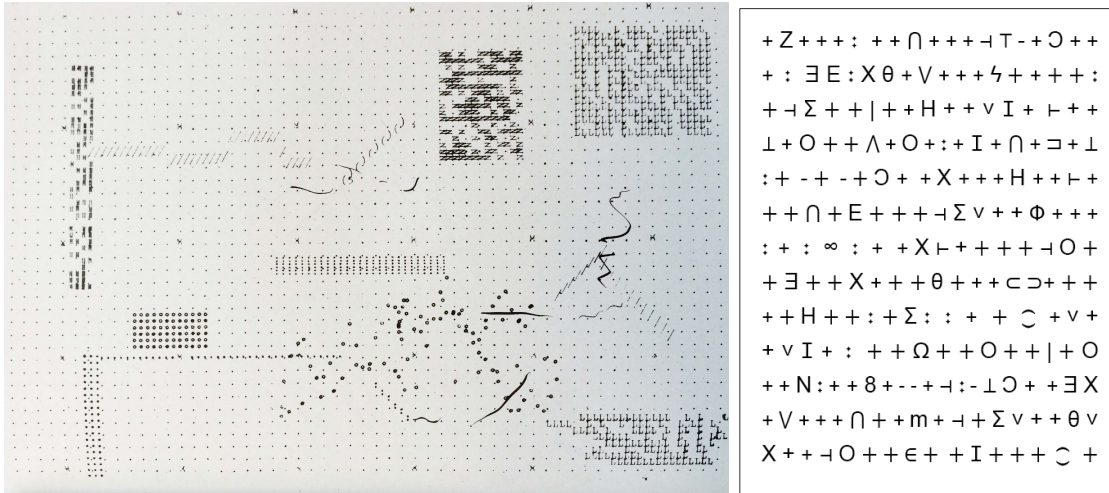


Spaces and Environments Between Writing and Drawing

Exploring Alphanumerical Representation in Architecture & Urbanism

Workshop for Gillmor Seminar, University of Calgary
David Gissen



Alphanumerical urban plans: On the left, from 1969 and made with a typewriter by Archizoom; and on the right, from 2015 and made with an algorithm and unicode (by DG).

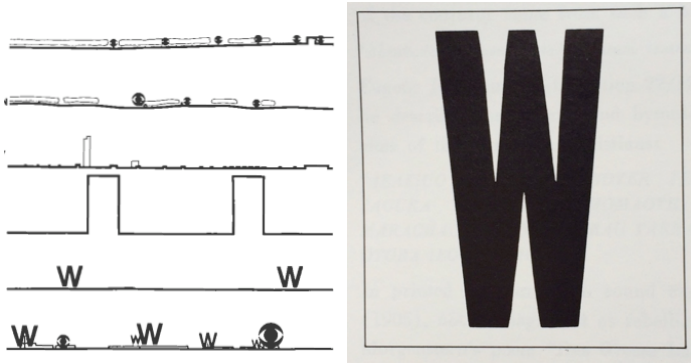
Abstract

During this seminar we will collectively explore the alphanumerical character and abstracted language as a component of architectural representation. Our goal is to open a speculative arena between architecture writing and architecture drawing, producing work that lies between documents and images. We will closely examine the techniques and context of a series of historical architectural text-images, read contemporary architectural theories on writing and representation, and examine and hear from contemporary “experimental” writers at the University of Calgary who are developing works that are similar to various architectural efforts. As we study this material, we will develop our own alphanumerical architectural experiments in the form of typed plan, section and elevation documents that will be gathered into a single collective, printed work.

Extended Description

Since the development of mass-printing, architects have explored how letters and other characters might be utilized to represent aspects of architecture and urban experience. Architects utilized letters for their resemblance to architectural elements, to convey notions of scale, the texture of urbanization and the communicative capacity of the built environment. By the 1960s, architects such as Peter Eisenman, Robert Venturi/Denise Scott Brown and the Archizoom collective all explored language-images that were influenced by experiments from avant-garde and experimental art, writing and poetry. Their typed plans, spatial transcriptions,

and “conceptual notations” suggested other forms for architectural representations between writing and drawing and that have become part of the legacy of late-modern architecture. Although each of these seminal works draws from wildly different urban and theoretical contexts, they all grapple with the dissolution of architectural form and the role of “non-figurative” architecture during the ascendancy of late-capital.



“A comparative analysis of vast spaces” Venturi Scott-Brown, 1972; “W” Kurt Schwitters, (from Maholy-Nagy, Vision and Motion, 1968).

Today, characters, strings and codes have emerged as a central aspect of digital culture via computation, telecommunication, and digitalization. Highly abstracted forms of language are everywhere, and yet few contemporary architects have embraced this reality in their portrayal of architecture. Language has never been more central to architecture’s image (via scripting, documentation and encoding) and simultaneously so far from the center of our representational projections. How can language, as a type of abstracted medium, articulate ideas about space, form, environment among a host of other possibilities, that are simply not possible with more traditional systems of representation? What can characters do as objects that oscillate between something read and seen; spoken and heard and written and drawn that enable us to portray spatial and environmental ideas about our world? How can we rekindle and learn from other fields that once were part of this architectural exploration, such as conceptual and experimental writing, avant-garde literature, or sound art, and which similarly explore writing and reading in a form that pushes our understanding of what language does and can do? These are some of the many questions that we will explore.



“Notes on Conceptual Architecture” Peter Eisenman, 1970; Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, Prix Nobel, 1966

Ground Rules

All of the work we develop should be entered on a keyboard of some type, readable in unicode, and able to be cut and pasted into a variety of platforms such as MSWord, Excel, Indesign, etc. Your final work should be typed within an 8.5 x 11” area and capable of being incorporated into a larger document. You can use characters from any language or notation system so long as they are encoded in Unicode and you know what they mean and – if letters – how they are pronounced (eg. don't use characters from foreign languages that are completely unfamiliar to you.).

Images: "Timed Erasures" Rem Koolhaas and Winy Maas, 1991. Removal, Move (Line of Evidence): The Grid Locations of Streets, Alphabetized, Hagstrom's Maps of the Five Boroughs: Manhattan, Vito Acconci, 1970?

Schedule [NOTE: THIS WILL BECOME MORE DEVELOPED OVER THE SUMMER]

Day One

- Introduction
- Examining case studies from architecture, 1452-1991

Introduction to working with text (Unicode, Mamp, brief look at alphanumerical programming in php and Excel)

Day Two

Introduction to themes from conceptual and experimental writing (visits by Derek Beaulieu? Christian Bok?)

Project development

Day Three

Project development

Day Four

Presentation