UNUSUAL SUSPECTS:

BAD

OBJECTS

FILIP TEJCHMAN

Introducing: *Bad*

Bad is not bad. It is not good either—by any virtuous or ethical measure—because *bad* does not necessarily connote an ideology, or otherwise signify some pre-existing or *a priori* value.[1] What *bad* represents is a form of *"trained judgement"* that thrives at the convergence of tacit and explicit disciplinary knowledge.[2] In this sense, *bad* is situated between positive and negative epistemic modalities; under certain circumstances it provokes the establishment of some new reference and in other instances *bad* destabilizes existing cultures or systems of classification, altering both political and aesthetic subjectivities.[3] In this sense, *bad* belongs to a special class of reflective aesthetic judgements that precede, or emerge in response to the production of new knowledge, and which work to activate and mutate the numerous subjectivities that are responsible for conditioning and enforcing those sensibilities that we value. In contrast to determinative judgements such as good, cute, or cool, which represent specific idealized virtues, *bad* can be recognized by the absence or negation of previously defined qualities; it represents a transitive moment preceding the establishment of a sensibility, or specific frame of knowing. Behaving in a manner similar to *"interest,"* which the literary critic Sianne Ngai, defines as the synthesis of *"affect-based judgement and concept-based explanation,"* *bad* operates as both performance and pedagogy in assigning value to a thing that has yet to be conceptualized or that diverges from a recognized norm in unfamiliar ways; the value(s) of *bad* is subsequently contingent on its ability to wrest novelty from the familiar.[4] In other words, interest can cultivate the attention we direct toward something the same way that *bad* things provoke a confrontation with those ideas or standards that we most previously found satisfactory.

Lurking inside this confrontation with the previously satisfactory, or good, is a necessary sacrifice, the inevitable and occasionally unconscious decision to subsume or expel a disciplinary reference, habit, or principle.[5] This could be a particular area of knowledge, such as an encyclopedic familiarity with the classical orders, or mastery of a range of techniques like those associated with manual drafting. Architectural history is built on the sediment of things and ideas that were at some point satisfactory, but which were eventually transformed into various types of anachronisms. Consider the introduction of Hal Foster's, *The Return of the Real* (1996), whose critical examination of artistic practices associated with the post-war Avant-Garde began by asking, *"how do we tell the difference between a return to an archaic form of art that bolsters conservative tendencies in the present and a return to a lost model of art made to displace customary ways of working?"*[6] Indeed, how does a discipline—and its attendant institutions—negotiate between promoting

1 Terms used here such as determinative and reflective judgement, as well as purposiveness are in reference to: Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement* (1790 orig.) trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987)
2 Sianne Ngai. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) pp 110-173
3 Bruno Latour, "First Lecture: On the instability of the (notion of) nature" from, Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime (Cambridge, U.K: Polity Press, 2017), 8

4 Ngai. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)
5 Mario Gandelsonas. "From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language" in Oppositions Reader: Selected Essays 1973-1984 ed. K Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009) pp. 201-223
6 *Hal Foster. The Return of the Real: The Avante-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) p 1

ROCKS NO. 1-12

In *Rocks no. 1–12,* MICHAEL MEREDITH AND HILARY SAMPLE/ MOS ARCHITECTS distort the anticipated material effect of geology by sublimating it with something that was previously un-relatable: beanbags. Added to this is the flattening of sign and signifier, through which the utility of beanbag-as-furniture is displaced by beanbag-as-architectural-program. This reciprocal encoding of object and effect produces a loosening of architectural principles through the inability or insufficiency of disciplinary standards to describe or represent the *Rocks.*
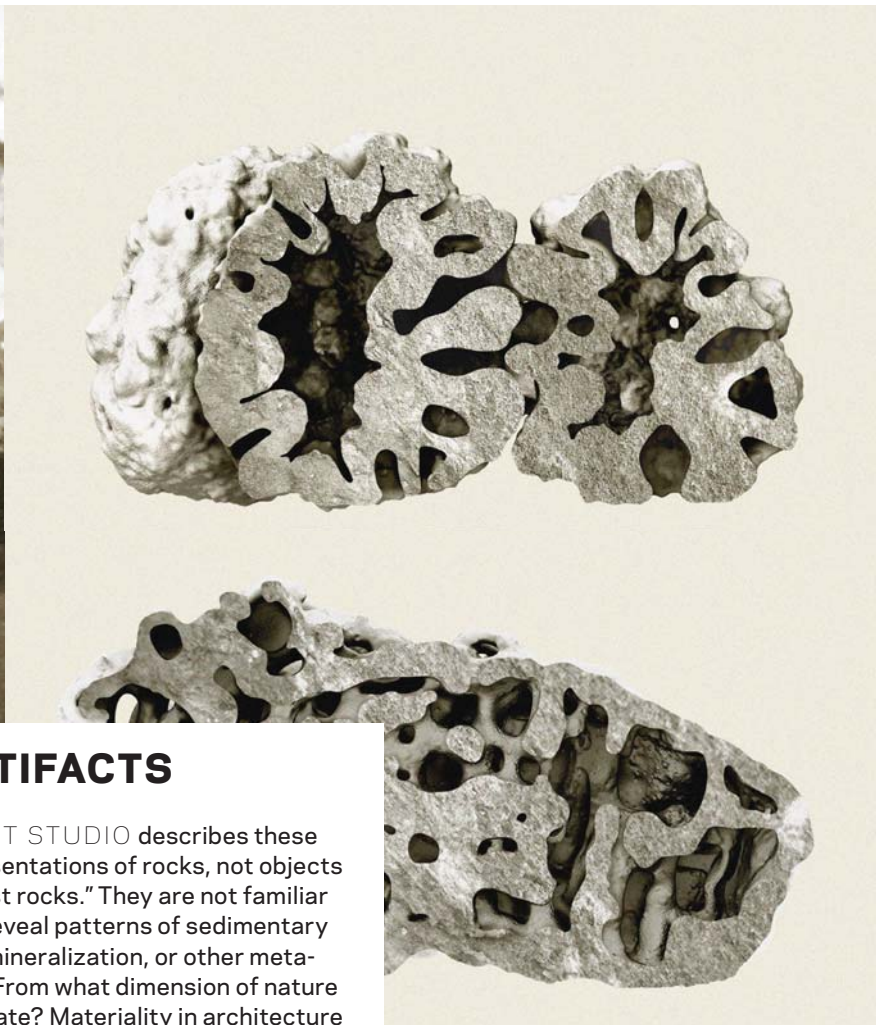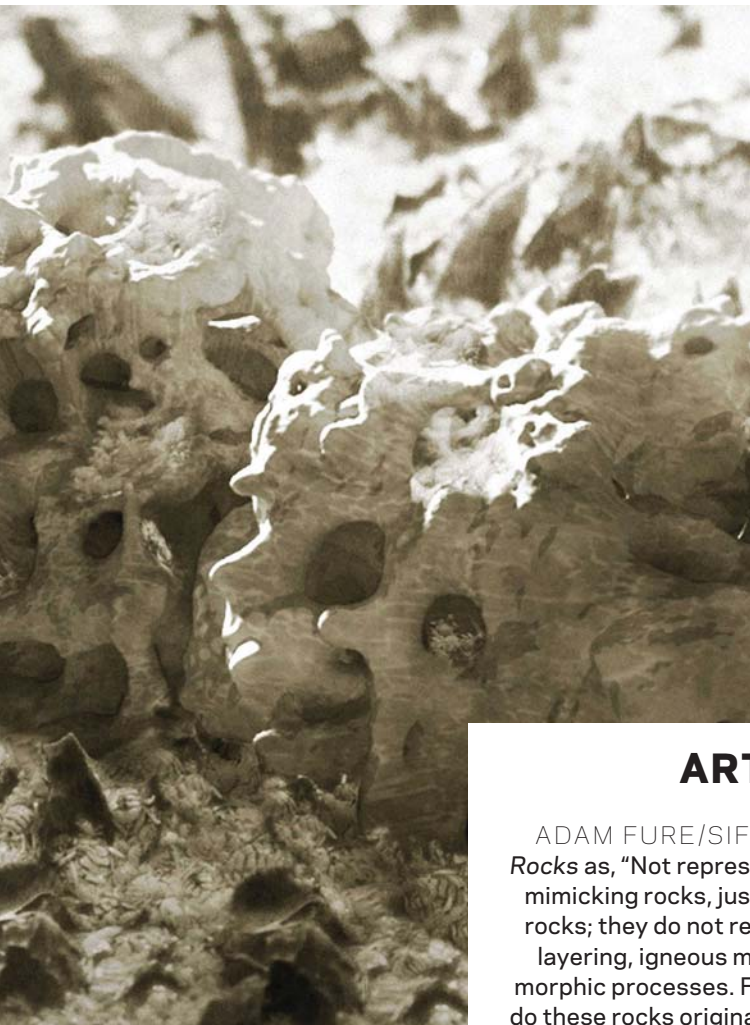
ARTIFACTS

ADAM FURE/SIFT STUDIO describes these *Rocks* as, "Not representations of rocks, not objects mimicking rocks, just rocks." They are not familiar rocks; they do not reveal patterns of sedimentary layering, igneous mineralization, or other meta-morphic processes. From what dimension of nature do these rocks originate? Materiality in architecture is often limited to outwardly detectable, discretized qualities such as mass, weight, displacement, or a range of surface aesthetics. The partitioning of the sensible, as described by Bruno Latour, is indicative of a discipline-specific bias; for example, a geologist sees the materiality of a rock as one set of finite determinations, while a sculpture perceives a differ-ent constellation of qualities. In that sense, these are architectural objects, classified as rocks.
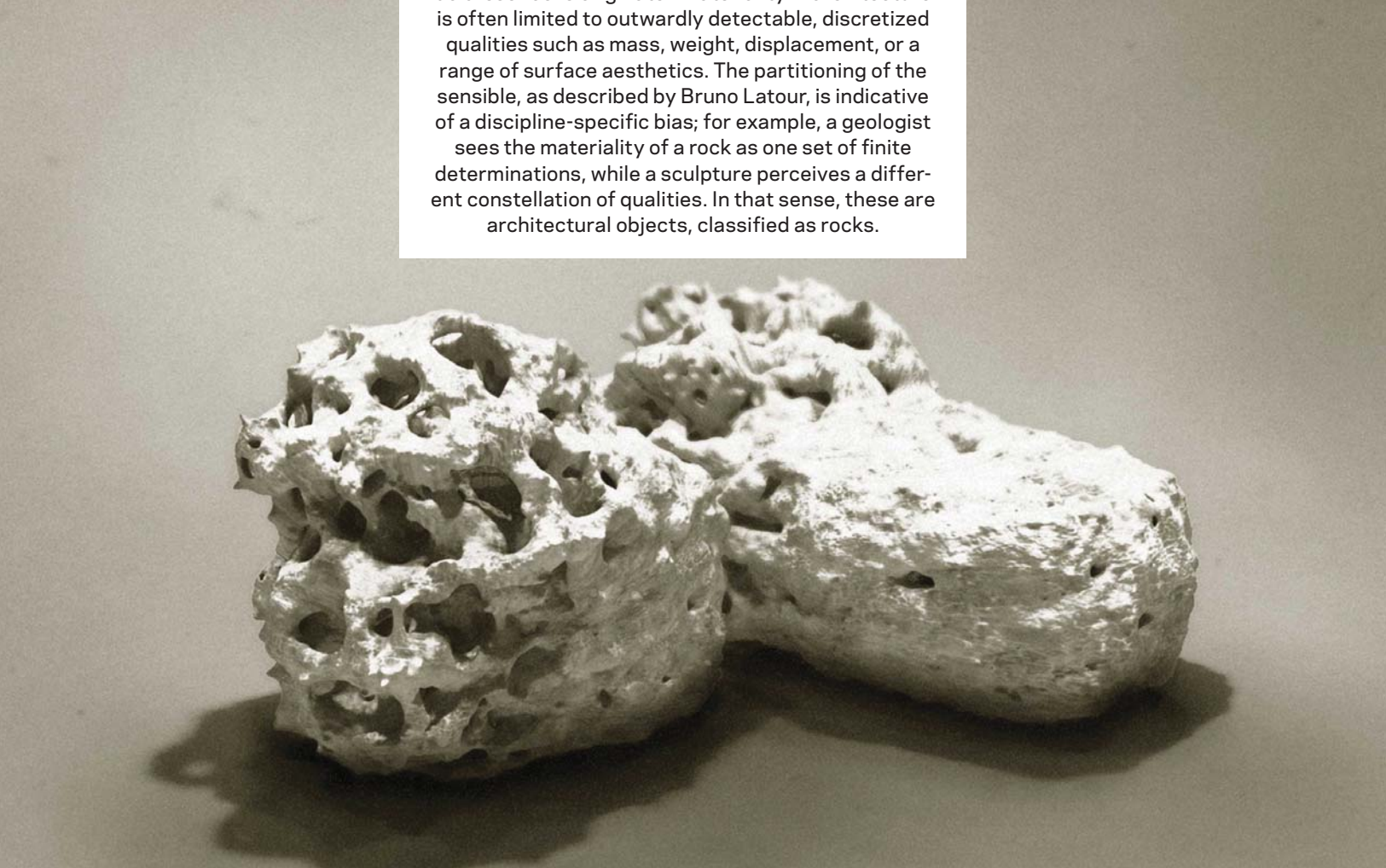
SIT

Scaffolds or constraint logics informs the "volatile" formwork used by FAYSAL TABBARAH in the development of *Almost Natural Things* and *Sit*. The formwork is made of foam that ignites an exothermic co-reaction with the casting resin. Energy released through this process, in the form of heat, alters the cellar structure of the foam and augments the composition of the resin as it cures. This combination of gasses and temperature flux results in forms that have a high degree of informa-tion invested in structural intricacy and that, through a self-destructive process, erase the scaffold or notation guiding their formation.

CITY OF GLASS BALLOONS

EVAN DOUGLIS STUDIO explores the indeterminacy of a material—molten glass—in relation to a set of fixed and calibrated constraints offered by another—stainless-steel meshes. The convergence of these two materials is a conflation of organizational and informational systems. The surface wire-frame is tangible, but, rather than describe the extents of the volume, it indexes the original constraints. The newly emergent structure embodies the entropy, or the degree of order, corresponding to the information within the glass and mesh system.

MASKS

Masks by WOJR/WILLIAM O'BRIEN JR ~~are~~ a series of elevations realized as objects. Though produced from a variety of materials—primarily wood and stone— the forms are materially agnostic. Yet their fabrication process was highly specific and was almost entirely numerically controlled, governed by ~~such~~ variables such as the dimensions of tools—~~such as~~ end-mill diameter or saw-blade kerf—or hierarchies of line-weight. The interchangeability of lines/profiles/tool-paths registers the underlying indifference of information. The re-formatting of an elevation as a tool-path, for example, shifts the accepted reference between elements in drawings, by conflating the path of information with the physical transformation of that information.

FACE-TO-FACE

Face-to-Face, by FLORENCIA PITA AND JACKILIN HAH BLOOM/PITA+BLOOM, uses multiple operative references. The six facade layers held equidistance from one another use an abundance of elevations to produce a volume that suggests a house-like silhouette—a quality echoed in the stucco colors.

INSIDE OF THINGS

ELLIE ABRONS/EADO examines the conventions and mechanisms of two-dimensional representation, with an emphasis on the techniques and nomenclature of descriptive and projective geometry. Both descriptive and projective geometry constitute a body of knowledge that is largely repurposed in the presentation of architectural ideas. Plan, section, elevation, isometric and other auxiliary projections, constitute a living-dead realm of architectural expertise; the vast majority of contemporary projects are developed in three-dimensions and formatted to fit this image-making lexicon. *Inside of Things* are a series of objects that simultaneously provide their own "site," since the model base provides a bounded context, a ground, and background. The latter self-intersects the object, revealing the interior—a meta-section, not a section-model.
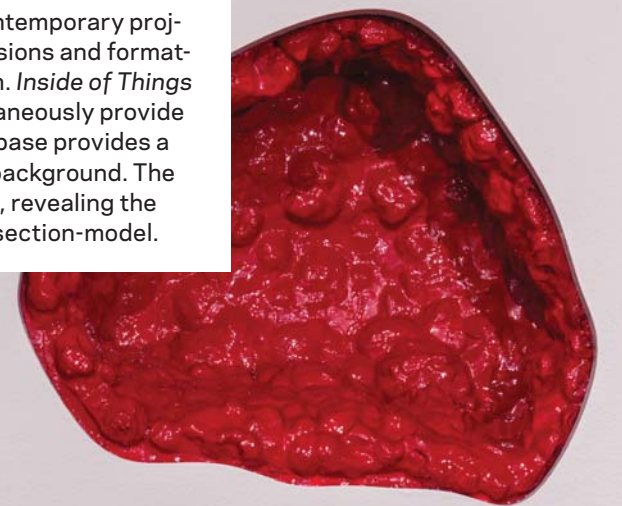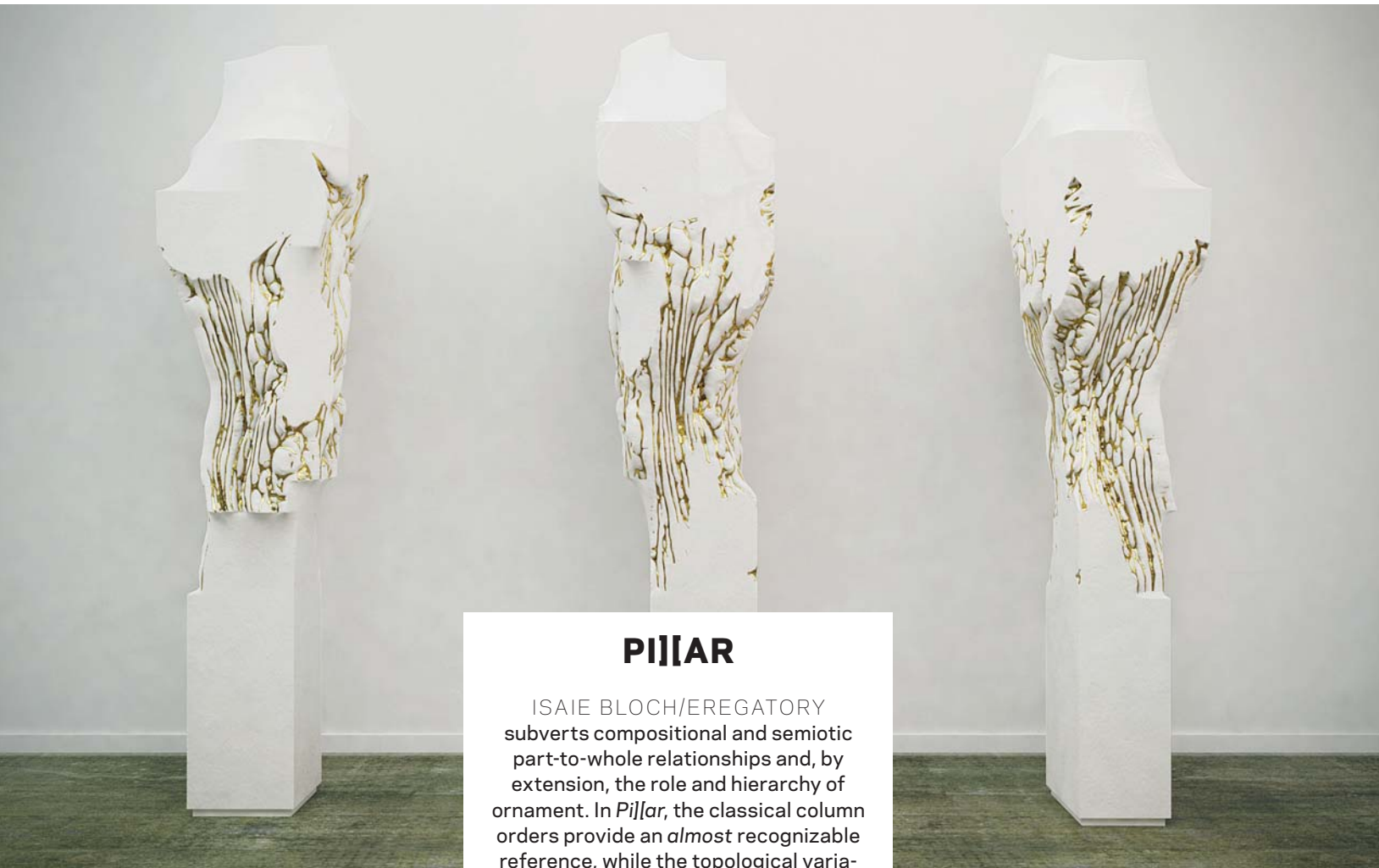
PI]|[AR

ISAIE BLOCH/EREGATORY
subverts compositional and semiotic part-to-whole relationships and, by extension, the role and hierarchy of ornament. In *Pi]|[ar,* the classical column orders provide an *almost* recognizable reference, while the topological varia-tions of the object's surface denote an emerging (rather than pre-determined) organizational logic. If ~~traditionally~~ ornament was deployed as an index of difference in the aggregation of parts (base, column, capital), here it emerges from indeterminate material processes and fabrication and yields unpredictable local variations.

DISCO BALLS

JASON PAYNE/HIRSUTA, refers to *Disco Balls* as "foreclosed" objects; a designation applied to objects whose identifying virtues— iconography, affect, etc.—occlude or sublimate other dimensions and readings of themselves. *Glint (Variations on the Disco Ball)* promotes the revenge/return of the virtual in confronta-tion with the perceived. Suppressing the identifying virtue of a foreclosed object such as a Disco Ball, by replacing the platonic sphere with variations based on the irregularly shaped moons of Mars (and other minor-plan-ets such as Pluto), this project shifts the familiar towards the *bad,* allowing for the identification of new qualities and the produc-tion of new meanings, or a new class of objects.
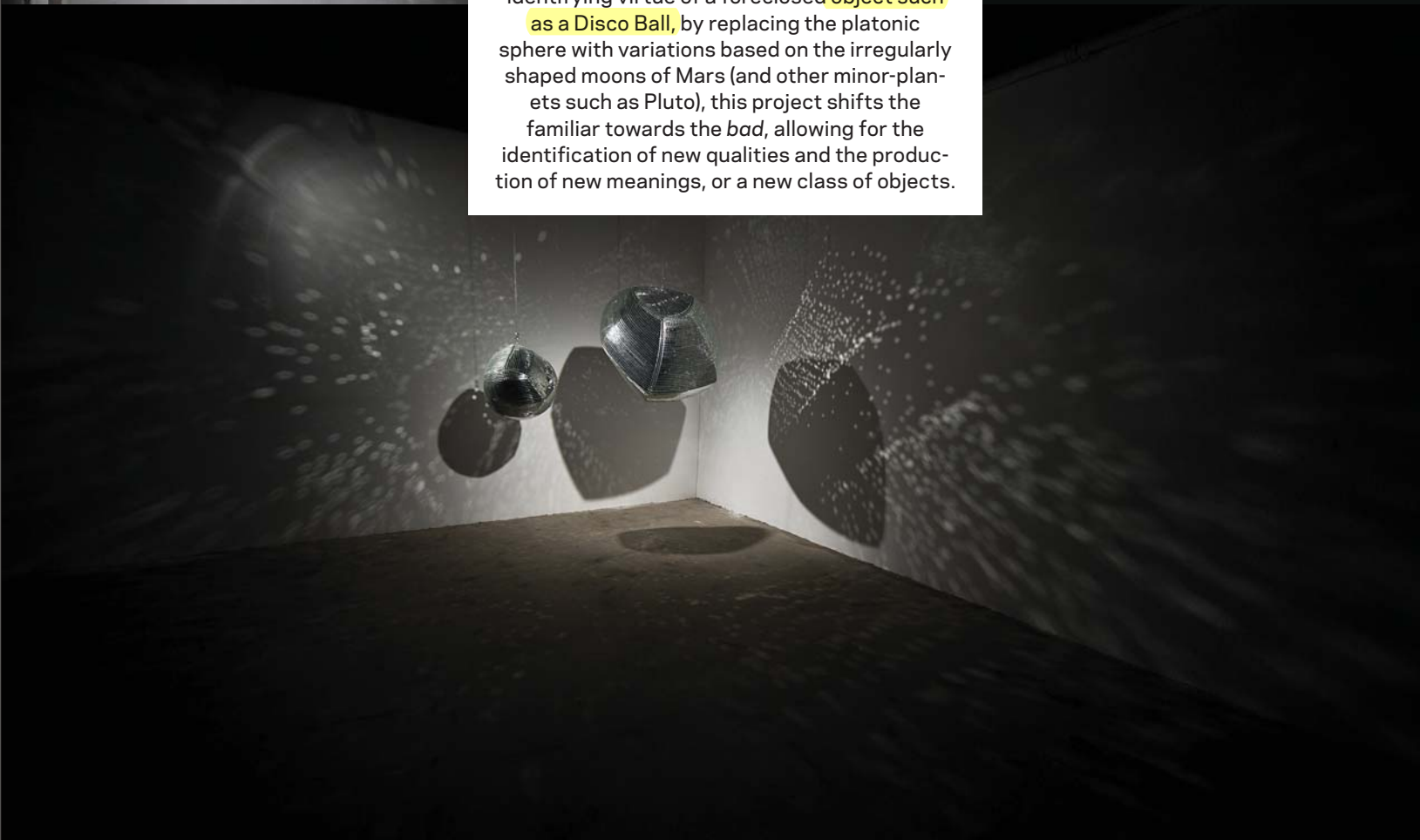
ISOCHRONIC MOUNTAIN: SÃO PAULO, O MORRO DA ESPERANÇA PAULISTA

In *Isochronic Mountain: São Paulo, O Morro da Esperança Paulista*, JOSHUA STEIN/RADICAL CRAFT utilizes a hyper-geographic representation of temporal data to produce two topographic models of São Paulo, Brazil. The resulting objects compare two different time periods—1939 and 2013—while indexing the length of time spent waiting for public transit as one moved from the periphery to the center of the city. Public access and engagement with the city are reconfigured as an alternate spatial terrain that is both experiential and inaccessible ~~and that~~ reveals the latent social and economic disparity engendered in the urban fabric.

COMPUTATIONAL SAND PILE

Computational Sand Pile is an example of pattern and form that find qualities intrinsic to matter. RHETT RUSSO/SPECIFC OBJECTS leveraged the self-organizing force of gravity to develop a process through which the volume and intricacy of the tile surface could be altered relative to a 2-dimensional reference surface. There is no mold; instead, a flat notational surface with holes of varying dimension and spacing is covered in reusable calcine clay, specifically spherical porcelain grains. As the grains escape through the holes, they produce a field of points and curves, an object-drawing that is simultaneously indexical and ambiguous.

concepts that undermine certain intrinsic virtues, while simultaneously maintaining those orthodoxies from which their collective disciplinary identity is constructed? The answer, obviously, is *bad*.

As a starting point for clarifying our understanding of *bad* we might ask the following: how do things—objects, concepts, landscapes, the real and the virtual—become architectural? [7] Historically, this quality could be contingent on the application of familiar typological elements such as the courtyard, the legibility of an originating *urform*, or the adherence to an institutionally promulgated organizational schema—the classical orders or grids, for example. Some vestiges of these continue to haunt architectural culture at-large. More recent histories of things-becoming-architectural have favored the formatting associated with various representational traditions. For some, it would seem that images have superseded objects as premier examples of the architectural, and that the latter exhibit disciplinary purposiveness only in direct reciprocity to their representational origins. Are there other processes through which things enter into the disciplinary territory of the architectural? By way of provoking our attention and cultivating recognition through judgement, it would seem that *bad* is on some fundamental level concerned with disciplinarity, and once recognized, it serves to further alter the epistemic forces that underwrite the latter. More precisely, *bad* implicates those subjectivities intrinsic to practice, arising from the institutions and traditions that we collectively reinforce as extensions of techniques, pedagogies, criticism, or models of research, etc. Likewise, since *bad* is manifested through exercising some type of trained judgement in practice, it inevitably contends with the techniques and methods of observation and representation. In this sense, *bad* objects, are those things that through negation or absence subsume certain institutional orthodoxies—such as 20th-century definitions of spatiality and transparency, or prescribed forms of viewing—in favor of new emerging modes of abstraction.[8] Recent conversations about objects have been either reinforced or dismissed relative to their association with the metaphysical musings of *speculative realism* or Object-Oriented Ontologies (OOO). The *bad* objects presented here are wholly within the purview of the discipline and are architecturally specific without relying on the reference to other inaccessible subjectivities. Instead, *bad* objects articulate classes of emerging characteristics that reflect the changing conditions of how architecture is both conceived, interpreted, and described. Though diverse in origin, these changes are generally alterations to the epistemic virtues of the latter; they inform how we construct the ontologies that influence our cultural and disciplinary institutions, and, as a result, they anticipate what will cultivate our attention and what will challenge those supporting standards and norms.

7   Here "thing" is used in reference to the primary substance and secondary effects of matter. For an extended interpretation of the boundaries of things as both material and metaphysical substances see: Tristan Garcia. *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) pp38–46

8   Stan Allen. "Notations and Diagrams: Mapping the Intangible," in *Practice: Architecture Technique+Representation, 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2009) p66–67

Amant— A Dirtier Truth SO-IL
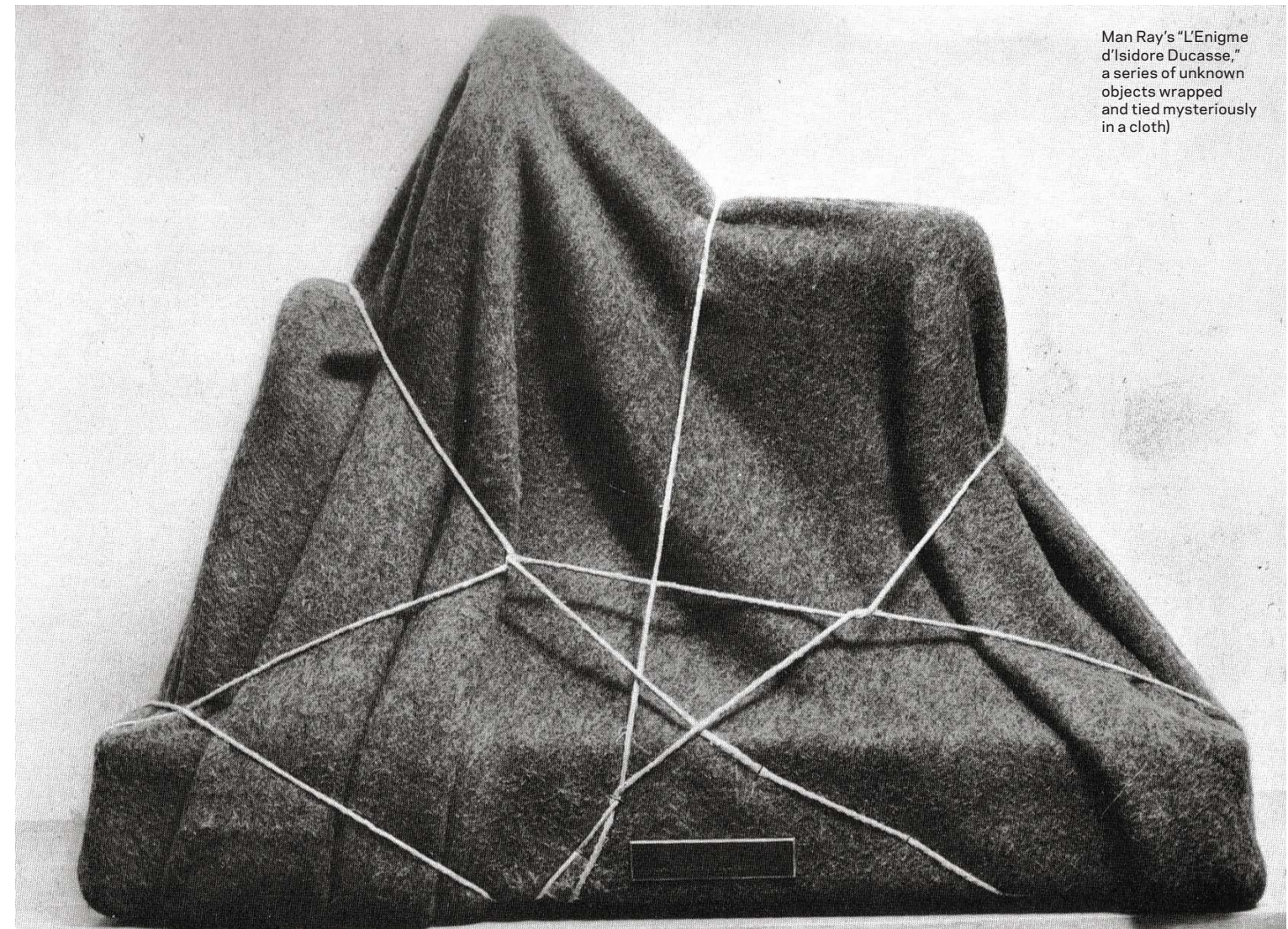
Man Ray's "L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse," a series of unknown objects wrapped and tied mysteriously in a cloth)