



Hector  
Zamora  
Panglossian  
Paradigm

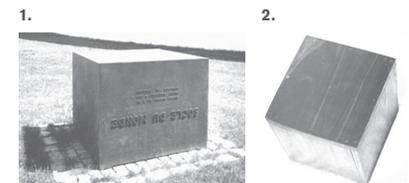
1.

**“A shoebox is a shoebox is a shoebox”  
Empty Structures, Full boxes.**

In 1961, an iron parallelepiped of 1 meter wide and a base of 82 cms high was placed in a park close to the then textile factory Angli Shirt in Herning, Denmark. The caption “Socle du monde. Socle Magic n3 by Piero Manzoni 1961, homage to Galileo” was written upside down on one of the sides of the rectangular piece<sup>1</sup>.

From this day on, whether it was read upside down or not, the *Socle du monde* by Manzoni anticipated and absorbed any *readymade*. Under an almost planetary generalization, this universal pedestal celebrated simultaneously the infinite cosmos of details. This way, each inert or living object that could stand on top of the base would be as important as *the whole* to which he referred. The potential list of unmentioned details and objects transformed the *Socle du monde* into the perfect space for generous excess, as well as the surface of the most disquieting emptiness.

*Box with the Sound of its Own Making*<sup>2</sup> (1961) by Robert Morris appeared as a sealed box from which the sound of its own construction emanated. In a tautological act, the content (if, in fact, there was one) lacked importance in favor of process: the *mise en scène* of the box functioned as representation of itself. A seemingly similar experiment, disguised as regular parcel



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post, flew from Mexico City to São Paulo. This other box (*untitled*, 2009), by Fernando Ortega, recorded all the sounds of the trajectory to the exhibition venue. In this case, the box didn't relate to itself, but to everything that in the process of sending identified it as a package – the hands, turnstiles and mailboxes that had touched it, without caring for its content.

The open *Caja de zapatos vacía* (*Empty shoebox*)<sup>3</sup> that Gabriel Orozco put in the Venice Biennial *Aperto* in 1993 ran the danger of being kicked. When people became aware of its presence, they could question the meaning of this element, a forgotten object left in the middle of the exhibition space right before the opening. What was important about the box was not the fact that it was empty, but precisely that which it didn't contain, confounding the viewer about its function as container as much as about its value as art. Twelve years later, Mateo López used, in a very sincere way, another open shoebox (*Sleeping Box*, 2005). This box contained another box which, in turn, held drawings, maps and ideas that were repeated in different media and formats. "The box questioned, without intention, the meaning of emptiness of other famous boxes (Orozco's and many others), reciting Gertrude Stein's *a shoebox is a shoebox is a shoebox*."<sup>4</sup>

For his installation at REDCAT, Hector Zamora uses two objects that are morphologically and culturally identified as containers of something else. On the one hand, there is the timber stud frame, a constructive model used in the majority of US suburban houses. This structure represents the spine of a house, understood as the most common metaphor of the integration of objects and goods with thoughts, memories, and desires of the subject. On the other hand, there is the shopping cart, a metal structure patented in 1937, and invented to aid the

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4.

Debroise, Olivier. "Mateo López KBK Arte Contemporáneo". *Frieze* 08 January 2008.

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carrying of goods and provisions in stores. The cart's original intention was to assist in physical tasks, and its evolution has been proportional to the development of consumption, becoming each time bigger, efficient and more suited for storage.

Despite their transparency and emptiness, these two structures inevitably revert back to a full volume. They appear interlocked as if, in this case, they wanted to contain themselves in a poetic act of constriction.

2.

**Just a cup**

*If you think about the evolution of cups, it's just a beautiful evolution. The first cups were human hands: folded together, they took the water out of the river. The next cups were made from things like hollowed pieces of wood or folded leaves, and so on. The last beautiful moment in the history of the cup was when it got a handle. After that, nothing really interesting happened with cups, just small variations, mainly ornamental. Many generations worked on it, and now you can say that the cup is finished in terms of evolution.*

–Mark Manders

This quote of Mark Manders explains the relation he establishes with objects. Manders uses everyday elements to assemble or to put one beside the other through personal associations. In this new morphology, the Dutch artist seems to rescue the *nudity* of objects, extrapolating their basic purpose, stripping them of functionless gadgets, returning them to their primitive condition. Almost without wanting, his installations speak to a certain nostalgia for the beginning of things, as if they were fossils of an archeological excavation (Mark Manders *Shadow Study*, 2010).<sup>5</sup>

5.



Interestingly, the objects Zamora chooses to make this installation have undergone very few alterations throughout the years, remaining fairly close to their primitive genesis. They are objects whose cycle (in Manders' view) has come to a close, while staying true to the function for which they were created. Yet, what has kept them untouched from the irreversible automatism of design and consumption?

They don't need to invent themselves anew. For one reason or another, it doesn't matter whether they are attractive or simply valid, surviving the fast obsolescence of the complex design apparatus. Both shopping cart<sup>6</sup> and timber stud are, nevertheless, the structures that carry, relate and order the vibrating system of objects (whose form and function continuously change) as well as an archive of sorts, a permanent storage system. They are atemporal structures to be inhabited, filled over and over again, and in every possible combination.

The case of the timber stud is particularly significant. According to architect Jason Griffiths in *Revenge Appreciation in Suburbia*,<sup>7</sup> one of the reasons why it has kept its original morphology is, precisely, for the symbolic connection it has with the past, with the idea of virtue underpinning the hard work and manual labor of the first American settlers. Just like Le Corbusier's *Domino House*<sup>8</sup>, this structure cultivates the democratic dream of a universal constructive system. More than one hundred years later, and even if the houses that those frames support have been penetrated by a compulsive and unimaginable system of finishes, they still rescue a fragile idea of humanity.

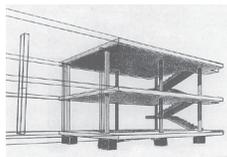
6.



7.

Griffiths, Jason. "Revenge appreciation in suburbia. The hidden presence of timber in the American home." *Magazine no. 10 – uncube*. [www.uncubemagazine.com](http://www.uncubemagazine.com)

8.



## 3.

**We will fly around till we've found a place to live.  
He will never find us.<sup>9</sup>**

Winsor McCay's 1921 comic strip materializes what happens to a middle class woman after eating a buttered toast. In her nightmare, the attic of the house where she lives contains a complex machinery that will take her into space. A propeller emerges from the walls of the house, helping her to fly and transforming her into a surreal being.<sup>10</sup>

The idea behind this winged panacea is to find a distant place to settle, far away from her mortgage, the insidious subconscious of the entire story. This suburban house flies over many neighborhoods where it could have fitted in perfectly if it weren't for the fear that its own reality imposed on it.

After an unfortunate and failed landing on the moon, the flying house is accidentally hit by a long-distance missile, parsing it into thousands of pieces. This fantastic hybrid thus reduces to nothing, and both husband and wife fall, slowly turning around each other, while the objects accumulated over decades turn around them: it is the last souvenir of the destroyed house, its memory and legacy. At last, they are set free. Once the fantastic element has disappeared, the final strike wakes them from their dream, with the same mortgage looming over them as before.

## 4.

**Panglossian Paradigm**

*Panglossian Paradigm*, to which the title of this exhibition makes reference, was coined by two evolutionary biologists, Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin, who disagreed with the notion that the entire world had adapted itself to fit some

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Gould, Stephen Jay.  
*Panglossian Paradigm: Origins and Consequences. Atlas of Novel Tectonics.*  
New York: Princeton  
Architectural Press, 2006.

10.



specific purposes. Instead, they suggested the existence of accidents (which they termed “exaptations”), and searched for new purposes in an organism’s past characteristics.

Both biologists also established a relation with the term’s applications in design and architecture. The *Panglossian Paradigm* explained the potential of secondary objects when shaping new objects. That is, parallel sub-products, that had been initially left aside or unimagined, and coming out of a main matrix, can be applied in the present for totally different goals—“An object can arise as a necessary consequence of other decisions and not as a direct adaptation for a particular purpose.”<sup>11</sup>

This is why the physical encounter of the two objects in Zamora’s installation is also the result of the interaction between the cultural and social uses of both. Uses that doubtlessly weren’t planned in the initial making concerned with containing a reasoned system of objects, establishing order and archiving desires. When the dysfunctionality of the objects, the celebration of consumption, or the senseless accumulation exceeded the limits of their fragile structure, they turned into symbols and clichés of excess, elements subject to sociological study.

This same timber is now visible in an artisanal way in many houses; it has been rendered naked, in the recurring image of many American suburbs. The frame is a phantasmagorical synthesis of the houses left half finished; the cart a mobile home of the homeless – containers of waste, reverse sides of the surplus.

This double skeleton that Zamora places in space, celebrates a new hybrid of disquieting possibilities and future applications.

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11.

Extract of a conversation taken from *The Flying House*, directed by Wilson McCay in 1921, 21 mins.

## Panglossian Paradigm

It also speaks to the impermanence to which these objects are exposed and the fragility of the system in which they are inserted. Maybe this sculpture is the last survivor of something that is on the verge of getting lost, breaking apart or disappearing.

## Héctor Zamora

Born in Mexico in 1974, Zamora has worked in São Paulo, Brazil, for many years. Some of his major projects have been presented in public spaces, including *Errant*, a suspended garden on the Tamundateí River, Sao Paolo, 2010; *Atopic Delirium*, a public intervention located on Jimenez Avenue in downtown Bogota, Colombia, 2009. He collaborated in the BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai, placed in the pavilion designed by Tokyo-based architects Atelier Bow-Wow. He has been involved with projects for: 53rd International Exhibition Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy; Medellin International Encounter 2007 (MDE07), Colombia; 27th Biennial of Sao Paulo, Brazil; 12th International Cairo Biennale, Cairo, Egypt; Busan Biennale 2006 Pusan, South Korea; and the 9th Havana Biennale, Cuba. His projects have been included in group exhibitions such as *Resisting the Present*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / ARC, France, 2012 and *Disponibile*, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA, U.S., 2010, among others.

The exhibition *Panglossian Paradigm* takes place at the Gallery at REDCAT, July 20 – September 1, 2013.



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