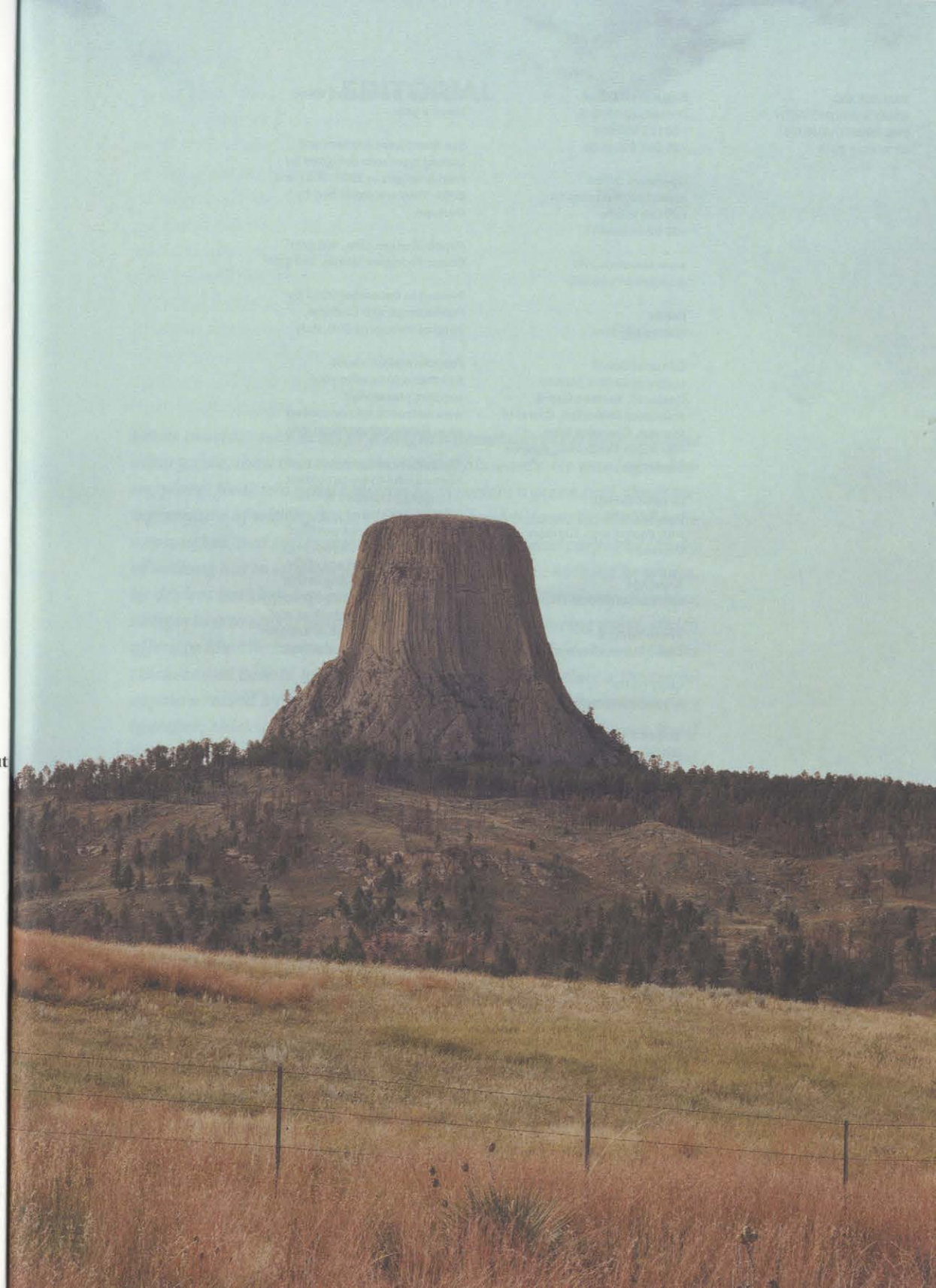




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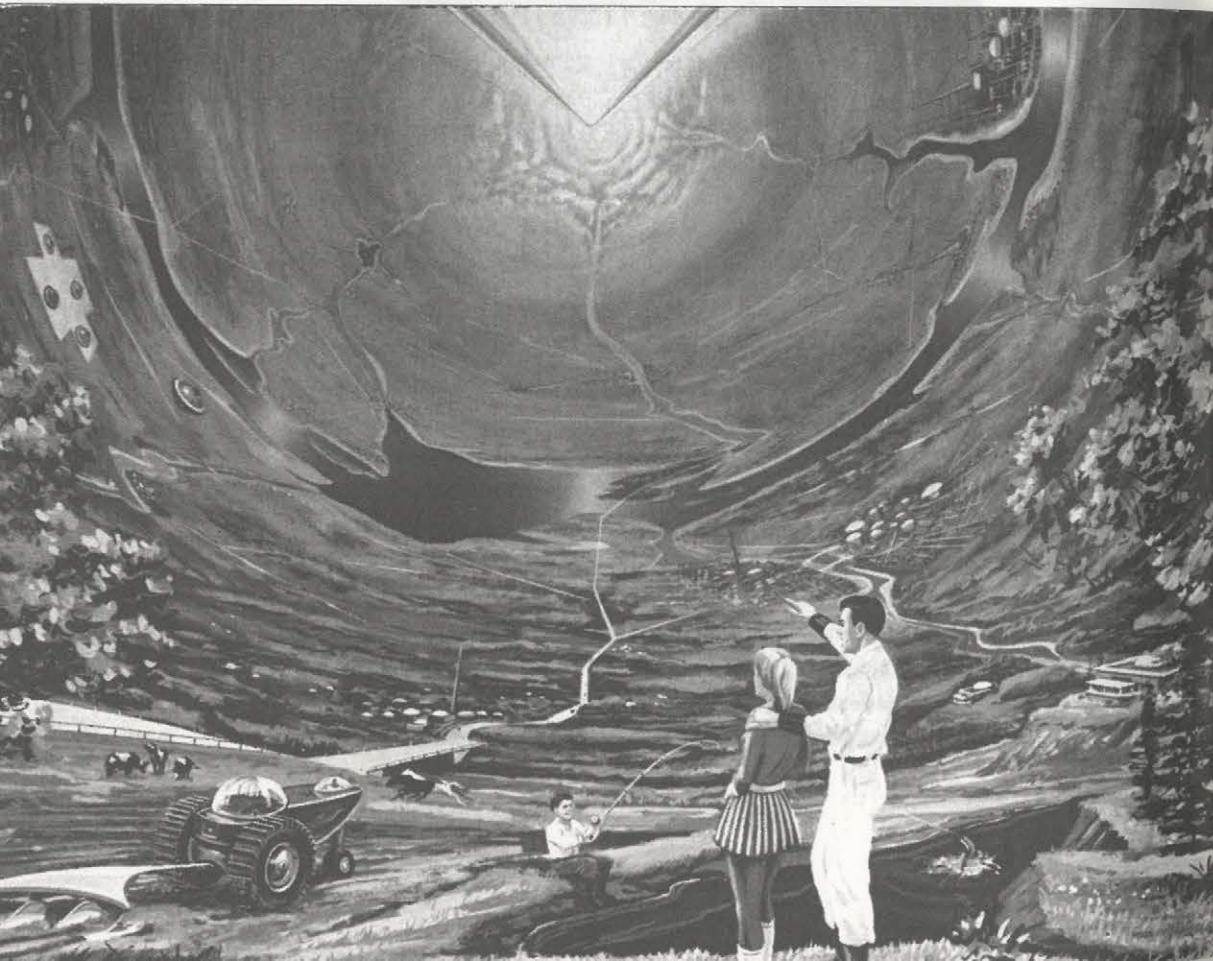


colonies” that could serve as survival pods for democratic society in the event that the uncontrolled growth of technology and population on Earth ever made a world dictatorship possible or even necessary. Ironically, after all of the effort he invested in describing a wise, civilized and balanced society, Cole could not restrain himself from revealing his hidden fantasies:

It is interesting to speculate about the legal status of the free enterprise, commercial tourist resorts on the captured planetoid. What laws would regulate such things as gambling on this island beyond the territorial limits of all the nations of the world? What wild three-dimensional sports might be suggested to the imaginations of the pleasure seeker by the very name of the planetoid, if the most appropriate object for capture should happen to be Eros?²⁵

Here Cole finally removed the mask and revealed his vision of a vicious interstellar Wild West.

The “inside-out” world of the interior of a hollowed-out planetoid. Drawing by Roy Scarfo, General Electric Company



THE WORLD IS MY HUT

Nils Havelka and Sarah Nichols

The Malm Whale in the Natural History Museum in Gothenburg, Sweden, is the only existing taxidermal exemplar of its species in the world. The belly is a room, making it also – presumably – the only whale that is actually inhabitable. Its conception and construction constitute an act of architecture; its power of assembly makes it a project.¹

In 1865, August Wilhelm Malm, director of the museum, stood on a ladder above a whale carcass in Gothenburg harbour and announced his intention to begin the momentous undertaking of preserving it for exhibition. Fourteen years earlier, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* had described the impossibility of representing “the noble animal himself . . . to preserve all his mighty swells and undulations” because “it is one of the more curious things about this Leviathan . . . that his skeleton gives very little idea of his general shape”.² However, by working over the course of the next three weeks together with a civil engineer and a sculptor, Malm ensured he would be able to do exactly that. The starting point was to record the whale’s volume, a measurement of the space contained inside. In the midst of swelling crowds, the group took technical photographs, drew anatomical sketches, and measured dimensions in order to produce a scale model that would serve as the basis for “constructing the whale in its entirety”.³

The behemoth was sectioned and dried by butchers’ apprentices who were guided – perhaps misleadingly – by two whale skeletons while being plied with hard alcohol to help them overcome the stench. At the time, taxidermy was widely popular but not yet its own discipline; it was a side business of furniture upholsterers who literally stuffed animals with wool just as they would an armchair.⁴ But the whale was not a taxidermal project in conception or execution; rather, it



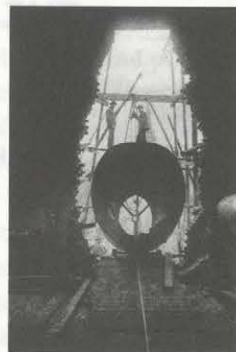
The clay model of the whale, from August Wilhelm Malm, *Monographie illustrée du baleinoptère trouvé le 29 Octobre sur la côte occidentale de Suède (Stockholm, 1867)*

1 Bruno Latour, “A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a Philosophy of Design (With Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)”, in Fiona Hackne, Jonathan Clynne and Viv Minto, eds., *Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society – Falmouth, 3–6 September* (e-book, Universal Publishers, 2009), 12.

Tail segment of the whale in the old courtyard of the Museum of Natural History in Cothenburg during the relocation of the Zoological Department. From "När museets hvalfisk flyttar", *Cöteborgs Aftonblad*, 10 October 1918

Far right: Lifting the biggest segment of the whale through the open brick wall of the Natural History Museum of Cothenburg on 1 November 1918.

Photo by Elisabet Petersson



was conceived as a space to inhabit for which the whale provided the frame. Thus, a pine "skeleton" was built by boat makers, not mimicking the original geometry but forming a hull that unified outer form and structure. Perhaps stemming from the original discrepancy between the outside and inside of the animal, it was remade as a hollow object, "because many people might be interested in exploring the womb".⁵

Malm undertook this project because he wanted to *inhabit* a whale; in order to do so, he needed to construct it. Fins, tail and mouth were sculpted by artists before the hide was re-stretched over the entire assemblage and fixed in place by 30,000 rivets. The upper jaw was hinged to open and a small wooden staircase was fitted within the geometry of the lower jaw, making the whale's interior accessible just under the baleen and roof of the mouth. Upon completion, the whale/boat was simply a space framed by its structure and an entrance, the mouth.⁶

The inside of the whale is indeterminate but not bare. Malm had ensured that "certain embellishments and devices [were] installed for the visitors' convenience".⁷ It is, in fact, a salon with upholstered walls, two wooden benches running lengthwise and a light hanging from the ceiling. It was once divided down the centre by a long, wooden table around which the Swedish Royal Family had gathered during the Stockholm Industrial Expo.

Preserving the whale had begun with Malm's personal fascination, but it soon transformed into a social project. Inside the abyss of desperation and loneliness – the belly of the whale – is a room for actual life within the "canned life" of the museum.⁸ The room has been used, alternately, as a café, a dining room, a theatre stage and a metaphorical "dark corner" – after a couple was caught *in flagrante delicto* within it, the whale's interior was closed to the public.⁹ It travelled for years to

expos and fairs across Europe, an itinerary that had been anticipated and inscribed on the mass as it was constructed in four, wheeled sections. It is now found in a specially built hall in the Natural History Museum. To install it, the brick wall of the institution had to be broken down to make an opening large enough for it to enter.

Laugier's theory of the primitive hut posits discomfort as man's impetus for building shelter, creating a fundamental distinction between the human habitat – self-made, and made in solitude – and the nature around him. *Umwelt*, our contemporary understanding of environment, renders this dialectic irrelevant, because we understand that our surroundings themselves are also a construct – our construct, another layer to the interior. Both Malm's whale and Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace are reactions to this condition, though they work with opposing means. According to Sloterdijk's reading of Walter Benjamin, "the 19th-century citizen seeks to expand his living room into a cosmos and at the same time impress the dogmatic form of a room on the universe . . . a trend that is perfected in the 20th-century . . . construction of micro-interiors and macro-interiors".¹⁰ Malm's whale is a single room within a construct of the universe that seeks through the making of space to contend with it. In a taxonomy of interiors, this is the other end of the spectrum from the Crystal Palace,¹¹ a roof that seeks to extend over everything, "herald[ing] the abolition of the outside world".¹² There is no more outside; what architecture produces now are mediations, whether engulfing or separating. The choice of the architect under capitalism is between making a whale and making a crystal palace.

The whale's construction both produces and bares the limits of knowledge – or bodies of knowledge, for multiple disciplines were involved in its making. Gottfried Semper first saw a primitive hut in 1851 inside Paxton's Crystal Palace, and in his theory its woven walls became the weaving, through culture, of the "cosmos" into physical reality.¹³ Malm's whale was built with the same intention: by perceiving making as a means of reckoning with the world around us.¹⁴ Malm and Melville – both contemporaries of Darwin – understood that modernity allows a focus on process instead of outcome. Architecture, instead of applying an *a priori* ideal with a fixed idea of completeness, can act in the ever-unfinished, constant construction of reality.

Civic life, of course, is part of that construction. Providing space – whether covered, strange, upholstered or possibly perverse – becomes a reflexive cultural act. In this process, the Crystal Palace, a

intrigué le monde savant tout entier, bouleversé et fourvoyé l'imagination des marins des deux hémisphères, il fallait bien le reconnaître, c'était un phénomène plus étonnant encore, un phénomène de main d'homme."

7

Malm, *Monographie illustrée du baleinoptère*, 20; translation by authors.

8

"Museums tend to make increasing concessions to the idea of art and life being related. What's wrong with their version of this is that they provide canned life, an aestheticized illustration of life. 'Life' in the museum is like making love in a cemetery." Alan Kaprow in an interview with Robert Smithson entitled "What is a Museum? A Dialog between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, 1967," in Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 44.

9

Since the amorous couple was found, the whale has only been opened for special occasions. Curiously, many of the older generation of Cothenburg still claim to remember having had coffee inside of it – a compelling image, but a near impossibility.

10

Peter Sloterdijk, "Spheres Theory: Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space", transcript of a lecture delivered at the Harvard Graduate School of Design,

2

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick, or, The Whale* [1851], vol. 6, Scholarly Edition (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 263.

3

August Wilhelm Malm, *Monographie illustrée du baleinoptère trouvé le 29 Octobre sur la côte occidentale de Suède* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt et fils, 1867), 18; translation by the authors.

4

Steven T. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

5

Malm, *Monographie illustrée du baleinoptère*, 20; translation by authors.

6

Jules Verne, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (Paris: J. Hetzel et Cie, 1871), 48. "Le doute n'était pas possible ! L'animal, le monstre, le phénomène naturel qui avait

17 February 2009, in *Harvard Design Magazine* 30 (Spring/Summer 2009), 1–8.

11 Paxton was an ardent botanist whose first glass structures were proto-greenhouses. One completed at Chatsworth in 1950 was built only for the flowering of the *Victoria Regia* water lily – an entire building for a single flower.

12 Sloterdijk, "Spheres Theory".

13 Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten, oder praktische Aesthetik: Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860), §60.

14 Giambattista Vico's *verum-factum* principle states that man only understands what he can construct.

15 Walter Benjamin, "Exposé of 1939", in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 14.

16 "Of all the great things about this work, the greatest, in every sense of the word, is the vaulted central hall . . . Incorporating (the magnificent elm trees) into his giant glass house . . . Paxton almost unconsciously – but nonetheless fundamentally – enhanced the architectural value of his

"phantasmagoria of the market",¹⁵ acts through the literal appropriation of the civic realm¹⁶ in a phenomenon that has been as widespread as it has been criticized. The whale, and interiors like it, construct a projection of our own world, and through that construction redefine its limits.¹⁷ The resulting space inside the whale is thus direct but undefined, an act of architecture that provokes questions rather than solving a problem.



construction." A.C. Meyer, *Eisenbauten* (Esslingen, 1907), translated in Walter Benjamin, "Convolutes F: Iron Construction", in *The Arcades Project*, 158.

17 "Die Logik erfüllt die Welt; die Grenzen der Welt sind auch ihre Grenzen. Wir können also in der Logik nicht sagen: Das und das gibt es in der Welt, jenes nicht. Das würde nämlich scheinbar voraussetzen, dass wir gewisse Möglichkeiten ausschließen, und dies kann nicht der Fall sein, da sonst die Logik über die Grenzen der Welt hinaus müsste; wenn sie nämlich diese Grenzen auch von der anderen Seite betrachten könnte." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 5.61.

The band Triple & Touch seated in the mouth of the whale celebrating the completion of the whale's restoration on 29 October 1992.

Photo by Cunilla Lagnesjö and Margareta Ekroth-Edebo

Facing page: The Malm whale inside the Cothenburg Natural History Museum, 1991. Photo by Cunilla Lagnesjö and Margareta Ekroth-Edebo