

*10/ The task of architecture*



Panorama of the costumes produced by the students during the final jury April 2009

*"FORMLESS: that a dictionary might begin from the moment it no longer gave the meaning of words but their task. Thus, formless is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning but a term serving to declassify, generally requiring that each thing has a form. What it refers to has no place in any meaning and is crushed everywhere like a spider or an earthworm. Indeed, for academics to be happy, the universe must take form. All of philosophy has no other purpose: it is about giving a riding coat (redingote) to that which is, a mathematical riding coat. On the other hand, to say that the universe resembles nothing and is formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or gob of spit."*

G. Bataille. Documents, 1929 number 7

Georges Bataille's article "Formless" is an integral part of his critique of the symbolic function of architecture, one of the strongest designers of this "mathematical riding coat" thrown over the world. This critique, which has served as a guiding thread to the presentation of the firm's work should not be understood as an attack on the construction of buildings. Bataille was very sensitive to architecture. *Rather, it is, in my opinion, directed against this overwhelming need that our civilisation has to flood all the grey areas of reality with light, to sniff out all nooks and crannies. This will to give a noble and presentable image to what it considers to be degrading or primitive. It is in this sense that one finds the symbolic dimension of architecture everywhere in the real, and not only in the production of the built environment. Clothing is one of those human productions that try to impose on human passions the rigorous form of a perfect system. The reference to the riding coat is not fortuitous. The redingote, derived from the*

English "riding coat" is a black garment, fitted close to the body and which imposed itself stylistically for the Puritan values with which it was associated: the rise of the figure of the bourgeois Protestant, an enterprising man, accumulating wealth without making vulgar display on his own person, in contrast with the lavish costumes of the old regime. The task of architecture is therefore not exclusive to architecture. Clothing, painting and language are just as concerned.

Since the creation of "Est-ce ainsi" in 2006, I have divided my time between the firm and teaching architecture for the Georgia Institute of Technology. This articulation between school and practice is almost consubstantial to the work of the firm. Teaching is a place for reflection where some of the issues faced in practice are discussed in the project workshop. Last year a workshop was dedicated to clothing on the basis of the term "redignote" chosen by Bataille. Each student had a materials budget of €50 to design a portable sleeping place. This architecture-garment was intended

Peuplade Nandi; plain of Tanganika  
Sources: «Documents» 1930, article «Espace» - Georges Bataille

Marriage in Seine and Marne, around 1905  
Source: «Documents» 1929, article «Figure humaine» - Georges Bataille



Costume made by the student Allyson Chase April 2009  
This clothing architecture denounces the modern enslavement of women in the world of underground fashion. It is a set of sewing patterns that are constrained by the movements of the woman who wears it.



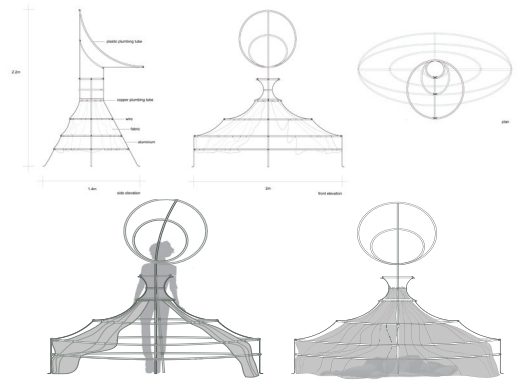
Costume created by the student  
Bethany Mare  
April 2009

This crinolin dress is a light, self-sufficient habitation. The neck is composed of plastic bottles in which collected rain water allows food to germinate. The whalebone structure offers an abode protected by a biodegradable plastic veil

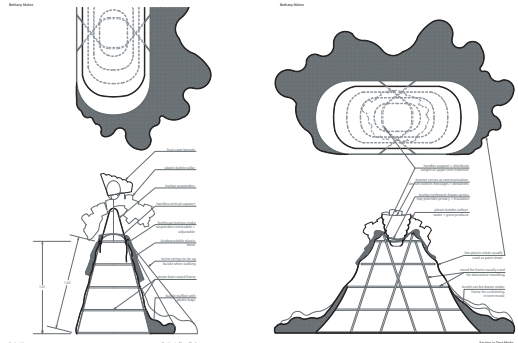
to formally express a reaction to the problems of the contemporary world. Modern slavery, the "economic crisis" and private prisons on the Mexican border of the United States of America are some of the themes that students chose to address. I think architecture schools offer a wonderful education. But after seven years of study and seven years of teaching I cannot help but see a weakness in schools: a student leaving an architecture school has never built. They will never have had the opportunity during school to try to their hand at the physical exercise of architecture.

My intention is not to make teaching more professionalised, to introduce the reality of the constraints of building into school earlier, since, in my view, this is to be avoided.

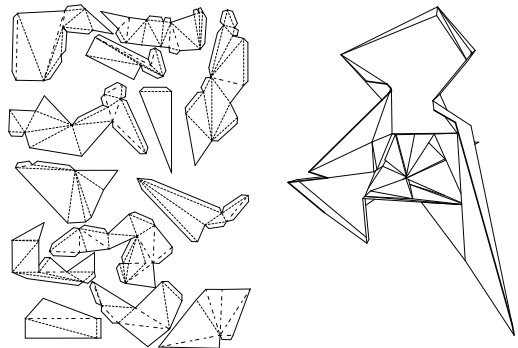
**Quite the opposite, when I talk about building within the school, it is to familiarise students with what will become their material. So they can be aware of the impact of their project on the real, the unsuspected problems that they will have to deal with in the design phase, learn to overcome incidents, bounce back after surprises and break with this idea that the site is just the implementation of the plan in three dimensions. So that they can understand budgetary constraints and use them a driver rather than a punishment. Any student practised in drawing or painting is quite easily surprised by the complexity as well**



Plan, section, and elevation of the costume by Moira Schneider  
April 2009



Plan, section, and elevation of the costume by Bethany Mare  
April 2009



Plan, section, and elevation of the costume by Allyson Chase  
April 2009

Panorama of the costumes produced by the students at the final jury  
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as by the power of the stroke of a pen or a spot of Indian ink. In my opinion, they should be able to feel the power of a new wall, a hole dug in the ground, a mass of cast concrete... as a direct result of their plan.

For a student graduating from an architecture school today, the reality of construction is an unknown. It appears as a set of fixed codes, perfectly removed from school, with its own rules and administration, and made up of people who have not been schooled in the concerns that have been theirs for the past six years. I see no reason why it should be that way. Schools of architecture could also be places where students reflect on a site with the same political-constructional-poetic attention as deployed in the design of a project. A place where the administrative and legislative workings of firms are reinvented, where one can reflect on what this famous professional world could be, rather than trying to introduce as it is, with its obvious dysfunctions, into the minds of students.

The project on costume as well as the project for architectural models on a 1:1 scale for the next semester are proposals that go in this direction. The aim is to establish an annual workshop for scale architectural experiments. After a jury has selected the most relevant project, students will work together to imagine the implementation of this little building. They will have to question the relevance of the materials selected, reflect on ways of supplying the site, divide up the tasks on site, manage the budget and so on. Once this choreography is established, they will go on site for a ten day period to build it.

**0106 "Redingote" against monstrosity**

Fourth year architecture studio workshop for the "Paris program" of the College of Architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology, housed at l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris La Villette.

The studio was composed of the following students:  
Emily Bradley, Cindy Caranto, Allyson Chase, Xiaoxi Chen, Sarah Colvin, Michelle Hendrickson, Yehwon Kim, Dessa Lohrey, Bethany Mahre, Jessica Marquardt, Calleigh Mentzer, Moira Schneider, Stephanie Self, Laura Welborn, Craig Whitehorne.

It took place at ENSAPLV from February 9 to April 6 2009.

Each student had an amount of 50 euros for materials to realize a portable sleeping place. This clothing architecture had to formally express a reaction to the problems of the contemporary world. Modern slavery, the economic crisis, the private prisons along the Mexican border of the U.S., are some of the themes chosen by the students.