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northern song
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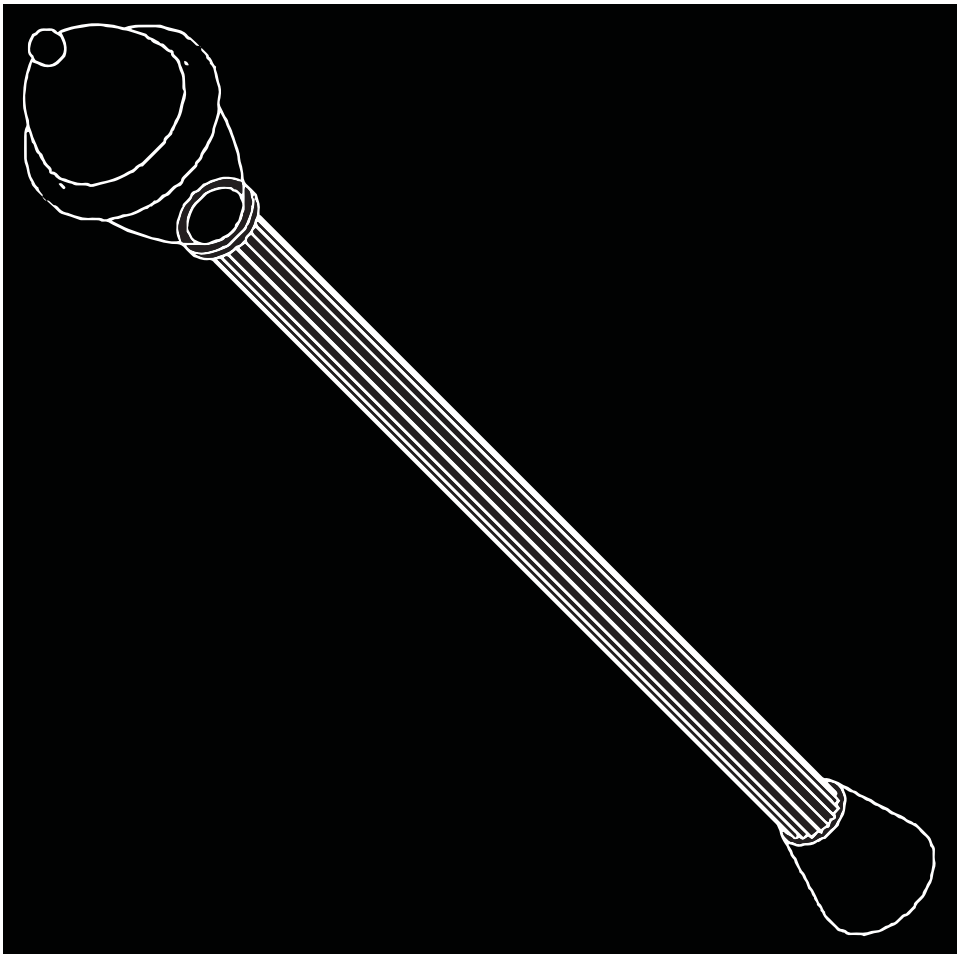
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Previous Page:
Photography by Connor Scher
“Goodbye Bozeman”

ON A LAMPPOST

170410

214704



Previous Page: Lamppost drawing; the lamppost in black and white.

PSU lamppost formed in fake green mocks crafted iron beacons—nostalgic. Cold LED replaces warm flame—ouch! Who claims this bastard?¹

1. Rer, C. (@PSUARCH533). 170410, 220000. Tweet.

2. Rer, C. (@PSUARCH533). Lamppost. 170410. 170410.

Lamppost outside Shattuck Hall on Portland State University. Photo: Connor Scher



Casting cold light, born from machine, this mirage is neither sculpture nor beacon. Green non-material replaces wrought iron; blue LED glares in the night. Beware this specter, it haunts nights and dirties days.²

NIGHT LIGHT

170420

215922

A lamppost illuminates darkened lanes, and suggests safety, however banal its appearance. This Portland State University lamppost fulfills these requirements, but like all residents of this weird city, is inappropriately dressed for the occasion. Green metal, or non-material, skins its electric guts, but the machine-made cover anachronistically replicates an archaic style and form. Historically moulded and styled from wrought iron with fluting, arabesques, laurels, and garlands, lampposts once exuded grandeur, romance, and civic wealth. In contemporary times, Portland unfortunately holds public works in contempt.



Lamppost outside Shattuck Hall on Portland State University. Photograph by Connor Scher

Participating in Post-Modern hollowness, the lamppost is a mirage, neither sculpture nor beacon—a spectre. The eminent metal sentinels of yore lofted living flames, fed by sweet whale oil and gas. Now, electric sinews thread from underground to the tip whence secretes a spherical spread of disorienting blue light. The teat-like LED bulb oozes a ghostly stain on the world that disrupts natural circadian cycles. Its straining, puckering point glares at the sky and arouses the earth.

Nighttime view of the lampposts outside Shattuck Hall on Portland State University. Photograph by Connor Scher



This lamppost represents another plastic bastard of commodity fetish and nostalgia, haunting the night with its mournful blues and dirtying the days with its perverse objecthood. As an object, the lamppost is a poor copy of the original. Whereas long dead night wanderers gathered under the dancing orange glow of oil lamps, no person can stand in this halo. Nightly pedestrians seem to seek shelter in the shadows, away from the unearthly glow. The broad coverage chases the darkness from the paths, leaving them deserted of their chiaroscuro and chthonic chimeras. In a purely æsthetic drive for a lamppost, without a thought to craftsmanship, quality, and honesty, the University constructed cheap, replaceable, and false replicas of a charming idea and object. Whatever authenticity drove the design is no deeper than the green shell is thick. Capitalism in drag, this false idol deserves its striated tiara.

PORTLAND PROVOCATIONS: PETRIFYING
PREMONITIONS PROMOTING PROJECTIVE
POLEMIC

170508
230817



On a sunny Friday afternoon in the refrigerated section of Shattuck Hall at Portland State University, students and faculty of the School of Architecture hosted a panel discussion in affiliation with the Portland Design Week. This closing ceremony of sorts included thoughts and speeches of a befitting (terminal) nature, and ended rather fortuitously as my pen exhausted its ink—in actuality the proceedings finished sometime after, but nothing interesting happened in those final minutes. Nevertheless, regardless of the nature of the post-ink actions, their content will remain a mystery, as their relation does not occur in this paper. Three panelists—two faculty, two men, and three practitioners—debated provocative and albeit projective and progressive thoughts about architecture and Portland. PSU SoA faculty Anna Goodman (Anna) acted as moderator while Director Clive Knights (Clive) and Professor Andrew Santa Lucia (Andrew) shared the roll of emcee.

Previous Page: Portland Provocations drawing; the profile of the Portland Building, a symbol and subject of the discussion.

After some announcements, Clive began the exhaustive biographies. First was the new School of the Arts Dean, himself a provocative individual. He, an intellectual and cosmopolitan, and a Black Southerner and Opera singer seemed sadly out of place among the whitewashed Portland architectural community members at the event—like a stray blue kernel in creamy grits. Then was Andrew, successful in academia and practice. Clive a-passionately delivered his colorful biography until salacious publications in Andrew's curriculum vitae provoked him to lose his cool.

Act I: Wherein Andrew describes the Portland Provocations exhibit at the Bureau of Development Services (Portland City) Building.

Purposefully placing the Provocation in the Permits lobby of the city reminds the unimaginative Portland architects about 'big ideas'. The prospective student work displayed there becomes a conversation, not accusation. Andrew carefully distinguishes the purpose of the project from the pejorative connotation of 'provoke'.

Andrew succeeded in provoking a debate through example and allegory, but stumbled over delivery. The first slide contained too much text and tiny images, countering the exhibit's strict graphic format, but later slides mended the slight with super-graphics and images. Interestingly, the masochistic self-provocations that themed his presentation were absent in the subsequent discussion, as the panelists adopted a supercilious objectivity, rejecting reflexivity—none satisfactorily acknowledged they were all architects in Portland Portlanding architecture. A reflexive exploration would have been interesting.

Act II: Wherein Andrew introduces the panel members.

Anna from Rice and U.C. Berkley wears her education on her gauzy sleeves and will be moderator. Aaron from UCLA and U. Penn and Sarah from Cranbrook and the Art Academy of Cincinnati will be panelists.

The three sat in front of the screen, mics in their faces, left-to-right brown hair, bald, brown hair; least, middle, most time in Portland; Punk, Techie, artist; Andrew, Aaron, Sarah.

Act III: Wherein Aaron reads to the table from a script.

Aaron seems unprepared for the talk but elaborates on the concept of "Portland-ism" that arises from an avoidance of competitions after construction (and rejection) of the Portland Building.

If provoke also means arouse (in the PG sense), Aaron violated the prime objective. His script reading weakened his thoughts and the lack of enthusiasm sidelined his thesis in the discussion. Nevertheless, he read bold statements about Portland Archi-

ecture. Suggesting that Portland architecture is not provocative (post-1979), he labelled Portland a “Neutropia”. Although Portlanders pride themselves on their self-described neutrality, and so can label their architecture as such, they misplace their faith. In being neutral, Portland avoids offense, provocation, and therefor ‘progress’. In an era of ‘Safe Spaces’ and ‘political correctness’, the popular and architectural expression is rather flavorless. Although the Portland Building has a foul flavor, at least it has one. In the face of Design Review and public opinion, architecture loses its ability to provoke.

Act IV: Wherein Sarah denies all hope of survival.

Sarah, describing passages from the manifesto of the Dark Mountain Project, levels depressing thoughts regarding Climate Change. Suggesting we are past the point of no return, she urges that humanity accept its ecocide and architects design its end.

How utterly depressing—or is it? Sarah explained that contemporary architecture must mourn the world and break the myth of civilization. As she read from her script, avoiding eye contact and talking to the table, she limited her thesis to eroding the myth of Portland, or at least the myth that progress is positive. Even with the acceptance of the demise of the world and civilization, architecture must act not only as a catharsis but also as a projective. The perspective she relates is still humanist and avoids engaging the environment and one-world. Earth and life will continue into the post-Anthropocene, why would not architecture? Sarah is too ready to concede her creativity; reading someone else’s passages and not elucidating their points is merely a summary.

Act V: Wherein Andrew makes Portland strange again.

Seeking the strange wherever he goes, Andrew suggests that Portland grew too incrementally and should instead espouse maximized strangeness.

Andrew took the image of “Big Pink” and the idea that Portland views the world through “rose-colored” glasses and suggested that although this is a criticism, it can inspire new growth. He indexed the iterations of “weirdness”, the Portlander axiom, and linked it to the other idioms (tropes) of Portland, uniqueness and localness. Expanding these terms to mean minimal and incremental, the proud son of Miami challenged Portland’s closeted hegemony with pursuing maximal—though not dictatorial—development. Instead of tiny-houses and redlining, the city should think big, and strangely. His slides were simple and effective, and he spoke with assertive bravados while his eyes wandered the audience, not his script.

Epilogue: Wherein Anna invites debate, but fails to engage the panel.

Posing questions to the panelists, neither pandering to one thesis nor distancing the ensemble, Anna strives for deeper discussion. Unfortunately, many of her questions fail to elicit much lucid commentary on contemporary design, and Portland.

Anna’s first question challenged that Post-Modernism and the Avant-Garde is too progress-ive. Sarah completely sidestepped the question and nihilistically rejected the idea as unimportant. Andrew came with a response aligned with his thesis. Sarah continued to founder in her responses while Aaron, often left out of the discussion, strove for relevancy. Andrew stuck to his script—both written and adopted—too well, almost to a point of a best-of record.

A question from the audience regarding the place of

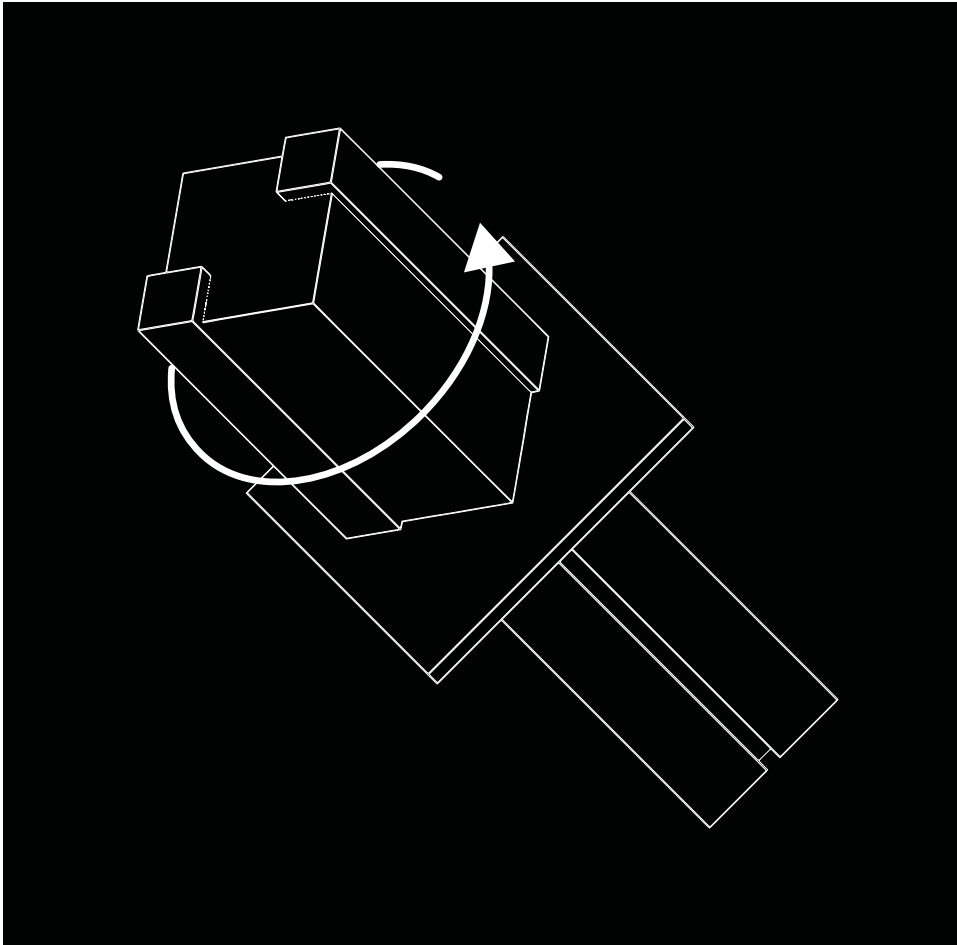
design in the contemporary world spurred the most (interesting) debate. Sarah insisted architects should comfort terminal humanity, and later added that because of the discipline's inability to separate sustainability from progress, doom must befall humanity, and architecture. Andrew countered that maximal design engages the "fiction" progressively, with an "hedonistic sustainability". Aaron sat quietly.

Anna continued to ask questions about capitalism and spectacle in architecture, but clearly intended these for Andrew. The coda of the evening seemed more a tired repeat than a triumphant recapitulation of the themes. The cryogenic ideas became inseparable with the frigidity of the room. Without substance or boldness, the ideas weakened throughout the evening, until they only came in spurts before dying anticlimactically, like a pen exhausting its

NV+RO; SIN IN THE REVIT AGE

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The buildings address each other martially. With the wind coming West-by-South, just abaft the beam, the NV controls the weather gauge and opens its starboard battery. With the intention of running ahead of the Cosmopolitan, the NV fires her starboard broadside, brought to bear as she slants towards the path of the other building, itself returning fire from her port battery. She intends to cut with the wind and pass along astern of the Cosmopolitan, raking her before running alongside, battering with the port broadside at point-blank. The two dueling buildings exchange shots over the dynamic neighborhood, their façades shrouded in smoke. Oh to have had the weather gauge, laments Captain Bora, envious of ZGF, Out Jib and Foresail!

Previous Page: NV+RO drawing; the scaled shapes of the NV and Cosmopolitan juxtaposed.

1 nextportland. North Pearl Highrises, Part I: The Cosmopolitan on the Park (Images): Next Portland. 9 December 2014. 9 June 2017. Web.

Rising auspiciously above the forlorn and forgotten warehouses of the Pearl District of Portland, Oregon are two new towers of glass and aluminum, related geographically and aesthetically. The morphologies of the two towers are obtusely similar, however whereas as the one, the taller, the simpler, conforms to the street grid, the other turns its body forty-five degrees askew. The first, called the Cosmopolitan, extrudes its footprint and seems to split at its sides, albeit disjointedly; the second, audaciously named NV, conforms to the Modernist columnar principles of base, shaft, and capital while avoiding any aesthetic congruency. Local firm Bora Architects¹ designed the Cosmopolitan as a unique, progressive project in the Pearl, but the building lacks spirit, and – well – uniqueness. The Seattle office of ZGF² had enoughchutzpa to type RO, twist their tower, and invoke envy. Although neither building is particularly livable, at least the NV is interesting.

2 nextportland. North Pearl Highrises, Part II: The Overton (Images): Next Portland. 16 December 2014. 9 June 2017. Web.

Although two blocks separate the two buildings, their surprising height connects them. Both dwarf their neighbors. The neighborhood still has many one-storey commercial and industrial buildings and more low-rise mixed-use buildings from every decade. The development renaissance affecting the Pearl District comes from growing demand – from wealthy young (white) professionals – for central city residences. More high-rise buildings will replace existing derelict structures, resulting in higher return-on-investment, greater centralization of capital, and extended gentrification; assimilating to the consis-

tent trend of all Western urban development, since time immemorial. Nevertheless, sometimes redevelopment is productive for cities, as the Pearl may become a vibrant addition to the west bank of the Willamette, replacing cheap industrial construction with sleek residential towers for the rich

NV dominates the block between NW 13th and 14th Aves and NW Overton and Pettygrove Sts, filling the 3 716 m² (40 000 sf) block with a single level of brick-clad storefront. Low- and mid-rise apartments, one-storey warehouses, and vacant lots surround the anomaly, exposing its altered profile (personality). Two blocks to the East, and across Overton, the Cosmopolitan juts thin and rhomboidal into the sky, absolutely commanding its neighbors. Parks lie to the North and South and mid-rise apartments flank on the East and West. The tower is taller than NV, but the floorplates are of similar size.

The buildings have very different aesthetics, likely results of different architects and clients. Of course, the NV treats its façades in a much more interesting way, having multiple materials and employing patterns. The one-storey base is off-black and brick-clad, although discordant: at once, the façade is contemporary and passé with storefront windows set back into the wall. Emulating the reused masonry warehouse buildings of the district, now filled with breweries and boutiques, it is either disrespectful or posing as an imposter. Two hundred years ago, John Ruskin wrote disparagingly about replication, and the hubris it exudes; inauthenticity incarnate. Perhaps the architects and developers were naïve enough to forget how similar the NV base is to its cousins downtown, which is unlikely. Undoubtedly, the architect used the artificial warehouse image as compensation for the atypical tower. Unfortunately, this rebellious design starts in private realm.

Above the banal mockery is an exclusive open greenspace. Rooftop terraces are a major commodity for high-rise developments, and can be wonderful places for interaction and recreation. Residents desire

secure areas of repose, away from the busy streets crowded with plebeians, and the technique of elevating the 'park' is quite successful. However exclusionary the terrace is, it seems a pleasant common space. The program appropriates the typically unoccupied roof, and plantings provide comfort and reduce run-off. Instead of individual patios, too small to fit a chair, or bicycle (really more of a diving platform for suicides), as in the Cosmopolitan, the NV forces its residents together on one plane, with the option to descend to a lower plane, the street. It seems unlikely that turf wars will happen on the city green in the sky, but hopefully its openness does not dissuade agoraphobes.

The shaft has three æsthetic patterns, each completely unrelated to the base (brick) and structure (concrete). The wonderful gift of Modernism that Post-Modernism re-gifted is the ability to build a tall building from any material (usually steel, rarely concrete) and then hang a completely different material (usually glass or aluminum) from the structure. Goodbye material specificity, hello æsthetic variety (and impermanence). The curtain wall encasing most of the tower is standard glass and aluminum. It is less imaginative than the curtains of the Cosmopolitan, but Bora produced little more than a glass tower à la mode. The glass, no doubt highly performing with low-E coatings and argon filling, does not enhance either design. The repetitive grid of operable and fixed panes, broken only by spandrel panels evokes a contemporary (rebranded) 'architect's dream'.

The NV has spice and flare, whereas the Cosmopolitan is bland. ZGF sprinkled chromatic tiles over two corners of the tower. Like fish scales, they shimmer and change with the light. The colors blend with a gray sky and precipitate in the sunlight as the glass disappears. The Cosmopolitan passively reflects Portland, both visually and metaphorically. The NV flaunts its uniqueness; its nondescript cloak parts to expose a sequined gown and shapely calf. Coyly turned, the tower glances back towards the city in playful spite while the Cosmopolitan disap-

pears into the dreary crowd. – Why do so many new buildings lack character? The ‘Portland aesthetic’ creates timid buildings, fearful of offense, and snuffs individuality. – Perhaps the NV is more like a mermaid bursting from the waves, her scaled sides glinting in the sun as curtains of water slide from her lithe body.

The capital of the NV breaks from the floorplate repetition. The scaled corners, now arms reaching into the sky, like a diver returning to the water, break away from the glass torso. Few contemporary buildings dare to conclude in anything but a clean line of a parapet, but the NV rejects the norm. The Cosmopolitan takes the standard approach, resulting in a boring completion of an awkwardly imposing building. The broken profile of the NV does not imply endless extrusion, as does that of the Cosmopolitan, but completes the building. Not only does the seductive tower come with black evening shoes and sequined figure, but a bejeweled tiara. The jagged line coupled with the rotated geometry of the tower is visually jarring, and calls attention to the building. It is atypical and hyperaware of its dissent. This awareness makes the building pleasantly Post-Modernist and yet salaciously Modernist. ZGF built the Modernist column, base, shaft, and capital, and broke it, not exclusively in style nor morphology, but their dialectical synthesis.

What makes NV so audacious and unique? Is it the views, as the developer says, in new directions? Is it material or detailing? Buildings rotated 45° complicate their designs. As the structural columns enter the lower levels, which align to the city grid, the tower supports conflict with all rational layouts. A column may just as easily pass through a corridor or parking space as queerly occupy a toilet room. These associated costs necessarily erase the values of views and solar exposure; otherwise, more buildings would look like the NV. ZGF must have wanted a simple act to turn the building into a new standard, some function in some program that magically senses interferences in buildings. Autodesk’s Revit (Architect’s Crutch) is just that magical

program with simple function: rotate (RO). Now, only two letters and two mouse clicks have the power to change the building developments of Portland, forever – at least until Cascadia slips into the sea.

The tale of the NV and the Cosmopolitan is not as much the story of two buildings born of gross capital and shaped by commerce but one of twin sisters with disparate personalities. The gangly one is common and complacent, content to conform to norms, standards, and custom. The elegant other flaunts her uniqueness with coquetry and lure. She projects her personality and glows with life. Dressed to the nines, she is far from sixes and sevens with you. Notwithstanding her rebellious devil-may-care appearance, she appears with poise and class. Her gown sparkles in the night and her shoes are sensible for the occasion. Her audacious tiara attracts men old and young, and she embodies an hybrid style all her own. Only her poor plain sister escapes the performance, and is nothing but NVous.

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