

## De-Ruining

*Like energy, entropy is in the first instance a measure of something that happens when one state is transformed into another.<sup>1</sup>*

There is a perpetual force embedded within certain historical architecture, a poignancy that won't fade. It persists long after its pinnacle has been reached, and traces often remain (and recur) even after the earth's soil, sediment, terrain and vegetation have enveloped it.

In some cases, the evolution or degradation furthers a structure's enigma. It keeps radiating pathos, a seductive charisma that engenders its rebirth across divergent scenarios. The architecture of the Classic Maya was in its most emblematic manifestations configured with features that have that very power to transgress its original context.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, along with his contemporary Robert Stacy-Judd, harboured an obsessive fascination with Mayan aesthetics. Both of them undertook expeditions to the ancient culture's architectural and cultural ruins located in the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico to study and appropriate what they perceived as principles for ideal building design.

During the 1920s, Lloyd Wright realized four private residences, called the Textile Block Houses, around Los Angeles, based on his interpretation of the Mesoamerican architecture, combined with the modernist rationale he pursued.

The name is derived from their creation process — cast cement blocks in Maya-esque ornamentation were stacked on top of each other. One of them, the Ennis House, was erected on an unsound hillside and forged from the very sand it stands on. Since its inception, it has needed continuous repair not to fall into ruin.

Despite its deficiency, it came to serve as a great influence on Hollywood cinema and TV as either a shooting location or a direct reference in set design. The set for the evil Tyrell Corporation in Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi classic *Blade Runner* utilized Lloyd Wright's block pattern as a departure point in the forging of a hybrid version inspired by a more future-looking, hard-edged style.

It's worth noting that what inspired Lloyd Wright, Stacy Judd and other's Mayan Revival creations were ruins of former grandiose buildings that they observed in the Yucatán.

The ruins there contained an embryonic form of the transgressive pathos that came to blossom in the eventual ruins of Lloyd Wright's Textile Blocks, as well as the fictional set designs standing in for worlds past and future. By way of what a set is made for its structure never achieves completeness as a building. It only ever exists as an architectural corpse.

The term Entropy is employed as a means to gauge the amount of unexpectedness, or possible states of alteration, within a given system. It is an unavoidable, as well as irreversible, phenomenon. I am

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<sup>1</sup> P.W. Bridgman, *The Nature of Thermodynamics*, 1941.

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interested in considering the amount of entropy associated with the movement of transgressive paths from one manmade structure to another. And further, in looking at how a material process of entropy can echo that process of aesthetic transaction.

In his 1972 lecture called *Hotel Palenque*, Robert Smithson deviated from focusing on the archaeological Mayan site of Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico — which were considered the significant architecture of the locale — to the seemingly mundane, incomplete cinder block structure of the Hotel Palenque, where he'd stayed in 1969 while it was still in the process of being built. Albeit in the process of creation, Smithson what perceived in it was the qualities of a ruin rather than the promise of something to come.

He used the self-coined term “de-architecturing” to describe his view on the dynamics of nature, as well as man-made structures, which he believed were in a continuous process of irreversibly changing states, beginning from the very minute a building's foundation is laid down.

In an interview with Alison Skye Smithson outlined how entropy undermines some of our common notions of a mechanistic worldview<sup>2</sup>. He argued that our tendency to think of our creations in the built environment as definitive once realized, are misleading. Human enterprises in creation, just as nature itself, are bound to attain myriad states, and these states are as digressive as they are progressive.

*Architects tend to be idealists, not dialecticians. They don't take those things (chance) into account. I propose a dialectics of entropic change.*<sup>3</sup>

Hotel Palenque became an example of the dynamics of entropy by transferring the notion of decay from the Mayan site to the contemporary hotel. The hotel embodied “ruins in reverse,” a sort of mirror image of the ancient ruins, where the modern city of Palenque exhibited the quality of “ruin-ness” as much as it's ancient counterpart.

More important than asking whether human culture is in a polemic or synergic relationship with nature, is the question of how time is experienced through nature and culture, respectively. On the one hand the unpredictable quality inherent to nature and Mother Earth herself has a non-discriminating way of telling us how each moment differs from the other. On the other hand human culture construes conceptualizations for how to navigate time. Yet however precise the calculations are, time itself seems too unpredictable and ephemeral to fully fathom.

And isn't the product of our culture — our archaic as well as contemporary ruins — means to fathoming how we cannot exist in isolation from nature? Time reveals itself through the geologic event buried in the earth's crust, our biological processes, and the countless states that the art we leave behind will incorporate.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, ed. Jack Flam, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p. 301-309. originally published in *Onsite* #4 1973

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 304

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It becomes futile to think of human creation -- a text, a painting in a cave, a cultured landscape or building -- as a formalization of definite progression or a static concretization of ideals or even form. On the contrary, these things only reach their full potential when endorsed as aesthetics of change and unpredictability: ethereal sublimity. The power of creation is its inherent variation governed by frailty and chance.

For this exhibition, I have aspired to catalogue entropy within manmade structures, as well as animate the architectural source material – film sets based on Mayan Revival architecture, in relation to the Mayan building language they originate from. Addressing the fluctuation between these states as symptomatic of something alive is one of the central concerns in the work on display. Another is how these filmic environments, as well as my work, in furthering an aesthetic transaction are breathing life back into the carcasses, or ruin, they were derived from.

I don't know what is going to happen exactly as the work is subjected to live "in a physical region"<sup>4</sup> of nature. All I know is that the unpredictable will become manifest.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Smithson: Fredrik Law Olmsted And The Dialectical Landscape, originally published in *Artforum*, February, 1973