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Reading time: the book as alternative architectural practice

[A]rchitecture is interstitial; the boundary is porous and functions to dissect and connect.¹

By occupying space, by having weight and heft, and by utilizing smells and tactility as part of their own stories, books have impact.²

Architecture has a history of enrichment through alignments with, dipping into, and tangential readings of interrelated creative disciplines. Content and technique have been appropriated from foraging in a wide range of sources, such as film, music, philosophy and painting. Another rich, though under-mined, resource is that of artists' books. Due to its reliance on various media for dissemination, architecture has developed a strong relationship with printed media.³ This relationship has resulted in the book as an alternative architecture practice. Artists' books, in particular, have certain qualities and characteristics that are different from the conventional presentation and documentation of architecture. The elements of the page, the frame, multiple pages and sequence, structure, the 'objecthood' of the book and the act of reading lead to possibilities for the book as a site for architectural representation. Books orient, intrigue, provoke and direct the reader while editing, interpreting, encapsulating, constructing and revealing architectural representation.

The dissemination of architecture relies heavily on various media. Since the 19th century there has been evidence of an entwining of architecture

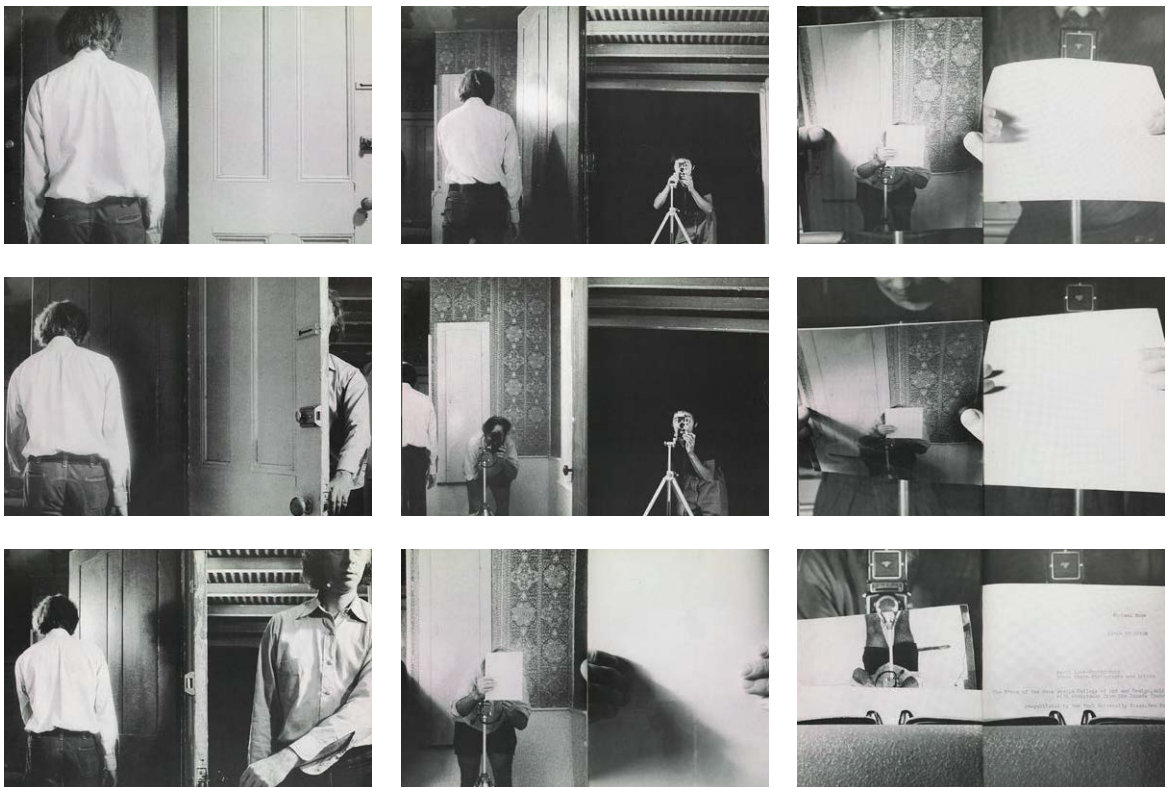
and printed media, and media's ability to frame the conceptualisation of the projects presented within it. Beatriz Colomina writes that until 'the advent of photography, and earlier lithography, the audience of architecture was the user'.⁴ Publishing in the 20th century shifted this situation and established the reader as a valid audience.

Printed media, including books published commercially and those produced by artists, and magazines, have been used variously by architects. In moving from three dimensions to two, the architecture is interpreted and altered, hence the printed media is 'neither mute nor innocent' as a representation.⁵ The space of the bound page offers the opportunity to explore the compositions of spatial drawings, to communicate ideas, images and rhetoric, to provide evidence of drawing as a form of thinking, to launch architectural ideas by conceiving of writing as both a manifesto for practice and as a vehicle for recording, documenting and archiving. These uses of the book are examples of the manifestation of practice where an investigation of the means of the representation of architecture takes precedence over realised buildings. Hence, printed media transforms the site of architectural production, from the construction site to the immaterial sites of architectural publications, exhibitions and journals. Architectural space is usually documented in the form of orthographic projections, that is, plan, section and elevation drawings, with perspective and three-dimensional models. These render the space in a particular way and hence, have limitations and specificity. The artist's book is a different format from the usual way of presenting architectural space. Due to its qualities and characteristics, it is conducive to a particular reading of drawings and of representation and offers possibilities for documenting space within the book. Jonathan Hill writes that sometimes a building is not the best way to explore an architectural idea;⁶ analogously, sometimes orthographic projections are not the best media to explore architectural ideas either.

Through two main case studies, this paper examines the points of intersection between books and architectural representation, such as drawings and models, focusing on the book's inclusion of time within architectural documentation. It demonstrates how the form of the book affects the way in which the architectural work is conceived, constructed, and read. In this way, the critical facility of the book is brought to reside within architecture and continues to be a site of architectural innovation.

Reading the temporality of space I: sequence

The book form inherently has within it the notion of the archive: it records experience and serves as a document itself. Tim Guest suggests, in his



Michael Snow, *Cover to Cover*, Halifax, Canada, the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York University Press, 1975

introduction to *Books by Artists* (1981), that the documentary function is one of the four main thematic elements of artists' books.⁷ Due to its repository quality, the book is a natural vehicle for the documentation of architecture, specifically event, place, journey and interior space. These all, in varying ways, acknowledge time.

With the acknowledgement that all representations omit as much as they include,⁸ it is time that is neglected in conventional documentation of architecture, which instead offers a version of the building at a static moment in time. Architectural drawings – that is, plans, sections, elevations – appear to provide a complete statement. This is aided by the meaning of the lines within the drawing: every line in these kinds of architectural drawings is a line to be built, or one that has been built. These drawings can only offer a partial version of the process, however, due to their moment-in-time quality. In these drawings, 'what disappears is a fundamental dimension of architecture: its temporal experience, which by definition *is not reproducible*'.⁹

The notion of the plan as a segment in time comes about due to its drawn idealised snapshot of a moment within the life of the building. It can be said that architectural drawings are a sliver of illumination of a moment in the process and time of a building. The passage of time, both of a building's

life and of the design process, is not acknowledged. The occupancy or life of the space once built is a complex system, yet this type of representation presents it as a fragment, a simplified snapshot in time. Eduardo Cadava, in citing Walter Benjamin's description of photography – that the 'past must be held fast as an image flashing within the Now of recognizability'¹⁰ – similarly describes the camera as an instrument of citation, in the seizing of an image in the split-second temporality of the shutter's blink.¹¹ The consequence of a frozen, documented snapshot in time is to elevate that particular moment to represent all moments.

Alternatively, the book admits time through its pagination, the accumulation of these pages, its content, and the reading of it, as a performance in time. Time may be acknowledged as the gap between an event and its documentation in book form. Books have been used by artists to document performances, to describe future plans or an unfinished or impossible project,¹² and may approach the status of art in the absence of the artwork.¹³ Time may be present as a gap, occupying the space between an ephemeral act and its record. For example, Laurie Anderson's *Notebook* (1977)¹⁴ is a companion book to four performances, comprised of an assemblage of scripts, scores, photographs, anecdotes and audience reactions that document those past events. In documenting performance art or events, books bear witness and give enduring form to personal experience.

The documentation of place as the location of events and journeys also acknowledges time. Sol LeWitt's *Brick Wall* (1977)¹⁵ is a series of 30 black and white photographs taken of a section of a wall at different times of the day and under different light conditions. Each image extends to the edges of a single page and the viewer must "read" the tones of light shifting across the facade of a richly textured surface'.¹⁶ Time is included within these books as having an effect on light quality and location, rather than its passage as a sequence.

An example of a commercially published book that charts the inhabitation of space over time is Gary Chang's *My 32m² Apartment: A 30-year Transformation* (2008).¹⁷ This intriguing book documents the author's original family apartment in Hong Kong through five iterations, from 1976 – when it was inhabited by the six members of the Chang family plus lodger – through to 2007, with only the author inhabiting it. Each stage of the apartment is comprehensively explained through plans, internal elevations, perspectives, sketches, text, photographs and ephemera. In this example, it is the succession of each of these that begins to record time: in flipping between the various iterations of the apartment, the reader begins to note the changes and internal shifts over

time. Time is also included in the documentation of the final phase, through cumulative drawings of the moveable elements of the apartment; a series of 24 plans highlighting the discrete activities that the apartment caters for; and photographs taken at 24 different times of the day, showing spatial flexibility and lighting levels. Rather than an idealised moment of time, as is usually shown by plans, sections and elevations, *My 32m² Apartment* acknowledges the notion of temporal palimpsest.

The book's structural component of paginal cumulation offers the elements of sequence and narrative that are beneficial for the documentation of architecture, specifically, the movement of the body in space. *Cover to Cover* (1975)¹⁸ by Michael Snow is a rigidly sequential book of 360 pages of black-and-white photographs. It documents the forward and backward views of objects and events related to Snow's life as he goes from his house to his car to his gallery and back to his house again. The work moves according to a cinematic logic;¹⁹ it is a systemic narrative employing photographs.²⁰ Each spread of pages is organised by a recto and verso reading: the recto shows the front view of Snow coming through the door and the verso the back view of him passing through, so the central gutter is used as the point of mirroring, of reversals and inversions.²¹ In one sequence, Snow aligns the door he walks through with the edges of the book, so the doorframe and page edge are one and the same.²² Once he is through, we see the photographers who are positioned to shoot him from each side. The photographer on the left then raises a blank white page over his face which comes to fill the full page opposite. This is then handled and fed into a typewriter and begins its own sequence, handled by fingers which enter the space of the page.

In this work, the space of photographic representation exists in its own space, concurrently within a surrounding environmental space.²³ Robert C Morgan writes:

What may appear as a firsthand representation of reality is suddenly twice removed as the artist's hand is used to cover an image, thereby confounding our expectations of what we are seeing and how we are seeing it. [It] surpasses the purely visual element on one level by elevating our cognizance of photographic imagery toward a multi-leveled strata of narrative.²⁴

Hence, the edges of the pages are finite limits: anything beyond them falls away into a void of unrepresentable space.²⁵

Cover to Cover, in Michael Snow's words, is a book built of sequences that, while relying on the strength of individual photographs, are always 'part of a sequence which in itself is part of a larger "narrative" which is itself about

the book'.²⁶ The book's structural feature – the cumulation of pages – is then emphatically called to attention. The movement through space and the particular quality of that space, is shown in flip books, by employing sequential photography. For example, *Eames House Flip Tour* (1997)²⁷ allows the viewer to journey from the garden, to the interior of the house, upstairs and view back down to the living space. Here, time is included within the full-scale book, less as content, but as a sequenced reading experience in time.

Each page of *Cover to Cover* is thin but, due to its recto-verso quality, it is this aspect – its ability to be one of many – that gives this work cumulative depth and strong references to time passing. Within this cumulation of pages, each page is granted a dimensionality, 'as if the full space of the event of Michael Snow's movement were contained within its flatness'.²⁸ The page is not a flat plane, but rather a three-dimensional dual surface. The layering of pages within a codex structure allows the paper to shift away from the conventional flat surface. Instead, the 'page's flatness is now actual and literal rather than merely serving as a visual support for illusion'.²⁹ Henry M Sayre compares the book's system of opening and closing to the hinging of Marcel Duchamp's *Porte: 11, rue Larrey* (1927). He writes that 'as one page opens, another closes ... the book [is] always open before us even as it closes behind us'.³⁰ It is this operation that is the core, and the strength, of *Cover to Cover*. The seriality and sequencing and 'reading' of this book places it in a unique position in regard to the documentation of the time, as shown through the passage of a person in the space of architecture.

The architect Bernard Tschumi's description of one mode of architectural drawing is analogous to this accumulation of pages as recording time. The practice of placing successive layers of transparent tracing paper upon one another, each with its respective variations, leading to reworking or refining organising principles of a design scheme, forms a record of a process 'based on intuition, precedents and habit'.³¹ This cumulation of drawings creates a transformational sequence; that is, time as event.

Reading the temporality of space II: cumulation

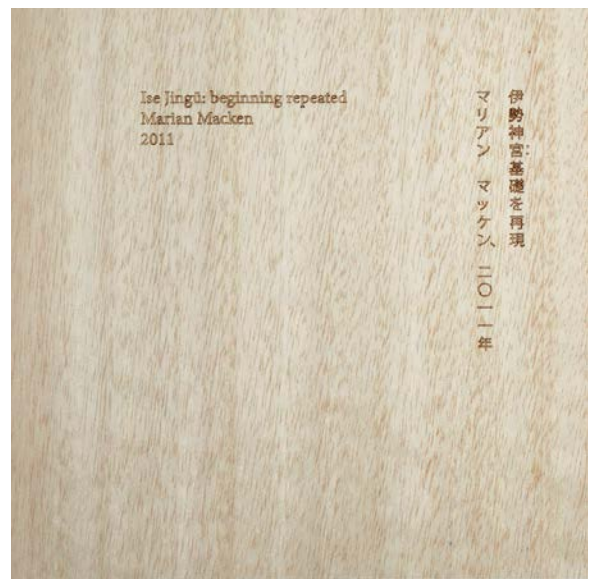
Architecture is precious about uniqueness and materiality: its representations have a troubled relationship with buildings that muddy the finality of the building process, or question a linear temporality. The case study of *Ise Jingū* or Ise Shrine, and an artist's book with this site as its subject, offers one such version of temporality and architecture. This Shintō shrine complex, located in Mie Prefecture, Japan, consists of the *Kōtai Kaijijingū*, or *Naikū* (Inner Shrine) and the *Toyoyuke Kaijijingū*, or *Gekū* (Outer Shrine). The buildings of this system



Naikū (Inner Shrine), with adjoining site. Source: Kenzō Tange and Kawazoe Noboru, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1965, p. 125

are built in a virtually identical style: they are set off the ground on posts, the roof is thatched, the building is rectangular and the roof is supported at each end by a pillar.³²

Ise Shrine is rebuilt every 20 years, a practice, known as *shikinen-zōkan*, dating back to the seventh century. The most recent of these transpositions

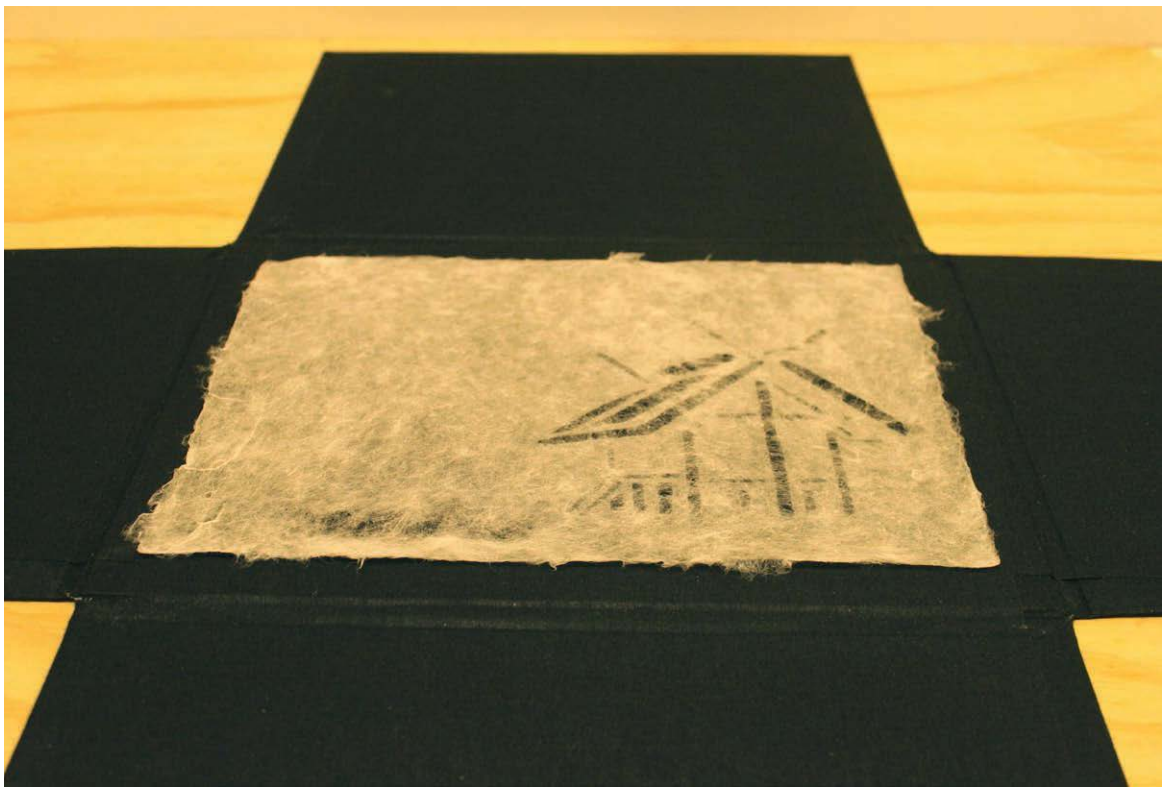


Marian Macken, endpapers of *Ise Jingū: Beginning Repeated*, [Sydney], published by the artist, 2011. Photograph by Joshua Morris

took place in 2013, which is the 62nd on record. Every fence and building is rebuilt on an identical adjoining site, and new ritual utensils are made. This process views architecture as performative, rather than as inert object: *shikinen-zōkan* manifests the replication of a beginning, of a process.

In 1953, at the time of the 59th rebuilding, Yoshio Watanabe was invited by the Society for International Cultural Relations to photograph Ise Shrine. This was the first time Ise Shrine authorities had granted permission to photograph from within the inner compounds of the Inner and Outer shrines. These photographs, published in *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (1965), by Kenzō Tange and Noboru Kawazoe, became the authoritative representations of Ise with an international audience.³³

Ise Jingū: Beginning Repeated (2011)³⁴ is a series of loose pages with a watermarked perspective image within each page. The image is of one of the subsidiary buildings of Ise Jingū, as photographed by Yoshio Watanabe. The pages contain this image, with every second page containing a mirror reflection of it. Taking the image from Watanabe's photograph refers to the power of representation and its importance in our understanding of architecture. The number of pages represents the 61 iterations of the shrine up until the book's making. The shifting perspective within the page refers to the process of relocation from one site to the adjacent one, as viewed from an imaginary line between the sites. As the reader turns the pages, the process of *shikinen-zōkan* is referenced. The pages, laid out side by side, demonstrate the length of the process of rebuilding over time. The pages, made from *kozo* fibres, reflect



Marian Macken, inside cover of *Ise Jingū: Beginning Repeated*, [Sydney], published by the artist, 2011. Photograph by Saul Deane

the idiosyncrasies of the papermaking process. Each page is made of the same material, yet contains variation due to the process.

Time as an accumulation of pages is also shown in *GoMA/Flip Book*,³⁵ which uses the technique of photographs taken from a fixed location, recording the building process of the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. Time passing is integral to the structure of this flip book and, through the cumulation of pages that rely on the passage of time for their making or reading, the structural component of the book form, to include time, is reinforced.

In the example of Ise Shrine, in which architecture deviates from the notion of the building as unique, it is the uncertain status in regard to originality and copy which gives it identity and clarifies its presence. This aberrant state is not acknowledged in conventional documentation, as time and this rebuilding process is omitted from architectural projections. Ise Shrine, as a process of repeated building, acknowledges that neither buildings nor beholders are fixed and solid entities: 'the experience of architecture is *not* ... an occasion of a knowing human subject recovering and deciphering the meanings hidden in an increasingly well-known architectural object.'³⁶ Instead all buildings, to some degree, are perpetually under construction; 'they are never "done"

in the sense of fixing and fully stabilizing their meanings ... The idea of the fully finished building is a fiction that cannot be sustained'.³⁷ Architecture needs representations which acknowledge this, hence the book form, and its ability to include narrative, is an ideal vehicle for the presentation of architectural documentation.

Reading the temporality of space III: residue

Within architectural drawing, the past may be seen as the time of the drawer, the drawing has been drawn. The present is the time of the viewer, when it is being viewed – according to Michael Newman, the drawing's particular mode of being 'lies between the withdrawal of the trace in the mark and the presence of the idea that it prefigures'.³⁸ The future is the time of the inhabitant of the proposed future building, that is, the drawing as proposition. There is not, however, necessarily an equality to these three. It is the generative qualities of architectural drawings, their strong reference to a future tense, which is the dominant reading. David Leatherbarrow writes, '[a]rchitects work not in the nominative but in the subjective case; each drawing or model is an "as if"'.³⁹ Therefore, the architectural drawing seems to proclaim *this will be*. Orthographic projections, however, may also be read as proof of a building's having been constructed, or a drawing's having been drawn: these drawings therefore say *this has been*.

Books with architectural documentation as their content are not proposing a future building. Instead, it is the book as object that is the dominant reading. This is achieved both through the presence of the representation and the encounter one has with it, in the act of reading. There is movement and change inherent within the book, that is, opening the book and turning the pages, as a performance – 'the book is something that one participates in'⁴⁰ – places the book in time. This 'present version' of the drawings within the book is experienced through the act of reading, which places the book in the present tense. Reading may be private and suggests an intimacy of engagement: it is an active relationship between a representation or object and the individual. This shifts the book, then, from existing as a full scale object reified in framed space, to existing in real time, as a series of experiences bound together.⁴¹ The physicality of the book allows it to come 'into being when it is read'.⁴² Rather than saying *what has been*, or *what will be*, the book instead says this is the most *present version* of it.

The artist's book, in its seriality and sequence, is able to admit narrative to the documentation of architecture. Le Corbusier wrote that '[a]rchitecture is not a synchronic phenomenon but a successive one, made up of pictures



Marian Macken, *Ise Jingū: Beginning Repeated*, [Sydney], published by the artist, 2011.
Photograph by Joshua Morris

adding themselves one to another, following each other in time and space, like music'.⁴³ According to Pierre-Alain Croset, narration is the only technique that can represent built architecture in all its dimensions, in its evocation of the temporal experience for the visitor: that is, 'the light, the resonance of steps and voices, the vertigo, the impression of intimacy, the muscular effort of climbing a stair, the refreshing sensation offered by the marble surface of a hand rail'.⁴⁴ This necessity of architectural representation relates to the American architect Philip Johnson's concept of procession – the experience of moving through a building – being the most important element of architecture. This aspect reinforces architecture as existing in time.⁴⁵

Taking Ulises Carrión's description of the page as a site, and the collection of these pages as 'a sequence of spaces',⁴⁶ the artist's book may be seen as a space of potential beyond that of bound drawings and photographs. The cumulation of these as content, combined with their sequencing, the structure of the book and the act of reading, elevates the book beyond a neutral vehicle of documentation. The book is a medium that carries and distributes information in a particular mode: it makes it possible to see some things more clearly by suppressing other things; something gained, something lost.⁴⁷ The acknowledgement and inclusion of time within the documentation is one augmentation. Time may be admitted within this documentation, both as a factor of the content and as a consequence of the structure of the book. An outcome of this inclusion is the notion that architecture is seen as a process, rather than a static object, and that it is made up of spaces we inhabit.