Timothy J. Finney

Urban Hospice: A Montage of Expiration and Memory
Washington D.C. – Mount Vernon Square – New York Avenue NW between 6th & 7th Streets

Susan Piedmont-Palladino, Chair
Dr. Paul Emmons
Dr. Marco Frascari

cosmos
patient bed
frontis piece
hospice
memory
life
death
brain
departure
montage
place
expiration
weathering
cypress tree
recorded construction
cavity
architecture
materiality
interval

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ABSTRACT

Architecture is visuality. Its object is what Norman Bryson has referred to as a *screen of signs*. “Between subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and the world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena.”

Architecture and representation are integral to the *screen*.

How do we make architecture?

Is the act of making architecture a montage?

Can architecture be made through montage?

What is the role of montage in an architecture for life and death?

The process of making architecture is not a prescribed methodology with a predetermined outcome. Architecture, crafted by the hand of the architect, is a divine act of assemblage of subconscious allegorical thought, image, and tectonics. Through this art of assemblage, an architecture is born capable of instigating a narrative of metaphor and memory. Metaphorical narrative has the innate ability of summoning memory, and is critical in an architecture for life and death. Architecture is the only total sensory means of narrative.
Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays;
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.²

"I am a hut builder. Compared to a filmmaker, I work in an unglamorous medium. I work with ordinary reality."

For Anne Cline. Your hut truly did take me someplace else.
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Daniel Libeskind's Face and a Pair of Shoes
PLACE

The project site, an infill site of the exposed load-bearing walls of adjacent buildings, sits at Mount Vernon Square on New York Avenue NW between 6th and 7th Avenue. Small local businesses and multi-family housing line the streets of the area. Recent construction of the Washington D.C. Convention Center has agitated new real estate interest to an otherwise mundane niche of the city.

The existing buildings along the traffic-veiled New York Avenue, adjacent to the project site, are non-uniform and seemingly constructed each at a different time and at a different place. A sense of place is created from fragments distant in time and space.

It is not the elements of the site that are significant, but the spaces, or intervals, between, within, and around that define the senses and potential depth of place. “The space of the interval is a shallow, compressed space, unfolding in time and linked together by the perception and recall of the observer – a transparent space developed out of the density of information and event. Montage, unlike abstract painting, does not turn its back on the world, but instead immerses itself in the experiences and products of modernity: mass media images, the disjunctive experience of the city, the anonymity of the crowd, the impersonal products of the machine. The early modern metropolis produced a new subject: the montage eye, capable of constructing a new reality out of the barrage of fragmentary, contradictory, and obsolete information that characterizes the modern city.”

The interval becomes the locus of the city where life, and in some cases, death, occurs in place.


MONTAGE

History

Montage, a term taken from the French *monster*, is “to assemble”, and has many meanings in film. Montage is the process of editing a film, of assembling all the shots, scenes, and sequences in the final motion picture. The term, because of its special usage by Russian filmmakers, has connotations that suggest something more than the mechanical process of editing, that make the process itself appear to be a creative act of assembling the pieces of film, of constructing the work of art from its building blocks with consideration of a film’s immediate and total effect.

The Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, a pioneer of montage from the early twentieth century, theorized montage as a “collision”, where the emphasis is on a dynamic juxtaposition of individual shots that calls attention to itself and forces the viewer consciously to come to conclusions about the interplay of images while he or she is also emotionally and psychologically affected in a less conscious way. Instead of continuity, Eisenstein emphasized conflict and contrast, arguing for a kind of Hegelian dialectic, where each shot was a cell and where a thesis could be juxtaposed by an antithesis, both achieving a synthesis or significance which was not inherent in either shot.

During the 1930’s and 1940’s, in the United States, montage was a technique of editing developed that condensed time and space, conveyed a great deal of information to the viewer in a short period of time, and also suggested a hallucinatory state of mind, a dream, or a character’s remembrance of past events.5

Montage is suggestive of collage, an abstract form of art in which photographs, pieces of paper, newspaper cuttings, string, etc., are placed in juxtaposition and glued to the pictorial surface; such a work of art.6

The Kuleshov Effect

In a famous experiment, the Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov intercut a shot of Mosjukine, a Russian actor renowned for his expressive but deadpan face, into situations which trigger emotion: scenes with a crying baby, a bowl of soup, a coffin. Afterward, the audience praised the actor’s performance, remarking on how well he displayed paternal love, hunger, and mourning. The actor was neutral and did not express anything different from shot to shot. Kuleshov proved that in context the expression took on appropriate meaning. “Kuleshov’s point was that in film, editing is all: context determines meaning. But underneath, Kuleshov’s experiment illustrates a yet more fundamental truth about the psychology of vision: people have an innate empathic instinct. If we see a face we have a natural, automatic impulse to divine what the person behind the face is feeling, to test that emotion inwardly to see if it is suitable and, if it is, to taste it as our own. If it’s not there, as in the Russian experiment, we will even try to fill in what’s missing.”7

What Kuleshov discovered was that it was possible to create, solely through montage, a cinematic terrain that existed nowhere in reality.

Lev Kuleshov sought to identify the very ‘material’ of the cinema and reasoned that it must be the celluloid itself, not the photographic image. As music was the manipulation and ordering of sounds, and painting the application and ordering of pigments, cinema was quintessentially the ordering of strips of film. For Kuleshov that was the *sine qua non* – what he termed the ‘filmness’ of the cinema. Consistent with that line of reasoning, he announced audaciously that what was conventionally called the narrative or dramatic ‘content’ of a film was irrelevant to the structuring of its ‘material’.8

Intervals

Montage is an organization and construction of intervals, or space and time between object ‘a’ and object ‘b’. Every interval has a front and back, and some relationship between the two. As illustrated by the Kuleshov Effect, object ‘a’ and object ‘b’ are given meaning by the interval, through contextual memory and deduction.

Quatremere de Quincy defined memory as the faculty that stores our sense of perception, and through the act of reminiscence, visual images are brought back to the peripheral after being stored.

Memory is imagination.
Patient + Bed - early drawing in which patient was intended to 'suspend' from above - conversely, idea was generated to make the bed an extension 'of the earth', like a stone quarry.
ARCHITECTURE + MONTAGE

“Montage is revealed construction. It utilizes instrumental procedures, but its products are not exclusively instrumental. The engineer-monteur is an architect who builds with images. Montage does not pretend to reproduce natural vision. It works on the surface, constructing new objects (and subjects) out of new relations of image to image.”

We cannot escape the veil of money-driven, efficiently, and mass-produced products that furnish our buildings and direct the hand of modern architecture. Architecture and montage seeks to examine how these often idiosyncratic and mundane materials can be organized and assembled to construct a significant architectural experience that rivals the banality of modern architecture.

Montage is a mode of architectural thinking. The image, projected on paper by the architect through the act of drawing, is the generator of architectural ideals. Montage requires consciousness and examination of the intervals of drawing, materiality, tectonics, and experience. The assemblage of drawings (plans, sections, elevations, details) construct a surreality, a reality conscious of the dream (imagination) and reality (real world). As in film, a new reality, capable of changing the inhabitant’s perceptions, is created that did not exist before. But in architecture, the surreality is realized through the act of building construction. The building tells the story of its architecture, and the architect is the giver of meaning.

The act of thought is montage.

The act of drawing is montage.

The act of assembling is montage.

The act of construction is montage.

The act of experience is montage.

The act of aging/weathering is montage.

Architecture is montage.
BRAIN & MEMORY

The art of memory is like an inner writing. Those who know the letters of the alphabet can write down what is dictated to them and read out what they have written.10


In scholastic tradition there are three chambers of the brain which work on a cooperative basis, and which are related to the Aristotelian elemental qualities. The front chamber of imagination, *cellula phantastica*, is hot and dry. Blake called it the “furnace of Los”, in which sensory information (in Blake’s mythology the larks, the messengers of Los) is shaped into glowing, visual images and etched into the brain. The central chamber of reason, *cellula rationalis*, is warm and moist. Here, the minted images are brought into ordered contexts to create knowledge. The linguistic arts of grammar, dialectics and rhetoric were assigned to it. Heinrich Shchipperges calls the back chamber of memory, *cellula memoralis*, the “great storage room of images” (H. Schipperges, *Die Weit des Auges*, Freiburg, 1978). It is the archive or reservoir from which the central chamber draws its material for new chains of thought. Here are the “halls of Los” holding the “glowing sculptures” of all things that happen on earth. “Every age renews its powers from these works.” (W. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820)11

—G. Reisch, *Pretiosa Margarita*, Freiburg, 1503

In classical antiquity memory was held to be the *mother of the muses*. As late as the Renaissance a series of polished techniques for the training of the memory were developed and handed down. They are all based on the notion that a basic repertoire of places or pictures is impressed upon the memory in a particular sequence, and that this can then be associated with random and changing images.12

In Fludd’s model, above the forehead floats the circular diagram of the world as perceptible to the senses. It is subdivided into an elemental quinternity which stands in relation to the five senses of man: earth:touch, water:taste, air:smell, ether:hearing, fire:seeing. This *sensitive world is imagined* in the first brain-chamber, by the transforming power of the soul, into a shadowy duplicate, and then transcended in the next chamber of the capacity for judgment and knowledge: through the keenness of the spirit the soul penetrates to the divine *world of the intellect*. The last chamber is the centre of memory and movement.13

—R. Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi, Tractatus primi*, Oppenheim, 1620

&

HOSPICE

The term Hospice, first used in medieval times in reference to a place of shelter and rest for weary or ill travelers on a long journey, is the same term used to define a healthcare facility for the dying and terminally ill that emphasizes pain control and emotional support for the patient and family, and which typically refrains from taking extraordinary measures to prolong life.

The ideology of Hospice first began in the 1960’s, when a movement began in Europe focused on helping people with terminal illnesses at the end of life. Dame Cicely Saunders, who began working with dying patients in the 1940’s, founded the first modern hospice in a residential suburb of London, England. She was inspired by a dying patient who, at the end of life, requested words of comfort, acts of kindness, and friendship.

A hospice facility serves three clients: the patient (vertical/spiritual) who enters, departs to the heavens, and never leaves alive, the family/visitor (horizontal/earthly) who enters, visits, leaves, and must continue with life, and the worker (horizontal/earthly) who enters, works, leaves, and must cope with the gravity of their work.

“We do not have to cure to heal.”
—Dame Cicely Saunders
FRONTIS PIECE

The front entry (patient entry/visitor entry & exit/staff entry & exit) serves as a frontis piece that tells the story of the building.

Weathering
Aging
Impermanence
Transformation

Multiple thresholds serve as a delineation of beginnings and endings.

Work day
Visitation
Life
Death
Sacred
Heavenly
Profane
Earthly
Transformation

Through the act of physical alchemy, an abandoned roadway guardrail is transformed to create a louvered wall. The recycling/re-use of the guardrail gives new meaning and life to the fragments of a once expired and dead material.

The “entry” door is clad on the exterior side with bronze, a material that patinas to a limited weathering, an allegory to the heavenly realm (sacred) of the building. The interior side of the door is clad with stretched leather, a material that weathers with human contact, a parable for reality (profane).

Filarete, in his Treatise on Architecture (1464), presents the building as an organism which lives, grows, and dies like a man, and needs nourishment during its life. All materials are alive, and each has a different life span.

The guardrail louver wall assembly, like all materials, is a living organism. The galvanized metal weathers. Dirt and foreign substances collect in each of the louvers, spawning life to plants and insects, which are continuously nourished by the rains from the heavens.

One imitates nature by doing not ‘what’ she does, but ‘as’ she does – one can imitate her action when one cannot imitate her work.

-Quatramere de Quincy, De L’Imitation
Patient Organization Study Model
Solstice/Equinox Study
Building Montage Study Model
I am kino-eye. I am a builder. I have placed you, whom I’ve created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I’ve managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase, which is the room.17

-Dziga Vertov
Patient Room Study Model
Patient Room Study
One of the oldest religious cults of both the Siberian and Ainu peoples of Japan is that of the Great Bear. Taoist mystics sought to derive the power to climb the sky and roam the stars by tracing stellar patterns and constellations. *Ursa Major,* meaning “Great Bear”, is the constellation in which the head of the bear is turned in the direction of the North Star. It was thought by the Great Bear cult that the Great Bear “overhears” the will of heaven and acts as an intermediary between the earthly and heavenly realm. Hibernation, an obligatory trance associated with the bear, marks a seasonal death and re-birth of the bear.

“Some stars are placed so that they never descend beneath the horizon; throughout the day and night, they follow circular courses having a common center, a spot that never moves. In our era, in the northern hemisphere, an almost motionless star in *Ursa Minor* nearly occupies that spot. It is *Polaris.* The name refers to the north celestial pole, the center of the circular paths followed by the stars that never set. Just as the earth spins around its “pole”, the sky appears to turn around this unique spot, and the stars that complete circles around it are called circumpolar stars. *Pole,* in the sense we have used it here, derives from the word for “stake”, and the concept behind the word is a pole that reaches to the canopy of the sky, supports it, and acts as the pivot of the sky’s daily rotation. It is a cosmic axis and is described in the mythologies of various peoples as a mountain, as an actual pole, as a tree, or as some other sky-piercing staff.”

The Great Yu was the chief of a tribe that lived along the Yellow River about 5,000 years ago. Legend has it that his father, when near death, turned into a bear and when his belly was opened, he brought out his son, Yu, the Great. Yu was said to change himself into a bear by donning a bear’s robe and wearing the paws of the bear over his hands. The shaman calls the bear’s spirit and begins making sounds of the bear’s cries and growls. The shaman begins the dance by walking as a human would walk and then changing his gait to that of a bear.

Imperceptibly he had changed from a human into a bear in gait and gesture. And finally he will assume the magical persona of the Bear. As the Great Bear he is seeking to “overhear” the will of heaven and act as an intermediary between the earthly and heavenly realm.

The shaman dances an outline of the Big Dipper, walking up the seven stars and invoking the help and protection of each star until at last he stands next to the North Star itself. The dance itself may have taken hours and involved the use of consciousness-altering substances and intoxicants.

Finally, at the height of the ceremony, the shaman becomes the Great Bear, *Ursa Major,* the intermediary between gods and men.

Winter solstice, the farthest southwest falling of the sun, marks the death of the sun. “On its southernmost path the sun is weakest, and it enters the underworld by passing below the horizon. The moment of transition logged by the sacrophagus is winter solstice.”

The sky is a metaphor of immortality. Although we know that some day we will die, we see the sun, moon, and stars survive night after night, month after month, and year after year. Their absence is temporary. “The sky in Egypt was Nut, a goddess whose outstretched body canopied the Earth. Although she swallowed the sun each night, it was reborn from her loins each dawn. As the sun rose, she consumed the stars and gave birth to them again when at sunset the sun crossed her lips once more.”

West in Latin is *occident,* a word which derives from the verb “to fall”. Ancient people equated setting of the sun and other celestial objects to their “deaths”, and we still speak of “sunset years” as a metaphor for old age. “For many cultures the west was the land of the dead, and in World War I a soldier killed in action was said to have “gone west”. The popular novel, *The Lord of the Rings,* concludes as the two main characters, Frodo, and Bilbo, in old age and at the end of an era, depart their homelands for “the West”.

The location of the patient beds are oriented in the direction of the winter solstice, twenty-one degrees southwest, and placed such that they imitate the footsteps of the Pace of Yu. The cardinal directions (north, east, south, west) are the structure of the world and all earthly creations.
Site Organization Plan
We could see that in individual scenes the Americans used so-called ‘close-ups’ – that is, that at necessary, expressive moments, they showed things in large format, more distinctly, that in a given moment, they showed only what it was necessary to show. The close-up, the compositional expression of only the most important and necessary, proved to have a decided influence on our future work in montage.

The close-up established exceptionally broad possibilities for the future montage construction of motion pictures. By means of close-ups, we arrived at the study of the potentialities of montage, we determined what it was possible to achieve through montage, how expressive its artistic strengths were….and a whole order of other crucial and interesting moments for our work.
PATIENT BED

Each patient bed, a vertical notion of structure, is a free-standing column of stacked wood timbers rising from the foundation and stability of the earth to each patient room.

Patient Room - Earthly - Horizontal
Patient Bed - Spiritual - Vertical

The remaining hollow inside of each patient bed column is used as a chase to distribute air from the basement HVAC equipment to each patient room. Like oxygen carried in the bloodstream from the heart and lungs, the patient room HVAC system is a vertical geothermal system, obtaining air continuously conditioned and monitored by the constant temperatures of the Earth.

The end grain of the wood timbers is exposed. The growth rings of the wood allude to an image of time, aging, seasoning, and transformation.

Through an act of architectural anthropomorphism and transubstantiation, or change in substance, spirit merges with building. The patient bed column supports the human spirit.
CAVITY

The patient room ceiling is an operable canopy sheathed in fabric. Like Rene Descartes’ comparison of the creation of pictures of memory in the brain with the traces left by needles in fabric, the ceiling sheathing is penetrated by small holes, offering a view of the stars “day-round”.

When opened, a glass roof above the ceiling canopy provides a view to the heavens.

The structural support for the canopy is like that of the human ribs and chest cavity.

The canopy assembly is counterbalanced, with a sliding scale that actuates the opening and closing of the ceiling.
Historically in funerary customs of many cultures, at the time of death, salt was placed on the breast of the body and all mirrors were covered. Not only did the salt prevent the body from swelling, but it was believed that salt, like fire and earth, was a protection from evil, guarding the soul of the departed. The covering of mirrors prevented the soul from becoming entangled and confused in the reflection.25

Born out of the necessity of structure, the primary vertical interior structure of the building is a series of tilt-up concrete wall panels (one for each pair of patient beds). A common construction technique at infill and confined building sites, the tilt-up wall system uses the building foundations and first floor slab as concrete formwork, creating a *memory log of construction*.

Each tilt-up wall panel has two sides with two different concrete finishes. The side facing down (on the first floor concrete slab) is rough (profane). The side facing up (to the heavens) is tool-finished smooth to a mirror finish (sacred). Efflorescence in the wall panels created by concrete admixtures result in “salt” streaks down the faces of the walls.

The tilt-up walls are oriented such that the tooled faces of the walls face south, towards the street, marking an arrival to a sacred place for people entering. Conversely, when one departs, they are faced with the rough side of the walls, indicating a departure from the sacred to the profane (real world), and concealing the mirrored surface of the walls.

Once erected, the first floor foundations and slab that served as formwork for the tilt-up walls is filled with terrazzo flooring.
Tilt-Up Wall Panel Plans, Elevations, and Details
Located along the western perimeter of the building is an outdoor chapel enclosed on three sides by the hospice building and on the western side by the brick veneer of the existing adjacent building. The outdoor chapel is accessed under a concrete beam containing a row of 10 cypress trees, a Chinese symbol of longevity and immortality. A tree is planted for each patient bed. At one end, the concrete beam is supported by the building, and the other by a concrete cistern containing water used to nourish the trees.

An irony is created between the relationship of the sempiternal (nature) and finite (human body).
I am kino-eye, I create a man more perfect than Adam, I create thousands of different people in accordance with preliminary blueprints and diagrams of different kinds.26

-Dziga Vertov
I am kino-eye. From one person I take the hands, the strongest and most dexterous; from another I take the legs, the swiftest and most shapely; from a third, the most beautiful and expressive head – and through montage I create a new, perfect man.27

-Dziga Vertov
Building Sections Study Model
Legend
1. Mechanical Room
2. Patient Exit Lift
3. Central Supply
4. Storage
5. Building Mechanical Room
6. Electrical Closet
7. Body Visitation
Legend
1. Patient Exit Lift
2. Main Entry
3. Hallway
4. Administrative Offices
5. Intake/Admitting
6. Resource Library
7. Counseling
8. Medical Records
9. Restroom
10. Storage
Legend
1. Nurse Station
2. Medication Preparation
3. Soiled Utility
4. Nourishment
5. Outdoor Chapel
6. Patient Room
7. Restroom
8. Patient Bath
9. Patient Shower
10. Roof Garden
11. Family Room
EXPIRATION & DEPARTURE

The patient exit door, located west of and immediately opposite to the patient entry door, mimics all but the orientation of the patient entry door. The door is oriented horizontally three-feet above grade. When opened, the door provides a shelf and elevated threshold so that expired bodies can be lifted, taken from the gurney, and transported from the building.

Above the main entry of the building is a counter-balanced core-ten steel canopy that cantilevers out from the building to cover the sidewalk when bodies are taken away by ambulance or funerary services. The canopy operates on a pulley system, and is actuated by gear and sprocket when the ambulance or funerary driver by pulling down on a chain. When the canopy is extended to its farthest reach, a gong sounds from the contact of the canopy with a steel stop, summoning someone inside to open the patient exit door for body removal.

The gong sound is reminiscent of the ringing of a church bell to signal the coming of a procession to a final resting place.

Like all material, life still exists. While the body has expired, the soul lives on.
Patient Exit Door
Life does not end here.
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Dziga Vertov, from *Practice; Architecture, Technique, and Representation*, by Stan Allen, 2000, Overseas Publishers Association, Singapore/The Netherlands
VITA

Timothy J. Finney

Education

2003  Master of Architecture
      VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
      Washington Alexandria Center for Architecture and Urban Studies
      Alexandria, Virginia
      Center Crystal Award – 2003
      Director’s Leadership Award – 2003
      First Prize, Tinner Hill Cultural Center Design Competition – 2002
      Finalist, National Air Force Memorial Design Competition – 2002
      Inform Magazine – Product Design Student Award – 2002

2001  Bachelor of Arts in Architecture
      MIAMI UNIVERSITY
      Oxford, Ohio
      Honorable Mention, Form-Z Student Design Competition – 2001
      Academic Dean’s List – 1997-2001

Professional

2002 - Present  MATRIX ARCHITECTS INCORPORATED
                Dayton, Ohio

1999 - 2001  BROWN AND BILLS ARCHITECTS
             Dayton, Ohio
Cinema is far too rich and capable a medium to be merely left to the storytellers.

-Peter Greenaway
URBAN HOSPICE:
A Montage
of
EXPIRATION
&
MEMORY
— belonging to —
T.J. FINNEY
Situated at
New York Ave NW
NEAR
MOUNT VERNON SQUARE
Washington D.C.