MARGINS IN OUR MIDST: A JOURNEY INTO IRWINDALE
THE CLUI CONDUCTS A PUBLIC TOUR OF THE PITS

The pits of Irwindale are dramatic landscapes of extraction, operating out of view, beneath the horizon line. The Durbin Pit, a dredge operation pulling gravel out from below the water table, was the first stop on the tour.

ON SEPTEMBER 20TH, THE CENTER CONDUCTED A PUBLIC BUS TOUR OF THE PITS OF IRWINDALE, EAST OF LOS ANGELES, AS PART OF THE EXHIBIT Ground Up: Photographs of the Ground in the Margins of Los Angeles. “We will be going to some of the most banal and dramatic landscapes in Los Angeles,” said the CLUI’s tour guide, Matthew Coolidge, “and by the time we are done, we probably won’t be able to tell the difference.”

Like the exhibit at the CLUI, the tour was about the material that makes up the ground we live on. In a city like Los Angeles, nearly all of our time is spent - whether we are standing, sitting, sleeping, or driving - on an underlayment of concrete or asphalt. This manufactured ground material has its origins in the earth, at specific locations around the city. The aggregate that makes up the bulk of these bulk materials tends to be found in great abundance in the river valleys, where the disintegration of the mountains spills into channels, and falls downslope over the millennia, forming deep deposits in the ground. The material even sorts itself out, based on the distance from the mountains, with heavier, coarser material near the base of the slope, and progressively finer material further away.

The area of attention for the tour was the City of Irwindale, which lies at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, and straddles the San Gabriel River, one of the major alluvial fans bringing marginal material from the mountains into the L.A. basin. Here, the margins literally flow into the city’s midst. Furthermore, as the largest aggregate mining area in the state, if not the nation, so much sand and gravel comes out of Irwindale that pieces of Irwindale can be found around all of Los Angeles in the form of the aggregate in the asphalt that is spread on Los Angeles’ roads, the aggregate in the cement of the city’s major construction projects, and even the city’s land mass itself.

FARM ANIMALS VIEW OF FARM DISPLAYED IN THE EXHIBIT “LIVE STOCK FOOTAGE BY LIVESTOCK”

“On the Farm” exhibit at the CLUI, Los Angeles. CLUI photo

IN AN EXHIBIT AT THE CLUI, LOS ANGELES, CALLED On the Farm: Live Stock Footage by Livestock, farm animals showed us their point of view, through wireless video cameras installed temporarily on their head and necks by virtuoso animal and plant videographer Sam Easterson. Easterson’s technology enables a cow, a pig, a goat, a chicken, a sheep, and a horse to guide us around their world; what they look at, what catches their attention, how they move through space, and how they relate to one another, on the farm.

Sam Easterson’s enterprise, called “Animal, Vegetable, Video” endeavors to create the world’s largest library of video footage that has been captured from the perspective of animals, plants and the environments they inhabit. The company creates its video footage by outfitting wild animal and plants with ‘helmet-mounted’ video cameras. It also installs micro video cameras deep inside animal and plant habitats. All video footage that Animal, Vegetable, Video collects becomes part of its extensive video library (more information on Animal, Vegetable Video is at http://anivegvideo.com/).

Though Easterson has put cameras on everything from armadillos to scorpions, he had to acquire additional footage of farm animals for the Center’s exhibit, in order to be able to represent the principal animals you would find on a farm. “Since the Center is not a natural history-based organization, we had to see Sam’s work in the context of land use, and the animal husbandry idea was where we found a common theme,” said CLUI curator Sarah Simons.

Sam Easterson was invited to present his work at the Center as part of the Independent Interpreter program, where unique documentarians and archivists of the landscape are given a forum to show and talk about their work at the Center. On December 6, Mr. Easterson gave a lecture about his work, and took questions from a capacity audience at the Center’s exhibit space in Los Angeles.

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Ground-Up: Photographs of the Ground in the Margins of Los Angeles, an informative photograph and text display, was shown to the public at the Center’s exhibit space in Los Angeles for several weeks between September and November. The exhibition used soil maps of Los Angeles County as a tool for reexamining regional physiographic phenomena, as these curiously compelling maps provide a unique view of the landscape, and the human interventions within it.

Soil maps, published by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are aerial photographs with soil types superimposed on them, and they serve as general guides for a range of activities, from agriculture to mining and construction. While no substitute for the on-site investigation of a soil engineer, soil maps can provide an overview of large areas of land as well as features that are overlooked on U.S. Geographical Survey topographical maps.

In addition to describing natural features, soil maps provide a record of recent human interventions on the earth and serve as a guideline for future land uses. The maps come with tables assessing the suitability of soil types for a variety of activities such as sand and gravel mining, septic tank filter fields, agriculture and excavation.

The sites selected for representation in the exhibit exemplify common soil interactions, in the margins of Los Angeles. “As we looked at the utilization of soil for agriculture, mining and recreation, and the control of erosion necessary for the construction of Los Angeles’ ever expanding borders,” said the exhibit curator, Erik Knutzen, “we found that it is at these margins that the ground can be seen most clearly, before paving erases the layers of meaning that soil contains.”

The exhibit featured several large format photographs of these selected ground locations. The fine grain of the photographs matched the grain of the depicted ground, and the authority and weight that large, finely crafted images convey contrasted implicitly with the nonplaces that filled the frame of each exposure, suggesting to some the possible terminus of one limb of the tree of landscape photography.

The Center presented an updated version of the Nellis Range exhibit at the IBID Gallery, in London.

Entitled The Nellis Range Complex: A Global Bombing Microcosm, the UK-sited exhibit described and depicted the largest bombing range in the US, the Nellis Range Complex in southern Nevada, a place where the UK’s Royal Air Force trains, dropping practice bombs on the landscape of the US desert. The exhibit was put together from CLUI Archive images, video, maps and text, with graduate students from the Royal College of Art, based in London, and was on public display at the Ibid gallery in October, 2003.

Representing the second half of the program, the US-sited exhibit, called Bomba Povera: A Characterization of the Wash Bombing Range, depicts and describes the largest and busiest bombing range in the UK, a place often used by the US Air Force for target practice - a part of Britain that is bombed by the USA, on a regular basis. The exhibit was presented in an electronic format on two wall mounted monitors at the CLUI in Los Angeles in December.

This bi-national exhibit program was intended to bring these two nations even closer together, by examining the lengths to which their partnership extends. In the days of the Cold War, where the US and the USSR bombed each other, we will leave the details of their respective territories to do it unto others for real.

The two ranges, each one superlatively the “largest and busiest” in each of their respective countries, have more differences than similarities. These differences are an expression of the different characters of the two nations, in terms of their physical landscape, if not their politics.

Since our readers have heard about the Nellis Range in previous issues of this newsletter, and may even have come on our circumnavigation of the Range in 1999, or seen the exhibit, which is on permanent display, 24 hours a day in Wendover, Utah, we will leave the details of this updated version of the range exhibit out of this space, and focus instead on the "terra incognita" of the Wash bombing range, in southern England.
The airspace over most of the wash is designated as a military operations area, and civil aviation through this space is discouraged. A red box indicates a "noise sensitive area" to be avoided by pilots, near Hunstanton - the Queen's beach hut.

**Site Report: The Wash Bombing Range**

**THE WASH BOMBING RANGE** in Lincolnshire, is one of four bombing ranges in the UK. The others - Tain, on the Moray Firth in Scotland, Pembrey Sands on the South Wales coast, and Donna Nook on the northeast coast of Yorkshire – are on the fringes of the country. The Wash, the busiest of them all, is just three hours by car from London. It is on the east coast of Great Britain, on the southern and northwestern shores of a large muddy bay called the Wash. It is composed of two separate target complexes, at Wainfleet and Holbeach, each with separate administration and scoring facilities. Holbeach, the larger of the two has been in operation since 1929, and used by Americans since WWII.

Beyond the gate is the administrative area, with three office and maintenance buildings. Since most of the users of the range never set foot on it, local staffing needs are small. Around 16 people work at the range, and not all at the same time. The administrative area is on the protected side of a levee. The range is all on the seaward side of the levee, and is accessed by a road travelling along its top.

There are four scoring booths on the levee, which are occupied when bombing runs are in session. Inside each booth, an observer records the location of the impact using a compass scope, and radios the coordinates to the main tower, the focal point of the range, from which all of the targets are visible. Inside the tower, a master scorer enters the coordinates from each booth into a log. An Air Force officer watches over the activities from the tower and communicates with the pilots and air traffic control.

The range is used on the average of 90 passes per day, five days a week, with occasional weekend and nighttime use. Squadrons come from bases all over the UK, and may use the range intensively for a few days, then the range may sit idle for a few days.

Full explosive ordnance is not generally used on the range. Instead, fighter jets drop practice bombs that have a small explosion to indicate the impact point on the target. Some targets are for strafing with bullets, while others are concentric circles that form bulls-eyes for small bombs.

Holbeach has nine primary targets. Two are bulls-eye type, with wide circles delineated with old tires, painted white. At the center is a target object, usually made of industrial plastic pickle barrels, which the Ministry of Defense buys in bulk from a local pickling plant. The barrels are also used to mark flightpaths to the targets, and to mark targets that become submerged at high tide.

Three targets are for strafing by helicopters and jets. The main jet strafing target has a pair of nets with a red fabric centers. Because the impact of the bullets are too numerous and small to see, a hit is detected by a group of microphones that pick up the distinct sound of bullets passing through the fabric. The equipment is inside a fiberglass box, protected by an earthen berm.

On Friday afternoons the range is shut down for clean up crews who come with tractors and carts to pick up the bombs and fragments, and to repair the targets. Bomb remains are collected in carts and stored on site, then shipped away for disposal and recycling. The used American practice bombs are kept separately in a locked cage.

A number of brightly painted pyramidal forms on the range are fixed points on the ground, easily detected by the reflected radar on board oncoming aircraft, navigating towards the targets. Further out into the mud of low tide, are the boat targets and the heavy bomb target. A pair of joined barges are a "sea convoy" target, which is bombed and strafed. The current "freighter" target is a recent replacement for the old ship, which was so shot full of holes that it had disintegrated. The new boat was bought from a shipyard, for 500 pounds, and towed to this location.

The "heavyweight" bomb target is marked by a haphazard ring of scaffolding and pickle barrels. This is where the full size cement-filled bombs can be dropped. Weighing up to half a ton each, they form craters where they land, and burrow deeply into the mud.

In a remarkable contrast with the US counterpart, the Nellis Range, where few civilian outsiders ever enter the secured and restricted bombing areas, at Wash the area is unfenced and accessible to the public. In fact, British law permits anyone to visit this stretch of coastline. One of the jobs of the observers and scorers is to make sure that no civilians are in harms way on the range before a bombing run begins. If people are present, walking their dog or picnicking - both of which happen there - the Air Force can only ask the people to leave. If this fails to be effective - which has also happened - a jet’s low pass with afterburners on has been known to be persuasive.
WENDOVER GETS AWFULLY COLD

in the winter, and most CLUI operations out here shut down until March. The public facilities, however, including the exhibit buildings and location-based projects continue to remain open to the public throughout the year.

Currently on display in the indoor exhibit spaces is an exhibit by architect Ted Kane, in Exhibit Hall 1, with large prints that examine the zonal flatness and linearity of the landscape in the area, and, in Exhibit Hall 2, an investigation and depiction of the state line, using sculpture, photography, and text, by Catherine Harris. Both are CLUI Wendover Residence Program participants.

A number of large-scale projects were completed over the last season, including a 40 foot tall radio tower, designed by Deborah Stratman, and built by her crew from Chicago. A sort of scanner/sampler for the invisible radio spectrum of the area, the tower has a kiosk at its base that enables visitors to listen to different radio frequencies in the region, such as aviation channels, fast food drive-thrus, casino security, and others. There is also a transmit function in the kiosk, with low powered FM and Citizens Band, so users can communicate with some of the thousands of truckers, residents, and transients in the area and on the Interstate.

The design/build team Simparch returned to Wendover for a few months this year, and completed the first phase of their South Base project. This involves the creation of a self-contained life-support facility out on the most extreme edge of the old airbase, which is possibly on the most scenic and desolate places on earth - an isolated, lifeless area established in WW2 for weapons storage, used for assembling test and training versions of the Fat Man and Little Boy bombs. It is now used for target practice and for police raid training exercises, as well as a movie location.

Out there, Simparch has converted an empty, damaged quonset hut into a functional, even livable base, which is available for others to use for future projects at South Base. Spending time at the facility allows people to interact with this environment in a more profound way, and to witness and participate in the unusual events that go on in this unseen edge of civilization.

Other developments include the construction of a garage to house the Landmark Cruiser, a GPS-equipped car that is programmed with information about the area around Wendover, and which dispenses information as it is driven. The project should completed and available for people to check out in the Summer of 2004. Planning is underway for an open house at CLUI Wendover for October, 2004.
THE BEST DEAD MALL?
A PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION AND INDEFINITE INSTALLATION

AN EXHIBIT ABOUT ONE of the most dramatic dead malls in the country was on display at the CLUI this summer. The electronic presentation, created by Steve Rowell of the CLUI, was entitled The Best Dead Mall in America: A Photographic Documentation of the Dixie Square Mall in Harvey, Illinois. Located 20 miles south of downtown Chicago, the 800,000 square-foot mall has been abandoned for over 23 years, and in that time, the mall has been transformed into a new kind of post-shopping experience.

From the outside the general form of the mall appears intact, and all of the rambling megastructure is still standing and is navigable. Faceted facades and colored wall treatments subtly echo the anchor stores at the ends (that type of brick – must have been a Sears; those vertical stylings – Montgomery Ward?). The shape of the structure is more difficult to discern than it once was, as a new growth forest of trees is doing well in the parking lot, plazas, and alcoves around the outside of the building, breaking through asphalt, and overgrowing out of planters. Behind the rusty cyclone, the garden center has finally gone to seed.

Inside the unlocked or doorless doorways is a space beyond the language of design. Surprising and exotic textures and forms are visible within the faint remnants of the familiar commercial layouts of the 1970's branded spaces. The interior lighting, natural, haphazard, and high contrast, brings full visibility to some spaces, while others remain occluded and mysterious, where senses other than sight are summoned to experience the space. A true manifestation of a deconstructed architecture, inside veneer exfoliates, panels peel, and drop ceilings drop. Holes appear, and spread, giving angular views of the structural layers.

This “dead” mall is actually more alive than many of its living counterparts: the building lives through its continuous transformation and integration with its surroundings. Visitors are free to interact with the space, to make modifications, adjustments, renovations, as they see fit, and to make it their own, if only for indeterminate moments. Organic matter lives and thrives, especially in the random atriums formed by the partial roof collapses. Grids of floor tile are covered in carpets of moss, with flooded puddles, which resemble a landscape of forests and lakes seen from above, teasing one’s sense of scale and cartesian formality.

This is an inside out architecture, where full trees have reclaimed some of the interior space, breaking through the linoleum and the concrete floors, and where drifts of snow are free to migrate through the corridors as far as they can, and hallways become avenues of ice. Conversely, some of the interior materials have begun to spill out the service doors and other apertures, a belching of soaked drywall, carpet, mattresses, old appliances, display cabinets, bringing some of the inside out to the exterior spaces.

And to top it off, there is a layer of artificial construction and destruction, subtly and indelibly merged with the existing history, further complicating the archeology of the place: in 1980, a year after the mall closed, it was refashioned for a film shoot, for a film that involved the destructive highspeed perusal of the shops along its interior corridors. As the police chase the Blues Brothers’ renegade police car through the mall, Elwood casually comments on the new fashions, then steers the car through another row of plate glass.

DEAD MALL IN DEAD MALL

Amidst the mostly incidental displays within the Dixie Square Mall, visitors may find the exhibit for the Dead Mall design competition, that was hosted by the Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design during Fall of 2002 and the Spring of 2003, and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. As part of this Dead Mall landmark, copies of the Dead Mall competition prints have been installed on selected flat surfaces within the mall, and have become part of the surficial material of the mall interior. While not officially open to the public, the exhibit will, like the mall itself, be on display indefinitely.

NEW CLUI NORTHEAST OFFICE
IN THE HEART OF THE INDUSTRIAL PASTORAL UPSTATE NY

The new CLUI Northeast Office in Troy, New York, to serve as the office for research and projects in the Northeastern United States. Renovations are underway, including the installation of public exhibits in the first floor storefront space.

Near the State Capital at Albany, Troy is geographically in the middle of the cluster of states designated by the CLUI as the Northeast Interpretive District (New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania). It is at the confluence of the Erie Canal, the Champlain Canal, and the Hudson River, a historic crossroads of the engineered

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landscape, where raw materials from the historic hinterlands met the unobstructed water highway of the Hudson that led to the population centers of the coast.

Aided by this location, Troy developed into the center of the country’s iron industry in the mid 1800s, cranking out stoves, horseshoes, and, ironically, the railroad spikes that enabled a new form of transportation to replace the canal system – the railway – which later rendered Troy’s strategic location on the river and canals obsolete. Similarly, Troy ushered in the steel age by having the first Bessemer process steel mill in the nation, the first economically viable method for converting iron into the more versatile steel, and a process that was adopted with greater zeal by the famous industrialists who established the new industry in their home state of Pennsylvania, putting an end to Troy’s primacy in metal production. And so it went with other industries, including textiles, which went south, and detachable shirt collars, which went out of fashion, until the city which had grown quite large, found itself without a central industry.

The post-industrial, post-Victorian decline was met by nearly all the towns of the northeast which were centered on industries that used the rivers flowing out of the hills to power their mills, as Troy did. Some cities crumbled, some were reinvented, and most just made do somehow and slowly changed. But there are few cities which seem to have missed as much of the 20th century as Troy. Downtown looks like a Dickens novel, and has been used as a location for period films (including Scorsese’s 1993 adaptation of the Edith Wharton novel, Age of Innocence). The major exception is the row of riverside storefronts, at the heart of downtown, torn down in the 1970s to build the parking garages and offices for the new, modern, and anomalous City Hall. Urban renewal that was soon regretted.

Other agents keep the area positioned within the 19th and 21st centuries. One of these is the Rensselaer Polytechnic University, which looms above the city, looking in places like an old sanitarium. The school is famous for producing some of the great engineers of the industrial age, the bridgebuilders, ferriswheel makers, and surveyors that built 19th century America. Across the Hudson from Troy, the Watervliet Arsenal is “America's oldest and newest manufacturing arsenal,” according to their official literature. The arsenal was established to support the war of 1812 (though it was officially founded in 1813), and since that time it has been the primary builder of cannons and other large bore guns for the Army. The barrels for the Abrams tank are still made there. Up river at the Cohoes Falls, once second only to Niagara Falls for attract tourists to its romantic cascades, so many canals tapped water away from the falls to power the now abandoned mills of Cohoes that the flow practically stopped. Today, the river is still used to produce electricity, and depending on demand, the flow of the falls fluctuates between something and nothing.

Troy is also where the meat packer Sam Wilson was from, who packed barrels of meat for the Army during the war of 1812, and who eventually became known as Uncle Sam, familiar to us mostly as a WWII recruitment program image. In 1961, the 87th Congress of the United States adopted the following Resolution: “Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives that the Congress salutes Uncle Sam Wilson of Troy, New York, as the progenitor of America’s National symbol of Uncle Sam.” “Uncle Sam” is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery in North Troy, a large rural cemetery noted for its ornate romanesque mausoleum.

Ruins of the industries cover the hills and valleys of the region, and their legacy continues to have an impact today. Some say that most of inhabited New York State would probably be a superfund site, if people dared to look. This is the exciting new environment that the Center now finds itself in.

The new terminal in L.A./Long Beach harbor, under construction for years, was built with fill from Irwindale – thus the inland city extended the western reach of the continent. The result of the city continuously giving of itself in this way, is that Irwindale is so full of holes that more of the land in the city is a pit than not.

After rounding a newly rock-studded landscaped cloverleaf at the I-10/I-605 intersection, the CLUI bus tour headed up the San Gabriel River, and turned into the gate at the first pit of the day, the Durbin Pit. The group was met by Denny Robinson, manager of operations at the pit, who boarded the bus and led the group through the maze of engineered plateaus, causeways, ordered mounds of material, and extraction machinery, explaining the process and taking questions along the way.

Durbin is one of three pits in the area operated by the Vulcan Materials Company, the nation’s largest construction aggregates company. Vulcan started off as Birmingham Slag, mining and marketing the slagpiles from the steel industry in Birmingham, Alabama. Business began to really take off in 1951, with need for aggregates for the new interstate highway system (to this day, possibly the largest complex construction project that the world has ever seen). Vulcan now, still headquartered in Alabama, has 10,000 employees working at 162 stone quarries, 33 sand and gravel plants and 43 asphalt plants, all over the country, generating $2.5 billion in annual sales (as well as a chemicals division, making chlorine and hydrochloric acid, based elsewhere).

To put this in a national perspective, the aggregate industry overall has around 120,000 employees, and 10,000 quarries, easily the largest mining industry in the country. The primary use of aggregates - officially defined as crushed rock, gravel (naturally broken rock), and sand – is in construction projects: 20% home construction; 20% commercial construction; and 20% is used for public works projects, such as airports, sewage systems, and other municipal infrastructure. The rest, 40%, is used in making roads. There are nearly 4 million miles of paved roads in the United States, and 94% of their asphalt is aggregate (the rest is the binding material, usually petroleum based). The asphalt and paving industry employs 330,000 people, while the broader transportation construction industry employs 2.5 million. Roads, clearly, are fundamental.

After a loop through the Durbin Pit, the bus passed by the Hanson Spancrete complex, a construction yard and administrative headquarters for California’s largest manufacturer of these prestressed precast
IRINDALE (continued)

concrete structural members. Spancrete was first used in the famous Arroyo Seco overpass next to downtown Los Angeles, called the first four level interchange in America. Spancrete is now an important pre-manufactured component expediting the assembly of ubiquitous functional structures like parking garages and freeway overpasses. Behind Hanson’s yard is the “Touchstone” Business Center with the likes of “Gibraltar” Products, Inc., more evidence that this region is the rock products capital of Los Angeles.

The bus then crossed the engineered San Gabriel River, noting the large vertical concrete fins protruding from the spillway, and headed into the second pit of the day, the Peck Road Quarry. Once inside the pit, those on board the bus could see that this is the western edge of a pit complex nearly a mile long, which is being worked especially on the east side by the Hanson Materials Company, which is the nation’s largest manufacturer of bricks, concrete pipes, and precast products (including Spancrete), as well as the third largest aggregates producer in the USA.

Of the 17 major pits in the Irwindale area only four are being mined at the moment. Many of the others are idle, having already been mined to their permitted depth of 200 feet, and having met their limitations in size by running up to the edges of adjacent properties and roadways. In many cases the material extends to a thousand feet deep and the quarries are trying to get permits to go deeper. Vulcan estimates that if they could go another 150 feet, their Irwindale pits would have another 30 years of life. The city, on the other hand, having literally dispensed with so much of their taxable surface area, is interested in bringing the inactive pits back up to grade, so they can develop the land in a more economically productive way.

One of the filled-in pits has been capped with a giant slab of asphalt (itself, no doubt, made up mostly of Irwindale aggregate), and turned into the parking lots and tracks of Irwindale Speedway, one of a handful of large-scale car racing complexes in the L.A. area. When the CLUI bus tour dropped in on the Speedway, it was met by a representative, Doug Stokes, who showed us around. Though it is normal for the track to host things like Nascar racing, the Irwindale Speedway recently had been the host of the “D1 Grand Prix,” the first major drifting event in the nation. Drifting is an emerging car racing sport where cars move around in prolonged controlled skids. These are made possible by using lightweight, rear wheel drive compact cars, mostly Nissans and Toyotas of late ’80s and early ’90s vintage. The sport originated in Japan, and is said to have been based on a Japanese comic book about the adventures of a tofu delivery boy.

One way for these massive pits to be filled in over time is to turn them into dumps. While some did become household landfills, the city now discourages this sort of pit filling, as it is unsanitary, smelly, and potentially hazardous. And, as Los Angeles’ disposal pressures mount, there was a serious concern that hole-y Irwindale might become the garbage dump for all of L.A. Currently there are only three pits in Irwindale that are being commercially landfilled, and they generally accept construction debris and not domestic waste. After the visit to the Speedway, the CLUI bus tour entered one of these three dumps, the Live Oak/Nu Way landfill, operated by Waste Management Incorporated, the nation’s largest waste company.

Between 1957-1973, this was an active quarry. In the 1980s, much of the pit was filled with mining waste from another quarry. The eighty feet or so that remains to be filled in, is slowly approaching grade, being filled in by “inert” wastes, mostly construction debris including rock, drywall, concrete, bricks, and metal. The group was met by Lalo, the site manager, who led the bus into the pit to observe the various recycling operations there, where construction debris is broken down, and divided into reusable and nonreusable metal, asphalt, and concrete piles.

The last stop on the tour before lunch was the Santa Fe Dam. The dam, an arc of piled rock nearly five miles long, built by the Army Corps, has never really had to be used for its designed purpose - yet. It was made to defend the land downstream from catastrophic debris flows. These are occasional storm events, which have been very destructive to some parts of the city, where unconsolidated rock from the mountains is mobilized by prolonged rain, and tumbles down the canyons and river valleys like a slow motion avalanche of coarse rock, gravel, and mud, destroying everything in its path. There are hundreds of check dams higher up in the mountains now, and these catch the majority of the flows before they reach the valley (the dam basins themselves are periodically emptied by the aggregate industry).

Structures like the Santa Fe Dam, the Sepulveda Dam, the Hansen Dam, and the Whittier Narrows Dam are the last line of defense, built downslope to hold back a major flow that makes it out of the mountains, like a geologic shock absorber. Behind these dams are undevelopable areas that need to stay empty to contain the material from this potential unscheduled aggregate delivery. The permitted uses of the land here is ephemeral: oddly disorganized wildlife areas and recreation zones.

The CLUI bus climbed up the side of the Santa Fe Dam, then travelled down the length of the paved, narrow recreational pathway that runs along its top. The view out one side was of the margins of this sacrificial recreational zone within the dam, and the mountains looming above it, and on the other side, the downstream industries and roads of Azusa and Irwindale. The sight of the bus up there was enough to attract a police helicopter and squad car. Apparently not all the authorities had been made aware of the Center’s visit. The bus parked at the center of the Dam, above the gatehouse, the tourists disembarked, and flowed down the stairs set in the rock wall to the entrance of the tunnel, where they were met by Jeff Nelson, of the Army Corps of Engineers, who opened the doors and led the group into the heart of the 24,100 feet long, hundred feet tall rockpile.

If the Santa Fe Dam is meant to keep the mountain’s margins from merging with the city’s midst, then the next stop on the tour was about the city’s margins stopping at the mountains. Typically, in cities ringed by wilderness, things fray at the edges. At these margins, typi-
Socialized behavior can give way to other, more marginalized activities. It is at the edges where you find, for example, dumping grounds, burned cars, and shooting ranges, places and activities nobody wants to see in the city's midst. The bus arrived at the San Gabriel Valley Gun Club, at the end of the road at the base of the mountains, just as the local snack bar owner and his family were finishing preparing the 58 kebabs that had been preordered for the group. After lunch and a talk from the club's representative, a small firearm was made available for anyone in the group to take a turn shooting the San Gabriel Mountains. Many partook, adding to the new land layer of shells and bullets.

Afterwards the bus followed the route the debris takes, from the mouth of the canyon that holds the San Gabriel River, down the wash back down the alluvial fan to the land of the pits. The next pit passed is known to locals as “Raider Crater,” for it was here, a decade or so ago, where the Los Angeles Raider football team pledged to build a stadium, inside a disused Irwindale pit. It was a plan that seemed to make sense; stands for 65,000 would be built on the sides of the pit, a playing field at the bottom, and the Miller brewery was visible across the highway. The plan fell apart, and the team took $10 million of Irwindale’s incentive money, and eventually moved up to Oakland. The pit remains fenced and empty.

The nearby Reliance pit is one of the most active in Irwindale. This is the site of Vulcan’s main processing facility, an amazing maze of conveyors, hoppers, and sorters. Neat piles of crushed and sorted rock are mounded in elegant conical piles of uniform grain size and texture. All this takes place in a 200 feet deep, massive rectangular hole, surrounded by office park buildings. Operations Manager Richard Roberts, and public affairs manager Todd Spitler met the group and gave a thorough, detailed tour through the operations of the site, including the old concrete silo on a raised area in the middle of the pit. This massive structure once loomed high over Irwindale, and had the big CalMat logo on it (Vulcan bought CalMat in 1999). The silo was currently being torn down so they could excavate underneath it, and reuse the concrete that it was made out of. The entire operation would then be nearly invisible, contained in the pit below the horizon line.

Heading up the ramp and out the main gate of the of the Reliance Pit put the bus onto Irwindale Boulevard, the main drag through the city. As the bus passes McDonald’s, the group is reminded that though Irwindale is said to have the highest per capita consumption of Big Macs, this is due probably to the fact that the population is less than 1,500, while nearly 40,000 people work here, many of them quite likely statistical hamburger eaters. The largest single employer in town is a frozen food company, Ready Pak Produce, followed by the cable TV company, followed by the Miller brewery. Irwindale's 9.5 square miles is largely a hodgepodge of margins, nonplaces, and the land not wanted by its neighboring cities, Duarte, Azusa, Baldwin Park, and El Monte. Its boundaries were made up by the existing limits of the surrounding cities, where their lines stopped in the unincorporated county white zone, in the wide gravel wash of the river, and along the Santa Fe sacrifice basin. But in 1957, when the city finally incorporated, the building boom was on, and its founders saw that revenue could be made by exporting its marginal real estate.
But not all the city got dug up and shipped out. The surface level land has typical office parks and bungalow rows. Irwindale Boulevard has muffler shops and storefronts. Like many L.A. Basin cities, aerospace was an important employer here, and just off the main drag, over the line in Azusa, Aerojet, the defense contractor, developed a complex for manufacturing and developing satellite-based surveillance systems that allow for, among other things, monitoring other nation’s rocket launches. Though Aerojet is mostly gone from the cavernous buildings down Optical Drive, the complex is now home to Northrop Grumman’s Electronic Systems, and a division of Perkin Elmer, the company that built the camera system for the SR-71 spy plane.

Across Irwindale Boulevard from the aerospace corner stands the landmark Miller brewery, visible to all who travel on the 210 Freeway, and the next stop on the Center’s bus tour. Like the sand and gravel of Irwindale, the city’s water is mined, processed, and shipped all over the place, in the form of beer products. Through its efforts to preserve the perceived purity of its water supply, the aquifer under the adjacent San Gabriel River, the plant has a direct effect on the landscape of Irwindale, using its leverage as one of the region’s major employers. When a trash-burning power plant was proposed for a pit next to the highly visible brewery, Miller successfully stopped the project. When the county proposed building wastewater percolation ponds along the San Gabriel River, the company sued to have the project reduced. When the plant needed room for expansion, Irwindale bought 242 acres of adjacent property for $10 million, and sold it to Miller for $1.

Miller brewery, as viewed from the “Raider Crater,” in the foreground. Note the Budweiser billboard preceding the Miller sign on the eastbound Interstate 210. CLUI photo

Since they don’t do public tours inside the plant, a representative of Miller, Kevin Harris, boarded the bus and led the group around the plant on a narrated tour of the facility from the outside. This plant uses over a million gallons of water a day to make nearly 200 million gallons of beer per year, under dozens of labels, many of them for other brands, such as Old Milwaukee, Schlitz, and Colt 45. Raw material including grains and corn slurry, come by rail, while the packaging material comes by truck. After a few weeks of fermentation, the finished product is shipped by truck to markets all over the west coast, but more than half of what is produced here goes to Los Angeles. This is one of six Miller breweries in the country, but is the only Miller brewery in the west. The next closest one is a thousand miles away in Texas. Miller, now owned by a South African beer company, is the second largest beer company in the country, with around 20% of the market nationwide. Anheuser-Busch, with around 50% of the market, is indeed the king of beers.

Miller is fortunate that its plant and water source is relatively close to the undeveloped mountains. Just downstream, the San Gabriel River aquifer under Irwindale has been designated a Superfund site, with a subsurface plume of contamination a mile wide that extends 8 miles south to West Covina - from the 210 to south of the 10, on the east side of the 605. Contaminants include perchlorates from rocket fuel at the Aerojet plant, and solvents and degreasers from the now closed Huffy bicycle factory. The next visit on the tour was the Azusa Land Reclamation Company, one of the eight legally responsible businesses cited in the Superfund suit, and responsible for assisting with the $200 million clean up of the contaminated ground. The Azusa Land Reclamation Company site is a former quarry pit that became an unlined hazardous material landfill. It was shut down by the state in 1991, due to the groundwater contamination concerns. In 1994, it reopened as a landfill, with new engineering and lining, and is now operated by Waste Management Incorporated. One of the four mandated water treatment facilities for pumping out and treating the contaminated aquifer is located at the site, and vents can be seen poking out of the mounded earth at the hazardous end of the dump.

The bus passed by the old sanitarium, across from the Irwindale Chamber of Commerce, on the way to the last two pit sites to be visited on the tour. The new Irwindale Business Center, just off Irwindale Boulevard, is a showpiece for the kind of development the city would like to see at other pit sites. It is a fancy new office park, that looks like other fancy office parks, except for the fact that it is about 30 feet below grade. Access roads into the park climb down a slope, into the faint remains of a (mostly) filled in gravel pit. After a loop through the business center, whose new tenants include the Custom Fruit Company, the final site on the tour was a brief look at a 192 acre empty pit, surrounded by homes, that was purchased a few years ago by the Catholic Arch Diocese for $3 million. The church has plans to develop the site by building a church, a school, a retreat center, and a cemetery there for some reason, one of the more unusual reuse proposals for the pits of Irwindale. The city manager is on the record as opposing it, however, and the city is trying to buy it back from the tax-exempt church.

Back on I-10, on the way home, the group ruminates on this portion of the Ramona Freeway, dedicated in 1954, part of the Interstate system, linking Jacksonville, New Orleans, Houston, Phoenix, and Los Angeles, in places more than ten lanes wide... Heading west, back towards the coast with beaches replenished by Irwindale’s sands... California, the leading consumer - as well as producer - of aggregate in the nation... These holes may be owned by Vulcan, Hanson, United Rock, the Pope, but they are holes that we all dug, together. ♦

Sights to ponder on the trip home: palm trees on tanks, palm trees as cell towers, palm trees as palm trees, in California’s setting sun. CLUI photo
A new collection of essays on the subject of J. B. Jackson, by those who knew him, and of the field that he represented, that of contemporary cultural landscape studies, who, among other things said, basically, as one of the essays reminds us, that the landscape is like a book, "...we have but to learn to read it."

The Half-Life of Salt, by Charles Hood, Fountain Mountain Press, 2002
This book poem traces the trajectory of the Enola Gay and the atomic bomb from the places of their independent inceptions to their brief combination, and fatal separation above Hiroshima. The book is written in a mix of poetry and prose, a precise condensation of language that allows more for notions than conventional narrative would allow, and for vivid recreations of the places to form, including depictions of Wendover, Utah, where the author spent some time observing conditions as a CLUI Wendover Resident.

A collection of essays exposing some of the issues that come to bear in the process of selecting and isolating places for special treatment as culturally significant sites. Contributors include landscape architects, historians, and anthropologists.

Zones of Exclusion: Pripyat and Chernobyl, by Robert Pulidori, Steidl, 2003
A just about perfect coffee table sized photo book of the ultimate abandoned landscape: Chernobyl and the surrounding area.

While it is not unusual to photograph places that are self-consciously unrealistic versions of other places, like Las Vegas's Venice, or natural history dioramas, Timtschenko's photographs reveal a benevolent beauty and tranquility in these spaces, beyond the obvious irony.

More than yet another celebration of roadside kitsch, this little photo book is a playful sampler of American road and highway typologies - pickup trucks, abandoned gas stations, box cars, trailers, signage - and indicates the work of a hyperdocumenter of considerable skill and energy.

Running Fence, by Geoffrey James, Presentation House Gallery, 1999
A black and white photo book of the Mexico/USA border, looking at the fence itself, and its edges, between Otay Mountain and the Pacific Ocean, one of the more dramatic portions of the border.

Architecture of Incarceration, Academy Editions, 1994
Big photos, a few essays, and diagrams depict monumental prison architecture, focussing on several contemporary examples. There is an interesting promotional representation of these projects in this book, as the images and blurbs were supplied by the architecture firms themselves.

Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash, by Susan Strasser, Owl Books, 1999
A nice book on the evolution of the domestic waste stream and the historic perceptions and definitions of what constitutes "trash."
American Ruins, by Camilo José Vergara, Mumaelli Press, 1999
Each of Vergara's publications modestly express some of the most startling visions of America's contemporary landscape. We agree with the MacArthur Foundation: he is a national treasure.

Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876-1881, by Constance Nyes Robertson, Syracuse University Press, 1972
Much has been written about the nearly successful 19th Century intentional community of Oneida, and much of it written by its highly educated member's offspring. This volume, by the visionary founder's granddaughter, provides details of the demise of the innovative group from upstate New York, who developed and practiced many progressive social structures, including communal ownership of property and communal "association" - marriage.

Red Land, Blue Land, by Claudio Hils, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000
Nice photographs of a military training area, with a mock town, dummies, and all sorts of other targets and props, in the North Rhine-Westfalia district in Germany. We are unclear about why there aren't more books of this sort.

100 Suns, by Michael Light, Knopf, 2003
The photo archive miner and artist Michael Light, who a few years ago culled NASA's public photo archive to create the book and photo series Full Moon, has turned this time to the images of the atmospheric nuclear testing program, and published an elegant, large, black book that should appeal to more than just explosion fetishists. We eagerly await his aerial photography project about the American West which will no doubt be an epic too.

The Promise of Paradise, by Hubert B. Stroud, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995
Subtitled "Recreational and Retirement Communities in the United States Since 1950," this is a rare book on the subject, and of great use and interest. Discusses several sites in detail, including Lake Havasu, AZ, Rio Rancho, NM, and Cape Coral, FL. Part of the Creating the North American Landscape series of Johns Hopkins and the Center for American Places.

James Dean Died Here: The Locations of America's Pop Culture Landmarks, by Chris Epting, Santa Monica Press, 2002
This book lists over 600 locations on a variety of subjects, from celebrity scandal sites to movie locations. Though it is illustrated with small black and white photographs, the focus is on locating the sites, and directional information is provided for places without street addresses. Very handy.

The latest and fifth of Bill Mann's guidebook series, each of which covers a separate part of the Mojave Desert. For the Lucerne Valley, he picks 55 sites including many old mining ruins, old homesteads, natural "curiosities" like rock outcrops and circular plant formations, as well as some microgems like the ruined manufactured home turned into a dinosaur, and an unexplained upside down cement boat hull in the desert.

A history of the still extant, extremely isolated R&D and theoretical study center, built by the Soviets in the late 1950's, to house and direct the high science of the empire. ♦
Back to the Bay:
Exploring the Margins of the San Francisco Bay Region
A catalog and guidebook of the 2001 CLUI exhibit, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco.
110 pp., illustrated.
$15.00

The Chesapeake Bay Hydraulic Model
An illustrated history of this remarkable engineering accomplishment, the largest indoor hydraulic model in the world, now abandoned.
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$5.00

Commonwealth of Technology: Extrapolations on the Contemporary Landscape of Massachusetts
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80 pp., with fold-out map and over 100 illustrations.
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100 exemplary land use sites in Washington state. From the 1999 exhibition presented at the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle.
80 pp., illustrated.
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Over 100 interesting places in the California desert.
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Illustrated travelogue to this remarkable, 216-mile roadway. A perfect weekend-long trip from Los Angeles. Revised Edition.
80 pp., illustrated.
$15.00

Subterranean Revolutions: The Unique Architectural Spaces of Show Caves
Examine underground built structures and depicts some of the best tourist care environments in the United States, with contact and visitation information. From the CLUI exhibit.
80 pp., illustrated.
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Antarctic 1:
Views Along Antarctica's First Highway
CD-ROM of the CLUI exhibit, with text by Bill Fox. Includes "clickable map" of McMurdo Station.
Works on Mac and PC.
$12.50

HOW TO ORDER
This is called the “Winter 2003” issue, because it is being put together in the ten days between the Solstice and the new year, but you will probably be reading it in early 2004. We have to put out at least two newsletters every year. With more effort going into keeping the website current, the newsletter seems to always be the last thing that gets attention. But there is no doubt about its importance as part of the outreach of the Center. It will not be forgotten. Recent hard drive failures in the office remind us of the fragility of digital media, and its contrast with the durability and tangibility of printed material. If you think about it, this line, between the ephemeral and the physical, is metaphorically analogous to the terrain covered by the Center: we deal with the nonphysical representation of physical places, the impression left by physical objects, like the shape that the land makes on the bottom of the sky, if you will. So to toil daily in the digital dominion, in order to expedite, economize, formulate, tabulate, and communicate, is our destiny, but to be sure to come back to ground on a regular basis, to commit, to record, to store, and to verify, is our duty. As it is for so many of us in these times. This duality is definitely a condition of this age. Here, in your hands, at least and at last, is something concrete.

-Lay of the Land Editors