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Life Editorial

Scapegoat

Seth Denizen: First, I think we have to start by saying a few words about the title. What exactly do we call this issue? The strikethrough is usually used as a kind of correction, but there are so many different flavours of correction. There is the correction as *epanorthosis*, where a word is recalled by the strikethrough, so that a more correct or stronger term can be substituted. A correction can also be an *apophasis*, where we mention something by not mentioning it, striking through what we might have said: ~~this is the greatest issue in the history of Scapegoat~~. This is closer to the original use of strikethrough, because it preserves what it redacts. We can see what's underneath the line, and it's only recently that this has come to signify a correction. Medieval editors used the strikethrough for emphasis.¹ It was not until the nineteenth century that the strikethrough was codified in English Law to signify a cancellation of a debt, as in to "settle an account."² I think this issue on ~~life~~ is also a kind of correction, but certainly not an *epanorthosis*, nor a cancelling of ~~life~~'s debts. Rather, it's a sustained curiosity in all the ways in which ~~life~~ as a category has been redacted, edited, cancelled, negated, or otherwise put in relation with its outside. It's more of a *not-life* issue, than a *non-life* issue. In this sense we're reading the strikethrough, or misreading it, as the metaphysical firewall that separates the living from the dead, the animate from the inanimate, the human from the natural, through an always incomplete redaction of ~~life~~ as a category. And as architects we've become fascinated by the

ways in which this line has to be built and rebuilt, constantly maintained, designed, and defended. Architects have always been paid by someone to build metaphysical concepts in physical materials—this is the canonical origin of architecture as a discipline. It's the gothic cathedral, or the acropolis, or every bank built to look like the acropolis that you've ever seen. What we're interested in, however, is another moment, where architecture not only builds but actively polices these metaphysical boundaries in ways that are extremely literal. I'm thinking here about the way in which the metaphysical firewalls that obsessively partition what is alive from what is dead in Texas abortion law recently became physical firewalls, built carefully according to strict building codes mandated by the Texas legislature (page 155, George-Johannes-LoriBrown, especially #18 in the figure). Here, architecture is literally the strikethrough. It's a literalism that I think is echoed clearly in Maroš Krivý's critique of the way biological metaphors become literal forms in contemporary neo-vitalist urbanism (see page 22, Krivý). We

¹ In the massive debts ledger in which the wealth of England and Wales was surveyed for King William the Conqueror in 1086, aka the Domesday Book, strikethrough is used for emphasis, to highlight rather than redact. See John Palmer, *Electronic Edition of Domesday Book: Translation, Databases and Scholarly Commentary, 1086, 2nd Edition* (UK Data Service, 2010).

² From the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to strike through is to cancel (writing) by drawing a line through it." From *Encyclopedia of the Laws of England, vol. VIII* (1898): "The initialing of the memorandum is struck through, and the loss is then 'struck off' or settled in account" (207).

live in a moment in which “life” is being subjected to the most rigid formalisms, or as Krivý puts it, “the formalism of the process.”

Marcin Kedzior: So maybe we should think about this strikethrough as not simply a negation but also a shattering. As we were editing this issue, every night I was reading *Humpty Dumpty* to my baby as a bedtime story and became more and more convinced that we’ve been misreading this story, that Humpty, the egg, did not simply fall and shatter—he hatched! (page 68, Kwinter) But all the king’s horses and all the king’s men (was it an army? a police force?) could only see fragments, and of course, they couldn’t reassemble them. Life was not where they were looking for it! It took off. Made a break for it. But not a clean break because we found traces of it in all of matter. As we learned, “Life” is simply “matter that knows reliably, stably, and continuously over time” (page 68, Kwinter). Every time we think we see something breaking or shattering, in fact, something has simply hatched. But the logic of differentiation makes this hatching hard to see. It is a logic as old as *Genesis*: creation coming from division or cutting. The horizon is a massive, architectural strikethrough of the cosmos, allowing the earth and sky to emerge (page 76, Scheinman), but what has hatched (and gone unnoticed) is the possibility for a reorganization of matter that underpins the emergence of form, of representation, of Life, even of architecture *from the deep*.

SD: You’re reading of *Humpty Dumpty* is incredible. Of course she hatched! And, you’re right, architecture is doing more than simply building the metaphysical boundary: it also transforms the nature of that boundary. Every time an architect tries to reassemble the egg the fragments get put together in a new way, and like IKEA projects, there’s always that disconcerting piece left over after you finish the assembly that reminds you (usually in a sad way) of your authorship. I’m thinking here of the Ruriko-in automated cemetery in Tokyo, designed by Kiyoshi Sey Takeyama (page 132, Fisch and Solomon). If there is an egg in this issue, this building is definitely it. What has fractured in Tokyo is the whole system by which one maintains a relationship to the dead. The temple cemeteries are full, the economies that underwrote the temple system of cleaning and maintaining grave sites have changed, become unaffordable, or disappeared, and the time necessary to visit the dead at proper intervals has come into conflict with the temporality of life under late capitalism in Tokyo. The building tries to solve all these problems through the logic of automation, drawing on the same technologies that created these temporal and spatial conflicts in the first place, in order to reassemble the physical and metaphysical requirements for caring for the dead in this new capitalist space-time. What will be the leftover IKEA piece in that assembly I wonder? Maybe it’s the nagging doubt that the automated system has really delivered your grandparents and not someone else’s? I don’t know, they’ve probably thought of that problem. To ask the question in another way: could the tools of automation and efficiency deployed in Ruriko-in reassemble what has broken in Jakarta (page 164, Bobbette), where the racial segregation

of Indonesian ghosts has become the precondition for strategic fires and subsistence economies in cemetery squatter settlements? I mean, what would that building look like? Even with all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, a challenging brief.

MK: There is something essential about errors and breakages here. I’m reminded of Frank Lloyd Wright’s morbid advice, “The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant vines.” Taken in our context, the vines are a strikethrough of a previous error, a negation of a negation, pointing elsewhere. Duchamp understood this when he refused to finish his work *Large Glass*, until the glass cracked during transportation. Duchamp laughed and said “now it is finished.” The more we break down the closer we are to Life. What we typically call “Life,” in terms of duration, spectrum of experience, or the category itself, is a sliver of light between two dark curtains of eternity. Framed, designed, even made visible by these curtains. We get a glimpse of the expansion of this narrow band, this strikethrough of *life and light* in four different translations of a poem about Spring (page 81, Wu). Another project that makes these curtains dance, aligns life-to-be-lived with the open, projective, space of the white walls in several galleries (page 94, Lexier). We think of birth as a sudden

appearance—but in fact babies have been here all along! It is us “grown-ups” who have, historically, recently emerged to restlessly define what is “Human” and what is “Life.” Engaging with the full spectrum of being, babies have more in common with babies thousands of years ago (or in the future) than they do with us. A redefinition of Life is presented in the story of Nicholas Green that reveals, and sets in motion, what bodies have in common—organs—and what cultures have in common—memorials (page 102, Culpepper). We have been staring at the cracks in Humpty’s shell as so many strikethroughs, but Life has exceeded the walls of the Kingdom, thrown off the political, ethical and architectural traps, and has fled elsewhere.

SD: I have to say that as a landscape architect I am scandalized by Wright’s conception of vines, but never mind, we have to go even further in saying what vines do, and what broken glass does. In short, we need to articulate what ~~life~~ does, and this is where I think Rosemary Joyce makes an incredible contribution (page 40, Joyce). Drawing on Karen Barad she offers a much more precise vocabulary for talking about these kinds of transformations (the organ, the bell, the birds), which for her are

3 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

bread-and-butter problems of archeological work. As an archaeologist she simply cannot afford to make the usual facile distinctions between life and non-life that structure our conceptions of objects or of how meaning can be made, and as a feminist she can afford them even less, because the ways in which we permit “matter” to speak are central to the historic oppression of women, whose bodies are relentlessly *biologized*. Her sensitivity to the historical contingency of our animacy hierarchies, and to the *intra-activity* of matter in its relationships rather than its essences, are precisely the concerns architecture should take seriously if it wants to stop being such a pawn in the power games in which it finds itself. This is true in Texas (page 148, GeorgeJohannes-LoriBrown), or the Aleutian Islands for that matter, where, surprisingly, the American military isn’t confused at all about the semiotic capacities of rocks, having converted the entire archipelago, and indeed the Earth itself, into its own private radiation sensor (page 10, Arroyo). We might call their device a life sensor, or as Alexander Arroyo does, a living laboratory.

MK: We can’t pick up all the pieces! Like the pieces in this issue of *Scapegoat*, some have escaped, some were forgotten, some we only glimpsed, some were relegated to the margins but are now starting to swell and take over, some were never found. We have been wiping, sanitizing, and decluttering, but now it is time to run with the mess, to jump into the river!

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a roving, sporadically reoccurring party that opens spaces for

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Chengdu, the brocade city, now flowerheavy.

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It is called skyline. But is it not also strata?

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The troubling animacy of stone is other

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bells from schools, churches, ships, mines, and even cows. These were flown in by the Italian Air Force

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empty beer cans afixed to the otter pens

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So that’s like our life because we take the shape of the things around us. And other people

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also the baby-like figures that snuck around rich peoples neighbourhoods and stole money

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“We play this charade so the government lets us operate.” I stayed at the station for the next several hours, watching the cycle repeat

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The picture turned out to be an unfinished painting turned on its side, caught in a beam of moonlight

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Self-portrait as a wall divided

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It almost looks like terrazzo, but it’s actually a concrete block with some nice aggregate in it

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of household “survival kits” complete with procedural manuals, dosimeters, geiger counters and

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the invention of Marmite from the leftovers of beer brewing

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the cultivation of the “magical” aspects of existence’s enduring permanent? mysteries.