

Architectural Reenactment:

investigating architecture's supporting roles

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"Souvenirs are much more than representations of the past. They are both document and proposal, memories that allow us to glimpse the future. Souvenirs, as Wren, Hawksmoor, Vanbrugh, and Vriesendorp might argue, act like totems of something yet to come. They remind us not of what has happened, but what might, not of places that you have been to, but places not yet invented. In the act of recording the past, souvenirs show that versions of the past can be manufactured."

-Sam Jacob

background:



Civil War Reenactment, Greenfield Village



Skansen

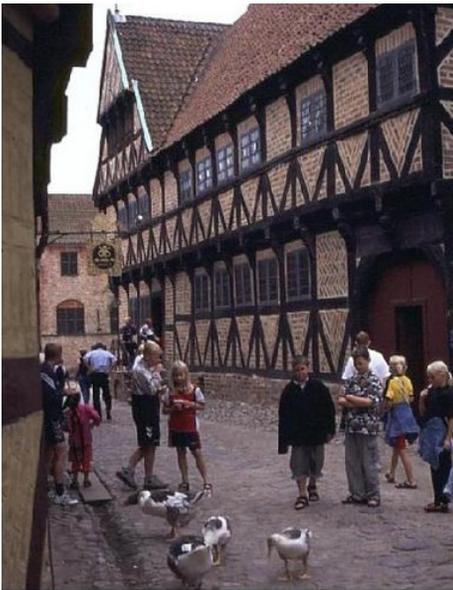


Skansen

Every year on Memorial Day Weekend, Henry Ford's Greenfield Village plays host to Civil War reenactors who set up camps and parade across the grounds. While the reenactors are no different from those one would find at Gettysburg or any other Civil War battlefield, the reenactment at Greenfield Village is unique because, strictly speaking, the festivities do not constitute a reenactment. There were no Civil War battles fought in Michigan, nor were there any pitched camps. The reenactors march in formation while visitors in shorts take photographs, breaking in and out of character, pausing to smile and face a particular camera. The festivities take place in a village that is not an actual village, having been assembled from buildings across the country, such as Henry Ford's childhood home, Noah Webster's home, the Wright brothers' bicycle shop, and Thomas Edison's laboratory. The result is pretend soldiers recreating a battle that never happened in a location that has been assembled from arbitrary parts of history. While Greenfield Village has often been criticized for playing fast and loose with history, and justifiably so, such a critique misses the point. Reenactment is less interested in historical fact than it is in theater, performance, narrative, and heritage.

In a similar way, the buildings assembled at living history sites like Greenfield Village often escape architectural attention because they are empty vessels. No one actually works in Thomas Edison's laboratory, and its spatial identity has been reduced to a flat icon of itself. These buildings at Greenfield Village, all of which have been physically moved from their original location and reassembled into a version of fantasy Americana, are simultaneously stage set, monument, attraction, and curatorial manifesto. They are architectural reenactors portraying architecture.

This practice of memorializing architecture through reenactment employed at Greenfield Village has several precedents in Scandinavia. In 1891, Artur Hazelius created Skansen, the first permanent exhibition of buildings and folklore, which was devoted to Swedish pastoral life that was being threatened by the onset of the modern industrialization. Hazelius handpicked over 150 buildings from all over the country and designed a village to house them, deconstructing and transporting the majority of them and, in some special cases, constructing meticulous copies of buildings that could not be moved. Skansen is currently a living history museum reenacting 18th century folk life, a concert venue, a festival grounds (Swedish National Day is celebrated here), and a zoo rolled into one large campus that is both



Den Gamle By



Skansen reenacted hardware store

theme park and museum. In contrast to Skansen's focus on country life, The Old Town (Den Gamle By) in Denmark reenacts town life by reconstructing several buildings from the nearby town of Aarhus, as well as others from across Denmark. In the same way as Skansen, the buildings are not adjacent to, nor do they at all refer to the location from which they were moved. Instead, the relocated buildings now help to create a new mythic environment, being a stage set for the reenactment of historical daily life, monuments to national identity, tourist attractions, and a visual register of national uniqueness.

In these open air museums, architecture is not concerned with its primary roles of space, form, or occupation, but rather its supporting roles of stage set, narrative, icon, and object. In the same way that one would go to a Civil War reenactment to study theater, role-playing, narrative, and contemporary interpretations of history rather than history itself, I would argue one would study architectural reenactment to study architecture's participation in performance, politics, monuments, and history rather than the design of space. These open air museums present an opportunity to study an extreme architectural condition which will call attention to some of the more obscure roles that architecture can assume.

To date, open air museums have escaped academic architectural interest due to the fact that these buildings are seen as artifacts instead of architecture. Instead, the vast majority of academic literature addressing these museums debates the historical merits of living or reenacted history. Instead of investigating the commonly raised questions of historical preservation and authenticity, or the content of what is being presented, I aim to investigate the delivery of that content and what part architecture has to play in that delivery.

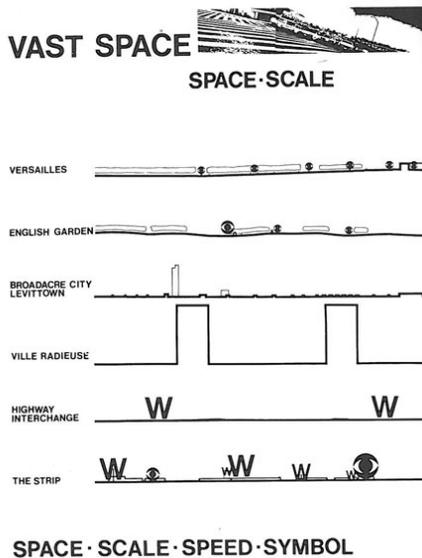
proposal:

This grant will investigate the role of architecture in living history museums through close reading of Skansen (Stockholm, Sweden) and Den Gamle By (The Old Town, Aarhus, Denmark) through multiple site visits. These sites represent both the largest and first examples of open air museums (they both predate Greenfield Village), as well as having a significant collection of repurposed buildings instead of simply focusing on 19th century folk life. Finally, these museums have transcended their status beyond simply being museums; they are also theme parks, zoos, and national monuments. The buildings assembled at these locations have become attractions in addition to being educational artifacts.

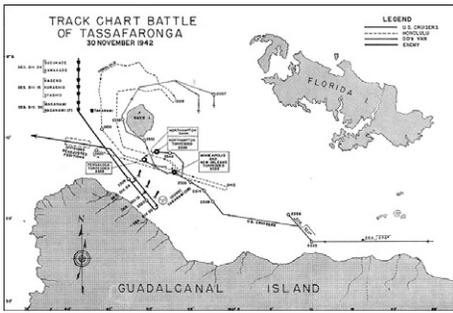
The questions I wish to address through close reading of these particular open-air museums are: How does architecture participate in the reenactment of living history? How does an emphasis on curation change the status of an architectural object? How can architectural representation be co-opted to communicate roles architecture can play other than space, occupation, material, or tectonics?

The goal of this investigation is to produce several parallel documents within a single almanac, each of which will highlight the supporting roles architecture is being asked to portray by documenting the building with separate representational techniques. Museum catalog photography, stage blocking diagrams, storyboards, elevations, iconographic detail drawings, and a claude glass will be used to create multivalent representations of the buildings.

The purpose of this almanac is not to delve deeply into the historical origins of these buildings, but rather to understand their repurposed role within the curated park. One precedent for this work is *Learning from Las Vegas*. The purpose of this deep reading of Las Vegas as a strip archetype by Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour was not to reproduce Las Vegas in their work, but to understand architectural communication and the impact of the automobile on architectural space and form in an extreme location where architecture has been defined purely by the communication at the speed of a car. Their work exposed that architecture was not just a formal object in space, but was communicative as well.



Learning from Las Vegas



battlefield diagram



claud glass

In the same way, my proposal seeks to recover and redefine some of the other roles of architecture that have become lost in an age of computational formalism, ecological disaster, and diagrammatic clarity.

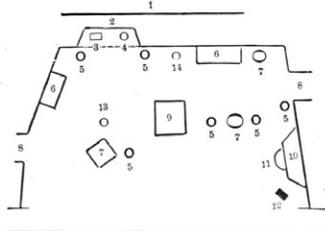
Another important precedent for this work is Umberto Eco's trip from *Travels in Hyperreality*. Eco visited seven different wax museums with seven different wax versions of *The Last Supper*. Each of the versions is different from one another yet somehow transcend the original painting. Eco writes, "The falsehood has a certain justification, since the criterion of likeness, amply described and analyzed, never applies to the formal execution, but rather to the subject...We are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for the original." In this essay, Eco largely avoids discussing the validity of producing copies of *The Last Supper*, instead focusing on how these reproductions become legitimate entities that produce their own identity. Similarly, as the Booth fellow, I will investigate the role architecture has to play in populist reenactments without questioning whether this reenactment is appropriately architectural.

The ultimate product of this investigation is to build a visual and textual vocabulary of architectural reenactment, highlighting a populist architectural phenomenon that has been ignored by the profession so far. This vocabulary, formatted as an almanac in both printed and digital form, will not only serve as a guide explaining how architectural reenactment operates, but also how reenactment is a reflection of the present, ultimately being a contemporary expression of the culture that has produced it.

LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY

GROUND PLAN.

ACT I.



1. Street backing; view of store with sign, "Stias Hobbs, Corner Store Groceries";
2. Double window—to open in;
3. Sewing machine;
4. Bird in cage;
5. Chairs;
6. Bookcases, tray, water pitcher on shelf;
7. Tables;
8. Doors to open on and up;
9. Centre piece;
10. Mantel;
11. Fender;
12. Work stand;
13. Stool;
14. Waste paper basket;
15. Chintz curtains on windows and R. H. bookcase.

stage notation

Ross Hoekstra

abstract:

I will travel to Stockholm, Sweden and Aarhus, Denmark for one month to extensively document two of the first living history museums ever constructed, concentrating on the curation and representation of the historical buildings that have reassembled on site. These buildings will be documented through multiple representations, from straightforward architectural drawings to touristic representations using a claude glass to theatrical representations.

The purpose of this documentation is to expose how architecture can be used in the service of history, narrative, theater, and heritage at the expense of space, form, and occupation. This documentation will both begin to outline the tactics of architectural reenactment, and speculate how a lexicon of reenactment might paint a fuller picture of the multivalent roles architecture can play.

itinerary:

Fly -> DTW to Stockholm Sweden
Visit -> Document *Skansen* [**17 days**]
Ride -> Train to Copenhagen and Aarhus, Denmark
Visit -> Document *The Old Town (Den Gamle By)* for [**10 days**]
Ride -> Train return to Copenhagen
Fly -> Copenhagen Denmark to DTW