Susan M. Stabile

Architectures of ~~Revision~~

Live by analogy, I tell my creative nonfiction students. Not by dwelling in comparisons between unfamiliars, but by making their familiars strange. To find a draft essay's architecture—its organic design—through the revision process, they should look to other arts. Because analogies reframe our creative uncertainties, tilt our stories awry, and resituate us beside them. Similarities between unrelated situations unfold, altering our perspectives and prompting new insights. Analogies offer distance from what we expect, know, or think we know. They provoke *creative interference*: producing raw ideas held in a state of potentiality, which provokes associative processing and reflection (Gabora and Saab). Most important, they are haptic: to activate an analogy's simultaneity and surprise requires adaptive, sensorial, hands-on work.[1]

Haptic Analogy: A Brief Quiz

Q: How has slow food guru Alice Waters' cultivated such an expansive appreciation of food's *aliveness*—from her acclaimed restaurant *Chez Panisse* and Edible Schoolyard Project to our own dining tables?

A: She applies the Montessori Method she learned as a teacher: "the senses need to be educated," Waters advises, "they are the pathways into our minds, and so the idea of something looking right and being able to touch, to be able to smell, to be able to taste, to hear, to listen, these are all ways that we can reach people and we can awaken them."

[1] On analogical design, see Andrea Ponsi, *Architecture and Design* (University of Virginia Press, 2015) and M. Gross and E. Do, "Drawing Analogies—Supporting Creative Architectural Design with Visual References." *3rd International Conference on Computational Models of Creative Design*, eds. M-L Maher and J. Gero (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1995): 37-58.

Q: How did the iconic Eames lounge chair evolve: its molded plywood in rounded rectangles and biomorphic curves anticipating our bodies sitting on its sturdy H-shaped legs?

A: During World War II, the U.S. Navy contracted Charles and Ray Eames to design and handcraft medical leg splints for injured soldiers. The prosthetic prototypes, after much experimentation, morphed into the body-hugging lounge chair that we know today. "A true model, in the experimental and *feeling-your-way sense*," Charles explains, "can just be a kind of tentative walk through the experience by which you can retreat, consolidate yourself, regroup, and take a try again" (Meir). (For more on their processes, see here.)

Figure 1: Charles Eames, Leg Splint, designed 1941-1942, Brooklyn Museum, Wikimedia

Figure 2: © Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com)

Figure 3: Charles and Ray Eames, The LCW (Lounge Chair Wood) Chair (1945-46), on view at the Honolulu Museum of Art, Creative Commons

Q: How did Frank Lloyd Wright's insistence on *Organic Architecture* achieve what he called "the over-all sense of unity" in his famous Wisconsin "country church"?

A: "This building is itself a form of prayer," explains Wright, his inspiration the image of quiet hands folded in prayer (which he manifests in a triangle of "origami-like folded copper clad plates") (Kearney). The upward and pitched roof (earthly *form*) evokes the transcendent (spiritual *function*), organically moving "*from within outward*": "wherever the whole is to the part as the part is to the whole . . . the nature of the entire performance, becomes clear as a necessity" (Meehan 36). A deliberate architecture, Wright shows, is pure analogy: A : B : : B : A.

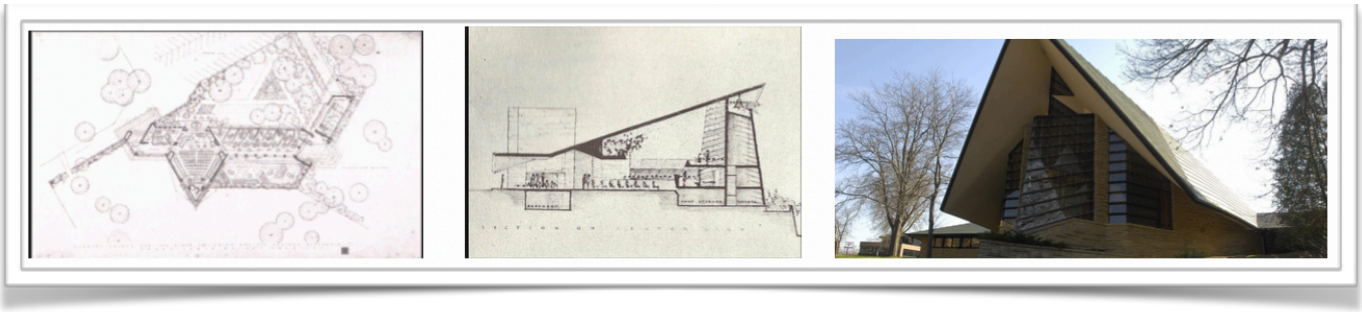


Figure 4: Frank Lloyd Wright, First Unitarian Meeting House, 1947

Figure 5: Frank Lloyd Wright, First Unitarian Meeting House, Sketch *Architectural Forum*, 1948

Figure 6: Frank Lloyd Wright, First Unitarian Society Meeting House (1947). Madison, WI. (Photo: Nomadsiefer/Wikimedia Commons

The human practices of savoring, lounging, praying—and writing —shape (indeed *necessitate*) the forms of food, furniture, buildings, and essays we design. And all require trial and error, experiment and revision. A little less salt, a few more chives, and Alice Waters perfected the medley of flavor and color for her *Salted Potatoes with Crème Fraise and Chives* recipe. Shaping plywood medical splints around his own leg and bonding them with resin glue by applying heat and pressure, and Charles Eames fashioned an adaptable prosthetic for wounded soldiers. Replacing the traditional church steeple with angled geometries sculpted in concrete, copper, and glass, and Frank Lloyd Wright revolutionized the performance of Unitarian devotion. Recipes, prototypes, blueprints, and sketches are these artists' first drafts, which are refined through tinkering, experiment, and modification. They are also potent analogies for the creative nonfiction writer to engage: the *feeling-your-way sense* through what Vivian Gornick calls an essay's *situation* (the topic or event or experience or memory) toward its *story* (the deeper and resonant meaning)(Gornick). The progression from situation to story (the essay's *within*), it follows,

necessitates its organic architecture (the essay's *outward*) or structural design. And moving from *within outward* requires manual labor.

The Manual Labor of the Draft

On the first class day and throughout the semester, I present *architecture*—particularly *scaffolding*—as our working analogy for close reading, drafting, and revising creative nonfiction essays. Because a working draft (in all its iterations) is a scaffold for an evolving structure, it provides both support and risk. Think of construction workers moving in midair along supporting runners and crawling boards without freefalling. (And what is a writer if not a construction worker? A builder of meaning through language's moveable parts and arrangements.) Wooden, metal, plastic, or paper, scaffolds provide a temporary staging area for construction, maintenance, and repair; they open access points to otherwise difficult-to-reach places.

I've always marveled at a scaffold's generosity: built in order to be dismantled so a permanent structure can stand on its own. Assembled from the ground up, part by part, and disassembled from the top down, a scaffold is an animate analogy for the essayist. It is a living and three-dimensional process. An additive, subtractive, and kinetic art. Its vertical standards—like solid paragraphs—transfer the entire structure's mass to the ground. Horizontal ledgers—like subjects and predicates or linking verbs—reinforce the vertical parts. Cross braces and façade braces—like transition sentences—increase stability and limit sway. And couplers—like a well-placed semicolon or conjunction—lock them together. And all of it resting upon a *bearer*. A scaffold's syntax illustrates how an essay's form shoulders its content. How it gives the prose sway to move between the situation and the emerging story from *within outward*. (See "Basic Scaffolding Erection Procedure")

The analogy reassures.

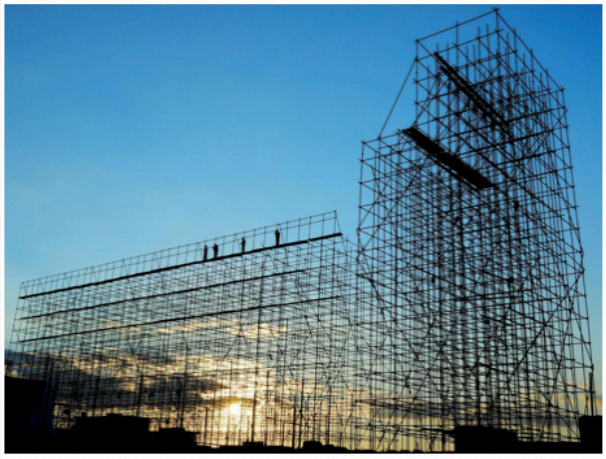


Figure 7

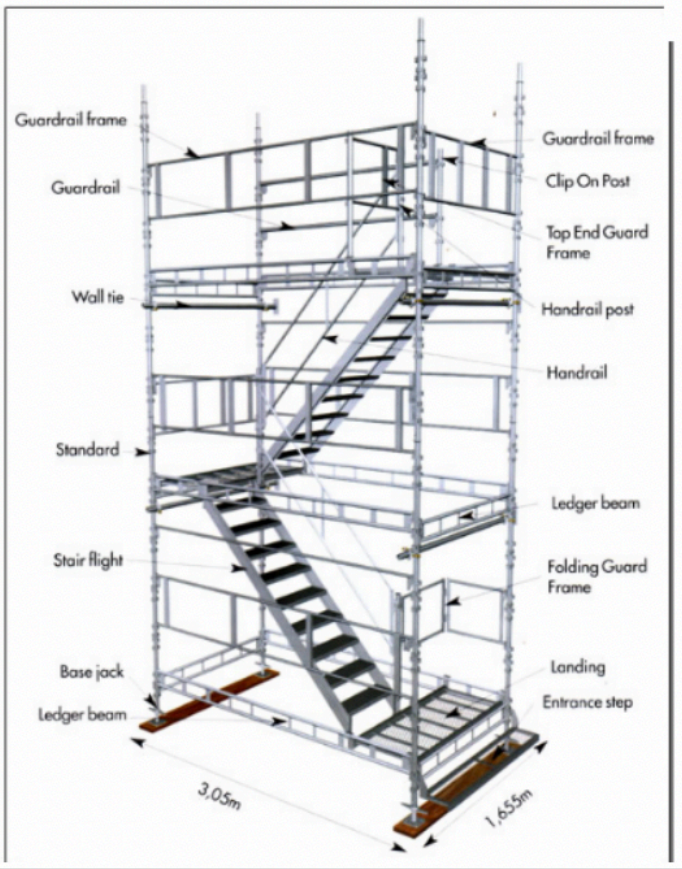


Figure 8: Vocabulary of Scaffold Parts

But what of a scaffold's risk? What of the *suspended scaffolds* that hang in the air rather than rise from the ground? Aerial workcages and swing stages, hoisting ropes and counterweights, vertical and horizontal lifelines. What might this balancing act offer the writer-construction worker?

A suspended scaffold asks us to trust the building process. To allow our minds acrobatic freeplay, swinging from one idea to another, knowing the temporary form is enough to hold them. To indulge suspension's thrills of anticipation, precarity, and disbelief. To stay open to surprises and pursue digressions we hadn't imagined. To keep writing because we don't need to know where an essay is going or what form its architecture will take.[2] We can "cantilever the whole narrative out into thin air and it holds,"

[2] Poet Diane Ackerman encourages a similar form of experiment in *Deep Play,* Vintage, 2000.

Figure 9: Catenary Scaffold

Figure 10: Float (Ship) Scaffold

Figure 11: Multi-Level Scaffold

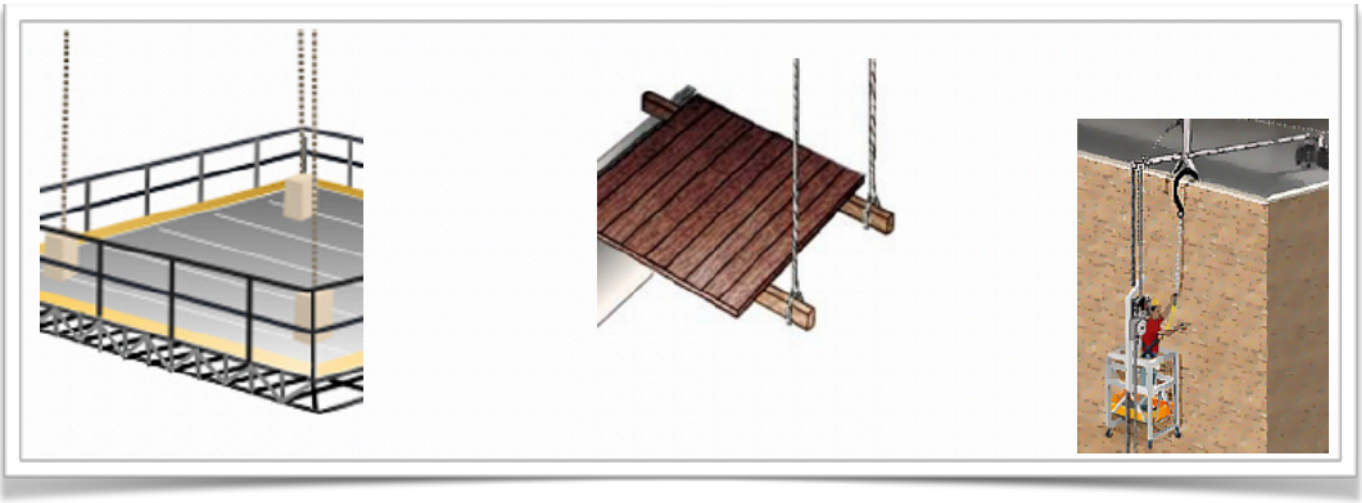


Figure 12: Multi-Point Adjustable Scaffold

Figure 13: Needle-Beam Scaffold

Figure 14: Single-Point Adjustable Scaffold

says Annie Dillard (Dillard). Paragraphs become horizontal beams projecting into space, vertically anchored at one end yet unsupported at its other.

Accruing down the pages—

sentence

by

sentence

—without decided permanence.

An essay's scaffold, therefore, not only anticipates, but also bridges; its suspension is a pause, a deferral that allows us to find our footing and discover its necessary form.

Architecture from the Outside: Initial Contours

Because revision is the process of removing a draft's scaffold, it reorients the air-bound writer, grounding them in the essay's unshaped ideas rather than in its eventual and formal design. Students find this first-level revision the most daunting: discovering their essay's story (which should push beyond the banal, the sentimental, or the didactic); cutting out the hard-worked and extraneous darlings; recognizing the underlying form as it emerges; or realizing it has no design at all, strung only by its hoisting rope. I remind them of Tim Bascomb's sage advice about a polished essay's singular organic form (which we discuss during the first week of class): "Nothing is wasted . . . because every bend in the process is helping you to *arrive at your necessary structure*" (Bascomb).[3] We revisit, too, our close readings of the essays he sketches: (1.) JoAnn Beard's "Fourth State of Matter"; (2.) Scott Russell Sanders's "Under the Influence"; (2.) Wendell Berry's "An Entrance into the Woods"; and (4.) Judith Ortiz Cofer's "Silent Dancing":

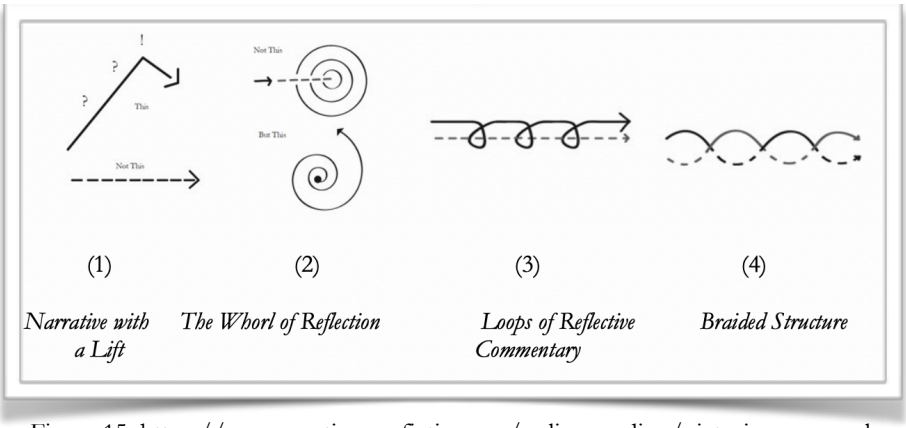


Figure 15: https://www.creativenonfiction.org/online-reading/picturing-personal-essay-visual-guide

[3] Other useful approaches to finding an essay's "design" include anything written by Ander Monson. For example, "Essay as Hack," *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction.* Ed. Sean Prentiss and Joe Wilkins (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014): 9-22. See http://otherelectricities.com/ for links to his other work and projects.

Though he generically labels the essay shapes (as if they were replicable or adaptable models), Bascomb warns: "*No diagram matches the exact form that evolves and that is because the best essayists resist predictable approaches. They refuse to limit themselves to generic forms*." With the exception of a *hermit crab essay* (that fits an original story into a borrowed or found form), every essay's architecture is unique (Miller). Moving from *inside outward* (as Frank Lloyd Wright reminds us), *form* (architecture) always follows *function* (story).

Readying students for their revision's inevitable excisions (and their natural resistance to modification), I present a short video tutorial on contour drawing in class. Students then sketch their hand's outline in their writing journals. The exercise "makes you pay very close attention to your object," the narrator explains, because a contour is a "simplification of what you see." It offers a kind of distance from the object's details (to which we get so attached) and reveals its basic shape. The reflexive contour demonstration (a hand sketching a hand) provides a simple and performable analogy: more than personal expression, an essay is a manipulable material object: *essaying* (as a *verb*) is an embodied process and (as a *noun*) an autonomous object. The sketched hand is a gesture, too: its palm a halting reminder of editorial distance. *Put your intentions aside, what you think you wrote. Step back and see what the paper reveals.* For homework, the students accordingly make a contour drawing of their draft beneath their hand's outline. The contour makes visible the basic scaffold holding the literary components in place. (Try the tutorial before revising your next piece.)

Indwelling: On Latent Forms

Since a contour drawing documents an essay's silhouette, the writer-construction worker must go next *inside* its roughed edges and attend to the essay's particulars. To discover how the sketched situation is emerging (or not) into a story. At this point, I introduce another tactile analogy: the *subtractive arts* of sculpture, papercutting, and woodcarving. Embryonic processes, they remove extraneous material that

prevents the visual stories from emerging. And they illustrate the ecstatic moment of realizing an essay's story, the moment when its consequent architecture becomes apparent.

We look first to Michelangelo's *non-finito* or *incomplete* sculptures displayed in *The Hall of Prisoners*. (Alternately called slaves, prisoners, and captives, the figures represent caged lives within punitive scaffolds: metal bars and shackles and locks barricade them within the stone walls). The *Atlas*, *Bearded*, *Young*, and *Awakening* Slaves are eternally suspended, struggling to escape the hand-selected and uncut Cararra marble.

Figure 16: Michelangelo, The Atlas Slave (c. 1530), Creative Commons

Figure 17: Michelangelo, The Bearded Slave (c. 1530), Creative Commons

Figure 18: Michelangelo, The Young Slave (c. 1530), Creative Commons

Figure 19: Michelangelo, The Awakening Slave (c. 1530), Creative Commons

Notice how the trapped yet kinetic figures seem to be shouldering themselves from the marble and awakening into their dormant forms. The faceless Atlas bearing the entire sculpture's weight (as he did the world) on his muscle-chiseled shoulders. The bearded bondsman supporting (or perhaps lifting) his heavy head with his fleshy right arm and unfinished hand, his

torso twisting and left foot pushing off the stubborn stone. The younger man, in contrast, bemoans his misery (arm over face, left ankle and foot retracted behind [or preparing to kick?] the relentless wall). And finally, the waking slave, sprawled and stretching, shoring up his strength: his right arm clenched against sleep and his head limp upon (or yanked back into) the unyielding pillow.

The slaves' suspended animation (along with the extant *pentimenti* of mallet grooves and chisel points) reflects Michelangelo's creative process.[4] He believed that a work's finished form innately dwells in the marble; the sculptor's role is to cut away the excess, thereby liberating the hidden figure. Unlike other artists who create plaster casts and methodically mark out sections on the marble, he worked freehand to relieve the form. (*Relieve*: what a marvelous word for the alleviation of a suffering body and its emergence into *bas-relief!) Per forza di levare* (by means of removal), pure sculpture—and elegant writing—is subtractive.

Shifting from marble to textiles, I offer paper cutting as a more practical applied art for the essayist. A brief slide show (from Étienne de Silhouette's 18th-century *shadow portraits* to Kara Walker's shocking wall-sized silhouettes critiquing U.S. racial politics) illustrates how Western paper cutters have variably crafted stories (through human profiles, historical scenes, and alternative lifescapes) in blunt contour.

Figure 20: Étienne de Silhouette (1709-1767)

To challenge students' immediate or automatic ways of seeing, I focus on the well-known silhouette, *Rubin's Vase*. A doubled image, it illustrates both the *cut-out* and *hollow-cut* silhouette methods that maneuver positive and negative space, a kind of internal and

[4] A rich analogy to a writer's compositional process, *pentimento* in painting and sculpture is a kind of *underwriting*: a still-visible layer of an earlier iteration of the evolving artwork (i.e. a shadow, line, color, chisel mark, etc.)

external contour at once.[5] And it invites them to look at a given subject from diverging vantage points.

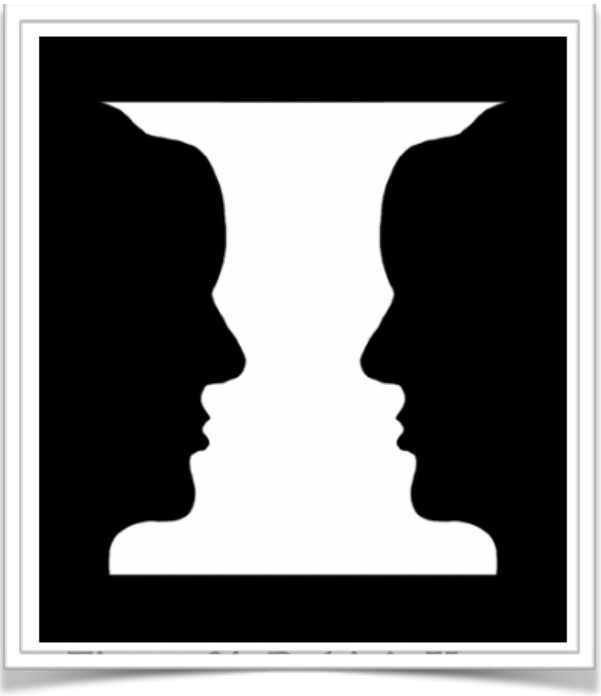


Figure 21: Ruben's Vase. John Smithson (2007)/English Wikipedia

Figure 22: Kara Walker, *Untitled* (1998) The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain under *Creative Commons Zero*).

What do you see in this silhouette? I ask them. *The positive white space composing the vase? Or the two faces shaped by the negative white space between and around them*? *Or something else?* A trick of the eye perhaps, but twice seen, we recognize the simultaneous figures. After this quick exercise, students adapt their essay's contour drawing into a silhouette (using either the cut-out or hollow-cut method) and paste it into their writing journals. A revision exercise, the cut and pasted paper helps students to visualize how their essay's organization (i.e. where details are foregrounded or sublimated) frames (or unframes) its situation and emerging story.

[5] The two historical traditions in hand-cut silhouettes manipulate positive and negative space. "Cut-out silhouettes" are images cut from a dark material (usually black paper) and mounted onto a heavy cream-colored card. "Hollow-cut silhouettes" are figures cut from a piece of light-colored paper, leaving the negative space outside of the image, which is then backed with dark paper or fabric.

In the following class period, we watch contemporary French paper artist Beatrice Coron's *Ted Talk*, "Stories Cut from Paper." Taking a piece of paper or large DuPont™ Tyvek® (a paper-like product made from flash-spun, high-density polyethylene fibers), Coron typically begins her paper cut by visualizing her story. Sometime sketching, always sensing by hand, she intuits it shape: *"By cutting paper, I look for hidden secrets behind the surface."* Through her unplanned process of discovery, Coron trusts the blank paper's suspended potential, its thrill of anticipation and deferral of meaning. The story and its organic form are indwelling, *"already inside the paper,"* she explains. "*I just have to remove what's not from that story."* After cutting the story, Coron places the design on a contrasting background for "*people to see what I see*." Framing and contextualizing the design—like a revising writer considering their audience—she makes the story clear-cut to its viewers. The paper-cutting analogy comes into starker relief by placing Coron's paper cut-outs beside Bascomb's earlier essay shapes:

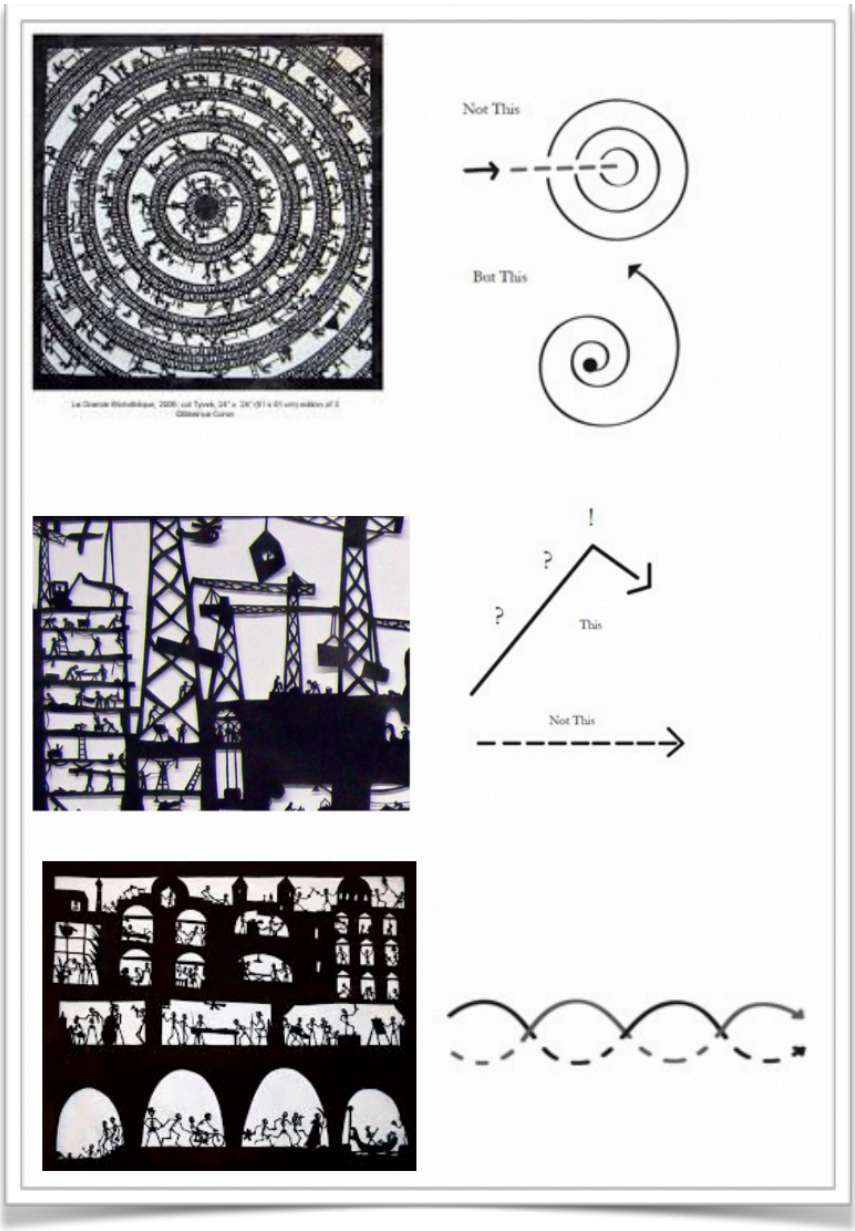


Figure 23-25: Beatrice Coron, Le Grande Bibliotheque (2006), Invisible Cities (detail, 2008), Dead City (2004). Tim Bascomb, "Picturing the Personal Essay," *Creative Nonfiction* 49 (Summer 2013)

Coron's urban architectural structures (from library and scaffolds to porticos and colonnades) illustrate the kinetic energy of narrative worlds. Of an essay's paper architecture. Interactive geometries (of circles and squares and rectangles and rhombuses and parallelograms and trapezoids) transform negative into three-dimensional space. Peopled, these spaces invite us to join the black cut-outs animating the scenes. Tracing each essay's contour, Bascomb similarly instructs his readers how to view the organic geometries: (*This* is how the story is shaped, *not That*). A kind of negative space, the *not That* resembles the silhouette's cut-out. It is precisely where the writer-editor removed the extraneous words.

In the next class, I bring each student a pencil and sliver of found wood, and instruct them to hold and turn the fragment in their hands—feeling its striated textures and the bark's knobs—before making a pencil rubbing in their writing journal. I remind them that wood, like marble and paper, invites subtraction. Another substrate with indwelling forms, wood suspends its carver's intentions. As American artist David Esterly describes the living medium: a carver learns about wood (i.e. long-grain is strong, short-grain weak, and end-grain tough) "in his muscles and nerves. There is plenty of feedback from the wood." Working in the high-relief and naturalistic style of the British wood carver, Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721), Easterly considers wood pliable, modeled by his intuitive hands.

Figure 26: David Esterly, Works in Progress
https://www.davidesterly.com/portfolio/work-in-progress/

Woodcarving is *hyperorganic*, he says, the process a complex balance of a negotiated ecosystem of human and former tree. Unlike Michelangelo, whose figures struggle for liberation, carvers (like writers) labor with and against the wood (like words). As Esterly explains his athletic process: ambidextrous handling of chisels while anchoring the wood with his torso twisting in a contraposto way: "*You take the resistance of the wood internally.*" Once the general shape emerges, he *undercuts* the splintery form, defining the finer edges. Its contour deepens. Returning to their pencil rubbings at the class's end, students prepare for their essays' second-level revision, a kind of *frottage* of its story's texture, its thick and subtle grains.

(Under)cuttings

Because first-level revision's subtractive methods have excavated the essay's story and attendant architecture, the second-level process dismantles its suspended scaffold. Students proceed by cutting their essays into paragraph pieces, scattering them on a large seminar table or our classroom floor, having their peer groups reassemble them. Where description and exposition balance wobbles, where narrative gaps appear, where the transitions jar, they can see the essay scaffold's weaknesses. Where its component parts and emerging story are unsupported. They accordingly reassemble the paragraphs from last to first (imitating a scaffold's erection from bottom up) to test the revision's integrity. *Does the essay hold?* Then they cut the unnecessary paragraphs, add transitions between the resulting fissures, and reconstruct the draft pieces one final time from the top down (imitating the scaffold's final dismantling).

As subtractive artists, I point out, they have just successfully cut away the suspended scaffolds' vertical standards and horizontal ledgers, the cross and façade braces that supported their draft's labor. Bringing to class a clean copy of their typed drafts and a writing implement (the new bearers), they return to the remaining paragraphs, marking the places for sharp *undercuttings* of sentences: excessive verbiage, incorrect grammar, and awkward syntax are shaved away. Their editorial *pentimenti*—~~*Cross-outs*~~ and arrows

and ∧words—are a writer-construction worker's most precise couplers, tightening the permanent construction so the scaffold can be fully removed:

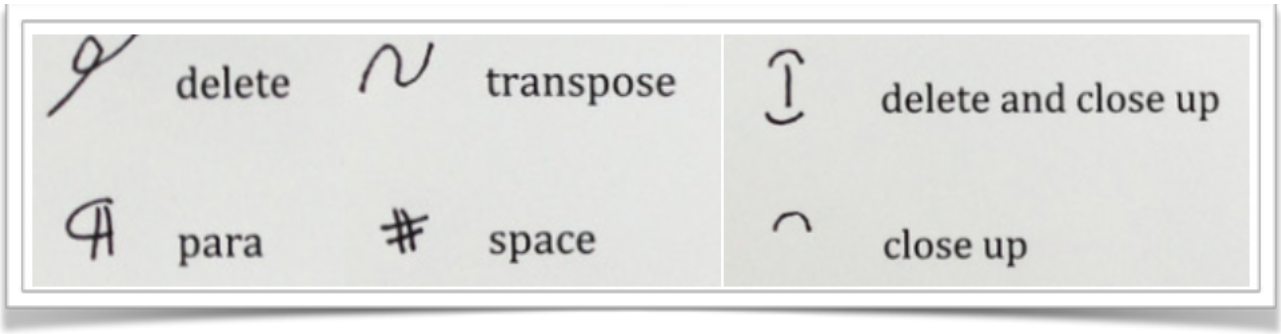


Figure 27

The editorial symbols (geometric in their own right) signal alterations for more efficient spatial configurations of a paragraph's sentences. Every thought cleanly linked to the next. Every word carrying its own weight. After integrating these changes, students print and read aloud one more clean copy of the essay, asking themselves: *What remains of the original object and what is now missing? How can I make each paragraph self-sustaining, while upholding the others?*

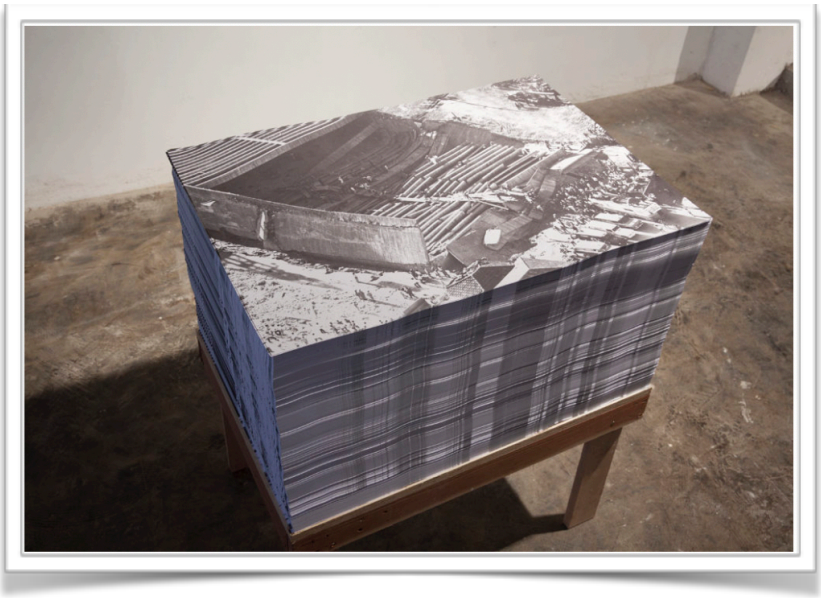


Figure 28: Lais Myrrha, Gameleira Project, 1971.
https://vimeo.com/100162834

At this final stage of their second-level revision, we read a story about a doomed architectural marvel uncovered by Brazilian artist Lais Myrrha's *Gameleira Project*. The situation: architect Oscar Niemeyer designed an exhibition park for the city of Belo Horizonte for the 1971

São Paulo Biennial. The story: part of the building slab collapsed, killing a hundred workers, but the military dictatorship covered it up for over forty years. Until Myrrha's 2015 traveling exhibition.

Through her archival reproduction and vertical exhibition of the singular extant photograph as an upright building's paper architecture, Myrrha has brought the hidden story to the contemporary surface. She has unearthed the memory of forgotten manual laborers trapped beneath the failed scaffold's rubble. Like Michelangelo's Atlas slave, they have symbolically shouldered all of Brazil's burdens under the dictatorship, emerging from the mass concrete-and-steel grave through a forbidden and hidden photograph. A *non-finito* project of trapped victims. A history of reversed cut-outs echoing Coron's work, where the story never surfaces. An industrial undercutting revealing what lies beneath (so unlike Easterly's hyperorganicism), carving texture into a misshapen cultural narrative.

During her Texas tour, Lais left me several hundred prints of the accident site, which I distribute each semester to students as we discuss the cultural cover-up. The unarticulated lives buried beneath swept-away rubble. *Think through analogy,* I remind them. *What is your revision still covering up or burying*? *Very likely part of the* story *you've been circling, overlooking, sensing, or avoiding*. Turning to the print's blank side, students do a new contour drawing of their revision's altered architecture, which I post to our ecampus page. (They also copy it into their writing journal to archive the three-part revision exercise). Here are some examples **(Figures 29-33)**:

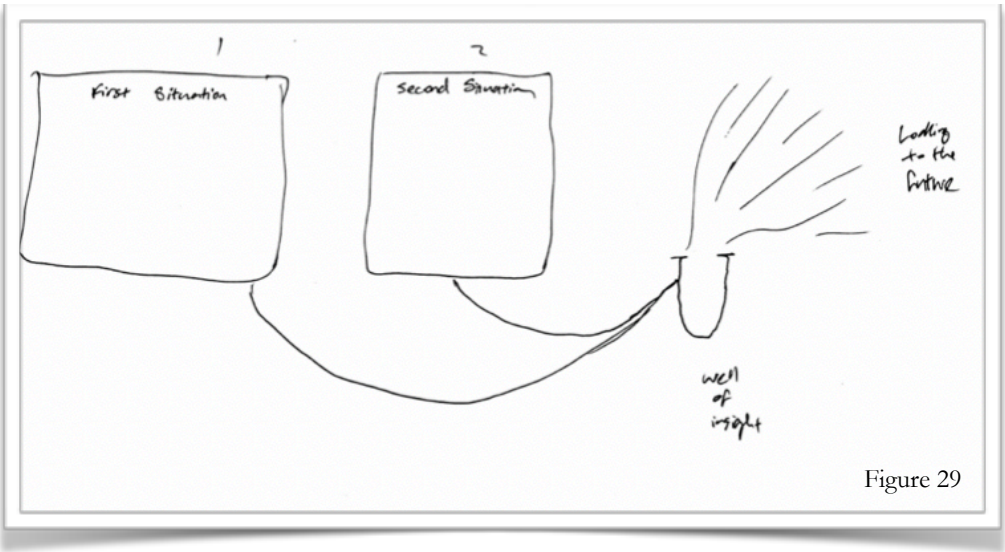


Figure 29

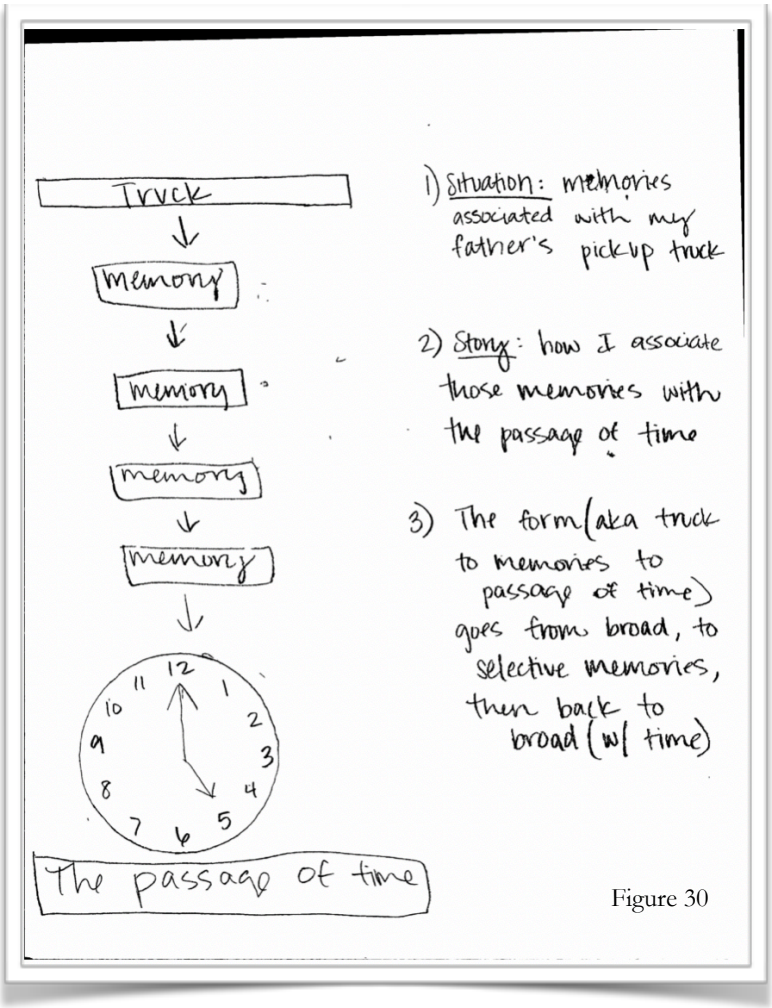


Figure 30

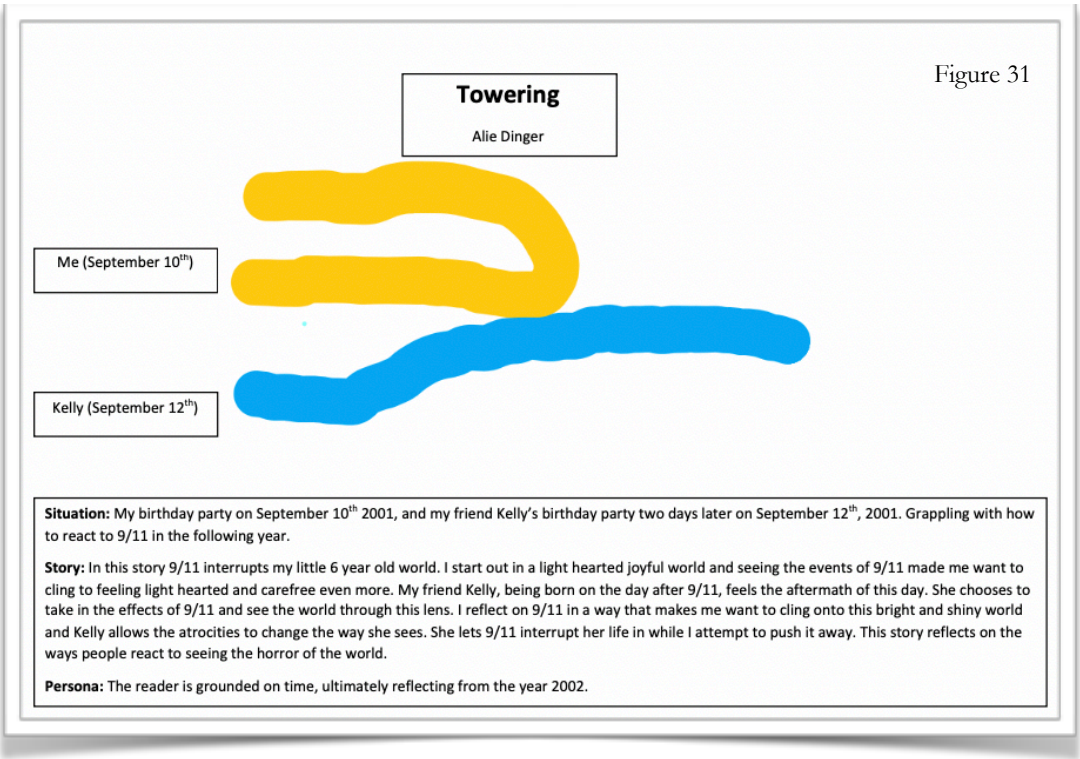


Figure 31

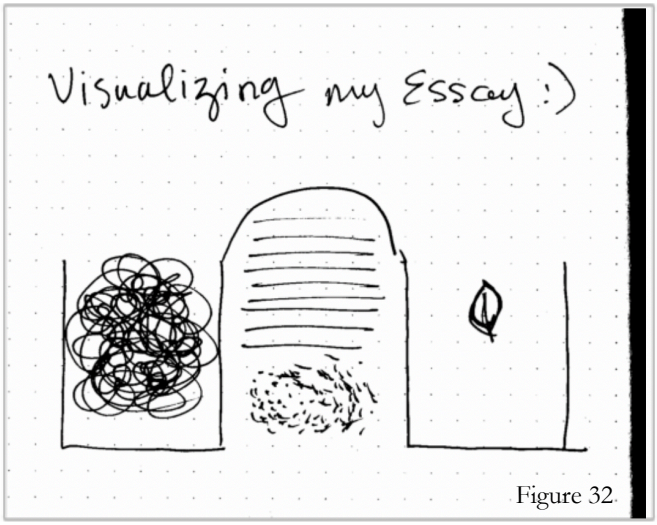


Figure 32.

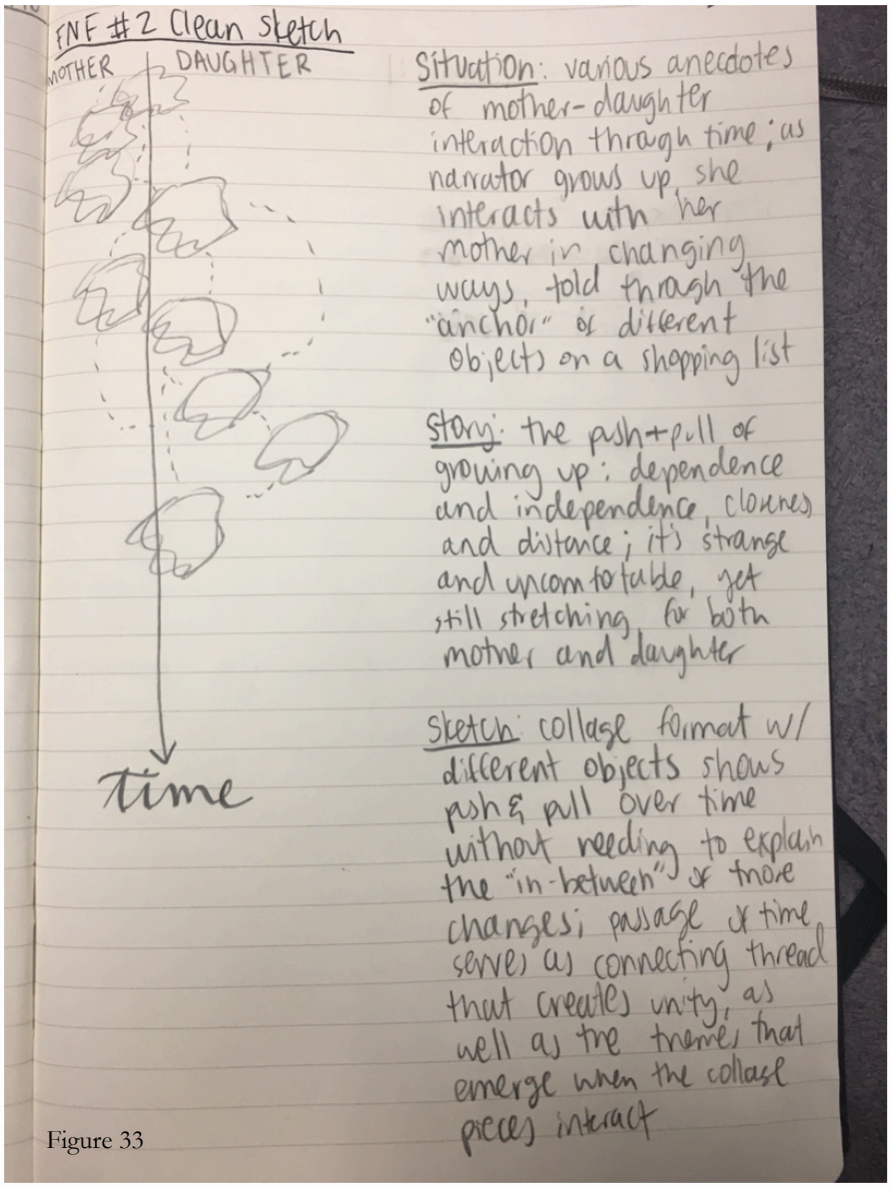


Figure 33

With the exception of one student (who transcribed her sketch into typescript), the hand-drawn and annotated blueprints are noticeably architectural (though I gave no leading instructions): squares and rectangles in horizontal and vertical matrices, full and broken lines, and directive arrows guiding the construction's progressive, recursive, and digressive movements. This tactile exercise handles the draft once again as a physical object. And their sketches, a kind of automatic, instinctive, and organic rendering, routinely portray the essays as living, evolving things.

Supported Scaffolds: Tinker Toys, Bricolage, and Sentence Diagrams

The third-level and final revision focuses on crafting artful sentences, picking up on their initial editorial undercuttings. Sentences, students quickly discover, are an essay's supportive scaffold, its fundamental architecture, its ultimate bearer. Each one a platform supported by rigid beams and poles and legs and posts. Each one a brilliant assembly of parts of speech, grammar, and syntax. Artfully crafted, they balance the entire essay while allowing it momentum and pause, curve and bend.

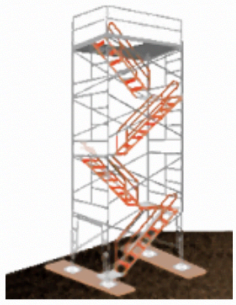


Figure 34
Frame Scaffold for Fabricated Frame

Figure 35
Tube and Coupler Scaffold

Figure 36
Pole Scaffold

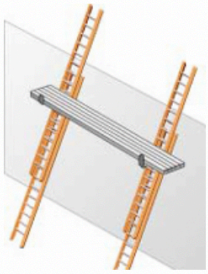


Figure 37
Ladder Jack Scaffold

After a brief discussion of the *supported scaffolds* above (emphasizing permanence and stability over freeplay and suspension), I ask what they know (and how they learned) about sentence structures. I tell them that they have to forgo their *suspended* scaffolds for more stable frames.

Volunteers list their collective knowledge on the white board as a working reference guide, while I spill a huge tub of brightly colored *Tinker Toys* on the classroom floor within our circle of desks: the spools, wheels, sticks, cylindrical caps, couplings, and pulleys fill the open space. The vocabulary of a familiar childhood toy is a sentence scaffold's vernacular. Nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections configured into subjects and predicates, objects and complements, phrases and clauses. Students play with the toy pieces, feeling the wood's pre-cut grooves and holes, its minute textures. I interrupt with a simple writing prompt: *Assign a part of speech to each of these Tinker Toy pieces. How do the language elements and their functions relate to the associated wooden parts as you see them?*

Subjects and predicates are the anchoring spool. Their modifiers are the fastened sticks, phrases and clauses their pulleys, objects and complements their couplers. More than a children's game, tinkering encourages a playful approach to sentence design and revision. *Puttering*, *fiddling*, *experimenting*, and *adapting* in the course of making repairs or improvements, tinkering is *thinking-through-doing*. As tinkerers, writers manipulate rather than re-memorize (what to 21st-century students seems stultifying) grammar and syntax conventions; instead we put them into play, purposefully and inventively. As sentence-makers, we are engaged *bricoleurs*, our hands and mind taking up the known world—what is right in front of us—and seeing it as if for the first time, giving it meaningful form (Dezeuze).

I show two quick videos: Gever Tully's *Ted Talk*, "Life Lessons Through Tinkering" and Edith Ackermann, "Pedagogical Perspective on Tinkering and Making," followed by a slide show of contemporary bricolage art. The final slide shows mixed media artist Pamela Winegard's provocative and untitled bricolage (see Figure 38), which prompts our class discussion. Students name the recognizable objects (and their original form and function): black elastics and hair scrunchies, copper wire, sticks, part

of a wooden placemat, encaustic paint, and Winegard's penciled *pentimenti* on the paper's underlayer. They note how commonplace the objects are, how familiar their materials. Things that they take for granted or overlook in daily life. Put into new contexts in unexpected juxtapositions, each part not only becomes more evident but also a vital part of the whole. (For a rich demonstration, see Arlene Schechet, "Pentimento in Paper.")

Figure 38: Pamela Winegard, *Untitled*

An *Additive Art* (complementing the *subtractive arts* of first- and second-level revision)[6], *brioclage* is an appealing segue to sentence diagramming. To introduce sentence architecture as an art that manipulates the known elements of speech, transforming the age-old parts into an exciting whole. Rather than removing excess, sentence diagrams builds a complex, layered, and seemingly three-dimensional structure. Each separate and moveable part with indwelling potential for countless permutations and combinations. As Gertrude Stein famously mused: "I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences. . . . the one thing that has been completing exciting and completely completing. . . . I like the feeling the everlasting feeling of sentences as they diagram themselves." A "sentence should force itself

[6] On the design evolution of *Additive Architecture,* see Kenneth Frampton, "The Architecture of Jørn Utzon" (The Pritzker Architecture Prize, Prize Hyatt Foundation, 2003).

upon you, make you know yourself knowing it" (Stein 290). An essayist's job is to know themselves. My job is to prove Stein right.

And our lesson begins:

Think about each sentence in your essay as a bricolage of familiar and well-used objects, hand-arranged to express your ideas. Look where the parts merge, where they overlap in unusual layers. They are supportive scaffolds, quiet bearers of the cumulative story.

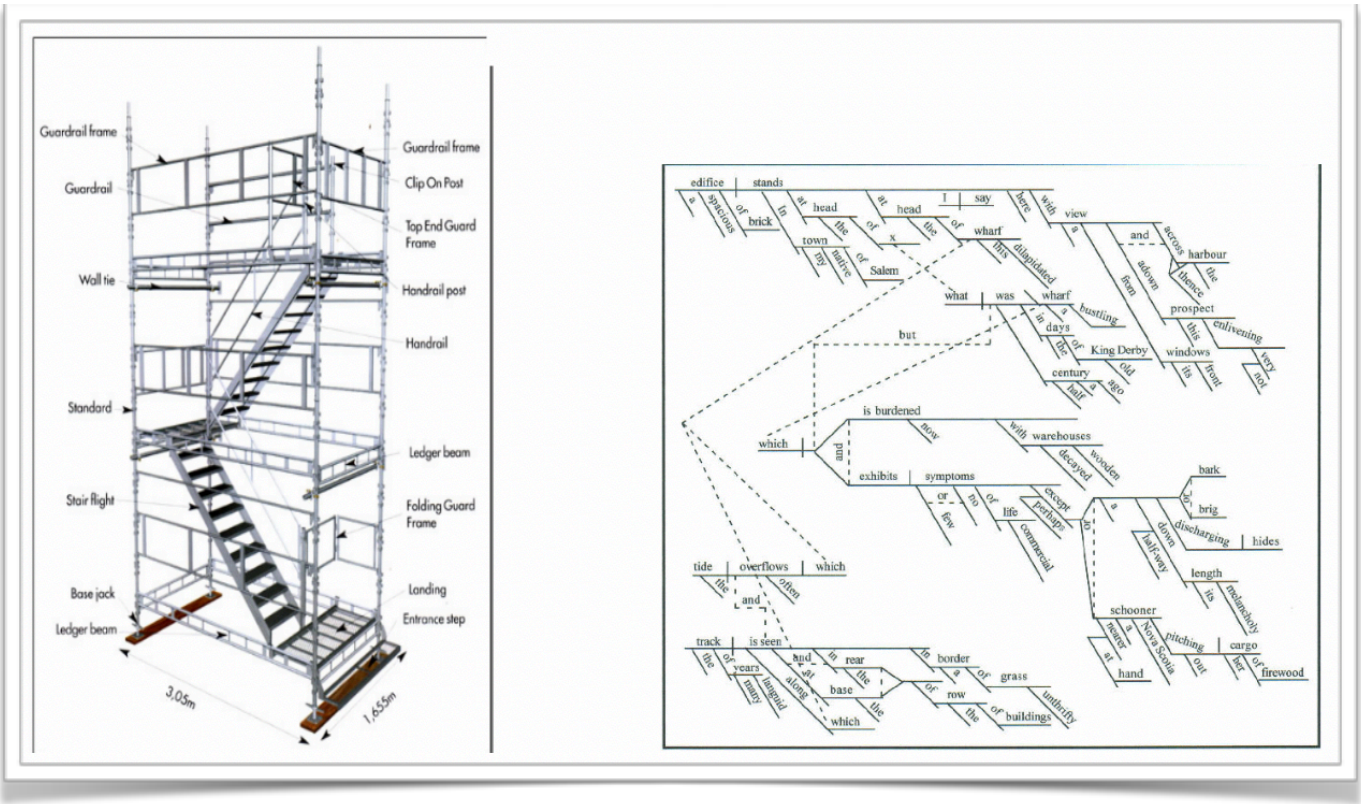


Figure 39 Figure 40

Study the building and sentence scaffolds side-by-side. See how the subject and predicate form the base jack, the standard bearer on which everything relies. How the vertical standard slices the noun and action verb, while angling the linking verb along a reclining diagonal.

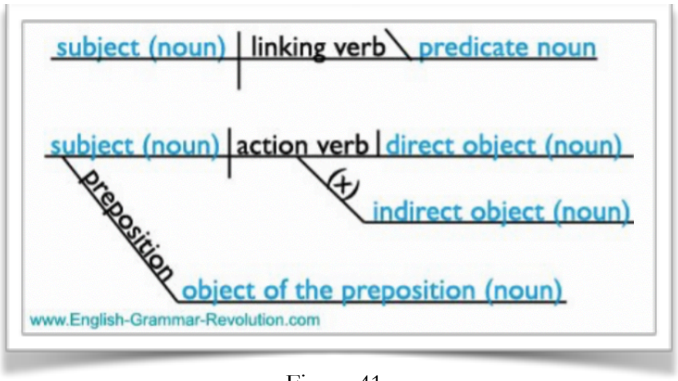


Figure 41

Notice, too, how indirect objects, objects of a preposition, adjectives, adverbs, and preposition, adjectives, and adverbs connect like folding guard frames beneath the words they modify.

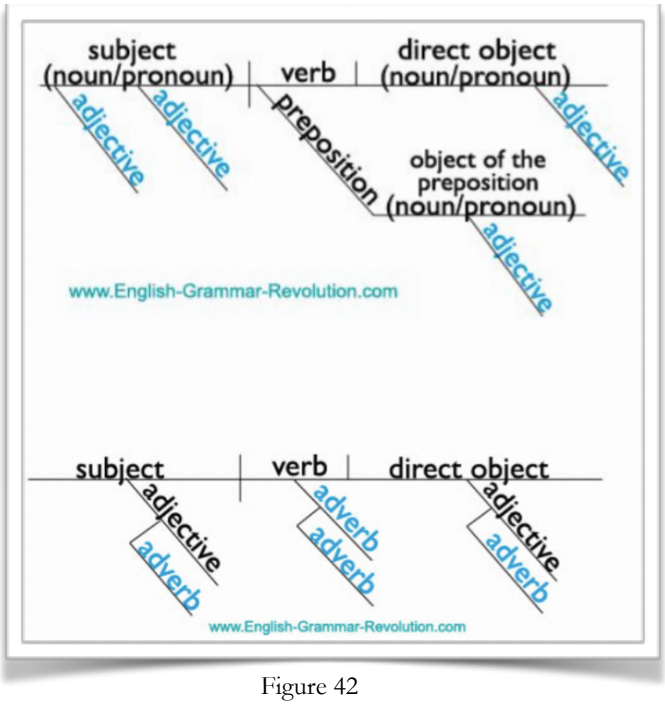


Figure 42

Consider how these modifiers' vertical, horizontal, and diagonal elements are held in perfect balance. And what of the conjunction's graceful coupling: a hyphenated handrail holding parallel levels in cantilevered permanence? And an interjection floating like a ship above the sentence's action.

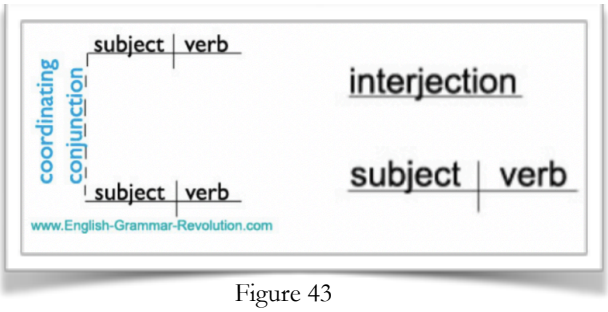


Figure 43

And here is the gerund, happening as we watch, held in motion by a ladder-jack design. See the verb climb, the ing *on the entrance step below, connected to the rest of the diagram with the forked line of a leveling jack.*

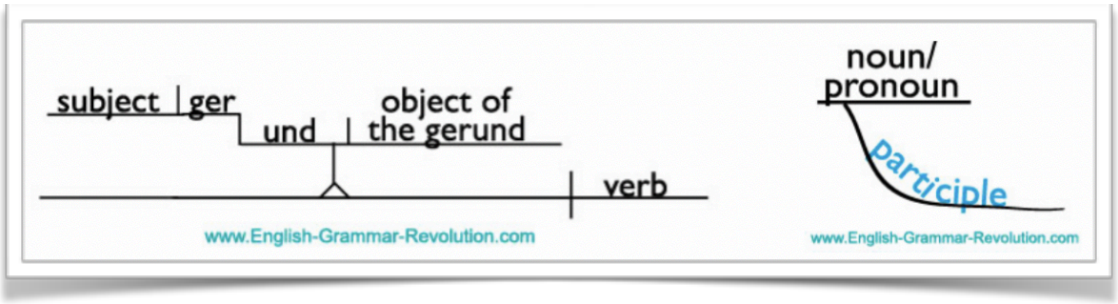


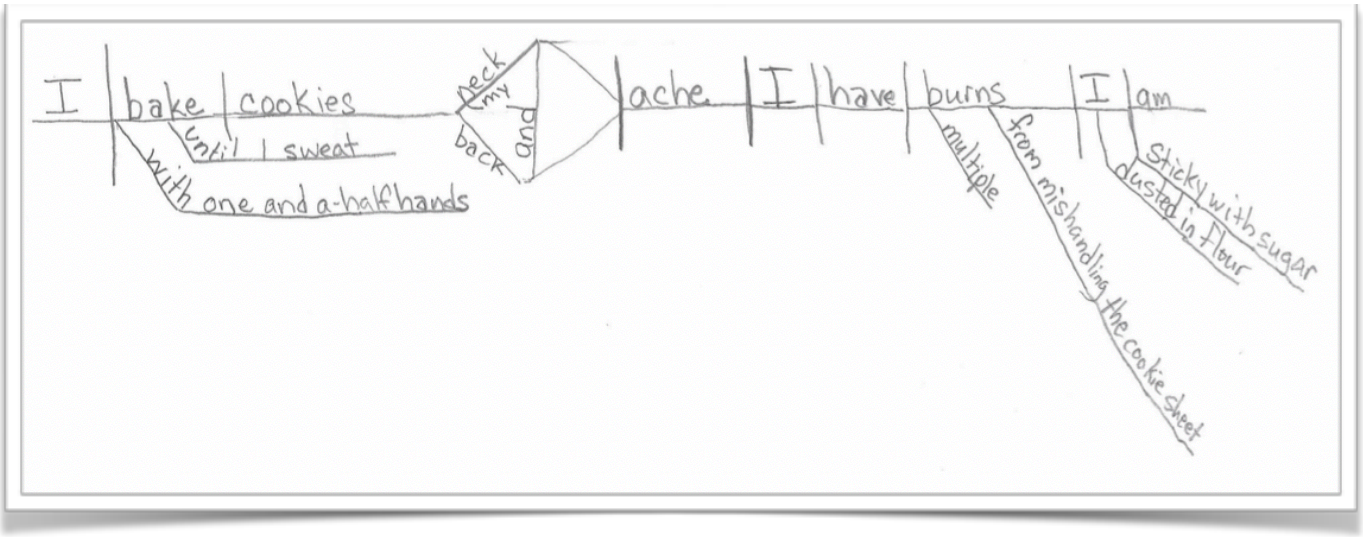
Figure 44

The fork swings and we ride a participle's down-turned wave, curving beneath and scooping up the subject it modifies. Formed by a verb, it acts as an adjective. A carnivelesque marvel. And all with the balance, proportion, and harmony of classical architecture.

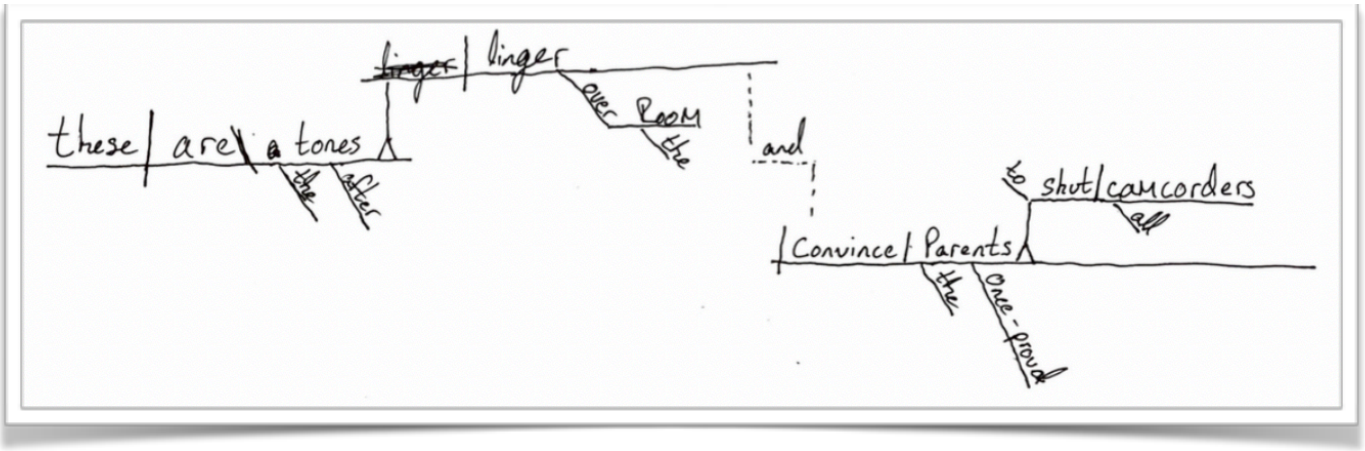
After my enthusiastic pitch and before they try their hand at diagramming the sentences from one of their revision's paragraphs, we do close analyses of the increasingly complex examples in Kitty Burns Florey's fabulous book, *Sister Bernadette's Barking Dog: The Quirky History and Lost Art of Diagramming Sentences*.

Posting their own sentence diagrams to our ecampus page, students exchange and discuss them in peer groups and then volunteer to present to the full class:

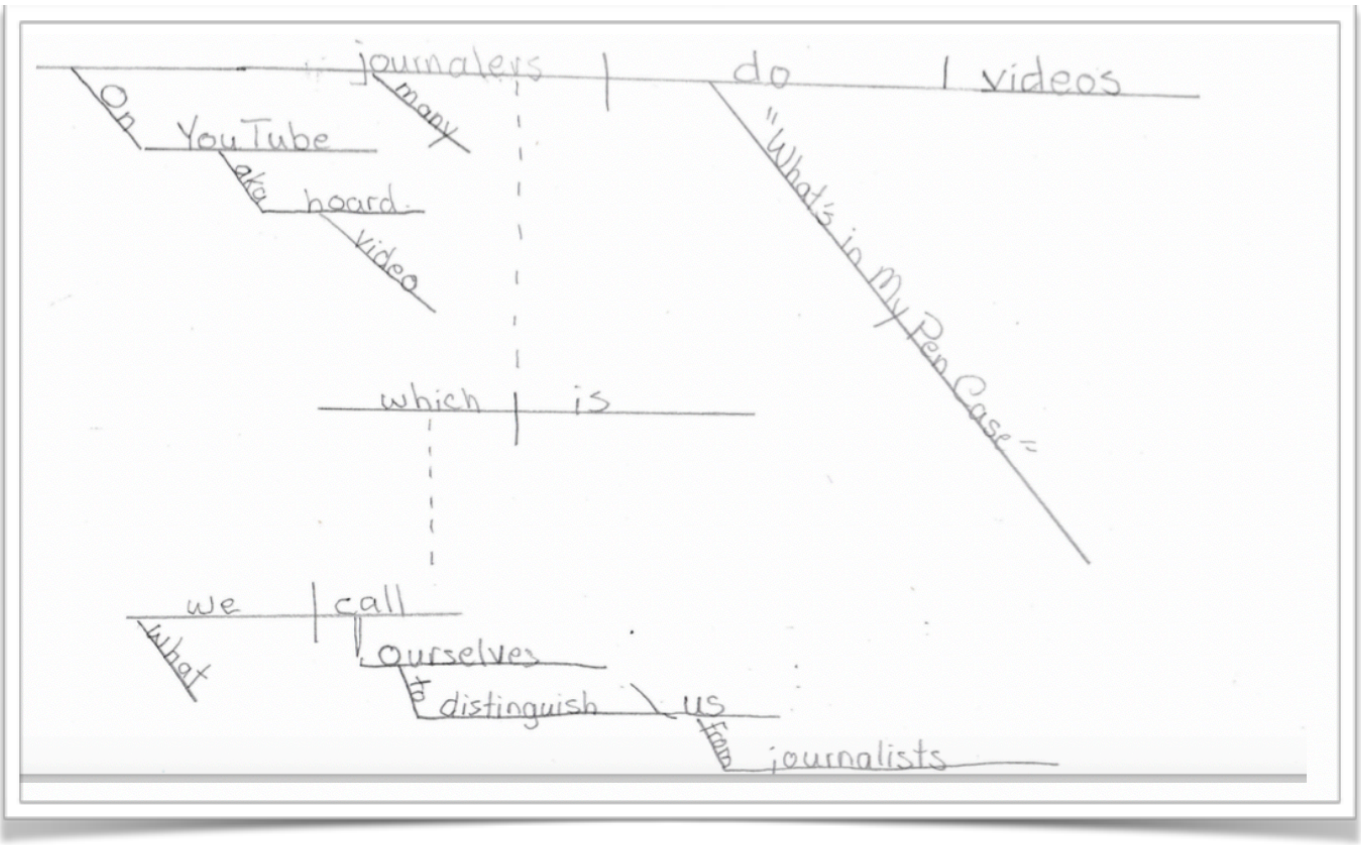
Example 1: I bake cookies with one-and-one-half hands until I sweat, my neck and back ache, I have multiple burns from mishandling the cookie sheet, and I am dusted with flour, sticky with sugar.



Example 2: These are the after tones that linger over the room and convince the once-proud parents to shut all camcorders (only after deleting the evidence).



Example 3: On *YouTube*, aka video hoard, many journalers—which is what we call ourselves to distinguish us from journal*ists*—do "What's in My Pen Case" videos.



As students draw and explain their sentence's architectures, they begin to understand the parts of speech and syntax as physical, supportive structures. As tangible, moveable, and interlocking parts suspended between the material world and our articulation of it. They *see* (even with the minor diagramming errors) where their sentences are strong and where they totter. They *see* that three unnecessary prepositional phrases weigh down a single sentence; they *see* the excessive adverbs and adjectives belaboring the obvious; they *see* subject and verb disagreement; they *see* sentence fragments and run-ons; even a dangling modifier. In other words, they see what my repeated Simplify Prose comments in their papers mean. A scaffold's weakest joint is a correctable mistake. It is the space where a writer-construction worker applies the

finishing touches from top to bottom, from inside out. We step down, our job complete. And the structure stands on its own.

Conclusion: On Manual Labor and the Pleasures of the Imagination

Contour drawings, silhouette cuts, frottage, tinkered scaffolds, and sentence diagramming are all haptic exercises in revision. They teach creative nonfiction students that language is active and adaptable raw material in our hands. Because writing is a complex mode of embodied cognition relying on intricate perceptual-sensorimotor combinations (Noë, O'Reagan). It is neither muse-inspired or mystical, but rather requires our mental and manual labor. An essayist's stories evolve from their perception and lived experience of the world, and that perception, neuroscientists have proved, is more than visual. It is a nuanced interaction of touch: exploratory hand movements, object manipulation, and brain function. In other words, our hands' movements and performances relate to what goes on in our brains. Until recently, the perceptual capacities of hands have been ignored by an emphasis on their motor capacities: "we grasp, push, pull, lift, carry, insert, or assemble" for practical purposes" (Gibson 123). Yet writing by hand (rather than solely composing on a computer) helps train our brains to integrate thinking with fine motor dexterity (Mangen and Velay). Regardless of one's writing process, revising by hand brings the story into relief. Our haptic engagement with words—both proprioceptive and kinesthetic— emphasizes that our texts are autonomous objects. Drawing and tracing, cutting and pasting, penciling editorial marks, and diagramming sentences, we disassemble and reassemble our essay's constituent parts by hand. We reorient ourselves to the work and make the familiar strange. And wonderful. *Live by analogy,* I tell my creative nonfiction students.

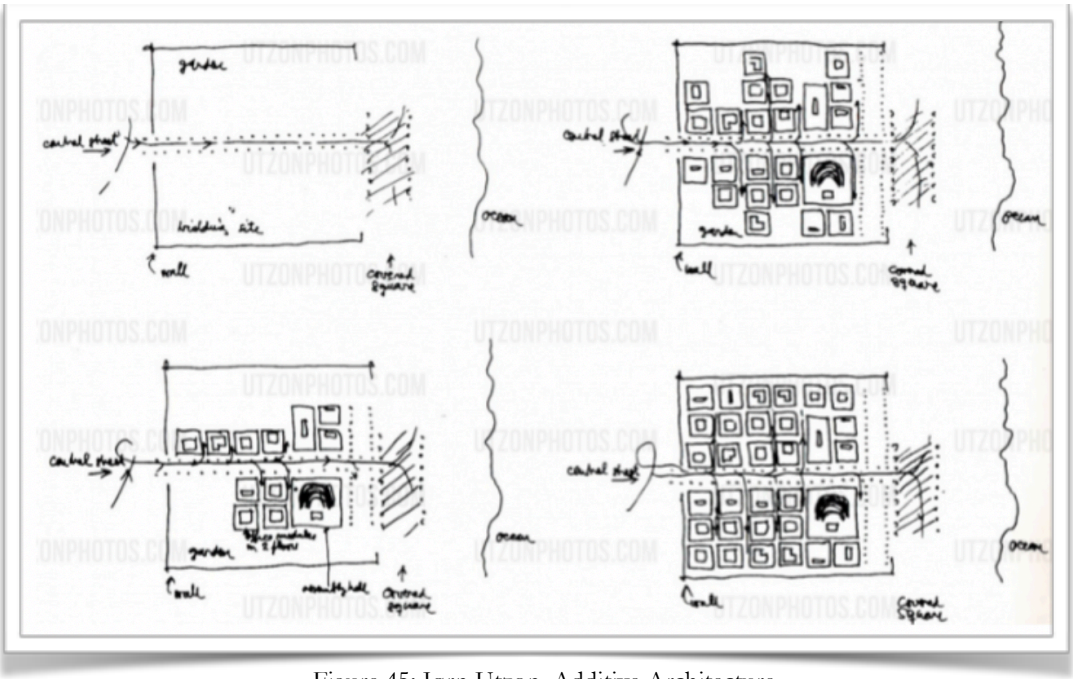


Figure 45: Jørn Utzon, Additive Architecture,
http://www.utzonphotos.com/philosophy/additive-architecture/

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