



Article

Thirteen Tactics for Teaching Poetry as Architecture

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Abstract: *What if encounters between modernist poetry and architecture exceed inspiration, imagery, and allusions?* These two modes of making have crossed boundaries for over a century, from Walt Whitman’s ecstatic stanzas on Manhattan skyscrapers to architect John Hejduk’s poetry of memory and place. Buildings become materials for poetry, and poems become material for building. When a literary critic and an architect build on overlaps they have discovered in syllabi for American Poetry and Architecture Studio courses, their teaching collaboration becomes a sustainable maker-space for student work—and for the Humanities more generally. We found that linking a literature survey to an architectural design studio brings materiality and resourcefulness to working with poems and that interacting with the Humanities demonstrates *praxis* (theory + practice) from the perspective of architectural pedagogy. Our classes also engaged each other through The Repurpose Project, a community space that promotes reuse and diverts waste from the local landfill. The profusion of readily available materials at Repurpose afforded students with a rich sampling of architectural textures and languages, opening new possibilities for thinking and making. In an academic climate that groups literary studies and architecture as “not-STEM,” we designed sustainable and resilient pedagogies that go beyond problem solving. Finding the same quality of renewable resourcefulness in Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” we offer 13 tactics for teaching poetry as architecture.

Keywords: architecture; design; humanities; maker-space; modernism; pedagogy; poetry; repurposing; sustainability; Wallace Stevens



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1. Orientation

Two modern forms flicker across the screen in the first city symphony film: American poetry and skyscrapers. Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler’s *Manhatta* (1921) takes its intertitles from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, joining poetry with architecture to construct a modernist metropolis. Early in his career, Wallace Stevens composed his sequence poem “Architecture,” which calls for new structures to house language. Late in his career, Le Corbusier combined poems and lithographs in his image-text *Poem of the Right Angle* (1955). Poetry and architecture have crossed boundaries for over a century, making room for architect-poets such as John Hejduk. In his introduction to Hejduk’s *Such Places as Memory*, which works as an image-text, David Shapiro writes: “Poetry and architecture are not just contingent analogues for Hejduk. They are both building arts. They are ontologically the same art, as he has proposed a drawing strong as a building and vice versa” (Shapiro 1998, p. xvi). Buildings become materials for T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and Gwendolyn Brooks’s postwar poems about Chicago. Poems can also become materials for building.

Made by a literary critic and an architect, this essay draws from our teaching collaboration to render Humanities work as a creative process and sustainable practice. We see Humanities as a mode of *making*, spanning from the etymological roots of *poet/makar* to Matt Ratto’s concept of *critical making* and DK Osseo-Asare’s *maker-space* practice. Linking a literature survey to an architecture studio brings materiality and resourcefulness to working with poems. From the perspective of architectural pedagogy and practice, interaction with

the Humanities also demonstrates *praxis* (theory + practice). How do theory and practice mesh in the activity of thinking and making? Inspired by Donald Schön's "reflective practitioner," Charlie uses the term *reflective building* to describe how thinking and making operate simultaneously and in feedback loops: thinking about making and making as a mode of thought (Schön 1984). Another aspect of reflective building is learning by doing. Marsha uses the term *sustainable pedagogy* to characterize her Humanities courses that tap community resources and cross-campus collaborations. In an academic climate that aligns literary studies and architecture as "not-STEM," we seek a resilient pedagogy that learns to set and frame problems, not merely "solve" them. So much of sustainability focuses on problem solving, but *resiliency* requires balance, levity, flexibility. These same qualities sustain the renewable resourcefulness of Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." Working together and with our students, we adapt Michel de Certeau's concept of *tactics*: crossing to another's space "fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). Our essay offers 13 tactics for resilient teaching and making.

What if encounters between modernist poetry and architecture exceed inspiration, imagery, and allusions? What if architecture's stories are not just structural, but narrative: tales of materials' past lives and future incarnations? How does architecture reveal the materiality of poems? How do poems become building materials for architects? How can twined pedagogies create sustainable maker-spaces for students' work—and for Humanities more generally?

2. Thirteen Tactics

2.1. Encountering

In a cross-campus teaching workshop on Experiential Learning in the Architecture Design Studio, we learned that we assign some of the same poets to build our respective syllabi for Design Studio (Charlie) and Modern American Poetry (Marsha). Charlie moderated the workshop's panel of faculty from the University of Florida's School of Architecture, orienting attendees to studio curriculum and pedagogy. We assembled in the School's teaching gallery, surrounded by students' drawings and models for their design projects (Figure 1). Many of these iterations struck Marsha as modernist poems in the making. Some of the student work incorporated words in their mixed materials, creating collage effects (Figure 2). Workshop panelists noted that poems, films, and songs can generate architectural designs.

The teaching workshop showed how studio-based learning forms recursive loops across the architecture curriculum through project planning, making, peer feedback, and self-evaluation. (In Marsha's poetry survey classes, the feedback loops are more separated: She responds to individual students' writing assignments, and students respond to one another's interpretations during class discussion.) Our workshop encounter prompted us to collaborate on designing our upcoming undergraduate courses. Because of our respective disciplines and their curricular demands, we would need to build on our modernist materials to synergize students' work.

What if Charlie's design/build students brought modernist poetics into their making, and what if Marsha's poetry survey students brought design thinking into their literary analysis? How might collaborations with a shared community site complement our shared syllabus readings? How would this twined pedagogy augment student assignments and outcomes in each class?



Figure 1. Teaching Gallery, UF School of Architecture, 2019.



Figure 2. Design Studio Work by Tatiana Campos for Elizabeth Cronin's Class (Campos 2021).

2.2. Consulting

Design/build classes offer time to practice, making room for experimentation and allowing for experience: understanding a site and its context, collaborating in groups, handling materials, and listening to clients. In some ways, design/build is the most impractical way to build something. Though a collaborative process, it moves slowly, and budgetary limitations require lots of labor. However, the slow process gives students time

to think, and delving deeply into the foundations of architectural education, it returns to basic forms, ideas, and techniques initially explored in first-year studios. Among the objectives of the design/build course is developing an ability to select, adapt, and apply methodologies and theoretical approaches related to design/build activity. Another key objective is to link university and community through public interest projects. Charlie had previously worked with a local non-profit that fostered encounters between poetry and architecture.

Founded in 2012, The Repurpose Project combines a salvage yard with a thrift shop to promote reuse and to divert what might otherwise become waste from the local landfill. Simply called “Repurpose,” the non-profit’s facilities include a warehouse (originally used for furniture manufacture) and an outdoor space (which holds an array of building materials, home furnishings, and shelves of miscellanea). Repurpose’s current site in northeast Gainesville, FL, is its second location; co-founder Sarah Goff recently led an expansion effort to purchase and adapt a mid-century building for additional space.

So, in the Spring 2018 semester, 14 fourth-year architecture students set out to design and build a maker-space trailer for the Repurpose Project. Along with Marsha, Charlie co-taught the studio course with Architecture colleagues Donna Cohen and Elizabeth Cronin. The project included a small workshop, tool storage, performance stage, and puppet theater. Built on the chassis of a 1973 Jayco travel trailer, the maker-space used items from Repurpose’s inventory to demonstrate how materials could be reused. Originally meant to move around town—effectively taking Repurpose’s mission on the road, the trailer has remained on site and now serves multiple functions.

Architect DK Osseo-Asare, who joined the design/build project at Repurpose for a week, notes that maker-space generally refers to “any open community lab or workshop where people can access tools and equipment for (digital) design and fabrication; typically they are capital-intensive and housed in buildings that are fixed in place” (Osseo-Asare 2017). Visions for maker-spaces at the Repurpose Project included the provision of space for local artists as well as members of the community to create and to repair things. Similar to Osseo-Asare’s AMP project located in an e-waste dump, maker-spaces at Repurpose occupy a site filled with discarded and salvaged materials. They are much like living laboratories, and the tools offered at Repurpose are relatively low tech—hand tools, small power tools, and only a few shop tools.

In a sense, poems operate like this: They accrue assorted symbols and allusions, they occupy adjacent spaces. Poems require intensive crafting. Their makers test the tensile strength of a juxtaposition here, torque a chain of images there. Poets adopt low-tech design modes, adapting preowned forms and inventing new ones. Marsha wanted her students to think about poetry through architectural making. She assigned consulting activities to build toward their Maker-Space Poetry Projects, twining them with Charlie’s class:

- Shopping for an item at The Repurpose Project to imagine alternative uses;
- Visiting Charlie’s students at Repurpose to think about maker-spaces;
- Attending Osseo-Asare’s lecture on campus.

Students who visited the design/build site interacted with Charlie’s students and photographed their maker-space, pairing an image with captions drawn from syllabus poets. Marsha’s students drew especially from Stevens, repurposing lines from “Anecdote of the Jar,” “The Man on the Dump,” and “Not Ideas About the Thing, but the Thing Itself.” They chose a second caption from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, a text Charlie had recommended to complement writings by Louis Kahn and Gaston Bachelard. Calvino’s poetic style prompted Marsha’s students to see how maker-spaces could be psychological as well as physical: *What line separates the inside and the outside, the rumble of wheels from the howl of wolves?* (Calvino 1974, p. 34). To complete the assignment, Marsha’s students wrote two sentences about architectural approaches to maker-spaces.

2.3. Reading

In “Architecture”, Stevens reminds us that entering a poem is like entering a building. To inhabit either form fully, the reader-stroller reassembles the whole as they encounter each part. To inhabit either form freshly, they must re-envision the design when the old structures have become stale and uninhabitable:

What manner of building shall we build?
 Let us design a chastel de chasteté.
 De pensée . . .
 Never cease to deploy the structure.
 Keep the laborers shouldering the plinths.
 Pass the whole of life earring the clink of the
 Chisels of the stone-cutters cutting the stones. (Stevens 1923, p. 121)

Stevens incorporates architectural terms throughout the poem: plinths, pointings, towers, portals, nicks, shafts, chambers, buttresses, embossings, plazas, esplanades. Ultimately, however, this is not so much a poem about architecture as it is an architectural poem. Literary terms become architectural components in Section II, where dithyramb and cantilene take their place among marble gargoyles and pillars. “Architecture” shows how Stevens and other modernists “not only use architectural tropes to describe their compositions,” as Suzanne Wintch Churchill explains, “but also claim for language the physical status of building materials” (Churchill 2006, p. 21). We see this fusion in the chiasmus quoted above: stone-cutters cutting stones. Stevens’s words cross like a joint in a structure. In the poem’s next line, Stevens renders architecture as a maker-space for words: “In this house, what manner of utterance shall there be?” (Stevens 1923, p. 121).

David Spurr sees this poem as “a dwelling place for the imagination,” one that resists “imposed order” to sustain “the poet’s pursuit of discovery” (Spurr 2012, p. 205). For Stevens, modern poetry must house changing ideas of order in forms of fixed words and flexible perspective. Encountering the poem-building as a student in Charlie’s class, Ana McIntosh offered her reflections on process: “Thinking and making are presented as one. As we built our own ‘palace,’ we took great care to break down the sun’s light through small openings or various layers to harness its beauty and tame its strength” (McIntosh and Ryzhikova 2018). Here, Stevens’s poem operates as a design studio.

Architect Louis Kahn’s essays often read like prose poems. “Structure is the maker of light,” Kahn writes in “Architecture: Silence and Light” (Kahn 1991, p. 252). “Let us build the building of light,” Stevens writes in “Architecture” (Stevens 1923, p. 122). What does it mean to build with light? For Kahn, it is a creative practice that meshes the poetic with the practical to invest ventilation and daylighting with a logic that personifies materials and brings them into vital conversations with humans and nature alike. All of this told through stories of light. Lisa Ryzhikova echoes the stories Kahn told through architecture when she writes how the students’ roof design opens, “reaching towards the sky” and “letting in light” and how it shelters puppet shows in an “imaginary space” of “hiding and revealing” (McIntosh and Ryzhikova 2018). Puppeteers, puppets, and the audience inhabit this light-filled air in what she called “other-worldly” performance, cloaked in Stevens’s “heavenly dithyramb” amid “embossings of the sky” (Stevens 1923, pp. 121–22). In their collaborative artist book for Charlie’s class, Ryzhikova and McIntosh paired the latter, sibilant phrase with this image of the roof made of reused pieces of translucent polycarbonate panels (Figure 3).

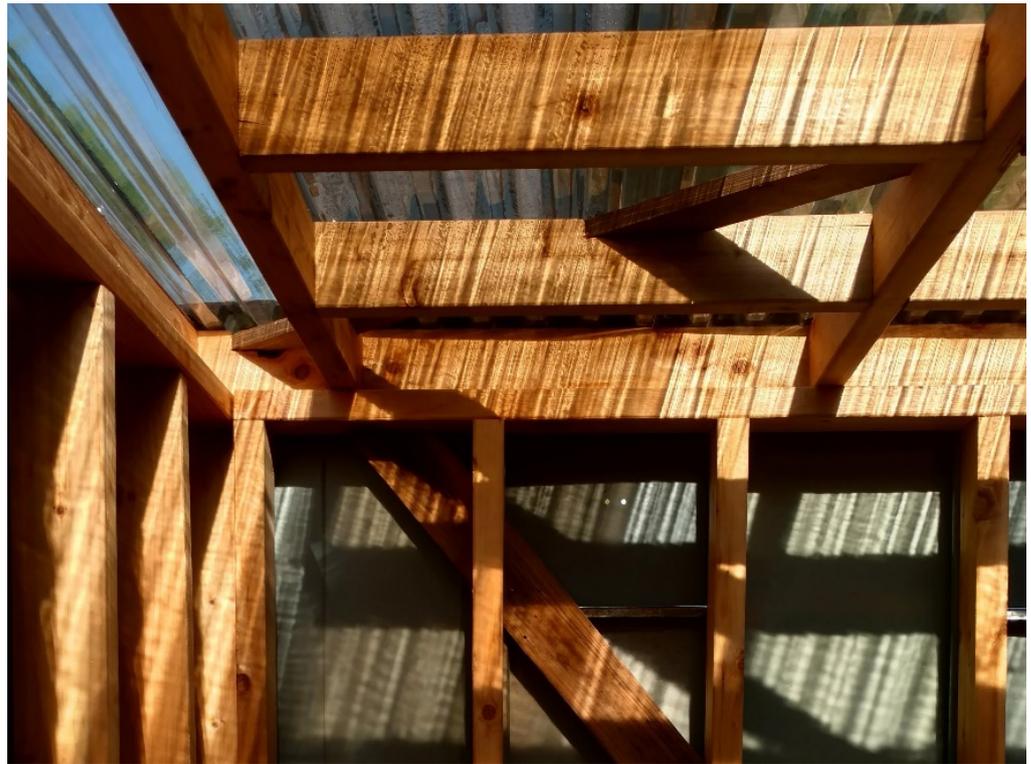


Figure 3. Wood Framing with Sun by Ana McIntosh (McIntosh and Rhyzhikova 2018).

2.4. Walking About

Think of a walkabout as a resourceful mode of strolling. On a winter walkabout through the woods, Robert Frost happens upon an unexpected structure:

It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight. (Frost 2002, p. 124)

These strictly measured lines of iambic pentameter in “The Wood-Pile” fit easily into Frost’s blank verse, which assumes the everyday rhythms of walking. Settled into its natural surroundings, the woodpile stands out from the lines of trees “too much alike to mark a name or place by” (Frost 2002, p. 123). It alters perception like the household object Stevens places in the wilderness in “Anecdote of the Jar.” However, there are key differences. Stevens’s curatorial speaker imports an object from elsewhere, creating an artificial focal point for the natural scene. The wilderness now appears to *surround* the jar, gathering *around* as the poem’s internal rhymes play on roundness (Stevens 1990). Frost’s itinerant woodcutter found materials in what was at hand, and the poet turns that *handiwork* into a maker-space. Some of Marsha’s students quoted from “The Wood-Pile” to caption their photos of the design/build project that Charlie’s students were making at Repurpose.

The woodpile and the jar recall the Situationist exercise of *dérive* and *détournement*. On a *dérive*, walks through Paris yielded resonances through found objects, aleatory experiences, and disorientations. Perceptions are altered but on the terms of what is at hand. Walking through what Charlie’s students called the “organized chaos” of Repurpose meant navigating atmospheres and resonances; it sometimes felt like moving against the grain of materials. On a walkabout, as on a *dérive*, you move not from A to B, but through zones, where boundaries overlap and attractions take over. On a walkabout, porcelain fixtures bleed into metal sheeting, which mixes with plastic tubs. Threaded rods lean against stacks of metal shelves next to actual shelving that holds doorknobs and stenciled signs. You can look through sheets of glass to see plumbing pipe joints and electrical outlet plates. Sharp things are next to smooth things, and shiny surfaces reflect rusted coatings. Findings

from the *dérive* are curated in the *détournement*, which often results in constructions such as collages. This process is similar to placing an object selected and removed from the “forest” of materials onto the trailer to see how it works in its new context.

Marsha did a walkabout at Repurpose before the semester began to generate assignments for her students. The blurred boundaries between objects defied categories, so that even the indoor aisles veered between chaos and order like a modernist poem. Somewhere near a heap of fabric remnants and a bin of picture frames, Marsha saw an emblem of Frost’s woodpile in shelves of stacked furniture parts (Figure 4). Outside, she encountered The Circle of Despair, the salvage yard’s underworld (Figure 5). A place of last resort for unwanted objects, this open enclosure offered a week’s reprieve from the county dump. Marsha’s students would encounter such mergers of the mythic and the mundane in the city poems they read, including Eliot’s purgatorial London in *The Waste Land*. Like their walkabouts through Repurpose, students’ navigations through densely packed lines of images and allusions could prove disorienting.



Figure 4. Indoor Shelf at The Repurpose Project, 2018.



Figure 5. The Circle of Despair at The Repurpose Project, 2018.

2.5. Shopping

At The Repurpose Project, there is of course no store layout map as with Ikea’s ubiquitous “you are here” placards; it also lacks the orienting familiarity of aisles and product clusters of Home Depot or Walmart. So, at Repurpose, students’ walkabouts—their “tours”—came to define the map. In the semester before the design/build studio, Charlie’s students take their second architecture theory survey course, where they read the “Walking in the City” chapter from de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In a short exercise that echoes the *dérive*, they take a walk across campus and map the results, reflecting on spatial practices that resist the cartographic logic of campus planning, a microcosm of urban systems. At Repurpose, this nascent (yet everyday) practice of walking came to include shopping:

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them) . . . Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other’s blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler; carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. (de Certeau 1984, p. 101)

In her Modern American Poetry class, Marsha sent students to Repurpose for shopping and brainstorming. Their assignment: purchase an item for \$2.00, photograph it, imagine three different uses for it, and make a slide to share with Charlie’s students. Literally *shopping for images*, Marsha’s students were alternative shoppers going against the grain of American consumer culture. Students hunted for things they could buy cheaply: a basket, a decorative tile, a door hinge, a lamp base, a windowpane, what one student termed *mysterious papers*. Wrenching these objects from their usual functions, Marsha’s students imagined new possibilities for putting them to use. A section of PVC pipe could be a blowgun. A table leg could roll dough, and a Rolodex file could hold burger patties. Thinking beyond candle holders, Hannah Hicks Brown saw a bottle as part of a bird

feeder or a camera filter (Figure 6). These Repurposing slides were and were not like Surrealist renderings of objects, which sought to free them from functionality. The students' repurposed objects were inventive, yet they remained grounded in everyday life. Even the strange set of paper circles covered with words and symbols could be repurposed: You could align their oval holes to make a camera obscura.

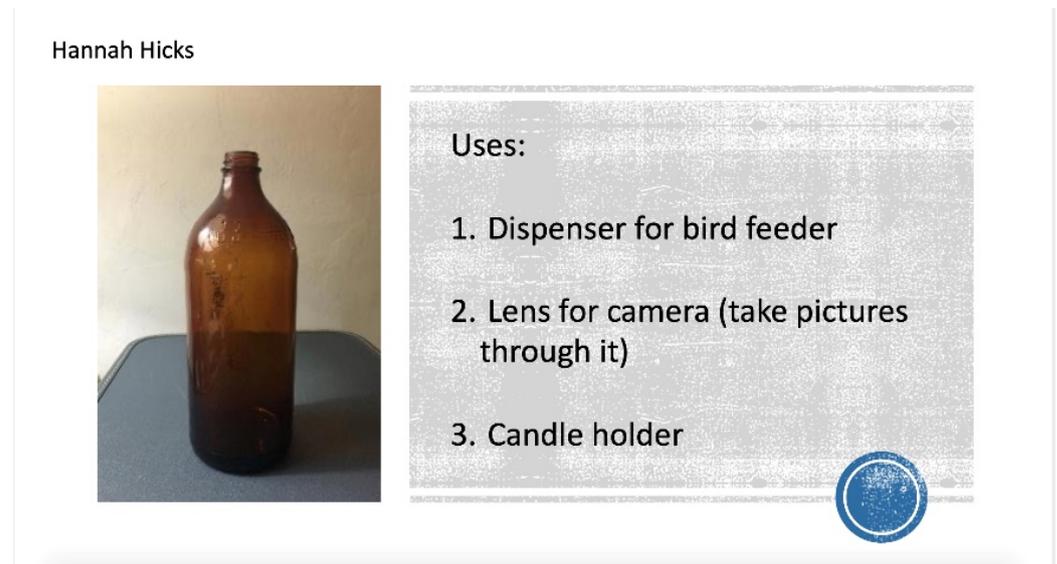


Figure 6. Repurposing Slide by Hannah Hicks [Brown \(2018\)](#).

In their tactical shopping, Marsha's students were resourceful like de Certeau's household provisioner who "confronts heterogeneous and mobile data" and considers "possible combinations with what she already has on hand" ([de Certeau 1984](#), p. xix). Through these maneuvers, shoppers become "poets of their own acts." They occupy everyday spaces like a poet who "boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike the hearer," as de Certeau puts it ([de Certeau 1984](#), pp. xiii, 37–38). His words could double as commentary on Stevens's poems about imagination and reality. In "Thirteen Ways," for instance, traditional poets make unaccustomed sounds when they see blackbirds "flying in a green light" ([Stevens 1990](#), p. 21).

2.6. Sorting/Re-Sorting

Denizen of detritus, Stevens's poet figure in "The Man on the Dump" is sorting things out. He sifts through the pile of discarded items that surround him: the literal trash and the trashy language of worn-out poems. He re-sorts the word hoard inherited from his predecessors. Perched atop a dump that "is full / Of images," he is poised between sunset and moonrise, clarity and fuzziness. The man on the dump wants to make something with the starkness of a modernist poem—like "the janitor's poems / of every day" ([Stevens 1990](#), p. 163) Yet he also finds a sumptuousness in modernism's junkyard aesthetic:

... the wrapper on the can of pears,
The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea. ([Stevens 1990](#), p. 163)

Stevens cannot shake off his own hangover from the Romantic poetry he studied in school. He cannot let go of moonlight and roses—even if the *floweriest flowers* are now scrapped *bouquets* wrapped in old newspapers. The man on the dump sees the setting sun as an architectural ornament, *a corbeil of flowers*.

Stevens recalibrates at the turning point, adopting Gertrude Stein's modernist mantra that *a rose is a rose is a rose*. The poem now declares: "the moon comes up as the moon /

(All its images are in the dump).” Yet however long the man sits “among mattresses of the dead, / Bottles, pots, shoes and grass,” Stevens cannot discard language’s tendency toward embellishment (Stevens 1990, p. 164). Stevens will still *tuft the commonplace* as he did in his earlier poem “Architecture.”

Modernist poetry was a salvage operation. Eliot sorts through “a heap of broken images” in *The Waste Land* (Eliot 1998, p. 33). The old couple in Brooks’s poem “The Bean Eaters” huddles in their rented room, a space “full of beads and receipts and dolls and cloths, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes” (Brooks 1999, p. 72). In the back of a hospital, physician-poet William Carlos Williams observes pieces of green glass shining amidst the cinders (“Between Walls”). These poems sort and revalue their hoarded or discarded objects.

Small things are the hardest to sort: Repurpose has an area called the ‘candy store’, where a lot of the smallest items are displayed, including school and crafting supplies. Sorting involves not only kind but also degree. Related to the latter: Goff notes how value at Repurpose really is ‘in the eye of the beholder.’ Value is also a question of proximity: \$200 items next to 50-cent items; Goff noted that some customers get offended by that range of valuation.

During the design/build process, students evaluated building components. In one case, they sorted and re-sorted metal shelves according to their patina—from those with cool grey paint to those coated in warm tones of reddening corrosion. In another, bolts of fabric were pulled across the roof frame to study different qualities of light and weather resistance. Students touched, stretched, pushed, and wrapped the material. How might thickness and texture coincide? Can something diaphanous shed water? Or does it collect moisture dressed in *dew*? Does its surface shine in the sun? Does it billow with the wind? Or peel away because, as Stevens’s figure on the dump knows, “Everything is shed.” Here, sorting also included questions of quantity and dimension: how much of one kind was available? Is it wide enough to span the roof joists? Will grommets hold along its fringe? However, even with such seemingly practical matters, the dump remained *full of images* to be sorted and re-sorted with a growing sense of what materials (and their sensual qualities) can do.

2.7. Repurposing

Gertrude Stein was modern poetry’s radical repurposer. In *Tender Buttons*, her inventive renderings of household rituals and objects, parts of speech assume materiality and become rearrangeable, like moveable type. “I took individual words and thought about them until I got their weight and volume complete and put them next to another word,” Stein explained in an interview (Stein 1971, p. 18). Consider how she literally thinks outside the box in this prose poem:

A BOX.

A large box is handily made of what is necessary to replace any substance. Suppose an example is necessary, the plainer it is made the more reason there is for some outward recognition that there is a result.

A box is made sometimes and then to see to see to it neatly and to have the holes stopped up makes it necessary to use paper.

A custom which is necessary when a box is used and taken is that a large part of the time there are three which have different connections. The one is on the table. The two are on the table. The three are on the table . . . (Stein 1997, p. 6)

Stationary on the table, Stein’s household box holds stationery—*paper* for writing about the house. Like much of *Tender Buttons*, this text box fuses object and observation, thingness and thinking. Stein considers her process of making *Tender Buttons* in her lecture “Poetry and Grammar”: “I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to get around them but to meet them, to handle in short to refuse them by using them” (Stein 1935, p. 228).

Stein *refuses* her words, rejecting conventional syntax as she rejoins them differently. A box is never just a box.

Some of Marsha's students generated Close Reading papers from household objects. They considered how a modernist poem repurposes a thing, image, aesthetic, or belief. Among their findings:

- Stevens repurposes an ordinary glass of water to manifest metaphysics;
- Brooks repurposes a comb to symbolize a woman's passionate life ("Sadie and Maud");
- Stein turns household books from tepid canon makers to intrepid canon breakers ("Book," *Tender*).

Modernist poets also repurposed the literature they inherited, making do with available materials to make new kinds of poetry. In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," Stevens reworked the British bird poems that were syllabus staples in school: from John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" to Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush." Marsha's students tapped their Repurposing slides to rethink a standard assignment: the *explication de texte*.

On one of their many walkabouts gathering materials to mock up their ideas, Charlie's students discovered a cache of metal vents and ductwork originally used for heating, cooling, general venting, and flashing. Designers—and certainly architecture students—typically see such components as means to an end, as mundane systems necessary for a building to function, but not necessarily something to celebrate or to consider as design material. Among the patinaed piles of metal, students found a stack of what's technically specified as "Type B vent flashing for gas appliances." Some would have vented furnaces, while other smaller vents served gas stoves or hot water heaters. The truncated cones of sheet metal set into square bases reminded some students of light cannons deployed to illuminate interiors as in Le Corbusier's chapel at the La Tourette monastery, and they found that their size fit the domestic space of the trailer as well as the standard framing for the walls with studs at the conventional 16 inches on center. On the maker-space's opening day, we saw a child peering through one of these roof vent components. The second row of vents lined up exactly with his head, as if he were looking through a rose window or port hole or a periscope. The design/build class had struggled to find a solution for the edges of the flashing: the 28-gauge galvanized metal is thin and sharp, and the circle resisted most other materials. After a series of tests, we found that electrical wiring insulation, split and removed from copper wire, could match the curve. One more radical repurposing. The array of circular apertures still moved air (as they were intended), but in this context, they also worked to send light into the trailer in a playful rethinking of their original function.

Going back through the students' final documentation after the semester, Charlie laughed out loud with this image where Zeff Bona sits under the "disco door dappled light," collaged as if he is holding up one of the metal vents to mirror the resident junkyard dog Blue's travel-pillow-as-collar (Figure 7). Another term for the vent is "collar" flashing, and Blue's itchy skin had flared up in the Spring heatwave, so the collar served as a stand-in for the traditional "cone." Repurposing on repurposing alongside repurposing.



Our chiefest dome a demoiselle of gold.
 Pierce the interior with pouring shafts,
 In diverse chambers.
 Pierce, too, with buttresses of coral air
 And purple timbers,
 Various argentines,
 Embossings of the sky.

Wallace Stevens, “Architecture”

Figure 7. Vent Flashing and Donut Collar and Stevens (Photographs by Samantha Janolo), 2018.

2.8. Collaging

Collages are generative rather than descriptive; they are further exercises in making. Charlie’s design/build students shared and borrowed images to make collages that looked back at what they had made; they also speculated about alternative compositions and new ways of building (Figure 8).

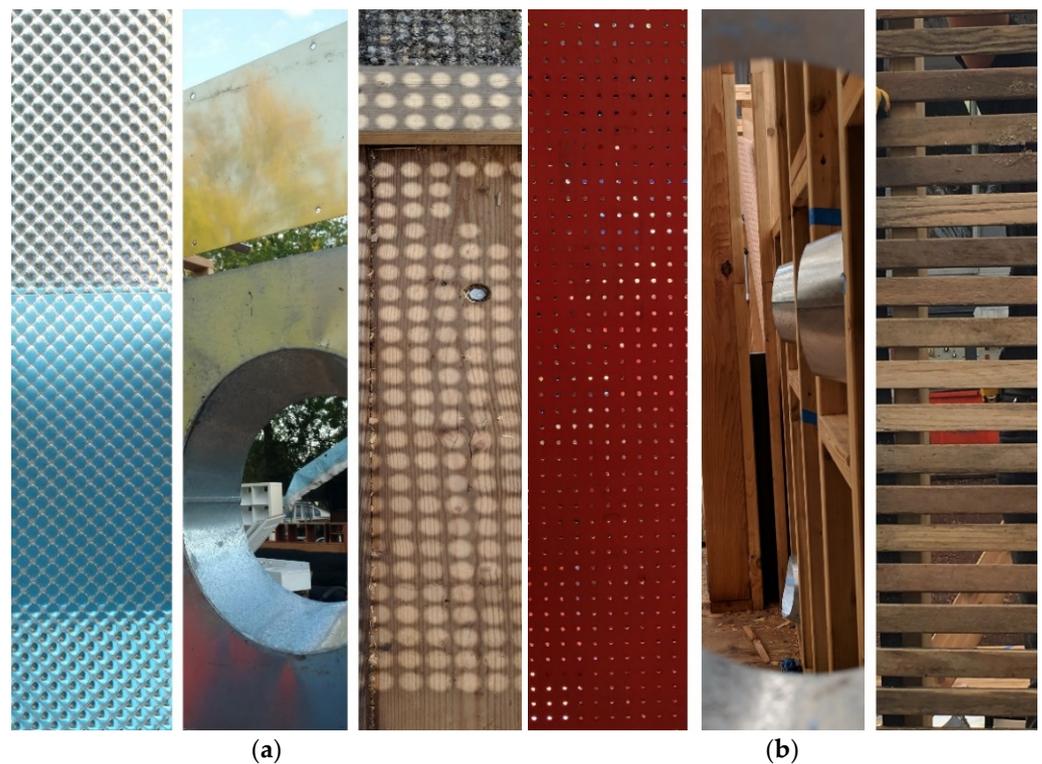


Figure 8. (a) Collage 1: Stained Glass (Ana McIntosh), Masked Reflections (Ana McIntosh) and Projected Sky Roberto Moreno (2018); (b) Collage 2: Screen (Roberto Moreno), Portals (Roberto Moreno), Horizontal View (Samantha Janolo), in [McIntosh and Ryzhikova \(2018\)](#).

“What manner of building shall we build?” Taken literally and structurally, this translates to a question about building a manner of building. Building a way rather than final thing. Of course, its etymology holds the ‘hand’. Manner is a near homophone of ‘manor.’

For Ryzhikova, the collage demonstrates the “interaction between the children and the puppeteer” in the maker-space trailer (Figure 9). It is the culmination of a series of analyses of puppeteer movements, interactions with the audience, and connections to light and air.



Figure 9. Performance Collage by Lisa Ryzhikova ([McIntosh and Ryzhikova 2018](#)).

The “puppeteer’s arm movements” come into contact with “quiet moonlight.” Their composition indicates that poetry lives in architecture and architecture resides in the poem. Writing these books, through poetry and architecture, is not just a renewed act of building; it is also a way to re-inhabit the project.

Collage “intervenes in a world, not to reflect but to change reality.”

—Gregory L. Ulmer (Ulmer 1983, p. 86)

Several poems that Marsha’s students read employed collage tactics. In her Repurposing Slide, Lauren Loveless recounts how a mirrored glass windowpane made her recall the window and *indecipherable cause* in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (Figure 10). Her triptych collage fuses recollected poem and found object.



Figure 10. Repurposing Slide by Lauren Loveless (2018).

In his book *Thirteen Ways*, architectural historian Robert Harbison calls Stevens’s poem “a beautiful example of shattered or oblique structure which approaches its central truth, how sense objects inhabit the world, glancingly in a series of separate forays” (Harbison 1997, p. viii).

2.9. Mocking Up

Is Stevens’s poem “Architecture” a mock-up? What happens when mock-up serves as final outcome? When is an architecture project, or a poem, finished? Is design/build pedagogy a kind of ‘building the unfinished’?

Charlie’s students found these questions in Stevens’s own interrogatory verse. In the opening line asking what manner to build, and then: “In this house, what manner of utterance shall there be?”

Mock-ups are tools of visualization. Building a test case at full scale makes it possible to see problems, pitfalls, and possibilities.

Mock-ups provide feedback. They tell us things that we may not have previously seen or understood.

In this final semester of Architecture’s undergraduate program, students draw on what they have learned over the past four years. Here, poetry hinges with architecture, and storytelling meets making. At The Repurpose Project in particular, the profusion of readily available materials allows for rich samplings of architectural textures and languages. Finding, combining, and playing with these materials yielded constructions (sometimes called “mock-ups”) akin to what Marco Frascari calls the “tell-the-tale detail.” Each joint, each detail has the potential to tell the story of the whole project. For Frascari, to *construct* is also to *construe* (Frascari 1983).

In Stevens’s “Architecture,” *chastel* connotes castle and fortress—the embellished fineries of chateau and the workaday practicalities of castellum.

The students named the project Trash Castle. The name derives from conversations with the Trash Princess, a Repurpose staff member named Sky, who dressed up in recycled materials—in the spirit of Ariel’s sequined scales and Belle’s pleated gowns—to tell stories to children about circular economies and embodied energy (A Princess on the Dump). This name also juxtaposes waste with fortification. Thus, the trash castle resonates with Italo Calvino’s “castle of crossed destinies” in the many lives and voices and materials it entwined and the many narrative turns it took, all with tarot-like chance inspired by seemingly random objects and juxtapositions.

Marsha finds that English majors typically spend less time thinking about how (and how often) they mock up their projects—unless they are in a composition course, a creative writing workshop, or film production course. In upper-division literature surveys, students do not expect their instructors to talk about the writing process for their analytical papers, and they do not share mock-ups of their papers with the class. Full-scale drafts are private affairs (if the students still write rough drafts). When Marsha consults with her individual students about their papers, she requires them to bring a list, a paragraph, or a diagram. She invites them to try modular modes of drafting, composing papers out of sequence like filmmakers shoot films. The proposed order will likely change by the time the final assemblage manifests.

What if literature students displayed their brainstorming and draft material in a gallery like Architecture students do?

Twining with Charlie’s class through the Repurpose Project invited Marsha’s students to revisit and reimagine their own modes of making. Talking about our Repurposing slides could further their thinking about creative reuse. Watching Charlie’s students build their maker-space trailer could prompt ideas about maker-spaces in city poems. These are writerly ways of reflective building.

2.10. Hinging

One of the most difficult details Charlie’s students faced was the hinge for the roof. They had to account for the butterfly roof’s swing above and below the pivot. They mocked it up numerous times. They laughed at it. Finally, they learned to think of the butterfly’s hinge not just as a physical thing (a joint made of component parts) but as an implied space. Ultimately, the students made it work by separating gutter from roof (Figures 11 and 12).

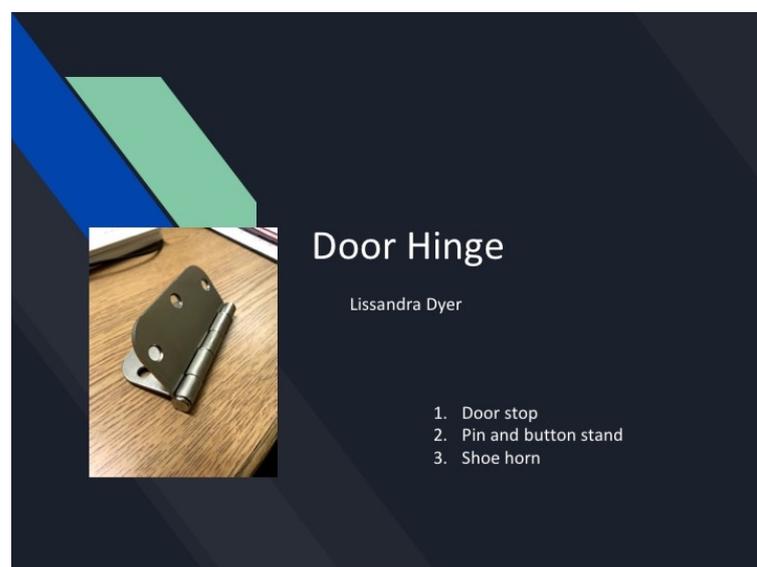


Figure 11. Repurposing Slide by Lissandra Hadron Dyer (2018).



Figure 12. The Butterfly Roof and Hinge, 2018.

2.11. Disassembling

Learning to build by tearing something down. In building construction disciplines, it is called 'deconstruction.'

The chassis for the project originally bore a Scotty travel trailer. Researching the trailer's history, Charlie realized that the trailer's age and model did not match the dual axle chassis. Someone had already repurposed what the class was repurposing.

The scrap metal from the deconstruction was recycled, but Charlie held onto a cutout of the trailer company's logo, a silhouette of a Scottish terrier. For a year after the studio, the fragment of sheet metal rode in the back of his pickup truck.

He had misremembered the logo as another animal, the blue jay of Jayco trailers. In their vintage permutations, both are simple black figures stenciled across corrugated metal on the trailer's nose. Each has its own gestalt. Each reminds him of Blue, the beloved junkyard dog who drifted around Repurpose (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Emblematic Triptych, 2018.

Perhaps this lapse of memory is also forgivable because both Scotty and Jayco have similar origins in burgeoning postwar production and comparable missions to provide economical mobilization and leisure time for an increasingly mobile middle class. Their company histories read like foundations myths.

Lloyd J. Bontrager started Jayco—its name inspired by his middle initial—out of two chicken houses and a barn. John Serro built Scotty prototypes in his two-car garage and barn in Pennsylvania after he retired early from his car dealership business.

Disassembling was a figurative process in Marsha's class: breaking a poem into components to discover *what* and *how* it means. This was a collaborative, back-and-forth process

in discussions. For their individual Close Reading papers, students enacted a double disassembly. First, they considered the poem's formal elements (imagery, diction sound devices, allusions, symbols), mentally taking the poem apart and putting it back together. Second, they considered the architecture of argumentative essays (introduction, thesis, body paragraphs, conclusion), determining how to fit their close reading to this form. *Never cease to deploy the structure*. Marsha offered tips for preemptive troubleshooting: organizing body paragraphs by individual formal elements would blur claims, discussing every formal element would blur focus. One strategy she offered for making conclusions was *opening a window*.

2.12. Transposing

Architecture students McIntosh and Ryzhikova considered how one design response might serve multiple functions: "The trailer opens up from the top, reaching towards the sky, and letting in light. This highlights the puppet stage and provides an opening for the puppeteer's 'sky puppets.' The form also allows for cross-ventilation." They cited Stevens: "Let us build the building of light. / Put up the towers / To the cock-tops" to mark how poetic qualities (skywardness, verticality, and lightened performance) reposition a practical solution (ventilation). Stevens's lines about "... the window sill / On which the quiet moonlight lies" recast the puppet stage's opening as a portal to another world (Stevens 1923, p. 122). They also write how "[t]he puppet stage creates an imaginary space that acts as a 'window' to a world of creativity and learning ..."—a window that exchanges actual and imagined worlds (McIntosh and Ryzhikova 2018).

To transpose design/build strategies to literary analysis, Marsha's students did a Maker-Space Poetry Project (MSPP). English majors usually make final papers by either positioning their thesis within a critical conversation or by applying a theoretical concept to their texts. The MSPP invited students to build their own conceptual framework by repurposing our course materials. Some students initially resisted this assignment, which seemed like an escape room with dubious tools. During our class check-ins, students shared how the MSPP changed their writing process: (1) they spent less time hunting for secondary sources; (2) they spent more time planning the paper; (3) they opened spaces for originality.

Assessing how a poet creates a maker-space in the city and determining its sustainability, students considered these questions:

- What *constraints* does the city put on this maker-space?
- What key *materials* does the poet use?
- Does the poem *repurpose* any materials?

Students used these materials:

- One long city poem (*The Waste Land*, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, *Howl*, *Paterson*) or Brooks's Chicago poems;
- For considering imaginative dimensions of urban spaces, 1–2 quotations from Calvino's *Invisible Cities*;
- For considering design, 1–2 insights from Kahn or Bachelard;
- For assessing creative process, 1–2 quotations from poems by Stevens, Stein or Williams.

In transferring syllabus materials from one context to another, Marsha's students transposed poems and design essays into literary criticism. Poets can occupy spaces like a building; for example, Ginsberg's presence in *Howl* struck one student as a shelter, another as a watchtower. The rooms in Stein's *Tender Buttons* can offer queer commentary on Langston Hughes's nightclub in Harlem. The fluid states between past and future in Stevens's "The Glass of Water" can illuminate the Passaic River in Williams's *Paterson*.

Bachelard's claim that "home has become mere horizontality" (Bachelard 1969, p. 27) in crowded Paris connects with kitchenette confinements in Brooks's redlined Chicago. Building on Calvino's imagined cities, Loveless declared that "Maker-Spaces are only conceivable when there is literal and figurative space to create the non-existent."

2.13. Inhabiting

If reading a poem is like entering a building, trying on a poet's *style* is an extended cohabitation. You learn your roommate's habits and quirks. Unlike karaoke performers, parodists get to change the lyrics. In parody pedagogy, the poem is not a thing to study, but an invitation to make. Marsha's students wrote parodies for their final assignment.

English majors can be wary of creative assignments, so Marsha offers tactics for making parodies:

- **Reverse the situation.** What if Brooks wrote about a luxury condo instead of a kitchenette apartment, or Ginsberg wrote about suburbia?
- **Change the speaker.** How would Hughes's trumpet player respond to his audience? What might the blackbird say to Stevens?
- **Switch poets.** What if Stein walked through Frost's woods, or Eliot wrote the Food section of *Tender Buttons*?
- **Update or localize the context.** How would Eliot portray a popular mythic figure like Elvis or a Disney princess? What if Williams taught at our Medical School?

Marsha's students made a provocative array of parodies, adapting course tactics and creating their own. Stevens's "The Snow Man" became "The Swamp Man" with a muggy mind for plenitude. Binge eating pervaded "The Waist Land." Frost became acquainted with our campus plaza. Students in dorms crammed for finals under Brooks's observant eye; they endured Mental Moloch in the science library. Stein wrote a student's grocery list, and Stein herself gained a Weird Twitter account. Students performed their parodies on the last day of class, opening spaces for us to inhabit as a community of readers and makers.

When Marsha writes about how parodies 'open spaces,' Charlie thinks of how moving from one medium to another (such as from building to writing) creates new perspectives for inhabiting—and reinhabiting—a project (Figure 14). At the end of the semester, design/build students worked in pairs to compose a booklet based on Cohen's template. Essentially an 'artist's book,' the structure includes four parts: The Title is an opportunity for students to capture succinctly a theme of the work, the Participants section acknowledges the role of collaboration in creating the design/build project (and now the artist's book), Reflections opens a narrative space for students to tell visual and textual stories that look back and speculate forward, and the Bibliography lists references but also serves as a reader's guide to the project. The book's brevity and structural clarity serve as a foundation for students to re-build their project with writing, prompted by images from the project's intensive process.

The book is dialogic. Working in pairs spurs conversation between students, just as image and text speak to each other. Fragments of poems serve as images that communicate with photographs of the project, both in its completed form and its process of construction. In one book, Stevens's "Architecture" links process to atmosphere: The "ruddy palace" stanza drifts across a reddening reflection on the trailer's wall, and "hew the sun" speaks to a collage where chisels carve pine and a vermilion mallet dances in sunlight. In another book, a two-page spread links speech with light when dappled light appears as an act of communication not unlike students' conversations about how materials speak. Such dialogues also challenge architecture's conventional modes of representation and perception: A page in another book juxtaposes a collage of the skyward view from inside the trailer with an oblique view of a circular vent that projects a vanishing point deep into space. With excerpts from Stevens hovering below, this pairing of collages demonstrates how layers of material filter multiple viewpoints through "coral air" in concert with the circular apertures' singular views and their "pouring shafts."

Documentation is an important part of studio classes in general and design/build projects in particular. Students record the work for their own portfolios, and the institution relies on such documents for its archives and for professional accreditation. Time is short at the end of the semester, and documentation often becomes an expedient, one that ends up as uncritical and encyclopedic, without room (spatial or temporal) for reflection. One

goal for making the artist's books was to provide another space for reflective building, or we might say: reflective re-building. In a section of their artist book titled "Programmatic Apertures," McIntosh and Ryzhikova discover how Stevens's lines of poetry open portals in the generous white space of the page just as the authors' own insights, deployed as short, epigraphic sentence clusters provide new invitations to design and build. They find value in the "memory of construction" and how "each individual carries the memories of a project with them" (McIntosh and Ryzhikova 2018). Memory, too, resides in the joint—that fluttering butterfly hinge—between architecture and poetry.



Figure 14. The Maker-Space Trailer at The Repurpose Project, 2018.

3. Coda

- Practicing a resilient and resourceful pedagogy requires stepping outside our home disciplines, venturing across the campus and community.
- In the spirit of Stein's *Tender Buttons* project, shared pedagogies of modernist poetics and design thinking afford a place for students to think outside the box as they are re-constructing the box itself, whether that re-making is writing, building, or both.
- Like Wallace Stevens's idea of a *supreme fiction*, teaching poetry as architecture is one part theoretical (*it must be abstract*) and two parts phenomenal (*it must change; it must give pleasure*).
- Our teaching tactics tap the renewable energy of *repurposing* physical materials from one incarnation to another, course materials from one context to another, student work from one project to another.
- When students learn to repurpose words and building components, materiality becomes a form of exchange, loaded with wondrous associations and serious implications. Teaching poetry as architecture opens ways to sustain a changing world.

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