Notes on Material Art Fair

1. Frontón México. Teodoro Kunhardt and Joaquín Capilla designed the Frontón México between 1921 and 1928. The first stone was placed in 1928, and President Emilio Portes Gil officially inaugurated it on May 10, 1929. In 1939, the conservative *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party) was founded there[1]. On August 30 1943, a massive farewell ceremony was held for the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. In 1951, Roberto Gavaldón filmed *La noche avanza*. The building hosted the jai alai competitions of the 1968 Olympic Games, as well as the 'Fernando Diez Barroso' Championships and the Jai Alai World Championship. In 1991, around 400 million pesos were bet daily (around 4 million pesos today). On October 2, 1996, it was closed by its workers, who were protesting their employer's default on payment of their wages. In 2009, there finally was an agreement in the Congress to foster its reopening, which was announced in 2010. It did not open until a few years later. The process of restoration and refurbishment of the building began in December 2015, carried out by Mexican architect José Moyao López—under the supervision of Mexico's National Institute of Fine Arts—at an estimated cost of 35 million dollars. On March 8, 2017, the STPS strike came to an end. On March 10, 2017, Frontón México opened its doors to the public in an official ceremony presided over by the city's mayor at the time, Miguel Ángel Mancera, accompanied by "El Ingeniero"[2,3]



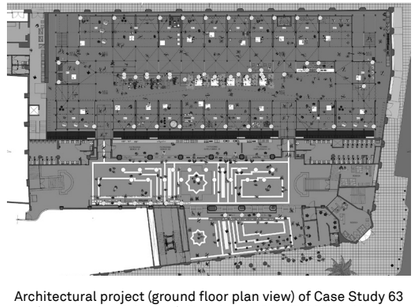
Frontón México, January 1943.
Photograph: Anonymous, Inv. 3733, Sinafo, Conaculta-INAH.

1. The space had a strict jacket and tie dress code, and these garments could also be rented by patrons at the entrance.

2. "Carlos Slim, whose love for art was born from the influence of his deceased wife (Soumaya Domit), does not collect contemporary art; he has a passion for the great masters, especially the sculptor Auguste Rodin, but also for Mexican and Pre-Columbian art, which by the way are safe investments: pieces that will never go down in price. ARTnews Magazine placed him as one of the most important art collectors in the world, pointing out that the entrepreneur does not take risks." Vicente Gutiérrez. (2011). Carlos Slim, un coleccionista "clásico". El Economista.

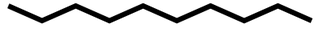
3. Wikipedia. (2018). Frontón México - Wikipedia, La enciclopedia libre.

2. Material Art Fair 2019 (version 4.1.0)[4]. Starting in 2018, we (APRDELESP, Fabien Capello and Carla Valdivia, along with the Material Art Fair team) designed a three-story scaffolding structure that is built and demolished every year in the jai alai court of Frontón México. This iterative process, more common in automobile design, for instance, than in architecture, allows us to update, modify, and perfect the design, testing different things in each version.



Architectural project (ground floor plan view) of Case Study 63 (Material Art Fair 2019). Drawings: APRDELESP Archive.

4. The Semantic Versioning system was created by Tom Preston-Werner to describe changes in computer programs using the form X.Y.Z where X, Y, and Z are non-negative integers. X is the 'major' version, Y is the 'minor' version, and Z is the 'patch' version. Each element must be increased numerically in increments of 1. By freely adapting this system, we could name each version of Material Art Fair as follows:



Material Art Fair 2014: version 0.0.0
Material Art Fair 2015: version 1.0.0
Material Art Fair 2016: version 2.0.0
Material Art Fair 2017: version 3.0.0
Material Art Fair 2018: version 4.0.0
Material Art Fair 2019: version 4.1.0
What would a versioning system for design-related disciplines where information cannot be encoded as a series of plain text documents be like?

3. "Pardon(,) impossible(,) to be sent to Siberia".



Maria Feodorovna, Empress of Russia (c.1885). Gelatin silver print, 26.5 x 17.9 cm. Image: London's Royal Collection Trust.

There is a famous (and apocryphal) anecdote about Maria Feodorovna, Empress of Russia, in which she saves a man's life with a single comma. After her husband, Emperor Alexander III, condemns him with the sentence "Pardon impossible, to be sent to Siberia", she adjusts the punctuation mark ("Pardon, impossible to be sent to Siberia"), and the man is set free. Just as a comma can alter the meaning of a sentence, any design decision, however minimal, can make a building—in this case Material Art Fair—change completely from one version to another.

4. Different versions of the same building in the same place

Different places: different designs vs. the same design:

Given the physical impossibility of two buildings existing in the same place at the same time, a person, company, or institution that decides to make a new building can either make a unique building in each place[5] or use the same design everywhere[6,7]

Same place: different designs vs. the same design:

Temporary architecture opens other possibilities: a person, company, or institution can decide to periodically build and demolish a completely different building[8] or erect different versions of the same design[9] *in the same place*[10]. Material Art Fair in this four-year period belongs to the latter category.

5.



The Guggenheim New York followed by The Guggenheim Bilbao.

6.





Although not all Greek temples are identical and they cover a broad range of scales, they are made with the same elements (a platform, columns and walls) and were used more or less the same activities. Some more recent examples are Starbucks cafes, or a more extreme case, Casas Geo (the low-cost single-family homes that have been mass-built in Mexico since the '90s).

7. One could also argue that, on the one hand, it is impossible to make two identical buildings, and on the other, no building is strictly unique. However, let's assume that these two categories exist.

8.



A few of the famous architectural competitions where different pavilions are periodically built and demolished in the same place: MoMA PS1 *Young Architects Program*, the *Serpentine Gallery Pavilion*, and the *Pabellón Eco*. Some of the pavilions that have been built and demolished in the Museo Experimental El Eco: 2010 (Frida Escobedo), 2013 (Macías Peredo), and 2016 (APRDELESP). Images (from left to right): Museo Experimental El Eco (UNAM), Estudio Macías Peredo, and APRDELESP Archive.

9.



When someone returns to set up a tent in the same place, yearly fairs and music festivals, or the booths at Mexican tianguis (open-air markets) that are installed once a week.

10. As in the case of permanent structures, this classification can be thought of as continuous (a spectrum) instead of discrete (two categories).

5. Frontón México is a plot of land. Material Art Fair proves that working in an empty plot of land ('a new construction') or inside an existing building ('a renovation') are not two distinct categories but a continuum that depends on the quantity and characteristics of the objects in each site at the beginning of the design process: the decision to build a three-story building on the Jai Alai court of Frontón México is the result of treating the existing building as a plot of land.



A plot of land: Windows 10 wallpaper photo. Image: Microsoft.

6. The largest bar in the world. The layout of the building—three floors around a central courtyard—allows visitors to see almost the entire fair from any point, flattening the hierarchy between gallery spaces. The fair is a map of itself: the building becomes its own communication tool without a predetermined route.[11] It is not a corridor with stands on either side but a place that allows visitors to decide how to move through it; it is a meeting place.[12] Perhaps it's even the largest bar in the world.



According to *The Guinness Book of Records*, the world's longest permanent bar is the 405-ft-10-in-long counter in the Beer Barrel Saloon at Put-in-Bay, Ohio, opened in 1989.
Image: Cincinnati People.

Material Art Fair is not a static image but a festive and optimistic expression.

Art is good 4 u
Freedom to art
¡Arte qué rico![13]



11.



Material Art Fair 2018. Image: PJ Rountree.

12. The design of the furniture for Material Art Fair 2019 was mainly motivated by the reuse of the floor panels from the previous version. The material was reconfigured to perform another function: a series of seats were laid out according to different social dynamics. The intention is to test engaging and effective configurations for a certain time and space. In last year's edition, ninety street chairs found in the parking lots, stalls, and markets of Mexico City were rented by their owners and placed on a red carpet around a series of planter-tables. This exercise generated an ephemeral environment for visitors to interact. In addition, it allowed us to start an inventory of typologies of peculiar chairs.





A chair from Material Art Fair 2018. Image: Estudio Fabien Cappello.

13. The process of designing the graphic identity for Material Art Fair has been the same every year: we start by getting rid of most of the previous edition's identity, keeping only the logo, and we end up with a radically different result. If an identity is sufficiently complex, there is no need to cling on to the neat idea of the perfect logo, iconic symbols, or recognizable colors.



Posters (from left to right) from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 Material Art Fair editions. Images: Carla Valdivia.

7. An annual party



Material Art Fair 2018 construction process.
Photograph: APRDELESP Archive.

Like the Great Mosque of Djenné[14], or the Ise Grand Shrine [15], Material Art Fair will be, at least for the coming three years, a celebration that is periodically rebuilt. As in the famous ship from the Theseus paradox [16], it is not the material that matters, but its shape. Perhaps Material Art Fair is not the material or even the form of its structure, but the place and the event as a whole[17], as well as the possibilities it generates.

14.





Since this temple (located in the city of Djenné, in Mali) is built with clay, its walls naturally erode and have to be plastered every year. This conservation process is achieved mainly through an annual party in which people from the surrounding areas gather to participate in the renovation work led by a team of master builders–obviously with a great amount of food and music. There have been institutional efforts to preserve the mosque replacing its structure with another one made of a more resistant material (such as concrete), but the population has resisted. Thus, the building is preserved in a more dynamic manner, through human relations and social organization. People are brought together and therefore committed to its permanent construction. Marchand, T., Vogel, S., & Sidibe, S. (2007). *Future of Mud: a tale of houses and lives in Djenné*.

15. Based on the Shinto (⛩) belief that nature dies and is reborn periodically, the two most important structures of this sanctuary, Naiku and Geku, as well as the Uji Bridge, are dismantled and rebuilt in an adjacent site through a festival that happens every twenty years.

16. "The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same."
Plutarch. "Theseus (23.1)". The Internet Classics Archive.

17. "For me, places are articulations of 'natural' and social relations, relations that are not fully contained within the place itself. So, first, places are not closed or bounded – which, politically, lays the ground for critiques of exclusivity. Second, places are not 'given' –they are always in open-ended process. They are in that sense 'events'. Third, they and their identity will always be contested (we could almost talk about local-level struggles for hegemony)." Doreen Massey Massey, D., & Stevens, A. (2010). "The Future of Landscape: Doreen Massey."

8. Groundhog Day. In the movie *Groundhog Day*, TV weatherman Phil Connors wakes up to the hit *I've Got You Babe*, by Sonny & Cher. He is living the same day (February 2nd) again and again, caught in a time glitch of which only he is aware.

All the events of the day–*the context*–are repeating exactly as they happened the day before, and he is the only one who can act differently–*the project*. However, there is no consequence to his actions as tomorrow will be just like today–*the impermanence*. Phil takes advantage of the situation swiftly, and starts living as if there was no tomorrow, binge drinking, engaging in casual sex and behaving inappropriately in public–*the ego*.

Given the opportunity to live the same day over and over again, he realizes that misbehaving doesn't satisfy him–*the vision*. As the movie unfolds, Phil changes his behaviour and tries to do as much good around him as he possibly can, intervening in conflicts and accidents he has acknowledged from previous repetitions of his day–*the mission*. However, after what could easily be a decade, Phil does not seem to be enjoying the repetition of his daily life in the small town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, and looks like he is being affected by a severe depression. Phil even commits suicide a few times–*the resignation*–, but this does not get him out of the time loop, and he wakes up to the same song again. Throughout his repeated daily life, he starts to develop feelings for his colleague Rita Hanson, and he discovers that what he likes the most about his routine is spending time time with her –*the values*. He spends an entire day with Rita–*personal growth*– and wakes up with her the next day–*the achievement*. Only this time, it is February 3rd: the spell has been broken.



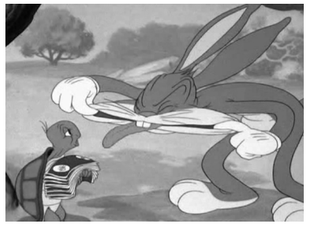
Phil (Bill Murray) wakes up next to Rita (Andie MacDowell), finally breaking the spell in *Groundhog Day.*

Like Phil Connors, we will have the opportunity to repeat our mistakes, correct them, and make new ones each year.

9. A 1:1 scale model. Because we are designing a new version of the building every year for this stage of Material Art Fair, each edition is, literally,[18] a 1:1 scale model of the next. [19]

18. Designing any building and granting it the quality of an object of study makes it a 1:1 scale model. In the case of Material Art Fair, this condition is direct.
APRDELESP. (2016). Café-Bar Wi-Fi – Parque Experimental El Eco. Recovered from: http://parqueeleco.com/cafe-bar-wi-fi/

19. With models we refer to a prototype of a building. We also think of these scale models as fables (which tell a story without the worry of being completely realistic) and as experiments (where specific hypotheses are tested in an isolated system).



Bugs Bunny pays his bet after losing the race to Cecil Turtle in *Tortoise Beats Hare*, an animation by Tex Avery loosely based on *The Hare and the Turtle*, the famous Aesop's fable.

10. A weapon. The predicament in which Phil Connors (*Groundhog Day*) finds himself is known in science fiction circles as a time loop, a plot device in which "typically, periods of time are repeated and re-experienced by a character's consciousness: there is often some hope of breaking out of the useless cycle of repetition."[20]

In her essay *A Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War*, Hito Steyerl uses *Edge of Tomorrow*, another film in which the characters are caught in a time loop, to describe the current historical moment of permanent planetary civil war in which we find ourselves, a moment of *stasis*[21]. In a video game,[22] the goal of playing the same level several times is to pass it: "Most likely there is a weapon or a tool hidden in some cupboard, and this can be used to vanquish whatever enemy and complete the level."[23] Should Material Art Fair exist as a temporary building in Frontón México forever or should we eventually exit the loop?[24] Could it be that the goal of making a different version of the same building in the same place, year after year, is to find the weapon or tool to complete the level?



The infamous *Water Temple* in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, the Nintendo 64 video game.

20. "Themes: Time Loop." 2017. Science Fiction Encyclopedia.

21. Steyerl quotes Giorgio Agamben, who has analyzed this Greek term, "which means both civil war and immutability: something potentially very dynamic, but also its absolute opposite".
Steyerl, H. (2016). *A Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War*.

22. Edge of Tomorrow is based on *All You Need Is Kill*, a novel written by Hiroshi Sakurazaka inspired by the experience of pressing the reset button in a video game.

23 Steyerl. *A Tank on a Pedestal: Museums in an Age of Planetary Civil War*.

24 Wondering what the role of the museum is in this context, Steyerl also uses the example of the historical tank that can be reactivated to go to war after entering the museum: if the tank keeps working within the museum, history can not continue.

– APRDELESP, Fabien Cappello and Carla Valdivia.

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