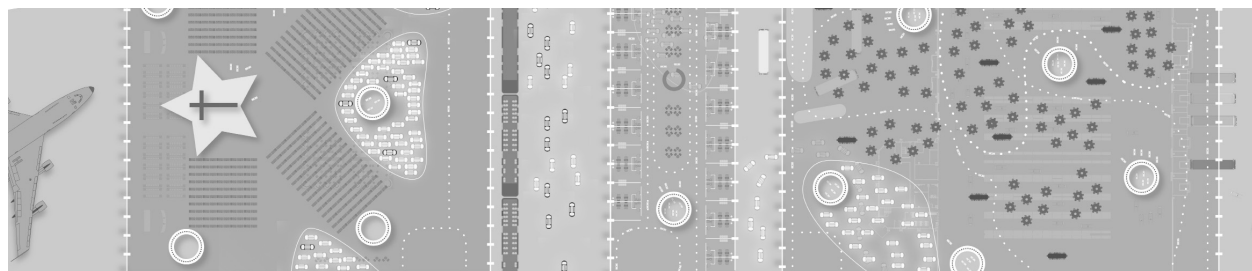# FLOOR.DWG

Keller Easterling

Floor.dwg is not really part of that genre of transportation designs that would include Norman Bel Geddes, Lawrence Halprin, Geoffrey Jellicoe, or Brian Richards. Within this genre, one finds everything from seemingly elevated utopian remedies to the slightly mad visions of inventors and amateur transport enthusiasts. Perhaps reacting to our dumb and monovalent transport networks, the drawings often depict a gloriously complex new circuitry of intermodal infrastructure intersections.
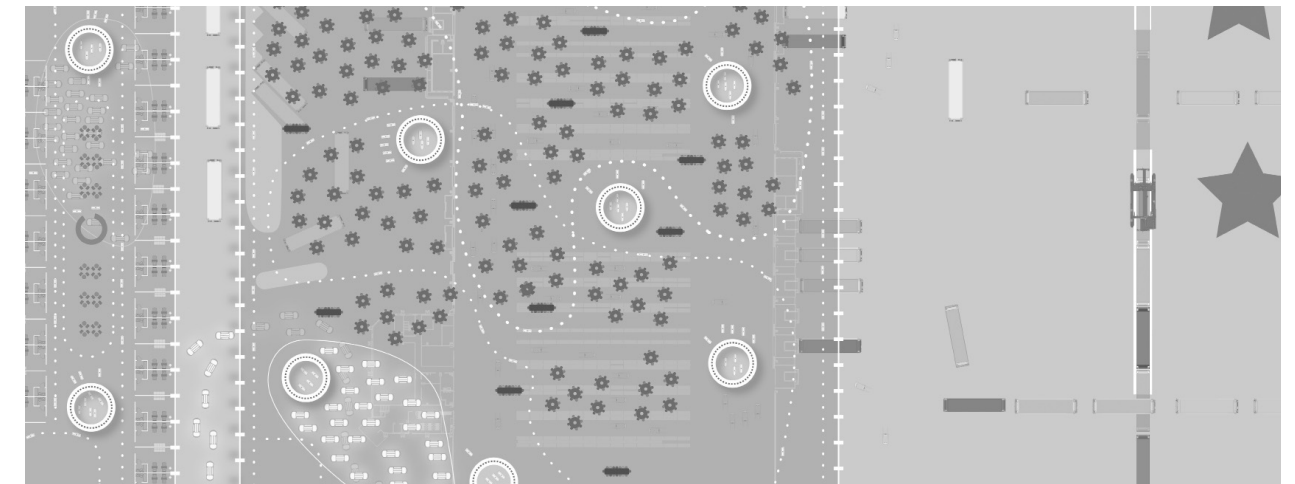
Floor.dwg was found on one of the many autocad exchange networks where people generously share drawings. You never know when someone might need something called, for instance, "do not delete.dwg," "Elks club parking lot.dwg," or "Andrew.dwg." So as not to go to waste, these drawings wait on the cad block exchange Web page in the hopes of someday being useful.

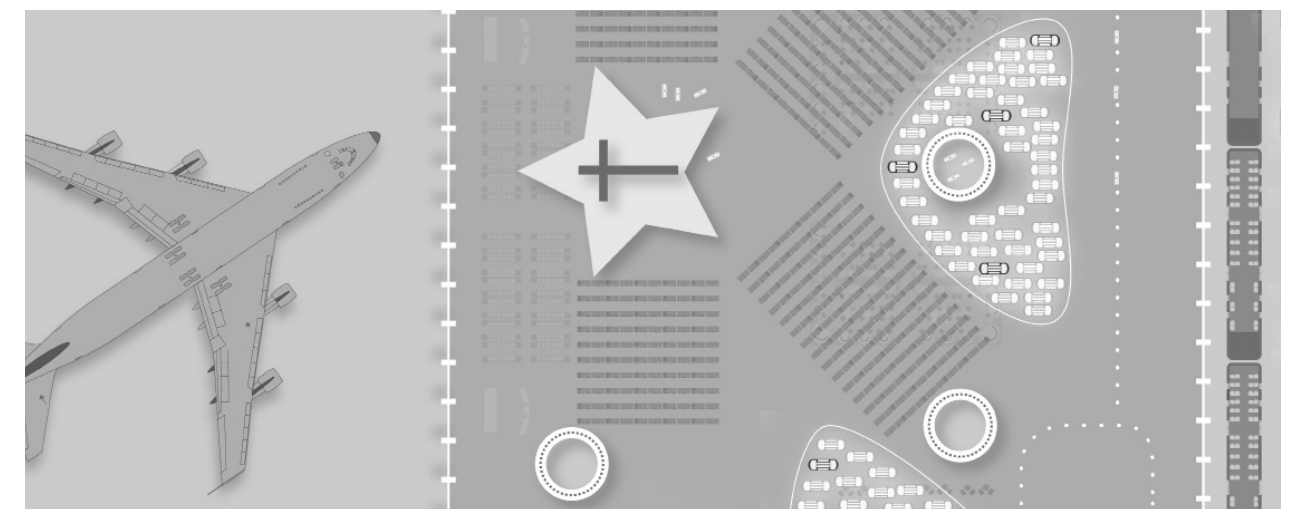A long text titled "Floor: a few facts" accompanied the found drawing. Below is an excerpt:

SEE, BASICALLY, THE CAR AND THE ELEVATOR ARE MERGING.
BOTH ARE BORROWING TECHNOLOGY FROM AUTOMATED VEHICLES
USED IN WAREHOUSES AND PORTS…

THE FLOOR IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SURFACE.

VEHICLES READ GRAPHIC PATTERNS ON THE FLOOR OR TRANSPON-
DERS EMBEDDED IN THE FLOOR. TRANSPONDERS USE MAGNETS, GPS
AND LASERS. SOMETIMES THE FLOORS HAVE LOUD PATTERNS…

THERE ARE A LOT OF NEW VEHICLES THAT ARE
ALREADY OPERATIONAL.

MY FAVORITE AUTOMATED VEHICLE IS THE ONE THAT COMES TO-
WARD YOU REALLY SLOWLY WITH A GIANT ROLL OF CELLOPHANE.

NEW FUELS AND NEW VEHICLES HAVE NO EXHAUST AND NO FRONT

OR BACK. WITH NEW AUTOMATED PARKING TECHNOLOGY, THEY CAN BE STORED ANYWHERE IN A BUILDING. NEW VEHICLES ALSO MOVE HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY, SO THERE IS NOT SO MUCH SEP-ARATION BETWEEN ELEVATOR, PARKING LOT AND ROAD.

WHAT I MEAN IS THAT THE FLOOR IS ALSO A PASSAGEWAY, LIKE A HORIZONTAL ELEVATOR SHAFT. I AM NOT AN ARCHITECT, BUT YOU WOULD PROBABLY WANT TO MAKE THE HORIZONTAL AND VERTI-CAL SHAFTS ACT LIKE STRUCTURE…FLOORS AND PILLARS."

Floor.dwg, however enthusiastic, is not hyperbolic, nor is it particularly futuristic. It is merely an exuberant rehearsal of existing, and quite common, transport technologies that use the floor as a navigational surface. These vehicles appear not in the sparkling or liberating utopias, but in the ordinary background environments of logistics or conveyance. They merge the technologies of the elevator and the car with automated guided vehicles.

Even as new technologies make building skins into media screens, the ordinary floor is absorbing technologies that radicalize its familiar role. In container ports and warehouses, for instance, automated guided vehicles take direction from gps, laser, magnetic transponders, or graphic patterns on the floor. With the help of rehearsals by these automated vehicles of logistics landscapes, the car and the elevator are also merging. While vertical surfaces are typically considered to be "readable," the floor is now also becoming a surface that directs navigation. The same vehicle, acting as both car and elevator, moves both vertically and horizontally through shafts and over surfaces.

Just as many effusive transportation drawings are found under the beds of madmen, there are also plenty of futuristic projections for personal rapid transit vehicles, monorails, podcars, and platoons of vehicles (e.g. the EUREKA Prometheus Project or the Aramis project in France). Most of these vehicles hope to operate collectively as transit in urban areas, and then disperse to take the passenger to their particular home or destination. Yet alongside this science fiction are a number of working prototypes. Among these are: FROG (Free Ranging on Grid) and the 2GetThere project in the Netherlands; the DARPA grand challenge in the United States; the ARGO project in Italy; VaMP and VITA-2 by Ernst Dickmann's team in Germany; and the ULTra personal rapid transit system in the UK. Some of these protoypes perform very simple tasks in the least glamorous of logistics environments, while others are vying to become the cars of the future.

Moreover, while both elevators and cars have been the subjects of futuristic projections (e.g. elevators to the moon; autogyros), the simple ability of the eleva-

tor to move from floor to floor, or the simple ability of the car to travel rapidly on a highway, was both more ordinary and more radical. Both the car and the elevator became germs, or multipliers, that dictated the morphology of cities.

As *floor.dwg* announces, new fuels and new vehicles that lack exhaust make no distinction between front and back, and do not create familiar segregations between inside vehicles (elevators) and outside vehicles (cars and transport). In any event, with automated car parking, conveyance vehicles move the cars. There are no running engines, no drivers, and no access lanes, so cars can be closely packed. They can be anywhere in a building without concerns about exhaust. In conventional parking, a quantity of 700 cars requires 245,000 square feet. In automated parking, 1050 cars require 115,000 square feet.

While claiming to know little about design, the author of *floor.dwg* is essentially describing a new Domino House for conveyance systems. The columns and slabs of this elevator system are passage as well as structure. They are voided vertical tubes and horizontal sandwich spaces in which vehicles travel. Hospitals and universities already deploy these spaces. As they are adopted, these systems gradually cancel the normative logics of floor and put many previously segregated environments into a colloidal soup of new adjacencies. Parking lots, elevator shafts, and exterior roadways are all potentially part of a more continuous surface within which vehicles are not necessarily confined to either inside or outside spaces. *Floor. dwg* does not depict the dream of omni-directional movement, but simply the concept of floors that, as a palette for these devices, have a less-constrained repertoire and a new responsibility.

Like many drawings from the autocad exchange networks, *floor.dwg* appears to have been lovingly created with a special affection for the floor's new attributes as an important carrier of new logics, as well as new adjacencies, for urban multipliers. As *floor.dwg* demonstrates, one strange outcome of all of these optimizing logics might be a graphic floor of excessive silliness and beauty.