man*, the teahouse goes incognito; inhabitants are able to look out and communicate electronically while at the same time being themselves overlooked.

Recycling old wood inspired a renovation for the public spaces in a converted warehouse in a project by Vanna Whitney. In this case, the designers removed a diagonally patterned wall of bleached, dimensioned boards that had been installed some twenty years earlier. The boards were rip cut into narrow strips, then treated to an “exfoliation.” Like a skin peel, to liberate the wood’s warmer nature, the boards were planed to remove the bleached outer layer, then reinstalled in a skip pattern on a red, painted concrete wall.

Most of the submitted projects took up the challenge to think big and one of these, by Annika Teig, supersized one of the quintessential and most long-standing recycling propositions: the reuse of a container—in this case a supertanker. A single illustration of the enormous ship standing upright and superimposed on a photograph of a skyscraper serves as a visual metaphor for the ship as a potential human habitat of amazing size and possibilities. Remediating the tanker hull prepares it for new uses defined by outfitting it with a variety of modules:

1. (Page 2) "The Wireless Teahouse" by Steven Mankouche.
- 2, 3. "Walls Optional" by Thomas Kearns, of Sand_Box Architects.
- 4, 5. "Thinktanker" by Annika Teig.
6. "Sustainable Office Building Renovation," detail, by Vanna Whitney, Kava Massih Architects.

"the modules are introduced as autonomous inter-connected elements allowing the empty vessel to be reloaded for a range of uses . . . from desalination plants to power plants to Phyto remediation centers." Less technically, "Thinktanker" is also imagined as a mobile mediation and conflict resolution center called a "political spa."

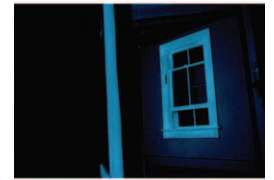
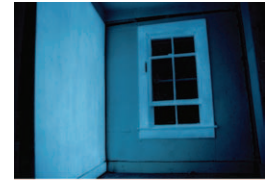
"Walls Optional" by Thomas Kearns is acutely reminiscent of Gordon Matta-Clark's "decontainerization" projects, particularly of *Bingo* (1974) and *Splitting* (1975), in its use of a soon-to-be-demolished house, the technique of opening the house by cutting through walls, the photodocumentation, and the postdemolition gallery exhibit. The photographs of "Walls Optional" are closer, however, to David Hockney's "joiners" than the "photoglyph" techniques of Matta-Clark's. Kearns's project is innovative in the way it uses phosphorescent paint to "recycle" daytime light at night.

Two projects were selected for more complete presentation. The first, "Bin City, Las Vegas" by Gabu Heindl, is a kind of recycling metaproject, a Hunter Thompson gonzo excursion into the underbelly of Las Vegas. Stylish and witty, Bin City turns Las Vegas into an extreme trope for the whole waste culture, more radical in scope than even Gordon Matta-Clark's *Garbage Wall* (1970). It also brings to consciousness our schizoid attitude about garbage that is both the hidden secret of the capitalist, hedonistic spectacle and a source of cultural discoveries and fascination. Conceived as a garbage theme park, Bin City invites the public into an encounter with unmediated reality. Beautifully presented in a manner reminiscent of the marvelous parodic drawings by Bruce McCall that appear occasionally in the *New Yorker*, Bin City orbits around the outer rim of the realm of possibility.

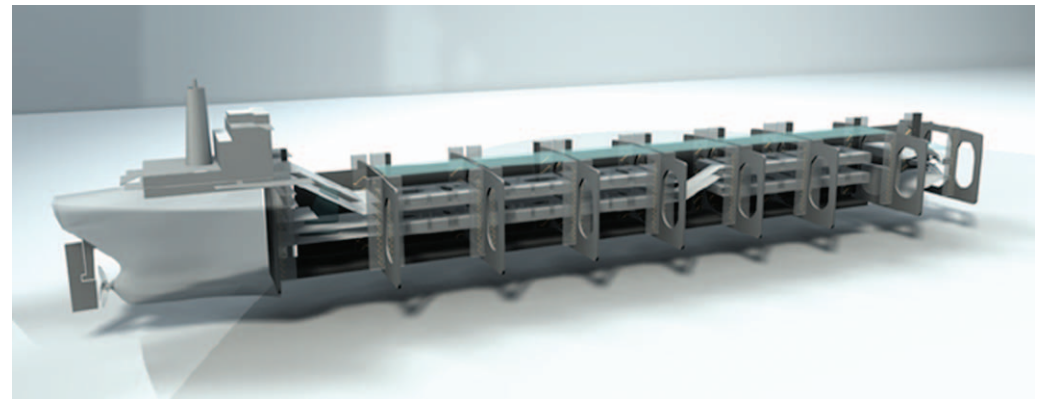
Torbjörn Lundell and Magnus Schön, two Swedish architects, developed "CO₂ Park" during their final year at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Their investigation began by exploring metaphorical possibilities in the *Aurora Borealis*, the northern lights that are part of the cultural myths



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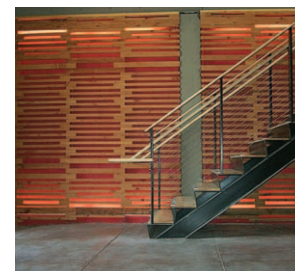
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of Nordic culture. Hands-on experiments generating fog clouds from dry ice led them to create what they called "smoke landscapes," the fundamental medium of the ethereal garden environments they intended to create. The project developed a pragmatic spine when they discovered that a by-product of their fog generator was that the water they used to liberate the CO₂ from chunks of dry ice became carbonated. From the laboratory, they went out looking for places in the real world to deploy their ideas. They settled on a heating plant on the outskirts of Stockholm that produced carbon dioxide as a waste, devising a way to capture the gas and use it to create fruit-flavored carbonated water. The environmentally friendly production system becomes a pleasure park at the interface between nature and the artificial.

Editor's Note: The editors sadly learned of the death of Annika Teig while this issue was being prepared.



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