Making Manifest
Grounding Islam

by
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in fulfilment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

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AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including and required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.
Abstract

A Caveat: For many reasons, names have had to be concealed within this work. The events depicted are real and the discussions true. This is an attempt to legitimize the informal, seemingly mundane and sometimes personal: the author’s experiences bringing a folly to the physical, while trespassing into a new world: Islam. This thesis documents a series of interventions at different scales within that world. There is a book, the chair, and the city of Makkah. The events themselves are superimposed onto the traditional language, or professional conventions, used to justify them. Here, they are relegated to the margins of each page. This is akin to how some of the first books were produced, by students in the confines of dark cloisters or hot desert temples, struggling to maintain historical integrity while fighting the natural tendencies of youth. Their master’s voices always looking over the gutter from the opposite page.

The sketches for a new Makkah and a monumental demonstration in Canada unfold in parallel to a body of formal research. Together, as seemingly independently as they are, they paint the portrait of an Islam, while building a personality between the lines.

That being said: there isn’t a correct way to read it.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their implacable support of my whims I thank my father and my mother.

For his patience, tolerance and wisdom I thank my supervisor Robert Jan Van Pelt, the professor.

For his curiosity and generosity, I thank Ryszard Sliwka. His Rome program not only gave me the freedom to build but also the chance to love.

For his fierceness and word, I thank Gary Michael Dault, the artist.

For her generosity and candor, Prof. Marta Braun.

For his attention, Gabe 'Hightower' Gonda.

For their brotherhood: Alessio Morglia, Federico 'Brokeback' Bacchichi and Med Hasan, without you this would have stalled.

For his guile: PooyaKasha
DEDICATION

for e*
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Figure 1: The operation of unfolding taking place over the equator of a sphere. This is an effort to understand the topology of a 3formed object, here the centres of rotation are conserved and the tabs seen on the edges are a theoretical method of reassembly.
This story is about resistance, about politics, and about faith; it is the act of making manifest.

There are many ways that people have discussed the events that unfolded after the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001 (9/11). So it goes, a decade later, like a wound being re-opened and salted day by day, year after year, so that it may not heal. Some have told stories, some that are paranoid, some about courage, some about love, some true and some false. Let me tell you this story, one that occurred somewhere far removed from those fateful events, one that—like history—loses its way.

The latin roots follow from the Greek term faĩdnw - which is pronounced Phaino, fah'-ee-no, creating the word Phainomai. That word finally forms the root of the familiar English term phenomenon. The meaning of this word, which predates the widespread use in religious language in the New Testament, means to shine, to come into ones sight, to be brought forth into the light, and suddenly appear. In some respects, to unfold what is hidden.

The other meaning of manifest has been at the root of the political use of the term manifestation. It is a noun that was originally used by the French military. A manifest was the list of munitions, activities or actions of a particular military campaign, it was the list of an army’s potential. In a modern context a manifest remains the same except we add to that passengers on board vessels such as ships and most importantly planes, planes raining down from the sky, wherein architecture must burn.

What is revealed is not the truth or any particular reality, but rather another history. What could have resulted from those histories is presented herein.
Figure 2 and 3: World Trade Center, Man Falling. Behind:
Translation of calligraphy by Yusuf Ali: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp [is] enclosed in Glass: the glass [is] as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men and Allah doth know all things. Qur’an 24:35
On Waking Up

It was an unusually cold morning for September, I remember it vividly because we woke up already fighting... It would be my first day at university, September 11th, 2001. By 6:00am my roommate Sheniff had already finished his first rakket. Myself, now awake from the rhythm of the prayer, lay in silence.

As Salam Ale Kum, As Salam Ale Kum...

By 8:45am, Sheniff and I had sat down for breakfast, we tuned the television to the news—CNN. We watched BREAKING NEWS streaking across the screen; the first tower of the World Trade Center burning. 'It's clearly a terrorist attack', but Sheniff went silent. He rolled his eyes, and laughed, “man you are so naive”, as if to say nobody can really know. Knowing is a kind of faith in itself.

We didn't stay to see the second plane hit, getting to our first day of classes early was the only thing on our minds.

I walked through a field that separated my subdivision from the rest of the town. Then down the abandoned train tracks that led to a road girdling the university. My mood was anxious; it was my first day of studio lectures and, after all the courting and leadup, I didn’t know what to expect.

But those feelings were drowned out by that burning building and Sheniff—his comments about the plane being an inside job. He was a contradictory kind of character, an Ismaeli with a buzz cut, piercings and facial hair trimmed precisely into chin straps. He prays earnestly in the mornings and through the day, then slips into a rhythm of drinking and drugs at night. He was entitled to be a hypocrite, but deep down I wanted to believe in something too. It was early, and a little chilly, the dew had settled on the brush and it smelled pungent, the way the suburbs have to.

My family had arrived in Canada when there was next to nothing there, in 1826 and more later on in the early twentieth century. Romanian immigrants from the Carpathian Mountains home to dark days and fantastical stories of blood-thirsty counts. They weren’t typical Eastern Europeans, they were slippery enough to avoid oppression, so none of these kinds of paranoid delusions became part of my psyche. It was too removed in the distance for me to feel any of those things, or a holocaust but these ideas are sticky, they lie dormant, colouring everything else.

I floated along the tracks and arrived at 9:10am. The university was almost empty. I saw a couple of Asian guys running with
Figure 5: The Earth projected using a Molleweid transformation, showing the lines of orientation to Makkah from Rome, Italy, Toronto Canada, and New York, U.S.A. These arcs are bent by the projection terms that are obligatory when representing a sphere in two dimensions. Thus, the arcs appear more like lines of electromagnetic radiation.
their backpacks, and then the die hard shorts-in-the-winter type Caucasian
computer scientists ahead. The campus was a ghost city on the outskirts
of a university town. It was one of those places that can be the centre of
another world, one where other continents cease to exist, as long as you stay
within the ring road. Where the sidewalks are clad in unilock pavers instead
of concrete. It was a movie set, empty, waiting for the director’s cue to start
the action. Motors on, scene 7 take 10, Our Future, Starring Alexander
Josephson. It wasn’t right to make this an academic discussion.

The school of architecture, a place I aspired to attend since the age of six,
was my destination. Here it was, at the technical university, where the
beginning of my dreams would unfold: a whole faculty stuffed into a low,
two-storey red brick building on the edge of campus. It was the ideal setting
for a fairy tale, a struggle, there was even a well tended ivy on the south
facade enclosing the adjacent parkette. It was utilitarian compared to the
other faculty buildings, which lent to its charm. The university needed the
architecture school; it was a symbol of their global cultural considerations,
so it was operating on a bare bones budget. All I could think about was
the rejection letters that came streaming in from abroad earlier that year.
I didn’t really want to be there, it was not the institution that would help
make my ambitions any more tenable. It was not trendy.

Inside, the digs were Spartan, it was clear that nobody would have a foot
up. The professors seemed to disappear and reappear out of thin air, their
ofices being located on what was a secret floor accessible only by two
claustrophobic staircases. They came across with an aloof confidence,
while driving, if you have been
lucky enough to have purchased
one. In the free world one may be
pulled over for speeding in that
car, thereby breaking the law. In
the free world, the primary role of
most law enforcement is centered
around the control of flows in the
public and virtual environment. Be
it stocks in trade or information
over the internet or speeding tick-
et. It isn’t the physical identity
of freedom that is important any-
more in the new world, it is where
freedom is taking a language by
itself. This new language is a force
of self annihilation inherent to
democratic free societies.

‘There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is
unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not
necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.’

Harold Pinter, Nobel Prize Laureate. His acceptance speech was
directed at the willingness of Western societies to judge others around
the world.

Here it would be good to include
the point that freedom can be
profiled, drawn, but never defined:
it is a consequence of flows. It is a
residue with a particular perfume,
with the power to attract some
as much as repulse others. Let us
use the example of the car. In the
free world freedom shows its face
while driving, if you have been
lucky enough to have purchased
one. In the free world one may be
pulled over for speeding in that
car, thereby breaking the law. In
the free world, the primary role of
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more in the new world, it is where
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itself. This new language is a force
of self annihilation inherent to
democratic free societies.
Figure 6: A map of the direction of influence of early Islam and the subsequent Muslim nations. Initiating in Makkah and Medina, the religion becomes popular in Iraq, Egypt and what is now Iran. Eventually, Islamic tradition would flirt with Hindu and Sikh cultures around the areas of India. Below, the urban plan of Makkah and Masjid al Haram, the mosque.
It is not beyond our imaginations to conceive of such confusion or accept such complexity. We have always known this, but for the sake of clarity and efficiency have denied its existence in reality, simplifying the world around us. A complexity is being ignored, for what reason perhaps a sociologist might expound. The struggle between the three Abrahamic religions to establish a global control on morality is an example of that tendency. It is a pattern toward simplification that denies the dignity of human differences, choices. Yet, there are global organizations such as the United Nations, founded on the idea that there is a singular way of civilization. Only one path deemed acceptable. As a solar system with the sun represented by the word architecture, day rise to a certain level. One where total freedom results. How to get there was something of a more polemical discussion. One thing was for sure, the ubiquitous sleepless night before a deadline, the all nighter, would become the red herring of herd mentality. The studios should have been filled with young students, but they were empty. Perhaps everyone else stayed at home to watch and, I am, by dint of my presence here an insensitive bastard? Or maybe bad timing, not yet late but maybe early. I was confused.

Then I found them, at least thirty or so, students and professors that didn’t stay home, packed like sardines into the utility room nestled between the studios. They were standing there starving themselves of oxygen, fixated on an old university television flopped onto a black plastic roller dolly. Everyone watched the first tower collapsing. I was on time, after all. There wasn’t really a drawn out silence, nor a scream, it was more like a gasp for air. People were talking, they were stunned yet very capable of talking. I noticed a couple of girls and a young man crying, holding on to each other, but I couldn’t bring myself to do the same. I felt nothing, it felt like I was watching an action movie. I was wishing that I could have taken part, been there, experiencing that realness. I thought, the best thing to have done was take a photographic series of the television, but my cell was nowhere near that sophisticated. Regardless, the smell and details of what people were wearing lingers in my mind.

Then the second tower fell perfectly into place.

After a few minutes most of them dispersed. I and about twenty others stayed behind for an ad hoc lecture in cultural history given by a man who had dedicated his life to the architecture of catastrophe. They didn’t need to disband, they were surely all going to talk about the same things regardless: endless classes, lecturer upon lecturer explaining why or how the attack had happened. More than the West have done to any other sovereign nation, group or individual, they discredited themselves. It is not the attack against Islam in the wake of September 11th that is uniquely brutal, rather the attack on democracy itself in the name of peace. All of this under the veil of a defense against an enemy with no face, simply a word. The Department of Homeland Security established new authorities, but they weren’t just physical, they were emotional. It is the best example of a monument to secure the presence of eternal fear and that is the most dangerous weapon of all.

Both of those elements of authority are the basic conditions that the revolutionaries of bygone eras fought against in France.
and America, forming new states. What is disguised under the convenient label of patriotism or the universality of democracy is actually a faith, one that is unquestionably tied to the Abrahamic religious and European political traditions. This is not a decadent reaffirmation of communism, it is an observation.

happened and what the consequences were. Some of the discussions would be gripping, others a bland excuse to hear one’s own voice.

I took a seat, fourth row from the front, on the aisle. After about thirty minutes of lecturing the history professor started asking for feedback. I liked attention, so I participated in the speculation as much as everyone else. Jockeying with the classmates for attention.

In one instance it was said we were at the dawn of an Islamic Reformation. I would have been interested to see my roommate Shennif’s reaction. People were drawing parallels to the bloodiest events in mid-Christian history, except they were many millions of victims short. Some scholars have shown that almost half the population of what became Germany was slaughtered during the Thirty Years War. There was no fight: in a classroom on the outskirts of a small town in Canada, we made a conscious choice, the one to be afraid.

There were fourteen Jews and three Muslims enrolled in the entire school of roughly three hundred. There wasn’t a single Muslim professor. The one reprieve was that the most acclaimed mind was an authority on the architecture of genocide, the same one that began the lectures that day. The mechanics of war from an architectural standpoint. The perfect person to appreciate the precise feeling of what this new history would feel like in the making.

I would replay my emotions of that morning like a broken record. Except, I was watching something else on TV each day, not the actual events in New York, rather something more pornographic. Just images and words on screens and pages. Before September 11th the World Trade Centre did not occupy that emotional place, and who cared about Islam outside of a few exceptional individuals? While being vanquished, a new monumentality

..."Rather than speaking of fear here, we should speak of fears. And this is why I say they are “liquid” because they are free to move easily, to detach and attach themselves to one sphere or another.

And then there is social insecurity that comes from knowing that in the same way as we are given a place in society, it can sometimes be taken away. As we go ahead we remain attached to this social position, because we are afraid of losing it. The promise of governments and organized society was to free people from this type of fear, deriving from social insecurity.

This principle was the basis for Roosevelt’s ideas: make a citizen’s position secure, respectable and honourable, justified, something to be proud of. And this was the social state project, designed to liberate people from the fear of insecurity. For example, society would take care of the weakest when ill and this social aspect would be guaranteed for every human being. This was a system that allowed citizens to go ahead, thinking that it was right to take risks and be brave. Today we have lost not only personal security, but also the ability to think in terms of society, with an individual approach to problems of security...”

Zygmunt Bauman speaking at the World Social Summit on the subject of Fear.
Figure 7: a cemetery in Northern France's battlefields with Jewish graves.
flowed into both of them. That day marked a new age full of mystery and faith, made true in real-time. Even better were the immediate conspiracy theories; one couldn’t conceive of a better way to mythologize an event than with disbelief. It isn’t to diminish the loss of life in New York by calling it a myth, the loss of life was tragic. Turning it into myth through intrigue and speculation actually elevates it to epic proportions. Into a story of worship for an unnamed faith, a western, American faith—one that had a new longevity to take it right through to the end of history, a superfaith.

Instantly, Islam became synonymous with evil and the Judeo-Christian America the wounded victim, though now it all seems much more nebulous than that. Islam became the poster child for human rights abuse, illegal immigration, cultural nihilism and ignorance embodied by pictures of fifty year old Talibanees marrying seven year old virgins. At least in our eyes, at that point, everyone on our side of the earth on the island separating Europe from Asia thought they were innocent. Nobody, not even the so-called unbiased Western media spoke of anything beautiful or valuable about Islamic culture, and if they did it was always a hedge against the regular sensational scandals.

Professors tried to begin classes normally in those weeks, but the topics would devolve—digress into a discussion about Islam and September 11th. They even segued into steel structures and mechanics of materials lectures, an engineering course. The lazy-eyed professor, a legend of sorts in that field who hailed from Germany, explained that the building’s engineering might have been at fault. The hypothesis was that designers and builders were to some extent responsible for the loss of life—the structure was too efficient. What about the architects, after all, it was they who materialized the symbols of difference, the temples of ideology. It was a little too much, nothing could ever be built to withstand those kinds of forces. The discussions lasted a couple of weeks, then slowly withdrew into the background, like a haze lifting in the heat of midday.

When it came to design, the professors didn’t digress from condos in small town Canada or private residence pavilions for visiting scholars on main campus. The entire curriculum was in the hands of a regulatory body. I was feeling very comfortable in such projects. I didn’t even blink, perhaps an appropriate substitution for these abstract structures and scholarly homes would have been to design an on-campus mosque, or to orient the house to Makkah. It would have been a coup at a university founded by

“As it determines this moment in time, the mind necessarily withers away and, stretched to the limit, desires this withering. Myth and the possibility of myth become impossible: only an immense void remains, cherished yet wretched. Perhaps the absence of myth is the ground that seems so stable beneath my feet, yet gives way without warning.

The myths which, in the white and incongruous void of absence, exist innocently and shatter are no longer myths, and their duration is such as to expose their precariousness. At least in one sense the pale transparency of possibility is perfect: myths, whether they be lasting or fugitive, vanish like rivers in the sea...”

Figure 8: A cemetery with a lone waxing moon.
MAKING MANIFEST | ON WAKING UP

Lutherans. Regardless, I was producing at the top academically, even if I hadn’t the slightest clue how to make architecture. I was fiddling on a drafting table in 2001, drawing spaces from triangular rulers.

September 11th was a blip on my academic radar: nothing changed at the school. Actually, things couldn’t have been better. The next three months would be a blur of project proposals and briefs retrieved from the same stockpiles as they had always been. I even achieved my first all-nighter, something that I was proud of, like a badge of merit, a true sign of a mediocre disorganized mind. Still, instead of punishing this kind of behavior it was rewarded generously, the perfect way to unlearn what it means to live life.

September 11th toppled the stock markets, but it couldn’t move the ‘course drop/change date’ assigned by the university on new electives. Our discussions had come to naught, no physical manifestation in relation to the degree of change occurring elsewhere ever happened.

Instead, there was utopia at the technical school, a wealthy aerospace-millionaire decided to give a chunk of cash to fund a move for the school of architecture from its roots on campus to a nearby town. The new site was a sprawling abandoned silk mill on the banks of an economically distressed town called Galt about half an hour from the campus. It was a storied place, the Manchester of Canada, once an economic engine fueled by vast textile industries and a wealthy cadre of American Loyalists that had settled at the turn of the end 19th century and again in the early 20th. It would be bliss.

By the end of term two of my three housemates, including Shenniff, became increasingly withdrawn. Their presence in the house now so erratic, it felt empty in the mornings. It appeared that they were sleeping during the day and working or partying by night. I had noticed one afternoon that, on a chance encounter with Shenniff, he had grown his baby fingernails to an absurd length. I could easily have thrown up at his feet when he told me it was for the guitar lessons he was taking. They stopped paying rent and were acting irate. I was so broke from the emotional and physical expense of the program that it became clear that the only solution was work, to enter the commercial flow, working for someone, if not myself.

I decided to drop out.
Figure 7.1: The world trade center towers before the attack (left) and the proposed view from the memorial (right).
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
ROME+ JULIET
FROM THE VISIONARY DIRECTOR OF MOULIN ROUGE
SPECIAL EDITION
The story of Leila and Majnun is echoed in almost every cultural tradition spanning the globe, from the Italian Petrarch and Laura to the Anglosaxon Romeo and Juliet. It is part of human nature that these tales of family interference and tragic unrequited love exist in all cultural strands. Yet if human beings see Islam as a threat to those who aren’ t, why do we not speak of these shared traditions?

If anything they are evidence of our broader shared beliefs.

By worldly prudence uncontrl’d,
Their every glance their feelings told;
For true love never yet had skill
To veil the impassion’d looks at will.
When ringlets of a thousands curls,
And ruby lips, and teeth of pearls,
And dark eyes flashing quick and bright,
Like lightning on the brow of night -

When charms like these their power display,
And steal the wilder’d heart away -
Can man, dissembling, coldly seem
Unmoved as by an idle dream?
He saw her beauty, saw her grace,
The soft expression of her face;
And as he gazed, and gazed again,
Distraction stung his burning brain:
No rest he found by day or night -

The Bees

....Tumultuous passion danced upon his brow;
He sought to woo her, but knew not how:
He gazed upon her cheek, and, as he gazed,
Love’s flaming taper more intensely blazed.
Soon mutual pleasure warm’d each other’s heart;
Loved conquer’d both – they never dreamt to part;
And, while the rest were poring o’er their books,
They pensive mused, and read each other’s looks:
While others for distinction strove,
And thought of fame, they only thought of love:
While others various climes in books explored,
Both idly sat - adorer and adored....

Their only taste was love, and love’s sweet ties,
And writing ghazels to each other’s eyes.

Yes, love triumphant came, engrossing all
The fond luxuriant thoughts of youth and maid;
And, whilst subdued in that delicious thrill,
Smiles and bright tears upon their features play’d.
Then in soft converse did they pass the hours,-
Their passion, like the season, fresh and fair;
Their opening path seem’d deck’d with balmiest flowers,
Their melting words as soft as summer air.....

The role of love and romance between men and women of Muslim faith has been maligned by the Western media. The story of Leila and Majnun is one of the rich and beautiful stories that are at the centre of many Islamic cultures, including Sufis and Ishmaelis.

Ironically this kind of reckless criticism is nothing new, the story of Leila and Majnoun has never made it into a popular frame: a movie

Figure 9: Romeo and Juliet, unknown author, posters for the Hollywood production featuring Leonardo Di Caprio and Claire Danes.
or best selling Western analog. What we see in the West, is never the good or the sophisticated, we act superior as if to be anglosaxon aristocracy isolating the nouveau riches. We see young girls married off to Talibani middle aged men. Let us not forget the extremes in our own cultures.

Leila for ever in his sight....

(Nazami c 597th year of Hijrah, 1221CE)

Eventually Leila and Majnun would be torn apart, their families forbidding their love. In the end Majnun fled to the desert and lived amongst wild beasts, only coming back to civilization upon hearing of Leila’s death. To mourn her, he lay upon her grave screaming and tossing for weeks on into months, all the while being protected by his tribe of wild beasts. He finally succumbed to the elements and time, and his remains, lying flawless upon her grave, were intombed beside hers so that their undying love would remain unstayed.

I would take my lunch in the same place every day. I first saw her standing in the piazza reading in the sun. When her perfect suspecting eyes that couldn’t be just one colour, smiled at me that first day, I had no choice but to introduce myself. That courage never came. It wasn’t until after the third week that we finally met. I almost flattened her walking around the corner to the office, when she spoke to me. After watching her pass by so many times, wandering through Piazza del Monte Di Pieta, we were about to speak and it wasn’t under my own will.

“Aren’t you the American who is friends with Veronica?”

“Yes, yes absolutely, that’s me”. I smiled, I had no idea who Veronica was, but she asked if I had been at such and such a party and I played it off as if I knew what she was talking about. So our relationship was starting on an honest footing.

“My name is Elisa, nice to meet you.”
That piazza where we met is a secondary space just about a hundred metres southwest of Campo Dei Fiori, where the statue of Giordano Bruno stands, patinated in black, resisting the fires that burned him alive almost six hundred years earlier. The dark weedy hole in the Ponte Sisto sits just a stone’s throw to the west. But around the corner from there another miracle was brooding, an architecture firm was changing the world, from a group of rooms with flayed plaster walls infecting that perfect powder blue Palazzo with young minds perfectly choreographed by the captain of this Nebuchadnezzar. It was humming and trembling with ideas.

That Christmas I ended up getting a job as an assistant model maker in Rome, Italy. I was not in the mood of being light so I chose the city that I thought would be the most alienating, to see if I could survive and work. I landed a job at Massimilliano Fuksas’ Studio. There wasn’t anywhere else in Italy that one could find better people, perhaps the last of a particular breed. My first week there was the most humiliating experience in my life. I was unable to properly converse with my superiors. Their pace was unrelenting—and it all started with a dexterity test. I was the only North American in the office.

To live, I found a place near Piazza Navona in a converted courtyard. It was a cavernous space characterized mostly by the scaffolding assembled in the main living space for a mezzanine, coupled with the damp musky smell of being on the raw Roman ground level. The ceiling above was perforated by cracked glass blocks, the deck of my neighbours above. I could hear them in the morning watering their flowers as the droplets splashed against the blocks, trying to drip in.

My first weeks of work were shell shocking, I nearly ended it then.
The people around me were building kilometre long glass veils and clouds docked inside stadiums while I could barely ask for the glue. They worked harder than I had ever seen anybody work before, and they did it with more grace, with less. They managed to have a life and laugh, then leave and enjoy the world.

If the attacks on New York hadn’t changed the world, they had at least revealed the new realities of America abroad. Italians have a way with words. It isn’t difficult to see why; there are words everywhere. Newsstands openly compete for pennies on almost every major streetcorner and piazza in the country, from small town Sicily to downtown Milan to the forum in Rome. They don’t just sell rags; you can find Dante and Faulkner on the streets. Talk of conspiracy was not only normal for Romans, but the standard doctrine in the Italian press. Every morning I would hear the word Chee-ya, Chee-ya, which after a while I figured out was actually the way they pronounce C.I.A—rather than the hairy, grass growing ceramic sculpture consumed by the millions. It wasn’t that they asserted that as truth, but that it wasn’t overt heresy was enough to understand the intelligence of the general public.

Italy in any given year usually has one of the highest number of architects per capita in the world—the Greeks and Japanese also compete. It is much like studying general arts in Italy; it simply makes sense given their history. At this point the global architectural community was galvanized by the tragedy in New York almost a year earlier. It was producing its own pre-emptive strike. They formed teams of super-architects, bands of famous minds from fields far flung, to propose fantastic new ideas to heal New York. The tower would be called freedom, but the architects committed mutiny. It turned into a
corporate real estate insurance grab, bereft of any value to architecture. Some of the most impressive urban architectural ideas developed in decades were proposed. Yet, the Jury chose a conservative design and they would eventually pare it down to something unrecognizable. The gumption and unassuming creativity of New York’s founders were forgotten, without even a fight. It all boiled down to insidious politics and back-door dealings of reprehensible proportions.

But they didn’t see it back on the island, that continent across the Atlantic called America. There was nothing to worry about for architects: at some point the leftover proposals, that could have actually changed the world, would be developed in real-time in Dubai, with much more luxurious materials, not to mention profit margins and creditors. It is the absolute proof of a profession that lost, one in which the younger generations, even students, have deified the giants before them. Never before had there been such a lack of general protest by the gods that proposed the best ideas.

The global architectural community bares latent pathological responsibility—fault. It created symbols of indifference and corporate greed, not those of freedom or democratic values. A twin tower would have sufficed. People refused to admit there was a problem deep down. Perhaps I am being a little overzealous, but that is because I still believe architects could be powerful enough to say no. Today it seems that less truly is more. They occupied a unique position able to solve our civilizational problems. It runs consistent with idea that architecture has evolved most during total collapse and global crisis, through wars and strife.

Before she left me in the Piazza that day, I had asked her for her phone number. While she wasn’t paying attention as I kissed her on the cheek twice, I slipped my Domori chocolate bar carefully into her purse and walked away.

“So, do you miss your good---black 70 chocolate? Too bad, it is all gone”...
She stepped out of a black town car that pulled up on Columbus Avenue just south of the corner at Broadway. It was just far enough away from the curb that when she rose to meet it, her legs revealed themselves from the vent in her long black dress.

She was far more cultivated than I and it was clear that the less I pretended to know, the better our night at the opera would unfold. It was embarrassing to watch something that made such an intense physical impression. To her it was normal; these things were the basic language, she wanted to be so touched, or to cry. It was the evidence of the steely foundations of her ancient European culture proven in an instant. It wasn’t until later that I realized how well the opera’s themes echoed the events in New York three years earlier. In another time, along a brook, Samson the Israelite fell deeply in love with Delilah, the enchanting Philistine girl. Having fallen for her against all counsel, and madly at that, he told her his only weakness—his hair. Delilah did not reciprocate. She feigned love and took advantage of his weakness—cutting his long tender locks while he slept upon her lap. The Philistines followed up with hot pokers to Samson’s eyes—blinding and then enslaving him to grind their wheat. To entertain themselves, the Philistines forced Samson into their temple of Dagon during a sacrifice to regard him in humiliation. There Samson asked to rest against the grand pillars, “Then Samson prayed to the Lord, ‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.’ (Judges 16:28),” Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” (Judges 16:30) Down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more as he died than while he lived.” (Judges 16:30).

The move to New York was a last-minute decision. It was probably mostly because of her. I couldn’t stand the idea of not being nearby. It struck me how in-over-my-head I was seconds after arriving at Penn Station and dragging my bags up the unending staircases to the curb on Broadway at 32nd Street, only to be flattened by the rushing crowd to get around my slow moving mass.

The verticality of the art deco brick buildings and overhead bridges clad in patinated copper was more potent than the photos. I hailed a taxi and took it to my cousins’ apartment on the Upper East Side where I could stay temporarily while trying to find an apartment. It is said that at any given moment in Manhattan there are over one hundred thousand people searching rabidly for apartments. It is one of the most interesting activities imaginable.

My cousins, Lawrence and Jodi, were a new family having just given birth to their first son. They moved there in the beginning of
Figure 11: Samson in the Temple of Dagon, most likely drawn by Giulio Romano in the mid 16th century. Note that in this representation, Samson’s suicidal act of bringing the temple down over the Philistines was by toppling two columns (or towers) not one.
Legend has it that Samson fell in love with more than one Pagan girl and when he refused to listen to his family when they told him to stay away from Dalilah, the consequence was his life. After Dalilah helped the Pagans capture and poke the eyes out of that exquisite specimen of a man, Samson fought back by sacrificing himself. He toppled the Pagan temple of Dagon killing thousands of people along with himself. Nobody can actually agree if Samson toppled two columns or one in order to destroy the Pagan temple of Dagon. One could believe it were two and since there were two towers in New York that fell, there is room for comparison. Regardless of the number or specifics, the self sacrifice is all the same, so was the outcome.

The story of Samson and Dalilah is part of a tradition of approval that follows the Judeo-Christian histories. By celebrating Samson’s story there is a fundamental sympathy toward that behavior: the human body as a weapon, a political device or at the extreme even a bomb. Western culture has approved and celebrated Samson’s act through some of the greatest art in history, from opera to sculpture. Some of the most important paintings in art history are depictions of Samson.

The body as a weapon is a device that is celebrated, in some way by almost all major religious and cultural groups on the planet. It is the ultimate weapon, the denial of any value of this reality in exchange for the unknown held up by a faith. These histories are part of the foundations of Western thought; by dint of this, they are facets of that culture, though undeniably part of a distinctly violent religious history. Between Samson’s sacrifice and for example, Usama Bin-Laden’s ‘fatwa’—a primer to self destruction—there is an important parallel to be drawn. Both are intended to destroy the ‘infidels’ or ‘pagans’. The destructive power of the body is the common tactic shared by both stories. The difference between Samson and a ‘Terrorist’ is critical, because it requires a bias. It would necessarily imply a judgment and that is not the motive of this project. Both stories are founded in what historians would have us believe are religious, rather than cultural differences. On the contrary, in these stories, religion and culture are one and inseparable. It is the same issue echoed in the basic struggle today for

2002 in the wake of the attacks because Lawrence was hired as a wildcat trader: the foreigners that were hired to replace the deceased financiers at the WTC. Cantor Fitzgerald, whose offices were totally wiped out bought his Bond Trading business back in Toronto and moved him to New York City. It was lucrative and somebody had to do it. New York wasn’t waiting for anyone anymore, you needed an invite.

I wanted to work for Steven Holl, so when I got an interview I was quite excited. When I arrived at their offices there was a catch. At the table in the meeting room were three young men, all Middle Eastern. They introduced themselves and then informed me that Steven wouldn’t be coming and the office wasn’t hiring. Essentially, it became clear that they invited people into Holl’s offices so that they would have a good applicant pool. They were too young to have a dignified space of their own, at least if they played by the rules. Makram, the trendy good looking one, told me they were opening an office that would complete a major project of Holl’s already in construction and that they would be opening their own first space immediately, I would work there. They called themselves LEFT; I asked why and they said it was because they worked in the smallest work station in the office, on the left side of the main studio space. Indeed, it was a closet of a space, but they were doing good things.

They basically hired me immediately. I was desperate, so the idea of working for three young Middle Eastern guys opening their first office in NYC seemed exciting and the pay was good. This was just before the war between Isreal and Hezballah broke out and the three principals were extremely worried; it was the right place at the right time to hear a Muslim’s perspective. I was shocked to hear that my bosses were so secular. These guys had their heads securely fastened to their bodies—when they weren’t partying, there wasn’t anything radical about them. In fact, their views were far more
Figure 12: The Ka’Bah in time lapse during Hajj with worshippers navigating the center of the temple.
understanding and compassionate than those of the so called Westerners.

It took me almost a month to find my own place. By that point my hosts had grown tired of my late comings and goings. It was a small place in the West Village with mice, but not a roach in sight. It was a corner building and my bedroom window had a view to the North, where you could see the Empire State Building. There was a cafe on the ground floor, owned by a Parisian couple. Metropol became my morning coffee before taking the subway to work in midtown at 26th and Sixth Avenue. It was there that I became friends with a young man, Blair, who drank Irish coffee every morning. After a couple of days I learned that he had witnessed the bombings of the WTC while on a cigarette break at a previous job in Tribeca. He cameoed as a currency trader while struggling to sell his paintings, his true passion being wealth and the trimmings that go along with it. I would later learn that he was being trained by a convicted con who had duped millions from investors including his mother. I guess the trade-off for Blair was to take some training from the man who had already taken so much from himself.

We had the kind of relationship where you know you don’t like each other, but for some reason you still spend time together. It was desire for conflict that kept it interesting, but there was a mutual distrust. It was through our interaction that I realized a sick sense of envy in myself; I was jealous of what he had experienced first hand, the events that had changed the world in Manhattan almost two years earlier. That was the reason I wanted to spend time with Blair, to take his experience, his highfalutin finance friends and associate myself with it—to victimize myself. That was one of the reasons I wanted to be in New York. It was the same feeling that any religious type of pilgrimage could elicit, one of participation in a global act. After all, it is a trend, historically, that many people who accomplished the greatest works bore witness to the most important events of their age.
In a generation of wealthy Westerners who had never come close to any real suffering, something had to fill that void—if not fictionalized, at least staged. At that point, all I was thinking of was how to design the events of my life such that I would become worthy. Except there was no social revolution taking place; I would have to construct those events and rebel against a fictitious Red Brigade.

Sometimes education can be romantic enough to be a beginning, but not everyone is so lucky. Universities are founded on that kind of separation from events, the observer from afar, but the privilege of criticism is fundamental to that model—it doesn’t work if it is real. That isn’t experience, it is a dress rehearsal. They simulate a role in the event through distanced observation, or authority through respect, above all through reputation.

I visited Ground Zero for the first time at the end of the first month of work. The disaster area, which by this point had been transformed into a construction pit, was nondescript except for scale. It was very bleak and disappointing. There wasn’t a sign of the surreal remains of the first floor columns of that fantastic building after its collapse. I was upset because I couldn’t really fathom the forces that had been in play in that space years earlier. Nothing remained except the feelings of blame and fear.

On the day of the attacks there were people in many buildings simultaneously. One that strikes me is the mosque at Makkah, because it is the centre of any Muslim’s world. Through time something else connected them. What I saw in that pit were two architectures juxtaposed, the Western twin towers and the Middle Eastern Ka’bah at Makkah. The simplicity and power of them both fighting for survival, one against the wrath of the markets and the other to maintain faith. I was imagining the fluid metallic skin of the World Trade Center facades in contrast to the perfect black silk veil bellowing in the hot Sirocco over the ancient mortar of the Ka’bah at the center of Makkah. The Ka’bah is a modest structure, a black cube, grey and void. From above, it looks like a strange remnant at the center of an explosion, a static core with a vibrating mass around it. Yet the height of the Ka’bah in the hearts of its believers trumped any faith in the other that day.

Everything I imagined that day was in opposing groups, always in pairs. Always one or the other, the twin towers, right and wrong, life and death. Our brains are a reflection of that paradox. Maybe that is...
in the region and the source of economic prosperity to the city (esposito, watt, et al). The shrine, which the Quran states was built by Abraham, was described by Plutarch, Ovid and even Dionysius of Helicanais as having the same structure as that of the universe. Many scholars link the foundation of Islam to powerful geopolitical and economic forces in the area resulting from Ka'ba's importance as a universal pagan shrine. In some ways this makes Islam the most inclusive rather than exclusive Abrahamic strand.

The exterior walls enclose a room of equal proportions within, devoid of contents. When Muhammad returned to Makkah in 622 C.E. the first thing he and his followers did was to destroy all of the Pagan idols stored within it. Destroying the Ka'bah's contents was to proclaim Makkah as the new gravitational center of the monotheistic Islam. The seal of the three Abrahamic religions, wherein humans were not made in the image of God, the new description of God was in abstract terms: God is light upon Light.

The tragedy in 2001 showed the confluence of two cultural rhythms, not a clash of civilizations. Two rhythms that have followers that truly believe in them. There is no doubt in my mind that a faith exists in America and it is so strong in some that it smacks religious. On that day both groups were submitting themselves to their higher powers, some throwing themselves off towers, in desperation to escape the heat and ensuing collapse, others bowing down before the abstract presence of God facing toward Makkah. The images of those people, flying through the air, are seldom mentioned, they are too painful. But they also have a frightening peacefulness, as if the faith in a better moment or future was proclaimed by their act. Halfway across the globe another kind of solemn peace was proclaimed bowing down in worship toward the Ka'bah. People resigned themselves to a higher power, in hopes of something better. It was a continuous event, it was a prayer amidst the acts of suicidal maniacs a world away.

But where do people face when the object of their goal no longer stands? Or when that object is always moving beyond their horizon? Where will we go into the future, and toward what star is our trajectory aimed? Ironically, all of this was allegedly precipitated by a group of young men who were in violation of the most basic rules of Islam, some being drunk the day of the attacks. But regardless, it gave Western opinion makers and politicians free reign to extend the mutual hatred that existed since the conquest of Granada in 1492 or earlier, when Spanish Muslims were forced to leave that country or face death. These events, far in the past, don't sublimate; they have strong presence in contemporary emotions. There are, above all, times in which the human reality, always mobile, accelerates, and bursts into vertiginous speeds. Our time is such a one, for it is made of descent and fall. History has made such an impression that it simply needed to be repeated over and over again. Like a prayer, every Sunday at church or even five times per day facing toward the Ka'bah.

There are two types of New Yorkers: those who experienced the attacks first-hand and those that didn’t. The two have a different concept of fear—one is real and the other is virtual. I represented perhaps the third untouchable caste of post 9/11 New Yorkers: immigrant workers, the people
Thus, this Pagan site of pilgrimage became a powerful symbol of cosmic proportions. Much like the gravitational centre of a galaxy, all of its followers would look to Makkah as their spiritual and moral epicentre. It would even be adorned by the pieces of a comet-meteorite that is the center of the ritual of the rights of Umrah. The black stone, or Hajar Aswad, brings the Ka’bah a cosmic dimension, with the center of gravitational or spiritual energy being the paradoxical supreme power of the void within. It is the very same process as a star supernova expelling its excess burnt or extraneous matter, only to recombine into the most powerful force in the universe: a black hole, a place in which all physical laws break down, where the gravity is so intense that we cannot prove its components. Leaving us to question where and who we are in this seemingly infinite system of dimensions.

Whether real, or hypothetically through ‘threat levels,’ the consciousness of vulnerability became a cultural reality. That event, though not unique, made an impression in the fabric of civilizations. Another temple had fallen, and just like Solomon’s, its foundations would be preserved for eternity. The people touched by that attack became part of the underpinnings of a new history, a new chapter—one more night being added to the two thousand and one already written.

Figures 16 and 17: Opposite Above: The Pinwheel Galaxy with supermassive black hole at center. Below: The silver frame protecting the rock of the Ka’bah, The black stone, or Hajar Aswad, a meteorite dedicated to the prophet Abraham.
Figures 18 and 19: Opposite


With illustrative curves and lines of intersection with orientation to the Ka’bah. Opposite Below: The earth with imaginary bridges to Makkah.

In the year 623CE, the prophet Muhammad received a revelation ordering his followers to face Makkah. They had previously used another focal point, Jerusalem, during prayer. The world did not have distinct boundaries or form at that time—in fact, most cultures believed it was flat.

Orientating toward a destination was done using stars. The sun was used on particular days of the year when it would be directly 90 degrees perpendicular to a location, in this case Makkah was perfect as it is almost equatorial.

Today, on a spherical Earth, at greater distances the idea of orientation changes, ironically, it becomes in a sense paradoxical: do you orient to an arc that a plane would fly or to latitude, or through the mantle of the Earth?

This has architectural implications for the orientation and design of Mosques and public squares in Muslim cultures.

There are a few ways to see the orientation of prayer in Islam. The first is to see it as an abstract concept without real physical importance, thus the idea of orienting toward Makkah can be done inexacty. The second is to follow the methods of rhumb lines and arcs to establish the orientation of the shortest line in distance to makkah or a line that travels without ‘curvature’, but in fact both have that property. Ironically, when this is done, two focal points result, the
antipode of Makkah lies in one of the most isolated regions of the Southern Pacific Ocean. The third way is to see oneself in relation to Makkah and draw a line traveling within the earth to the Ka’bah, this is an angle cutting into the ground and directly intersecting the Ka’bah. This third method is never followed by Muslims, but in fact, it would be the most direct orientation. The fundamental point is that these rules, though stated in the Quran, cannot be seen as static.

Figures 20 and 21: Opposite above: A standard pseudocyclical map of the Earth with arcs of orientation to Makkah. Opposite below: Makkah as the new gravitation center of the earth.
There is nothing new about changing historically important aspects of mosques across Islam. The best precedent for this was the changes made to Isfahan by the Safavid Kings in the early first millennium. In fact, these changes were almost always political rather than religious.

The recent crisis in Makkah is population and crowd control, they have to expand the scale of the mosque to accommodate the Hajj. But what about expanding the nature of the Hajj itself, the nature of the centre of the mosque, not only its exterior?

Figures 22 and 23: Opposite above: The main central zone of Makkah and the Ka‘Bah. Opposite below: The Ka‘Bah removed and replace by a depression in the floor of the Mosque.

For example, to get the rest of the Makkahns to convert to Islam, the prophet Muhammad changed the focus of prayer to Makkah rather than Jerusalem [Quran Surah 2, The Cow, Lines 120-160, Qibla]. This was the way to get the most powerful and politically important people in the city, such as the Quraishi (keeper of the Keys), to convert to Islam. Essentially, he aligned the socio-economic interests of the most powerful clans in Makkah with the religion. Thus, the religion is very political, physically, always changing.

Change is Islamic, it is not the horrible static object depicted by the ignorant. The temple at Isfahan, one of the most important cities and temples in the Muslim world, was changed to help create one of the most spectacular public plazas in history. When the square was built for the city, the Safavid Kings, who were sufis that converted to Shiite, actually moved the Friday Mosque to activate the public plaza in front of the royal palace and gardens! It became essentially an extension of the procession marked by the bazaar and royal garden. This place is still evolving, they changed the name to the Imam Khomaini mosque, which is further evidence of politics in religion; the original name was the King’s Mosque.
In Isfehan, the top of the square is the kings palace, it used to be separate, however they joined them and then built the square, Isfehan was built for ceremonies. so they matched the square to the palace. thus the major public space was oriented to the political power, not the religion within the mosque. In fact, it is widely understood that the Ayatolla was far more active in politics during his life than he was ever a religious cleric.

The way to get the people back to the square, the only way they could get the population to come to the square was to move the friday mosque to the bottom end of the square, thus also rotated toward makkah, seemingly in no relation to the major public avenues. Very convincing work has been done proving this set of evolutionary characteristics by a young Iranian Architect and Historian, Pooya Baktiash (see appendix).

Figures 24 and 25: Opposite above: The center of Makkah and the Ka’Bah. Opposite below: The Ka’Bah removed and replaced by a depression in the floor of the Masjid Al-Haram. This becomes the new naval of the earth, the spot where our greatest aspirations of the abstract and the greater than life are manifest.
On Authority

In another time, in a desert oasis on the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula, there lived the queen Sheba. Her beauty was irresistible, and her powers alchemical. It was long before the birth of Christianity or Islam, in an area where Pharaohs, Pagans and Jews reigned. Sheba was so captivating and her lands so fertile that she was said to be one who could control matter and its states, affecting destiny. Nearby, in the land known as Kanaan, a King named Solomon was building one of the greatest temples in history, His First Temple. It would have been close to 1000/1623 B.C.E. When Sheba heard of Solomon’s great efforts and of his greatness she decided that she must meet him in person. But instead of going to him, she would bring him to her. Using her powers, Sheba created a flying carpet large enough to hold his entire court. With it he could fly them all speedily across his kingdom, across the desert, to see Sheba in hers. It was an object made out of desire.

A competition was held in New York in the Winter of 2002-03 to design a piece of furniture for the twenty-first century. I decided to enter. At that point, the website counter indicated more than nine hundred groups submitting designs. After all, it was just a drawing, nothing had actually been given the responsibility of being real.

The organizers released a competition brief offering the definition to work from: ‘a chair is a device with four legs and a back to support a person, it can also be a position of authority and dignity.’ Based on the exact constraints of times passed, they wanted something ‘hot,’ something for the future. They used the slogan of being in the hot seat. Their rules needed to melt into thin air. The story of Sheba’s flying carpet is more open to the future than their avant-garde nostalgia. The chair, or any object for the twenty-first century, would need to support different definitions and functions than a back.

I asked Blair, my breakfast partner, if he was interested in looking at some ideas, perhaps even working together. I began with tiny sketches of things like chairs with various functions, starting with one that could accommodate bodily secretions: the diaper chair. This evolved into various other explorations including sexual positioning, but alas, I found out that this too had already been achieved—even mass produced by Karim Rashid. Anything I dreamed of and drew up in my original investigations were parts of well-mapped terrains. I needed another vessel, or at least a vast ocean that nobody had crossed yet. Perhaps a chair for a terrorist? Or perhaps a chair made of the remains of the WTC, left at a dump on Staten Island? Blair suggested that we create a bean...
Figure 27: Developmental renderings of the monuments for prayer.
The prayer rug is never mentioned in the Quran; it is a device that evolved out of necessity, not doctrine. Nonetheless, it has become an icon in depictions of a Muslim’s life and faith outside of Islam. Because prayer is central to a religion that is more orthopraxic than others, the rug is simply a clean practical medium upon which to perform it. Indeed, textiles and pattern-making became essential aspects of Islamic cultures, thus these rugs also came to be seen as objects of joy and pride. It made sense for those objects to be depicted in legends. Specifically, the Arabian Nights tome was full of Pagan stories retold and understood in the Arab peninsula. **viii** These stories helped form the icons or windows into Islam; they made it popular.

In Islam, the prayer rug and prayer itself are icons that define its form, and they have rich history. Salaat, the position that must be held precisely and accurately five times daily became the epicentre of this experiment. In some way this is a familiar kind of ergonomic furniture, a chair with a purpose and general function. The most compelling aspect of this impression is the possibility of tiling it over large spaces. The field that results echoes the function and collectivity of the source, which is also part of the experience in a Mosque, as in a field of beings.

The word ‘Islam’ means to submit oneself, before God*. More subtly, it is a condition of being resigned to the existence of God, the act is continuous. Submission is not only a linguistic law, but a bodily activity, ritualized. The concept runs through the heart and body of the religion manifest in Salaat, the word for prayers. It is part of daily existence regardless of any circumstance. A chair based on these histories and faith would be an extension of the magic carpet. This design is a myth manifest physically.

Salaat is the central act in a Muslim’s life, one’s day is meant to begin and end in prayer, a rhythm set by the cosmos as moon dances around Earth. It is fundamentally different than those of Christianity or Judaism. It is not concerned with repentance, rather the universality of God and the act of submission to that force into perpetuity. It is the only abrahamic religion in

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*The recovery effort that ensued immediately after the towers had collapsed was made next to impossible due to the heat the fires within produced. Melted steel beams effervesced a hot slaggy tang. I abandoned the work for a while, not seriously thinking that an entry would happen.

It was noon on a January morning and absolutely frigid. I was walking along the street thinking of the current state of this nonextant chair. Then I stumbled on a man prostrate upon a carpet of crumpled newspapers, wedged between the concrete curb clad in steel and a filthy Ford F-150, facing east: he was praying. He must have just run out of time to find a peaceful place, so he made his own, right there in the street. I could imagine that the layer of slush supporting the paper would have been rather comfortable, perhaps even ergonomic. The newspapers were just able to hold back its wet deluge creeping around the edge of the street.

The chair was going to support that precise act and position in space and time: a prayer chair. That hot, droopy, ergonomic plastic and runny resin from all the studios I had frequented was infecting me. It was only natural that the grid and rational forms that we always experienced would melt again; it needed software to heat the line, make autocad vectors bend and move.

I didn’t know anything about Islam. It was something I had only an impression of through the media. It was a new place for a kid who grew up in a Jewish neighborhood, so I began there. Everything had come full circle from the first days of school on September 11th, 2001. By now it was the trendiest field to investigate, from literature to genetic science. Nobody could escape from the constant media barrage: terrorism and war were everywhere. Everyone getting on a plane was now looking manically for any
Figure 28: Developmental renderings of the monuments for prayer.
Muslims in line at the boarding gate. What does a Muslim look like? A fear perfectly packaged for the consumption of Westerners, by none other than our unbiased Western media. It is a fear toward Muslims with no legitimacy except to the most hardened. After all, why or how could anybody be afraid of Americans?

I thought it might be nice to loosen up a bit, but the whiskey bottle didn’t last too long. Blair and I decided to hole ourselves up in my apartment until something was finished. The wail of heavy metal one minute contrasted the solemn tones of Arvo Part the next; we had different tastes, but for a banker, Blair had a nonsensical mood set that would change at any given moment. I always imagined financial types being decadent characters with limited emotional connection. The drinking, started after a couple of hours of inertia, prevented us from accomplishing anything—we just sat there talking and arguing. By about midnight my friend Neri, who was working for a famous architect during her time off from school at Yale, came over. She was a demure type, highly academic, with a facade of total control and cool intelligence. Her mother had moved to Canada from Barbados, she was undeniably sexy, her rabid logic barely held back what lay beneath. We were wrecked by the time she arrived and Blair had already begun asking me to shave off his hair with a trimmer.

By the time the second bottle of whiskey was half through, his hair was all over my floor, and I passed out on the bed in the centre of the space. He and Neri had made some kind of attempt at love on my couch, how so I have no idea. But by this time Blair had stumbled back up and over near me at the bed, Neri having left presumably just before. I woke up to the sweet stench of warm steamy urine; he had mistaken the bed for the toilet.

I sprang from my position under the duvet. Blair was so startled that he fell over as I hit him, his head making square blunt contact with the hardwood
Figure 30: Details of monument
floor. He stopped moving. A small stream of blood dripped from his brow.

His whole face now bloodied, he turned to me standing over him. Within a second, his head turned as his eyes rolled back and then slammed home again on the hardwood. He passed out as good as dead. I decided to drag him into the bathroom. I gripped the soiled sheet on which he lay half astride, and proceeded down the hall and left him to vomit on himself in buccus on the tiled floors. I slept comfortably that night, in a new set of sheets.

Late in the night I heard him wake up periodically, still too drunk and in pain to pick himself up, he would cry out. Screaming that he loved her, as if I knew who he was talking about. I have never done anything I didn't want to do while drunk, regret was an emotion reserved for a class I hadn't accessed yet. My mind was set that this would be the last occasion we would spend real time together, the memory of his humor all over me was seared into my brain.

The next afternoon I got back from work and he was still there, sitting in his stench, but awake. It wasn’t that he seemed angry, the first thing he asked was why I punched him in the face. I told him that I had no choice, that he urinated on me and that it felt like an affront to my dignity. He would touch the orbit of his left eye every so often, it looked dreadful. The fact is I was happy to make him think I had been the primary cause of the bleed, but it ate me up inside that my nature didn’t bring me to right to it, instead all I could muster was a pathetic shove to a drunkard with the fortune of a wood floor to break the fall. I should have brought him to the hospital, but I was too pissed off to bother. Plus, the scar was going to be part of his brand, it was a favor probably.

At work I had already done some drawings that morning and sent them to as many people as possible, to see how they would feel about the idea. First, to the only professor I had kept in contact with after dropping out and second to some contacts in the Middle East. One of these was a man who had been the first major collector and gallery owner in the region.

Not thinking twice, I sent an informal e-mail with some images. It turned out that the man happened to be a major industrialist in the Emirates, who was generous enough to respond with a number of personal e-mails.
Thu, Jan 24, 2003 at 12:02 PM

Muhammad Kanoo <Muhammad.kanoo@gmail.com>

Thank you for your kind comments yesterday.

I am of two minds about the work you have shared. From a contemporary art perspective I feel it is most creative and intriguing.

Further to your interest to exhibit it here in the Middle East, whilst we both (I spoke with my partner) appreciate the spatial aspects and political commentary associated with such a bold work, I fear it may not be construed, or understood here as such and may cause offense.

At this critical conjecture in our cultural evolution, we both agree that it would not be the right time now to present this, lest it de-rail all our efforts to popularize art and culture. For that matter, anything which may be construed as provocative to Christianity or even Judaism would not be exhibitable, as there remains a deep rooted respect to these religions.

I remain,

Yours Sincerely,
Muhammad Kanoo
Wed, Feb 28, 2003 at 7:19 AM

rjvanpel@engmail.techu.ca
To: I I <Alexanderjosephson@gmail.com>

Dear A,

I have given the situation some more thought, and I really must advise you to go gently on this one: perhaps it would be good that you discuss it with the chairman of the Canadian Muslim Congress, who is a professor in engineering at the University.

You need backing from within the Muslim community to prevent the kind of paranoid hysteria that has accompanied past attempts to raise the issue of the place of Muslims in the Western world—or for that matter any representation of Muslim religion and culture that is not Muslim generated. It is one thing to do a good theoretical project, another thing to launch it in the world as a large demonstration. Especially one that comes across as opportunistic, which is another thing all together. My gut instinct is that if you did it after you have also completed the Jewish and Christian pieces, and would present it as a celebration of all Abrahamic religions, much of the likely controversy could be avoided, or if there is controversy, the Jews, Christians and Muslims could agree on attacking you jointly—which would be a first agreement in many centuries. But a demonstration that only focuses on the Muslim prayer machine provides no opportunity to create a lateral “escape.” Perhaps I am too cautious, but in this case I prefer to err on the side of caution.

It is a pity I am out of the country, and you will be back in Rome by the time I return. So e-mails will have to do the job.

Sincerely,
Robert Jan

The e-mail from the Sheik was a rejection letter I couldn’t have begged to pay for, proof that e-mail can be so revelatory when people let their better judgement go. For some reason we pour our words out uncensored into the electronic ether. To some degree,
because of confidentiality riders, it becomes even easier to be offensive, if not at least politically incorrect. After all, it was absurd that the Sheik could have been frightened of wrecking the Middle Eastern commercial art market by offending people. The note fortified my resolve to see the project through, so I replied to the Sheik by asking if he would like to commission a personal copy of the form in solid gold. No response.

These were educated and respected people. Why they didn’t see the value of a solid gold functional prayer mat evaded me, it would have been a stunning investment—gold has doubled in price since. It would have been a financial instrument, not just a chair. But it wasn’t just the Sheik; others were saying that I had no right to make something that had to do with Islam. They were offended by the materialization of the pieces. They told me that I had no authority to comment on anything religious, because I wasn’t Muslim, I wasn’t religious. People didn’t even censor what they wrote in their e-mails, as if they thought what they were saying would disappear into nothing simply because of the disclaimer in fine print below their words. I even did a survey that was sent out, which I couldn’t include here due to ethics rules.

But the critics weren’t limited to a few conservative Muslims; for the most part they were secular and not Muslim. These were the people, friends and classmates. The reversal of logic was nauseating; it was unfathomable in a so-called free Western society. It was repression, the ultimate stage of democratic society: one in which we repress ourselves and become our own worst censors, either out of fear or consideration of unspoken rules. The object did not separate religion and politics, it obliged them to a duel. Here, instead of two people and guns, it involves a cultural instrument, a seemingly innocuous chair.

People were uncomfortable and began distancing themselves. The problem was that it only goaded me to keep pushing to make it real. The only logical conclusion was to extend that to the masses and the real scale of a congregation. To create fields of impressions and to allow the stories, ideas and facts to inform any group of people regardless of their faith. For a drop out, it would be an insurmountable financial cost.
Figure 32: Opposite: The entrance to Makkah, signage forbidding infidels to enter the holy city.
Paratactical Dejection

Sat, Nov 9, 2003 at 11:26 AM

From Majid Morza <majid.morzid@gmail.com>

Hi Alex:

Thanks so much for your response. Please forgive me if my previous reply sounded at all stoic. Its the e-mail paradox where 80% of the feeling is lost due to lack of tone and body language :)

I re-read the description of Making Manifest and would have to decline this request, for the simple reason, that I, personally, think the sincerity and sublimeness of Salat might be diminished by bringing in external elements. Namely the object and secondly that your methods may not quite appreciate the fidelity of the act. Our two sources are the Quran and Sunnah (example of the Prophet) and although some of the greatest artistic and architectural endeavours were carried out by prominent Muslims, these were kept independent of acts of worship. On the other hand, if you wanted to participate in a prayer gathering at a Masjid (mosque) or Islamic Center I would be happy to arrange this for you, but you aren’t Muslim, so it is always a question of motivation, why would you want to do this?

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to consider this :)  

Majid

5

At this point the debate over what is valuable comes to a catastrophic end. The difference between what is real and unreal blurred so greatly that total breakdown occurs. The weeks I had spent calling and emailing for participants in the study had now come to a perverse end, the responses consistently more saddening and offensive. My own frame of reference, what I called history writ large, was a seemingly naive and two dimensional assumption. The assumption was that there were no bounds to what we can see or choose to design. But that frame of reference was wrong; Majid was questioning my rights. The student wasn’t alone though, many people would later tell me I had no right to read this subject in a critical way. What is more, the sheik’s earlier excuse about ruining his plans to legitimize culture, seemed a nice rejection, but it feels more sinister. Right or wrong, he is simply a
man in a place. To preserve his real identity the most one could say is that he is a prominent industrialist and one of the original patrons to the arts in the United Arab Emirates. His words represented an appraisal that opened a fissure so great in the set of ideas that when I tried to stare it down, it shot back blaringly clear what was always going to be missing. I would never be legitimate, I was not Muslim, I was not faithful, I could convince no Muslim to produce a valuable analysis of prayer with me, or even more so, to take the credit for the project and act as a front. I couldn’t care less about credit, I was too aggravated by now. The forms of this idea would be a hollow stump waiting to collapse as a product of movement without intent and intent without comprehension. It would always be an approximation based on inference rather than observation, thus a new kind of register was required.

If the powers that be needed a Judas of the ilk, then I would give them one. By this point, the fact that anyone, let alone so many voices of opposition, wanted to discourage me from seeing this project through, made me realize that I had passed a point of no return. I actually started to believe in it. Their presumption was that for the project to have any value it needed to be functional, and to be so, a Muslim needed to be willing to sell his soul. Because in their eyes creating an anthropomorphic object directly for the act of prayer and sajida was not only a sacrilege, but an illegitimate pursuit for a non-Muslim. A constitution is a set of words, a veil hiding the ugly face of our natural proclivities toward exclusivity and segregation. This is a frame of reference that is always attenuated by circumstance and interpretation. We no longer read signs, we act them out as if in a diorama. We are all the celebrities of our own newscast, recording our lives on YouTube. It is logical in a time where we no longer speak of virtual reality—there is only digital reality. Realism is a pre-requisite. Why actually know something

**Figures 33 and 34:** Opposite from top to bottom: In the beginning and toward the end of the nineteenth century artists began to examine the dehumanizing effects of the industrial revolution. They were now armed with the corresponding weapons (technology) of their times. They critiqued Modernist thought and the new political systems being imagined, history was increasingly becoming the product of empires. Victory became the directive of truth. Thus, art found meaning in exclaiming what reality or histories were unfolding, right or wrong.

Almost everything the human being perceived as being natural law was on the verge of being flipped upside down. People began to realise new possibilities for civilization, as well as the mechanics of how they perceived the world. History became a moving picture, news became subject to advertising.

Technology was becoming more and more of an extension of our senses. Conversely, humans were also becoming one with technology, our lives were to become more and more about routines. The possibilities were seemingly endless and there were many people who embarked on world changing investigations. One of the most intriguing, perhaps misunderstood, of those first experimenters in photography was Eadweard Muybridge. The impetus for his studies on motion was in fact just such a history, such a sinister one that it is almost a joke. His work would bring art practice into a new dimension of time and space that would be the inspiration for a major strand of art practice that is dominant even in contemporary works.

Behind Muybridge’s studies, lay an excuse: Science. It was the only currency of his age and the only means by which he could mask what was less clearly a vast cultural project: a kinetic portrait of humanity. His efforts to align himself with contemporary scientists to understand velocity and to have a frame of reference for each of his photos, betrays his true actions, his true motivations. Some would have us think his serial photography had a fidelity of perspective, they are wrong.
Muybridge’s decisions while putting together his final plates lie squarely in the realm of aesthetic order, subjective will, in the arena of art not science. His placement of a grid or set of white lines as a rational reference (as seen above), is a truly clever conceit toward the scientists he required for funding, to complete his studies of human cultural activity. Acts that betray the controls of science that would have eliminated differences such as sex or race or species from the kinetic actions he and his biographers exclaimed to be so paramount. In many ways he painted the portrait of our pavlovian life, the increasingly serial nature of our existence.

His studies show men wrestling, women carrying food stuffs, animals hauling carriage, or women exposed in their buxom sexuality. These were hardly necessary nor ideal in their specificity to understand human muscle or ligature kinetics. What they paint, in sublime serial beauty, is the oppressive and yet picturesque reality of our world in his age. This is twofold in its genius, he had simultaneously given legitimacy to his work as science, thus allowing his work to be published in the main stream, and second this allowed artists to then be even more comfortable to draw from his work, see Duchamp’s Nude Wlaking Down The Stairs, and by extension On Kawara.

The background, or conceit, made perfect sense in an age wherein the ability to capture three dimensions mechanically on a two dimensional medium was revolutionary. If one were to perform the same kind when you can depend on e-mail or Google to search it out whenever you need it again after you forgot? An example of information that travels in this void is the presence of extremist websites. They are exceedingly difficult to find and only through supposedly non-extremist ‘tracking sites or research institution sites’ can these violent sites be readily found.

The idea of making an ethical object was raised by a friend, who thought there was a responsibility in our generation of architects to be circumspect, not to alienate or judge through design. This is a time when heat guns and plastic are as much a part of the process as the most important literature, let alone the final large-scale production of architectural components.

Politically, I had already sold my soul; there was no reason to realise the idea except for pride and to resist those who told me I should not. These may be efficient operations, but they are energy-intense. They require massive quantities of embodied carbon through the petroleum cycle and electricity cycle, be it nuclear or not.

That summer, they announced the competition results. The prototype for the prayer mat had not been given mention nor was it included on the Internet with the hundreds of other submissions. Was it censored by the competition administration? I had no proof. I sent out a number of e-mails under other identities in order to probe the situation and did not receive a response, except that the competition had reserved the rights to exclude any submission and to not respond to queries by the entrants. One thing was clear; our visas to remain in the U.S.A. were coming to their end and I wouldn’t be able to stay and fight the fight. I guess I could have, but the thousands of dollars required to pay the lawyers to argue before the Department of Homeland Security that their clients are aliens of extraordinary and unique ability just didn’t excite me. I was either heading back to Canada, or going back to Rome;
of study today, the technology
exists to take those dimensional
parameters even further, to go
into the three dimensional, in a
sense a physical scan based on a
two dimensional photograph: the
inverse of Muybridge, the ultimate
recording device.

The bacground needs to change,
but the content stays the same.
The following graphic is an active
graphic, one in which the paper
literally becomes a medium and
frame of reference that allows
digital photography to become
a three dimensional, real-time
scanner.

**Figure 35:** Opposite: The
concept of a photograph is no
longer a static one, nor simply
a representation of three
dimensions within the plane of
two. The properties of light and
shadow can now be extended
into the physical world. New
developments or rather, extensions
in optics now allow us to capture
motion and even moving-three
dimensions using two dimensional
technologies. The grid is now
replaced by cones and targets,
objects that, instead of being
familiar to the human are the
language of computers. The seemingly pleasant and graphic panels
of dots and circles allow a basic webcam or still camera to create
stereolithographic models of the contents within this new frame.

**Figure 36:** Following Page: photographic targets.
A haboob is a type of intense sandstorm commonly observed in the Sahara desert (typically Sudan), as well as across the Arabian Peninsula, throughout Kuwait, and in the most arid regions of Iraq. African haboobs result from the northward summer shift of the intertropical front into North Africa, bringing moisture from the Gulf of Guinea. Haboob winds in the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Kuwait are frequently created by the collapse of a thunderstorm. The southwestern deserts of Arizona, including Yuma and Phoenix, also experience haboobs. During thunderstorm formation, winds move in a direction opposite to the storm’s travel, and they will move from all directions into the thunderstorm. When the storm collapses and begins to release precipitation, wind directions reverse, gusting outward from the storm and generally gusting the strongest in the direction of the storm’s travel.
In the birth of Christ is embodied not only the concepts of resurrection and redemption but, by result, what we call the Common Era. Time is manifest though the miracle of his virgin birth. The end of all other eras was marked by a virgin birth and a new zero was implied.

In Islam the concepts of era and time are equally important. Its new era begins 623 years after the birth of Christ, but instead it is marked by the year of Muhammad’s first revelation not his birth. The difference is subtle, but similar. Christ represented an immaculate conception, his body the physical manifestation of God and then his resurrection, whereas in Muhammad case things were more practical. He was an orphan born naturally on all accounts.

The early followers of Islam were left no other choice; they decided the new era would begin from the year when God spoke through Muhammad, rather than his birth. Thus time begins at revelation. It is consistent with the important point that in Islam the human body and matter are secondary, everything is trained toward the future, to the afterlife.

The prophet’s physical birth is either 552CE or 570CE. Most of the seven holy academies of Islam claim that it is indeed 552CE, which corresponds to the Year of The Elephant, which is a surah in the Quran. In the Ahmed Ali Princeton press version of the Quran, he places the chapter/surah ‘Elephants’ or ‘Al-Fil’ on page 552, ironically.

For the Mekkans, fear became overwhelming. They were clearly outnumbered. Abraha had come for the Ka’bah and all of its contents, intent to unseed Makkah as the economic hub in the region.

Then, in just an instant came darkness. The air thickened even more and nobody could breathe. There were only screaming voices. The red dust covered everything and rained down a hail of stones. A violent wind brought the sand in fifteen foot drifts up the sides of the walls—pushing, scraping and overcoming it all. The hordes were massacred by the larger pebbles, the elephants collapsed instantly, soldiers fell on the dunes and slowly suffocated. Lighting and thunder flickered vaguely inside the dark storm and within hours there was nobody left standing.

The early summer in Rome can be inclement, one minute it’s sunny and twenty eight degrees Celsius, but then dark cumulous clouds appear and unleash a maelstrom of cherry sized hail, only to disappear barely minutes later. They come from nowhere and the next thing you know you are in the center of a concert, car hoods Mazzeratis and Cinquecentos alike, their windshields pounded and in some cases obliterated by the weather.

The week we moved back was difficult, I was having a hard time finding a place, living and working in Elisa’s house was not going to work. Into our second week she had already begun filming the scenes of a short film commissioned by the state media board, I admittedly wasn’t trying hard enough.

One night she arrived late and I hadn’t prepared anything for her. She opened the
This is most likely the year in which the Pagan Makkahns were attacked by Abrahu and subsequently won by dint of a storm of ‘birds in flocks, striking them with stones of baked clay, so He rendered them like straw eaten up’... The Makkahns saw this as a miracle and later associated it with the prophet's birth—thus also a miracle. This even though the prophet was orphaned at least four times in his infancy which would have made any practical attempt of dating his birth almost impossible to achieve.\textsuperscript{[14]}

That year was said to be that of Muhammad’s birth because the events that year were prescient. Through the prophet’s birth the city of Makkah was saved, and it forshadowed the symbolic importance of eventually destroying the Pagan idols stored there. Makkah was the largest shrine of Pagan idolatry in the region and it was the center of its economic prosperity. It resulted in jealousy, sparking the attack by the Abysineans. The prophet’s birth follows that idol worship would be doomed. That set of events is an integral influence on Islamic culture—not only the religion itself but specifically the arts. Many forms of idolatry place the human form and representations of it on a pillar. This is central to the Old and New Testaments. Islam rejected idolatry and brought with it a critique of anthropomorphic representations of God, humans, and the cult of materialism. In fact, one of the surahs in the Quran is called ‘Ornaments of Gold,’ ornament being diminutive.

Muhammad consistently preached the importance of Christians and especially Jews. Until the year 630CE, the direction of Qibla or the direction of prayer in Islam was to Jerusalem, not to Makkah.\textsuperscript{[15]} The Jews and Christians were protected peoples and are still named as such in the Qur’an. One can also find repeated reference to unbelievers though, which leads many critics to contend that the treatment of any non-Muslim by the Quran is violent and unjust. But the Western media does not want the fact of this positive history to be well known or widespread.
The histories are clear: Islam did not exist in isolation and its development went alongside pagan Arabs and the other Abrahamic religions—Judaism and Christianity. In fact, the sabbath as well as the dietary requirements of Islam are shared with Judaism. The Jews who lived outside of Makkah in 622CE accepted Muhammad’s plea for refuge in the town known as Yathrib, a Hebrew derived name, now replaced by the city called Medina. It was originally founded by Jewish tribes and is now the second holiest site in Islam. It would seem that if people put aside their prejudices and simply looked at the initial events in history, more tolerance would result, yet this is not the case. Muhammad founded the first mosque, his home, on what was purportedly an abandoned cemetery given to him by the tribes of Yathrib. These stories have gone virtually untold in the media.

The development of Islam began not only through revelation, but also in Muhammad’s rejection of idolatry. The entire Muslim world orients toward the Ka’bah during prayer. Five times per day, based on the lunar cycles, Muslims pray toward Makkah, their collective will aligned. In fact, the first location that the Muslims prayed toward from Yathrib and Makkah was to Jerusalem. Salaat is a powerful collective activity conscious of a perpetual rhythm. This is not Sunday mass, it is not an energy spike once a week for atonement, it is a daily dedication. The Ka’bah has a cosmological signficance, it is a gravitational singularity in some way. The Hajj and circumnavigation of the Ka’bah is an astounding vision of the human religious energy. It all appears to vibrate; the arcades and terraces are proportioned so that they suggest a spin into the heart of the great mosque. Even the black stone of Ishmael is a cosmic object. All of this builds up to a set of powers that beg for a cosmological comparison. It is no surprise that the centre of worship in Islam is directed through architecture. At that, the simplest idea of it—an empty box. There is an intriguing history of how the Ka’bah was emptied, in fact, the act of emptying it of its contents marks the initial victory of Islam. This is the rejection of idol worship and anthropomorphic representations of God(s).

When foreigners began to take a liking to it. Indeed, by this point, the seat of two governments and countless movies had made the cost of living in the centre almost intolerable to the most fortuitous individuals, let alone the super rich. I was lucky; my friends helped generously with the space. This one in particular had been occupied by an elderly woman of about eighty four years who had passed away inside only to be found weeks later due to the stench in the hallway. She had not paid any substantial rent in over thirty years. The water was drawn into the apartment from a tank on the roof space. It smelled of moth balls, and old photographs. I wasn’t complaining; any space was good space, especially since I wasn’t going to be working for anyone but myself.

Without the help of a Muslim I decided that I would drive further into the heart of the subject. Perhaps if I couldn’t make a form or derive a site I could create a space or spiritual zone for myself. With two compressors and sixty kilograms of pure titanium white pigment, Federico and I sprayed the entire space, floor to ceiling. There was even an old, leather-bound travel box for a camera left on the sideboard that we sprayed. I finally had a space that I could call my own.

The last time I was in a spiritual place—because it was a slog reading through the Quran I tended to drift mentally—was a synagogue for my great aunt’s funeral. She had spent a month in bed losing the excruciating fight against cancer of the intestines, which spread to her stomach and liver. She had never had children and her husband, who had died decades earlier, was rumored to have driven her totally insane. I remember phone calls wherein she would talk and I would physically fall asleep for as much as twenty minutes, which seemed to have no effect on her whatsoever. After the ceremony, which was attended by scores of mothballed widows and widowers, the Rabbi approached me outside of the foyer where the
The Ka'bah at Makkah, more than fourteen centuries later, represents a new political epicenter in the world. It is the site of an annual pilgrimage that is a sight to behold, though it is a place limited to Muslims. The Hajj and its ritual of circumambulation about the stone of Ishmael and the Ka'bah, even from photography, is powerful. Herein the collective will of Islamic history and currents of faith are manifest. It is simultaneously an act of collective will while also affirming the singular nature of faith itself, the Ka'bah being the singularity or gravitational object binding all Muslims to the faith. Nowhere else in the world is any public display of beliefs expressed in this scale; over one million Muslims can be present in the shrine during the Hajj season. It eclipses political rallies in the United States as well as Chinese communist party demonstrations.

The Hajj is an annual event that is the world's most powerful political symbol. It is this event that prompts this project to manifest a political identity. It shows an unfamiliar territory where the laws of religion and state are interdependent. This contravenes most things secularism take for granted, it is an extraordinarily powerful schism. It brings to bear the fact that two very large groups of people in this world have such black and white contradictory rationales to society. Taken to a further extent, religion is near banned in Communist China.

In Islam prayers are made by individuals in close physical proximity to each other. (Shoulder by shoulder). There are carefully measured spaces between each 'impression' in this project. This emphasizes individualism and mortality rather than the collectivity of the faith community. It is about the absence of those items. This is a sociological criticism built into the project based on the paradox of a suicide bomber or martyr being completely isolated, when the communal and collective is more important. Instead they are searching for the collective in heaven, and also the mortality here. It is in response to the Western tradition of burying soldiers in the earth at equal intervals as seen at cemeteries.

Perhaps it is foolish, but to me the idea of believing had next to nothing to do with what my family thought or did. I actually would have begged to believe. It would have been a gift like no other to have that tender sensation of righteousness, or even comfort that such a religion could offer. The Rabbi's speech—there was no gravity there, nothing telling me that those reasons, such as community, should make me feel like these stories were seductive enough.

My close friend Federico Bacciochi, a young architect, told me about a friend of his that would be perfect for the project. He had been exiled from Tunisia and now resided in Pantelleria, a strategic island near the very tip of Italy's reach beneath Sicily. He explained that Med was the son of an aristocratic family in Carthage, where they presided over a vast interest on the coastal portlands. According to Federico Med's family disowned him upon his return from university. He had studied in Lebanon in the early seventies and had fought as part of the Muslim resistance during the Karantina massacre. He was forced out afterwards and drove all the way back to Tunisia by way of Jordan and eventually took a ferry to avoid the conflict in the Sinai, in a used BMW.
Fri, Feb 16, 2003 at 9:54 AM

I I <Alexanderjosephson@gmail.com>
To: med—hasan@hotmail.com

Dear Med,

Thank you for talking with me the other day about my project.

Federico is going to be working very closely with me on this and we couldn’t ask for a better collaborator than yourself. Would you be willing to help out the next time you pass through Roma?

Some people find this project opportunistic because I am not Muslim, but I am confident I will be able to extend this work to other faiths. I aim to make physical the metaphysical, the act of prayer. Perhaps we can strike back at bombs with another type of weapon. The prayer impressions, which are monuments, that I have attached images of are a kind of sculpture or painting perhaps of the residue of prayer. This has intonations of being functional, with some limitations regarding size. It is very raw at this point and I understand that there may be some other religious laws that need to be abided by regarding positions of prayer and anthropomorphism. I would be very grateful if you might comment honest and candidly.

Gratefully,

Alexander
The startling aspect of the Jewish Ghetto is that it is in fact aligned to within an astonishing one degree to Qibla. It is the only major axis, or piazza of any significance in the urban fabric that is aligned so closely to the Ka'bah. It is ironic that two religious groups that have seemingly drifted so far apart from their original relationship can be held together so subtly in that artifact. Even if the alignment is a total fluke. Perhaps the Jewish Ghetto in Rome is a harbinger to an eventual reconciliation, a closing of the gap between history and time and the hate in between.

Hi Alexander,

I would be happy to lend a few words, I spoke to Federico and he has given me some idea of what you are doing.

From what I see you are making a type of sculpture/impression in some material. It looks like you’re trying to capture the impression of prayer in the earth? As if to capture the body in the desert sand dunes. It is fine to me, and I don’t see why anyone would have a problem with it. If you are using an actual person in photos you might want to be careful... If you do they should be wearing clean clothes and generally in a clean environment. Someone wouldn’t necessarily pray in or on just anything. Of course this is not always true as you can pray on anything clean. Are you close to being finished? Let me know about your progress, this sounds interesting, but you didn’t send me enough to be really candid yet.

Good luck, keep me in the loop.

Peace,
Med

Mon, Feb 19, 2003 at 5:56 PM

Med hasan <med—hasan@hotmail.com>
To: Alexanderjosephson@gmail.com

Hi Alexander,

I would be happy to lend a few words, I spoke to Federico and he has given me some idea of what you are doing.

From what I see you are making a type of sculpture/impression in some material. It looks like you’re trying to capture the impression of prayer in the earth? As if to capture the body in the desert sand dunes. It is fine to me, and I don’t see why anyone would have a problem with it. If you are using an actual person in photos you might want to be careful... If you do they should be wearing clean clothes and generally in a clean environment. Someone wouldn’t necessarily pray in or on just anything. Of course this is not always true as you can pray on anything clean. Are you close to being finished? Let me know about your progress, this sounds interesting, but you didn’t send me enough to be really candid yet.

Good luck, keep me in the loop.

Peace,
Med
Dear Med,

Many people seem to think that this will garner death threats and other malaise. But, I disagree. I believe Muslims will appreciate this and all of the rules it seems to question. At this point, paranoia is strikingly Caucasian. As if the rules we invented to stabilize our society are fighting back against us.

I have decided that the impressions should be made of either solid gold or possibly a black glossy plastic—a derivative of crude oil. A slight reference to the economic underpinnings of the seat of Wahabbi Islam in Saudi Arabia. The gold would be in reference to the Sura ‘Ornaments of Gold’ in the Quran, where opulence and consumption are criticized—a backhanded statement about inconsistencies in contemporary Middle Eastern monarchies. Not to mention the special economic zones they have created such as Dubai, wherein our Western attitudes are supported. This is about Islam in the age of liquid consumerism.

I want to extend the single form into a field of them, creating a manifestation for lack of a different word. Wherein the forms function for prayer, while also bringing Islam into the public eye in a different political context.

The form you saw in the picture is like a tile in my mind, imagine many hundreds of these tiled over a large surface indoors, but perhaps outdoors also. It becomes a spiritual space or a mosque even. The idea is to create a large number of these in the formed plastic versions or another very light material that could potentially be stacked and these placed in front of say Parliament in Ottawa. Perhaps even in Washington at the ellipse, oriented to Makkah, like a compass.

Be Well,

Alexander
I don’t know if I said it in the last e-mail but I’m not fond of the gold impression... Gold was seen as a sign of extravagance at the time of the prophet and prayer is supposed to be plain. I think a gold chair would be a symbol for everything wrong with Islam regarding material idols. Why would you do this when you can get it made out of wood or something and use the money you save to help out people in need. You seem adamant about making one out of gold, to use as a symbol of the problems with Islam...I also dislike the name prayer chair. Usually only old people or the disabled use things called prayer chairs, monuments are a better one. Perhaps it isn’t even a functional chair in the end?

The prayer usually, unless in emergency cases, includes cleaning yourself with water or in some ancient ways with sand. I don’t remember if I mentioned that, but the impressions you are making also brings to mind craters, or rather impressions in the dunes of the open desert. There is mention of this in the hadith, though I can’t remember which one at the moment, something about the ground boiling up beneath the feet of the followers of Muhammad as they prayed.

Keep me posted.

Peace,

Med
this point that home started making some sense to me. There is a widely
known convention in Toronto that any kind of political demonstration or
act of faith can be represented at the Parliament buildings there. It is a natu-
ral part of a city that, over time, has nurtured some of the worlds largest
inner city minority populations.

There was still no site, or physical context available except an abstract set
of histories and rules. The park was a long shot, at least for someone like
me with no experience. Furthermore, according to so many of my critics
I wasn’t even allowed to discuss or design unless I was religiously sanc-
tioned.

These are the kind of people that believe in rules, ones that in each reli-
gion, contradict historical sciences as they have developed. For example, in
Canada in 2008, one couldn’t count the number of cases of tricinosis infected
pork on one hand.

Tue, Mar 6, 2003 at 2:24 AM

Alexander I <Alexanderjosephson@gmail.com>
To: Med hasan <med—hasan@hotmail.com>

Dear Med,

I want to invite you to participate on the project, come to Rome, I know Pan-
telleria is distant but I would be happy to help you get here. At the moment
I am in negotiations with Queens Park in Toronto, well, I have sent them a
request with a rendering of the idea. Then there is the Canadian Parliament
Ottawa, and now Washington D.C. to get permission to set up a field of 570
(the year of the birth of the prophet or also 552) impressions. Queens Park
seems to be the most likely place, given their open policy about demonstrations, plus it is in the city where I was raised.

Would you help, if for at least the possibility that they say yes and I have nothing physical it would be a mess! I would ask you for a letter stating that you have been advising in the design of the impressions and that its intentions are toward the better understanding or acceptance of Islam in Western contexts. We need mention nothing of any critique as it will only infuriate people. I have attached the demonstrations permission form that I am submitting in the next 48 hours to the Sergeant at Arms office at Queens Park.

I want to ask them for July 16th, which at 12noon as you may know is one of the days when the Sun is DIRECTLY over Mecca and the Ka’bah. Thus our shadows will fall in the opposite direction of Mecca and this will be how we map the site at queens park for the giant field of impressions. The same method the ancient tribes used to orientate themselves. It will be a kind of overlaying of a new cosmic order, which always seems to exist at a strange opposition to Western planning (such as the Ontario Parliament buildings). I want to leave the demonstration standing for hopefully a week.

Fondly,

Alexander
Figure 51: The Homogenous Field, a grouping of impressions such that the rules of Salaat are followed through contact, each piece abuts the adjacent.
Building Faust

The bed sat at the center of a vast library, an old monestary converted into a giant repository. Papers and manuscripts lay strewn all over the olive wood flooring and mahogany tables. It was late, the candles had filled the room with the stench of honey, flickering across the mediocre but charming fresco of the three muses on the ceiling. They cast shadows of bodies across the sheets, Latin, Italian, and the wild strokes of Arabic flashing across the pages. Exhausted and drenched in the sweat of a visceral yet loveless act, the young poet rolled off his mate. Gemma panted and her breast heaved as she struggled to catch her breath, her arm fell across Dante’s chest as if to acknowledge her presence but not her comfort. Yet her suffering would not last long; she would fall into a deep sleep, leaving the contractual bonds of their youth to rest even for just a few hours while he would rise and continue:

Now new punishments I must fit to verse,

Shaping the subject for my twentieth canto

Of the first canticle on the buried damned.

Already I was fully set to look

Far down into the depth that opened to me

To see its bottom bathed with tears of anguish,

When through the valley’s circling I described

People coming hushed and weeping, at the pace

Followed by processions in this world.

As my fixed gaze descended lower to them,

Each seemed bizarrely twisted at the neck

Between the chin and top part of the chest,

Because their faces turned round to their haunches

The Hadith Volume 1, Book 2, Number 49:

Narrated An-Nu’man bin Bashir:

I heard Allah’s Apostle saying,

Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the Hima (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people!) Beware! Every king has a Hima and the Hima of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.
The Italian scholar Enrico Cerrulli was the first to question the origins of Dante’s Inferno, the three part serial poem describing Dante’s ascension to paradise through hell. His conclusion was that Dante was most likely influenced by a story called the Mi’raj, which is the story of the ascension the prophet Muhammad took in one night, around the year 621CE, to paradise. It is important because this was translated into Latin just prior to Dante’s birth in the early 13th century, and it is widely regarded to be the first detailed account of the conditions in hell, which are extraordinarily similar to Dante’s. Those were then adopted almost unanimously across western cultures.

So that they were compelled to walk backwards
Since they could not possibly see ahead.

Perhaps a stroke of palsy once has twisted
Someone so completely, but I doubt it
For I have never seen a case like this.

May God so grant you, reader, to find fruit
In your reading: now ponder for yourself
How I could keep the eyes in my head dry

When I saw close at hand our human image
Contorted so the tears streaming from their eyes
Bathed their buttocks and ran between the cleft.

I wept, surely, while I leaned back against
A rock there on that rugged ridge; my escort
Said, “Still like all the other fools, are you?”

“Here pathos lives when its false meaning dies,
Since who is more pathetic than the person
Who agonizes over God’s just judgments?”

Dante Aligheri, La Divina Commedia, False Prophets Canto

Tue, Mar 20, 2003 at 5:59 PM

From: Med Hasan <med—hasan@hotmail.com>

I will be in Rome in two days, then we can begin. You have your Judas my little prophet. You will have two months to finish and produce the forms, that is, if you can chase the path of the sun.

PEACE

Med

(see ethics approval forms for volunteer subjects in appendix 8Y)

When he arrived it was one of those days, sweltering heat after days of near-frigid and damp conditions. Heat was going to become more important than I had imag-
Figure 54: The Heretics, Circle 6, Canto XI. 1480s Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro Filipepi), part of the series of studies and paintings he completed for the entire work.
and there is the infidel tribe of Mudar intervening between you and us. So please order us to do something good (religious deeds) so that we may inform our people whom we have left behind (at home), and that we may enter Paradise (by acting on them)."

Then they asked about drinks (what is legal and what is illegal). The Prophet ordered them to do four things and forbade them from four things. He ordered them to believe in Allah Alone and asked them, "Do you know what is meant by believing in Allah Alone?" They replied, "Allah and His Apostle know better." Thereupon the Prophet said, "It means:

1. To testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle.
2. To offer prayers perfectly
3. To pay the Zakat (obligatory charity)
4. To observe fast during the month of Ramadan.
5. And to pay Al-Khumus (one fifth of the booty to be given in Allah’s Cause).

Then he forbade them four things, namely, Hantam, Dubba,' Naqir Ann Muzaffat or Muqaiyar; (These were the names of pots in which Alcoholic drinks were prepared) (The Prophet mentioned the container of wine and he meant the wine itself). The Prophet further said (to them): "Memorize them (these instructions) and convey them to the people whom you have left behind."

I had been preparing the studio for Med’s arrival for days. The rooms were immaculate. The notion that this angel was descending upon my studio to do things that every Muslim let alone confidente of mine thought impossible was still not real to me. When Federico brought him by my studio that afternoon, except for his tall sinewy frame, he was everything I wouldn’t have expected from a refugee. Elegant, with a cream-coloured linen jacket and a black scarf; his mottled face of deeply tanned skin supported two of the most intense black eyes I have ever seen. They were huge, disproportionate things that you expect on some other sort of being. His eyebrows were so long and bushy they curled on end as if to extend the curly locks of his dark Arabian hair. He must have been in his fifties but looked no older than forty and had the energetic presence of a teenager. In a raspy voice the first thing he asked me was in which language would I prefer to speak to him. Italian? English? You said you were originally from Canada, how about French, he gibed.

When I asked how religious he was, he told me that until this trip he hadn’t prayed in over two decades.

There is a condition that some people have dubbed the Jerusalem Syndrome, whereby upon visiting the holy city they begin to have delusional or even psychotic breaks of a religious kind. It might be likened to the Stendhal effect in Venice. Sometimes Rome has a similar effect on certain visitors, they enter a kind of self revelatory condition—well, let’s call it an experimental stage. Med was going through something similar; his excitement was palpable. The idea that some random atheist, let alone a Jew, from another time and place needed him to perform was borderline ridiculous. Needless to say, he was driven to
It was right down to business, he really wanted to just start and let us learn. The studio was all set up facing Makkah so he began by washing himself. I had assembled two basins of warm water. Explaining every point during the process, he washed his hands twice, then fingers and then all the way to the elbows. He rinsed his mouth out twice very gently, being very careful to grasp the water with his right hand which he also did for his nose, sending the waste into a third basin. He then rinsed his sweating forehead moving in a smooth circular motion down to his neck and then the back of it. He finished with his ears before moving down to his feet.

Then he stood up and began to speak softly. Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar... God (the one god) is Great...

The hair on the back of my neck began to slowly stand on end until the tingle had traveled all the way down my arms and shoulders. His voice had changed completely, it was gentle and rhythmic combined with the sound of his garments creasing as he gestured down and across his chest. It was musical. The choreography of it completely transformed the atmosphere in that studio. It was no longer a factory, it was a temple.

By the end of the prayer, he looked both ways and said something over both of his shoulders, as if there were people right there with him. When he was done he looked over to me and said that this is when I say my peace to the good and bad devils of me. He broke out laughing. It was as if he had never stopped; the position of his left foot, his arms, the tone of his voice, the idea that he hadn’t done this in twenty years was impossible.

Med was a more willing collaborator than I could have ever asked. He didn’t feel as if he were blighting the prayer, even when we attached LEDs to his clothes to capture the movements with light. The countless rejections I had received from other Muslim students or otherwise were trivial now, they meant nothing. To Med, his spirituality wasn’t a static concept wrapped up in the ancient language of tradition. His was the part of that religion that is so intoxicating, the parts that are about a progress and change. After each prayer, during which he would recite a different section of the Quran, he would chat with me about life and religion—writing poetry. He told me that after he moved to Beirut in the seventies he had started to write and described a life enriched
through making art and readings that weren’t available at home.

He had an insatiable appetite for culture. His religion, or the practice passed down to him, was no more important than any other menial activity. He wrote me a poem that first night at the trattoria Augusto in Trastevere after the gruelling session of more than eight hundred photographs over six hours. Trastevere was a mess at that time of the year; American students at the plethora of satellite architecture schools were everywhere, the piazzas were concert halls of body.

A person once told me that if you are less than thirty years old and not ideological then you have no heart, but if you are older than thirty without having rejected them, then you are a fool. Med was exiled from Tunisia at barely twenty six and still a practising Muslim; his socialist leanings in Lebanon hadn’t taken his soul, much to the chagrin of his conservative family, who couldn’t possibly reconcile the implications of his politics. He became an active demonstrator in Carthage with a young group of French and Tunisian situationists. The straw that broke his back was when they conscripted an entire factory of textile workers to lock down and demand unionized wages. The police and military were brought in and massacred the entire place. No less than fifty people would be beaten to death that night, October 4, 1968.

It was after he was deported to Pantelleria, the Italian island paradise just off the horn of Tunis, that he atrophied. The indigenous locals still resemble the Persians that first settled there centuries earlier, most likely Muslims themselves. At sunset you can see the horn of Tunisia on the horizon, with Tunis just behind it. He eventually rustled up enough money to help out local politicians and restore boats to purchase a small patch of land on the leeward side of the island where the volcanic soil was perfect for farming. It’s the kind of soil that with the combination of infernal heat in the mornings and cool evenings can grow something tree sized in mere weeks. The olive orchard he planted became one of the best in southern Italy and slightly notorious in the great kitchens of the world for the oil he named after the son that he would never have: Per mio figlio.

Med insisted we start at the break of dawn the next day, the time of Fajr was at about 4:47am. We would spend the day like a practicing Muslim would in the Middle East, well at least the prayers: Fajr (Dawn), Shorook (Sunrise), Zuhr (Noon), Asr (Afternoon), Maghrib (Sunset), Isha (Night). He decided
that we would bounce off to the local café called Sacchetti on Piazza San Cosimato between the hours and have something to drink or to snack. He never left without a red pad he carried around, like a Chinese citizen under the cultural revolution, except he filled his with poetry, if he wasn’t talking he wrote poetry. That is, if he wasn’t drinking a cold Peroni Riserva—he prefered beer with a little ice after lunch.
Building on Heat

8 Behind the doors protecting my face from the heat, the plastic slumped, dancing on the edge of being a liquid and solid. The machine was more like a room, with a gaping set of vertical hung shutters punctuated by three thick glass apertures about the size of a standard oven pan. Its guts ran up and down, overhead and then across, then disappearing into perforations along the battressing keeping the walls and floor in perfect stillness. Fans, pumps, and rushing gas through elements vibrated and spread a thick stench of industrial burn into the air. A pair of enormous black tanks about the size of a small liquid transport truck were tucked in behind the giant tower of green powder coated steel lining the furnace. The three windows stood in the centre of a giant door that you could have driven a truck through. They couldn’t contain the heat and the noise was deafening. The feeling of being inside an oven is less awkward than one can imagine. The fear of making contact with anything rings hard at every second; you try to protect yourself but eventually you are resolved to the fact that you will burn, and your feet become the limiting agent of your time within as your soles melt onto the elements underneath them.

Getting to a mass producable object is a particular process, each stage bringing you close enough to kiss the next, and that approaching the level of tolerance only a machine can perceive. The problem is that there is no tolerance; a machine has no eye nor imagination, it follows the lines of least resistance. Those in turn either become the points at which production grinds to a total standstill or, if they are properly accounted for, allow the run to come to fruition. What is hard to avoid is forgetting the ungraceful parts, the temptation to move right into the heat of the final moments.

While still in Rome, before I had ever known the scale of the furnace that would finally meld this idea into solid form, Med and I began creating a set of physical impressions while he prayed. We did this in many different substances, anything to approach the form of the computer prototypes: plaster, sand, resin, and paraffin wax. Using bare skin at first against giant latex membranes or ultra thin wax sheets I had made by pouring gallons of wax onto sheets, then plaster and even epoxy. Each material had some kind of human characteristic, skin, bones, flesh. I had no choice but to start with the most economical approach: plaster castings and industrial seran sheets in four foot wide rolls from a city works depot called SAPIG on the edge of Rome’s periphery.

It was unlike most corner hardware stores. Across the street a wall separated it froma
giant bridge spanning twenty lanes of railway track and highways buffeted by the ancient cemetery Campo Di Verano. The dead were never allowed to be buried within the city walls of ancient Rome. To this day that tradition continues, not just in Rome, but in many other cities and towns. There, in what we could call the suburbs, the cemetery sometimes became another city outside the city. Da Verano was now in the centre of a transportation knuckle, with dense mixed-use buildings populated by the lower and middle classes. It was the perfect place for a store like SAPIG. The owner there is an older man named Saporito, which sort of sounds like the words flavour or tasty in Italian.

The cost of materials in Italy was a fraction of what they had become in other countries. Perhaps the motive is that so much of the Italian economy is an unaccounted-for super engine in global manufacturing. But Italians really have the world fooled into thinking they are the most inefficient, unproductive cultures. To me it is their coup d’état, as long as the world believes this ignorant stereotype they can continue doing things their way. Sicily is one of the most incredible civilizations in the world, yet everyone seems to think it is some Mafia-ridden cesspool. This is not to mention that they are in the G8, without including the open truth of widespread black markets. Italy’s corruption index really isn’t even in the lower half of the studies released each year. The cultural price of black labour and black economies has become nothing to be ashamed of to the masses there; they are open about this. Some try to fight this, but it can be extraordinarily dangerous.

I didn’t have any problem with it either I guess; plaster in Italy cost me at least one tenth what it did in North America. I was saving a fortune on labor and materials—twenty-five kilo bags could be procured for about four Euros at the time and my peers were willing to help me in other ways for
Figure 62: RTV-880 is a general purpose condensation cure RTV silicone rubber. It has good heat resistance, high resilience, and exhibits good vibration resistance which makes it popular as a high performance insulator. It has a density similar to that of organic flesh and has an elastomeric quality that prevents laceration. Depending on platinum or tin cured types, the heat of evaporation during set times can exceed 80 degrees Celsius, though platinum curing varieties are expensive their shelf lives after cure are indefinite in ideal conditions. [Wikipedia entries].

Figure 63: Waxes may be the natural secretions of plants or animals, artificially produced by purification from natural petroleum or completely synthetic. In addition to beeswax, carnauba (a plant epicuticular wax) and paraffin (a petroleum wax) are commonly encountered waxes which occur naturally. Earwax is another oily substance found in the human ear.

Chemically, a wax is a type of lipid that may contain a wide variety of long-chain alkanes, esters, polyesters and hydroxy esters of long-chain primary alcohols and fatty acids. They are usually distinguished from fats by the lack of triglyceride esters of glycerin (propan-1,2,3-triol) and three fatty acids. [Wikipedia entries].

In the middle of all this, the Ontario Parliament had been in contact with me about the proposal I had sent them for an Islamic prayer park and temporary monument. The only way I could word this work in their terms was to depict it as a religious intervention wherein the public was welcome to participate in some way, when in my mind this was a solemn monument. I had sent them plans for a laceration like strip of impressions measuring 250m x 25m, composed of 570 forms. It was a stretch and they clearly knew I was testing their better judgement by the socio-political ground I had intentionally placed them. If they denied the proposal it would have been grounds for controversy at least given that they allow almost any political demonstration, let alone annual iconography in celebration of Judeo-Christian holidays—a giant menorah, christmas tree and the nativity. These also weren’t gallery owners or architects, they were police officers who could care less than an iota about anything except public safety. They obviously wanted to know that there were some members of the community willing to support the project or that a Muslim had been involved.

My efforts with students finally turned a corner at the University of Toronto. The Muslim Students Association was much more diverse and interesting than I had experienced at the University of Waterloo. There weren’t any members asking me what the point in art or interesting architecture was, in fact, they wanted to help improve the work.
Tue, May 28, 2003 at 5:59 PM

Zane Hussein <zanehussein@gmail.com> wrote:

Hey Alex,

There were no objections whatsoever to the research, in fact I got nothing but offers of support from the other executives at the meeting, so I’m glad to tell you that the University of Toronto MSA and its more than 3000 members are officially on board for Making Manifest.

Now there’s a little more than a month until the event so we need to figure out a few more things such as advertising this to city and scheduling.

Let me know as soon as you get a chance.

All the best,

Zane

By this point the momentum was great enough that I poured all of my resources, even a lot of my savings into building the monuments, the mat that everyone wanted to function after all. The thing is that after so much work, when I sat down inside the final plaster forms, I realized that they were completely impracticable. They were uncomfortable, which in terms of Islamic Law, isn’t really a problem as the specific aspects of Salaat are in fact supposed to be awkward, but the universal size issue was nagging. Everyone has a different body, it was so clear that this was not ever going to be used by anyone unless it was custom made.

Corrosion resistance can be excellent due to a thin surface layer of aluminium oxide that forms when the metal is exposed to air, effectively preventing further oxidation [Wikipedia entries].
**Figures 66 and 68:**

Polystyrene was discovered in 1839 by Eduard Simon, an apothecary in Berlin. From storax, the resin of Liquidambar orientalis, he distilled an oily substance, a monomer which he named styrol. Several days later Simon found that the styrol had thickened, presumably from oxidation, into a jelly he dubbed styrol oxide ("Styroloxyd"). About 80 years went by before it was realized that heating of styrol starts a chain reaction which produces macromolecules, following the thesis of German organic chemist Hermann Staudinger (1881–1965). This eventually led to the substance receiving its present name, polystyrene. The I. G. Farben company began manufacturing polystyrene in Ludwigshafen, Germany, about 1931, hoping it would be a suitable replacement for die cast zinc in many applications. Polystyrene is about as strong as unalloyed aluminium, but much more flexible. [Wikipedia entries].

After Med left it took me almost three weeks of day and night work with help to get the form completed so that I could pour a one centimeter thick negative out of wax. This would serve as the form for a classical lost wax die from which cheap plastic versions could be fabricated using thermo-plastic vacuum forming. The same process used in almost all plastic packaging products, such as egg containers. Whatever it was that I was producing could never be as beautiful as the process to get to it, the vanity of all this.
The security booth in the entry vestibule of the legislature is a raised oak hexagonal podium to the right of a grand ascending stair clad in warm red carpeting. The booth feels like a lector in a large church, except, instead of a priest a police officer stood imposingly. Ironically, once you’re in close enough to the booth your body is already directly underneath the halls of provincial parliament, a strap on weapon would be enough to take out the entire government if you were to arrive at the right time. Nonetheless, they take security quite seriously in there. I was given a badge in a laminated plastic pin on a clip, with my name and status as a visitor clearly printed. It was all very official, I waited there until a pickwickean woman arrived, The Sgt. At Arms, the one that holds the gavel and protects public representitives at the parliament.

The rights of passage into this inner sanctum seemed a shadow of their former glory. The halls of panelled oak and dusty carpeting insulated the creeking wood floors below my feet betraying their purpose to hide the noise. This was, after all, once built in service of the people founding a new place, a place where a dream was to take place in real-time.

The offices were in a converted indexing space, a giant room in the bowls of the building with strange dimensions. Inside were a two story block of gangways and mezzanines, that seemed to hold something like books, but the shelves looked more mechanical than anything for a book. Flanking this machine were offices separated by makeshift drywall partitions.

When she said yes, I remember looking out the window into the interior courtyard and feeling a strange sense of dissatisfaction.

I was born in this city, “the place where trees stand in the water.” xiii Toronto’s name likely comes from the native Iroquois people’s word tkaronto which roughly translates into this ideal marshy condition. What I like
transportation disaster. These tracks should be expropriated from the railways by the city. Then, the city should hold a competition to architects to design sections of this land which could then be auctioned to developers on the cheap under the condition of a public or affordable housing ratio.

These things being said, there is no city like it in the world. Nor so many with these kinds of opportunities.

about its name is that it has an ironic cultural reality. Centuries later the devout Anglican-Protestant urban fabric is blessed by the good fortune of being punctuated, torn and knotted by minority ghettos. Like the trees poking out of the serene waters, they are the most important ghettos in the world, so large that Toronto has become the world’s most diverse city. I don’t say this out of pride, nor do I use the words to demean this city. Except perhaps that it has created a culture that trusts outside opinion and foreign cultures more than its own, which with all of these ingredients is totally unique. It is the model of the city of the future. The result of these attitudes is a city that has a very tenuous relationship with history, allowing greedy interests to profit all too effortlessly off of the extensive urban fabric. The examples of this are various, from the City Place developments beside the Dome Stadium and CN Tower, to the sprawling suburbs which continue to grow unabatedly with grave consequences to the liveability of the overall urban form.

The proximity of all the cultures and this rampant development is precisely the reason that I could force this project into the public eye quickly. The city has had to develop a series of free and available venues for a variety of cultural expressions, ranging from the political to the most inoquous farmers market, on the streets. None of these has ever been an expression of Islam.

Toronto is one of the few places in the world where mounting a full scale public exhibition at the houses of political power is very easy, in fact, demonstrations of all kinds are encouraged. The authorities are forced, by dint of the shear scale of the minority populations, to allow projects addressing those cultures at Queen’s Park as well as other public lands. This is remarkable seeing that the city has no record of violent demonstration. What it has is the constant reminder of how many different beliefs and
Thursday April 12, 2003

Mr. Alex Josephson
112 Kilbarron Road
Toronto, ON
M3P 1K9

Dear Mr. Josephson,

This correspondence is to advise that the Sergeant-at-Arms has approved the application you submitted to use the Legislative grounds. The application was submitted on behalf of the Prayer Park Event for use of Legislative Assembly grounds on the 16th and 17th July 2003.

As per our discussion, use of the Legislative grounds is contingent upon availability and adhering to the policies and procedures of the Legislative Assembly as agreed upon.

- The event is scheduled from 0500-1930 hours July 16th and 17th 2003.
- Estimated attendance is 50 participants.
- The Prayer Park will consist of 52 Prayer Mats on the South East Quadrant.
- The affected area will be approximately 10 feet in width by 60-75 feet in length.
- The Prayer Mats are to be removed and reassembled daily.
- Parking on the grounds is not permitted. Attendees should be encouraged to access the Precinct via public transit.
- Washroom facilities in the building may be made available. Alternate locations are advisable ie. Local Hospitals and or the University of Toronto.
- The Prayer Park Event may not be the sole users of the grounds on the aforementioned date.
- The Legislative Security Service is the sole security provider for the Legislative Precinct; officers must be notified of any incidents on the grounds including any medical emergencies.

If you have any questions regarding your event, please contact me at 416-325-2426.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Staff Sergeant Kathy Seymour
Investigative / Liaison Unit
Legislative Security Service
Legislative Assembly of Ontario
cultural systems exist in careful balance there. The city is not a woven quilt of multiculturalism, it is the raw yarn on a loom with knots tangling and growing as fabric grows. It has its roots as a Loyalist city, always in opposition to the European mode of Montreal, yet somehow smarting.

What all this added up to was that when I finally made it through to the Sargant At Arms’ offices, it became obvious that just showing up in a pressed suit and being civil would be more than they were used to. The process of getting permission to demonstrate at Queen’s Park is a judicial one: they presume your innocence. The rule is that the park is the space of public dissent and celebration. The tradition of open debate subsequently has led to the space becoming every citizen’s space, the collective’s own front lawn per-se.

They announced that they had accepted my application (see appendix x), except with one catch, it would only last three days and it would have to be dismantled each evening or else security would need to be on hand all night. The final number of forms allowed would be 70, rather arbitrary from their point of view, but convenient to some of the numerological points I was trying to make in my plan of 570 monuments, 552 plus 18. With 70 I could create a field of 52 forms plus 18 to make 70. What I wouldn’t tell them is that in fact there would be a series of 10 extra forms installed to create a kind of abstract multiplier, forms created in a different material, to achieve a kind of compromise. It wasn’t perfect, but there was no way to build all 570; it would have been an enormous financial burden.

I strong armed them from the beginning. I enquired about the possibility of erecting an Islamic analogue of the Christmas Tree and Minora that are installed permanently at the park. They informed me that it was in fact...
an act of provincial parliament that paved the way for these. My attitude was to take the stance that a temporary Muslim spiritual space should be granted the same status, or else it would appear rather closed minded of them to exclude them. The city is, after all, populated by hundreds of thousands of Muslims as well. They would feel pressured, and I knew this, so my strategy was to submit the request for all 570 knowing full well that they would reject it for a smaller number. Which is exactly what they did in the days leading up to the final meeting with them at the Parliament. This is also how developers get permission for awful larger buildings in most cities.

The Sgt. At Arms office was trying to look supportive, but I expected a run around to prevent the work from being mounted. Their last stand was by inviting the Park’s grounds keeper into a sign-off meeting a few days after the first. He exclaimed that no object would be allowed to be placed without a contract stipulating that I would resod any damaged lawn. In fact, he said, under no circumstances could objects larger than a book in area be placed on the grass. I had already seen this coming, so I designed the forms to sit on pressure points formed by the impression of Med’s knees, hands, and feet in the final mold. I stumped them, so he capitulated, with me signing the contract it was written in stone. July 17 to 19 the exhibition would be installed.
The Post Critical Era: Architecture in the Age of Righteousness

This thesis, before anything was designed, was tainted. It was a desperate attempt to create a cultural experience that for various reasons I lacked. It was an attempt to frame a person. I was born in a safe city to a safe family, yet by reading history I learned to require more. I developed a hunger, to be a part of anything less boring, perhaps even fighting for a cause. This is why I decided to leave Canada and school so young, but I didn’t find what I needed. What I discovered and contributed to was a cultural insecurity that I now have to face upon returning to the homeland. But we are what we are, born into more or less comfortable circumstances, and a witness to varying degrees of societal banality. Others are less comfortable, but perhaps they are aware of their importance to a changing world. This set of actions was a conscious battle to take part in that struggle. It was an attempt to build a person rather than a building.

I had an idea and I decided to run with it, now that it is over, I am lonely. I wanted that fatwa that people exclaimed as inevitable for proposing such ideas! But it never came. It would have been defining, it would have been a privilege to feel so relevant. It didn’t matter if they ran full page spreads in newspapers and televised interviews, I wanted that something that lived beyond the moment. This is a classic confession of immaturity, but I am a literalist sometimes, which makes banal things like this engaging. I wanted to see the fear in the flesh; perhaps I didn’t show the right people?

This was an act of historification, it is the idea of making history that is such a curse, for there are others willing to go much farther than I and actually hurt someone to make their mark. Perhaps without history and the people so desperate to understand it, I wouldn’t have had a need to create such a project, because the problems that beg for it would not have existed. Without history, human beings could probably look at each other through the blissful amnesia of the introduction. But we will never escape history, that is what humans do, we remember.

The attention to the event, unlike the subject of religion, is so fleeting. This is a dialog that perhaps nobody can see unfold in a lifetime let alone a moment in time during a balmy Toronto summer. Everything unfolded exactly the way my drawings had specified them to, even the alignment of the monuments was achieved to within mere centimeters of accuracy.
Everything fell exactly into place the way it had been planned. The twenty
gallons of fresh hot Starbucks and the gourmet croissants and pastries
were all on hand. The University of Toronto Muslim Student Association,
almost three thousand strong, fully supported and advertised the project.
Their executive board, as well as dozens of friends attended, along with
reporters and news crews from several networks/papers.

The only thing left is to pass the torch of examining the most sacred a
nd profane to be carried by someone else, perhaps a true prophet. Prophets
do not understand the ramifications of their actions in their own times,
because what is happening to them is not constructed, it is natural. This
is a topic that is best left for the ages, one far beyond the confines of this
work nor anything else any single person achieves in a lifetime.

Faith is conserved, it is not
eliminated and the celebrity is the
expression of this in a mass media
world. There will always be a place
for new icons and charactures.
The only place left to explore is in
the designer’s own individual fe-
tishes. These perversions will lead
to new places and landscapres: it
is our only salvation.

There will always be a cohort of
the moral: architects who give lip
service to a new corporate hege-
momy. It is a faith in the machine,
a faith in numbers, and a faith in
the dehumanization of the indi-
vidual. Human nature ensures this
pack mentality to some degree.

Theory, much like religion requires
a certain kind of faith, in this age
many scholars call a post-critical
one, theory and criticism have
fallen from grace. It is a natural
process when something goes from
the avant-garde or perhaps some-
thing even more revolutionary to
the popular. Fine architecture
is no longer a cult practice, it is
becoming as popular as designer
clothing. These were only until
recently reserved for the ultra
wealthy and powerful.

Yet, unlike fashion, which was always accessible and forced to the limits of production, architecture lagged behind, now that
it has caught up, it is studdering. Forces within the profession are dying to keep it an elite and discrete practice defined by
certain modes of technical expression and worse by the creation of theory. These are some of the most powerful and elite
institutions in the world, they care not about quality but about controlling the profession in general. They will fail, the force
of the market to create celebrity and the general public’s desire for protagonists is a stronger force of perversion than any
institution may ever have.
MAKING MANIFEST | ON WAKING UP
But what is this word: perversion. It is a stronger way of saying ‘change’. The anxiety to produce a unique cosmology outside of any theory for a given context is a great source of perverse beauty in contemporary design, it is not a negative force. This an age in which we either go back to following theory or make the choice to explore the limits and depths of our own whims.

This is manifest by the production of the righteous object. Perversion brings us to a new age in design when each object of difference has absolute legitimacy. As faith is directed inward, the objects created become more and more whole. The complexity and completion of architecture is today breaching the barrier of what looks naturally occurring, or grown, rather than built. This is the ultimate realization of the minimal object: where the form is not of any concern, but rather the distance between the human hand and what is their work, becomes infinite or imperceptible. These tendencies toward the righteous object transcend schools and fashions of design.

Each of these has a devout set of followers or supporters. A minimal object in the true sense, in that it no longer seems to be wrought by the mere mortal but of some perversely higher power. The distance between what seems human made and divine shrinks, enhancing the boundaries of what is considered natural. As everything is natural, so will architecture tend to achieve the living qualities of that word. It has authority in that moment xvi. They become the majority in a specific place and time.

The street has become secondary as much as our bodies, probably even tertiary tomorrow. All that will remain is an impression, a nostalgic picture of our physical selves and our appetites. Second lives can be had through online Avatars and we can step back from what might have been called the real world. The two are equally valid and real.
The people who come to the streets, as violent as they can be, act out a predetermined set of scenes based on historical precedent. The incisions made by Huasman’s Plan on the fabric of the city was the first attempt to nullify the body into a meaningless casualty of city planning, an analog version of the internet. It was, instead of allowing electric impulses to flow, allowing control to flow.

The space of authority was finite before and now it is infinite. Tomorrow that space will already have morphed, moved into a world that is only limited by how many servers and how much bandwidth can be accommodated. What has been created, possibly inadvertently, was a vast void, wherein the bounds of it are defined loosely by the new scales of authority—the street without traffic jams. Any resistance to that scale is futile. Its greatest power is that it is next to impossible to perceive, while still making us feel like we can touch, taste, see, hear, or smell.
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REMEMBERING BAUDRILLARD, March 11 2007, A Good Long Run by Dr. Douglas Kellner

ISSN: 1705-6411

http://plato.stanford.edu/
ENDNOTES

No.  Source

I.  Cramer, Kevin. The thirty Years War, University of Nebraska Press: 2007. In some areas it was believed that more than 60% of the population was killed. It is more certainly known that 30% of the pre war population of what became Germany was killed, roughly 20 million people. pgs 178, 187.

II.  Ki Moon, Ban. In one of his first speeches at the U.N. Headquarters as the Secretary General, he states that Democracy is the unique path to a civilized world. 2006

III.  During the initial stages of this project a series of three questionnaires were distributed to thirty people in the school of architecture at the University of Waterloo. Because of the nature of these questionnaires, an ethical clearance and thus the permission to use that specific data in this document were forbidden. The data clearly shows, that people Muslim to Atheist felt strongly that I had no business to continue with my investigations.

IV.  The largest pilgrimage is not the Hajj, rather it is the Maha Kumbh Mela held in rotating locations in India. The 2001 and 2004 pilgrimages were attended by more than 60 million people. 1. http://www.kumbhamela.net/ 2. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/15/AR2007011500041.html

V.  Depending on the type of source and translation of the Quran one choses, this word Jihad is most rationally and non-violently stated as a personal and inner struggle. As associated with that battle to remain faithful. Ahmed Ali’s translation of the Quran clearly states this version of the word. Armstrong, Karen. The Battle For God, pg 37.

Aslan, Reza. no god but god. Indonesia’s President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono called for greater democracy and efforts to improve the plight of Muslims and spread Islamic values, in a speech to the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit.

“‘The possibility of an Islamic Renaissance lies before us,’” Yudhoyono told the summit, but first, he added: “‘We need to get our act together as an organisation of Muslim nations. ‘‘When the Islamic Renaissance comes it will be the natural fruit of a peaceful and constructive ‘jihad’”’

VI.  Sgaier, Sema. Sema Sgaier is a Ph.D in Neuroscience at New York University and Brown University. She describes the development of the brain as an enfolding of two rows of cells that she visualized, using gene color coding. www.subtletechnologies.com/2006/symposium/Sgaier.html

VII.  Ibid. Primary sources such as the Quran describing the destruction of the idols that were held in the Ka’Baa are also affirmed by Armstrong. Pg 38. The discrepancy of the dates of the prophet’s birth were sourced through much of Esposito’s work and in the Koran Surah

VIII.  Venter, Dr Craig. The Venter Institute, TED TALK. We are creating life and new chromosomes to deal with our current problems and potential fuel shortages. http://blog.ted.com/2008/03/craig_venter.php

IX.  The definition of the word Islam is litterally to submit to god. This is echoed by Karen Armstrong and other scholars as well as the translation from Arabic to English. See Battle for God, by Armstrong pgs 37-38.

X.  Where Toronto Got It’s Name, government of Canada natural resources: http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/education/toronto_e.php