**BIRDFOOT**

WHERE AMERICA’S RIVER DISSOLVES INTO THE SEA

The end of the Mississippi River is the subject of a 35-minute long photoscape presentation, on view at the CLUI exhibit space in Los Angeles until May 18, 2008. This program is a portion of the outcome of a two-year CLUI research program examining this region of the United States.

Contrary to popular belief, the Mississippi River does not stop at New Orleans. Downstream there is another hundred miles of river, flowing between parallel levee walls, until the levees stop and the river splays out into the Gulf, and ends. Not even Mark Twain, the famed chronicler of the river, mentions this part. This is the forgotten, ignoble end of the river that drains nearly two-thirds of the lower 48 states.

If the river is like a digestive tract, carrying away the country’s wastes - the effluent of Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Memphis, and the runoff of agricultural and industrial lands from the cornfields of Iowa, to the oilfields of Oklahoma - and everything in between - then the end of the river, the delta of the delta, is like an anatomical orifice at the bottom of the country.

Few people come this far down. From the water, initially, there is little to see, just the levee walls rising above both banks, obscuring the landscape beyond. And on the land side too, the river is out of sight, behind the grassy mounds of the levees. South of New Orleans, as the river makes its last curve to the left past Crescent City, and heads straight southeast to the Gulf, the land on either side is Plaquemines Parish, which had a population of 26,000, before Katrina.

As before the storm, the population of Plaquemines Parish lives in suburbs that, moving south, rapidly evolve into pastur-lands within a narrow strip on either side of the river, bound by a front and a back levee, one protecting the land from the river, the other protecting the land from the sea.

*continued on page 17*
MUCH OF THE MODERN LANDSCAPE is formed by and for the car, and we seem to spend a lot of time and space talking about driving. But driving is at best half the story. In fact, if you think about it, driving is just a brief interstitial act of motion between protracted periods of parking. Despite how much we value them, and despite how much we spend on them, most cars are parked for more than 90% of their lives.

Parking is something all drivers want to have, ultimately, but to think about as little as possible. However, this liminal and static space of automotivet transience – parking - has a great impact on our lives and surroundings.

Pavement Paradise: American Parking Space, shown at CLUI Los Angeles in the fall of 2007, and made possible by a grant from the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, examined parking space, from the micro to the macro, drawing examples from Los Angeles’ parking-scape.

A full size parking space from a nearby shopping plaza (from outside the Baja Fresh/Panda Express building at Culver Center on Venice Boulevard) was recreated on the floor of the CLUI exhibit space, using adhesive parking lot tape, signage, and a wheelstop. Transplanting a parking space from outside to indoors shifts the scale of both the parking space, and the room, and the transposed parking space, a substanceless, quotidian artifact, gains new stature and relevance when brought inside. Around it, cantilevered plaques in the room labeled and explained different elements of the space, such as the role of the concrete wheelstop:

The wheel stop is the often overlooked workhorse of the parking space. It is usually 6 inches high and 4 or 6 feet long, and is used to stop a car at the forward end of a space. Typically made of concrete, new plastic models are increasingly popular. Its use is contested, as it is often the only vertical obstacle in a parking lot, and it constitutes a major tripping hazard for pedestrians. Wheel stops also make cleaning lots more difficult. However, they are very useful in preventing cars from hitting nearby light poles or walls. They are also used in larger lots with traffic islands, where they prevent people from parking too far forward in facing stalls, and, more importantly, discourage people from driving across vacant stall areas, which is considered a hazardous parking lot activity. A larger source of accidents in lots however is caused by cars backing out of spaces, something that the use of wheel stops requires.

Other physical features of the exhibit, such as parking signs and striping, explored the origins of the dimensions of a typical parking space, the standards for disabled parking, and the history of the parking meter.

Parking meters were first used in Oklahoma City, in 1935, as a parking control device to help enforce short term parking regulations at high density curbsides. In Los Angeles, 88% of the meters have a 1-2 hour limit. A staff of 30 maintain the city’s 40,000 meters, which generate $20 million a year. However, much more revenue is made from parking tickets issued for expired meters. In many cities, the mechanical timing mechanism is being upgraded to an electronic system. The housing is generally reused. New York City replaced its last mechanical meter in 2006. Duncan Parking Technologies, based in Arkansas, is one of the largest manufacturers of parking meters. They began making parking meters in 1936, as a sideline of the Duncan Toy Company, which manufactured the Duncan Yo Yo. The first parking ticket for an expired meter was issued in Oklahoma City to a local minister who complained to the judge that he was getting change to put in the meter from nearby store and returned to find the ticket on his windshield. The judge accepted his argument, and the ticket was excused. This legal precedent, however, has not remained effective.

Beyond the physical elements in the exhibit space (parking’s “material artifacts”), the exhibit consisted mostly of images and text projected on two screens on the wall. One screen focussed on the development of parking spaces, on-street parking management techniques and infrastructures, parking space code requirements, and domestic parking, including the effect of parking on residential architecture. The second screen addressed parking lots and parking garages: their creation, evolution, forms, management, ownership and the like.

The exhibit also included a looping video of the view of a nearby parking lot at a typical shopping plaza, shot from the roof of the Best Buy at Culver Center, down the road. This wide angled view enabled people to see the complex orchestrations of individual car behavior in a dense and active commercial parking space. The movement of cars was an expression of the desires, motivations, and sentiments of their drivers, forced to contend with the complications of continuous arrival and departure.

A video about parking by Ryan Griffis of the Temporary Travel Office, called Parking Public: A Brief Tour Into the Storage of Utopia, helped to illustrate some of the larger societal issues about parking. A publication, Pavement Paradise: American Parking Space, was produced by the CLUI, in conjunction with the exhibit, and is for purchase in our bookshop.
who said “although there is not a single work of art on display, ‘pavement paradise’ does art’s job efficiently and with significantly less to-do was detected by david pagel, an art reviewer in the Los Angeles Times, who said “Although there is not a single work of art on display, ‘Pavement Paradise’ does art’s job efficiently and with significantly less to-do than usual.”

One material artifact from the exhibit has stayed in the CLUI space as a semi-permanent fixture. The Duncan parking meter, anchored to the floor, remains by the reception area as a reminder for visitors to feed the meter.

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**CLUI THEMATIC PROGRAM: WASTE STREAM**

**HEATHER ROGERS TALKS TRASH AT CLUI**

The CLUI provided another installment in its thematic program about the waste stream, with a presentation by Heather Rogers, author of Gone Tomorrow: the Hidden Life of Garbage, last spring.

Rogers is an independent filmmaker and writer whose widely praised book is a history and analysis of the main channels of the waste stream - hauling, dumping, landfilling - and the reasons why we generate so much of it, in the first place.

Garbage is a fairly new invention, connected with mass production of things made out of paper, plastic, metal, and glass. In the last 30 years, Americans have doubled the amount of trash we collectively generate, and now packaging - not even really a product itself - takes up around 30% of landfill space. Rogers suggests that recycling makes us feel better about our waste generating habits, while instead we should be feeling worse, and compelled to do something.

Understanding garbage enables us to understand ourselves. As Newton’s third law states, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. And so, the other side of consumerism could be said to be excretionism, which is something we all participate in, though we would sooner not think about it. This realm is not always pleasant of course, which is exactly why it is so…rich.

As the great garbologist Bill Rathje observed, modern dumps are the midden mounds of contemporary culture. In his work at Fresh Kills landfill in New York, the largest dump in the nation, he found that the stratigraphy of this archeology was aided by the fact that the historical layers inside the mound were dated to the day, by still legible editions of the New York Times. He found that trash disintegrates a lot slower than we thought. It is here to stay.

Rathje’s work sampling and analyzing the past 50 years of America entombed at Fresh Kills, along with the work of the Garbage Project at the University of Arizona, which sampled local waste streams and made demographic and social extrapolations based on their findings, is micro-cosmic.

Heather Rogers’ work is macrocosmic. She is a garbologist (which, I’m sorry Heather, you become after you write a book about garbage, whether you like it or not) who strives to see the big picture. Under her gaze is the system of flow, the networks and nodes that refuse passes through on its way to some hypothetical disappearance.

And as we illustrate in numerous projects here at the Center, there is no Away. The Gone Tomorrow in the title of her book is the perpetual horizon of the near future that we never can reach, as we are always Here Today.

Rogers showed her film and addressed a packed house at CLUI Los Angeles, providing insight into the world of waste. Her presentation was supported by the Center’s Independent Interpreter Program, where we periodically invite someone who is doing interesting work in and about the landscape to present their work to a general audience at the CLUI.

It was also an event in the CLUI thematic program series on the “waste stream.” Other upcoming events in the Waste Stream program include an exhibit about a journey through Los Angeles’ solid waste network, and a public tour to the dump, coming up.

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**WENDOVER REPORT**

FROM THE CENTER’S COMPLEX ON THE EDGE OF THE SALT FLATS

2007 was another busy season for the CLUI Wendover Complex in Wendover, Utah. Work progressed on the completion of the Orientation Building, which should be ready to open for the beginning of the 2008 season, in April, thanks to the efforts of the Annual Work Party crew: Jed Lackritz, Joe Ports, Philip Weil, Ben Loescher, Jenny La Nicca, Carolin Bock and Moritz Fehr, Ed Coolidge, Brett Stalbaum, Paula Poole, and team leader John Brinton Hogan.

Currently in CLUI Exhibit Hall 2 is a display of material by 2006 resident Katherine Bash and the writer Bill Fox, from their project Wendover: Floating Point Operation, an examination of spatial phenomenology related to Floating Island, an ephemeral landscape at the far end of the salt flats. Up for a little while longer in CLUI Exhibit Hall 1 is a display of large images from a University of Missouri, St. Louis class that blasted through the area last Spring. The class (of art history students led by professor Susan Cahan), spent three days being led around the great Salt Lake and Wendover by the CLUI. They then went to work at a spot picked out by the CLUI as a field project site, an abandoned gas station at the tip of the Skull Valley, a veritable “Home Depot” of unclaimed raw materials for making temporary sculptural interpretations of the region.

continued on next page
The CLUI Wendover Artist-in-Residence Program was also busy over the 2007 season, with more than a dozen new individuals or groups involved, including: Owen Gump, a Californian living in Leipzig, Germany, who made photographs of some of the remote stretches and corners of the region into a booklet, *Promontory*, and returning to finish his project in 2008; Filmmaker Matt McCormick, from Portland, Oregon, who filmed ghost towns in the region for presentations and performances around the country, and for an upcoming video installation; Cassim Sheikh, from Massachusetts, who worked on a film about the region; Guenter Stoeber and Rutar Lasberger, from Berlin, Germany, who worked on regional photographic and film projects that will be displayed at a later date; Vincent Lamouroux, from Paris, France, who made a large dome sculpture on the salt flats (later removed after being photographed); the painter Philip Govedare, from Washington state, who made paintings based on the landscape of the area for an upcoming exhibition; Jess Dunn, from New Mexico, who used the landscape around Wendover, and its salt resources, for her larger work *Corporeal Landings*, shown in Albuquerque; Robin Doherty and Carol Hummel, from Ireland and Ohio, respectively, who made photographs and macramed portions of the landscape; Kristin Posehn, from Penryn, California and Holland, who focused on the former boom town that never was, called Metropolis, located in northern Nevada, as part of an elaborate documentation and research project she is working on for an exhibition and publication; and Smudge Studios, based in New York City, who were in residence at South Base, as part of their program to explore inhabiting different kinds of spaces all over the country.

Lewis Colburn, from Syracuse, New York, repaired the Russian Inspection Station at the airport, and researched its use and origins. The Russian Inspection Station is a prefab building, built in Russia in the 1980s, and shipped to the rocket plant at Bacchus, Utah, to house Russian inspectors, as part of the START (Strategic Arms Reduction) treaty. After serving their purpose at the rocket plant, and facing disposal, these buildings were moved to Wendover for safe-keeping. The apartment and inspection work station in the building, complete with Russian furniture, fixtures, appliances, and equipment, remained untouched behind a fence at Wendover for the past few years. For his time as a Wendover resident, Lewis, who is fluent in Russian, fixed the place up, with the cooperation of the Wendover Airport, translated some of the manuals and publications inside the station, and made a series of photographs of himself, based on historic images of its former Russian users. It remains to be discovered if the complimentary inspection station made for the American START inspectors in Russia, is still in existence, somewhere in the former Soviet Union.

Other repeat visitors came through to work on new or ongoing projects, including Lisa Blatt, Lucy Raven, Jessica Sowls, Deborah Stratman, Rob Ray, Steve Badgett, and the couple Brett Stalbaum and Paula Poole, from San Diego, who returned to Wendover to make more work based on their C5 Landscape Database. The latest project involves a hiking trail, indicated on a kiosk outside the CLUI orientation building. The trail takes hikers along a computer generated path between two old bunkers, on one either side of a small mountain range north of Wendover, using a route determined by their software. And, as they have for the past five years, the Land Arts and the American West field class from the University of New Mexico came through in early September, led by Bill Gilbert, and spent a few days working on a number of sites in the region. The work from the group is currently on display in Albuquerque.

New visitors just passing through included Michael Sturtz and his crew from Oakland, California, who came out to the salt flats to attempt to set the world speed record for a biofueled diesel motorcycle, the “Die Moto.” They succeeded: 130.614 MPH. The team of volunteers, known as the Diesel Dozen, crafted Die Moto from BMW R1150RT motorcycle parts, replacing the motor with a high performance BMW automotive diesel engine found only in Europe. The bike is a motorized work of art—an automotive engine on a motorcycle chassis encased in a hand-crafted ¾ aluminum fairing reminiscent of the GP racers, paying homage to the early pioneers of motorcycle daring. Team leader Michael Sturtz is the founder and Executive Director of the Crucible, an art space and foundry in Oakland.

The 2008 season, fully booked and just set to begin, promises to be another compelling chapter in the Center’s interpretive odyssey on the edge of nowhere. ♦
The initial purpose of this facility, a logistics site for the Los Angeles-based CLUI, is to serve the educational community of the University of Houston over the spring semester of 2008, specifically the departments of Art, Creative Writing, and Architecture, to assist with the development of creative interpretive projects in the region. A series of field trips conducted by members of the CLUI with students from the University are based on three themes related to the physical and economic landscape of the city.

One theme is water, specifically: drainage. The city of Houston was founded at the confluence of the White Oak and Buffalo Bayou, at a spot known as Allen’s Landing, named for the Allen brothers who landed there and platted out the early city in 1836. The Buffalo Bayou, which drains into San Jacinto Bay, and the ocean beyond, was later dredged and widened to accommodate shipping into the city’s core, and became the central artery for its developing economy, supported by rail, and, later, highways. The downstream portions of the Bayou evolved into the Ship Channel, the industrial port of Houston, one of the busiest ports in the nation, and the heart of the nation’s petrochemical industry. The waterway is the industrial city’s front door.

Conversely, the bayou is an essential egress. The city, built in flat and swampy grounds in a region prone to heavy rains, is dependent on the historic “bayou” network to get stormwater out of the city as quickly as possible. The bayous (White Oak, Brays, Sims and the upper Buffalo) have been channelized and reinforced to accommodate this task. Portions of Buffalo Bayou have been spared from this invasive engineering, and, especially on the portion between the ship channel and downtown, remain a chaotic and beguiling incidental landscape, cutting through the core of the nation’s fourth largest city.

Another theme being explored in collaboration with students from the University of Houston, is that of bulk materials. The Bayou is a corridor for aggregate, which is transported by barge to construction projects around the city. This material – sand, gravel, crushed rock, concrete – form the literal building blocks of the city. Where it comes from, and how it is used, is being studied by the students, led by Erik Knutzen of the Center (who was project manager for *Ground Up* at the Center in 2003, an exhibit and tour program that examined the aggregate industry in Los Angeles).

The third theme being addressed with the students, by Steve Rowell of the CLUI (who is a native Houstonian), is the oil industry, which of course, is the raison d’etre for the modern city of Houston.

The field office also serves as a regional base for the CLUI, supporting the development of other public programming in the Houston area. These include future tours, exhibits, and events, based out of the field office location, and at other venues in the city. These programs will also relate to the Buffalo Bayou and the industrial waterways of the city, and to the oil industry that is concentrated in the Houston region. A CLUI exhibit about oil will be displayed at the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston in January, 2009.

The CLUI Houston Field Office and Gulf States Logistics Site follows the model established by the CLUI in a number of other locations, including the Mojave Desert Research Station and Information Center near Barstow, California; the Great Basin Landscape Information Center and Residence Program in Wendover, Utah; and the Northeast Regional Office and Information Center in Troy, New York.
The Center occasionally organizes and conducts tours for school groups, museums and other cultural organizations. These tours are custom designed by the CLUI, and are generally not repeated. Among these tours are van trips for school groups (mostly college or university graduate level students), conducted as informal research programs, usually consisting of one or two days of exploration and pre-arranged encounters within the larger urban or suburban environment that surrounds the school (though generally within a 100 mile radius). CLUI bus tours are more formal and complex affairs, requiring weeks or months of preparation. Bus tours work on a tight prearranged itinerary, with many stops, local briefers, an onboard video program, and other scheduled events. They usually take all day, and are open to the public if possible.

CLUI TAKES STUDENTS TO NEW OHIO MOUNDS
THINGS PILE UP AROUND THE HEART OF PROCTER AND GAMBLELAND

The group visited the “on site disposal facility” which has eight cells, with vegetative covering. It contains the bulldozed remains of the contaminated buildings and ground from Fernald.

A DAY OF APPLIED INTERPRETATION was organized by the Center in spring 2008 for students at the University of Ohio in Cincinatti. The tour was generally about the city of Cincinatti, its origins, development, and re-development, and interpreted versions of its past, present and future.

The tour began at Sawyers Point, the park where Cincinnati has rediscovered its waterfront and erected a very complicated sculptural interpretive area, which includes the Gateway Monument.

The tour then drove by some of the big businesses in town, generative places producing products for the city and the world: the downtown Procter and Gamble headquarters, and the Kroger Grocery headquarters. Kroger is one of the largest supermarket chains in the nation, and P&G of course is the largest consumer products company, whose full spectrum of soaps and paper products fill a substantial amount of Krogers shelves (and are said to find their way to more countries of the world than any other company’s). P&G started as a local candle and soap company in Cincinatti, whose raw material, tallow, came from the rendered byproducts of the region’s slaughterhouses. Now most of their products are petrochemical and paper-based, and they have over 135,000 employees worldwide.

Then it was on to the other side of the consumer chain - dumps and scrapyards. At the river (and there is still river trade along the Ohio) we looked at the DJJ yard, where metal is ground up and shipped downstream to steel mills and metal re-manufacturers. Next was a famous local landmark, Mount Rumpke, one of the largest active dumps in the nation. Driving around the back side of the dump, we visited the Handlebar Ranch on Bank Road, an alleged midget carny town, housing marginalized people on the margins of the dump. Nobody was home.

Then to Fernald, to see what condition the “future site of a former uranium plant” was in. The plant, which over a forty year period made 500 million pounds of uranium metal for America’s nuclear weapons arsenal, was closed in 1989, and has been undergoing remediation since that time. Though the visitor center has not been built yet, and the site is still closed to the public, we were met and briefed by Sue Walpole, of the Office of Legacy Management of the DOE, who showed us around the 1,000 acre site. Just about all of the 323 industrial buildings are gone, and the site is being graded and planted to be an open space preserve, with ponds and manufactured wetlands. A few metal sheds remain, including pump houses and monitoring stations, as what lies beneath portions of the green veneer will remain toxic for millennia. The $4.5 billion preserve (the amount spent cleaning up Fernald) will never be fully open to the public.

From a land use point of view, this site has been used to capacity, and is now in terminal status. The end of the line. ♦

HIGHWAY 62 REVISITED
CLUI BUS TOUR EXPLORES CREATIVITY IN MORONGO BASIN

A BUS TOUR OF THE Morongo Basin was conducted by the CLUI last spring, as a commission by the Museum of Contemporary art in Los angeles, in association with a MOCA exhibition of the work of the artist Andrea Zittel. The tour, which was open to the public, visited sites of creativity in the area, which include the towns of Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree, in the desert two hours outside Los Angeles.

In 1997 the CLUI also conducted a public bus tour through this region, as part of the first series of bus tours arranged by the organization (the Hinterland series, done for Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), so one purpose of this trip was to examine the changes over the last decade. The changes, it turns out, are dramatic, more so here than in other parts of the desert arc around Los Angeles. Ten years ago this was more like other places. Today, it is like nowhere else.

This is the part of the California Desert most romanticized, visited, and developed by today’s creative people from Los Angeles. Palm Springs may have been the desert getaway of choice in the 1950’s through the 1970’s (and it continues to be popular among the golf-set). The Morongo Basin, and the region around the north side of Joshua Tree park, however, is the current desert au-courant. Rapid development of the commercial type now clogs Highway 62, the central artery through the region, and businesses like health food stores, coffee shops and art galleries are now part of the strip. Alluring modernist prefab glint in the sun on hillsides along the highway, though the most interesting sites are just off the increasingly beaten path.
The fully loaded big white tourbus left the CLUI HQ in Culver City early in the morning, with 53 passengers on board, and headed into the sun. After an introduction by the tour’s humble narrator, Matthew Coolidge, the bus headed down the 10 freeway, in the direction of Jacksonville, Florida, while an excerpt from *Dividio Highways*, a film about the interstate system, played on monitors overhead. As the bus passed the transition between the L.A. basin and the Inland Empire at Kellogg Hill, the “world’s largest religious mosaic” was pointed out. The artwork is 172 feet long, and is one of several unusual attractions at this branch of Forest Lawn Cemetery (where services include the $595 “a la carte burial,” the $3,500 “basic cremation package,” and the “Elegance” casket funeral for $19,500).

Religiosity and death are often part of the inspiration and effects of the sun, and for many people the life of Jesus is what comes to mind first when contemplating the meaning and context of the desert. As the bus passed the giant dinosaurs and windfarms of Cabazon, the tour transitioned from the Inland Empire to the inland desert, and headed up Highway 62, to the first stop on the tour, Desert Christ Park. Discluding things like historic and modern rock art, this was one of the first site-based artworks in the region. Desert Christ Park is a series of larger-than-life concrete human forms depicting biblical scenes. It was made over a ten year period starting in 1951, by Antone Martin, a former aerospace worker who lived near LAX. Though he wasn’t particularly religious (he also made plaster dinosaurs for museums), he was concerned about nuclear war, and dedicated the park to world peace. Though nuclear war has so far been avoided, the park has suffered from vandalism and earthquakes, and several versions of Christ are missing limbs and essential digits.

The next stop was the Institute of Mentalphysics, a spiritual campus with interesting buildings that blend with their surroundings. Similarities to Taliesin West are no coincidence, as the campus was designed by Lloyd Wright, and the architect’s more famous father apparently consulted on the design (though there is some dispute about whether it can be considered at least partially a Frank Lloyd Wright design). The Institute was founded in 1927, and moved to this location in 1974. The founder was Edwin Dingle, who had developed a philosophy and methodology for “victorious living” from his years wandering and studying in China and Tibet. “Whatever you seek is seeking you,” claims the Mentalphysics brochure. The facility is used for spiritual gatherings and retreats for many different types of practitioners now. After a tour of the grounds the group had lunch in the dining room.

Back on the road after lunch the bus headed to Andrea Zittel’s house, on a hillside south of the highway. Zittel’s work is a sort of “institute of investigative living,” an examination of the objects and forms of daily life, from clothing, to furniture, to housing. Her style is idiosyncratic modern, and her work is in museums all over the land. She also organizes High Desert Test Sites, periodic art events in the area that bring art people from far and wide. She met the group and toured us around her homestead, which includes several outdoor artworks and specimens of her industry, like custom trailers and living units.

The next stop was the unusual domed structure near Landers built as a human rejuvenation machine called the Integratron, created in the 1960s and ‘70s by the former test pilot and UFO abductee George Van Tassel. When we visited the Integratron (and his former home at nearby Giant Rock) on the CLUI bus tour ten years ago, it was for sale for $165,000. Since then it has been purchased by the Karl sisters, who operate it as functional mystical place. They conduct sound baths inside the dome, where the sounds reverberate in architectural harmony, and host other appropriate activities there. The Integratron, and the community, is fortunate to have found owners that appreciate and respect its unique history and capabilities.

This part of the desert seems to have drawn visionary and mystic builders of all types, some of whom we have visited, some long gone, and others hard at work. The new wave of builders include locally famous places like Garth’s teepee in Gamma Gulch; Lou Harrison’s Egyptianesque vaulted straw bale home; the Cube, an all-white modernist box; Marmol and Radziner’s Prefab buildings; and at Cal-earth in Hesperia, Nadir Kahili’s earth bag homes. The next stop on this tour is an exemplary modernist desert structure called the IT house, built in a remote spot by designers Linda Tallman and Alan Koch. They meet us there, and the group enjoys the purity of their elegant glass and metal box, and the landscape it embraces.

The last stop is dinner at Pappy and Harriet’s, in Pioneertown. Pioneertown is the former western movie set used for 1950s clean-cut cowboy productions with the likes of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. It became rundown in the 1960’s and ‘70s, when Pappy and Harriet was a serious desert biker bar. Today Pioneertown has been reoccupied, with buildings built behind the movie set facades. Pappy and Harriets, one of the few functional business in town, is run by young people and though still rustic, loud and boisterous, it takes reservations. The Pioneertown motel across the fictional main street, just went up for sale for $1.2 million. We leave fully supped as the band takes to the stage at a packed Pappy and Harriets (it is after all Saturday night), and watch the remainder of a film about the changing times at Pioneertown (*The Last Western*), as we head down the hill on the bus.

As we pass the edges of Joshua Tree Park, the discussion moves to Gram Parsons, the 1960s/70s country rock pioneer/balladeer who died from too much morphine and tequila in Room Number 8 of the nearby Joshua Tree Inn. We watch the last part of *Fallen Angel*, a documentary about Parsons, where his former road manager describes stealing Parsons’ coffin from Los Angeles Airport, where it was about to be shipped back to his family, and taking it down Interstate 10 to Joshua Tree Park, where they doused him in gasoline and lit him on fire.

In a way, Parsons is the region’s Dorian Gray, an L.A. hipster gazing stoned at his reflection on a desert motel TV screen showing the 50s singing cowboys prancing around Pioneertown. A visionary romantic heroin neo-cowboy who, today, is reincarnated, as a youthful desert Christ on the barstools of the creaky honkytonks along Highway 62.

Down the hill, across the highway and into a labyrinth of dirt roads to another desert art site, the sculpture park made by Noah Purifoy. Purifoy was the founder of the Watts Towers Art Center, and a founding member of the California Arts Council. He began working at this site in 1989, making numerous complex and large-scale assemblage sculptures, and showing curious visitors around when they would occasionally show up. He was an inspiration to many, including Andrea Zittel, who once said that she moved to the area because of his example. The artist Ed Ruscha is on the board of the foundation that runs the site now, following Purifoy’s death in a trailer fire at the site in 2004 (he was 86 years old).
Partnerships with other institutions enable CLUI-generated exhibits to be born or to acquire additional lives, traveling around to different places. Some recent CLUI exhibits include work generated specifically for presentation “elsewhere,” others incorporate existing work in new contexts, in each case they make CLUI projects available to new, and often larger, audiences. Here are some CLUI exhibits, displayed at non-CLUI venues, over the last year.

CLUI EXHIBITS AT THE SMITHSONIAN

EXHIBIT OF POSTERS ON DISPLAY UNTIL JUNE 22

AN EXHIBIT FEATURING 15 CLUI programs and projects posters is on display through June 22, 2008 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, in Washington DC, as part of their exhibit Celebrating the Lucelia Artist Award, 2001–2006 (CLUI director Matthew Coolidge was the recipient of that award in 2006).

The posters, commissioned by the museum, are representative relics of CLUI programs. They are promotional materials become artifacts in themselves. The posters depict executed CLUI programs and projects, such as the Margins in our Midst tour of gravel pits, the Loop Feedback Loop exhibit about traffic control, or the VORs of Texas exhibit.

“We are exploring the notion of the museum poster - like ‘Monet: Waterlilies – Metropolitan Museum of Art’ and such, where the poster of an ephemeral exhibit becomes an artifact of that exhibit, and gets circulated as a representative shorthand, or signifier, of the exhibit,” explains Matthew Coolidge. “Posters like those often end up getting seen more than the actual exhibit does, staying up on people's walls above the couch at home for years. They may have equal or greater power than the exhibit itself since they suggest, without defining, what the exhibit was like. They allow the imagination to fill in the rest, and like Einstein said, ‘imagination is more important than knowledge.’”

Also, by being ephemeral objects that by themselves have no value – just printed paper – the posters in the SAAM exhibit possess an immateriality that helps to counter their context: a very object-oriented heavy-duty art museum, where they are presented along with very physical art objects (the work of the other Lucelia award recipients, Andrea Zittel, Kara Walker, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liz Larner, and Jorge Pardo).

And, frankly, we liked the fact that the Smithsonian, as a museum’s museum, would be showing objects that referenced things that occurred outside a museum context, in the field, or in the Center’s own exhibition venues. The grand neoclassical institutional frame, built to collect and embrace objects, indicating a world outside, beyond their grasp. A full circle, of sorts.

And posters are, after all, the people’s art.

The posters (now nicely framed, courtesy of the Smithsonian), will be displayed as part of the traveling exhibition Experimental Geography, curated by Nato Thompson for Independent Curators International, which will open September 19, 2008 at the Richard E. Peeler Art Center, DePauw University in Greencastle Indiana, and will travel to the Albuquerque Museum, 2009, and the Colby College Museum of Art, 2010.

But, if you can’t wait, it is our hope to secure funding to print them out in quantity, and make them available for retail sales, so you can hang them above your couch. Maybe someday they’ll even make it to the curb after an unsuccessful day at a garage sale. That really would be a full circle. ♦

SEEING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

CLUI PLACED IN THE MIDDLE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

RECENTLY THE CLUI HAS BEEN approached by a number of curators asking if we have work addressing climate change. Usually our response is “Yes we sure do. We have a lot of before photos.” Then it occurred to us that we could also have a lot of during photos too, depending on your point of view about climate change.

The Center’s exhibit about Dauphin Island vacation homes, built on high stilts to protect them from the surf, but battered none the less in recent hurricanes, were shown as part of the exhibit Weather Report: Art and Climate Change at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art in Colorado.

Multiple and attributed meanings are the subject of the curatorial context, as indicated by the exhibit’s curator, Lucy Lippard, who said “CLUI's deadpan approach to dramatic issues reflects the public indifference to such obvious threats.”

That, for sure, is one way of looking at it. ♦

REPRESENTATIVE LOCATIONS

EXHIBIT OVERLOOKS BAY STATE

REPRESENTATIVE LOCATIONS: SIX AMERICAN LANDSCAPES Selections from the Center for Land Use Interpretation Photo Archive. This was the rather long title of an exhibit about the CLUI Photo Archive, commissioned by the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, and on display there February 19 - March 19, 2008.

All the images in the CLUI Photo Archive have been taken by members of the Center for Land Use Interpretation since the inception of the organization, in 1994. These images, now numbering over one hundred thousand, represent ground truths and primary source material compiled by the Center.

The images shown were selected from existing mounted prints within the archive, to show different types of representative landscapes - places that are manifestations or distillations of larger systems. Each site depicted is part of something larger. These images also explore the role of the camera as a device for framing and contextualizing a place, and are arranged to suggest a few of the many possible thematic parsings of the American landscape, and the meaning these landscapes harbor.
As Mark Feeney, an astute reviewer writing in the *Boston Globe*, commented, the 11th floor gallery where the Center’s 39 photographs were installed “has large windows affording a sweeping view of the cityscape to the north, east, and southeast. It serves, in effect, as the 40th image in the show – and an implicit reminder that representative locations are all around anyone who has eyes to see them.”

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**AUTOTECHNOGEOGLYPHICS**

**VEHICULAR TEST TRACKS IN AMERICA**

A RESEARCH GRANT FROM THE Heinz Architectural Center, at the Carnegie Museum of Art, enabled the completion of a series of images and related research into automotive test tracks in the United States, now on display as part of *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes*, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis February 16 - August 17, 2008 and at the Carnegie Museum of Art October 4 - January 18, 2009, with a companion publication out in bookstores.

Located, physically, between work by Ed Ruscha and SITE, the CLUI’s twelve images are arranged in a grid, with each image depicting a different track, as seen from the air. The project is entitled *Autotechnogeoglyphics: Vehicular Test Tracks in America*.

Like the lines on the Plains of Nazca, automotive test tracks are alluring earthen etchings on a huge scale, partly representative, partly enigmatic, pointing towards the future, and the past.

They represent the condition of America, land of the automobile, a syndrome that transformed the landscape of the nation, and the world, more than any other. These tracks are the nurseries for the vehicular companions that we can’t seem to live with, or without.

Despite their vastness, often a few square miles in size, these track complexes are a condensation of space, a microcosm of the country, built for subjecting vehicles to all the types of terrain - from interstates, to suburban stop and go; from dirt roads to black ice - that the vehicle might encounter in the real world.

The need for space pushes them to the edge of the suburbs, and beyond, where land is cheaper. And where visitors are less likely, as these are, famously, secret places, where new ideas in this competitive, capital intensive industry, are covertly aired.

Despite their size, they are supremely surficial, nearly two dimensional. Outside, on the ground, they are obscure horizontal bands of bermed earth, beyond a distant fence line. From the air, they are fully exposed, laid out like a diagram, hidden, in plain sight, and curious to behold.

The automotive test tracks of America are mostly in the West and Midwest. Around Detroit, each of the “big three” operates at least one major complex. Test tracks are located around Phoenix, Arizona, to test in conditions of extreme heat, on top of everything else. On the fringes of this city’s sprawl are tracks for companies whose home terrain has no desert to work in, such as Volvo, Toyota, Volkswagen, and Nissan. Honda and Hyundai’s tracks are in the desert north of Los Angeles. And, in Illinois, Caterpillar, the global earth mover, tests its machines in a giant hilltop sandbox.
Though much of it is overgrown, concealing the full extent of transformation, the Masabi Iron Range of northeastern Minnesota is one of the most churned up regions in the country. The scale and number of mining sites in the area are nearly matched by the number and variety of visitor facilities.

Join us here as we travel along Highway 169, between Hibbing and Soudan, a distance of 50 miles that spans the mining interpretive spectrum.

Hull Rust Mine and Overlook
The consolidated network of pits north of Hibbing, called the Hull Rust Mahoning Pit, is the largest iron mine pit in the nation. Known as the Grand Canyon of the North, the pit is 3.5 miles wide and 500 feet deep, has been worked for over 100 years, and is still active. Peak production was in the 1940s, when ¼ of the ore for the entire U.S. steel industry came out of this hole.

The Hull Rust Mine overlook provides panoramic views of this engineered landscape, which extends for miles, with lakes, mounds, benches and cliffs, on such a scale that is hard to reconcile it as being made by humans. The overlook has some nicely rotting signage, which seems to echo the crumpled disintegration of the landscape below. A walking trail passes by machinery marked with canted plaques, and a framed hole in the fence has a sign that says “Take Photos Here.” A small visitor building on the edge has a pleasant gift shop.

Another notable element of the mine is that it is the location of an unusual national hydrogeographic “triple divide.” Known by the Chippewa natives as the Hill of Three Waters, a drop of water falling on that spot could flow either into the Arctic Ocean (via the Big Fork and Red Rivers and Hudson Bay), the Gulf of Mexico (via the Mississippi River) or the north Atlantic (via the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River). The fact that the precise spot now falls within the mining area perhaps changes this dynamic somewhat.

North Hibbing Town Site Frisbee Park
Much of the town of North Hibbing was moved in the 1920s to make room for expansion of the Hull Rust iron pit. Though many mining towns have been moved in the past, this former town site is unique because it has been developed into a frisbee golf course. Each “hole” in the course is a historic site, usually an empty building slab or some other remnant, marked with an interpretive plaque. A new hybrid form of interpretive recreation.

Greyhound Bus Museum
Hibbing is also the “birthplace of the bus industry in the United States.” It was here that a local shuttle service between Hibbing and Alice slowly grew and became Greyhound Bus Lines. The story is told in a museum of artifacts, dioramas, and architectural recreations. The museum is wonderfully plain and straightforward, right down to the restored busses in the last hall. Typos in the text of the wall panels, with corrections penciled in, help to add to its charm.

Bob Dylan’s House
Though privately owned and occupied, the existence of the childhood home of Bob “Dylan” Zimmerman emits a strong interpretive presence in Hibbing. He has said little about the place directly, but the assumption is that the town and the mining industry it lived on had a profound effect on his character and his emergence as a contemporary balladeer of the American Land.

Iron World
Up the road at Chisholm, Iron World is an interpretive attraction built in and around an old iron pit and slag piles, in the 1970s, as part of an early attempt to replace the shrinking mining industry with tourism. The wonderfully outdated and undervisited “disneyland of mining” has different pavilions along a looped paved trail, mini golf, a Civilian Conservation Corps display, a pit overlook, an outdoor stage, and closed food stands. Iron World is a mining theme park, museum, and living history center in harmony with the “dying” industry of the Mesabi Iron Range.
Minnesota Mining Museum
Also in Chisholm, the Minnesota Mining Museum is a cluster of out-buildings, machinery and artifacts spread around the grounds, including trains, drill rigs, haul trucks, and steam and electric shovels that sculpt-ed the landforms around town. The focal point for the museum is the Castle, the gift shop and display center housed inside a small turreted structure that looks like the logo of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Continuing to travel easterward along Highway 169, you reach the intersection of Highway 53, at the midpoint of our journey. Head south, briefly, along Highway 53, to visit two notable sites in Virginia and Eveleth, then continue east on 169.

Mineview in the Sky Overlook
Operated by a nearby Chamber of Commerce, this mine overlook was originally established for mine foremen to view the operations below, a network of pits known as the Rouchleau group, a mine complex nearly three miles long and 450 feet deep, which was operated by U.S. Steel and its predecessors until 1977. Now the mines visible from here are closed, and the pits are filled with water – giant unused rectangular lakes. A small gift shop and a broken haul truck are located at the overlook.

Largest Hockey Stick
The largest hockey stick in the world may or may not be the 110-foot long version erected in Eveleth. There is a stick nearly twice as large in Duncan, British Columbia, though it is said not to be a “real” hockey stick, as it is not structured like a hockey stick (glue laminated), though it is shaped like a hockey stick. Either way, if a hockey stick is an implement used to play hockey, then both are out of the playoffs, for now. Eveleth is or was home to the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame, which is why the stick was installed on a downtown lot here in the first place. The Canadians also have a Hockey Hall of Fame, whose authenticity is enhanced by being located in a former Bank of Montreal building in Toronto, Ontario. Eveleth’s Hall of Fame may be closed or closing, moving to the Mall of America or someplace with enough visitors to keep the doors open. Incidentally, the stick in Eveleth was the second one built on site. The first one was installed in 1995, and fell apart just a few years later. This one, made by another company, was installed in 2002.

Mountain Iron Mine
Back on Highway 169, just east of Highway 53, is the Mountain Iron Mine, the largest operating iron mine in the nation. It is a pit and plant operated by U.S. Steel’s Minntac operation, to provide taconite, a source of iron ore, to its steel plants. In the mid 1900s, iron ore extracted from underground mines of the area gave way to a less pure but more easily extracted form of iron, drawn from a rock called taconite. Taconite is 20-30% iron, which is processed into pellets at plants next to the extraction pits. It is then shipped by rail and boats on the Great Lakes to the steel mills of America, and beyond. The Wacootah Overlook overlooks the Minntac operation from across the road. The large plant and massive pit are visible in the distance, beyond the gated access road.

Soudan Mine
The underground Soudan Mine, the last stop on this trip, is seen not by an overlook, but rather through an underlook. The Soudan Mine would be simply superlative as the largest underground iron mine in the state at the time it closed in 1963, and became a state park, attracting tourists to its half-mile depths, but it has become an unusual high tech research environment as well, one of a handful of physics labs established in former underground mines around the country. Taking advantage of the infrastructure (elevators and electricity and such), part of the mine was leased to the University of Minnesota to house physics labs for research that requires isolation from the frenetic activity of the earth’s surface. Two large chambers have been hollowed out at the deepest level of the mine supporting primarily two different experiments. One is the CDMSII (Cryogenic Dark Matter Search), studying “dark matter,” the unknown material that takes up 80% of the universe. The other chamber houses MINOS (Main Injector Neutrino Oscillation Search), which is the receiving end for catching neutrinos injected into ground by a subatomic gun at Fermi Lab in Illinois, 450 miles away. In both cases the rock above and around the facilities acts as a filter for subatomic particles, allowing the smallest and hardest to detect ones to rise to the level of detection. MINOS, for example, uses a battery of massive octagonal sheets of energized steel to look for neutrino traces – a subatomic “stop” sign.

The Soundan Mine has a trippy mural that explains everything, and an interpretive plaque to help explain the mural.

CLUI photo
MINNEAPOLIS
HEADQUARTERS HEADWATERS

TRAVELING UPSTREAM, ONE GETS CLOSER to the source, both literally and metaphorically (Remember Joseph Conrad!). 300 river miles from Lake Itasca, the source of America’s river, the Mississippi, Minneapolis is in a way the city furthest upstream on the American land. A quick look at the corporate headquarters of this city is an interesting and illuminating reflection of some of the sources of contemporary American culture and economics.

Mill Ruins Park is at the historic heart of Minneapolis, and a good place to get a sense of the city’s reason for being where it is. It is a collection of partially rebuilt ruins of mills and constructed waterways, from the 19th century, which made this the flour milling capital for the vast wheat fields of the Upper Midwest. Located at a natural waterfall, St. Anthony’s Falls, the waterworks here were first developed to operate saw mills, processing lumber cut from the virgin timberlands of the Midwest, and floated down the river. As trees were cleared away, grain was planted in the fields, transitioning the regional economy to agriculture and food processing. Visible from the park on both sides of the Mississippi River are grain silos and plants, some belonging to companies that emerged in this era which still dominate the food industry today, like General Mills and Pillsbury.

It is in the suburbs, however, where you find the modern behemoth that is the legacy of Minneapolis’ food production: Cargill. Cargill is a company of superlatives, and a company with many unique qualities. It is one of the largest food companies in the world; the nation’s largest grain trader; and the world’s largest privately held corporation. 90,000 employees work at hundreds of processing plants for various food and feed products, scattered all over the nation and in over 50 other countries. Subsidiaries of Cargill include Excel, one of the largest meat packing and processing companies in the world, Cargill Steel, which operates 19 steel plants in the United States, and Cargill Salt, one of the largest salt producers in the country. The corporate campus is in a pastoral suburban setting outside Minneapolis, near housing developments and a lake.

But perhaps the most surprising company headquarters in Minneapolis is in a nondescript office building on the highway, not too far from the Southdale Mall. This is the corporate headquarters for ATK, a military products company that specializes in the full range of projectiles, from bullets to ballistic missiles. Also known as Alliant Tech Systems, they are the nation’s largest manufacturer of rocket motors, used to propel ground-based missiles, as well as space entry and re-entry vehicles (like ICBMs). Their plant in Missouri makes more than 95% of the bullets used by the defense department in war, and in peace. They do not have any major production facilities in Minneapolis anymore, they owe their existence here to the fact that they once operated at the Twin Cities Ammunition Plant. Now closed and undergoing remediation (though more than half of the property remains in use by the National Guard) the plant produced small arms munitions, such as rockets and mortars, and billions upon billions of bullets from WWII to Vietnam.

Maybe this is more the terrain of the mythical Colonel Kurtz, at the end of the river.
TRAILERS ARE EVERYWHERE IN AMERICA, but nowhere more than in Elkhart Indiana. Over 100 trailer companies are located within a 25 mile radius of Elkhart, making half of the recreational vehicles in the country.

Why Elkhart? Well, somewhere has to be the largest trailer production area in the country, and it happened to evolve in Elkhart Indiana. RV historian Al Hasselbart has researched the local industry extensively, and attributes the founding of Elkhart’s dominance in the RV world to a few people, but especially to Wilbur Schult, who opened a trailer dealership in town in 1933 after seeing some trailers displayed at the Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago’s 1933 World’s Fair. Milo Miller moved his small Sportsman Trailer Company to Elkhart in 1934, and Schult became his national distributor, buying the company in 1936, calling it Schult Trailer Coach. By 1939, the company was making 125 trailers per week. Customers included itinerant vaudeville and carnival industries.

Many people came and went through associations with this company and started their own ventures in the late 1930s, some of which failed or moved away, others that grew. By the 1940s, there were enough manufacturers, and networks of parts suppliers to feed them, to make the region known as an advantageous place to open a trailer business. By 1949, 35 companies were operating locally, and the trade press touted Elkhart as “The Trailer Capital of the World.” As the post war recreation and travel boom continued, Elkharts’s trailer companies boomed along with them.

Today at least half of the workforce in the area works in the RV industry, or in companies supplying it. Small towns are flanked by vast assembly sheds, behind which fields of parts and chassis await integration. This is Amish country too, and traditional farmsteads and furrowed fields are interspersed with industrial parts and finished products laid out in organized rows.

Many Amish work in the industry. Some factories have busses that cycle through the rural landscape, picking up Amish employees from outside their homes, as the Amish don’t drive cars. It is a curious overlap for the Amish, whose abstinence from transportation technologies keep them bound to horse and buggy, and who are known for their simple practical craftsmanship, yet who work in assembly lines, putting together RVs with lightweight prefabricated material and pneumatic staplers.

Elkhart itself is the largest town in the RV capital district, which extends throughout Elkart County, but principally the towns of Goshen, Middlebury, Wakarusa, Napponee, and Bristol. In Elkhart, the new headquarters of the RV/Motorhome Heritage Museum is easy to find, at exit 96 of the Interstate 80/90 in East Elkhart, and a great place to go to study the industry. The building was finished in March 2007, and a convention center is going in next door. Inside are two primary display areas, with the “Go RVing” display, which features five of the latest brand-new RVs from some of the manufacturers in the area. Each RV has pop-outs, making them much larger inside.

The RV Founders Hall, has a great collection of historic RVs, laid out on a meandering pedestrian road. Upstairs a large study hall and research center has trade journals like Trailer Life, Trailer Dealer, RV Companion, as well as old service manuals and old advertisements from the industry.

Dozens of companies operate in and around Elkhart proper (population 59,000), but one of the largest and most diversified headquartered in Elkhart is Forest River. The company was founded in 1996 by Peter Liegl, a veteran of the RV industry. Leigl built the company through acquisitions and consolidations, creating a $1.6 billion (annual sales, 2005) company in less than 10 years. He was the sole owner of the company when it was acquired by Berkshire Hathaway, billionaire Warren Buffet’s investment company. Leigl still operates Forest River, which has nearly 60 plants, and over 5,400 employees, building several different brands of RVs, cargo trailers, recreational pontoon boats, shuttle busses, and manufactured housing units. Billboards around the county tout Forest River as “America’s largest producer of towable RVs and cargo trailers,” and the “Quiet Company.”
The next largest town in the county is Goshen, less than 10 miles down Highway 33. Goshen is the headquarters for Keystone RV, the “largest producer of travel trailers and 5th wheels in America” (with additional locations in Pendleton, Oregon and Howe, Indiana, just outside the county). Keystone manufactures over a dozen brands, (Sprinter, Outback, Laredo, etc.) and is itself owned by Thor Industries. Thor is an industry giant, and may indeed be worthy of its claim as the largest builder of recreational vehicles. Thor owns three major motor coach companies (Damon, Four Winds, and Mandalay, all of which are manufactured in the Elkhart area), passenger and shuttle buses (including the Champion and El Dorado National brands, the nation’s largest airport shuttle bus companies) and “towable” RV companies like Breckenridge, Keystone, Komfort, Dutchman, and Airstream.

Airstream is a bit of an industry aardvark, up until it was sold in the 1970s, and became more like other RVs in design. Before then, it was headed by its visionary founder, the fiercely independent Wally Byam, who led Airstream caravans around the globe, encircling the Pyramids, and such. Airstream, under Thor, has recently rediscovered the retro power of the brand, and is now manufacturing new units in the old rounded aluminum style. No Airstreams are made around Elkhart though. They are all manufactured at the company’s original location in Jackson Center, Ohio. Another company conspicuously absent from Elkhart is Winnebago, whose main manufacturing site is in Forest City, Iowa.

Middlebury, otherwise a small farming community ten miles northeast of Goshen, has three large RV companies that were established there and continue to operate today. Jayco was founded in 1968 by Lloyd L. Bontrager, a family man and inventor, who started with a design for a fold-down camper. Now the company does a full line of travel trailers, and employs 1,600 people, making it the largest privately owned independent RV manufacturer in the area. Pilgrim was founded by Dave Hoefer, who was the founder of Dutchman trailers and Four Winds Motorhomes, both of which are now owned by Thor. He started Pilgrim just a few years ago, a company focusing on towable trailers designed to be simpler, with fewer options, to make them less expensive. The company was one of several in the area whose production increased dramatically with post-Katrina orders from FEMA.

Coachman Industries was founded in Middlebury in 1964, and also claims to be one of the largest full-line RV manufacturers, making travel trailers, motorhomes, and manufactured housing. It also has plants in Georgia and Michigan. Over the years Coachman Industries has produced nearly 600,000 RVs, and today makes around 15,000 a year, with 1,600 workers.

Wakarusa, ten miles south of Elkhart, is dominated by two companies, Monaco Coach, and Utilimaster. RV building started out in Wakarusa in the 1950s with the Holiday Rambler Company, founded by Richard Klinger. It was later bought by Monaco, which manufactures in Wakarusa, and in Coburg, Oregon.

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work at the company, building boxes on to chassis made by Ford and others, creating fleet delivery trucks for companies like FedEx, Frito Lay, Budget Truck Rental, and Cintas (uniforms), as well as mail trucks for the United States Postal Service.

Wakarusa is also the home of a unique individual, DeVon Rose, who worked as a draftsman for Holiday Rambler. In his spare time, over the years, he made a miniature version of the town of Wakarusa, circa 1965, in his basement workshop, a workspace he made with scraps and castaway materials of the local RV industry. His models of the buildings of his town, over 150 of them, show great detail, and are made from scratch, using popsicle sticks and toothpicks, at a scale of one inch to five feet. His hand-made art, made slowly over the past 40 years, comprised what he calls the Bird’s Eye View Museum, and it stands apart from the rapid full-scale prefab factories that surround his town, turning out transient, and ephemeral, recreational vehicles.

Azusa Quarry, Azusa, California

The concrete used for the foundation, parking garage, and floors of the Museum came from a number of local batch plants operated by the Cemex company. The aggregate (crushed rock, gravel, and sand - the primary constituent of concrete) used by these plants at the time deliveries were made, came from Cemex’s Azusa Quarry, east of Los Angeles. The Azusa Quarry is one of several in the region around Irwindale, the primary source for aggregate in Los Angeles basin. The Azusa Quarry was started in 1941, and is 315 feet deep and nearly a square mile in size.
General Iron Industries, Chicago, Illinois
The steel beams that make up the structural skeleton of the Museum were fabricated by companies in the Inland Empire, east of Los Angeles, using steel that was manufactured in the Nucor-Yamato steel mill in Blytheville, Arkansas. The source of the steel manufactured by Nucor-Yamato was scrap, provided by numerous suppliers, collecting scrap metal from nearly a third of the nation, from Texas to Illinois. One of the largest suppliers for the plant is General Iron Industries, on the north side of Chicago. Consumer and commercial waste, including cars, appliances, and former building materials, are ground up here and shipped to Arkansas on barges traveling on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Fish Creek Quarry, Imperial County, California
Operated by US Gypsum, this mine was the source of the gypsum for the wallboard used to make the interior walls of the museum. The wallboard was assembled at a plant at Plaster City, connected to the quarry by a dedicated narrow gauge railway, 26 miles long, the last one in commercial use in the country. Gypsum is removed from the ground by blasting, using a combination of ammonium nitrate and diesel fuel. This quarry and plant produce more than half of the wallboard sold in Southern California. It is located in the southeastern part of the state, next to Anza Borrego State Park.

U.S. Silica Quarry, Rockwood, Michigan
The large windows and the glass roof of the Museum were built at a fabrication shop in Wisconsin, using specialty glass made at a PPG plant in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Most of this type of glass (73%) is composed of silicon dioxide, using a sand that is excavated from a pit next to the Huron River, south of Detroit, Michigan, operated by the U.S. Silica Company.

Bruno Poggi & Sons Quarry, Bagni di Tivoli, Italy
The skin of the Museum is facing stone, cut from a quarry 20 miles east of Rome, Italy. The quarry is one of several in this district, near Tivoli, the source of Roman travertine for over 2000 years. Another nearby quarry, the Mariotti company quarry, supplied the stone for the skin of the Getty Center. And from another, long ago disappeared, came the walls of the Colosseum.

The Museum came from the earth, just as, one day, it will return.

This photodocumentary research project was made possible by the support of LACMA, and is included in their publication BCAM/LACMA/2008.
After glancing off Florida, Katrina headed west and bulked up in the Gulf, then turned to make landfall at Buras, in the middle of narrow Plaquemines. The front and back levees, protecting the narrow strip of developed land on either side of the river were easily topped by a 20-foot storm surge. The levees now held the water in, even for days after the storm, until they were breached to drain the debris-choked soup, leaving a residue of the remains of Plaquemines’s towns: everything from school room desks, police cars, wrecked buildings, and bodies, spilled from crypts, tangled in the trees. Today, rebuilding continues, and now more than half the population has returned.

The road runs behind the levee along both sides of the river. On the east side, the levees stop sooner. The last chance to cross the river is the ferry at Pointe a la Hache, then the paved highway makes a loop where the front and the back levees meet at Bohemia, and heads back north.

On the more populated west side of the river, Highway 23 continues further downstream, passing the restored Woodland Plantation, captured in a Currier and Ives rendition that ended up on the label on Southern Comfort whiskey. South along the river, past Port Sulphur, where the powdered yellow landscape of Freeport McMoran’s sulphur plant dissolved into the soup during Katrina; past the Vietnamese shrimp fleet at Empire, whose boats littered the land for months after the storm; past Buras, whose name was emblazoned on the town’s collapsed water tower making an iconic image of the landfall eye of the storm; past Fort Jackson, a civil war fort that, with its twin Fort St. Philip (now overgrown on the other side of the river), served as a gateway for the mouth of the river; until finally, on the western bank, the front and back levees meet at the last town, the town furthest down on America’s river: Venice.

Over the levee, to the port and marina at Venice, the land becomes level with the sea. Commercial fishing, shrimping, and sportfishing is at least part of why this place exists, as a gateway to the waters of the Gulf. The other larger reason, is oil and gas. Venice is an industrial port and logistics center for the regions onshore and offshore industries. Drilling mud, equipment, and personnel head continuously to offshore rigs on supply and crew boats. Several helicopter ports, with parking lots full of hundreds of pickups, serve as a link for crews at the more remote offshore rigs. Venice, last town on the river, is a point of embarkation to the water-bound land and artificial islands beyond the roads.

Past Venice is where the Birdfoot really begins. Beyond the roads, beyond the levees, the Mississippi splays out into the gulf, resembling, from the air, the webbed foot of an aquatic bird. The shape of this landscape is a reflection of the forces at work, a blend of human constructions and terrestrial dumping, a spreading out of one of the most sediment laden rivers in the world – a wet conveyor of earth - slowing to nearly a stop as it enters the sea.

This is a national landscape of disappearance and disintegration. It is a fractal labyrinth of dendritic channels, where land melts into marsh, and marsh melts into water. It is a transformed, massively engineered space, whose dynamics are dominated by the monolithically leveed Mississippi, and cut by thousands of miles of incidental pipeline channels, left ever widening by erosion.

As it disappears, its soft marsh is exposed, and disappears further into the waves. The land is also sinking geologically, the effect of the sediment of America’s heartland, washed down the river at rate of a million tons per day, pressing on the continental shelf. Further, the Birdfoot is battered and submerged by hurricane after hurricane. The landscape, this end of America, is breaking up into the ocean.

Within this landscape though people live and work. Oil company workers stay in manufactured industrial housing units bolted heavily to oil platforms rising above the marsh. These workers tend the oil and gas wells and gathering stations, scattered throughout the Birdfoot. The few weekend hunting and fishing communities are being rebuilt. At Trappers Canal, accessible only by boat, where a dozen people once lived, making their living hunting and fishing in the marsh, residents are slowly returning, rebuilding their simple homes, off the grid.

Pilotown is the largest established community in the Birdfoot, though its population is shrinking, following Katrina. Operated as a base for river pilots, people have lived here for nearly 100 years. The main street is a raised walkway, along which a couple of dozen structures once stood, including a school, post office, and grocery store. The population peaked in the 1960s, at around 200 people, before a series of damaging hurricanes destroyed buildings and compelled people to move away. Hurricane Betsy in 1965, was devastating. After Hurricane Camille, in 1969, the school was closed, and remaining students were bussed to school in Venice by boat. In 1996 the postmistress retired, and the post office at Pilotown was closed. The pilots association has been able to keep their zip code, 70081, although it serves a mainly symbolic function now.
Today, some of the largest old buildings are being repaired and torn down, following damage from Katrina. The buildings that remain will support the half dozen or so river pilots that stay here, along with their chef, pilot boat captains, and maintenance crew. The pilots that stay here belong to the Crescent River Pilots Association, which has jurisdiction for the river between Pilottown and New Orleans.

Each foreign flagged ship over 100 tons that passes by this stretch of river is met by a pilot, who is ferried to the ship on a pilot boat, and climbs up the side of the still moving ship on a ladder, to the bridge. The pilot then guides the captain of the ship along the river. When the ships pass River Mile 103, at New Orleans, they enter the jurisdiction of the New Orleans-Baton Rouge Steamship Pilots Association, and the Crescent River Pilots are replaced. Downstream, when ships enter the mouth of the river, they enter the jurisdiction of the Bar Pilots Association, who guide them from the mouth to Pilottown. Heading south from New Orleans, the process is reversed. Each time, the associations levy a fee for their services, around $2,000. With three associations and thousands of ships passing every year, this is clearly a lucrative business for the hundred or so Crescent River Pilots and their peers, and their governor-appointed jobs are highly prized.

Downstream of Pilottown at a point called the Head of Passes, the river splays into three main branches, the “toes” of the Birdfoot. To the east, Pass a l’Outre (Otter’s Pass) is the historic and naturally deepest way in to the river, a channel now silted up and shallow in points. It bifurcates before it reaches the gulf, and amidst its maze of marsh channels are the lost ruins of Balize, the original "pilot town" near the mouth of the river, a name also once given to a perhaps mythical Caribbean pirate hide-out located there, or nearby.

Approaching the river here by ship from London in 1827, after a seven week Atlantic crossing, Fanny Trollope (accompanied by her young son who would grow up to be the writer Anthony Trollope) wrote a descriptive account of the transition from ocean to river, at this older, natural river approach, "The shores of this river are so utterly flat, that no object upon them is perceptible at sea, and we gazed with pleasure on the muddy ocean that met us, for it told us we were arrived." Under the guidance of a river pilot sent from Balize to take them over the bar, she describes the journey further, "I never beheld a scene so utterly desolate as this entrance of the Mississippi. Had Dante seen it, he might have drawn images of another Bolgia from its horrors. Only one object rears itself above the eddying waters; this is the mast of a vessel long since wrecked in attempting to cross the bar, and it still stands, a dismal witness of the destruction that has been, and a boding prophet of that which is to come."

A large camp on the north side of Pass a l’Outre is owned by Don Deladernier, the eldest of an old family that has lived on the Birdfoot for many years. Don is a commercial alligator farmer and duck hunter, and is also the largest private landowner in the marsh, having inherited hundreds of acres of dredge disposal lots that were purchased from the government by his parents in the 1920s. Now in his 80’s, he is one of a few people left who have lived their whole, long life in the marsh, in the old way. His remote birdfoot camp, being rebuilt after Katrina, is the legacy of a family whose name, Deladernier, translated from the French, means of the last.

North of Pass a l’Outre is one of a few government financed island building projects in the Birdfoot, which attempts to counteract the effects of land loss that is occurring throughout the coastal marshes of Louisiana. This one, called the Fort St. Phillip terracing project, involves backhoes equipped with special, wide tracks to operate in the mud, digging and dumping piles of muck to make new land where there was none. A drop in the bucket perhaps, but something at least.

The coast of Louisiana is one of the fastest disappearing landmasses on Earth. Twenty-five to thirty square miles are lost every year. Fifty acres a day, two acres every hour. The reasons for this mass land loss are largely manmade. A major factor is the 10,000 miles of pipelines and navigational canals built by the oil and gas industry that allow erosion deep into the marsh. The Mississippi River levee system also contributes to land loss by restricting the movement of sediment and freshwater to the marshes.

The river carries on average more than a million tons of sediment per day. This sediment, before the levee system was put into place, would flow with the river current, and along with fresh water, spill out into the marshes, building up land. The levees are a continuous wall, extending up to Missouri, that prevent this from happening.

Efforts to protect and rebuild the marshes physically and ecologically, like the Fort St. Phillip terracing project, include the Carnarvon freshwater diversion project in North Plaquemines, which pumps fresh water out of the river into the marsh to help counteract salt water intrusion. The state is also proposing to make a series of cuts in the channels of the Birdfoot (called crevasses) to help sediment return to the marsh.
On the seaward edge of the marsh, natural barrier islands, also formed by sediments washed down the river, protect the marsh from perpetual wave and current erosion of the Gulf. These islands are disappearing too, leaving the soft marsh exposed. A number of barrier island construction projects, using sediment pumped from the sea floor, are also underway.

During hurricane Katrina the coast of Louisiana lost 218 square miles of coastline in 12 hours. 2.7 miles of healthy marsh absorbs one foot of storm surge. As the marshland recedes, the effect of these storms, with their deadly consequences, moves closer to the population centers in Plaquemines Parish and the rest of coastal Louisiana.

At the Head of Passes, where the Birdfoot splits into three, the middle channel is known as South Pass. While Pass A L’Outre led to the historic, engineered channel, used more than 100 years ago, to gain access to the main channel of the Mississippi, South Pass was the first engineered channel into the Mississippi River.

Though South Pass is no longer the main shipping channel, its depth is maintained by Army Corps dredges to a depth of 20 feet. This allows it to be used by oil company crew and supply boats, and large commercial fishing boats. River dredges work these parts of the channel to keep the minimum depth for shipping. The dredges suck wet sediment from the bottom, and pump it through pipelines to dumping sites on shore.

At the end of South Pass is Port Eads, for many years the last settlement on the river. A lighthouse there marks the original modern entrance to the Mississippi.

The town is named for the man who established it, and who made shipping in the Mississippi River possible, James Eads. Eads became an expert on the fluid and material dynamics of the river through his years of experience as an underwater diver and salvager, based originally out of St. Louis. In the 1870s, Eads conceived of a method for opening up the shallow bar at the mouth of the river. Naturally, as the river slows down at the mouth, the sediment load drops, forming shallow shoals — bars — that prevent larger ships from entering the river. Eads’ plan called for a network of jetties projecting perpendicularly from the banks of the river, that forced the flow towards the center of the channel. This, he proposed, would have the effect of speeding up the current, carrying the sediment load beyond the bar, and scouring the river bottom, making it deeper.

No one, especially the government, believed this monumental task would work, so Eads financed it himself, taking on the full risk of failure. Hundreds of workers came to Port Eads to work on the project, and in just a few years after construction was completed, Eads’ system had deepened the channel from 9 feet to 30 feet. The Mississippi was now open to ocean-going vessels, and became an economic gateway to the interior of America, and a major economic force in the nation.

A few years later, the government took Eads’ system and built it on an adjacent channel, Southwest Pass, and the main shipping channel was transferred there. Port Eads, no longer on the main shipping channel, dwindled into a small recreational fishing marina. Port Eads today is a diffused wreck on the edge of the world, a river settlement that is so close to the river that it very nearly is part of the river. With the exception of the large lighthouse to the south, the settlement consists of a few houses, cabins, and docks, used by sport fishermen, including some of the more affluent members of the Parish government, as a weekend fishing retreat, and as a refuge from the open ocean. After Katrina, the marina was wrecked. Flipped boats, half sunk barges, and strewn domestic debris are still scattered around. This is a place that is barely there.

During Katrina, two of the half dozen or so residents of Port Eads decided not to evacuate, to ride out the storm. Both of them, Wayne Scarabin, age 53, and Roy Clark, age 18, were literally blown away. Their remains have never been found.

The main shipping channel today is through Southwest Pass, the western branch of the three forks that separate at the Head of Passes. Along the pass are several oil and gas processing stations. The largest of these is Burrwood. Historically, Burrwood was a small community of oil workers, river pilots, and fishermen, who traveled up river to Pilottown to socialize and get their mail. It is now a tank farm and oil and gas collection and transfer facility.

Towards the end of Southwest Pass are two hulks of obsolete lighthouses, and offshore rigs in the Gulf beginning to appear above the marshgrass. The land begins to disappear from the river’s shores approaching the last building on the river, the Bar Pilots’ Southwest Pass station. A handful of pilots stay here to board ships and guide them through the mouth of the river, up to Pilottown.

continued on next page
The edifice, an outpost, furthest out from civilization, is a hybrid structure reflecting its environment, a building resembling a ship, and an oil platform. It is designed to withstand the worst storms imaginable, and survived Katrina intact.

Beyond the pilots station the landscape disintegrates into piers at the mouth of the Mississippi, and the end of the Birdfoot.

The bar pilots station at the end of Southwest Pass, the last building on the Mississippi, built to survive hurricanes, resembles a ship and an oil platform.

The earthen riverbanks end soon after the Bar Pilots station, and the mouth continues as a structural skeleton for another mile into the Gulf. The jetties, built following the work of James Eads, dissolve into a lattice that ultimately surrenders to the ocean. The land is now gone, broken into a constellation of navigational aids, and oil platforms.

The fresh water enters the gulf as a plume of nutrient rich liquid earth. Nitrates and phosphates from America's heartland fuel algal growth that sucks up the oxygen dissolved in the water. The resulting lobe of hypoxic sea, known as the "dead zone," can grow to over 5,000 square miles. But that's another story.

The exhibit Birdfoot: Where America's River Dissolves into the Sea, is on view at CLUI Los Angeles until May 18, 2008. It was presented using the CLUI's photo-scape presentation method, a series of photographs and text presented sequentially as a looping digital "slideshow" 35 minutes long. The accompanying sound, a suitably ambient meandering music, was a recording made by Chas Smith, called "Endless Mardi Gras," on the Cold Blue label. The presentation was made possible by the support of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and The California College of the Arts Curatorial Program.

For most people, practical hovercraft are large water-borne vessels carrying hundreds of people across European waterways (like the English Channel) at high speeds, or Marine Corps equipment carriers that can discharge troops in vehicles the second they land on the beach (like those based at Camp Pendleton, on the coast north of San Diego County). They seem to work OK when they are big, heavily powered, and headed in a relatively straight line.

Small hovercraft, however, seem more of a science fiction kind of thing, like the little sport model Luke Skywalker drives across the desert in Star Wars (in reality an actor driving a small hovercraft). Or science fantasy, like the hovercraft made as a Saturday project, perhaps from plans that were advertised in the back of Popular Mechanics magazine, that never really seem to work as well as expected.

Small commercially made hovercraft however do exist, and they do seem to work. There are several companies in the United States making small quantities of hovercraft for commercial, recreational, and search and rescue functions, such as Hovertechnics of Eau Claire, Michigan, which has delivered over a thousand of its craft to customers since opening in 1984. Or Neoteric, of Terre Haute, Indiana, which has supplied craft of its design to the Border Patrol, and many other state and municipal agencies, and private companies. They are finding their way into their niche. And their niche is places that you can't get to by any other means.

In the mud flats of the Great Salt Lake Desert of Utah, for example, distances are great, and surface conditions are often too soft for wheels (or even feet), and too hard for boats. Here the search and rescue team of Hill Air Force Base's Utah Test and Training Range has two Neoteric hovercraft, used for accessing remote crash sites. Or the edge of estuaries, for example, like parts of the Sacramento River Delta, where it is too shallow for boats, and changing tides can leave vessels stranded. Here the California Department of Water Resources operates a Neoteric for fishery restoration programs.

Hovercraft are ideal for flat muddy rivers like Nebraska's Platte, or the Connecticut River, where the Enfield, Connecticut fire department uses their Hovertechnics hovercraft for rescues on the river. Or frozen lakes and rivers, where the ice is often too thin or broken to be passable to cars, snowmobiles, or people, yet too hard for boats to break through, as in the case of the communities around Bethel, Alaska, where the United States Postal Services uses a British built Hoverwork hovercraft to make its rounds.

Other commercial applications of small hovercraft include use by environmental sampling teams, pipeline survey crews, and oil exploration. Any industry that needs to get anywhere where the roads give out, the ground is soft or liquid, and where helicopters are impractical due to expense or tree cover, could use a hovercraft. And unlike an ATV, hovercraft leave no tracks.

To a hovercraft, flowing water is static, since they float on a cushion of air. So they can travel up or down rivers with ease, and even fast moving rapids feel like frozen ground, to a hovercraft. If quarters are tight, a small hovercraft can travel slowly, navigating between, say, a rock and a fallen tree, coming to a full stop on top of a flowing stream, if necessary. Its
almost as if they exist in a parallel universe, in the in-between spaces and the transitional zones between material states and seasons.

Hovercraft are a relatively recent invention. The first commercial versions appeared in England in the 1950s, where they became useful as rapid ferries. Hovercraft are “ground effect vehicles” that fly by pushing down on the ground (or water) with forced air. This air cushion is contained inside a flexible fabric skirt. The double walled “bag skirt,” which came into widespread use around 1960, made small hovercraft much more stable, channeling air through multiple individual pockets or “fingers” inside the skirt.

An excursion in a small hovercraft usually begins with the vessel being trailered to where it needs to be, either by an open “hover on/hover off” trailer, which slopes so one can drive directly off it, or with a regular trailer and a wheeled dolly that enables the craft to be rolled off the trailer onto the ground, or a lightweight trailer/dolly that can be removed from under the craft on arrival.

With some designs, like the Neoteric Hovertrek, one person can easily launch the vessel. This model, which retails for less than $20,000, can carry around 500 pounds, up to four people, and is available as an open cockpit, or with a windshield and a roof. It can travel safely at 35 mph, and its single two-stroke engine burns around 2-3 gallons an hour. It also has a braking system, where at the flick of a switch, scoops flip around the back of the fan, diverting some of the flow frontwards. This is unique, as for most hovercraft the only way to stop, is to back off the throttle and wait until it slows down.

To start hovering in the single engine Neoteric, the engine is turned on, and the fan on the back forces some of its air downward through a duct inside the body along the bottom rim of the craft, into vents that force the air through the segments of the skirt, and onto the ground. The vehicle quickly rises up, a sensation like a camel getting up off its knees. Once “on hover” the bottom of the craft is nine inches above the ground, and unless it is on a flat surface, it begins to move by gravity or by force.

Like its brethren the flat-bottomed airboats, indigenous to the swamps of Florida and Louisiana, propulsion comes from a fan on the back with rudders to force the flow of air left or right to steer the craft (though the Neoteric’s scoops further improve the maneuverability of the craft). Unlike airboats, the hovercraft’s fan is smaller, and usually encased in an aerodynamic housing. Hovercraft are also more sensitive to weight than boats. Like a motorcycle, they are steered by moving your body into a turn, as well as by their fan rudder.

Since the craft is sitting on a cushion of air, it cannot manage abrupt obstacles, like rocks, higher than the lift, which is generally less than a foot with small hovercraft. This is one of the primary limitations of hovercraft. Over water, waves much higher than a foot will catch the leading or trailing edge of the craft, causing it to drag, slow down, or stop. It is possible to flip a craft, if, moving quickly, its bow digs into the ground or water abruptly.

If a hovercraft needs to stop and switch its engines off, it will drop off its cushion of air and sit on the ground. On water, the craft is a flat bottomed boat that floats. The Neoteric’s fiberglass bottom is completely flat, making it very stable in boat mode. In fact, even though they move by “flying,” hovercraft are considered as boats, more than anything else, and are under the control of the Coast Guard, not the FAA. No license is required to use them.

Despite this, there seems to be a very limited recreational market, due to the fact that piloting a hovercraft is actually reasonably difficult, requiring around 15 hours or so of practice in order to be proficient. Maintenance can be expensive and time consuming (the skirts get torn up by abrasion on rough surfaces, the body is often made of lightweight fiberglass and fragile, engines need servicing by aviation mechanics, and fans get damaged by debris). There are, however, a number of clubs and associations for racing hovercraft.

Other than being unable to navigate irregular or heavily vegetated terrain, the other drawback of small hovercraft is the noise they generate. They are loud. Part of this is due to the use of two stroke engines, which are preferred for small craft as they provide more power for their weight than their four-stroke counterparts (and weight is critical to performance). Much of the noise comes from the fan blades that propel and lift the craft too. Even the mid-size twin engine craft sound like a really loud vacuum cleaner. To communicate, hovercraft passengers generally use headsets, which work remarkably well.

All in all though, small hovercraft seem to be unique in their capability to provide access to certain types of landscapes. They are opening up some of the inner corridors of the nation, the cracks between the places people normally go.
America from the Air: A Guide to the Landscape Along Your Route, by Daniel Mathews and James S. Jackson, Houghton Mifflin

A site and region-based book, as opposed to the more generic, and basic Window Seat: Reading the Landscape from the Air that came out from Chronicle a few years ago. Despite digression into the geology of landforms, there are many interesting human landscapes discussed, using numbered annotations on contrast-booster images taken out the window of jetliners, or vertical satellite imagery (which is less useful in this context, somehow). The book is arranged according to the general preferred routes planes take between major cities. A CD ROM is also included, so you can read it on your laptop from the plane.


Blue Monday: Stories of Absurd Realities and NaturalPhilosophies, AUDC

Robert Sunrell & Kazys Varnelis, Actar

Stylish book, with contributions by CLUI program manager Steve Rowell. Essays include Either: One Wildfire (the telecommunications hotel in Los Angeles which was the subject of an exhibit at the CLUI) and Swarm Intelligence: Quartzsite Arizona (a temporary community of RV snowbirds which forms seasonally in the American southwest.)

Poles, by Frank Breuer, Faulconer Gallery

A typological photography book about local utility poles, with their complicated connections, cumbersome transformer cans, and podlike splices, standing like expressive footmen of infrastructure, united in their task, but each distinct in the particulars of their position and burden, delivering current to the buildings of the land.

Sorry, Out of Gas, Architecture’s Response to the 1973 Oil Crisis, Giovanna Borasi and Mirko Zardini, editors, Canadian Center for Architecture

From an exhibit about the ways designers and builders (and industry, culture, and politics) reacted to the first contemporary oil crisis of 1973. Though the book/exhibit brings together some interesting and relevant architectural examples, graphics and publications, like the journals of the pioneering Underground Space Center at the University of Minnesota, it is most effective at conveying the sense of the enthusiasm and creativity of those times, which dissipated as the years went on (the solar panels that Jimmy Carter installed on the roof of the White House, were removed by Ronald Reagan), until we find ourselves there again now, in a sense, picking up where we left off.

The Playbook, by Alex S. MacLean, Thames & Hudson

Another arresting book from Alex Maclean, whose aerial photographs provide a graphic design lexicon of the landscape of the nation. This one is themed towards the recreational sites, like pools and amusement parks.

Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes, Edited by Andrew Blauvelt, Walker Art Center

Catalog of the current exhibit at the Walker Art Center, this exhibit is all over the place, but then so is suburbia! Nice essays and photos, on subjects like corporate campuses, suburban neologisms (“blandburb,” “nerdistan”), and photos by Larry Sultan, Julia Christensen, and Ed Ruscha (parking lots). The Center’s contribution is “Autotechnogeoglyphics: Vehicular Test Tracks in America.”

The World Without Us, by Alan Weisman, Thomas Dunne Books

This popular book does have some interesting imaginings about the built landscape falling apart if humans were to all of a sudden disappear. For example, New York City’s subways would flood within a few days, and their roofs – the streets above them – would collapse, turning Manhattan into a system of canals. The world’s nuclear power plants would probably meltdown, sending clouds of radioactive gasses all around the globe, exterminating and mutating animal species for millennia, and the petrochemical plants of the world would explode and burn for days and weeks, spewing rich toxic brews into the atmosphere in huge quantities, and a chain reaction of pipeline and well fires could ignite entire oil fields, burning for hundreds of years. See? We are important after all!
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