-SITE

BUILT MATTERS.

2016 | MEDIA KIT

Vol.35 Borders | Vol.36 Vernaculars

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2016 | MEDIA KIT

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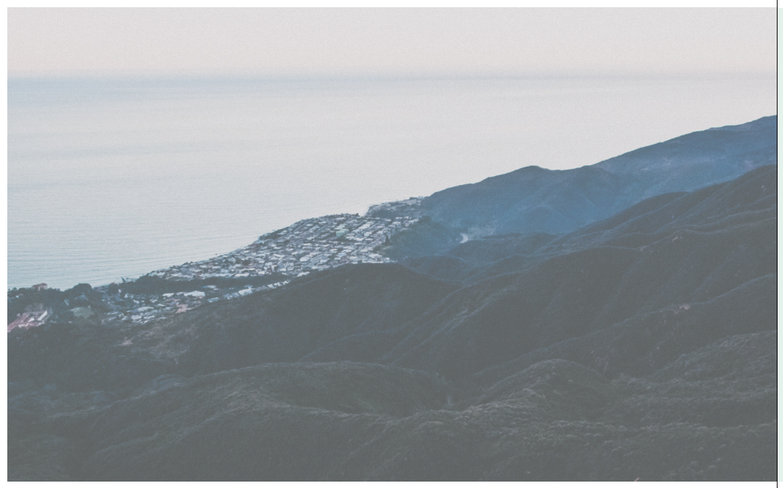


about us.

Our mission is as ambitious as ever.

The-Site-Magazine is the leading independent journal of contemporary architecture, landscape, urbanism, and design in Canada. Through our predecessor, *On Site review*, *The Site Magazine* has a 15-year legacy of publishing independent, critical thought on the built environment.

Our mission is to provide a platform for interdisciplinary exchange by publishing essays, photography, art, design, journalism, and stories from a variety of contributors with fresh ideas and unique perspectives. By curating each volume around topical themes published semiannually, we intend to stimulate dialogue on the profound questions - ecological, social, political and economic - which affect built culture in the 21st century. *The Site Magazine* contributes to a global discussion, leveraging the multi-faceted Canadian lens that includes the Canadian perspective abroad. Our accessible and high-quality content brings this discussion into the mainstream, to the breadth of audience it deserves.
The Site Magazine is a nonprofit organization sustained through funding by the Canadian Council for the Arts. Along with the generosity of private and corporate sponsors we are able to ensure that *The Site Magazine* remains editorially independent and can continue to publish critical pieces without agenda or bias.

YEAR 2016

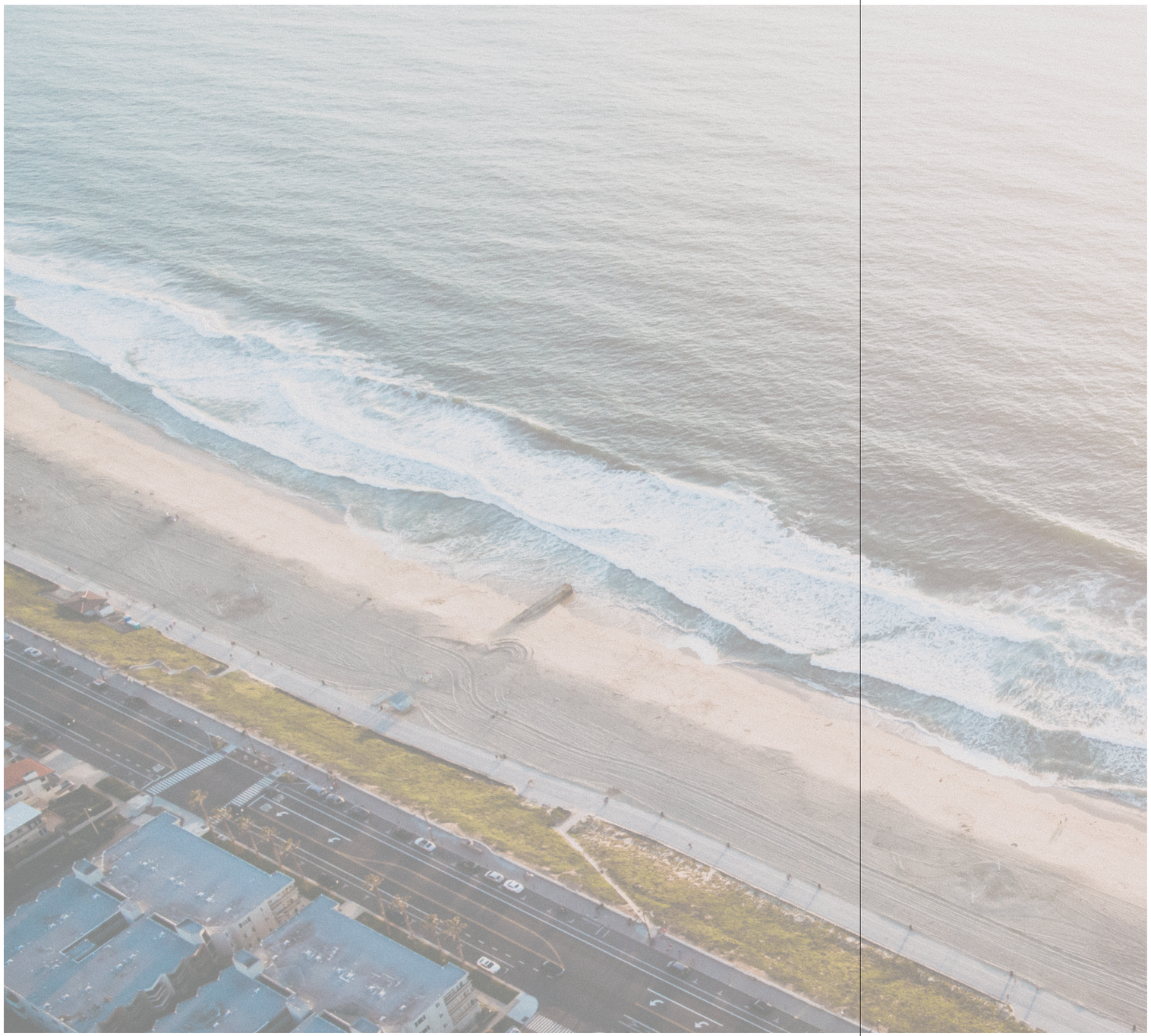
This year begins with breaking some borders.

Our recent name change acknowledges our shifting value-system on contemporary architecture and urbanism's relationship to context: globalized and digitized, speculative and transgressive, "- Site" lacking prefix (or ready to accept any offered) is better suited to represent the valuable and often radical investigations, narratives, and scholarship that we publish.

If there is one word that could summate the intellectual-global zeitgeist as 2016 begins, it is the title and topic of our 35th volume: Borders. This year, we have watched thousands of people become displaced over territorial disputes. We have listened as debates on the Schengen Area and certain American political candidates rally to restrict some of the most welcoming borders we know. We have also felt the blurred lines of race, gender, and sexuality that various public figures have helped push further into mainstream ways of thinking about identity.

In the quotidian discussions on the barriers-of-entry to life in our major cities; in the grassroots movements that ensure one less pipeline on our west coast; and in the concerted national effort to return the Liberals to power in Ottawa - Borders, boundaries, and thresholds have been especially topical for Canadians in 2015. Making us well poised to discuss them at a global scale.

2016 marks a huge leap in the evolution of our periodical. With a newly assembled editorial team *The Site Magazine* is expanding its reach in every way possible: In discipline and discourse, online and in print, within Canada and internationally, we are pushing some borders of our own. In our effort to bring Canadian ideas on urbanism and architecture, and all that these disciplines encompass, into the global-mainstream discussion, we hope that you will join us.



TEST-IMON-IALS

T E S T -

I M O N -

I A L S

“I first came across **On-Site Review** as a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, when a few colleagues were involved in guest-editing **On Site 9: Surface.** Having just left practice in Toronto to do further study, On Site became a journal of
immediate interest as it bridged the practice of architecture with its intellectual motivations.

When we moved to Melbourne, Australia was in a record drought, which was curtailing drinking water supplies and changing longstanding behaviours. In response, the Melbourne Design Festival chose as its theme, ‘When It Rains, It Pours’. When we saw a call for submissions to **On-Site 21: Weather**, we felt it would be the perfect platform for sharing the installation projects we had developed for that festival.”

:There are few journals that offer a place for work that is neither strictly professional nor strictly non-commercial.

This magazine’s strength is that it occupies such a space with verve.

John Stanislav Sadar, PhD, SAFA,
Senior Lecturer, Monash University,
Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture
Contributor and Editorial Board Member

“Writing for magazines can be depressing. I’ll spend hours on a pitch, and my heart will be set on writing about the UN weapons team investigating chemical weapons in Syria. No, says the editor. Old news. How about writing about ISIS?

Magazines are made by people, and in the editor of this magazine, I found someone who would encourage me to write what I thought mattered. For this publication I’ve written pieces on rubbish dumps in South Sudan, the sound of silence in Marseille and Paris, migrants in Lisbon, summer camps and refugee camps, and more besides.

None of these pieces would have existed without On Site. It is open to formal experimentation, and the most recondite of subjects. Simply put, it is a venue that allows writers to engage with what matters to them, and that passionate engagement with architecture and space comes across in each piece. In its pages is the most thoughtful and sustained engagement with architecture, in its broadest and richest sense, that I have encountered in a magazine.

Writing for it has been a blessing.”

:Simply put, it is a venue that allows writers to engage with what matters.

It is open to formal experimentation, and the most recondite of subjects.

Joshua Craze PhD Berkeley,
2014 UNESCO Artist Laureate in Creative Writing
Collegiate Assistant Professor, Social Sciences
University of Chicago
Regular Contributor

"On Site represents everything that research in the field of architecture and urbanism should be, but so often is not. An interdisciplinary platform for diverse investigations into the understanding of site and context, the mutating topographies of our contemporary world, it has since its inception, relentlessly brought us an open and discursive presentation of urban, landscape and architectural field work. As a journal allied to architecture, but which prioritises process rather than end product, the magazine offers a broad and reflexive consideration of how we can perceive and record context, to inform and reform the process of design at a fundamental level.

Above all On Site is a rich resource and outlet for the expressions of spatial practitioners who aim to learn from the complexities of existing urban conditions in order to intelligently formulate future change."

Dr. Robin Wilson
The Bartlett School of Architecture,
University College London
Reader and Supporter

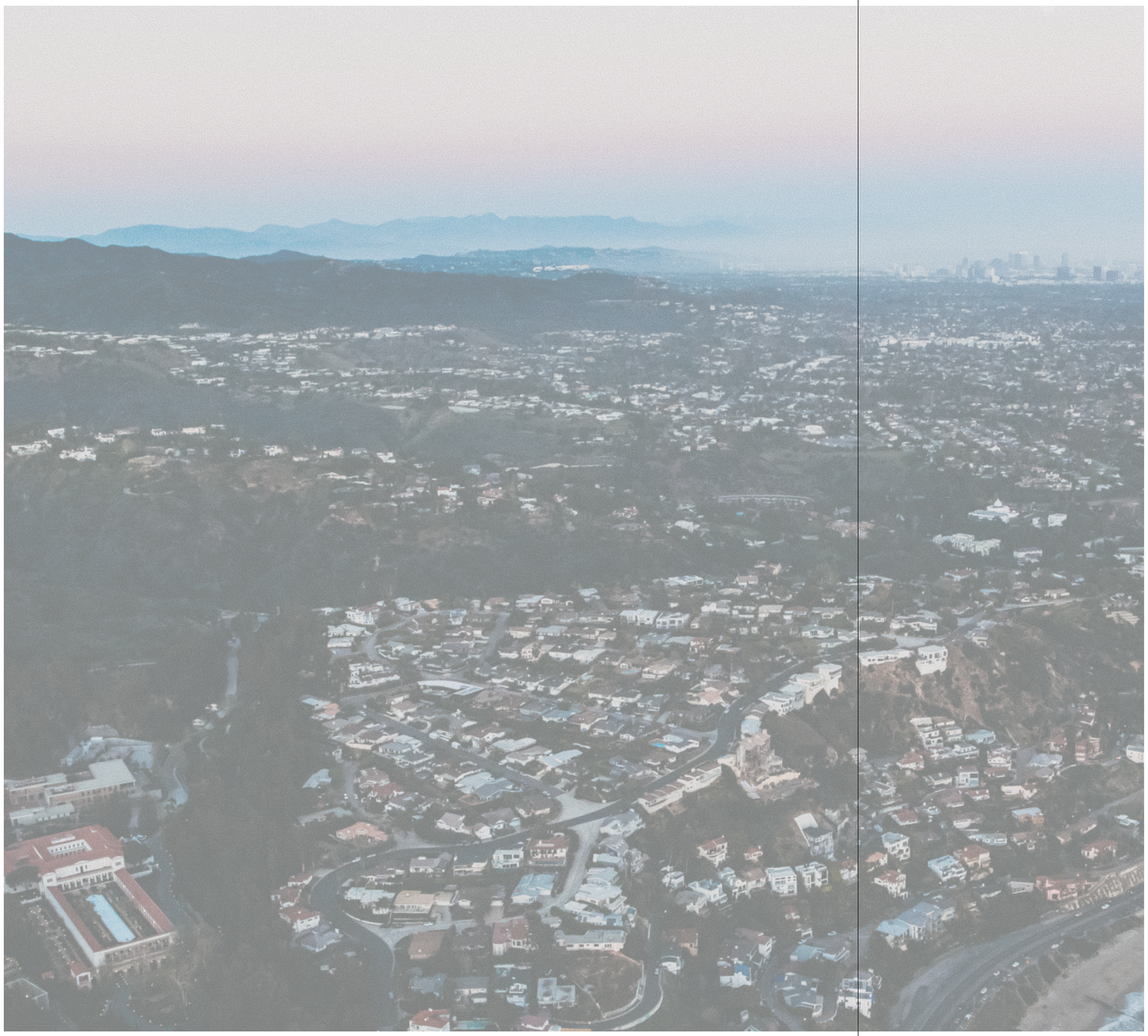
"On Site Review was one of the first magazines that got me truly excited about how big the world of architecture could be; how space and architecture could be used as a lens to unravel some of the complexities of the world we live in. It's smart, diverse, and globally focused. And because it operates on the basis of an open call, the door is always open for new voices to be heard. These are the key qualities that make this magazine such a valuable publication today."

Brendan Cormier, Design Curator
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, UK
Long Time Reader

"On Site review represents one of the best examples of what the word 'periodical' means in my life. Periodically, it appears in my mailbox and provokes me to think, thematically, about a broad range of readings and practical approaches to an important issue. I believe I have been a subscriber since the beginning and the magazine has never failed, or even faltered, in its goal to turn my head around subjects central to our built environment. It is not afraid. It collects real design research concerning the interactions, interventions, and perspectives on what we build, how we put things together or touch the earth/sea/sky, deep cultures, art, and social concerns that we all share. I cherish each copy I receive and have collected the set."

:it is not afraid.

Ken Lambla, AIA
Charlotte, North Carolina
Long Time Subscriber



2016 - CALL FOR ARTICLES

SPRING
Vol.35 : Borders

A border is perhaps the most necessary, ambiguous and political architectural tool. The line that defines an area has the power to create, and an equally great capacity to divide and destroy.

Borders delimit to diminish scale. By drawing a border, objects can become objects, buildings can become buildings, forests can become forests, countries can become countries. But borders are more than the hard edge of a wall or cliff; they can also be soft, invisible, intangible barriers. What does it mean today to delimit a territory? What does it mean to control society, when, as Deleuze says, we are living in a time in which "man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt"? If access to the Internet is more desirable than access to natural light, what does exclusion or detainment look like? Are borders defined by what divides us or by what connects us and which one of those do we find more important nowadays? It is hard to avoid talking about danger, fear, protection and shelter in a discussion of borders. Territory has become seemingly irrelevant because power is distributed and controlled through capital, yet we are currently experiencing one of the biggest migration crises in recent history and it is all about territory.

Also, capital is manifest in various forms: real estate, oil platforms, gas pipes, telecommunication cables and other infrastructural systems are actually different types of physical borders. Fear also finds expression in physical forms, even though walls can no longer protect us from today's dangers. How does that influence our idea of dwelling if safety is still one of the most important values in defining domesticity? And what does it mean today to protect a territory – be it a household, a country or the planet?

Discussions of borders foreground their prohibitive role, but the absence of limits can be just as oppressive. The inability to define and comprehend turns into a lack of an alternative, an impossibility to escape or to create something new. Limits can be valuable.

DO WE ACCEPT THEM?
DO WE TRESPASS THEM?
DO WE CREATE THEM?
DO WE COMMENT ON THEM? OR DO WE DESTROY THEM?

Borders are always political, but all of them are constructed– either through geological processes, planetary relationships, political and social contracts, distribution of wealth or built environment. What defines borders is eventually also how do we act upon them, our attitude towards them.

THE CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR VOLUME 35: BORDERS WAS PUBLISHED SUMMER 2015. DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS ARE MARCH 1ST, 2016. VOLUME 35 IS SCHEDULED TO BE RELEASED BY MAY 2016.

FALL
Vol.36 : Vernaculars

Building is a universal phenomenon: long before there were architects, people have crafted their own homes, built cities, and designed systems to harvest requisite natural resources such as water, wind and light. Today, as climate change threatens, as engineered solutions spur new problems, and global politics fall short in addressing local issues, architects are turning to the vernacular: the informal, the spontaneous, the regional and the handmade. Is it mere nostalgia that drives us to seek examples from the past?

Vernacular architecture, made from local materials using techniques that respond to the local climate, present a vision of architecture where human needs exist in perfect harmony with the landscape. The craft is rooted in an instinct and respect for the land. Cultures that still practice vernacular construction often have an intimate relationship with nature and a strong sense of environmental stewardship. These traditions contain valuable lessons for today's socio-environmental concerns.

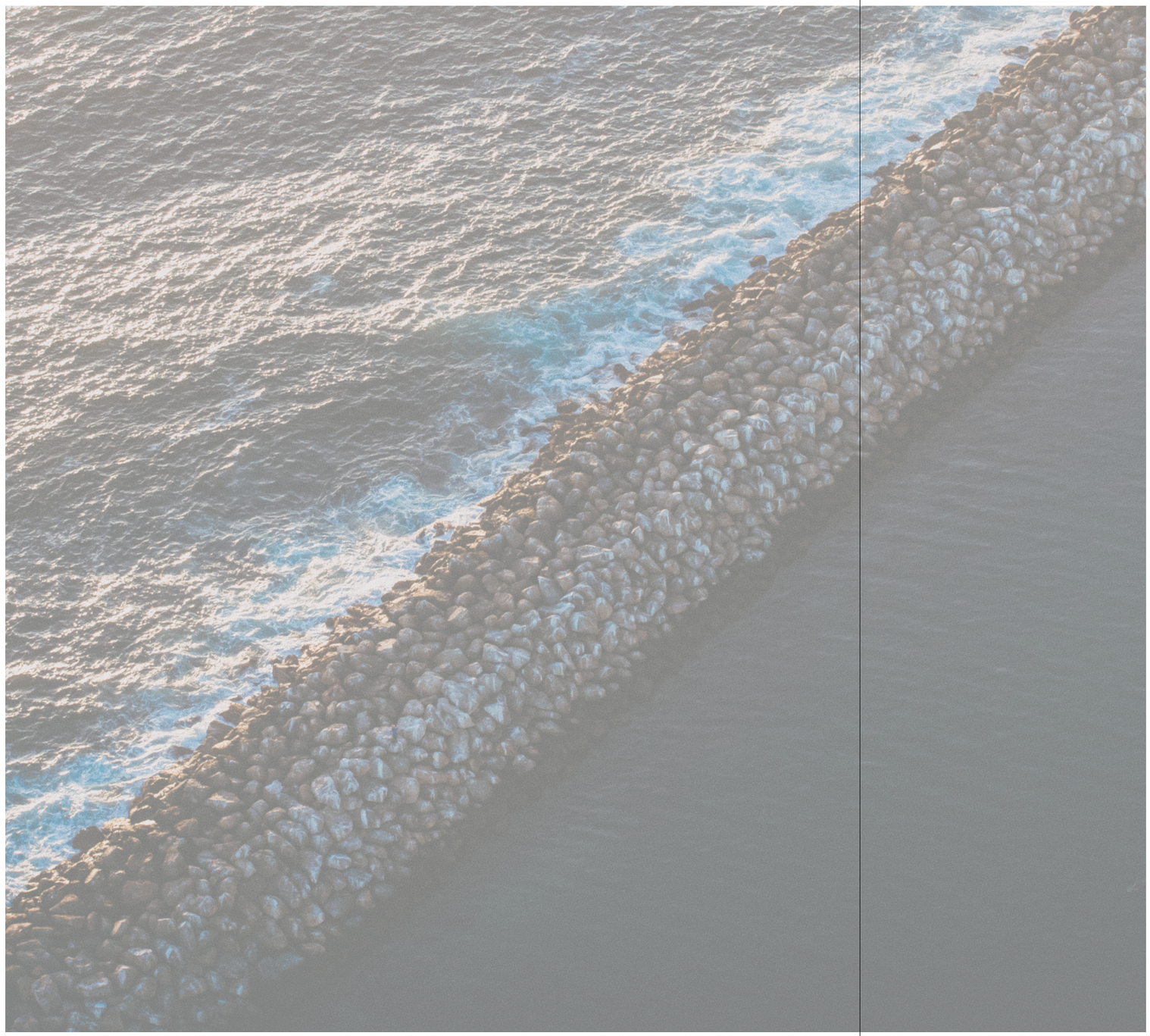
Yet these same cultures, such as the Native people of Canada, are also marginalized by colonization, resource extraction, and political decisions that have lead to their displacement from landscapes deeply connected with their identity and way of life.

Can vernacular traditions continue to thrive in this context? Moreover, modernity brings new technologies, new affluence, and new social desires to traditional communities. **How do vernacular typologies evolve and adapt to contemporary living?** The construction industry is driven by cutting-edge technology, computer-aided design and fabrication, and benchmarks for building performance efficiency. Are the homes that people build for themselves, work that is done by hand, using found materials rather than mass-manufactured and certified products fundamentally incompatible with the future of construction?

Amid a looming awareness of the fragility of the environment and its finite resources, are there new answers to be found by revisiting the constructions of the past?

BEAUTIFUL THOUGH IT MAY BE, IS VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE STILL RELEVANT TODAY (AND TOMORROW)?

THE CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR VOLUME 36: VERNACULARS WAS PUBLISHED SUMMER 2015. DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS ARE SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2016. VOLUME 36 IS SCHEDULED TO BE RELEASED NOVEMBER 2016.



BEST OF: 2015
VOLUME 33:
ON LAND &
VOLUME 34:
ON WRITING

OUR NATIONAL LANDSCAPE.
ROMANTISIZING THE CANADIAN HINTERLAND.

Matt Neville

Vol. 33 : On Land
SPRING | 2015

The topic of landscape is overwhelming. Ruminating on the word floods the mind with all of its meanings and applications – far-reaching, often meaningless, always subjective. The diversity of essays in this issue demonstrates the range of the term. Reading Desiree Valadares's essay 'Dispossessing the Wilderness', I find it difficult to reconcile the landscape images I most often see of Canada – often of our National Parks – and what I experience. I'm left wondering – why is our physical, common – or national – landscape not urban in nature? -

MYTHOLOGY OF UNIHABITED NATURE

Matt Neville

I'M LEFT WONDERING

Matt Neville

- Regardless of definition, Canada, as one of the world's largest politically-defined land masses and culturally-diverse population, is rich in landscapes. From the picturesque wild of our National Parks to the often grotesque results of resource extraction, the Canadian landscape means something to both Canadians and to people beyond our borders. In her essay, Valadares eloquently points out that the "cultural constructs of North American identity have long hinged on wilderness, the mythology of uninhabited nature, and the vastness of the American landscape"1.

Canada is often envisioned as wilderness, yet such representations of a national landscape are vastly different from what most of us experience and inhabit. We are, after all, a country of (sub)urban dwellers, with 80-90 percent of the country's inhabitants living and working in an urbanised region (and more than half of urban dwellers concentrated in either Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver).

In his 1926 'Manifesto for a National Literature', literary scholar Lionel Stevenson noted that "the primordial forces are still dominant" in Canada; as a result "Canadian art is almost entirely devoted to landscape, Canadian poetry to the presentation of nature."2 Today, this mythology remains strong, yet our common history is one of nation building, urban migration and urbanisation. Walter Pache, the late German literary scholar, once commented that urban writing in Canada is ubiquitous, yet elusive – an observation as relevant to Canadian literature as it is to the notion of Canadian urbanism.2 It is little wonder why the concept of Canadian urbanism is so weak, when our real and representative landscapes are so far detached from one another.

Less than 20 percent of Canadians live in non-urban environments, yet political discourse, policy and patterns of urban development are often rural-centric, and, in some cases, blatantly anti-urban. Over the past three decades, the trend of municipal amalgamation of towns and villages with large areas of non-urban land, suggests "a denigration of the urban, reflective of the disdain and indifference with which the city and the urban continue to be treated in the Canadian political system and cultural imaginary"3. In Halifax for example, the City of Halifax is part of a municipal unit of nearly 5,500 square kilometres in size. 75% of people within it, however, live within an urbanised area of less than 300 square kilometres. As we are in a federal election year, it is worth noting that a rural vote in Canada continues to count for more than an urban vote. Canada is a nation of urban dwellers who refuse to accept their urban condition, instead we appear to have a national preoccupation with open green space.

Paradoxically, with a mere 3.3 persons per square kilometre, Canada has one of the lowest population densities on the planet – suggesting that it is very much a non-urban nation. With more than 75 percent of Canadian clustered within 150 kilometres of the US border, there is a very real great expanse above – the true Great White North – which only a small percentage of citizens have ever actually experienced. And despite being so far removed from the North, its impact on Canadians and their image of the country cannot be overstated. Perhaps it is this overarching notion of nordicity and of a large empty hinterland beyond the city skyline that makes the truism of urbanity more difficult for most Canadians to accept.

NORDICITY - FADING

Canadians seem to insist on the "city's subordination to the natural world"4 and preference for the non-urban, yet in the daily lives of nearly all Canadians, non-urbanism is little more than a myth. But is this sense of identity based on the notion of wild and wilderness – and of nordicity – fading? While immigration to Canada was traditionally dominated by Europeans, today the vast majority are coming from cities in countries that have long experienced a ferocious pace of urbanisation (China, India, Philippines). New Canadians are coming from large cities and settling in a the largest of Canadian cities. Will this change in demographics bring about a new respect for the urban in Canada? Or are they looking for reprieve and will only reinforce the myth?

Matt Neville

There is a critical need to "assert the centrality of the city and the urban within the Canadian spatial and cultural imaginaries, to help us see the city as a place of Canadian society and culture".5 The need for an understanding of the urban as space of possibility, of personal freedom, of opportunity is critical to the overall health of the country. The future of the country is visible in its cities today – our shared physical landscape. This fixation, however, on the non-urban myth may ultimately degrade the overall high-quality of life that Canadian cities are known for today.

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2 Pache, Walter. *'Urban Writing'*. The Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada, edited by W.H. New, . Toronto: University of Toronto Pres, 2002. pp1148-1156

3 Stevenson, Lionel. 1926. Appraisals of Canadian Literature. Toronto: Macmillan, 1926.

4 Edwards, Justin and Douglas Ivison. Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. p199

5 Edwards p4

OPEN LETTERS.
AN EPISTOLARY INVESTIGATION OF AN ONGOING PUBLICATION AT THE GSD.

Lara Mehling
Chelsea Spencer
Irene Chin
Miranda Mote

Vol. 34 : On Writing
FALL | 2015

Dear Chelsea,
Between you in New York, Lara in Zurich, Miranda in Philadelphia, and myself in Montreal there are a couple continents, several time zones, many miles, and even more kilometers (I need to adjust to thinking in metric).

There is this physical distance now, but what feels farthest is your old kitchen in Cambridge where, two years ago, we first met to discuss your idea of a publication to feature writing about architecture and design in the form of letters. It seemed like an obvious idea at the time, but one that was risky too.

THAT WAS RISKY TOO

I trained through years of reviews and pinups in architecture school, but putting myself out there through writing was terrifying on a completely different level. There is no obfuscating with text like you can with a rendering, little room for interpretation with your choice in words as you might find in a drawing.

And unlike the objective proximity of one's position in a journalistic piece or the critical distance one can take in a scholarly essay, in signing a letter you consequently expose yourself.1 You embody your writing hopefully, with earnestness. (My favorite valediction so far has been Bryan's "In upbeat sincerity"). Although, I did break that rule about signatures just once2...it was this vulnerability that we kept poking at with each issue. Trying to tease out emotions and opinions, be it humor or anger, romanticism or criticism.

I've always wanted to ask you about your training, in dance. What your experience on stage was like communicating with audiences. It was my sense that this shaped the presence you command on paper. If I could ever learn to be comfortable with my limbs in public, I bet I would in turn become a more confident writer also.

Now the four of us might write to keep in touch, but I would venture that Open Letters was about making a deliberate effort of being in touch with ourselves, each other, and the environments around us. Maybe some designers are accustomed to constructing and shaping in world axis mode, from a virtual distance. But the medium of the letter allowed us to deliberate topics from the value of theory to issues of divestment. It gave us an opportunity to be sentimental 3 and also be held accountable for our politics. Our featherthin publication became a sizeable platform for all kinds of personalities and perspectives.

You wrote in Issue 00, that you were worried about this project turning out "to be a waste of paper."4 I hope with each 30 lb box of newsprint that we continue to order we are helping to fill in some space between.

Yours,
Irene

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1 "Ingrid Bengtson and Sarah Bolivar respond to Anonymous" *Open Letters*, Issue 20, December 12, 2014.

2 "Anonymous writes to GSD," *Open Letters,* Issue 19, November 21, 2014.

3 "GSD Students write to Niall Kirkwood," *Open Letters,* Issue 13, April 18, 2014.

4 "Chelsea Spencer writes to Mack Scogin," *Open Letters,* Issue 02, October 3, 2013.

Open Letters 35

I THINK THERE'S TWO WAYS YOU COULD LOOK AT IT

Open Letters Issue 20, 19, 13, 02

DO WITH THE GOOD OL' MUTE GAZE

Dear Irene,
It was with great excitement that I received your message last week. I'm thrilled to be in touch with you, Lara, and Miranda, all the more so because we've flung ourselves so far. I've been thinking about how I'd reply for these past eight days , but of course not actually putting fingers to keys. I always do this with writing, and I can't say whether it's productive or the opposite: I fantasize about how I'll phrase certain things – usually a few words, not whole sentences. The problem is that I so rarely get to the sentence writing part and quickly forget those little particles of language fused only in my imagination. My year of editing all day every day has made me come to realize that people write at different scales. My problem these days is that I write at a scale slightly smaller than the clause (i.e., "the smallest grammatical unit that can express acomplete proposition"). But I most admire writing that advances at the scale of the sentence.5 I think it is between sentences – the vaulting from one declaration, or question, to the next – that an author's thinking is revealed. Earlier this year I was helping to edit a collection of essays, translated from French, by the structuralist philosopher Hubert Damisch. He starts practically every sentence with mais . Mais je m'éloigne du sujet.

I don't know that I've ever been asked about writing and dance. The two worlds have always remained very separate, neither curious about the other. I think there's two ways you could look at it. One is that dancing and writing draw on two very different, perhaps even opposing, intelligences. The great dance critic Edwin Denby wrote a piece in 1944 called "A Note on Dance Intelligence," which he begins like this: "Expression in dancing is what really interests everybody, and everybody recognizes it as a sign of intelligence in the dancer. But dancing is physical motion, it doesn't involve words at all. And so it is an error to suppose that dance intelligence is the same as other sorts of intelligence which involve, on the contrary, words only and no physical movement whatever." Mind you, this is around the time of Martha Graham's height, when the most modern of dance was a melodramatic expressionism/exorcism.

Dancing on stage – under blindingly bright lights behind which an audience you can't see but know is there sits, watching, ensconced in darkness – is an utterly transcendent experience. Lots of dancers count the music and organize their movement recall that way. 6 I can't do it, because even that degree of articulation – just to say the numbers one through eight – interferes with the articulation that (I hope) is functioning at another register and that, for me, has always been silent and has everything to do with the good ol' mute gaze.

The other way I look at the relationship between dancing and writing is this: Both are performances. In both, you get to decide to be whomever you wish. Of course in dance, you've got a choreographer telling you what they want to see. I think that makes it easier – this wedge of external directions that moves action away from identity. The more ridiculous, the more you must commit to that ridiculousness with total seriousness. Physical limitations impose themselves too: there is no pretending to turn out five perfect pirouettes; there is only doing it. But even the most exquisite technicians can lack what dancers and choreographers call "commitment" – the elimination of doubt and hesitation. I detest the word presence , but it has something to do with the seamless fusion of time, space, energy, and corporeality. (Which quality is scarily instrumentalizable.)

Writing can be more forgiving. Writers need not muster the energy, renew their commitment to every word, every punctuation mark, again and again for the piece to subsist. You can gather facets of your writerly self over the course of working on it. The work of writing leaves a durable (though not necessarily stable) proxy on the page – a score, if you will – and the rest is up to readers. The work of dance can only ready you to start the piece from the top, at which point you're only as good as your fortitude, strength, and readiness in that moment.

At the same time, the necessary immediacy of dancing – the indispensability of repeatedly rehearsing a piece from top to bottom with your own irreplaceable body until you are prepared to carry out and commit to the performance of every gesture with conviction – grants its own undeniable gratifications and possibilities.

With love and eager curiosity,
C

Open Letters Issue 12

WITH LOVE & EAGER CURIOSITY

Open Letters Issue 21

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5 "Edward Eigen responds to John Davis," *Open Letters*, Issue 12, April 11, 2013.

6 "Mack Scogin responds to Chelsea Spencer," *Open Letters*, Issue 02, November 01, 2013.

1 "Ingrid Bengtson and Sarah Bolivar respond to Anonymous" *Open Letters*, Issue 20, December 12, 2014.

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4 "Chelsea Spencer writes to Mack Scogin," *Open Letters*, Issue 02, October 3, 2013.

Dear Lara,
I noticed the Harvard Art Museum is hosting a symposium this week, Material World . Anni Albers' 1926 'Wall Hanging' is front and center (you know the one we lingered over with magnifying glasses last Spring —finally, some redemption for our beloved Anni.7 I wonder if the museum will tweet about her weaving? "#BR48.132. German silk 3ply weave textile, complex layering, made by beautiful woman #AnniAlbers in 1926 #itsabouttime." Could a tweet absolve art history and the Bauhaus from about seventy years of footnoting the women of that studio and their progeny? In June, I walked through the museum one last time and noticed next to Albers' 'Wall Hanging' a curious textual drawing: a typed pattern of 'X' and 'O's on printed newsprint. It was a weaving pattern composed by Ruth Asawa when she was a student at Black Mountain College in Anni Albers' weaving studio. It was framed as if it was a drawing, but it was really a complex, coded set of instructions for a loom, which described the relative position of` thread in three dimensions across its warp and weft. I suppose, because it was coded with 'X' and 'O's, mathematicians or software engineers would like to see it as a curious set of syntactical relationships. Well, in this regard, Anni was a 'coder', a junky of pattern and nearly imperceptible, luxurious detail that can only be felt when the fabric is wrapped around our sad, cold, ailing shoulders. She also wrote, well. German was her language, thread was her vocabulary, the loom was her syntax.

Irene, in her concise genius, declared that "there is no obfuscating with text." I write because, in my achey social anxiety, I want to connect with my own and other's intellect as much as I want to connect and interpret my own imagination. Anni wrote about art and design while in Germany, in the thick of antiSemitic rhetoric (a world saturated with malevolent tweets and judgments). She also wrote about the collective weaving genius of the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus' administration's hypocrisy that subjugated women to weaving, but consequently consolidated a team of genius that would code the magic of textiles for modern design . "Art — a Constant. Times of rapid change produce a wish for stability, for permanence and finality, as quiet times ask for adventure and change. Wishes derive from imaginative vision. And it is this visionary reality we need, to complement our experience of the immediate reality." I suggest that there 8 is little room for hypocrisy in a signed letter. The obligation of writing as a physical, printed, signed act keeps our public selves sincere and disciplined. So yes, I write slowly and with ink. Because, I love you, Anni and everything she valued.

Sincerely Yours,
Miranda

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7 "Anni Albers writes to Ise Gropius," *Open Letters*, Issue 21, January 30, 2015.

8 Albers, Anni. "Art—A Constant". Ed. Brenda Danilowittz. Anni Albers Selected Writings on Design. Weselyan University Press, Hanover, NH, 2000, p. 10.

Dear Miranda,

Facebook has just informed me that today is #nationalpunctuationday. I got sucked into taking the Which punctuation mark are you? quiz: Results cast me as a full stop/period, "." calm, helpful, and distasteful of drama. More interestingly, the quiz describes the punctuation mark itself as nondramatic, calm and helpful. Personally, I am partial to the semicolon. This discovery reminded me of Chelsea's comment on writers progressing their ideas at different scales. If Chelsea longs to scale up from clauses to sentences, I am stuck at the scale of punctuation. (If clauses are capable of expressing a complete proposition, what can a single punctuation mark reveal? They Punctuation marks are defined as singular characters, which separate sentences and their elements to clarify meaning. But I would argue, they do more; they connect sentences, stitch the elements together.) My eyes catch tiny things; I was the one who found the dropped earring back, the invisible pin, the single, miniscule flower in a world of brown, grey and green. Here, my windows stand wide open so gusts of fresh air will force me to look out while I copyedit. Occasionally, I must extend my depth of vision, give my eyes a rest but they won't ignore a misplaced comma. Is an obsession with text at this scale connected to the luxurious detail of a textile?

I share your fascination with pattern because I think in terms of digits, units, spaces set into an expansive field. My initial idea for the Open Letters covers was to mine the writing for details, which I could weave into an encrypted graphics that would act as an abstracted background.9 Even as the wallpaper patterns faded, I stuck with details: like a Dawn Redwood's needles.10 Until now, I had never thought to consider why I took on the role of design editor. It appears rather obvious: I gravitate toward looser structures and rather than write to provoke thought, I write to organize it. It's a bit odd to declare, but I find pleasure in layout, the more physical orspatial composition of thought. With a given document size, a margin, I can draft an idea theway I draft a plan for a landscape architectural design; by treating the paper space as modelspace. And just as hard and soft materials come together on the ground, text is, for me, only half the equation. It is in the play between image and text that I find meaning. Designing the cover graphics for Open Letters gave me this freedom: to treat text as both a formal organization of thought and an aesthetic composition. Text , more than writing, obsesses me, because it isolates the compositional element, brings it down to the tiniest terms.

In Zurich, there is no avoiding even the smallest elements of graphic design. The big, bold, sans serif type developed in 1957 by Max Miedinger and Eduard Hoffmann catches my eye at every corner. Of course, in Switzerland, its birthplace and namesake (the Swiss name for the country is Helvetia, or Confoederatio Helvetica), it is no surprise. Thanks to Chelsea's good taste, we stuck with Benton Sans Condensed and Baskerville for a classic yet contemporary look.

In addition to clean, readable typeface, the Swiss Style established uniformity through a mathematical grid. A standard procedure today, but in the 1920s the use of the gridin the pursuit of minimalism, functionalism and simplicityrevolutionized graphic design in accordance with modernist ideals. I am not a graphic designer but I, too, recognize the grid as the most legible means for structuring information. Using this method, the structure precedes the content. Text is applied to a grid, snuggled into the predetermined order. Like Asawa's textural drawing, which you saw hanging at the Fogg, communication relies on a composition of units in our case, a system or grid of letters. The International Style cast designers not as artists but as conduits for disseminating information. The semicolon in me wants to say we are, in our different ways, both. The grid is my playing field; it has order, but

I AM PARTIAL TO THE SEMI COLON

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it is infinite. (We set the frame.) And the reason, I think, for our affinity with Albers' textiles is our approach to composition. We are writing with warp and weft: First we hold the "composition stick" in our hands and put the lead type into order, and then we set the type into the press bed along with wooden "furniture" (placeholders). Whether by hand, with a typewriter, or on a keyboard, I approach writing like I print text on an analog letterpress: The bed is the field. I am tempted to think that it has something to do with being a landscape architect, rather than an architect. Looser structures allow for visible threads and multiple meanings. Letters are our scale. They are the unit we prefer because each letter can stand alone and yet it is enrichened by a response. And a response could expand the grid in any direction.

I AM THE FULL STOP

I am the full stop, but we know this conversation has no end. A bit homesick for American culture and lit., I am reminded of Emerson's "Circles" essay: " Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on midnoon, and under every deep a lower deep opens." Don't we write/solicit/edit/publish letters in order to grow, to redefine ourselves in terms of each other, in even greater contexts? Ultimately, I think our project embraced the openness of a letter, of inquiring without any guarantee for an answer, because we have learned to accept "do[ing] something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle." The textual fabric has no boundaries of its ownwe set and reset the frame. A collaborative editorial team is in constant exchange, sending verbal missives at full tilt. With that, nothing, not even me, is a full stop.

Open Letters Issue 05

LET THE RUCKUS BEGIN

Let the ruckus begin –
Lara

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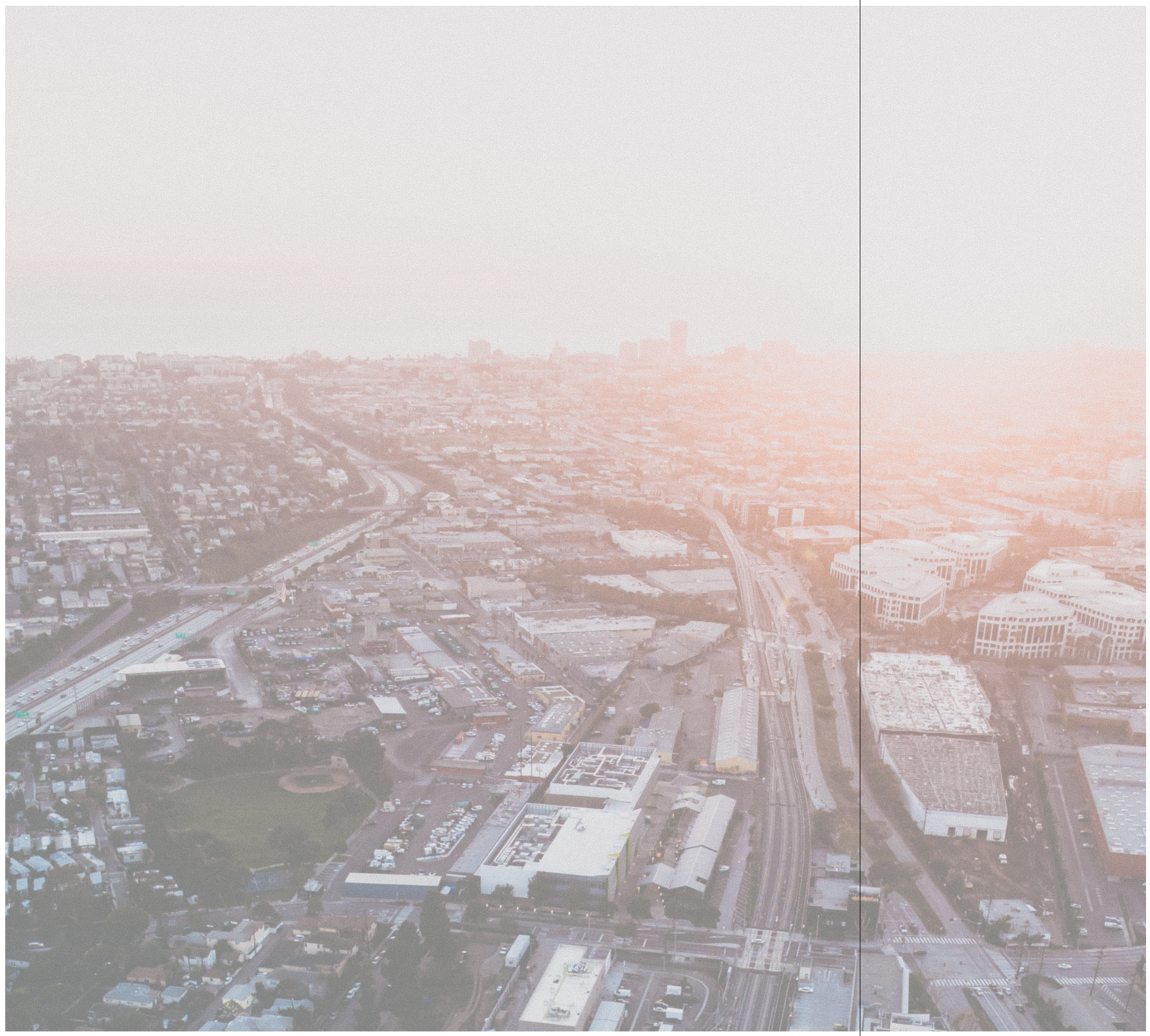

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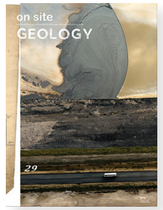

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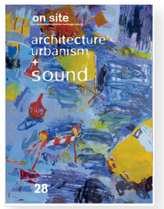

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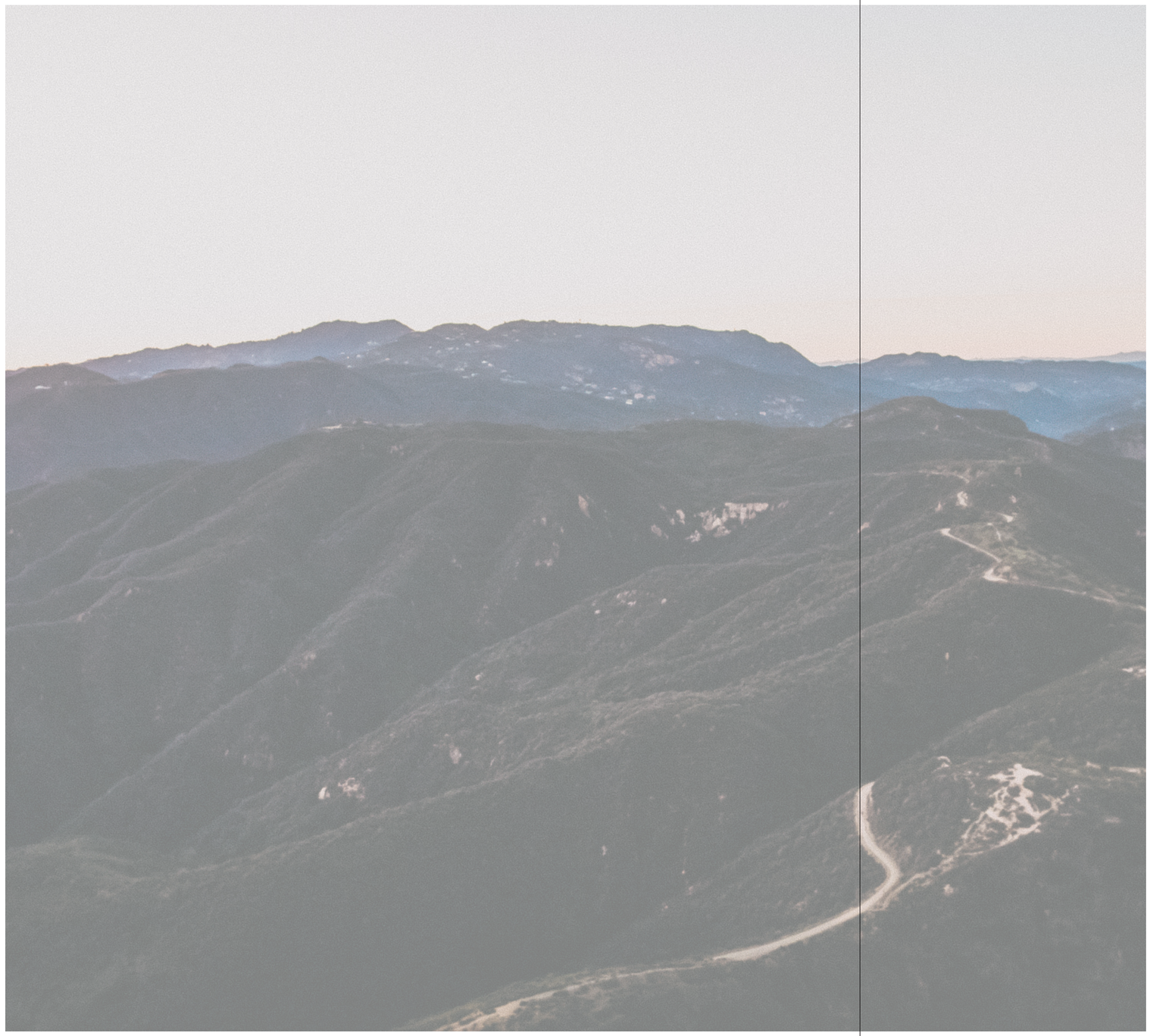

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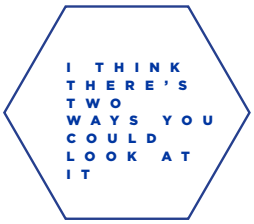
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