

What constitutes an *exact copy*, and what are the stakes in making such a claim? The issue is examined here through images of the Oval Office.

## Almost exactly: realism at $\frac{7}{8}$ scale

Amy Kulper

'Ditto,' said Tweedledum.  
'Ditto, ditto!' cried Tweedledee.  
(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

### Faith in fakes

It all began rather innocently, on a fact-checking mission inspired by a passage from Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality* (published in Italian in 1973, under the more revelatory rubric *Il Costume di Casa*, or *Faith in Fakes*.) Eco's essay is a cogent rumination upon the pervasive American obsession with sham experience and mock reality – a paean to our cultural preoccupation with the simulated, the imitated and the counterfeit. As evidence of this American *faith in fakes*, Eco offers a 'Wunderkammer, an ingenious example of narrative art, wax museum, cave of robots' built in Austin, Texas by President Lyndon B. Johnson – a presidential library containing a full-scale model of the Oval Office.<sup>1</sup> He continues:

*Constructing a full-scale model of the Oval Office (using*

*the same materials, the same colors, but with everything obviously more polished, shinier, protected against deterioration) means that for historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of a reincarnation. To speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real. The 'completely real' becomes identified with the 'completely fake'. Absolute unreality is offered as real presence.<sup>2</sup>*

Eco's evocation of a shinier, more polished Oval Office double is compelling, but (says the fact checker) also compellingly inaccurate. The replica of the Oval Office housed in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in 1971, is reconstructed at  $\frac{7}{8}$  of the original scale.

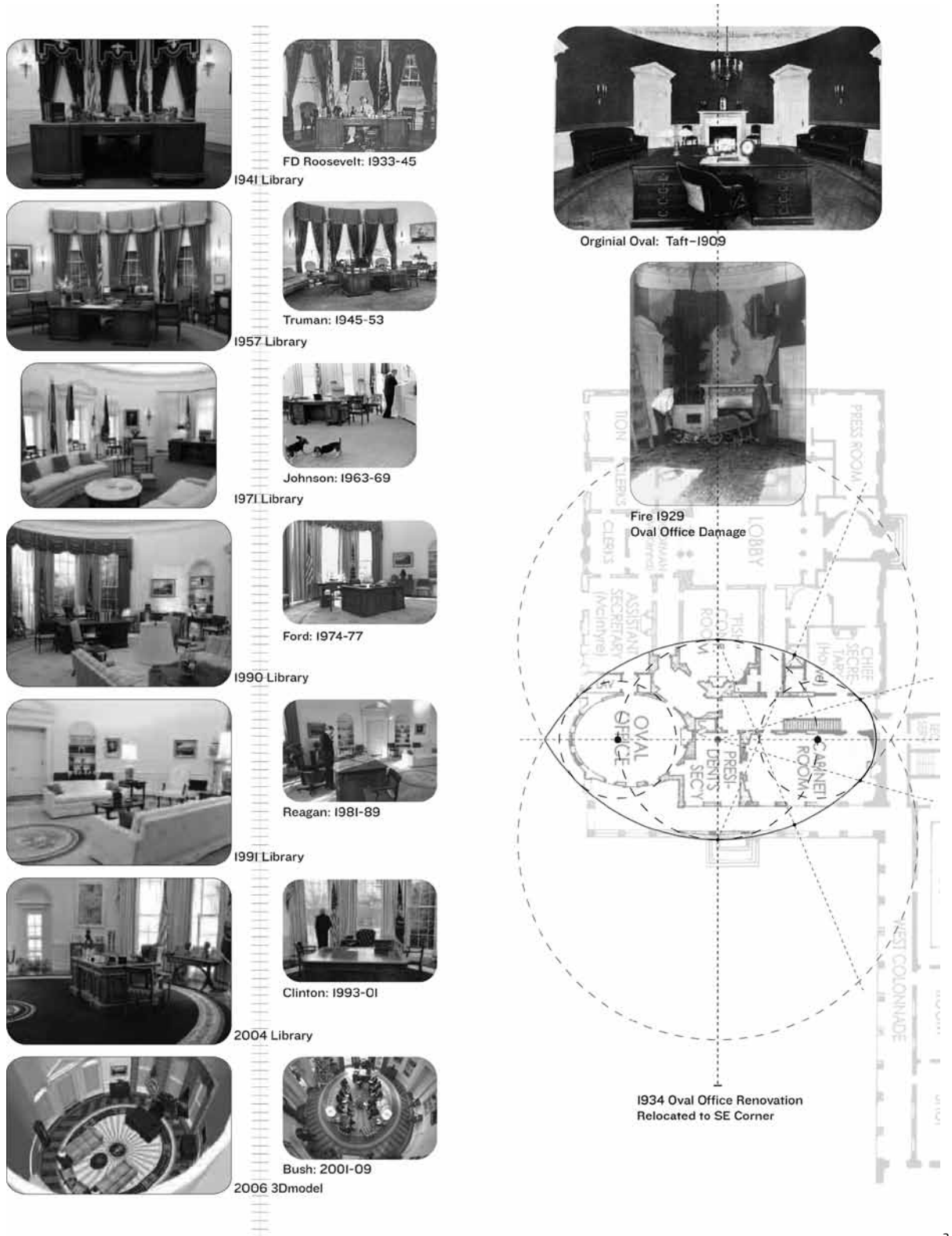
$\frac{7}{8}$  scale, such a curious detail, *almost exactly*, but *not quite* the same.  $\frac{7}{8}$  scale – the scale of a musical instrument modified for a child to play, the preferred scale for model train enthusiasts, the scale of the buildings on Main Street in Disneyland [1]. Theories

1 Disneyland:  
Then and Now



abound as to why Walt Disney utilised the 2/3 scale convention on Main Street. Some hold that looking down the 2/3 scale Main Street to the full-scale Magic Castle in the distance creates a forced or accelerated perspective, exaggerating the imaginative distance between the typicality of Main Street and the enchantment of the Magic Kingdom beyond.<sup>3</sup> For others, the 2/3 scale is the repository of normalcy, preserving, almost genetically, the ubiquity and familiarity of this well-worn American locus. Still others posit that the altered scale is a nod to Disney's

most loyal constituency – kids, rendering the experience of a walk down Main Street strangely unfamiliar to the average grown-up. Regardless of which theory you ascribe to, the most compelling aspect of deploying 2/3 scale is the potential to explore and exploit the difference between this slightly-smaller-than-full-scale imitation and the original it attempts to duplicate. Here, in the oxymoronic agon of *almost exactly*, resides a repository of representational possibility, a sanctuary for the spatial imaginary.



### The replica that wasn't

So, how is it that the Johnson Oval Office came to be constructed at  $\frac{7}{8}$  scale [2]? To answer this question, we need to return to Christmas Eve in 1929, when a major fire ravaged the West Wing. As one writer described the scene: 'President Herbert Hoover had to leave his Christmas party to oversee the removal of important papers from the Oval Office. (But the Marine Band played on, and the First Lady kept the party going.)'<sup>4</sup> As a result of this untimely conflagration, the Oval Office was destroyed, occasioning a complete renovation by FDR in 1934. William Howard Taft was the mastermind behind the original Oval Office. In 1909, he undertook an expansion and remodelling of the West Wing, opportunistically taking over a secretary's 'round-ended' office, and converting it to a full oval. After the fire, FDR moved the Oval Office to the south-east corner of the White House, taking the opportunity to expand its dimensions, adding two feet to both its length and width. Conceptually, this simple act of relocation and redesign opened up a Pandora's box of subsequent duplication and replication, as if the symbolic destruction of the original occasioned the reproduction and propagation of an escalating culture of copies. If, indeed, this seemingly mythological destruction of the Oval Office can be interpreted as a symbolic act, then the fact that all subsequent progeny reside in the realm of the *almost exactly* is equally significant.

As a geometric shape, the oval is born of an act of doubling – two circles, and therefore two centres, give form to its elongated figure. An apt symbol for democracy, the oval is a figure that theoretically eschews any singular consolidation of political power. As an architectural type, the Oval Office is born of an act of dislocation – prior to Taft, the president's office was in his residence, so moving the Oval Office to the West Wing was indicative of a new kind of presidency. This dislocation, a slightly asymmetrical mitosis, is significant not just for its capacity to produce self-similar facsimiles, but also for opening up a conceptual distance between the original and its ersatz duplicate. This generative act

of reproduction conjures the double meaning of occupation as both the act of inhabiting a residence, and of the work done and vocations pursued from this paradigmatic context.<sup>5</sup> This doubling of instinctive behaviours and cultivated intellectual orientations preserved in the etymological progression of habitation, habit and habitus, populates the imaginary that emerges from within this conceptual breach. Specific to the typology of the Oval Office is its inherent capacity to operate between the domestic and the domestic economy, between the particularities of any given 'bureau' and the generalities of the bureaucracy they engender, between the office and corporate culture writ large. In Taft's hands, the typology of the Oval Office epitomised this notion of the twice occupied, eliding the domestic and the transactional into a paradigmatic locus of American home office culture. In the gap between the presidency and any given president, between the family in residence and the First Family, between the office of the president and the Oval Office, resides the *almost exactly*, a placeholder for imaginative differentiation. The *almost exactly* stretches promiscuously between the exactitude of descriptive geometry's construction of an oval and the imprecision of the copious claims of having produced an 'exact replica' of the Oval Office – it loiters in this incongruity.

Some of what we know about the context surrounding the choice to reproduce LBJ's Oval Office at  $\frac{7}{8}$  scale is contained within a recorded telephone conversation between Johnson and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill architect Gordon Bunshaft on 10 October 1968 [3].<sup>6</sup> Johnson begins the conversation by stating that he would like Bunshaft to 'reconstitute as nearly as possible' the Oval Office in the presidential library.<sup>7</sup> The ethos of the *almost exactly* permeates this conversation. Johnson continues:

*And if we could, I'd just, that's the one thing I want. I'd like to have, as near a reproduction as finances, architectural requirements, would permit. I don't say it's got to be 18 feet high or 14 or got to be 38 feet long. It might have a little card on the door that says, 'this is not an exact reproduction' or something.*<sup>8</sup>

Here are some highlights from the remainder of the conversation, emphasising the verbiage of the *almost exactly*:

GB: *Goodness me, if that's what you'd like we'll make every effort ...*

LBJ: *I'd rather have that than anything else about the building.*

LBJ: *I'm in there now. I'm in that office tonight, I come in it sometimes at 6:30 in the morning and I'm here till late, and I would like for them to see just where we work. And I'd like to have the exact replica as near as possible. But, I would accept anything that would be better than nothing.*

GB: *It's just a question of, is there room in plan, you know. But we'll see what we can do.... Well the only problem is, if we, have enough space. The height I think we could work, but it's uh, just a question if we have enough space in plan to reproduce that oval.*

LBJ: *We'll take some space from somebody else!*<sup>9</sup>

2 Oval Office diagram, May 2012

3 Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, LBJ Oval Office replica, interior photographs, Austin, Texas, 1971



3

In the course of the conversation, Bunshaft alludes to the fact that the floor slabs were currently being poured, and this is perhaps the most telling pragmatic evidence for the design decision to reproduce the office at  $\frac{7}{8}$  scale.

The architect, Gordon Bunshaft, was a partner in one of America's foremost corporate architectural practices, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and this too is significant to the narrative of the  $\frac{7}{8}$  replica. In his discussion of the corporate architecture of the 1950s and '60s, architectural historian and theorist, Reinhold Martin identifies the ubiquitous repetition of image as an essential ingredient to such practices, arguing:

*[...] earlier modernist experiments with spatial flexibility through modular assembly were exhaustively reworked and redeployed. The universal space associated with the steel frame and the planning grid was assimilated into a finely modulated field. This modularity, and the flexibility that it implied, became the very image – and instrument – of the organizational complex.<sup>10</sup>*

In Bunshaft's design of the Johnson Library [4], the universal space of the steel frame and planning grid are readily apparent in the repetitious panels of travertine on the facades, the grey and beige pattern of the piazza upon which the building sits, and the gridded waffle slab of the roof construction. Even the detail of the visual expression of the archive in The Great Hall – a feature based upon Lady Bird's observation that in the four existing presidential libraries she visited, the public and the scholars never intersected – the insistence of the concrete grid, exponentially increased by the grid of the red document containers housed within it, implicates the presidential library as an instrument of the organisational complex [5]. For Martin, the 'organizational complex' is a system in which architecture serves as a 'conduit' for the organisational continuity of media and infrastructure, and in this sense, it is not much of a stretch to imagine the Oval Office replica in this same guise.<sup>11</sup>

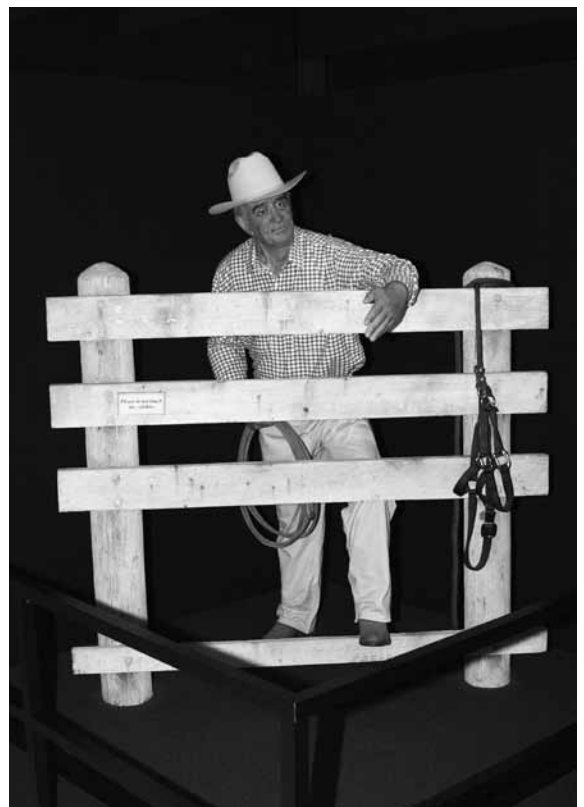
The claim for the Oval Office is not simply that it is a replica, but an exact replica, so it may be useful to examine the conceit of exactitude at this juncture. The virtues of exactitude are myriad and well known, however, its vices are rarely articulated. Like the shim that masks the deficiencies of shoddy construction, or the concealer that hides the cumulative dark circles of too many sleepless nights, or the camouflage net that blends the specificity of objects into the uniformity of their respective contexts, the vice of exactitude resides in its suppressing of the oxymoronic and its obscuring of difference. Perhaps the most interesting thing that can be said of the Johnson Oval Office replica is that it is constructed at  $\frac{7}{8}$  scale, just as the intrigue of the Truman Oval Office duplicate resides in its seemingly indiscriminate disregard for the proportions of the original.<sup>12</sup> So how is it, wonders the fact checker, that these libraries occupy the historical record as *exact replicas*? In his lyrical essay on exactitude, Italo Calvino begins with the mythological figure of Maat, the Egyptian goddess of the scales, and posits three criteria for



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5



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4 Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, Lady Bird Johnson and President Lyndon B. Johnson, Austin, Texas, 15 March 1971

5 SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill), Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, interior photograph, Austin, Texas, dedicated: 22 May 1971

6 Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, Animatronic LBJ, exhibition photographs, Austin, Texas, 1971

precision, the second of which is germane to this consideration of replicas: 'An evocation of clear, incisive, memorable images [...].'<sup>13</sup>

According to Calvino's criterion, the exactitude of the Oval Office replicas resides not in the physical reconstruction of the room, but rather in the proliferation of its image as copies. The repetitive imagery of the Oval Office indexes an organisational complex connecting this media to disparate forms of infrastructure: the institutions of the library and museum; souvenirs and their attendant commercial networks; entertainment and the infomercial; and even the mechanisms of political image making and spin doctoring. As evidence of the work of the image in propagating *exact replicas* of the Oval Office, simply consider the fact that every presidential library and museum has its own gift shop in which these images are the primary commodity; that the political image of Barack Obama as an 'agent of change' is even manifest in his Oval Office decor, in that he is the first president not to have painted the room a solid colour, opting instead for beige on beige stripes; that the Johnson Presidential Library crosses the line between education and entertainment, proffering an animatronic figure of Johnson who recounts folksy tall tales to visitors in his characteristic Texas twang [6]; and that if you conduct a Google image search of Oval Offices, you are sentencing yourself to the protracted frustration of never knowing with any certainty if the image you are looking at is real or counterfeit, just ask the fact checker. In the uncertainty and indecision of this moment lurk the insidious operations of exactitude, masking the relationship between so-called *exact replicas* and the political and commercial practices of the institutions lending them infrastructural support. And from the ashes of this murky in-between rises a facsimile phoenix, the embodiment of the replica that wasn't.<sup>14</sup>

### Hawking the image

When John F. Kennedy became the thirty-fifth president of the United States, his wife, Jacqueline Onassis, struck by how few furnishings and objects of historical significance populated the White House, began a major restoration project. In February of 1962, Jackie took the American television public on a tour of the renovated White House, and this broadcast was a boon for the Kennedy administration. The terminology 'do-it-yourself' first came into common usage in the American culture of the 1950s, and the impetus to restore and redecorate the White House fanned the flames of a growing D.I.Y. culture. Fast forward to January 2009, on the eve of Barack Obama's historic inauguration, the world's largest furniture retailer, Ikea, launched an ad campaign in the form of a guerrilla event. Opportunistically appropriating Obama's campaign theme of 'Change we can believe in,' the advertising agency Deutsch NY and the MWW Group Consumer Lifestyle Marketing team, launched their 'Embrace Change '09' campaign. The opening salvo of the campaign was a series of out-of-home billboards, displaying the bold yellow and blue graphics of the



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7–10 Ikea Embrace Change advertising campaign, January 2009

Ikea brand and the Swedish flag, and bearing the slogan: 'The time for domestic reform is now!' [7].<sup>15</sup> The second prong of the ad campaign involved the insertion of a replica of the Oval Office in Washington D.C.'s Union Station, demonstrating to thousands of commuters how Ikea would furnish 'the most important room in the world' [8]. The replica consists of a half-oval wall and full oval rug, equipped with two faux Secret Service agents, an American flag and an Ikea flag, and filled with bright, inexpensive flat-pack furniture. Nestled between Billy Bookcases, sits Ikea's version of the resolute desk with a guest book for commuters to sign that would be sent to the Obamas at the conclusion of the campaign.

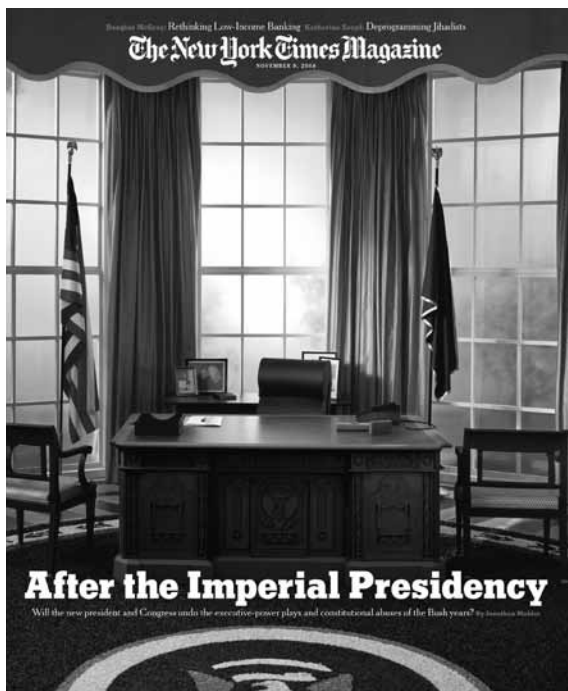
Simultaneously, on the day of Obama's inauguration, Ikea launched the Embrace Change website, inviting customers to 'design your own Oval Office', with the chance to win a \$1500 Ikea gift card [9]. The website consisted of a digital model of the Oval Office, inviting visitors to customise the space with Ikea products of their choosing.<sup>16</sup> Upon completion, visitors could employ the 'send to friend' functionality to share their design with their own contacts, or they could opt to send it to the White House and 'Let your voice be heard!'.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Ikea paraded a fake presidential motorcade through the streets of Washington D.C. with Ikea boxes strapped to the roof of the limousine and a striped sofa bulging out of the boot [10]. They even produced a faux-adversary in the form of a fictitious Twitter group, IKEAGreen, protesting at the gas-guzzling vehicles in the motorcade.

Not surprisingly, this campaign marks the largest advertising success in Ikea's brand history. MWW generated more than 495,500,000 media impressions from over 400 placements, and more than 60 minutes of broadcast coverage in media outlets of every kind. Additionally, blog posts mentioning Ikea increased by 300% throughout the duration of the campaign. This mediatisation of the Oval Office image by Deutsch NY and MWW aptly illustrates the process through which institutions are shaped by mass media and the degree to which 'realism' is not simply extant, but rather is always, *almost exactly*, a construction. At odds with the *exact replica* status of the Oval Office reconstructions, is the elision of the stylistic image of the office with the media cultivated image of the president. Ikea's Oval office replica is clearly a conduit for the commercial forces it unleashes through its droll presence and well-choreographed chain of events, simultaneously revealing the insidious agendas of a do-it-yourself culture in which self-direction and personal design conviction are mere apparitions. The heady aspiration of personal customisation often masks the stark reality that one is operating in someone else's aesthetic, making 'individual' choices that have already been foreseen. However, conspicuously missing from the language of this ad campaign is the phraseology of the 'exact replica'. The exactitude of the images produced, in Calvino's sense, pry open the ambiguous territory of the *almost exactly*, catalysing the unlimited potential of the spatial imaginary.

### Photo 'realism'

On 9 November 2008, the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* bore a photograph of the Oval Office as the illustration for an article entitled 'After the Imperial White House', examining the extension and abuse of presidential powers and authority in the administration of George W. Bush [11]. The photo credit was an innocuous line of text, simply reading: 'Photos (Photographs by Thomas Demand for the *New York Times*)', and in the letters to the editor in subsequent issues, there is no mention of the photographs. But, why would there be? Thomas Demand is a German photographer and sculptor who uses paper and cardboard to recreate the spatial settings found in images from various media sources. Once he has 'staged' these environments, he photographs them (typically in large format), always devoid of figures but often bearing traces of some recent occupation, and then, pointedly, destroys the model. The benign photo credit now seems particularly charged, as the *New York Times* actually commissioned the piece by Demand, but surreptitiously neglected to mention it in the issue. In a seemingly quintessential moment of art meeting life, an artist whose stock and trade is to blur the distinction between reality and its mediatisation, illustrates a journalistic exposé on a political reality that is, by all accounts, much stranger than fiction. Significant to this narrative of Oval Office replicas is the typicality of Demand's representations, epitomised by their striking lack of detail, and yet even without detail, their unerring capacity to reference this iconic room. Here, Calvino's evocation of 'clear, incisive, and memorable images' takes on new meaning, as Demand's exactitude resides in his photographic capacity to essentialise [12]. His destruction of the paper Oval Office model provocatively parallels the fiery demolition of Taft's Oval Office, the first obliteration unleashing an escalating culture of copies, the second, positing that even representations twice removed can extend the grasp of the *almost exactly*.<sup>18</sup> Demand's consistent choice to represent his spatial settings devoid of human presence but bearing evidence of recent human occupation is an interesting 'tell'. In poker, a tell is a gesture or habit that unwittingly reveals the intention of the player, and in the search for Oval Office images, a significant tell (if not a hard and fast rule) is that the replicas are consistently documented without inhabitants, as if personal identity is the one factor that could convincingly tip the scales from counterfeit to real. Naysayers and critics of Demand's oeuvre accuse him of being a one-trick pony, but if the elusive  $\frac{1}{2}$  is indeed a repository of the spatial imaginary, then Demand is the doyen of the *almost exactly*. His Oval Office suite compellingly weaves reality and fiction into a heuristic fiction in which the reader discovers that this flat, superficial caricature of the Oval Office is producing critical commentary on an equally shallow and vacuous presidential administration.

The intermingling of reality and fiction that is central to Demand's representation of the Oval



11a



11b

11 *New York Times Magazine* cover, 'After the Imperial Presidency', 9 November 2008  
a *New York Times* cover  
b Thomas Demand image

12 Thomas Demand, *Presidency II*, 2008, chromogenic print, 210 cm x 300 cm



12

Office also characterises *The West Wing*, a popular television drama that aired on NBC from 1999 to 2006, renowned for its choppy hand-held camera work and pithy dialogue that realistically captured the patois of American political life inside the beltway. In season five, an episode entitled 'The Stormy Present', found fictitious President Josiah Bartlet attending the funeral of former President Owen Lassiter. Lassiter's widow, Libby, informed President Bartlet that her husband spent his final years visiting battlefields around the world upon which American blood had been spilled, collecting glass vials of that soil, and displaying them on the shelves of the Oval Office replica in his presidential library. She further revealed that her late husband ate and slept in the Oval Office replica, and had his hospital bed placed in the space after his recent surgery. In this provocative television episode, reverberations of Umberto Eco's reflections on LBJ's Oval Office replica take on new meaning: 'For historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of reincarnation. The completely real becomes identified with the completely fake.' In *The West Wing*, this reincarnation takes many forms. It takes the form of a fictitious former president's actual inhabitation of his Oval Office replica, inverting its sense of double occupation, such that the trappings of work and vocation supersede the habitual behaviours of simply occupying a space. It takes the form of numerous consultants, formerly serving on presidential staffs, and pressed into service as experts, ensuring the

'realism' of the fictitious *The West Wing* storylines. It takes the form of an intelligent, creative and idealistic fictional democratic president, who becomes a foil for Democratic aspirations during the eight-year Republican monopoly of the George W. Bush administration. In all of the instances, everyday life and fiction, the completely real and the completely fake become so delicately intertwined that they are rendered indiscernible, except for those moments when they are *almost exactly*.

#### 'Realism' without the 1/8

In each of these examples of scrupulous copies, it is critical to consider precisely how the effect of exactness was produced, in order to appreciate the creative differentiation of the 1/8. In the case of Disneyland's Main Street, the 1/8 scale is in the service of the generic or the typical; lulling the visitor into a sense of complacent recognition, while nagging at the edges of awareness, indicating that something is strange or not quite right. Similarly, it is telling that LBJ remained unflappable when Bunshaft broached

the idea of changing the scale of his Oval Office replica, as long as the copy was as 'near as possible' to the original. Here, the effect of exactness operates in the service of the symbolic content and practices of a space that is both politically laden and fraught with meaning. The animatronic LBJ, on the other hand, posits the historical imaginary between the veracity of Johnson's distinctive twang and the abject phoniness of the figure's physiognomy and comportment. Exactness is born of temporal disjuncture – the perfectly and permanently anachronistic state of this ersatz historical agent. With respect to Ikea's guerrilla advertising campaign, the effect of exactness is produced at the precise moment when political change finds its corollary in customisation and individual preference, subsumed within brand identity. The spatial imaginary is unleashed, but perpetually burdened by the aesthetic of inexpensive Scandinavian Modernism. In Thomas Demand's Oval Office replica, exactness is born of the very flatness of his representations – a flatness that occasions the easy elision of the two- and three-dimensional. This flatness produces the immediate impression of exactitude, a gestalt effect of recognition that requires no further scrutiny, while simultaneously calling attention to the thin surfaces, unconvincing veneers, and lack of detail in this obviously constructed reality.

By definition, these copies are not exact, but in producing the effect of exactness, they access the

spatial imaginary of the  $\frac{1}{8}$ . This is where the architectural capacity to conjure creative differentiation is housed. Though architecture is, undoubtedly, an exact and exacting discipline, creative practice must be careful of what it wishes for. The more closely representations simulate the reality they hope to evince, the more tenuous the discipline's grip on conceptual distance becomes. The spatial imaginary operates as an arsenal of creative potential for architectural variation – it insulates the discipline from the ubiquity of rote repetition and homogeneous formal iteration.

What would life be like without the coveted  $\frac{1}{8}$ ? What would it mean to dwell in an environment filled with exact replicas and devoid of the gratification of contradiction and the sheer pleasure of the *almost exactly*? In this world, images and representations would all be tautological, useful only in so far as they accurately describe the reality they hope to conjure. This world has no use for the space of differentiation, the space of contradiction, or the space of translation – everything is as it seems, the spatial imaginary wallows in its own obsolescence. So the lesson of the almost exactly is that reality is a construction, and the  $\frac{1}{8}$  is the repository of the cultural imaginary that produces this construction. To ignore this is to subject ourselves to the oppressive weight of the real. To acknowledge it is to unleash the imaginative potential of the *almost exactly* and revel in its creative ambiguity.

## Notes

1. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 6.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
3. On Main Street, the street level facades are constructed at  $\frac{1}{8}$  scale with each additional storey becoming progressively smaller. While the park was under construction, Walt Disney stayed in an apartment above Main Street's Fire Station. Inspiration for the typical American Main Street came both from Disney's hometown of Marceline, Missouri and Fort Collins, Colorado, the hometown of one of the Main Street designers.
4. Amanda Ripley, 'A Short History of White House Fires', *Time Magazine*, 19 December 2007.
5. Edward Eigen, 'The Place of Distribution: Episodes in the Architecture of Experiment', in *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors*, ed. by Antoine Picon and Alessandra Ponte (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 62. Eigen uses the trope of the twice occupied to discuss the emergence of the laboratory from the context of the domestic interior, arguing that the exigencies of home economics ultimately gave rise to experimental procedures. Here, I want to suggest that the institutional values of the library and museum equally emanate from this formalisation of domestic experience.
6. This conversation is a part of the infamous LBJ secret recordings, documenting over 9000 phone calls during his tenure as president and subjecting those with opposing points of view to the dreaded 'Johnson Treatment'.
7. Citation no.: 13533; Speaker: GORDON BUNSHAFT; Tape: WH6810.03; Program no.: 11; Length: 7:47; Date: 10 October 1968; Time: 8:57pm.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* Emphasis is the author's own.
10. Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 5.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
12. The 'original' dimensions for the Oval Office: Taft – 33'10" L x 27' W x 18'6" H; FDR – 35'10" L x 29' W x 18'6" H. The Truman Library Replica: 32'9" L x 27'3" W x 18'6" H.
13. Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, MA: Vintage Books, 1988), p. 55.
14. Last month, the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* featured an image of historian Robert Caro with the tag line 'Robert Caro is a Dinosaur: And Thank God for That'. The article described Caro as the 'last of the 19th-century biographers, the kind who believe that the life of a great or powerful man deserves not just a slim volume, or even a fat one, but a whole shelf full'. Caro has dedicated nearly forty years of his life to crafting biographies of Lyndon B. Johnson, suggesting that the evocation of Calvino's 'clear, incisive, memorable images' can equally be accomplished in words. Somewhere between Caro's paradigm of exhaustive biographical description and the Oval Office copy's allusion to the typicality of American home office culture lurks the *almost exactly*. See: Charles McGrath, 'Robert Caro's Big Dig', *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 April 2012.
15. Out-of-home advertising refers to any form of advertisement that



reaches the consumer when they are outside of their home, but in the paradoxical case of the Oval Office, a space whose origin can be traced to a displacement from the presidential residence, the term takes on new meaning.

16. Ikea's digital model bears a striking resemblance to the Google SketchUp model of the George W. Bush Oval Office, and it could be argued that the software provides infrastructure for the propagation and reinterpretation of the image.
17. 3998 Oval Office designs were sent to the White House from this web page.
18. In fact, Demand's photographs are four-times removed, as they begin with photographs from various media sources, translate them into paper models, and then photograph them. In the case of the *New York Times* images, then, it is possible to argue for six degrees of separation.

#### Illustration credits

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*New York Times Magazine* (double image with *New York Times* cover and

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the first step towards understanding the argument I hoped to make. And finally, thanks to Michael MacDonald from the LBJ Presidential Library, who helped me unearth the treasured conversation between LBJ and Gordon Bunshaft.

#### Biography

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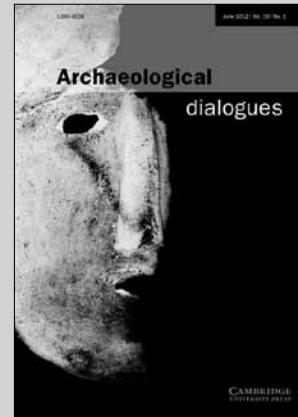
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