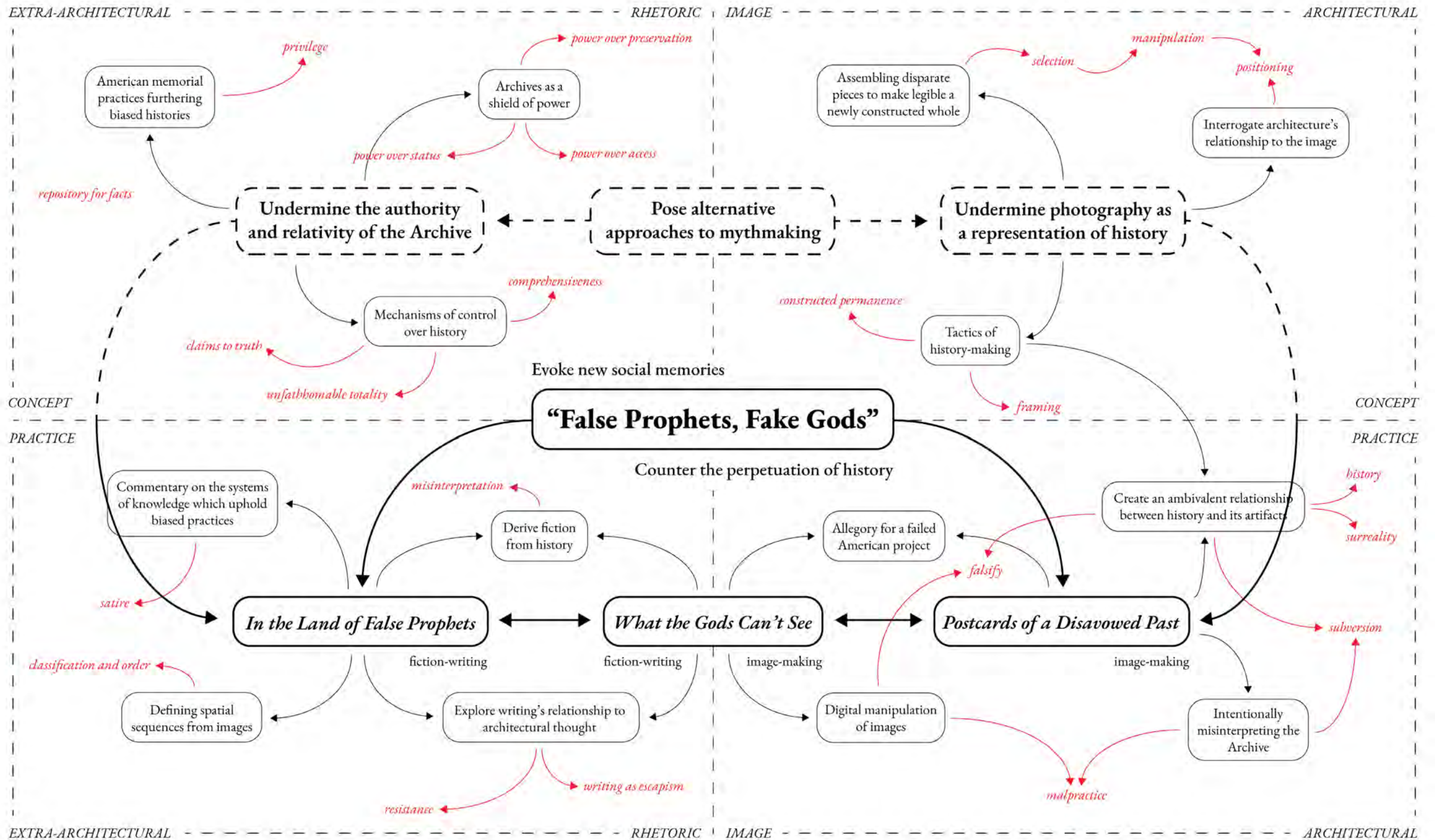


False Prophets, Fake Gods

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0.0 [American Social Memory]

0.1 At the Turn of a High

This thesis is about American social memory; it focuses on the evocation of history as an act of revolution, as a means of reshaping relations between space, place, and time in order to reconstruct cultural identities. As cultural geographer Karen Till defines, social memory is “the ongoing process whereby social groups ‘map’ their myths of self onto and through a place and time.”¹ American memorial practices² today continue a legacy of mythmaking that furthers biased histories—grounded in preconceptions of whiteness, privilege, and permanence. A legacy that was founded in the infancy of the nation and has been perpetuated over time. As memorial practices have been engrained into the fabric of American society, so to have their prejudices.

At this moment in American history, it is crucial to rethink how we (re)define social memory. Not only because the events of the past few years have made more visible the biases inherent in our cultural practices, but because we are situated at a crucial moment in the cycles of American history. In 1997, William Strauss and Neil Howe wrote a book³ about the recurring generational cycles of American history—identifiable and archetypal shifts in culture that occur about every twenty years. They identify four turnings (periods) that constitute a full cycle: *the High*, a period when institutions are strong and collectivism is favored over individualism, *the Awakening*, a period when institutions are attacked in favor of autonomy, *the Unraveling*, a period when institutions are weakened and individualism is high, and *the Crisis*, a period when existing institutions are torn down and rebuilt in favor of new institutions.

We are currently in a “Fourth Turning,” a Crisis,

which started with the financial crisis of 2008 and is assumed to end around 2028. What will follow this period is a High: a newly defined network of cultural institutions. The institutions that have been attacked throughout the past decade or so will ostensibly be rethought and reconstructed; the hostile individualism of the Crisis transitioning to a period of collectivism.

In anticipation of such change, we—as Americans—must be proactive. The approaching moment is an opportune time to revolutionize our memorial practices. We must pose alternatives and reshape our relationship to the past in order to project into the future. To counter America’s biased practices, we must exert agency; or else, they will continue to be perpetuated. The responsibility of redefining memorial practices rests on us all, it is a collective endeavor requiring collaboration and compromise. It requires us to reckon with difficult issues and realities, yet we must face them head on. The approaching High is inevitable, yet its form is indeterminate.

¹ *Places of Memory*, Karen Till (2003)

² “memorial practices” is used to describe the processes, systems, and practices which manifest social memory

³ *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous with Destiny*



Photos sourced from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*

From Top to Bottom: HABS DC,WASH,2--32, HABS DC,WASH,2--31, HABS DC,WASH,2--30, HABS DC,WASH,2--29

0.2 “Revolutionary”

[Transcribed from an interview with Angela Davis, 1972]⁴

What do you see as the meaning of the term 'Revolutionary'?

Well, there’s no single, simple meaning of the term Revolutionary.

A Revolutionary is a man or a woman who is a lot of things, but basically, the Revolutionary wants to change the nature of society in a way to promote a world where the needs and interests of the people are responded to.

A Revolutionary realizes, however, that in order to create a world where human beings can live, and love, and be healthy, and create, we have to completely revolutionize the entire fabric of society.

You have to overturn the economic structures, where you have a few individuals who are in possession of the vast majority of the wealth in this country—that has been produced by the majority of the people.

You have to destroy this political apparatus which, under the guise of revolutionary government, perpetrates the most incredible misery on the masses of people.

⁴ “Angela Davis - What it means to be a Revolutionary (1972 Interview)” posted by AfroMarxist on Youtube

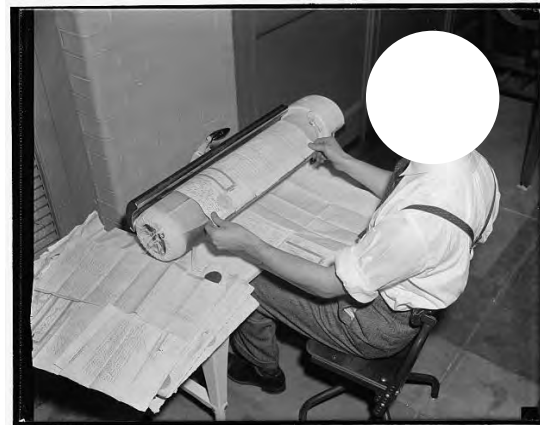
1.0 [Temple, Prison, Restaurant]

1.1 “From Document to Archive”

[Excerpt from Achille Mbembe’s *The Power of the Archive and its Limits*]⁵

“Archives are the product of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations. As a result, they become part of a special system, well illustrated by the withdrawal into secrecy or ‘closing’ that marks the first years of their life. For several years, these fragments of lives and pieces of time are concealed in the half-light, set back from the visible world. A ban of principle is imposed upon them. This ban renders the content of these documents even more mysterious. At the same time a process of despoilment and dispossession is at work: above all, the archived document is one that has to a large extent ceased to belong to its author, in order to become the property of society at large, if only because from the moment it is archived, anyone can claim to access the content. Over and above the ritual of making secret, it seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of a judgement, the result of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchivable’. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status.”

⁵ *The Power of the Archive and its Limits*, Achille Mbembe (2002), pages 19-20



Photos sourced from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*

From Top to Bottom: LC-DIG-hec-27697, LC-DIG-hec-27698, LC-DIG-hec-27701

1.2 Representing Otherness

Memorial practices are a vast and ever-evolving network. They range in scale, materiality, spatiality, and temporality; from subtle daily routines to large-scale monuments. Addressing memorial practices at large, in the context of today’s American political and social climate, is an arduous and near-impossible task; its extents are too far reaching to synthesize within an act of scholarship. Rather, approaching this topic must be done by focusing efforts on its individual components. In doing so with rigor, many small actions will amalgamate to form a larger impact.

In the current American climate, the issue of cultural identity and representation is a crucial matter. There is a need to combat the lineage of prejudiced practices that continue to inform America’s dominant hierarchies. These practices are engrained within the systems of governance that inform our social structures, including archives.

As Achille Mbembe describes, archives necessitate a process of selection and curation which results in the endowment of status; a status that renders cultural artifacts as the property and representation of society. National archives exploit this condition to the extreme; describing their collections as comprehensive and holistic. They establish the scope of a nation’s history, yet comprehensivity is impossible to achieve; there is not enough space nor time to manifest a comprehensive national archive. For example, the United States National Archives contains just 1-3% of the Federal government’s documents and materials.⁶ Thus, the power of status is used to define whose narratives and histories persist; which are important enough to include in constructing America’s history and which are not. At stake is the issue of identity;

whose identities constitute the representation of the nation and whose are discriminated against.

The permission of archival status is defined by those in positions of power. As national archives construct their histories, they also construct an Other—that which is consciously and continuously rejected. The Otherness of the American archive is not restricted to a particular group; it ranges from exclusions on the basis of race and gender to exclusions based on confidentiality and secrecy. Redesigning the structure of national archives in order to construct a collective practice of history-making is a necessary task, however this thesis focuses its efforts on the evocation of existing archived material. Through image-making and fiction-writing, *False Prophets, Fake Gods* calls forth histories that lie beneath the surface; representing the Otherness of the American archive.

⁶ [archives.gov/about](https://www.archives.gov/about)

1.3 The Gatekeeper

In the mid to late 1930's, the U.S. Government created a series of agencies as part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, one of which was the Farm Security Administration (FSA, 1937-1942). The FSA was created as a successor to the Resettlement Administration (1935-1937). It aimed to combat rural poverty; resettling farmers, providing emergency relief, and building experimental farm communities. Along with these duties, the FSA focused on the representation of rural conditions through documentary photography—what has since become understood as the agency's lasting legacy. Since 1944, the FSA's collection has been a part of the Library of Congress; the FSA-OWI Collection consisting of approximately 175,000 negatives.⁷

The FSA was headed by Roy E. Stryker (pictured above), a former economics instructor at Columbia University. Stryker operated out of Washington D.C., assigning photographers subjects and geographic areas. The photographers would mail their negatives back to D.C., where Stryker would review them and select those he considered suitable for printing and dissemination. Those that Stryker disapproved of, he "killed," punching a hole through the negative, leaving an unquestionable mark of refusal.⁸

While Stryker's hole punches denote the end of a negative's life in one way, many take on a life after this action. Most of Stryker's "killed" negatives were still scanned and integrated into the collection; they can be found within the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*. Positioned within an archive defined as comprehensive, Stryker's images reveal the falsity of that claim. They reveal that the history of many is constructed by the hands of a few, whose

⁷ loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/about-this-collection

⁸ *ibid.*



intent is concealed by the structure of the archive. The archive preaches objectivity while it is birthed from subjectivity, which it veils through its unfathomable totality.

These marks, and their position within the archive, represent more than a simple act of refusal. They provide a deeper meaning to acts of gatekeeping that exist within the archive. They are violent marks, providing a glimpse into a subjective and biased process of selection. They are indications of Otherness, marks of intention and disavowal. They speak to histories long forgotten, forbidden from the realm of history.

The resultant compositions go beyond their initial intention as documentary photographs and become historical artifacts, representative of issues broader than the rural poverty of the Great Depression era. The intervention of brute black markings renders the photographs as something physical, objects with material and spatial properties. As historical artifacts, they speak to the hierarchies evident within American institutions; symbolic of the unstable relationships between these institutions and everyday people. Some markings are passive, simply a notational device of rejection. Others are formidable, dauntingly positioned in the background like a black sun. Others are active, intentionally situated to block out a face or body. Stryker's markings go beyond notation and become intervention, representative of the biased practices of gatekeeping that define American history-making.

Photos sourced from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*

Top photograph: LC-DIG-ppmsca-31918



LC-USF33-006218-M4



LC-USF33-002822-M1



LC-USF33-T01-000425-M4



LC-USF33-T01-000425-M4



LC-USF33-T01-000532-M3



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LC-USF33-T01-000465-M1



LC-USF33-T01-000298-M4



LC-USF33-T01-001126-M2



LC-USF33-T01-001112-M3



LC-USF33-T01-001094-M2



LC-USF33-T01-001107-M0



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LC-USF33-T01-001113-M3



LC-USF33-001143-M3



LC-USF33-T01-000651-M5



LC-USF33-T01-002653-M1



LC-USF33-T01-002767-M4



LC-USF33-T01-002419-M1



LC-USF33-T01-000697-M2



LC-USF33-T01-001398-M2



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LC-USF33-002370-M5

2.0

[Divine Intervention]

2.1

Necessity is the Mother of In(ter)vention

The present is a moment of charged partisanship, its discourse is the property of the privileged. Institutions act as thresholds between the enfranchised and disenfranchised; a division both formed by and continuously forming one's accessibility to action. While some Americans possess a voice in determining our collective progress, others are deprived of such rights. To move towards an equitable America, where a diversity of voices—and the narratives they speak—are celebrated, the systems that restrain them must be abolished. To move towards collective practices of social memory, intervention is necessary.

While intervention and abolishment of many existing political and social structures is necessary, this work takes time to achieve. Parallel to large-scale systematic shifts, Americans must intervene in the objects, spaces, and places we have agency over. Small-scale actions have the ability to have large-scale effects; protesting in its many forms—marching, taking a knee, raising a fist. Social memory⁹ is not limited to gatekeepers, it is something everyone has the ability to exert agency over.

The first design practice of *False Prophets, Fake Gods* is about intervention; signaling disruption, the opposition and transformation of an existing condition. The practice is image-based: it involves curating a series of archived photographs, reprinting them, then physically altering them by cutting and mark-making. Acts of disruption and decomposition challenge the validity of the existing photograph; they create missing spaces, holes of doubt and speculation; hidden narratives appear and questions float to the surface.

⁹ defined by cultural geographer Karen Till as “the ongoing process whereby social groups ‘map’ their myths of self onto and through a place and time.” *Places of Memory* (2003)

2.2

On Sourcing

The following design work uses photographs sourced from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*. Photographs are selected based on aesthetic, compositional, and thematic qualities. The selected photos are transformed through a series of design practices: intervention, speculation, manipulation, and spatialization. The variety of practices evident throughout the work outline the myriad of techniques one may approach history with; each approach defines a distinct relationship between its product and its source content. It is intended that this work not be perceived as a complete and whole entity, but as an ongoing process of methodologies, from which others can borrow from and further.

The Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog* was selected as the starting point of the work for a number of reasons. The Library of Congress and the National Archives are the primary information repositories for the United States. The Library of Congress is a part of the legislative branch of the government whereas the National Archives is an independent agency within the executive branch. Both hold an important position in the monumental core of Washington D.C. as architectures and both are revered as a source of American history. Both institutions necessitate interrogation, yet this work focuses on the Library of Congress. The primary distinction being that the aim of the Library of Congress is to “acquire, organize, preserve, secure and sustain for the present and future use of Congress and the nation a comprehensive record of American history.”¹⁰ As noted before, this notion of comprehensivity veils the constructed biases inherent in the archival process. The National

¹⁰ “What’s the Difference Between the National Archives and the Library of Congress?” Stephen Wesson (2018)

Archives' primary interest is in preserving the records of the federal government. While this design work focuses on the Library of Congress, its methodologies can be applied to any archive of visual material.

Another important factor in the selection of the Library of Congress is accessibility. Over 95% of the Prints & Photographs Division's holdings are digitized—over 14 million items in total—making it an accessible online, public resource.¹¹ The accessibility of the archive is imperative, such that the institutional boundaries the work is produced within and responds to are not accepted as a restriction.

Upon approaching the archive, one must establish a focus; an intent. Entering the archive without a focus is to get lost in its vast and endless corridors of history; one must establish a reason for reckoning with a particular set of artifacts. Once established, design tactics can be deployed in response. Sourcing is the fundamental starting point for the following methodologies.

¹¹ <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/about>

2.3 Postcards of a Disavowed Past

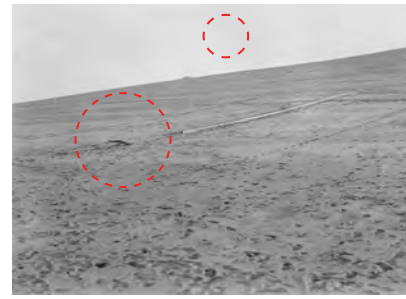
Postcards of a Disavowed Past consists of eight diptychs, pairs of intervened archived photographs, sourced from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*. The photos are selected to represent certain phenomena throughout the construction of America. In sequence, the sixteen photos portray a transition from beginnings to ruins; an allegory for a failed American project. The visual narrative is cyclical, calling back to Strauss and Howe's generational theory.

Each photo is printed on a 5 inch by 7 inch piece of cardstock, mimicking a typical postcard. The "postcards" are then physically intervened in, cut with circular hole punches. The distinct mark of Roy Stryker's FSA photographs is deployed as a visual trope to turn his symbol of rejection against the archive, disavowing the photos' place within American history.

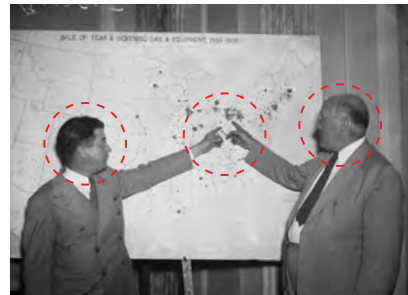
The work represents a necessary intervention in memorial practices, a need to reconstruct what constitutes American social memory. They signal and call for a reclaiming of agency over the institutions, artifacts, and tactics which construct history. The source photos are viewed as history itself, not representations; history exists because the photo exist. The resultant artifacts are anti-historical, rejecting the past constructed by America's gatekeepers. Simultaneously, they position themselves as historical artifacts through their size, materiality, and visual appearance.



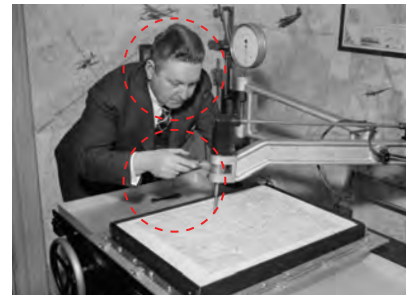
Beginning(s)



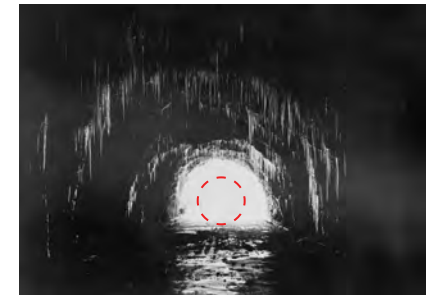
Observation(s)



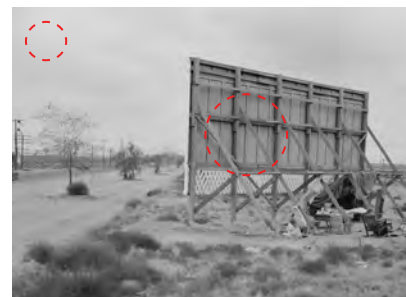
Plan(s)



Construction(s)



Action(s)



Memorialization(s)



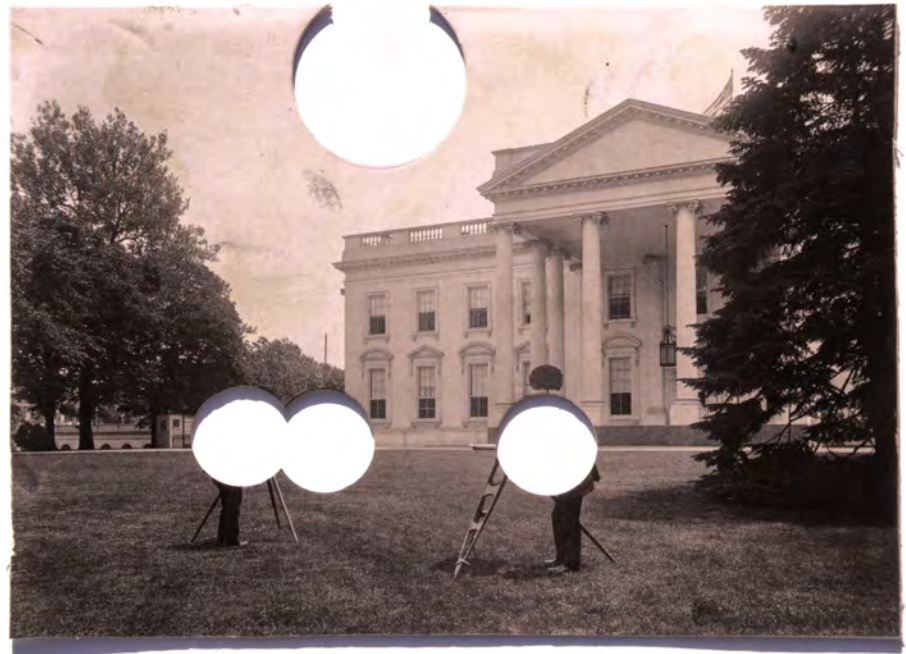
Abandonment(s)

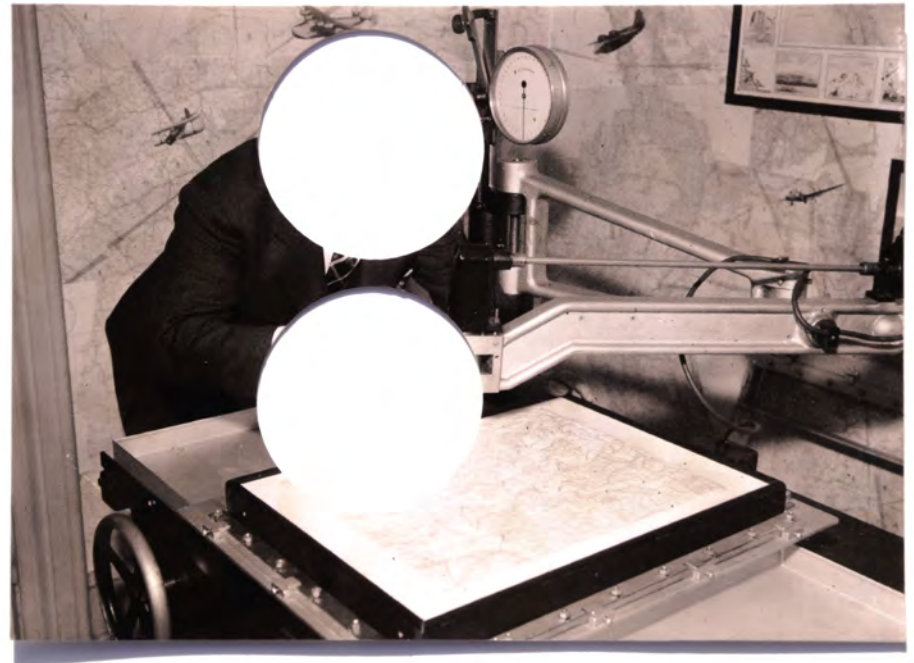
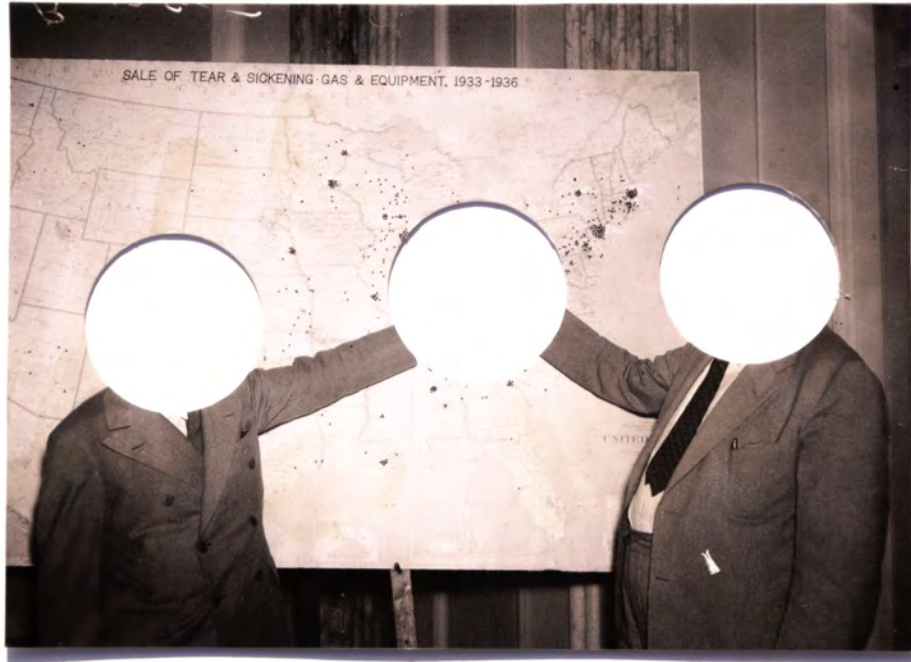


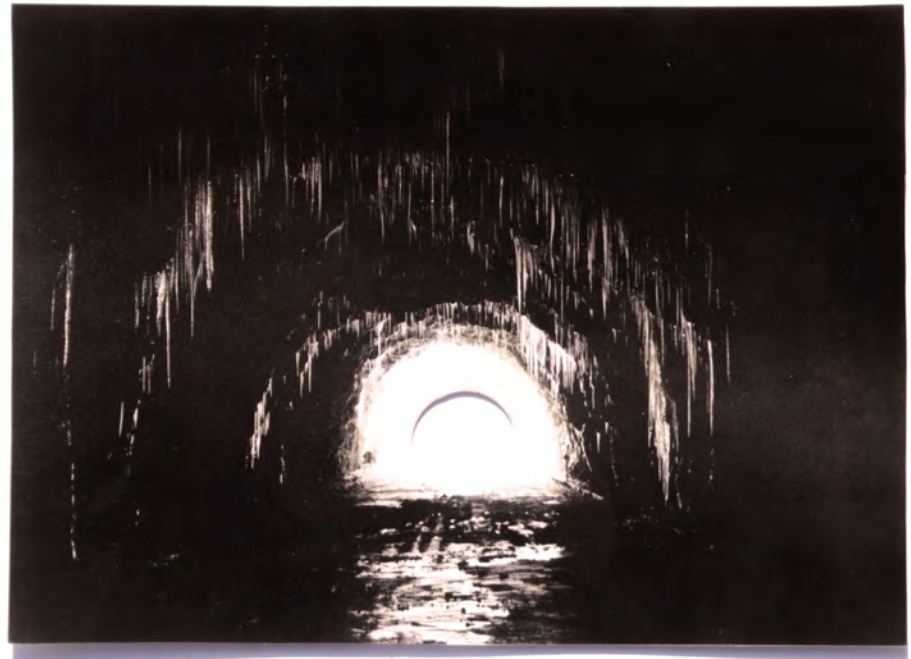
Ruin(s)



















3.0 *[Fictions of Fact]*

3.1 On Speculation

The second design practice of this thesis is about transforming fact into fiction. Archives are established on the basis of accuracy and fidelity; they define fact. That which the archive excludes is deemed false, banished to a realm outside of history. Where do these narratives go?

As Patricia Hampl writes:

"Sufficient time must pass, we are told, after a great or defining experience in order to write history—personal or otherwise. Passions must cool. The necessary distance must be achieved. But what, really, is left to tell from the position of this exemplary coolness? Occasionally an undissolved silver floats up from the corrosive murk to pierce and poison the heart. But nothing is left of the thing itself. The secret has completed its vocation of extinction. It is gone, cured. Lost in its corrosive element."¹²

Repressed narratives lay dormant, awaiting light within the darkness. From the murky depths of history—the murky depths of the archive—narratives float to the surface. These are the narratives hidden by gatekeepers, repressed and restrained. Some are buried underground, others are disfigured beyond recognition, others are left in plain sight, unassumingly present. To speculate on areas of concealment is to challenge constructed histories. This thesis views speculation as a means of activating hidden histories; producing narratives that challenge the status quo of history.

Speculation is a rebellious act; it challenges the archive to reveal its construction, to reveal that which lies beyond comprehensibility. The comprehensiveness which the Archive is presented with dilutes its role and shrouds its true power; while the Archive is an incredible system of preserva-

tion and organization, it is not a repository for facts, it is the birthplace of fictions.

The power of the archive rests in its accessibility. An inaccessible archive, one that shelves away artifacts of the past, leaving them to accumulate dust and mold, never to be touched again, is not an archive in the slightest. The archive is constructed on the basis of assembly. It is a curated body of resources which becomes activated once members of society reckon with its contents; "constellations of loosely associated fragments make present previously absent objects."¹³

In the Land of False Prophets is a commentary on the systems of knowledge which actively perpetuate biased memorial practices, a satirical representation of the relationship between time, power, and history. It tells the story of three people who become obsessed with breaking the confines of their field: the Photographer, whose fascination with photographic truth leads them to the excruciating task of producing two indistinguishable images; the Archivist, who discovers a pair of identical images in a reclaimed box of artifacts and is subsequently exiled to find their source; and the Researcher, whose assignment to uncover information on unidentified satellite images leads them down a rabbit hole of exploration. The narrative follows their twisting obsessions, colliding in a discovery that questions the validity of history. The narrative is constructed by deriving archived photographs from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*, using selected photos to inform spatial sequences within the narrative, constructing a semi-coherent world of loosely associated fragments.

3.2 Towards Myth

What is the difference between history
and fiction?

Once upon a time,
history and myth, fact and fiction
were one and the same

Humans spoke of gods, heroes, rituals
life was saturated with joy and meaning

The past was fictive
meaning was valued over truth

Today, fact and fiction
are strictly divided

History and its discontents
are disaffiliated
a binary opposition

Our society is left with this message:

*History is what it is.
There is no room for interpretation.*

Lost in this belief is a capacity for
hope, wonder, speculation

Lost is an ability to exert agency over history,
an inability to elevate our narratives
to those defined by gatekeepers

We must not understand our cultural records
as essentialist
or comprehensive

We must utilize them
to construct new meanings for life

We must seize agency over history
and favor malpractice over practice

We must mythmake
misinterpret
misuse
subvert

*The past should not be a repository for facts,
it should be the birthplace of fictions.*

¹² *What She Couldn't Tell*, Patricia Hampl (1999)

¹³ "Salvage memory: constellating material histories on a hardscrabble homestead," Caitlin DeSilvey (2007), page 420

3.3

In the Land of False Prophets

Disclaimer

The following is an (un)true story; a pseudohistorical narrative; a parafiction. It is an allegory for the systems of knowledge which construct history and a commentary on photography as an accomplice to this construction.

The identities of our protagonists will remain anonymous, as not to risk any legal complication. Our story follows the obsessions of three people*: the Photographer, the Archivist, and the Researcher.

We begin with the Researcher...

**representative of the three spheres of historical control: authority over production, preservation, and access*

Part One

One day, as the Researcher studied a box of artifacts, they discovered a pair of photographs. After meticulously assessing the two photos, the Researcher could not distinguish a single difference between them; they were identical. Stunned yet fascinated, the Researcher packed the two into their bag and stole them, fixated on deciphering their illogical existence.

After countless hours of investigation, the Researcher tracked the photos' origin to a remote area of Alaska, the site of a former military testing facility. At this point they were in too deep, their devotion necessitated further action.

They called out of work, spent a week packing, then departed for the site. After several days of gruesome travel, they arrived.

The site was severely remote; the Researcher hiked from dusk until dawn. As the twilight tundra transformed from red to indigo hues, a mysterious building appeared on the horizon.

The Researcher eventually reached its monumental entrance, craned their neck upwards to look at the looming structure, then slid open its massive metal door.

The Archivist believed in predestination—*that the world is divinely foreordained*. It was of their belief that within the complex and incomprehensible network that is life, everything holds its righteous place. To classify and organize things is to aid in the understanding of life.

Such is the reason they worked at an Archive, so they could aid in the organization of cultural artifacts. They made sure that everything assumed its rightful place.

When they discovered the pair of photos in a shipment box, they became just as perplexed as the Researcher. The pair conflicted with their duty as an Archivist, as well as their belief in predestination.

It was their devout mission to locate the source of the photos and clarify their existence.

They arrived at the mysterious building not long before the Researcher, when the expansive tundra was ablaze with orange and yellow tones. The building's metal exterior shone with the fire of low-hanging sun; the Archivist opened the same door and entered.

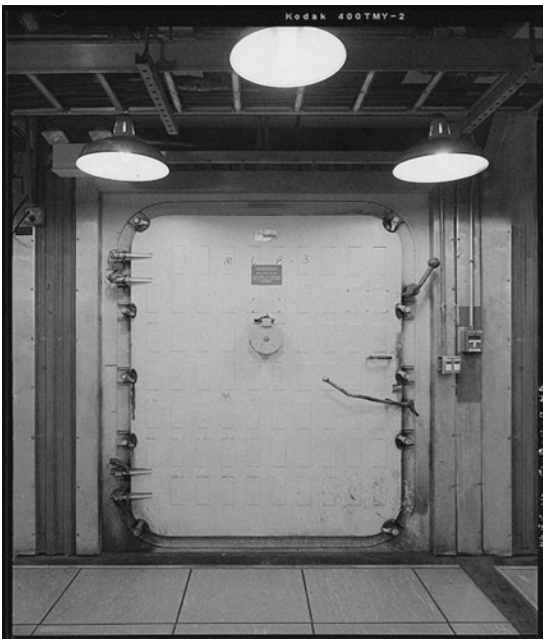
The Photographer sat hunched over; their eyes bloodshot, hands trembling. In front of them was a large wooden table, well-worn yet undoubtedly exquisite; on top of the table sat two photographs and an array of small tools: pencils, pens, erasers, knives, scrapers, brushes, paints, glasses, a magnifier.

The two photos were, in fact, the same photos that both the Researcher and the Archivist had become obsessed with. Yet, the Photographer's obsession was unique to the others: they were the producer of the photos, fascinated with undermining photographic truth.

Through the action of producing identical photos, the Photographer deconstructed their validity. An ostensibly singular artifact in nature, split into two distinct, physical entities through craft and focus.

The resultant photos were enigmatic, paradoxical, antihistorical pseudo-artifacts. They deployed history against itself, defying the boundaries of history which humans have constructed.

The aim was to induce obsession, to incite speculation, to invite others into their world of mischief and malpractice.



Part Two

Upon entering the interior, the Archivist faced a monumental hall. The building's machine-like exterior gave way to an exquisite architecture: black and white marble forms arranged to define a massive basilica.

The Archivist proceeded from the entry down the nave, observing the monolithic columns as they passed.

They soon realized the appearance of black and white marble was an illusion; the entire building was instead made out of paper—shredded and torn papers reconstituted into a solid material; *characters swirled to form indefinite patterns*.

When they reached the apse, they discovered a small metal door embedded within the wall. They glanced back at the sublime space—the warm hues of the setting sun flittered in through skylights.

They put their hand on the cold metal handle and pushed the door open, it clanged shut behind them, echoing throughout the basilica.

The Researcher entered the basilica just after the Archivist exited; the echo of the clanging door still reverberated throughout the space, yet each were unaware of the presence of the other.

The Researcher also perceived the material as marble, only realizing its true substance after closer inspection. The Researcher stopped and attempted to glean some information from the basilica's surfaces, yet they failed to do so; *characters swirled to form indefinite patterns*.

Unbeknownst to the Researcher, the papers that made up the basilica were classified Government documents.

Not long after the building ceased operation as a military testing facility, the Government converted it into the Archive of Classified Information—the site's remote location ideal for situating valuable information.

The Government shipped their chosen documents to the site, *excommunicating them from history*. The documents were shredded with military-grade equipment, reconstituted with a newly developed resin-like substance, and used to construct the Archive.

When the project was finished, the government needed someone to act as caretaker.

The Photographer was offered the job and accepted it, on the basis that they were to be provided whatever resources they requested in order to conduct their photographic practice.

The government obliged; they constructed a living and working space attached to the Archive. Ever since, the Photographer has lived a life of solitude.

The building only required about an hour of attention per day; with the remainder of their time, the Photographer produced sets of duplicate photographs.

Once a work was finished, the Photographer would ship them to archives and research centers, aiming to evoke fascination and skepticism from those who may cross their path.

As it happened, the Researcher and Archivist were two of those who fell for the Photographer's antics.



Part Three

When the Archivist opened the metal door, they entered a long corridor. The space was dimly lit, yet they could make out a small light at the other end.

They slowly walked through the space, the temperature dropping as they moved away from the basilica; their skin had goosebumps, their senses tingled with anticipation.

They reached the end of the corridor to find a small wooden door with a single window. They peered through to see a figure sitting at a desk, their back turned to the Archivist.

At the same moment, the metal door on the other side creaked open; the Archivist turned to see a figure occupying the frame. It was the Researcher, though the Archivist didn't know that.

From being alone in one moment to being surrounded by two people the next, the Archivist began to sweat. The Researcher eerily approached them; fearful, the Archivist turned and pushed open the wooden door...

The Photographer, startled by the noise, stood up and turned to face the door; the Archivist stood in the doorway, stupefied. The Researcher sprinted towards them then came to a halt, now standing side by side the Archivist in the doorway.

The two outsiders observed the study, slowly understanding this as the source of their photos; the Photographer grinned. The three now stood face to face, the air was ice cold.

Once they got past their initial fear, they each came to a realization: they were all the same person.

The Photographer, aged and solemn; the Archivist, mature and reserved; the Researcher, young and jovial. Each a different age, yet undoubtedly the same person.

Time had collapsed onto itself. In this space, reality deteriorated; history unfurled; logic evaporated. This was the land of false prophets.

None of them could speak, yet they need not. The illusion of reality was broken.

4.0

[Image Truth]

4.1

On Manipulation

The third design practice of this thesis focuses on the relationship between photographs and images in the context of today's digital technologies. It poses that digital imaging practices permit manipulation, an act which undermines perceptions of truth. While photographs are colloquially understood as truthful, images cannot be viewed in the same vein. Photographers have long debated the existence and validity of "photographic truth," yet we have gone beyond this conversation and entered into an age where we must consider "image truth" as a concept. Images are processed into binary information and recombined into a visual entity, throughout this process of translation is room for error, estrangement, and manipulation. They are inherently deceptive, estranged from the physical production necessitated by photographic processes.

This issue is exacerbated in an era where truth and image are overtly politicized subjects. Mass media outlets utilize images as primary sources, social media platforms are centered around images as representations of daily life, archives present images as representations of history. Images are posited as factual pieces of information, used to manufacture truth and construct arguments; their constructed nature veiled by preconceptions of truth. Yet again, gatekeepers exploit constructed boundaries to perpetuate biased arguments, wielding control over historical narratives. If we are to reshape our culture's relations to these systems, we must reposition our perception of the image; we must face them with skepticism and doubt rather than trust and gullibility.

The contemporary condition of the image not only requires a repositioning of consumption, but allows for

new potentials of production. New techniques arise, formed by ever-evolving digital technologies, constantly shifting the relation between image and reality. Architects, designers, and thinkers have an ability to deploy these techniques to produce images that counter the systems of knowledge which perpetuate their misconception. Manipulation becomes a tactic to counter existing narratives, to pose and construct new realities. In doing so, and in making this manipulation apparent, image-making can act as a tool for activism and revolution; it can be used to reveal what has been hidden and, simultaneously, bring in to view that which we could not see.

4.2

What the Gods Can't See

The following images are real, even if they appear otherwise. They ask us to suspend our disbelief, to imagine that they come from a very real place; from a place we haven't yet been able to see.

What the Gods Can't See is a series of 13 vignettes, each image manipulated from photographs taken from the Library of Congress *Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*. The images present surreal architectures, accompanied by parafictional descriptions. They depict and describe alternate universes, discarded histories, banned narratives; teetering on the brink between truth and falsity. They depict a world not too dissimilar to our own. Perhaps these are the narratives Othered from the archive, Othered from American history.

The work exploits tools of digital image-making and manipulation to construct new realities. To the untrained eye, they appear real. This approach views digital manipulation as a rebellious act, as an act that counters established constructs of truth and reality. The work focuses on architecture as a means by which we construct reality, construct relationships to space, place, and time. By subverting these notions, by dismantling preconceptions of space, place, and time, architecture is deployed as a tool of speculation.





6. Contextual view of EPA Farm showing cattle shelter, facing southeast. - Nevada Test Site, Environmental Protection Agency Farm, Area 15, Yucca Flat, 10-2 Road near Circle Road, Mercury, Nye County, NV

Long ago, during electronuclear testing in Nevada, a detonation malfunctioned, interrupting Earth's gravitational field for a fifty-mile radius.

The area was further secured, made off-limits to the public.

The Government took advantage of the unique site: building new facilities and conducting more advanced testing.

Yet, they left existing structures—many of them now floating—untouched, hovering from the Earth's surface indefinitely.



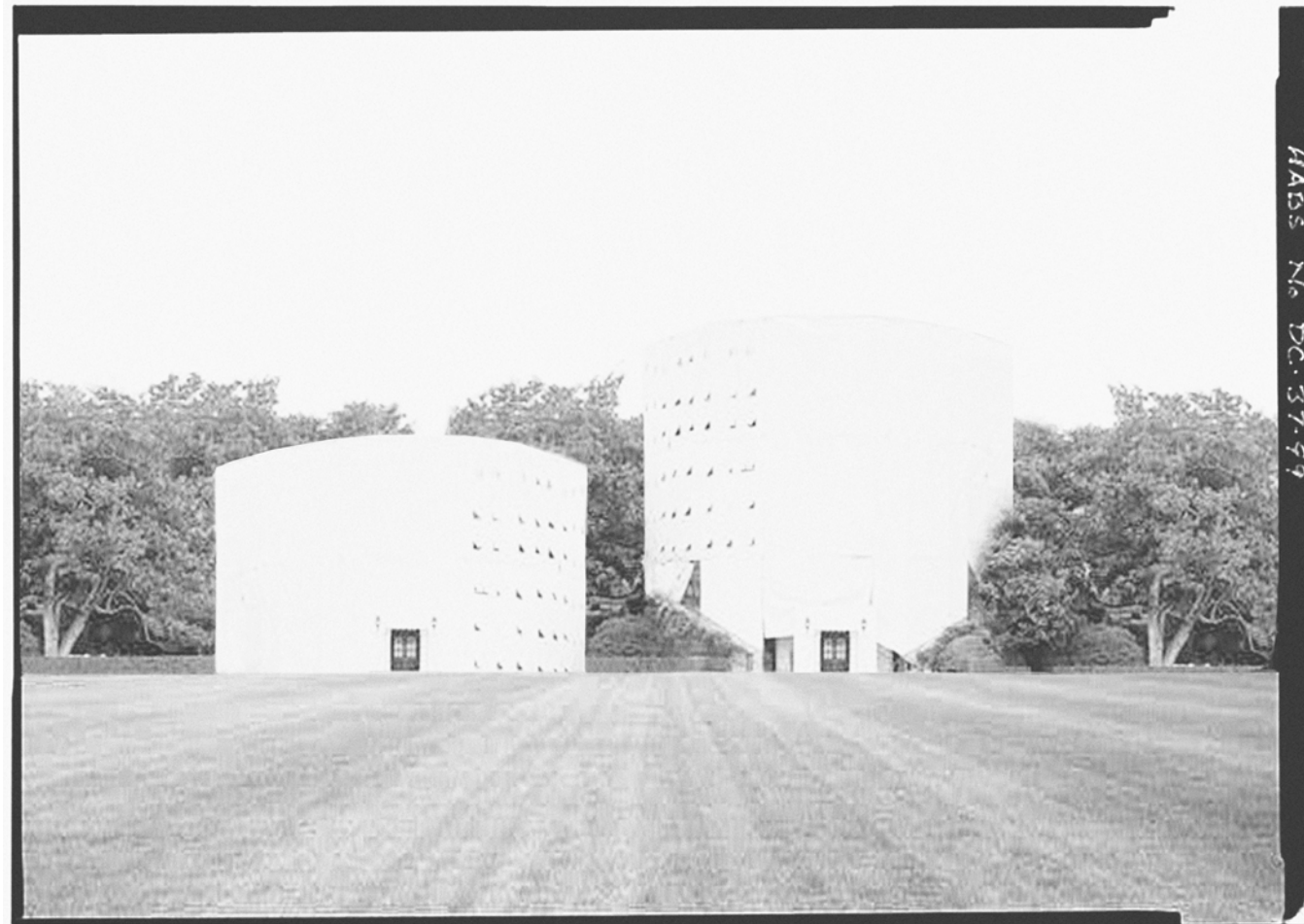
Torries Tavern farm house, Nashville vic.,
Nash County, North Carolina

When highway construction began,
Torries Tavern needed to be moved off the premises.

The Government offered the tenants two options:
either relocate the existing structure or move to a nearby town, free of charge.

The tenants—the Winstead family—opted to move to nearby Rocky Mount, under one condition:

The facade of Torries Tavern was to be reconstructed as a roadside attraction;
a marker of what once was.



99. South Elevation, View of South Elevation with Scaffolding / Covering - White House,
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest, Washington, District of Columbia, DC

After the war, the White House was left in ruins,
only the South Tower remained intact.

Rather than rebuilding the entire structure,
the White House was reconstructed underground.

The South Tower acted as the exit,
a monument to histories passed.

Next to it, a second tower was erected as the entrance,
a monument to futures ahead.

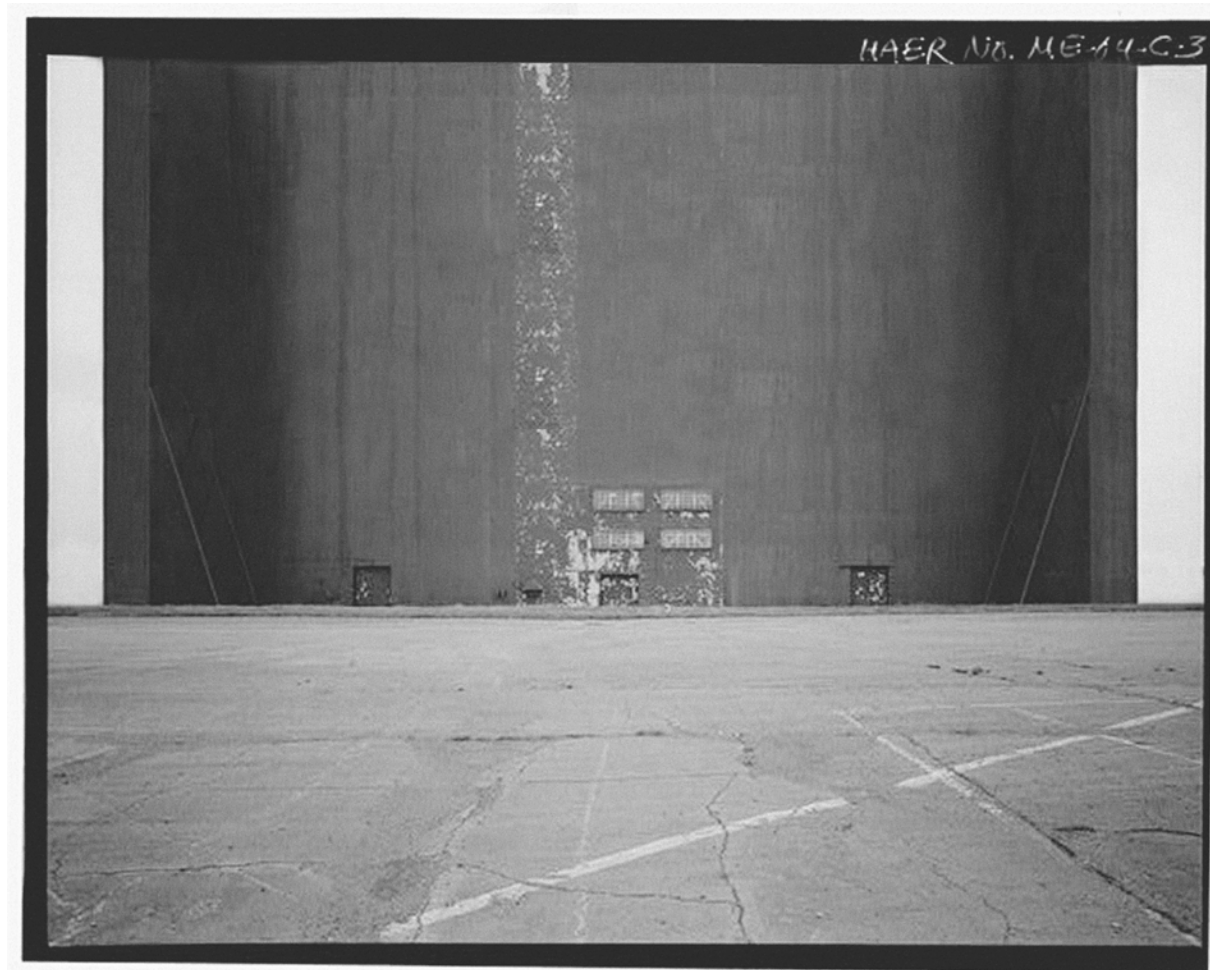


10. EXTERIOR WEST SIDE DETAIL VIEW, FACING SOUTHEAST. - NASA Industrial Plant, Missile Research Laboratory, 12214 Lakewood Boulevard, Downey, Los Angeles County, CA

In order to enter into the Missile Research Laboratory at the NASA Industrial Plant, one must pass through a decontamination chamber.

There are seven chambers in total—perhaps representative of the seven deadly sins—and they each lead to a different part of the underground laboratory.

Upon entering a chamber, a light mist of chemicals fumigates the body; it is said that the mist smells like lavender and produces a brief psychedelic effect.



3. EAST ELEVATION, SHOWING RAISED APRON BERM IN FOREGROUND.--Loring Air Force Base,
Double Cantilever Hangar, East of Arizona Road, west of southern portion of Taxiway J,
Limestone, Aroostook County, ME

At Loring Air Force Base, the U.S. Military produces the world's largest aircraft carrier:
the C-99Z Super Galaxy Ultra, measuring 135.81 meters long,
with a wing span of 119.62 meters, and weighing over 500 tons.

When conceptualized, the engineers realized that no architecture existed that was adequate for the
production, maintenance, and storage of the C-99Z.

Thus, the Double Cantilever Hangar was designed:
a monolithic 47-meter tall building covered in a weathering steel shell.



Contextual view of Buildings 70021 and 70022, facing northeast
-Naval Ordnance Test Station Inyokern, Randsburg Wash Facility Target Test Towers;
Tower Road, China Lake, Kern County, CA

In Southwestern California, there are a number of massive test towers, used to regulate conditions for nearby Searles Lake.

Decades ago, a stunt man scaled the 127-foot tall towers and strung a tightrope between them.

A service worker discovered the daredevil, suspended midair, and called the police. It took authorities over twenty hours to get the man off of his tightrope, after which he was arrested for trespassing.

Years later, the tightrope is still suspended between the two (now inactive) towers.



2. View of Statue of Freedom airlifted off of the dome - U.S. Capitol, Statue of Freedom, Intersection of North, South, & East Capitol Streets & Capitol Mall, Washington, District of Columbia, DC

After the revolution, they dismantled the Capitol, piece by piece.

The Statue of Freedom was the first thing to be removed, a spectacular ceremony watched by millions.

The 15,000 pound statue was flown out to sea and dumped into the Atlantic Ocean;

Sinking to the ocean floor for the rest of time.



9. EXTERIOR VIEW TO THE NORTHWEST OF THE SOUTH AND EAST ELEVATIONS:
- Nevada Test Site, Reactor Maintenance Assembly & Disassembly Facility, Area 25,
Jackass Flats, Junction of Roads F & G, Mercury, Nye County, NV

After military facilities ceased operation,
the Government retrofitted their shells for other purposes.

This testing facility, located in a remote part of Alaska,
was converted into the Archive for Classified Information.

The Government ships documents to the remote site,
which are then shredded and used to construct the interior of the building.

The building is maintained by a single caretaker.



5. VIEW NORTHWEST FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: COLD CALIBRATION
OBSERVATION BUNKER BACKGROUND, COLD CALIBRATION TOWER.
- Marshall Space Flight Center, East Test Area, Cold Calibration Test Stand,
Huntsville, Madison County, AL

Due to worsening climatic conditions,
the Government moved most military facilities below ground.

Their entries poke out of the Earth's surface
like large molehills, piles, or mounds.

The design allows the facilities an extra layer of control,
maintaining specific conditions below while
more easily monitoring security.

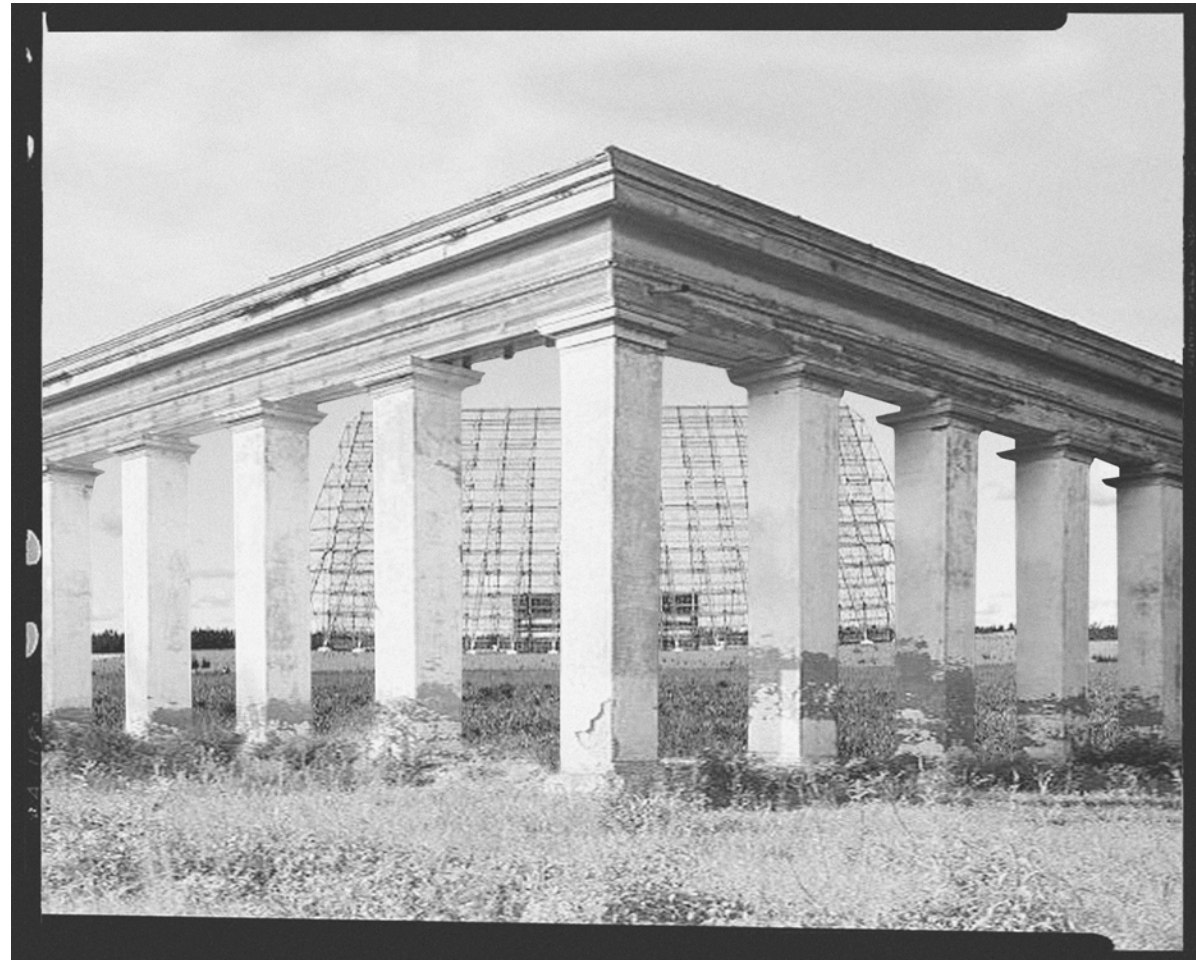


2. CONTEXTUAL VIEW OF DITCH OVERLOOKING CLARKSVILLE ROAD'S CUTBANK,
JUST EAST OF EAST BIDWELL STREET, FACING SOUTHEAST
-Keefe-McDerby Mine Ditch, Between Clarksville Road and White Rock Road,
along East Bidwell Street and Placerville Road, Folsom, Sacramento County, CA

Once the Government abandoned the space project,
they relocated the massive machines throughout the U.S.

Rather than break down the structures and use their parts for other projects,
the Government decided to keep them intact.

They were often relocated near roads and highways:
monuments to progress, looming in the distance.



3. View of middle DR-2 antenna looking north 30 degrees west and showing radar scanner building no. 105 east face through antenna. - Clear Air Force Station; Ballistic Missile Early Warning System Site II, One mile west of mile marker 293.5 on Parks Highway, 5 miles southwest of Anderson, Denali Borough, AK

Shortly after the Government constructed three detection radar antennas at Clear Air Force Station, they constructed a perimeter of square columns topped by a pediment.

The classical structure had two purposes:

It was protective, silently casting waves of high-voltage currents that would stun any living creature who came near.

It was symbolic, equating the antennas to the classical revival architecture which defined the nation's image.



Contextual view of dry dock 1 from west end, showing building 50 and 52 at right; camera facing west. - Mare Island Naval Shipyard, Drydock No. 1, California Avenue, east side near Ninth Street, Vallejo, Solano County, CA

Once the sea levels rose to a threatening enough level, the Government constructed barriers to contain the oceans and expand usable land area for an expanding population.

Old perimeters, where the sea once touched, became sites of architectural inquiry.

Some structures, such as this naval shipyard, were restored into public spaces; areas for gathering, celebration, and ceremony.



16. West elevation. 22 May 1991. - Lincoln Memorial, West Potomac Park,
Washington, District of Columbia, DC

After Washington was attacked, many buildings lay in ruin.

Over the following years, the Government worked to reconstruct
the nation's monumental core.

Rather than constructing the buildings and monuments exactly as
they were before, the Government decided to acknowledge
this as a new period of American history.

The Lincoln Memorial, for example,
was reconstructed as a single colonnade.

5.0 [Design Methodologies]

5.1 Architecture?

At the end of the day, this is an architecture thesis; so what does all this have to do with architecture in particular? What contributions does this work make to the field?

The image-making and fiction-writing practices of this thesis learn from and extend architectural thought in the way they construct relationships between place, space, and time. They use images and writing as mediums of architectural thought, rather than drawing and modeling—which many view as the primary mediums of architectural thought. This thesis focuses on images as cultural artifacts, rather than focusing on buildings. As argued for in Chapter 4, images have transcended their immateriality and are, in fact, architectural. As architects, we must respond to this shift and transform the means by which we practice. These design practices are not architectural by the dictionary definition, yet they take on social memory as an architectural and spatial issue; they enter into the architectural networks of social memory through their production and dissemination.

However, if one abides by the dictionary definition that architecture is the practice of designing and constructing buildings, there is certainly merit to the belief that the design practices of this thesis are not acts of architecture themselves. In response to this skepticism or ambivalence, I offer two, perhaps more concrete, answers as to how this work contributes to the field of architecture:

5.2 Constructing Context

In architecture, the issue of context is constantly present; it is the means by which an architect responds to the world around their practice and constructs relativity. It has become a buzzword within architectural pedagogy, teaching students that their designs do not exist in a vacuum. Yet, the means by which architects generally construct context is stale. Throughout architectural pedagogy, context is confined to a several-week period of research, often shallow or half-assed. This process typically gleans its information from popular sources of information, barely scratching the surface of history. These approaches abide by the popular systems of information which this thesis identifies as problematic. They lazily reject the histories which take extra time and effort to grasp; yet these histories are often the most potent and necessary narratives to reckon with. The more difficult a history is to evoke, the more valuable it likely is.

This thesis calls for a restructuring of the way context is constructed. While American national archives are the particular focus of the thesis, it implores that its approaches of intervention, speculation, and manipulation are extended; used to construct responses to other systems of knowledge. Acts of rebellion and speculation are vital to the progression of architecture as an active force in the contemporary world. As design firms such as Neme Studio and Design Earth have shown, practices of fiction can be applied to architectural issues in a manner that can help us reckon with global issues. These actions can often speak to architecture better than drawings and models can; they can extend the field outwards and make it more accessible for others.

5.3 (Cross-)Disciplinary Measures

This thesis borrows much of its approach from the fields of geography and anthropology. It uses theories from these fields to construct the conceptual focus of the work: social memory, archival structures, and American nationalism, primarily. To address and alter the conventional approach to context that architects abide by, they can learn from the approaches of other fields, such as geographers and anthropologists. By expanding into other disciplines, architecture can become a more robust field. This suggestion is not limited to manners of context; the need for architects to act as cross-disciplinary practitioners is understood by many.

Architecture has seen a dramatic transformation in the past decade or so. We have slowly seen a transition from the confined, individualistic view of architecture that dominated the 20th century. Architecture is opening outwards, becoming a more holistic and open-ended field; a necessary development. In our contemporary world, the role of the architect is polymorphic. Global contexts demand more from architects than we have ever asked; as the late Virgil Abloh said, "young architects can change the world by not building buildings."¹⁴ This sentiment is felt by many, yet it requires architects to reckon with their evolving role. How do we practice, if we are not to build? What is the role of architectural thought in a world that doesn't value the typical role of the architect?

Perhaps this thesis is my own response to this question. The methodologies constructed require a given condition, they reject blank slates in favor of many-layered palimpsests. If there is one thing to be taken away from this thesis, it is that architecture can not exist as a solitary practice. Our

contemporary global conditions require us to mobilize our knowledge-base, our practices, our intellectual abilities, in new manners. They require us to become more than architects, to reject the idea that we are restrained by a set of limits to what architecture is and can be. We must push our discipline forward, so that even in a world where architects do not build, we can offer valuable contributions to the world.

¹⁴ from a lecture given at Columbia GSAPP in 2017
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKYp1t0-xYw>)