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Notes on Terence Gower's *Bicycle Pavilion*

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The word pavilion (*pavillon*) has several meanings in the French language. I was raised near Paris in a *pavillon*, which is the French term for a detached suburban house. Later I read Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*, translated as *Le pavillon des cancéreux* in French; in this case *pavillon* denotes a hospital section. Many years later I discovered the meaning of what Terence Gower refers to as a *pavillon* through an encounter with the work of Dan Graham.

Architecture is a social art, an art of creating spaces to be shared. It is the art of designing shelters and refuges to protect us from the weather, from the ravages of outdoor life. The pavilion, as defined in this book, is a quest for harmony, for formal balance, for the harmony of lines and volumes. It is an architectural gesture with no function other than to give pleasure. Another useless entity? I'm not so sure.

In memory of the "cultural producer" he once was, Terence Gower responded to the invitation of Patricia Martín to create an artistic interface between man and machine. He created a minimalist work, both monumental and functional. A monument is a memory aid. Its function is to remember, in order to remind us. The monument erected by Gower is a resting place for an invention that is also a small wonder. In 1817 Karl Drais invented a contraption many consider as an ancestor of the modern bicycle and called it , not unmodestly, the Dracienne. It was an extremely simple device – a front wheel and metal plate hooked to an iron "S" – that became an open invitation to the *flaneur*.

The *Bicycle Pavilion* is a social structure, one designed for a shared enjoyment of space. It is designed to promote wellbeing and happiness in its visitors. But the word "social" more often evokes the struggle to improve one's standard of living, as in "social housing" (it also evokes the loss of a certain state of grace, as when we trade the bicycle for the automobile.) Perhaps the lower level of this pavilion represents the "social" (the worker) and the upper level represents "society" (the art world). Luckily, the *draisienne's* metal plate has rematerialized as the treads of a spiral staircase inviting visitors to transgress the boundary between the two spaces.

If one puts aside the function of bicycle storage, there is very little to distinguish the *Bicycle Pavilion* designed by Terence Gower in 2002 from the *German Pavilion* at Barcelona, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1929. Gower's aesthetic could be read as an homage to the illustrious architect, or as a reinterpretation of Dan Graham's *Triangular Solid with Circular Inserts* of 1989. These three structures offer a permanent space—even if these types of buildings are designed to be ephemeral—to those nomads lacking a space of their own.

Is there a more incongruous non-place than a bicycle shed placed on the border between a parking lot and a giant fruit-juice distribution complex?

The *Bicycle Pavilion* is situated in the town of Ecatepec, a place halfway between Teotihuacan and the centre of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, now known as Mexico City. One climbs a helicoidal stairway to a suspended corridor, translucent on both sides, white outside, red inside. A long metal parallelepiped supports a rampart walk with views either into the distance or reflected back by a red monochrome, part vermilion, part carmine. This assemblage of vinyl-lined glass sheets grids the surrounding landscape and imposes a coloured geometry over the trailers entering the factory distribution centre to load and unload their cargo. The attentive visitor might notice that the pavilion mirrors the shape of these trailers, but floats just a little higher – it is a kind of *Trailer in Levitation*, as Paul Thek might say.

On a cold, miraculously-clear winter morning, some time before 8:30 and under a sky of racing clouds, one can stroll the pavilion's corridor, playing hide-and-seek with Mexico City's two volcanoes, Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, off in the distance, tall and white.

Warning: it would not be advisable to wander through the open spaces of the Bicycle pavilion on rainy days. And who knows what a moment of contemplation spent on the pavilion might do for passionate spirits?