Inconclusive Evidence is a semiotic study of letters, drawings, sketches and paintings related to Strawberry Hill in Twickenham, Middlesex, one of the most studied villas of all time and regarded as a forerunner to the Gothic revival in architecture. Horace Walpole assembled a 'Committee of Taste' to assist him in its construction, and as a result of the social requirements of the time an all male household emerged. The book sheds new light on the relation between Strawberry Hill and modernity.

Jan Hietala is an artist who has exhibited at Modern Museum Stockholm, Museum of Contemporary Art London, and Bibliotheca Alexandria, amongst other institutions. He has represented Sweden twice and Finland once in international biennials. Hietala's essays and research have been published widely, including publications with Black Dog Publishing and the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, he has also appeared on national Swedish television in relation to his research. Hietala has held visiting teaching positions at the Royal Academy of Arts, London; the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm and Chiang May University, Thailand. Hietala presently holds a ten-year grant endowed by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee.

AADR publishes innovative artistic, creative and historical research in art, architecture, design and related fields.

“I have had the pleasure of following Jan Hietala’s artistic development for three decades. The nonchalant decadence of his early days has been surpassed and transformed. Over the years Hietala has methodically turned the screw harder, in a theoretical and complex artistic direction. In his work we encounter contemporary gender and queer theory related issues as well as an unorthodox critical methodology. Inconclusive Evidence is Hietala’s most theoretical piece to date. With anticipation I look forward to what results it will bring, both within the field of architectural theory and elsewhere.”

Daniel Birnbaum, Director Moderna Museet Stockholm
INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE
SPATIAL GENDER POLITICS AT STRAWBERRY HILL 1747-58
JAN HIETALA
A Few Words On Critical Studies

*Inconclusive Evidence* is a PhD-dissertation from Critical Studies in Architecture at the KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm. Critical Studies investigates the histories, theories and discourses of architecture. Important issues concern architectonic meaning and representation, the influence of different ideologies and power structures on architecture and, conversely, how architecture itself may reproduce ideological systems and power structures. Research methods are interdisciplinary and relate to a wider humanist field such as critical cultural studies, as well as artistic methods of investigation.

PhD-projects in Critical Studies range from arts and design driven studies within landscape and urban planning, interior design and visual arts; history and theory based studies of critical periods and particular contexts in the 18th and 20th centuries; and architectural investigations of current spatial conditions on larger urban and architectural, as well as more intimate scales, set in relation to issues of gender, power and social responsibility.

Critical Studies in Architecture at KTH is internationally recognised for its experimental art and design driven approach and its prominent position in queer and feminist architectural criticism and alternative practice. Jan Hietala’s dissertation makes a solid contribution to this line of development. Engaging in a textual construction productive of critical imaginations and re-enacting past phenomena – spatial, social and material – Hietala’s thesis builds upon and expands the experimental literary methodologies developed in previous PhD-dissertations and on-going research in the Critical Studies group.

Katja Grillner
Professor of Critical Studies in Architecture
School of Architecture and the Built Environment
KTH Stockholm
The Mudlark

On an early Sunday morning, when a fresh uninterrupted wind brought in a taste of salt from the North Sea, I could step out of the front door, leave the house and walk down New Road to Wapping. Descending the Wapping Old Stairs, I explored the exposed riverbank. It was a little bit hazardous; I never knew how far I would be able to reach before the ebb turned to flood. The flood brought all sorts of things that, to be honest, were perhaps more interesting to discover there and then, such as bicycles and fragments of cars or minor boats. The colossal forces occasionally disclosed various items of a more collectable nature: pieces of china, glass or ceramics, polished and soft, enigmatic and secretive to their nature. Was it a piece of 17th century Ming China, or trivial litter? One never knew. Gradually, these fragments from an unknown country, age and origin began to fill the mantelpiece in my tiny drawing room that overlooked the garden. At first I put them there, as a part of the procedure of emptying my pockets of change and receipts on a silver plate. But, little by little, it would overflow. Over time the objects became arranged in a spectrum of colours and shapes; china on one end, glass on the other, and soft shimmering oyster-shells in the middle. Once asked by my inquisitive neighbour what these objects meant, I was caught not knowing what to say, lost as to what the accurate answer would be. My neighbour did not seem to notice my lack of reply, and continued in his usual genuinely uninterested manner. He explained an ancient practice never challenged by law, ruling that any object found on the exposed bottom of the river Thames belonged to the finder, no matter what. “Jan” he exclaimed, holding a piece of bead-shaped glass to his healthy eye, “you are a mudlark did you know that? And, by the way, this may very well be Roman” he said, putting the glass piece back amongst the oyster-shells and deliberately disorganising my order of things.
'A Map of the County of Middlesex, John Rocque 1757'. On the right hand corner we find London. To the left just before River Thames makes a deep dip, we find the village Twickenham. Never-the-less, when reproduced in this size Middlesex County appears to be more as a floating continent, a smudge, in a sea of nothingness, perhaps an ocean, with details blurred out to oblivion. Courtesy of the British Library
Introduction – The Past is a Foreign Country

A poet once suggested that the past is a foreign country where people behave differently. The past the author refers to here is evoked in writing, and perhaps only there. If we accept this metaphorical statement’s suggestion that the past is a construction within language, we may imagine a singular object originating from this particularly foreign country, like a house for instance. Imagine that the house no longer exists in the same way as it once did, that it is gone. Imagine illustrations, publications, essays, letters and other writings describing this once upon a time house reaching us, not unlike driftwood from a wreck. These fragments of information are carried to our shores over the sea, in the form of debris. Let us call this foreign country the 1700s. Let us imagine a household. Let us read and consider signs left behind from this household. Let us call the household a villa. Let us call it Strawberry Hill.

The past’s resemblance to a foreign country resounds in the introduction to Roland Barthes’ (1915-80) *Empire of Signs* (1970), a semiotic study of Japanese signs. We know that Barthes visited Japan in 1966. This is a fact that could be of importance. However, we may also argue that it is of little significance whether or not Barthes actually visited the ‘empire’ of his treaty. Considering Barthes’ approach, it is almost as though he wants to argue for the superfluity of an actual journey to Japan. It is as if Barthes argues for the necessity to read the signs of the empire in question as if their origins were not available to him. Barthes commences his study by making a case for a fictional creation of his own, beginning with “If I want to imagine a fictive nation”. His aim, he says, is to isolate, without compromise, a certain number of features in a certain faraway fictitious nation. Out of these features Barthes hopes to form his constructed image: an empire named Japan. The only thing he possibly compromises, he says, is writings of fiction. Arguably, this is the introduction to one of the most elegant works of philosophy ever written. There is an elegance to the thought and language which shields the consequence of its argumentation.

What does this elegance conceal? It is the void the introduction opens up in front of us. It is as if the world we speak of in an everyday sense ceases to exist inside the world of words, or to be more precise the world of language, either written or spoken. The notion that words and sentences correspond to a reality of sorts is undermined. Barthes seems to suggest that grand things such as empires exist with more certainty as notions, rather than masses of land and sea. Barthes attempts to question our understanding of the world in the same sense as the poet’s work does, we “might even say that the poetic project is one of destroying the world as we ordinary take it for granted”. Barthes’ constructed model is related to the notion of the sublime.

The terrorising introduction to the *Empire of Signs* seems to be a plausible reference for studying something long since gone, and that only now exists in a fragmented state. Either in letters, images or in an estimated reconstruction, the recently restored villa Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, Middlesex, England.

The present thesis will “afford us another sort of logic and critic, than what we have been hitherto acquainted with”. It will consider semiotics and the reading of fragments concerning something lost, unknown, enigmatic and somewhat alluring, in favour of commenting on something present and indeed
as well-presented as well-known. It is a study liberal in its associative form, and precise in its use of sources.

Notes
3. Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the surplus of Meaning, Chapter three, Metaphor and Symbol, Texas Christian University Press 1976, p. 59
Register of Bodies

The principal bodies of interest in this study, are long gone: a villa with its garden and four men. However, the spirits are uncountable and very much alive. Left remaining of the bodies are documents. It is logical to consider the bodies of interest before exploring what remains after them. In alphabetic order:

Richard Bentley (1708-82) was a talented draughtsman, introduced to Walpole in the later part of the 1740s. He was included in the original Committee of Taste with Chute and Walpole, living on and off at Strawberry Hill, but fell out of favour with Walpole after an argument in 1762. Bentley was married and had two children. Later he struggled as a playwright and pamphleteer in London where he also died.

John Chute (1701-76) was the tenth and youngest son of Edward Chute of the Vyne, Hampshire. He was educated at Eton, and from the death of his father in 1722 he lived principally abroad, together with his cousin Francis Withead (1740-46). They spent much time in Horace Mann’s residence, Casa Ambrosio in Florence. Here, in 1740, he was introduced to Walpole and his then companion the poet Thomas Gray (1716-71), both who had just completed their education at Cambridge. Returning to England, Chute set up a household together with Walpole at Strawberry Hill. At the death of his brother in 1754, he gained access to the family seat The Vyne. Walpole and Chute remained intimate friends until Chute’s death.

Johann Heinrich Müntz (1727-98) was a Swiss painter, draughtsman and architect who lived with Horace Walpole for some years. Müntz was introduced to Walpole by Richard Bentley. Walpole released him from his obligations after an incident with a maid. Müntz returned to Switzerland where he died.

Strawberry Hill (1748-present), a villa situated in the London Borough of Richmond; countryside in the 1700s, but today an affluent suburb. The first villa was the result of the remodelling of a modest house with the name Chopped Straw Hall, between 1748 and 1753. The villa was then later enlarged in sequences until 1792 to house Walpole’s ever-growing collection. After Walpole’s death, his cousin’s daughter, the sculptress and unmarried Ms Anne Damer, inherited Strawberry Hill for life. In 1811, the villa was passed on to the related Waldegrave family. After more than a century, in 1923, it was bought by the Catholic St Mary’s University College. The Strawberry Hill Trust was initiated in 2002, which recently secured a 120-year-long lease, initiating a restoration-scheme for the villa and its garden. Today it is a museum.

Horace Walpole (1717-97) was born as the second and youngest son of Lady Catherine, née Shorter and the statesman and Whig politician Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), 1st Earl of Orford, 1st Lord of the Treasury, and in effect the 1st Prime Minister of England. Sir Robert was the mind behind The Declaration of Rights (1688). Walpole grew up among material wealth and intellectual richness, mainly living with Lady Catherine, as Sir Robert had taken residence with his mistress Maria Skerret elsewhere. He was educated at Eton and later King’s College in Cambridge. As did many of his peers, Walpole conducted a Grand Tour, which was the only longer journey of any significance he ever made. He commenced the tour with his Eton and Cambridge friend Thomas Gray, but returned from it alone. Walpole was introduced to John Chute as a guest of his distant cousin Horace Mann (1706-86), the British representative in Tuscany, who lived in the residence Casa Ambrosio. Walpole died in London.
d’étudier avec ordre, de réfléchir avec fruit, & de se frayer des routes pour arriver à des découvertes utiles.

On doit donc commencer par voir beaucoup & revoir souvent; quelque nécessaire que l’attention soit à tout, ici on peut s’en dispenser d’abord: je veux parler de cette attention scrupuleuse, toujours utile lorsqu’on fait beaucoup, & souvent nuisible à ceux qui commencent à s’instruire. L’essentiel est de leur meubler la tête d’idées & de faits, de les empêcher, s’il est possible, d’en tirer trop tôt des raisonnements & des rapports; car il arrive toujours que par l’ignorance de certains faits, & par la trop petite quantité d’idées, ils épuisent leur esprit en fausses combinaisons, & se chargent la mémoire de conséquences vagues & de résultats contraires à la vérité, lesquels forment dans la fuite des préjugés qui s’effacent difficilement.

C’est pour cela que j’ai dit qu’il fallait commencer par voir beaucoup; il faut aussi voir presque sans dessin, parce que si vous avez résolu de ne considérer les choses que dans une certaine vûe, dans un certain ordre, dans un certain systême, c’est-à-dire presque sans ordre, vous n’arriverez jamais à la même étendue de connaissances à laquelle vous pourrez prétendre, si vous laissez dans les commencements votre esprit marcher de lui-même, se reconnaître, s’affûter sans secours, & former seul la première chaîne qui représente l’ordre de ses idées.

Ceci est vrai sans exception, pour toutes les personnes dont l’esprit est fait & le raisonnement formé; les jeunes
Sign One. An Observation in Anthropocentrism


It is Monday the 14th of March 2011. In front of me I have a first edition of L’Histoire Naturelle, générale et particuliére avec la description du cabinet du Roi, by George-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon, published in 1749. In accordance with the general instructions and terms at the reading-room for rare books at the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm, de Buffon’s L’Histoire rests upon a large double-faced pillow which allows the spine to rest comfortably in a purpose made dip.

Carefully, I open the book and commence turning its pages. A scent of past centuries briefly oscillates above the spread facing me, before evaporating once more. The sound of separating one page from another reveals that the book has not been read too many times since it first reached these damp shores of the Baltic Sea, following its voyage from Paris.

Sniffing over the pages like a hound I try to foresee exactly what it was my main supervisor wanted me to find: “Jan” she had said at the end of a critique meeting last week, ”now you walk down to the Royal Library and order that book. Lovely read.” With a little doubt I ordered some thirty volumes from their eternal rest, deep in the darkness of the library’s nuclear bomb-proof storage system. Strictly speaking, L’Historie Naturelle is not within my subject’s parameters.

De Buffon’s French spelling is rather different from the language we were taught at school. “Is that an ‘s’ or an ‘f’?” I wonder pusillanimously. Will I loose myself in an interpretative excess to such an extent that I will actually miss the vital information I am looking for? Or perhaps it was not a specific paragraph or sentence I was supposed to find after all.

Perhaps it was something else my supervisor wanted me to find; something more closely connected with the process of reading old school French, to turn pages in what once was considered a bestseller and actually experience something sensual, rather than intellectual, in the true sense of the word? Carefully gripping a new sheet at its top right corner, I let it rest between thumb and index finger. I can feel the imprint of a pattern in the lump, left there after it was spread across a sieve-grid. It remains clearly visible to the eye.

An afternoon seminar on methodology at the Courtauld Institute comes to mind. It must have been in October 2006. I cannot decide what exactly had been said, other than that the paper given contained various layers of references. In fact, so many that the actual subject of the paper became somewhat eclipsed. At the end I felt obliged to ask the professor one candid question concerning a topic which had been brewing in my mind for some time. “Was it possible” I asked, “that one – as PhD student, researcher, scholar – could study any given object of art, or any other cultural phenomenon for that sake, as if one did it for the first time ever, as if one saw it for the first time ever as if discovering it, and thus represented the first gaze a member of humanity laid on the object in question?” And as if that was not enough I

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continued, in the short moment of silence the somewhat baffled professor left: “Is it not true that anyone with an average level of intelligence can come up with a combination of theories explaining something within these theories’ frameworks, and get away with it, but to actually see something new, requires something else?”

Departing my drifting and daydreaming state and moving back to de Buffon, I found the following passage:

This is why I said we must begin by seeing a lot, we must also see with almost no plan, because if you have determined not to consider the objects in a certain view, in a certain order, in a system, you find the best way, and you will never again get the same extent of familiar acquaintance if incorrect, and if you let your mind commence the pace itself will then proceed without help, and form the first chain that represents the order of your ideas.

George-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon's (1707-88) first discourse regards his methodological approach, and addresses the necessity of observation. As seen in the quoted paragraph, he emphasises observation as a vital source for understanding nature.

My mind drifts again, now decades back in time. My first encounter with a higher academic milieu was at the Department of Phanerogamic Botany, at the Swedish Museum of National History, Stockholm. I was not twenty and held a position as draughtsman. Every day I studied *cypselae* and their adjoining *pappi* bent over a microscope, learning and considering a tiny element of the existing world though the lens of a man-made device. Not many would know what a *cypsela* is, and the same goes with a *pappus* too. *Cypselae* is the microscopic containers of pollen or a seed, in this case a member of the plant family *Asteraceae*, a *Cladanthus Multicaulis*, which is Moroccan chamomile to be exact. A *Pappus* is the adjoining organs with which the *cypsela* may be carried away, by a wind for instance. One can barely see individual chamomile *cypsela* and *pappus* with the naked eye. These specimens were put in water to soak, before being transferred onto a piece of glass. I had other tasks too, such as mounting dried plant specimens on sheets of paper, answering the phone and preparing the nine o’clock coffee for the academic staff, but the hours spent in the herbarium were longer. The drawings I made later became arguments in a revision of Carolus Linnaeus *Systema Naturae*; in fact more than a revision, it was a cladistic deconstruction of it. Leading the research was Dr Kåre Bremer, then Head Curator, who published the results in *Tribal interrelationships of the Asteraceae* a few years later.

The implications of the process of studying an illuminated object through a microscopic lens have stayed in my mind. So has the experience of being in the very midst of a change, a change of paradigms, where an old order was being replaced by a new. The electric, sensational feeling of working for someone who knew he was making history yet without really grasping the impact of it, came back to me. I recalled sitting there in the herbarium, day after day, occasionally raising my eyes from the tiresome staring through the lenses. I would let my gaze and mind drift through the large windows, out on the other side of the uneven and distorting glass-panes. There, an oak stood, experienced enough to have seen Carolus Linnaeus stroll under its canopy, talking loud, perhaps naming a common toad after de Buffon, with a flock of students behind him eagerly taking notes.
Notes
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