FrameWork 4/13

Lee Henderson on Ian Carr-Harris

From Sea and Sky:
A True Diary Covering the Period of March 21st to April 5th, 2013, Containing Several Fictions.

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March 21, 2013
Three books, three tables, three ships, three oceans.
A variable edition or a tripartite object with variation built into its singular makeup.
Three epochs of exploration are invoked by galleon, corsair, and steamer (Forgive me for getting the types of ship horribly wrong, as I suspect I have; a gap in my boyhood education, owing to a prairie context. But I can tell you about various cloud formations or grasshopper, should you be so interested).

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March 22, 2013
What is a model?
A model is a replica or representation of a thing or a process.
If someone points a finger at a window, you look at the window. You know the finger still exists, but you follow its path anyway. It could be a particularly beautiful finger, perhaps the finger of your beloved, even, but you follow its pointing because you following the learned code that tells you that the index finger must be an index to something outside itself.

A model is this kind of index, but rather than operating spatially, it operates through resemblance or depiction. It often has enough resemblance, in fact, that when we observe such a model we say, "here is an aircraft carrier", rather than the more precise, "here is a model of an aircraft carrier." That is, we assume the indexical nature of the model to be made evident by its difference from its original (it is smaller, made of other materials, etc.), but its similarity to the original is what makes it useful.

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March 23, 2013

The book is also a form of index. Whether fiction or non-fiction (whatever that distinction means), the book points to a set of ideas or perspectives. And the quality of this pointing is dependent on the quality of the index.

Memorization seems to have a bad reputation, seen as the chief tactic of only the most outdated and draconian systems of education. And yet, I recall hearing once that under fascist regimes and in times of political upheaval, memory was all that could be relied upon. "If you memorize a poem," I think it went, "they can never take it from you. It's yours. And you can distribute it for free."

Our ability to memorize is therefore the seed that ultimately ensures the possibility of democracy. Memorization is the antidote to book-burning.

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March 25, 2013

A poem I remember, even as I forget the author:

I really hate this damn machine
I wish that they would sell it.
It never does quite what I want
But only what I tell it.

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March 26, 2013

In staring down at the text of John Masefield's poem Cargoes, reproduced in a book (or a model of a book), I notice the annotation that takes up half of one page. It contains:

A citation of the poem's source

A short biography of the poet, touching upon his mid-life, his old-age, and his posthumous reputation

Six namings of years to ground something in an historical timeline (1944, 1902, 1878, 1967, 1930, 1967)

The exposure of two historical errors contained in the poem

God, as it were, is in the footnotes. What the poem performs in its repeated invocation of various points in seafaring history, the annotation to its side does by referring coolly to biographical and historic information. The rhetoric is different, but the friction of temporal juxtaposition remains. It

points us towards a reconsideration of the poetic in light of the historical (after the reconsideration, by Masefield, of the historic via the poetic).

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March 27, 2013

In school once, as a child, I noticed how readily the construction paper sheets were transformed into convincing waves when cut into curves and slid back and forth against each other—a believable and thoroughly enjoyable lie that could make a landlocked prairie boy feel adrift at sea. I can't see such constructed waves without thinking about that primary experience, suggesting that maybe one can't ever jump into the same river twice.

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March 29, 2013

What is a kit?

A kit is a model you build, according to instructions that can be implicit or explicit. Culture is carried in these instructions (the technical manual is a literary genre all its own).

With a kit, you feel that you've done something, completed a task, made an object yourself, created… but you've also executed something, been the functionary of a mechanism, performed a program, run an algorithm. You've made the code of the kit manifest but the code predates you. The kit—as manufactured fragments designed for compilation or assembly—possesses the potential of the model. But just as the model-that-points (as index) to its originary parent of The Original, so does the kit-that-waits (as index) point to both its originary grandparent of The Original, and its eventual reiteration as The Assembled Model.

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March 31, 2013

ITERATION: An obvious cornerstone of design and architecture; a secret cornerstone of art. Iteration, as a noun, can mean both a step in that process of development and change, or it can mean the process itself. This is confusing, but offers rich ontological territory.

Susan Hobbs Gallery

The role of iteration in working towards an objective is difficult to comprehend unless one has access to the iterative process itself (and could only have been more difficult to understand before Darwin, I must imagine). But perhaps the problem lies in defining an "objective" point in time at all, rather than seeing iteration itself as the objective; a process-based object is a suspicious one... perhaps we should instead think of process-based processes.

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April 1, 2013

AN INTERJECTION:

I am watching my son play with some ants (he is six). He coaxes a few of them onto a leaf, and places it in the stream that runs next to the curb and towards the storm drain. The loaded leaf floats away; he plucks another, returns to his laboratory, and loads it with slightly more ants than before. Again he places it into the stream, and again it floats away. I gather this will continue until a leaf sinks under the weight, or until he runs out of ants.

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April 3, 2013

Iteration can exist in time or in space... usually in both. We might imagine a structure of utility—a barn, for instance—that gets slowly dismantled. At each step of this taking-apart, an onlooker would be presented with a new manifestation of the barn's program, albeit in the reverse order from the process that led to the barn's construction—these are iterations in time.

Amid this process, the onlooker might wonder at what point the barn ceases to be a barn—is it when three beams are removed? Or five? Or when the first wall comes down? Does the structure remain "a barn" until the last scrap is removed from the ground, or did it cease to perform barn-ness the moment it fell out of use?

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April 4, 2013

Now imagine a new structure emerging where the barn once stood, or very nearby. Such a structure would have to go through its own processes of iteration, even if built according to the basic program of the original barn. It would be designed, planned for; each alteration to the design being its own version of the structure. We might picture texts or drawings on tables or on a wall, plans for a thing that is on its way but has already happened. Then it would find another, more three-dimensional manifestation, perhaps first as a maquette (a special kind of model that points to both its origin and its eventual construction), perhaps even several maquettes—these are iterations in space.

And finally, imagine that the new structure is lived in, is occupied—it is now both house and home. Even if its construction is finished (a dubious suggestion at best), each new use of its interiors, each new modification to its exteriors, each new social engagement for which it provides the context offers, too, an iteration of the house. As a process in progress, it is philosophically clean, tidy... it does not assume some messy point of completion that will then need to be interrogated when further iteration proves unavoidable.

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April 5, 2013

I wonder often about the thing-ness of an art work. It seems to me that an installation, for instance, ceases to exist when it is packed away for shipping, only to spring back into existence when re-installed. Not so for the crated painting (Schrödinger's riddling aside), which is no longer "on view" but is not fundamentally changed by mere storage.

Perhaps all art works have three alternating (or simultaneous) versions of themselves... not their three Platono-mimetic possibilities, tempting and comforting an old model as that may be; nor, indeed, the Kosuthian variation of text/image/object chair(s). Rather, if art is a context and not a set of materials or methods of imaging, the three versions of the art work are defined contextually, too—the work as it exists inside the space of art, outside the space of art, and finally *as* the space of art. The artist's studio is already both the site of the work, and work itself.