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Waste Not: Salvaging the Lives of Buildings at the Land/Digital Divide

Abstract: The destruction of architecture or its re-location elsewhere to avoid demolition is a part of a history of the planet's wastelands. Land/Slide, a vast art installation exhibition challenges how we consider historic buildings that have been transplanted, as it were, to new tangible and intangible, digital, places. The buildings that form the physical springboard for the exhibition were salvaged as a result of their being relocated to the Markham Museum, near Toronto. Land/Slide opens a debate around architectural history and contemporary practices in art, architectural heritage, and urban cultural life. Artists and architects were invited to adaptively reuse and infuse a selected salvaged building with new life while weaving it back into its previous existence. This chapter explores the game-changing strategies presented in this exhibition that challenge how we consider heritage buildings, sustainable architecture, systems of living and the stratifications of architectural history in what I am calling an ecology of heritage in contemporary culture.

Keywords: *destruction, architecture, salvage, demolition, art exhibition, ecology of heritage*

> Ce qui nous retient dans le spectacle des ruines, même quand l'érudition prétend leur faire dire l'histoire, ou quand l'artifice d'une mise en son et lumière les transforme en spectacle, c'est leur aptitude à faire sentir le temps sans résumer l'histoire ni l'achever dans l'illusion du savoir ou de la beauté, à prendre la forme d'une œuvre d'art, d'un souvenir sans passé
> (Marc Augé, *Le temps en ruines*)

While reeling from the cataclysmal news of the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015, where the staggering of life peaked to almost 9000 souls, we are at once reduced to a feeling of helplessness coupled with shock by the almost immediate and harrowing media images of physical devastation and ruins of architecture fragmented and pulverized to rubble and dust. Rubble is different from how we consider ruins, for as Marc Augé explains, rubble has no time to become ruins. Once, ruins did have a "pure, undateable time, which does not figure in our world of images, simulacra, and reconstitutions".[1] The pictures of Nepal that flooded social media are testimonies that stand in for lost life in a way that seem – however awkward and insufficient in communicating the events as they are experienced – more palpable, more real; these are pictures that convey the absence of any conceivable form of nostalgic and romanticized concept of ruin. Our sensibilities are immediately rattled to see the Maju Deval,

[1] Marc Augé, *Le temps en ruines* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 10 [translation mine].

once an elegant and austere temple of 1690 devoted to the God Shiva, obliterated from that same space, in a heartbeat. The idea that what was is no longer and that what seemed permanent – built of bricks and stone – can be eradicated in a nanosecond, is impossible to synthesize intellectually and we are left with the emotional fallout: the only part that remains for those who only receive the news. How can we not feel crestfallen and grief-stricken to witness these severe physical ravaging of homes and places, as if the image of the violent destruction is an anthropomorphized built environment that connotes the impending fear we imagine for the potential loss of our own lives. Yet the destruction of architecture into a wasteland as a result of natural causes or human interference (often to reinstate national identities) is part of our histories from the beginning of recorded time. And with that destruction, goes memory, embedded in the landscape, in the object, in the remains, in the material evidence or lack thereof. For, as Pierre Nora suggests, "Modern memory is, above all, archival ... it relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image".[2]

For this chapter, I will discuss a vast art installation exhibition entitled, *Land/Slide*, in order to frame its game-changing strategy to challenge how we consider historic buildings that have been transplanted, as it were, to new physical settings. The buildings that form the physical springboard for the exhibition were salvaged, not demolished, and relocated to the Markham Museum, located in the City of Markham, a municipality in York Region, northeast of Toronto. Whereas the destruction of buildings in Nepal propelled an entire local and international community to rebuild on the site of devastation, the transferred buildings in Markham lost their connection to their original landscapes and material traces... the archival correspondence to the materiality of the trace, to recall Nora, meant that the memory could no longer be located. *Land/Slide* locked its horns with these complicated issues in order to open a larger debate around the stratifications of architectural history and contemporary practices in art, architectural heritage, and urban cultural life generally. I will explore how the curatorial objectives challenged how we consider new approaches to thinking about what I am calling an *ecology of heritage* in the context of contemporary culture. Thanks to this interventionist agency by artists and architects buildings that were once destined for landscapes of waste instead boldly confronted head-on multiple dialogues with the structures' pasts and futures to articulate manifold conversations of the now. How we journey through this temporary exhibition world that relays between the physical and virtual dimensions (or the tangible and intangible – or that which is difficult to put in material form – cultural heritage), is part of the voyage.[3] Therefore, I introduce the term *ecology of heritage* based on a concept by Janet Blake where she argues: "Cultural heritage does not end at monuments

[2] Pierre Nora, Preface, I, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* , trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Columbus: Columbia U. P., 1996), 8.

[3] I turn to Unesco's 2003 *Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage* but best summarized by Janet Blake in her report that attempts to trace the contours for standards for safeguarding that which is intangible. "Developing a New Standard-setting Instrument for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage", Unesco, 2001, revised 2002: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001237/12 3744e.pdf, accessed 17 May 2015.

and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants".[4] And for this reason, Kristina Baine adds that therefore, "Ecological heritage might be considered a subset of cultural heritage". To extend this for the purposes of this chapter, and taking Baine's lead, heritage is governed or guided by a set of considerations such as the type of involvement someone has with their environment, or if that environment has been subject to change over time.[5]

Public Art Curator, Janine Marchessault, set out to construct a vast physical and virtual network reaching into and beyond local geography where, as she proposed, "The ways in which the cartographic has moved beyond mere two-dimensional representations towards constructed, dynamic and layered spaces" are to be explored.[6] Land/Slide, a "massive"[7] public, spatially epic, exhibition delivered. It shaped, reconfigured, questioned and attempted to highlight the vexing space and place dyad by acknowledging first the breathability and volatility of the ground and what the ground of Markham and its museum represent. The Markham Museum was established in 1971 by the Markham Historical Society, the Lions Club, and the City of Markham. The twenty-five acre site includes a 2011 LEED Gold Standard exhibition hall (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the international rating system for buildings in order to encourage sustainable practices) and collection, and an open-air parkland replete with twenty relocated historic houses and outbuildings (dating from 1820-1930) comprised of, among others, houses and private tradesmen's shops. The Museum assembles thematic exhibitions related to settlement particularly with regard to the environment. Apart from the more than 75,000 items in its collection of various objects, archives and photographs related to individuals, families, settlement history, business and government, the Museum's permanent architectural heritage collection is made up of private houses, log cabins, a Church, Variety Hall and train station.[8]

The exhibition curated by Marchessault in Markham chronicled how, through art and architectural projects, the land on which the Museum sits slides and transforms into other shapes and essences. This was achieved by interweaving a network of tangible heritage historic buildings to the art installations – some of which were physically tangible, built objects while others were intangible digital networks and navigational devices. The label of site-specific work in the subtitle of the exhibition, that is to say art that is located intentionally in a geographic site and is thus physically present, was undone by the very teasing premise of the title of the exhibition itself, *Land/Slide*: Land that Slides, or Land is a Slide, or Can Land Slide? Is it stable, and what slides off of stable land? If site-specificity, as proposed by Nick Kaye, is an artistic approach that proposes "exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined",[9] then the notion of fixity or original

[4] Kristina Baines, *Embodying Ecological Heritage in a Maya Community: Health, Happiness and Identity* (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 7-8.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Janine Marchessault, Project Description, np.

[7] I take this adjective from the exhibition's website: "Land/Slide Possible Futures, September 21-October 14, 2013, Massive Public Art Exhibition in Markham, Ontario", http://www.landslide-possiblefutures.com, accessed 17 May 2015.

[8] Http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/RecreationCulture/MarkhamMuseum/WhatOn, accessed 12 May 2015.

[9] Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

location, as Kaye suggests, depends upon the integrated consideration of site to the work and the exploratory or problematic nature of that relationship.

For Marchessault, the invited artists needed to invest their projects with the imperative to consider the element of time as suggested by the subtext of the title: "Possible Futures". Hence, the interface between the digital and the tangible, the projected and the invisible, is one that we are invited to consider at once through physical presence but also across and through the space/time continuum. *Land/Slide* proposed a wickedly creative solution to adaptively reuse and infuse each of these salvaged buildings with new life, ensuring that this cluster of homes and shops belongs by tying back to the community. Artists and architects were invited to propose new interventional dialogues to take place within the extant buildings all the while tethered to the notion of history, that is, with an awareness of the relationship of the building to a previous existence. *Land/Slide* sought to take up the past in order to carve a pathway to the future yet firmly rooted in the now, the space of the exhibition and its temporariness. The invited contributors thus disrupted and played with these existing pioneer houses while poring over at least eight thousand artefacts in the collection in order to create site-specific installations that could speak to memory – or the imagined histories of the buildings – through interactivity, responsive environments and performative intervention. Each work is an attempt to request something new to emerge from the building as a result of this integration and interrogation, and each avoids cannibalising the existing building in favour instead of gentle agitation to set the structure gently thumping back into existence – almost giving the building a new heartbeat. Given this agenda of objectives, what are some of the game-changing shifts and strategies presented in this exhibition that challenge how we consider heritage buildings, sustainable architecture, systems of living and the stratifications of architectural history that attempt to be alive still and in continual dialogue? How is it possible to pretend to reach back into the past while pushing forward, or really consider the now? What does it mean to incorporate a historic structure into a contemporary project and weave it into the cloth of this Markham parkland, this oasis of ruined and revived buildings?

Some of the pieces, such as the work by Mark-David Hosale, computational media artist and composer whose work questions the digital, virtual and material divide, also included touch-sensitive electronic circuits inviting people to interact in an ecology of form, light and sound. Elsewhere, various mapping tools were introduced to negotiate the campus or staged events.

At this point, let me present a surgical snippet of only four of the over thirty artists' projects included in the show to drive home my point. First, in *A surface describing the volume of earth displaced for redevelopment on this building's original site,* (Figs. 1-2) Adrian Blackwell and Jane Hutton studied how the

colonised land is leveled, or that which is developed, stockpiled and backfilled, to erase previous footsteps, markers and life. Instead, they erected a structure of soil to approximate the displaced quantities for redeveloped land that would become the Wyper Harness Shop. In their words: "Levelling is a strategy which is a symptom of both sovereign property, the desires of the state to mark land as national territory, and of capitalist property, where the land is seen as a site for the extraction value that can be maximized on a *tabula rasa.*[10]

[10] See Adrian Blackwell and Jane Hutton, "A surface describing the volume of earth displaced for redevelopment on this building's original site", http://www.landslide-possiblefutures.com/site.html#blackwell, accessed May 2015.

Fig. 1: Adrian Blackwell and Jane Hutton, *A surface describing the volume of earth displaced for redevelopment on this building's original site*, Day, 2013, architectural intervention, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Fig. 2: Adrian Blackwell and Jane Hutton, *A surface describing the volume of earth displaced for redevelopment on this building's original site*, Night, 2013, architectural intervention, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Similarly, Jeff Thomas asks in the title of his installation, *Where do we go from here?* (Figs. 3-5). For his piece, he uses the once active train station that stood for movement of the colonial settlements and that undercut the indigenous histories of Markham and Toronto. Thomas considers the map of North America before Europeans set foot on its soil and then compares it to a second map of today's landscape where indigenous peoples are sequestered onto

designated land parcels: reserves and reservations. Where are the indigenous people on urban maps, he asks, and why they are invisible? That heritage, that ecology of population, must be made visible from there to here, from that place to which the general audience does not venture, to the place of this exhibition, and where we are located as we participate in the piece.

Fig. 3: Jeff Thomas, *Where do we go from here?,* Detail 1, 2013, photo intervention, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Fig. 4: Jeff Thomas, *Where do we go from here?,* Detail 2, 2013, photo intervention, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Fig. 5: Jeff Thomas, *Where do we go from here?,* Detail 3, 2013, photo intervention, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

For their contribution, Patricio Davila and Dave Colangelo tracked a romanticised cartographic return projected filmically on a barn structure in *The Line* (Figs. 6-7). Against the planks was a haunting and evocative showcasing in moving images of the larger lines that intersect the spaces between then and now, here and there, the borders, fences, pipelines, green belts and flight paths that represent, as they put it, our ideals, hopes, fears and failures. The piece shown day and night alike, and transforming light to darkness while cloaking architectural structures that make them disappear, beg the question that is their title: Where do we draw the line?
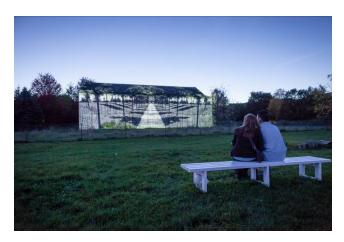

Fig. 6: Patricio Davila and Dave Colangelo, *The Line,* Day, 2013, installation and architectural projection, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land/Slide.

Fig. 7: Patricio Davila and Dave Colangelo, *The Line,* Night, 2013, installation and architectural projection, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Finally, in this brief sampling, Phil Hoffman's *Slaughterhouse* (Figs. 8-10) resolutely bars us from entry into the historic building, yet he teases our curiosity. How is this achieved? He offers temptations to peak through

peepholes and worn barn wood cracks in the rescued structure. The work calls attention by harnessing our visual contact to the slits and pokes into the boards and the space for our eyes to squint into the darkness. Eventually, we perceive the light that illuminates a photographic or filmic animation of the barn's butchering heritage. As if to beguile us with an exclusive and nostalgic view of the past, Hoffman shrewdly tugs us back to the present when we move onto a chink in the structure's surface that we must find for ourselves. The futility for us to be able to access the interior space aside from the visual glimpse through the crack or puncture in the barn-boards reminds us of the past that is impossible to recuperate. Yet while we can no longer access the slaughterhouse, Hoffman's experiment with cocooning the (and our) inside space is no less real.

Fig. 8: Phil Hoffman, *Slaughterhouse,* Detail 1, 2013, multi-channel video and sound installation, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Fig. 9: Phil Hoffman, *Slaughterhouse,* Detail 2, 2013, multi-channel video and sound installation, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

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Fig. 10: Phil Hoffman, *Slaughterhouse,* Detail 3, 2013, multi-channel video and sound installation, Markham Museum, Markham, *Land|Slide Possible Futures*, Courtesy of Will Pemulis and Land|Slide.

Apart from these four projects it is worth briefly mentioning a few others that stirred history, memory and place in these historic and physical settings. The "Soup and Bread" Food program, for example, was a digital and material media project by Lisa Myers and Richard Fung. Myers is an artist who uses walking and cooking research to retell narratives for her video, film and photographic projects. Fung is a Toronto-based video artist, writer, theorist and educator, whose work explores queer sexuality, Asian identity, colonialism, immigration, racism, homophobia, and his personal family history. An audio tour entitled, "The Rust in the Furrow" by David Han, recounted a fictional visitor's interactions with residents of one of the heritage buildings. As a filmmaker, video and digital media artist, he alters interactive technology to locate the fine line between cinema, new media and video. Or take a sound project by Iain Baxter& (pronounced Baxterand), "CARmen: a symphony for Cars". This legendary Canadian artist, whose work dates back to the 1960s, is often referred to as the visual Marshall McLuhan. An Officer of the Order of Canada, among other noteworthy honours, he has been devoted to exploring the meshing of environmental, ecological and contemporary projects with regard to the broadest sense of the information landscape. For Land/Scape, he included windshield wipers, car doors slamming open and hut, horns alarms, seat belts and ignitions that performed as musical instruments, creating a cacophonous symphony to awaken our senses to contemporary urban culture in this parkland.

General Thoughts on Heritage: Salvage and Waste Not

To return to the heritage objective of this museum, I want to lay out various thoughts about such objectives. Transporting these historic buildings to this Museum site reflects one type of heritage philosophy. While conventional wisdom suggests that architectural heritage buildings at risk of demolition can be "saved" if they are transported from one location (where the risk is high) to

another "safe space", this is really no more than an emptied emotional act, emptied of the memory that is tied to the what Pierre Nora referred to as the materiality of the trace: "Modern memory is first of all archival. It relies entirely on the specificity of the trace, the materiality of the vestige, the concreteness of the recording, the visibility of the image".[11] We no longer assign the emotional attachment to the material object – such as the barn or the house – when it is detached, or ripped from its material site. Site is powerful and is woven to the object, inseparable from it, actually. To surgically remove it and shift its location saves the material form but not the soul that inhabits it. For it is the fabric of places, all the architectural, geographic and topographic bits and pieces that form, when taken together, the cultural and emotional soul of a place. So what do we do with salvaged buildings and how are we to consider them in their new quarters?

Part of the rationale is rooted in the increasingly public and visible nature of heritage properties and the exponential growth of the preservation movements. While ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites established in 1965) banned relocation of historic buildings (of its Article 7 [Venice Charter, 1964]: "a monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs", more recently, in one of its charters of 2003, principles for the Analysis, Conservation and Structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage, the idea relocation was accepted on the grounds that "Dismantling and reassembly should only be undertaken as an optional measure when conservation by any other means is impossible or harmful.[12] But as Jenny Gregory points out in her in-depth study of relocated buildings, "Underlying the heritage concerns surrounding relocation is a very real apprehension that relocation will compromise the authenticity of heritage buildings".[13] Yet she doesn't hold her punches when she underscores that "[m]uch that is intended to replicate the past authentically bears no resemblance to the 'real' past".[14] And of course, open air museums contribute to this aura of authenticity with simulations or performance based "staged authenticity", a term coined by Dean MacCannell in 1973 (and perhaps best understood in Living Museums where actors dress as historic figures, such as pioneers, to simulate life "as it was").[15]

However, this late 20th century preservationist methodology is not without its flaws. To imagine that saving a building is saving a past, or a nation, or an identity, reflects a cult of historic monuments, and a cult is a system of worship[16] replete with ethical and altruistic elements, whether national or individual, as Alois Riegl argued in 1903. "Old buildings became the relics, vestments, and symbols of a commemorative liturgy grounded in historiographical practice".[17] For his part, the art historian and preservationist, George Dehio, also declared: "We conserve a monument not because we consider it beautiful, but because it is a piece of our national life. To protect

[11] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire", *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring 1989), 7-24, 8.

[12] Jenny Gregory, "Reconsidering Relocated Buildings: ICOMOS, Authenticity and Mass Relocation", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 14.2 (2008), 112-130.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings", *American Journal of Sociology*, 79.3 (November 1973), 589-603.

[16] Rudy Koshar, "On Cults and Cultists", in Max Page and Randall Mason, eds., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge 2004), 37-60.

[17] Ibid., 31.

monuments is not to pursue pleasure, but to practice piety".[18] And so it is that
the decision by the Municipality of Markham to move these houses and barns
and harness shops to the museum location to "protect" them took place to
inculcate the belief that in so doing, one takes on the role as protectorate of a
past that would otherwise have been erased.

It is worth noting, too, that along with the theoretical implications about
architectural destruction comes salvation: The term "spoliation", from the Latin
term *spolia* – once used to describe the pillage and re-appropriation of buildings
– is now defined as "the integral adaptation of buildings and as the reuse of
construction material salvaged from structures for erection elsewhere".[19]
Spoliation, for this exhibition especially, takes spins otherwise and provides
these structures of the past, that is to say, heritage sites, with a new life in the
present, for, as Eric Hobsbawn cautions, "If there is no suitable past, it can
always be invented".[20] We see, therefore, that the Markham Museum acted on
an impulse to integrally adapt the salvaged buildings to a new physical
environment but in maintaining the mythologised "living" history of their pasts.
This exhibition, however, clearly reveals the willingness and foresight of the
Markham Museum director who embraced and encouraged *Land/Slide,* clearly
recognising and championing its objectives. This is no doubt largely due to the
idea that, rather than ruminate about wastelands and what the action of
transposing architecture from its original setting does, this exhibition proposes
an opportunity; an opportunity born from a cognitive dissonance. It is an
opportunity to imagine an alternative community built for the future, a
community where the wish to reconcile history could in some way be attempted
to create a pattern of revival through sited incongruities, indeed sited through
those dissonances. Here are some theoretical vignettes that demonstrate what I
mean by cognitive dissonance.

Vignette 1

The experience of place as a wasteland recovered, or as a wasteland retold, is at
the heart of this exhibition. Specifically, architecture has been recruited to
infiltrate and challenge sculptural practices and spatial narratives. This junction,
or this mediated moment of encounter, between the afterlife of buildings and the
visual and sensorial cultural process of making is required in order to mark the
cognitive dissonance. And cognitive dissonance is marked in turn by the
multiple and parallel systems of how we experience and sustain our cultures
generally. Emily Apter bemoans that "Life forms are vanishing, landmasses are
eroding, holes are widening in the ozone, and nations subsist in a state of
increasing mineral depletion".[21] Each artist's project critically questions natural
and built habitats in the wake of such an ecological mandate within their

[18] Ibid., 32.

[19] Joseph Albermes, "*Spolia* in Roman Cities of the Late Empire: Legislative Rationales and Architectural Reuse", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 48 (1994), 167-178.

[20] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The New Threat to History", *The New York Review of Books*, 16 December 1993, 40.21, http://www.nybooks.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca /articles/1993/12/16/the-new-threat-to-history/, accessed 18 September 2015.

[21] Emily Apter, "The Aesthetics of Critical Habitats", *October*, 99 (Winter 2002), 21-44.

practice. Moreover, each artist is preoccupied with the sites of political and social struggle surrounding them rather than the more globally produced (or virtual) habitats of social media. Yet, it is important to signal that Apter is speaking to a world that dates from more than a decade ago. These were early days when people were preoccupied, despondent, or even enraged with increasingly global overreaching culture and economies, announcing our world of today. However, to imagine the world of big data and trans-global networks overtop of the local – and sometimes all too myopic – economies, is to miss the point; this is because it is the very interfacial place, that space between those concepts, that is the point. And this is where Land/Slide derives its momentum and begins its journey.

Vignette 2

More tangentially, still, the dissonance of ripped architecture or newly functioning place became metaphorically clear for me on a recent flight from Los Angeles to Toronto. The view out my window laid out the strikingly arid landscape which soon appeared to be torn apart by finger-like cracks. Abruptly, with accelerated nightfall across the time zones, the geographic blackness splintered with bronze lights flickering far below: these familiar patterns of the suburban regularity of road systems and angled shapes of architecture became visible as the city took form. This series of images out my window is not unlike the way Michel de Certeau described his view from the then World Trade Center where "the gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes", and "One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it.... An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below".[22] It is almost as though we must relish this aerial view to appreciate our location – ever mobile nonetheless – in city space. Indeed airports, as the new train stations, accelerate a conversation about our relationship to the city. Yet we are still challenged, and subsequently refute the competing perspectives, of where we are. How can we awaken our state of interrogation to recharge our sense of place and its "imageability": that place where the land and the communities it represents meet the built forms, the forms from the past meet the future, and where we are present in stillness or movement as the *land slides* into being, a land once wasted and now recovered, and positions us to understand the full arc of its form in its context.

Vignette 3

Cities, of course, are for and of the people who are in them, live or visit, who ambulate, skate-board, bicycle, tram, bus, subway, drive, sit, stand, lie, live, eat,

[22] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, trans. by Steven Randall), 91-2. De Certeau elaborates about Greek narration or "diegesis", a process that guides and transgresses, topological rather than topical, or place-related (see 129).

work, or play in them. Cities are also flora and fauna, or what we sometimes call "nature" albeit mostly curated in cities as opposed to the landscapes beyond its ever difficult-to-decipher borders. And equally, cities are really the sum of its invisibles meshed with the hard architectural visibles: the smells, breezes, winds, drafts, heat-waves, cold spells, and all the other weather that fills the physical houses and office buildings, warehouses and apartments like spray foam insulation that puffs and expands into every nook and cranny. Mobility in cities is a performance of actors in place, of minds invited into a site to engage, rethink and reshape.

We also know that what gives character to places extends beyond the architecture to the psycho-geographic networks that tie those (usually) fixed objects to each other and to us in composing the city, communities, and places. Citizens and tourists, short-term and long-term visitors, and the routes they take every day, week or month of the year through its passageways are sometimes set, and many times are serendipitous pathways to create or follow once or repeatedly. Along the way we enter into stories and histories with the places we see, touch, hear, smell or sometimes even taste.

Between our entry points to the city and the stuff of the city itself, is the past of those places, the past we bump up against in the city, the past that lives in our everydayness, the past that is sometimes set apart as something to relish, something to consider, something to identify as precious and protected. It is what we inherit from the past, but then what we identify specifically as heritage, or that with which we no longer have an active engagement but rather a passive one.

Ultimately, an Ecology of Heritage

Why is there a worldwide campaign to protect heritage sites? Perhaps what we are truly considering, rather, is the ecology of heritage. Heritage sites are relics of the past but present today. Their apparent dis-embodiment from the present troubles us as we attempt to develop strategies to mediate them for our current moment in time: that is, to be present with us now as opposed to being considered as residue of relics of inheritance from the past, or a time that is no longer alive for us today. "Heritage ... is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct", as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblatt defined it long ago in 1995. She continues, "Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display)".[23] Another way of understanding this is to imagine that what we have been told as past is otherwise considered as finished, discarded remnants of another timeframe, nothing but waste and refuse (or that which is refused) of the past, the material culture of which is sometimes still tangible today.

[23] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage", *Ethnomusicology,* 39.3 (Autumn 1995), 367-380.

We have witnessed examples of where problematic scenarios arise in a battle to appropriate identities at these sites in an effort to "construct an authentic, historic narrative, on which collective identities and political claims can be validly asserted in the present".[24] Ecology has been subject to many diverse definitions and appropriations as a term. But if we return to its Greek origins where the root is in the study of the house, or the scientific analysis and study of interactions among organisms and their environment, then we are close, very close, to possessing a broad understanding of what it means to have an ecology of heritage, or the study of the various interactions among historic places, ideas, and habitats as organisms. Moreover, the word "organisms" can suggest heritage as a process of objects, indeed living things that are in ongoing interaction with their surroundings and with each other. For its part, human ecology is the spacing and interdependence of people. Hence we can come to a broader consideration of heritage ecology as a spacing and interdependence of heritage ideas, places, objects and people that relate to habitat or home.

Land/Slide Wastes Not: Thoughts to Conclude

The Land/Slide exhibition revived the deadness of heritage sites and the idea that they can haunt so abidingly on their own. These sites, once transported to the Museum precincts, remained locked in what I would argue is a wasteland of the past, never to be considered anew and where the curatorial objective is to retain the format of a Living Museum. Living Museums typically attempt to recreate a semblance of the past by experiential considerations in the present architectures. For the Markham Museum, this takes the form of, among others, activities in the Blacksmith shop ("What is a Blacksmith and what was their changing role in the community?), or in a log cabin ("Discover how people lived before modern home conveniences"). As its website indicates, "[v]isitors can explore the changes in our landscape ... how we came together as a community over the past 100 years".[25] The challenge for the Land/Slide exhibition, therefore, was to target heritage alternatively. It mediated by fragmenting aspects of the past and re-assigning them as quotations in the present tense. How interesting to note that cultural historian and philosopher, Walter Benjamin, once suggested: "To write history ... means to *quote* history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be ripped out of its context".[26] The ripping method modeled on his thoughts, became what he called the "montage principle", and recently, what Patricia Morton called a criticism method that completes a revelatory operation and makes explicit the pre- and post-histories of what is discovered.[27] An ecology of heritage, then, pushes our critical thinking to see what Benjamin saw as the dialectical image where the "trash of history" breaks the flow of narrative

[24] Chaim Noy, "Embodying Ideologies in Tourism: A Commemorative Visitor Book in Israel as a Site of Authenticity", in Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams, eds., *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society,* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 219-240.

[25] Http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/RecreationCulture/MarkhamMuseum/WhatOn, accessed 12 May 2015.

[26] Walter Benjamin, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress", N11,3, http://www.rae.com.pt/Benjamin_Methode.pdf, accessed May 2015.

[27] Patricia A. Morton, "The Afterlife of Buildings: Architecture and Walter Benjamin's Theory of History"*, in Dana Arnold et al., eds., *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 215-228.

continuity forcing a gap to be created between the notion of "context" and how the historical building once functioned.[28]

[28] Morton, "The Afterlife of Buildings", 225.

Land/Slide was welcomed as an event that began a process of thinking about this gap, or forced awareness of the space between then and now, and, as with all ecological structures, the inevitable interconnectedness of systems (and thanks to this exhibition and its afterlife in print and visual media, we are reminded of it). If we can begin to see heritage this way, we can also recognize how the term "authentic" is somewhat misplaced, or at least has an awkward role in heritage ecology. And this inevitably leads to considering how that notion of the authentic is mediated, in particular, through the souvenir, as a remnant of a place, memory or heritage property. "'Authentic' experience', as Susan Stewart tells us, "becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic and other fictive domains are articulated".[29]

[29] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke U. P., 1993), 133.

To imagine these heritage houses and tradesmen shops in the parkland of the Markham Museum as "authentic" would be suggesting that they are part of the present lived experience. The Land/Slide artists and architects sought to disentangle these notions. And in the end, what this exhibition attempts to make clear, is how distant their pasts are, and yet how close and present they can be if articulated through a contemporary lens. It affirms that while an experience of nostalgia can result from the re-manufacturing of these emptied, re-positioned, and newly articulated historic buildings, there is an attempt to halt or reverse the nostalgic sentiment. To countermand this, Land/Slide offers vignettes, and indeed even encourages us to consider creating our own narratives for confronting history and memory so that it can be powered up for an ecology of heritage. The resistance to nostalgia is a conscious decision to untangle the knots of historical mythologies for all of these projects, in fact, in an effort to step into the present moment with new forms of agency and critique.

I have discussed only a smattering of the projects broached in this prodigious and capacious exhibition, projects that offer poignant cogitations with history, place, space and time. The curatorial objective shatters any shortsightedness that historic buildings continue to live and represent the past, that it is possible to support the idea of a fluidity from then to now, such as we continue to see in Living Museums, for example. What it did prove, however, is that the afterlife of buildings (originally destined as wasteland) can evolve differently. Patricia Morton eloquently summarises Benjamin's thoughts on traditional history (and in this case, read, buildings) that serves to reflect on the past as "a constellation of contingent, local knowledge that flashes up into dialectical images constructed out of history's detritus".[30] And this is precisely how Land/Slide proceeds. It serves as a moment in time – in only a period of a few weeks – as a media-interrogation, a meditative, psycho-geographic musing on history and

[30] Morton, "The Afterlife of Buildings", 228.

place, that resuscitated the park-land through storytelling that temporarily transformed itself and us by hitching us onto the past and sliding, as Land/Slides can do, maybe even head-first, into the future, possibly, but more importantly, into the now.