

DIALECTIC VIII: SUBVERTING

UNMAKING ARCHITECTURE?

Dialectic is the refereed journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Utah. Established in 2012, the journal brings together the most competing opposing voices on the most compelling questions in discipline today. It interrogates the issues, values, methods, and debates that are most important to the community of educators at the University of Utah and elsewhere.

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DIALECTIC VIII: SUBVERTING

UNMAKING ARCHITECTURE?

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Cover Design By: Michael Abrahamson and Sam Ball

Cover Image: Women's March, Utah State Capitol
Salt Lake City, Jan. 23, 2017, Photo: Ole Fischer

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"This book is dedicated to authority"
—Le Corbusier, May 1933

In 1933, the father of modern architecture, Le Corbusier, infamously dedicated his pamphlet for *The Radiant City* to "Authority." But he is of course not the only architect to fall under the spell of authority. His cynicism is akin to other architects' retreats into "a-political" professionalism or "autonomous" aesthetics. Each of these forms of retreat amounts to a defeatist stance—that society gets the architecture it deserves. What about practices that oscillate in between, can they be regarded as subversive actors?

Subverting requires the presence of long established regimes to undermine, corrupt, unsettle, destabilize, sabotage, or pervert. There is no shortage of such regimes within the discipline of architecture. Our subversive efforts might take on its legal, professional, educational, and authorial conventions.

A primary way to consider subversion in architecture could be to address the legality or illegality of spatial interventions. How can we rewrite the laws, rules, regulations, and codes of architecture to get out of the stranglehold of power and authority? What lies beyond conventional architectural practice—"outsider architecture"? Mere building? Spatial practice? Appropriation? An authoritarian urge is inscribed into the very name of the discipline. So should we rather, following Gordon Matta-Clark, speak of anarchi- tecture? What are the models for non-authorial and non-authoritarian forms of practice? Can we learn from informal economies where architects and building codes are absent? How can we think of subverting as a practice that moves beyond avant-gardist claims of termination, erasure, destruction, of blowing up buildings, or burning them down?

What are the best ways to subvert the current capitalist model of architectural practice? Might these show the way toward a new architecture? What are some of the models for innovative economies of designing and building places, working relationships, organization of the planning and building process? On the one hand, in some of the most sustainable practices like Gluck + (New York), the office's focus has not taken the form of the right commission but the right economics of design practice. On the other, architects like Arif Hassan (Karachi) are subverting the

traditional role of the architect and planner as experts of the built environment, in favor of the spatial production of other actors—trained and licensed or not. Henri Lefebvre reminded us that spaces and buildings have always been produced or "secreted" by groups and societies. With the contemporary turn toward crowd organization, authorless cooperation, and of the (digital) commons, we ask what lessons can be learned for spatial production. Are there suggestive examples of spaces being made and unmade by users and the public?

"Learning" is yet another field of inquiry into subversive architecture. Post-colonial studies have long identified education as the most powerful instrument of colonizing the mind. The global spread of the Western pedagogic model of scientific rationalism, has impoverished the architectural mind by marginalizing, if not outright delegitimizing competing forms of knowing and wisdom about the physical world. It is not only outsiders, insiders too have critiqued Eurocentrism at the heart of architectural imagination. Horkheimer and Adorno have proven Enlightenment to hold both emancipating and oppressive impulses of bourgeois society. Canonical education is silent on the immense number of ways of social engagement beyond the Western model of the architect as the designer of plans, detached from—but superior to—the execution by builders, contractors, craftsmen. We therefore ask educators, students, and practitioners to share modes of spatial practice and building culture that critique the Western figure of the architect as technician, expert, scholar, researcher, or ingenious artist.

Finally, particularly valuable for the renewal, expansion, or unmaking of architecture is the scholarship of Michel de Certeau, who set aside the strategic nature of planners and designers in favor of the tactical action of users, renters, and consumers of urban space. Of special interest are reports on acts of co-option, of poaching on the property of others and spaces of the powerful, of in- action, and of unfinished business beyond the fetishes of "design" and "object"—rather than form, let's focus on affect, effect, and the performance of architecture. Consider sending stories about time, the temporal, the ephemeral, and the tactical pockets within the cloak of authority. We will value contributions that turn upside down, inside out, flip the perspective, and honor the unsung users, makers, consumers, and appropriators of the built environment.

EDITORIAL

FOREWORD

LISA HENRY

TURNING THE MASTER'S HOUSE AGAINST ITSELF

MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON



Interim chair **Lisa C. Henry** was appointed in 2001 as an Assistant Professor at the University of Utah College of Architecture + Planning, and she was promoted to associate professor in 2009. She received a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from UVA and a Master of Architecture from Harvard University. Henry's architectural practice is focused on the influence of gender, race, queer and (dis)ability theory on the construction, perception, and form of architecture. She explores this theme in both scholarly research and small-scale design projects. Lisa is currently completing her Ph.D. Dissertation in English at the University of Utah. Lisa's dissertation asks how and why race is so intimately implicated in conceptions of landscape and property ownership in the United States. She investigates both legal definitions and literary representations of property and how narrative structures and disruptive occupations might begin to undermine conceptions of and claims to property.



Michael Abrahamson, Ph.D. is an architectural historian and critic whose research explores the materiality of buildings and the methods of architectural practice across the twentieth century. His Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan centered on the important late modernist architectural firm Gunnar Birkerts and Associates. Michael has also written about the Detroit firm Albert Kahn Associates and on the architectural style known as Brutalism. In these and other research projects, he explores the systems of creativity, subordination, and legitimation that have underwritten the creation of architecture. Michael is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Utah, where he teaches history surveys, research seminars, and design studios. He has previously taught at Kent State University and the University of Michigan. In addition to his Ph.D., he holds a B.Arch from Kent State University and a master's degree in architecture criticism from the Ohio State University.



Dr. Ole W. Fischer is an architectural theoretician, historian, critic, curator, and associate professor as well as associate director of the University of Utah School of Architecture. Before his appointment in 2010, he conducted research and teaching at the ETH Zurich, Harvard GSD, MIT, and RISD, and since then held visiting appointments at the TU Vienna and the TU Graz. He lectured and published internationally on history, theory, and criticism of architecture, art and culture, amongst others in: *Archithese, Werk, JSAH, MIT Thresholds, Arch+, AnArchitektur, GAM, Umeni, Beyond, West 86th, Framework, and log*. He contributed chapters to numerous books, such as *The Handbook of Architectural Theory* (London: 2012) and *This Thing called Theory* (London: 2016). He is the author of *Nietzsches Schatten* (Berlin: 2012) and co-editor of the peer-reviewed architecture journal *Dialectic* (since 2011/12).

FOREWORD

LISA C. HENRY

We were not given such an assignment because not only would it have disrupted and subverted the idea of artistic endeavor and creative expression as politically neutral acts, it would have fundamentally challenged the idea of art as always a site for transcendence ... I learned to see freedom as always and intimately linked to the issue of transforming space.¹

—bell hooks

Dialectic has become a critical and productive provocation for the University of Utah School of Architecture (SoA) since its founding in 2012. We have taken advantage of this prompt to explore concepts critical to the education of an architect, including *Decolonizing Architectural Pedagogy*, *Architecture at Service?* and *The Art of Making Architecture*. Each of these provocations may be seen as attempts to subvert the discipline and its many sacred concepts, above all the critical centrality of architecture as an isolated aesthetic object. However, in my mind, this form of provocation has been necessary for the development of the School and its curriculum. Far from subverting, these ideas have enhanced architecture, shifting its boundaries to include aspects of culture and representation that are in my mind critical to ethical architectural practice.

The 2019 call for papers for this issue of *Dialectic* states, "Subverting requires the presence of long-established regimes to undermine, corrupt, unsettle, destabilize, sabotage, or pervert." We have acted on the idea that the inverse is also true: long-established regimes require subverting. They require subverting in order to remain relevant, and in the case of architecture, in order to corrupt the idea that architectural practice—though driven by capitalist modes of production—is politically neutral or at least immune from any responsibility for the operations of power.

The School of Architecture at the University of Utah (SoA) has been working in the last three years to transform our curriculum and our institution. We have subverted many of our own conceptions of architecture and professionalism. We have focused on the idea that an architect must be a citizen of both the local and global contexts within which we all work, research, and build. In particular, we have focused on subverting professional and educational conventions in order to support a practice of architecture that no longer hides behind isolated aesthetic considerations but instead takes an ethical position in relation to economies of production, climate, and cultural resilience. Our subversions of architecture stem from the idea that culture, representation, power, and ecology are inextricable from both the built environment and its modes of production. It is precisely the intersection of architecture with these phenomena that allow us to explore new approaches to building community.

The faculty of the SoA created a new curriculum that interrogates the role of architecture and the responsibility of the architect in the construction of the community. We unsettle the architectural object as the focus of the studio curriculum by initiating the exploration of architectural practice through theories such as gender, race, and queer studies. This preparation readies our students to question how the built environment serves as an instrument of discrimination. This, in turn, allows them to move beyond the naturalization of normative values. The critiques of disability studies, indigeneity, and decolonizing methodologies sabotage the tendency of unreflective architectural practices to create and perpetuate disadvantaged communities. Architecture emerges as a double-edged sword. If it has been structured to reproduce existing social inequities, then it can also become an instrument of activism.

TURNING THE MASTER’S HOUSE AGAINST ITSELF

MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON

Several of our faculty have incorporated feminist pedagogy promoted by scholars like bell hooks. They have replaced the frameworks of “competition” and “authorship” in the classroom with a collective, collaborative, and mutually supportive approach to the creation of knowledge. This model encourages students to take responsibility for questioning course objectives and rubrics through probing discussion and collaborative design of projects. With this, faculty and students disrupt the traditional pedagogical paradigm in which the professor is the disseminator of knowledge, and the students are its consumers. The classroom, instead, is a site of collective production. The teacher is not all-knowing, but a seeker him or herself. They teach not a stock of canonic information but techniques for crafting research questions and the best methods for finding answers. The goal here is to disrupt the vision of architecture as a single-authored building, delivered complete to a client. Instead, we promote the notion of an architect as a participant in a process that includes collective envisioning of program, building, and different modes of contributing to the process of making.

Poaching and borrowing critical research methods from many disciplines such as ethnography, history, art, and geography destabilize the Eurocentric frameworks within which they have originated. European thought has established the architect as an expert and professional, producing a very narrow and provisional canon. It has done so by delegitimizing diverse ways of creating meaning, relationships, and values found in underrepresented communities in the discipline. The body of knowledge and self-criticality of these different disciplines enable our colleagues and students to bring the same ethos to the studio and its focus on the building. They provide a critical lens for framing new questions that drive the work in studio, technology, and professional practice classes. They refine our sensibilities by pointing to the disconnect between the aspirations of service and activist based architecture and the skills and methods aimed at serving corporate practice.

Since the 19th century, architecture has been formalized into a discipline through institutions of higher education and processes of licensure. It has attached itself to the conception of the “professional”

in order to carve out a narrow territory for its members within the building industry. As it has modernized, it has slowly reduced professional know-how to technocratic forms of knowledge. At our School, we are working to also subvert this model. We have done so in a number of ways, but most conspicuously through revising our approach to community engagement, that has been a longstanding value of the School. Our new concept of community engagement recasts the architect as an apprentice, learning from the communities, rather than descending on them as an expert. This mindset asks that students/architects-in-the-making, be humble, and think of themselves as facilitators. They become eager to educate themselves about different ways of being in the world, making space, authorship, and spatial agency. They learn with Henri Lefebvre that architect is one spatial producer among many. All these efforts are designed to undercut the closures of western theories of knowledge and professionalism. With this, our students are reminded that our current systems are historically constructed; and history by definition is subject to change, questioning, revision, and subversion.■

ENDNOTES

1. Bell Hooks, Julie Eizenberg, and Hank Koning. “House, 20 June 1994.” *Assemblage*, no. 24 [1994]: 22-23.

UNMAKING ARCHITECTURE?

A subverting action requires something be subverted. In this issue of *Dialectic*, the twin targets of our subversion are the architectural education system and professional practice of architecture.

Why might the discipline and profession of architecture be in need of subverting? Because, in short, we have proven, time and again, unwilling to confront our complicity in and perpetuation of contemporary environmental and social problems. We have been unable to meet such problems with anything more than a modicum of superficial transformation: in response to climate catastrophe we’ve provided self-congratulatory checklists; in response to demands for inclusion, diversity, and equity we’ve presented tokenistic gestures with little to no structural impact. Above all, the discipline and profession of architecture are in need of subverting because of our unmatched ability to naturalize the present order of things.

To encourage subverting actions as educators, we must emphasize the contingency, malleability, and impermanence of our inherited systems and institutions. Our students must clearly understand that both the profession and the discipline, despite their apparent resistance to change, are susceptible to subverting actions. To encourage subverting actions as practitioners, we might work to unmake the norms of authorial heroism and the conventions of hierarchical subordination.

The contributions to this issue have been divided into three sections. In part one, the articles address unexpected examples of everyday architecture while proposing ways of distilling lessons and applying those lessons in scholarship and in design. In their analysis of the pedagogies of fieldwork in the Milwaukee-based

Field School program, Seung-youp Lee and Chelsea Wait propose that through direct engagement with everyday buildings and the general public, architecture students can come to understand their societal function differently. In an ethnographic commentary featuring scenographic drawings of the Héliport housing complex in Brussels, Belgium, Claire Bosmans proposes new ways of doing architectural research that document and interpret the everyday tactics of appropriation undertaken by building occupants. In her article, Ashley Bigham subverts the format of a classic manifesto to offer an alternative formula for architectural form-making based on her ongoing studies of Eastern European shopping bazaars.

The articles in part two offer critiques of the tendency to instrumentalize architectural knowledge, particularly in its indigenous forms. James Miller and Eric Nay address the use of the term “The Rights of Nature” in contemporary architecture, arguing that while it could be used as a lever to pry open our understanding of the relation between humans and their environment, it instead too often serves as a justification for suppressing indigenous knowledge and beliefs. In an interview discussing his complex, hybrid drawings, Chris Cornelius outlines the way he understands the relationships between history, design, and research.

Finally, the articles in part three question fundamental architectural concepts in a direct and confrontational way. Annelies De Smet asks, through her lyrical collages and writing, to what extent architecture’s practice and pedagogy depend upon a normative definition of the user or building occupant, while proposing strategies for unmaking this norm. And in this issue’s final essay, Colin Ripley constructs a theory of subversion, atop the foundations provided by queer literary icon Jean Genet, questioning our concepts of ground, property, and propriety along the way.

To introduce such a diverse selection of approaches and aesthetics, we must also put a finer point on what we mean when we say *subverting*. A meager historical genealogy for such “subverting” might include the avant-garde artists and architects who worked to overturn cultural and political consensus through radical works and actions. But overturning the canon requires identifying alternative exemplars. Where else might one look for subversive examples to follow?

We should instead follow less-trod avenues, tracing the paths of those whose resistance to the strictures of contemporary architecture led them to other realms, taking what they learned with them as they went. In addition to “alternative practices”—which, under late capitalism, are typically forced to merely seek out alternative modes of income rather than developing alternative modes of ownership or means of production—we might also look for pathfinders who deploy time-tested techniques of subversion in new realms and in new ways.

VIRGIL IN THE HOUSE OF MIES

The contemporary art and design polymath Virgil Abloh traces his creative genesis to a skyscraper project he completed while a student at the Illinois Institute of Technology’s architecture school, which he titled “Subverting the Norm.” The project itself was nothing extraordinary, a bent and twisted box, but as Abloh explains, this work and its title emblemized a struggle between his fascination with the seemingly open, creative potential of design and the rigorous, professionalized strictures of the discipline:

Architecture school for me was a conundrum. It started out with a sort of leveling of the playing field. On day 1, they began by beating us down, saying that only 11 percent of students who get a degree in architecture will actually practice architecture. What was interesting to me about that was that I went to architecture school not to be an architect, but to learn about design. So it wasn’t going to be a kind of “coming to reality” lesson, but instead a lesson in making my reality come true.¹

Abloh, we might say, *subverted* this so-called lesson by turning it against itself. So what, he seems to ask, if architecture students don’t practice architecture? The message Abloh took was not that architecture requires discipline, commitment, and sacrifice (which must have been what his instructors intended in a school whose legitimacy still rested upon the long shadow of its dogmatic former director Ludwig Mies van der Rohe), but rather that “reality” is never an inevitability. His instructors’ peremptory first lesson in “coming to reality” tells us little about how to understand the fact that an African American architecture student from suburban Rockford, Illinois might use what he learned when leading the menswear department at the fashion house of Louis Vuitton. “We’re all investigating reality,” Abloh has said, “to achieve some ultimate goal, which might be the pursuit of absolute life, or reordering the coincidences of the world so that they make sense.”² By what outcomes should we judge the effectiveness of an architectural education?

This exceptional story isn’t used here as an allegory for interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurial bootstrapping, or to suggest that everyone should chase membership in the globetrotting “design” elite Abloh inhabits. But Abloh’s strategy is undeniably subversive: to inject a streetwear aesthetic—subjected to architectural discipline and tinged with conceptualism—into the heart of *haute couture* fashion.

On the contrary, subverting mustn’t be understood as a mere synonym for the corporate catchphrase “disruptive innovation,” or for capitalism’s imperative toward “creative destruction,” both of which suggest cyclical (or even circular) processes through which growth and profit are maintained. Subverting retains nefarious connotations that disruption and innovation have shed through association with the perceived heroism of entrepreneurial thought leaders.³ A truly subverting action does not simply redirect or reformulate in order to promote further expansion. It must instead overturn conventions and expectations with the aim of delegitimizing them. Subverting actions, one might say, are a means that do not prescribe a desired end—they are primarily gestures of unmaking.



Figure 1: Virgil Abloh photographed by Richard Anderson for *KALEIDOSCOPE* magazine at Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House (Plano, Illinois, 1948-51), wearing a vest he designed for Louis Vuitton and a version of the iconic Air Force One sneakers he designed for Nike. Courtesy: Richard Anderson, by permission of Virgil Abloh and *KALEIDOSCOPE* magazine.

IRONY AND INCLUSIVITY

Does Abloh’s rise to the highest echelons of *haute couture* represent a co-optation of an otherwise subversive streetwear, aesthetic by what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer famously called “the culture industry”? Perhaps. As Marxist and feminist critics never tire of reminding us, society’s institutions are powerful enough to co-opt subverting actions and, thereby, avoid undergoing transformation. All too often it is the critique that’s transformed rather than its target. Characteristically, Marshall Berman wrote that:

Bourgeois society, through its insatiable drive for destruction and development, and its need to satisfy the insatiable needs it creates, inevitably produces radical ideas and movements that aim to destroy it. But its very capacity for development enables it to negate its own

inner negations: to nourish itself and thrive on opposition, to become stronger amid pressure and crisis than it could ever be in peace, to transform enmity into intimacy and attackers into inadvertent allies.⁴

To avoid this trap, subverting must mean something other than trying to use “the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house” (to borrow Audre Lorde’s famous architectural metaphor).⁵ A subverting action must instead turn the master’s house against itself. We might say this is embodied in one of Abloh’s most common tactics—placing everything in quotation marks—which is intended to reveal the contingency and constructedness of trademarks, brand names, and “artwork” alike. These quotation marks cue the viewer to consider the context that surrounds the work—what Abloh calls the work’s “halo.” And, Abloh believes, the more reciprocal the relationship between a work and

its “halo,” the better. Both context and content can and should be designed.⁶

The stylistic content of much of Abloh’s work (such as his canted skyscraper produced at IIT) is easily copied, and this is intentional, as his near-universal use of all-caps Helvetica Bold reveals. Value isn’t inherent to his generic objects but is instead built through the exchange of images in a contemporary, social media-conscious parody of Marx’s commodity fetishism. Abloh’s work and its designed “halo” accelerate this basic capitalist conceit to the point of absurd irony. The brazenness of this subversive parody is what distinguishes Abloh from other contemporary designers and artists.

This approach need not result in a “minor” or elitist practice; it can also be inclusive and populist. Abloh, for example, tries to appeal to two constituencies in his work: the tourist and the purist. Whereas the purist (a connoisseur, in other words) may have extensive knowledge of the history and context surrounding a work, a tourist may situate it within a different, more personal history and context. Appealing to both requires pulling at the “sharp distinctions,” such as the distinction between streetwear and *haute couture*, or Architecture and buildings that, as Adorno and Horkheimer observed, “do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers.”⁷

Indeed, despite his appeal to broader constituencies, the problem with Abloh’s approach may be his conscious perpetuation of narratives of exclusivity and luxury, and the propping up of a personal design signature as the embodiment of these narratives. A more generous reading might interpret this inhabitation of the Houses of Mies and Vuitton as an example of what Michel de Certeau called *la perruque*: a subtle kind of sabotage in which one uses company time to make one’s individual creative voice more visible.⁸

THE PERSONALITY TRAP

Well-founded educational systems and professional practices, like those of architecture, are supremely adept at transforming subversive critique into an engine of profit and progress. A familiar example of this process is the discipline’s piecemeal adoption of

that most canonical critique of modernist architecture, *Learning from Las Vegas*. In this case, the all-too-enthusiastic embrace of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steve Izenour’s *aesthetic* critique among architects who had grown bored with the “less is more” ethic of modernism effaced the authors’ equally powerful *political* critique of architecture’s elitism. Countering the professional ideal of individual artistic authorship and the academic ideal of canonical exemplars, Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour offered a collaborative, conversational working method and a “nonjudgmental” perspective on everyday architecture. These aspects of their critique were sidelined, as a new aesthetic of combinatory historical reference and an arguably even greater lauding of *Fountainhead*-style artistic heroism took hold. Postmodern architecture proved to be just as elitist as its antecedent.⁹

Revisiting and highlighting this subversive theme within such a canonical book is worthwhile because we are still dealing with its consequences. The authorial conventions of originality and autonomy remain pervasive, despite the increasingly disingenuous nature of claims to individual authorship due to ever-more-intensive modes of project delivery and design. Postmodernism’s individualist form of aesthetic pluralism was and is a “skittishly stylish” practice which, in the words of critic Craig Owens, requires cultural actors like artists and architects to “simulate schizophrenia as a mimetic defense against increasingly contradictory demands—on the one hand, to be as innovative and original as possible; on the other, to conform to established norms and conventions.”¹⁰

Owens’s observation raises an important question: To turn a system of norms, conventions, or laws against itself, must one first master that system? Perhaps not, as evidenced by the political and pedagogical culture of our present moment, when norms have been subject to rapid erosion by forces with little regard for what came before. Subverting influences seem omnipresent today, and they are no less impactful because of their often-willful ignorance or naiveté.

How, then, might one avoid co-optation by the object of one’s subverting action? One strategy might be to forcefully distinguish project from personality in one of two ways: to exaggerate the “simulated schizophrenia”

of postmodern practice into a caricature personifying subversion, or to assert the primacy of ideas and actions over individual identities. For the former, Abloh’s generically innovative work and his mastery of contemporary communication media serve as a perfect example. For the latter, we might once again learn from the example of Venturi and Scott Brown. Presciently, Venturi wrote in a “Note on Authorship and Attribution” preceding the first edition of *Learning from Las Vegas*:

I feel the role of the prima donna culture hero even in its modern form as prima donna anticulture antihero is a late Romantic theme as obsolete for the architect and for the complex interdependencies of architectural practice today as is the “heroic and original” building for architecture. An architect strong on his own feet does not need this illusory support at the expense of other architects. As a firm, we look best when we stand as we are, a group of strong individuals who share enthusiasms and work well together, not as a pyramid with the figurehead of an Architect at the top.¹¹

Though this biting critique proves that Venturi and Scott Brown were openly disparaging of the “star system,” they were ultimately unable to escape its pull as a tool for marketing their practice, and to add insult to injury, Scott Brown was often passed over for the awards and accolades that flowed to Venturi because of his privileged positionality as a man. Unfortunately, the discipline and profession are still wrestling with their misogynistic foundations, even as compensatory gestures cascade toward Scott Brown.

On the one hand, the struggle for today’s architectural subversives remains how to avoid co-optation by the market for professional services. But on the other hand, perhaps we need contemporary models of subverting that are more in touch with our contemporary conditions of labor, media, exchange, and value. Learning from Abloh’s balanced attentiveness to content and context, tourist and purist, offers one possible way forward. We hope that the articles in this issue of *Dialectic* offer a menu of further strategies and tactics. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Quoted in Michael Darling, ed., *Virgil Abloh: Figures of Speech* (New York: Prestel, 2019), Book 3: Archives, unpaginated. Presumably the “11 percent” that Abloh’s instructor cited was actually the number of graduates who would go on to become registered architects.

2. Jack Self, “Dissolving Power: Virgil Abloh in Conversation with Jack Self,” *Real Review*, no. 8 (Spring 2019): 48.

3. For a recent critique of the widespread use of these particular words and phrases in contemporary business culture, see John Patrick Leary, *Keywords — The New Language of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 65–69; 114–19; 170–72.

4. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 118–19.

5. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” [1981] in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Calif.: Crossing Press, 2007), 110–114. Lorde employed this metaphor as a critique of the latent race and class discrimination within the second-wave Feminist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. She felt that the movement would always fall short of truly liberating women unless it first overcame its persistent tendency to amplify only the voices of economically privileged white women.

6. Self, “Dissolving Power,” 46.

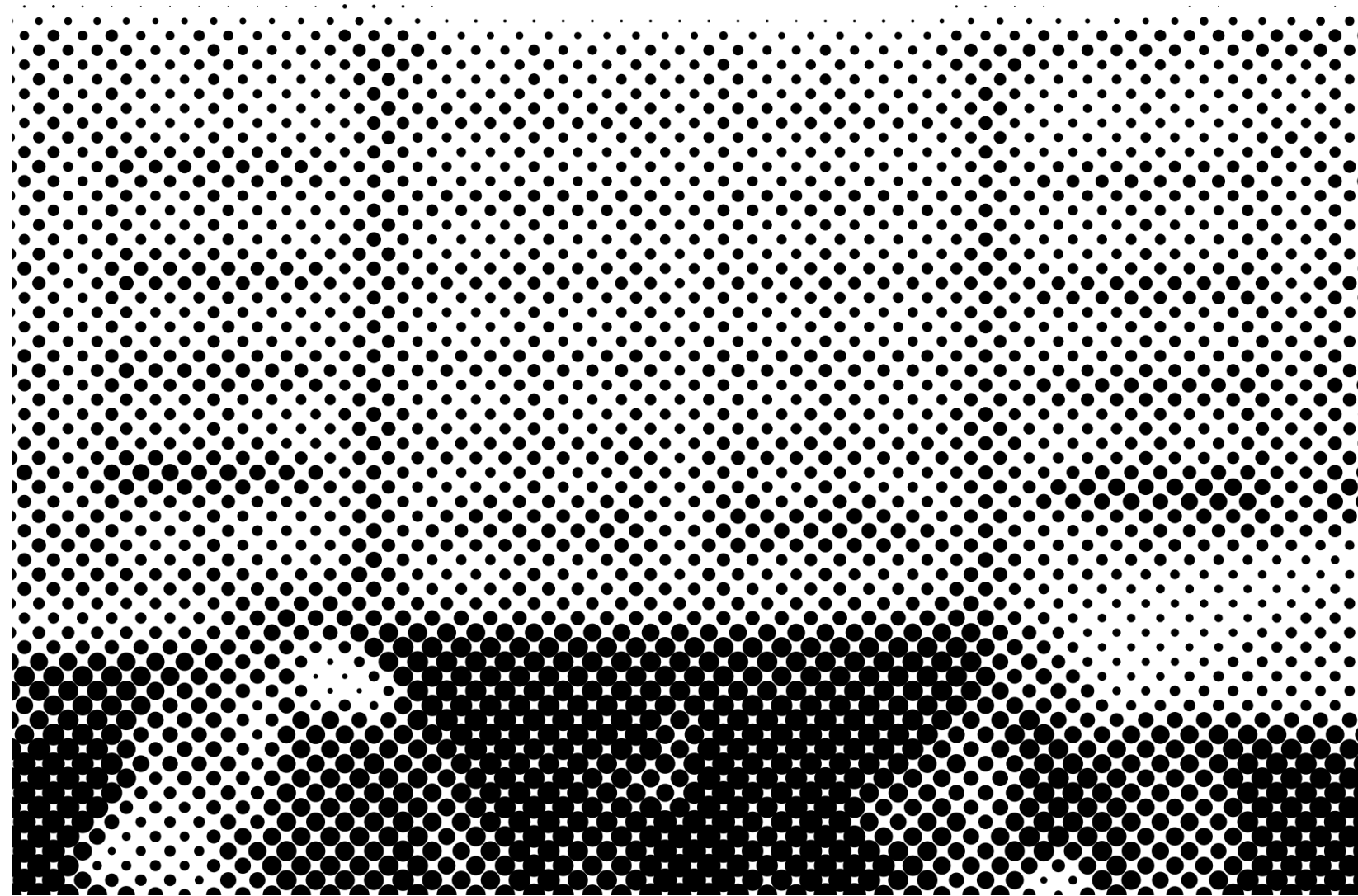
7. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” [1944], translated by Edmund Jephcott, in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 43.

8. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), 24–28.

9. A classic exposé on this aspect of Postmodern architecture is: Suzanne Stephens, “The Fountainhead Syndrome: The Skyline’s the Limit, Says Suzanne Stephens, When Architects Build Reputations on a Foundation of Ego,” *Vanity Fair*, April 1, 1984.

10. Craig Owens, quoted in Hal Foster, “Against Populism,” in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1985), 214, note 11. “Skittishly stylish” is Foster’s phrase (18).

11. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), xii.



SUBVERTING RESEARCH

**THE ROLE OF FIELDWORK: BUILDINGS-LANDSCAPES-CULTURES FIELD
SCHOOL AND ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY**

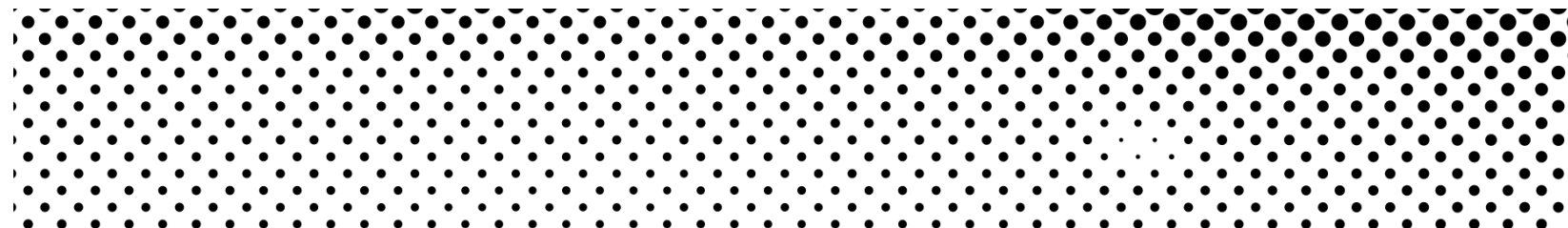
SEUNG-YOUP LEE, CHELSEA WAIT

**INHABITATION AS IMPLICIT URBAN PROJECT: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF
SPATIAL INTERSTICES**

CLAIRE BOSMANS

**FIVE POINTS OF "INFORMAL" ARCHITECTURE: TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE
OF ABUNDANCE**

ASHLEY BIGHAM





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THE ROLE OF FIELDWORK: BUILDINGS-LANDSCAPES-CULTURES FIELD SCHOOL AND ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to share the pedagogical value of fieldwork in architectural education by exploring students' experiences in the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School as a case study. It also examines pedagogical methods for integrating fieldwork into the regular architectural curriculum.

The field school encourages students "to look at this world from multiple perspectives and often from the standpoint of those whose voices and stories are not accounted for in history canons." To achieve this, the Field School incorporates problem-based learning methods of scaffolding, or the breaking up of a complex project into manageable parts, and chunking strategies, in which students learn to categorize knowledge and exercise cognitive flexibility, an ability to shift modes of thought, and engage multiple concepts at once. During fieldwork, students learn to cross boundaries and to connect, apply, and shift knowledge as they encounter real-world situations. These skills equip students to become citizens of the world, learning through small-scale situations about broader social dynamics. This awareness subverts traditional architectural education that often focuses on influential icons based on authorship and aesthetics, obscuring the people who occupy and use buildings.

Developing fieldwork as a component of architectural curriculum is complex, requiring a lot of preparation to coordinate events with students, residents, and scholars. Above all, fieldwork is fundamentally about building relationships, and this work is never complete. Building on these overarching issues, we argue that fieldwork needs to be carefully integrated into the regular architectural curriculum for its pedagogical value.

INTRODUCTION

In August of 2016, images of burning buildings in the neighborhood of Sherman Park in Milwaukee, Wisconsin circulated through international news networks as protesters reacted to the shooting of Sylville Smith by a Milwaukee Police Department officer.¹ Many protesters were frustrated with police violence, media narratives, and pervasive segregation.² This moment of violence and destruction of the built environment is how most of the world will remember Sherman Park, a neighborhood deceptively labeled "resilient" despite decades of policies that reinforce racial and class segregation, while concentrating opportunity in the white suburbs.³ This global event cannot be fully understood without stories on the ground: stories of frustration leading to unrest, as well as stories of people taking back their neighborhood and turning sites of trauma into positive places.⁴ Global images are powerful mainstream narratives, which often obscure the social context surrounding such events.⁵

Likewise, architectural curricula often focus on influential icons based on authorship and aesthetics, obscuring the people who occupy and use buildings.⁶ This engrossment with icons does not equip students to understand the ordinary buildings and landscapes that comprise the majority of our world. Furthermore, the focus on high design relies on an oversimplification of building "users," disregarding how humans influence the world around them.⁷ With these oversights in mind, the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School (henceforth Field School) starts with the study of how humans engage their surroundings. Design is a later phase, as a separate course in a subsequent semester.⁸ This curriculum subverts traditional architectural education. During fieldwork, students learn to cross boundaries and to

connect, apply, and shift knowledge as they encounter real-world situations.⁹ These skills equip students to become citizens of the world, learning through small-scale situations about broader social dynamics.

The goal of this article is to share the pedagogical value of fieldwork in architectural education by exploring students' experiences in the Field School as a case study. In this program, students come to understand how the burden of broad social problems ultimately impacts individual lives and is expressed through the everyday built environment. Simultaneously, they gain skills that allow them to see critically, ultimately restructuring their knowledge of the cosmopolitan. Students then bring this interconnected perspective back to their design work.

First, we describe the pedagogical background of the Field School.¹⁰ Next, we provide a brief overview of this program, a five-week summer course at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's (UWM) School of Architecture and Urban Planning (SARUP). Then we examine four teachable moments in Field School students' learning experience. We also describe how fieldwork pedagogy can be integrated into studio design. Finally, we discuss potential obstacles in bringing fieldwork into the architectural curriculum.

THE FIELD SCHOOL PEDAGOGY

The concept of *strategies* and *tactics* by Michel de Certeau underpins the philosophy of the Field School. Architects design the physical layout of the buildings and in that, establish *strategies*, while inhabitants subvert and manipulate the intention of the design through their ordinary action as *tactics*.¹¹ Field School students learn through on-the-ground situations that cannot be fully planned into the curriculum. Understanding users' tactics is an important lesson for design students, but difficult to incorporate in lesson plans, so there must be alternative pedagogical methods. To resolve this, director Dr. Arijit Sen, an associate professor at SARUP, looks to problem-based learning pedagogy (PBL).¹² Specifically, the Field School incorporates PBL methods of scaffolding, or the breaking up of a complex project into manageable parts, and chunking strategies, in which students learn to categorize knowledge and exercise cognitive

flexibility, an ability to shift modes of thought and engage multiple concepts at once.¹³ The first three weeks are scaffolded into examinations of materiality, building history, and social history. This order allows students to shift from the comfort of studying users' physical engagement of space into the complexity of how people socially engage space. The last two weeks are dedicated to chunking; students categorize their knowledge through eliciting themes in order to produce digital stories and exhibition materials. Beyond the Field School, there is a studio course offered annually that makes use of the stories and data produced by summer fieldwork.

THE FIELD SCHOOL PROGRAM

Since 2012, students in the Field School have conducted research in Milwaukee neighborhoods such as Sherman Park in groups of about twelve graduate and undergraduate student participants per year (Figure 1).

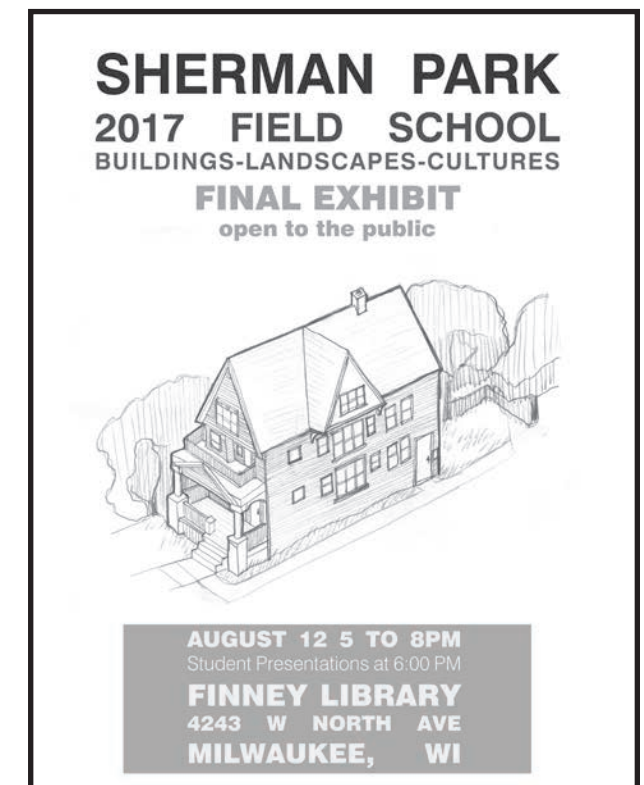


Figure 1: Final Exhibit Flyer of 2017 Field School. Courtesy: Created by Chelsea Wait, August 12, 2017, Milwaukee, WI.

Participants spend the first week documenting four or five houses, beginning with producing a floorplan by measuring walls, features, and walkways (Figure 2).¹⁴ This material exploration reveals social, cultural, technological, and economic changes through interior patterns of use as successive families and generations inhabit the home.¹⁵ The floorplan and field notes document how residents subvert the original intentions of the architect.

Students conduct archival research in the second week; they trace the history of the house and street through census data, photographs, and Sanborn maps. These materials help to contextualize the construction, renovation, and occupancy of buildings and streets (Figure 3).

In the third week, students conduct interviews with residents of the neighborhood to learn about the social history of each home (Figure 4).¹⁶ Oral history scholars guide students through interviewing procedures, technical audio recording, and debriefing afterward.

These interviews provide an opportunity for students to discover that their thoughts about an everyday object, space, or place may be different from others'.¹⁷

The last two weeks are reserved for developing stories, themes, and portraits of residents and homes. Daily reflection among students and scholars on ongoing research and field notes aids analysis and the exchange of thoughts, contributing to their ability to categorize knowledge. Weekly, residents collaborate in developing stories and discussing themes in a process called co-theorization.¹⁸ Finally, students present their boards, podcasts, videos, and websites to residents, students' families, and SARUP faculty.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

In architectural education and practice, one learns to cross physical, professional, social, and ideological boundaries. Designers shape the physical world for people and must be cultural go-betweens. Field School students learn how others experience the world



Figure 2: Measuring a Foreclosed Home. Courtesy: Photograph by Denise Zahran, June 5, 2018, Milwaukee, WI.

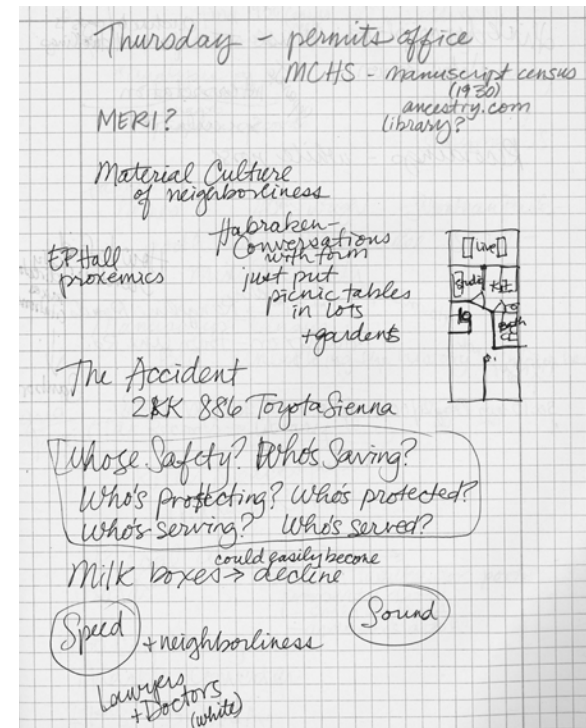


Figure 3: Chelsea Wait's Field Notes. June 30, 2017, Milwaukee, WI.



Figure 4: Interview with Matt Bohlmann. Courtesy: Photograph by Guha Shankar, June 13, 2017, Milwaukee, WI.

situated in different bodies within different contexts. This information cannot be gathered in a one-day site visit. It must be a collaborative research process that is self-reflective and involves dialogue and relationships with residents.¹⁹

Many UWM students come from suburban areas throughout Wisconsin, where incomes are generally higher and which are primarily white. At the state level, political discourse stigmatizes poorer neighborhoods of color in Milwaukee by using racialized and classed spatial metaphors such as zip codes.²⁰ As in other Rust Belt cities, segregation in Milwaukee parallels geographic boundaries created by more than a century of informal discrimination and formalized by restrictive covenants and redlining maps.²¹ After these classifications were deemed unconstitutional, mid-century freeway clearance and construction devastated vibrant black communities.²² Today, segregation is subconsciously reinforced by word-of-mouth advice for students to "stay safe" or "don't cross the river."²³ These warnings reinforce a segregation mindset. Student Bella Biber tries to allay her father's fear of the urban:

I took him to Sherman Park [...] I could tell he was surprised that "this neighborhood" could

have such beautiful historic homes and well-groomed lawns. "Wow, this is pretty cool," [...] In my experience, this means of showing or experiencing rather than telling can be a successful way to non-argumentatively settle opposing points of view.²⁴

Here, Biber is using chunking strategy. As she categorizes knowledge about urban neighborhoods, she senses a deep divide between media stereotypes and the authentic people and places she has studied. Biber's anecdote resists the stereotype that lumps together Sherman Park and racialized people. This is evident in common spatial metaphors such as zip codes and neighborhood names used in reference to blackness.²⁵ Furthermore, she creates a place-based experience for her father that humanizes the people living in Sherman Park.

As economic polarization grows in the United States, it is increasingly clear how deeply it is linked to place and layered on the landscape, so that it becomes racialized.²⁶ First-hand experience that crosses boundaries gives students the cognitive flexibility that they will use as future architects to understand the difference between abstract "users" and the people who make and remake the world through their everyday actions.²⁷ This understanding is one of the benefits of ethnographic fieldwork for architecture students.

THE SEVERITY OF FORECLOSURE

Some homes that students document are empty city-owned houses, where systemic reasons such as tax foreclosure, unpaid citations, unemployment, or predatory lending caused residents to leave abruptly. The fault often lies with negligent landlords. Field School participants witness firsthand the results of segregation, poverty, and racism. These broad issues are often discussed in conceptual conversations, but their gravity cannot be truly felt by students in the classroom. Ethnographic fieldwork in these vacant homes presents students with an embodied experience to witness the severity of this crisis.

The Field School has so far documented seven foreclosed houses, with permission from the Department of City Development. In 2018, students measured such a



Figure 5: Foreclosed Home. Courtesy: Photograph by Seung-youp Lee, June 6, 2018, Milwaukee, WI.

house with green boards and a bright orange eviction notice. Students first approached it through tall weeds and a moss-covered porch with broken railings (Figure 5). Water damage, rot, and structural failure hindered students from measuring walls. They found animal footprints, droppings, and even an occasional bird's nest, marking a long vacancy during which non-human occupants overtook the building. Each house was in a different state, forcing students to imagine the previous dwellers. Traces of renters or owners, such as utility bills, ID cards, and family pictures, became evidence in establishing a story of who they were and how they lived. In her blog, Esmé Barniskis describes her tragic understanding of the moment the family was evicted:

The other [home], far harder for me to walk through, had been left by the city mostly unchanged from when the previous owners left in what must have been a hurry. I imagine the head of the family telling the children, "Take only what you can carry."²⁸

In this moment, Barniskis comprehends the human side of Milwaukee's foreclosure crisis and, consequently, the eviction crisis that sent families in downward spirals.²⁹ Also concerned by this phenomenon, Teonna Cooksey's research enumerates a century of history in these homes and their sudden forced evacuation (Figure 6). Whether by city or bank foreclosure, vacant houses accumulate in places like Sherman Park.

Cities demolish former homes in a concentrated area, which addresses the problem of vacant homes being vandalized but pockmarks the architectural fabric of the neighborhood. Cooksey concludes that while the crisis affects individual families, it also happens on such a broad scale that it shapes how people perceive whole swaths of the city.³⁰

THE POLITICS OF HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS

Over several years of Field School interviews, consistent themes and patterns have emerged. One constant tension that students observe is between homeowners and renters. In the interviews, homeowners generally see renters as careless and disrespectful of community. They often point to improper disposal of trash, unkempt lawns, or small repairs that go unfinished as examples of why owners should keep a nervous eye on rental properties. Field School students understand the opposition between homeowners and

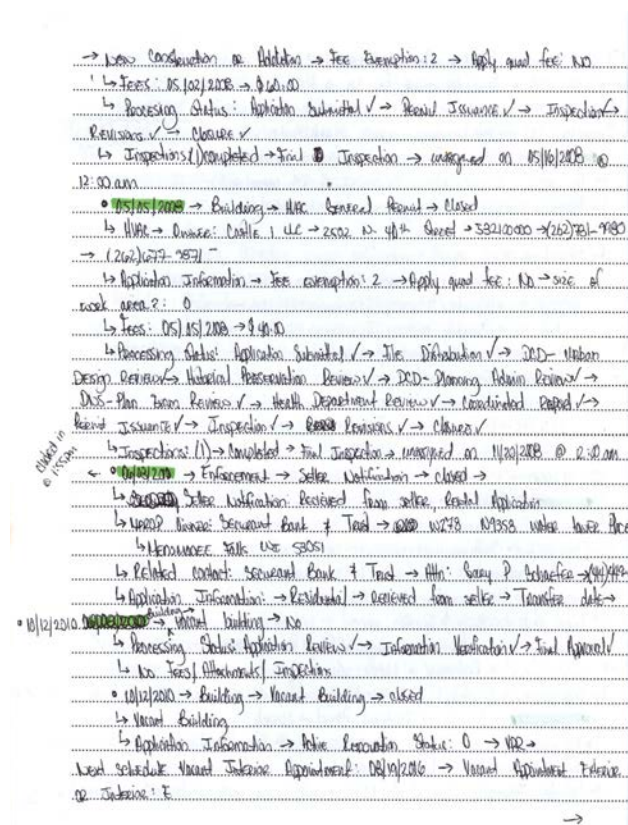


Figure 6: Teonna Cooksey's Field Notes. August 15, 2018, Milwaukee, WI.

renters as a structural problem: it is not so much that owners are good and renters are bad, but rather that it takes resources to be able to care for yourself, and only with those resources may care for their home.³¹ Joy Huntington explains this theme from one of her interviews:

She returned to this topic of renters and landlords multiple times, and because of her body language, tone, and repetitiveness, this is a significant subject she took personally. She stated that, "the lack of care reflects on me [the interviewee] because no one will remember my house they'll remember the unkempt one next door."

Huntington's field note underscores how a home's value is interwoven with its surrounding context. This interviewee, who does not live in the unkempt house and might never enter it, is frustrated by how it reflects on her. Huntington uses cognitive flexibility to extrapolate this situation into a larger understanding of how people structure their world according to their values.

Understanding the different values and meanings of a house is a constant pedagogical task in the Field School. Homeowners seek to protect the value of their houses in a part of the city that is far undervalued, while renters are often mobile out of necessity or instability. With the recent spike in real estate investment, rental homes and apartments are increasingly owned by absentee landlords, which raises the number of renters. Absentee landlords extract profit and abandon the local economic cycle that once kept communities thriving.³² Coupled with unemployment and mass incarceration, much of the stability of neighborhoods like Sherman Park is gone.³³ The strength of the community lies in fewer hands, but those who remain work tirelessly to maintain it.

LEARNING FROM RESIDENTS

During fieldwork, students engage directly with people who are working to resist and undo injustice through their practices of caring. They meet residents working to make their neighborhoods thrive, not to prove stereotypes wrong, but to lift communities and create

networks of love, safety, and security. In 2012, students met a resident named Mavis McCallum who said she and her neighbors don't talk about social justice; they talk about caring.³⁴ McCallum's statement sparked a long-term investigation of caring, a feeling and action that strengthens community relationships. Caring can be enacted in ordinary, day-to-day life: picking up trash, patronizing local businesses, or creating block watches. For others, caring is an extraordinary act.

Sherman Park resident Camille Mays sees informal memorials for traffic accidents as reminders of death in her neighborhood. She also sees these as evidence of caring, but these memorials fall apart and gather detritus. So, she replaces them with perennial flowers with permission from the family of the deceased.³⁵ Mays' work exemplifies an urban gardening best practice for students. As a result of the Field School, Mays now collaborates with architecture students in their studio courses, creating designs for vacant homes and empty lots.³⁶

Another resident who performs extraordinary acts of caring is Christie Melby-Gibbons, a Moravian pastor. Melby-Gibbons uses healthy food to care for her community. She started Tricklebee Café in 2016, a pay-as-you-are-able restaurant that feeds everyone, whether they pay \$20 or wipe down tables for 20 minutes (Figure 7).³⁷ Tricklebee inspires students to reflect on how places such as restaurants and gardens can influence healthy living. Student Kalin Reed writes, "Christie talked about nature and how it can be used to help heal communities and teach young people about caring for their neighborhood through gardening."³⁸ Reed and his classmates learn from residents, which contradicts prejudicial media stereotypes.³⁹ This ethnographic theme of caring teaches students that the architecture of our everyday world is maintained by social networks of support in a mutual relationship between people and place.

CONCLUSION: FROM THE FIELD SCHOOL TO THE STUDIO

The essential position of the Field School is "to look at this world from multiple perspectives and often from the point of view of those whose voices and histories are not accounted for in history canons."⁴⁰



Figure 7: Tricklebee Café.
Courtesy: Photograph by Chelsea Wait, June 6, 2017, Milwaukee, WI.

People expect that structures will outlive them, and so numerous people share a specific building over time.⁴¹ Yet, individuals bring different values and worldviews to bear on their surroundings. This is why fieldwork takes many forms: students observe a house, measure it, interview dwellers, produce podcasts, create short videos, and design presentation boards. Through these multiple narratives, they tell a more complex story, a sentiment echoed in Teonna Cooksey's comment: "I want to write the true account of what people are telling me without creating and/or perpetuating negativity."⁴²

Students take this learning into their design work. For instance, in his essay on "Rethinking Home," Jared Schmitz maps out the spatial positions of socialization at the front of the house.⁴³ Schmitz focuses on the front porch, lawn, and upper porches, preparing himself for a studio project that creates a landscape that is conducive to neighborliness (Figure 8). Schmitz's work is exemplary in integrating lessons from Field School into design studio projects.

Building upon the teachable moments described here, we argue that fieldwork needs to be carefully integrated into the regular architectural curriculum, but there are no simple means of doing so. There are two overarching issues to consider: the nature of fieldwork itself, and the structure of the architectural curriculum. Coordinating fieldwork for a dozen students is complex and requires a lot of preparation. It depends on clear expectations and timeframes from students, neighborhood residents, academic experts, and instructors. Furthermore, fieldwork is fundamentally about building relationships; this work is never complete.

Secondly, to fully achieve the potential of publicly engaged problem-based learning, students must complete fieldwork and apply that knowledge in their studio designs in stages. Developing fieldwork as a component of the architectural curriculum would require long-term scaffolding, or a succession of courses that begin with intensive fieldwork first and then apply knowledge from the field to design. Without

LIVE - WORK

- MIXED-USE, SHOP HOUSE
- OPEN FRONT TO PUBLIC
- WORKSPACE IN REAR
- PRIVATE UNIT ABOVE
- LIVE UPSTAIRS, WORK DOWNSTAIRS
- SMALL BUSINESS
- LOCAL EMPLOYMENT
- LIBRARY, RESOURCE CENTER
- RESTAURANT, BAKERY, CAFE
- ART STUDIO, DAYCARE, STORE

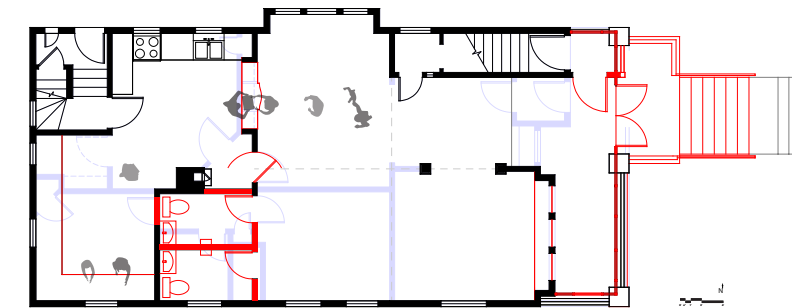
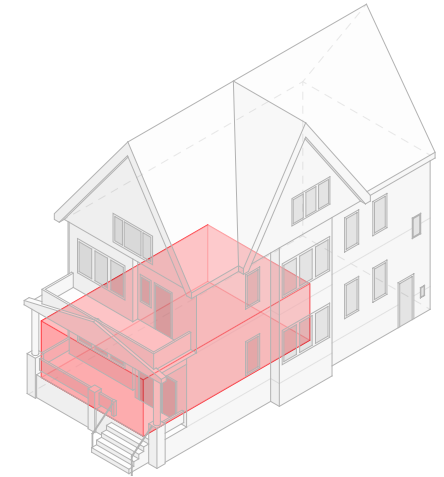


Figure 8: "Live-Work: Rethinking Home," Citizen Architects Studio, 2017.
Courtesy: Schmitz, Jared.

this concatenation, fieldwork and design might only be loosely related in students’ cognitive skills, and the connection students make between physical space and social space would remain bifurcated. These are points to consider carefully in addition to the entanglements of departmental administration, but the advantage is that students develop the ability to categorize knowledge and the cognitive flexibility to make sense of complex problems that frame ordinary places. The field of architecture engages in broad conversations across time, space, and place, yet the work of the architect is inevitably local and contextual and must emerge from a deep understanding of a specific location. Critical analysis skills and the first-hand experiences in different neighborhoods that students gain from fieldwork equip them to see how power shapes the world and teaches them to be architects who are able to shift modes of thought and engage multiple concepts at scales from the local to the global. ■

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7. Arijit Sen, and Lisa Silverman, ed. *Making Place: Space and Embodiment in the City*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014.

8. The Field School has obtained consent from all students and interviewees, per the Institutional Review Board at UWM that approves research on human subjects.

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10. As authors who draw on the experiences of students and neighborhood residents, we must state our position. Relative to the graduate and undergraduate students whose research and writing we draw from, we are doctoral students and at times research coordinators. We had the privilege to access academic discourse, knowledge of past Field School research, rely on personal connections with neighborhood residents, and have experience in ethnographic research. Additionally, as doctoral students, our approach to the Field School was to gain the methodological and research experience, but also as potential architectural educators, we were simultaneously observing our peers. Relative to residents of Sherman Park, we are privileged to live in wealthier neighborhoods positioned closer to economic and social opportunities. One of us is a white, middle-class woman and one of us is ethnically Korean and an international student. We are privileged as students of higher education. Overall, Field School students come from diverse backgrounds, from international students to students from the neighborhoods in which Field School does research.

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16. The Field School students interview neighborhood residents who come from a variety of backgrounds: most are homeowners, retired, and middle class. The Field School director makes a connection with residents who wish to participate in this project and then uses the snowball sampling technique in which residents connect students with their friends, family, or other contacts in the given neighborhood for collecting interviews. The Field School is unable to interview youth under age eighteen.

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25. Loyd and Bonds. “Where Do Black Lives Matter?”

26. Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford Blackwell, 1991.

27. While many students come from areas of Wisconsin that are predominantly white, there have been several students who come from the neighborhoods in which Field School does research. These students may not come from areas of great privilege, but they come from UWM and are seen as privileged by the residents of Sherman Park. Crossing boundaries here refers not only to the racialized geographic zones of Milwaukee but also social classes such as education.

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INHABITATION AS IMPLICIT URBAN PROJECT: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPATIAL INTERSTICES

CLAIRE BOSMANS

ABSTRACT

While public participation has become essential in informing public renovation projects in 21st century Brussels, the lived experience of place is rarely used as leverage. Interested in the residents' (un)conscious contribution to the (de)construction of public housing environments, this research combines ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation with spatial drawings. The paper is a commented graphic reflection on a three-month living experience in *Héliport* social housing estate managed by *Le Foyer Laekenois*, in Brussels. Advocating for an architecture of maintenance formulated on the residents' lived experience, the study investigates the over-defined and interstitial spaces in and around the modernist housing site. It interrogates everyday relations to the shared (common, collective, and public) spaces, meaningful scenes of inequality and oppression, as well as repression through urban interventions, though open to design investigations. It interrogates the multiple spatial translations of cultural, gender and age differences, border issues of tolerance and illegitimacy, and the simultaneous possibilities of meeting and avoiding. It illustrates the controvert but implicit urban projects of inhabitation as mutual relationships between users and their built environment. Eventually, by illustrating the potential of a space to host subversive uses, the project pleads to open the production of architecture and urbanism beyond the middle-class standard vision, integrating other perspectives in urban life evaluation.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN URBAN REGENERATION

The municipality of Brussels launched a design competition entitled "*Héliport: vers un socle plus ouvert*" (*Héliport: toward a more open plinth*), inviting design teams to reflect on the future of the *Héliport* plinth, a four- to six-meter-high modernist concrete platform supporting an elevated public space, erected between six social housing buildings in the Northern Quarter of Brussels.¹ Questioning the morphology of the ensemble, the city called for scenarios to reconnect ("ouvrir") public spaces through the plinth ("barrière") renovation or demolition. First, this initiative aligned with the growing attention given to high-rise housing estates in Brussels, lifting modernist features to overcome stigmatization. Second, the *Héliport's* brief came from a larger vision: the "*Plan d'Aménagement Directeur Maximilien-Vergote*" (PAD), a regional strategic and regulatory tool projecting the urban regeneration of the Northern Quarter.² The political imperative of residents' participation infiltrates public architecture and urban projects in Brussels, so is the PAD ongoing elaboration through workshops and public surveys. However, participatory processes and results are questionable: superficially designed to first and foremost fulfil design commission requirements, the absence of successful examples to take inspiration from, difficult stakeholders' mobilization, versatile data collection, and poor translation into clear project definition elements or design desiderata. To the contrary, the lived experience of place is rarely used as leverage. At the crossroads between several burning agendas (urban regeneration of the Northern Quarter, renovation of Brussels' high-rise housing estates, *Héliport* plinth competition), this article investigates which spatial scenarios can be identified from resident's spatial practices and support the present maintenance and future transformation of *Héliport* plinth. It develops a focus on the shared

spaces in and around the modernist housing estate, and more specifically on the mutual relationship between users and built environment—given and taken space, regulated and rule-less, claimed and vacated. Ethnography is mobilized to encounter these happenings and unravel the social production of space in the Northern Quarter. Observations are graphically reported in and interpreted through drawings.

ENCOUNTERING LOOSE SPACES: FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

My knowledge of the place is built upon a three-month immersive living experience from February to May 2019, during which I inhabited a flat in the social housing estate *Héliport* managed by *Le Foyer Laekenois* in Brussels. Along with mapping, this personal and



Figure 1(a-d): Avenue de l'Héliport, Social Housing and Plinth. Courtesy: The author, October 2018-August 2019

daily engagement with the site developed a street perspective, informing a cross-disciplinary sense of place, moving back and forth from anthropology to urbanism.³ Participant observation requires ignoring (as far as one is able) personal background and assumptions, and in the theatrical performance of a stage, playing the game of the place—simultaneously audience (researcher) and actor (inhabitant), continually crossing the invisible fourth wall. This dual situation confronts the lived reality of a site and suggests reflecting on it as well: tirelessly discussing, drawing the obvious, and questioning the mundane to eventually unravel hidden stories.

“What are you doing here?”, two teenagers shouted at me the first time I stepped on the *Héliport* plinth. Confused by being labelled as stranger on a site inhabited by around 2000 people, I forgot to return the question. One evening, when I reached the seventh-floor corridor by the outdoor stairs, I frightened a neighbor waiting for the elevator who “did not expect a woman coming from there.” On another day in the corridor, while I was chatting with my neighbor emptying her trolley to show me all the clothes she just bought at the market, another woman joined us, and looking through the open door of my flat, asked if I needed help to

make curtains. Opportunistic encounters challenged my subjective perception with other versions of home, confirming my interest in grasping local, everyday stories in addressing the urban project. Along the way, each of these happenings rendered a new set of invisible borders, contested and negotiated territories, diversifying the apparent looseness of modernist open spaces while recalling my personal condition as an outsider in my own city.

EVERYDAY BALLET ON AVENUE DE L'HÉLIPORT: STREET LIFE (DE)CONSTRUCTION.

At the bottom of *Héliport* plinth, a chain of triangles is squeezed between the roadway and the blind walls of the building's ground floor. A pattern of (hilly) grass beds and asphalted paths aligned with the constructions further fragments the space. The oversized measure of the walkway emphasizes the early impression of emptiness. Nevertheless, a multitude of ephemeral activities take place here: all together or successively, the street turns into the kids' playground, women's short meetings, elderly people walking dogs, etc. The endless back and forth of groups and individuals on the public space reveal an everyday ballet for the outsider, commuter, homeless, doorkeeper, and resident hiding



Figure 2: Avenue de l'Héliport. Courtesy: The author, March 2019

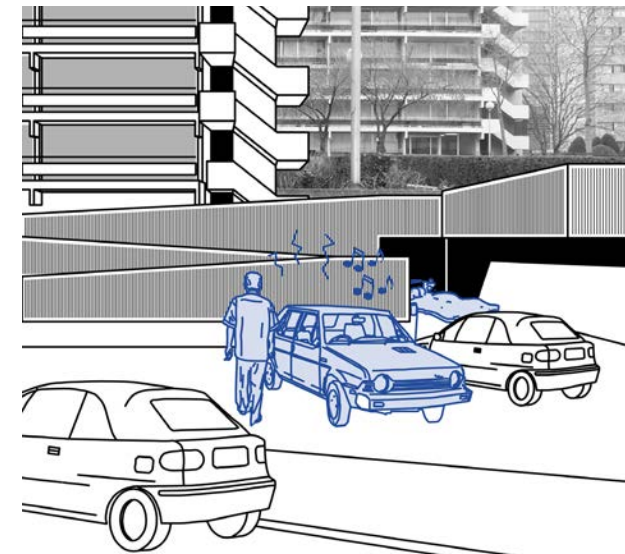


Figure 3: Along Avenue de l'Héliport: (a) Wild parking, young men hanging out and homeless resting on the walkway. Courtesy: Drawing by author, August 2019

behind curtains, who have joined the stage in turn. Isolated, they are like scenes of a play, but read as a succession, they react to each other and give sense to the place.

A few uses stand out, either for their disruptive character or longer-term occurrence. A herd of (unregistered) cars and utilitarian vehicles parked on the pedestrian open space at the bottom of the housing blocks seems to indicate an improvised solution to the local parking issue. In this still-life tableau, two men repair a vehicle. On another day, rap lyrics sung on a thrumming motor betray a volatile presence: piled up in and around a purring car stopped down the block they live in, young men just opened an ephemeral “urban living room” on the public space, but off its influence. These driving reunions on the walkway, the concentration of fancy sportive engines in a central neighborhood highly

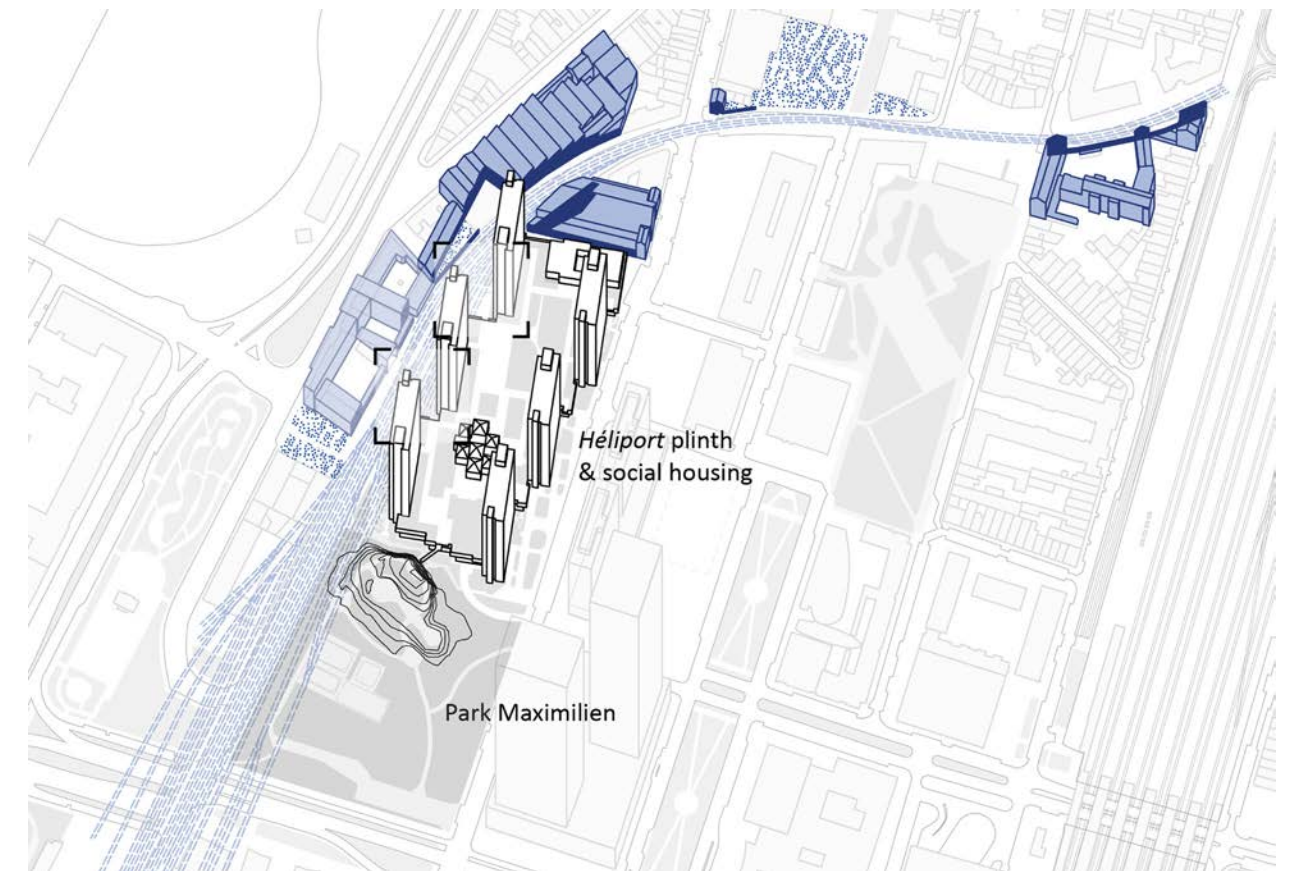


Figure 4: Avenue de l'Héliport: Allée Verte railway & inherited industrial backside. Courtesy: Drawing by author, August 2019

connected to public transportation, and the nearby popular open-air hand carwash that employs tens of young people demonstrate a local, tight entanglement between cars and public space.

Avenue de l'Héliport is the shapeless negative of a disjunctive assemblage between an obsolete and long disappeared infrastructure (*Allée Verte* railway, 1835-1954) and the modernist north-south orientation of the housing blocks and plinth (1970s). The curvy paved road offers a rare and fascinating urban décor (an inhabitant affirms that a high-speed car chase involving French actor Jean Dujardin was filmed here a few years ago), between an alignment of backside entrances and industrial warehouses. The impressive width contrasts with its emptiness, rarely disrupted by local traffic. Alternative driveway (for the school across) or (wild) parking, the misnamed *avenue de l'Héliport* accumulates contradictions. Being unclear as an urban figure, it implicitly invites to resignifications.

Bordering this *tableau vivant*, the blind walls of the plinth covered by overhanging railings frame less legible spaces: homeless people share them with occasional wild deposits (furniture, clothes, building materials, etc.) or flash (illicit) dealings. The grass tartan down the block, littered with trash and dog's droppings, is endlessly cleaned by the municipal maintenance team. In front of a housing block, a few elderly people join forces to turn a monotonous grass tray into flowerbed, playing the role of public space's beneficiaries and caretakers.

A multitude of other stories similarly unfold on the parallel *chaussée d'Anvers*—the former medieval *chemin* then *route d'Anvers* historically linking Brussels to Antwerp, later cut off and bypassed by new infrastructures. Downscaled to a local commercial road with construction wholesalers and entertainments shops, it is partly closed off on Wednesdays for market purposes. Here again, the infrastructure breakdown highlights the space's failure as signifier and simultaneously points out the potential for reinterpretation. A local youth group identifies itself as "CDA," an acronym representing the mutilated figure of *chaussée d'Anvers*, where young people gather in front of popular snack shops, bars, car washes, barbershops and Ladbroke's entrances. In that disputed multi-ethnic

territory, old men count on one hand the last cafés (serving alcohol) in the neighborhood.

Next to an old abandoned refrigerator, or a ripped-open couch, all these street manifestations could appear anecdotal; however, challenging mainstream discourses on social housing inhabitants' desolation or passivity, it rather displays an active engagement with space, turning social housing residents into creative dwellers. Discretely, it invites architects to learn from them.

THE PLINTH INSIDE OUT

In *Héliport* social housing, strategies to disseminate "good behaviors of inhabitation" among tenants are multiplying, teaching them how to manage a home with diligence on topics like ecology (hot water restriction and intermittent heating), hygiene (forced ventilation through the cooker hood on a 7am-10pm timer), co-habitation (the corridor shared maintenance organization displayed on the walls, cameras to control behaviors in the common spaces), etc. In turn, inhabitants develop tactics to perform their own way of living, as many alternatives mediate between rules and personal constraints: installing

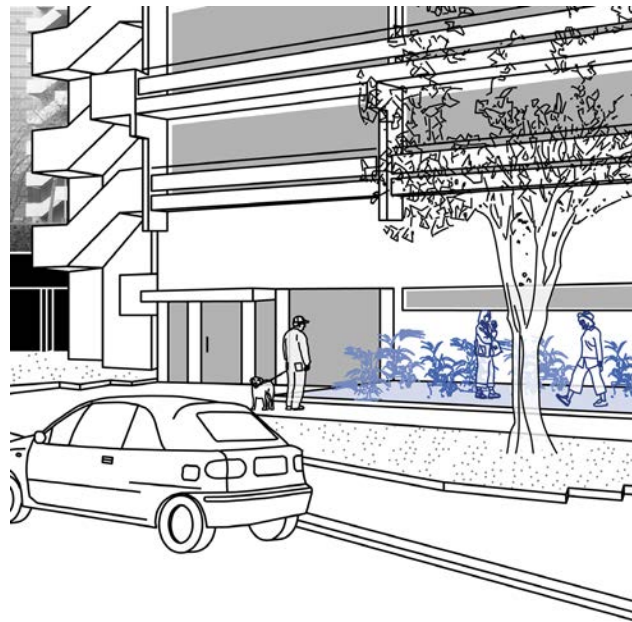


Figure 5: Along Avenue de l'Héliport: (b) Elderlies gardening in front of blind ground floor. Courtesy: Drawing by author, August 2019

wall-like curtains, reusing water from the laundry to clean shared corridors, etc.

Whether in the public space or inner courtyard, the ambiguous status of the *Héliport* plinth raises other tensions; the housing buildings are managed and ruled by *Le Foyer Laekenois*, while the public garden is owned and maintained by the City of Brussels. The municipality and housing company have installed local antennas on the plinth (*ASBL Cité Modèle*, *PCS Quartier Nord*, *MQ Millénaire*, *MJ l'Avenir*)⁴ and organized the daily maintenance, implicitly regulating uses. In contrast, despite most housing units enjoying a view on the plinth, none of them has an address on it. In parallel, controlling devices proliferate around the blocks: cameras in the hallways, electronic badges to open front doors, curfew, fences around green spaces, etc. The growing culture of security alters the perception of public space, seemingly shrinking it to the strict necessity of passage.

The plinth is an in-between figure: morphologically "inside" (inner garden of a building block) but officially "outside" (public space), it presents a rather unnatural composition. Ground and building (parking rooftop), the difference in levels isolates the garden. Local destination more than shortcut, the plinth is



Figure 6: Héliport plinth. A few steps leading to a closed vitrine formerly connected to the building's inner distribution: (a) collage & (b) plan. Courtesy: Drawing by author, August 2019

not crossed by any commuter and is rarely visited by any outsider. It is an exception in the local street life, animated by the continuous drilling of the construction sites around. The set of stairs and slopes linking street to the elevated plateau are narrow, tortuous, and poorly maintained. While comfortless, they do help preserve the garden's quietness. In the original 1970s modernist project, a vitrine opened on an indoor staircase connecting each building to the plinth. Today, these accesses are closed, generating inside (inaccessible) and outside (re-signified) dead-end spaces. As a third ambivalent urban figure, the platform generates feelings of problematic disconnection (among outsiders, designers⁵), late-night unsafety (elderlies), demonstrations of deep attachment (young men), etc.

Overdesigned but weakly defined, the plinth attracts spontaneous reinterpretations. Every day after school, teenagers meet on the platform, walking, sitting on the slopes and stairs, and standing on the footbridge connecting the plinth to the adjacent Maximilian Park, on the balconies overlooking the street and the police school across *chaussée d'Anvers*, etc. The slab becomes alternately a noisy playground, soccer field, motorbike track in the evening, drug dealing platform, etc. Some groups spray graffiti on walls and pavements; in leaving marks, they turn public space into personal

territory, opportunistically (ab)using spatial qualities [programmatic, access, control] of underdefined interstices.

However, the manifold expressions of this deep attachment are controversial. As shared space, the inner garden articulates the co-presence of differences, challenged by the subjective appreciation of “right distance.”⁶ One isolated senior living on the plinth level got his window broken at night, shortly after he recorded young men riding motorbikes. Another inhabitant extends his balcony on the public garden, using privatization as a mean for socialization with everyday passersby. Right next to his balcony, undocumented migrants store their belongings and improvise a changing room. Farther away, a few elderly people set up and maintain vegetable, flower, and herbs gardens, well protected behind high and solid fences preventing intrusion.

Exemplary of resignification tactics, the eastern slope was torn down last year (October 2018), before the municipal elections. The “*spir*”—as locally called by young men, derived from “*spiral*”—had been blamed for hosting drug dealing and youth late-night meetings while damaging the feeling of safety among other inhabitants. Diverting its original function, young men turned a public passage into an occupation, reducing the plinth’s porosity to the public realm. The demolition forced the displacement of the subversive activities. Just like the closed vitrine mentioned earlier, the slope’s clearance generates (dead-end) spaces awaiting new meanings: the balcony becomes a meeting space and playground for teenagers. Down the street, it opens the view, erasing layers, and emphasizes the closure of the building’s ground floor. Now the loss raises a new urban question: how do we deal with a blind wall on a public space?

VERS UN SOCLE PLUS OUVERT: DESIGNING WITH ETHNOGRAPHY

The overlay of spatial manipulations (buildings and infrastructures) and regulatory frameworks have accumulated contradictions and inconsistencies in the Northern Quarter, and more specifically around the *Héliport* plinth and collective housing. These spatial misfits challenge the widespread middle-class



Figure 7: Chaussée d’Anvers: Conflictual resignification. A slope formerly occupied by young men was demolished in October 2018. Courtesy: Drawing by author, August 2019

standard definition of public spaces, introducing cracks, exceptions, and mobilizing locals’ creativity. Interstices get charged with new meanings and alternative uses and occupations, colored by the people engaging with them. In-between spaces showcase urban diversity, accommodating the excluded otherness. They display the unspoken claim, the invisible but implicit fight. Articulations between different worlds, interstices are both mediating spaces and disputed thresholds⁷—undoubtedly spaces for socialization threatened by privatization supposedly to consolidate security. Conflictual co-habitations and forced interventions can eventually lead to displacements, inducing a migratory pattern of spatial practices looking for other interstices.

Nevertheless, urban contexts need margins, loose spaces to be the alternative ground, the honest and democratic stage of what is a neighborhood today⁸ and a simultaneous performance of what it could become tomorrow. In my opinion, the plinth (like *avenue de l’Héliport* or *chaussée d’Anvers*) is—due to its history, morphology, materiality, etc.—one of these loose spaces, or rather, an articulation of loose spaces staging a multitude of spatial variations from home to street. It physically translates into a messy collage, a

broken mosaic with inconsistencies, morphological mismatches, and interstitial spaces not belonging to any system. Weakly defined, these gaps are left open to interpretation, subversion, and resignification. In the mixed and multicultural Northern Quarter, interstices are “stages”⁹ conditioning and framing the negotiation of co-presence. As leftovers, they allow for and are reciprocally activated by the performance, the mutual entanglement between evolving space and society. Combining and mediating the different temporalities and movements of urban space and users’ everyday lives, they orchestrate plays on a binary rhythm that produce harmonies and dissonances, and simultaneously transform, stress, or soften their own in-between condition.

Beyond the map, the immersive experience bodily confronts personal limits, cultural expectations, and local necessities, sketching a multiple definition of public space closely bound to its context. *Héliport* is intensely used (young men) and avoided (young women), anonymous (dumpsite) and meaningful (gardening), conflictual and mediator. The presence and absence of these (in)visible markers, report cultural relationships with space and environment. Moreover, they are manifold expressions of politics. Does the over-representation of young men indicate a playful public space or a lack of infrastructure dedicated to (and opportunity for) them? Does street dwelling concentration highlight the welcoming (quiet, safe) character of a space, or the absence of decent organized shelter for the same group? Does young women’s invisibility express an attachment/seclusion to the private space or an exclusive and gendered local public space? Ethnography invites us to decode signs and tactics that individuals and groups – as consumers-makers¹⁰ – perform out of necessity or freedom on a space to overcome its difficulties or commit to its maintenance, and eventually project its ideal version for the future.

Urbanists tend to project a functionalist vision for space. We design to host activities and programs, and we plan for users. By our practice, we regulate space and control people.¹¹ Mobilizing ethnography aims at enlarging our scope and enriching our vocabulary. It forces us to present ourselves not as urban professionals, but as active recipients of a

local expertise, (un)consciously trained through the repetition of everyday practices. It challenges our role, the hierarchy and timeframe of conventional projects, confronts ephemerality and reiteration, fieldwork’s unknown dimension, and the future’s uncertainty. This shift of perspective is subversive because it forces us to move out of our offices and personally connect with the site we plan to transform. Provocative, it potentially confronts with critical practices, generating contradictory feelings as it stresses the limitation of space to control behaviors. To the contrary, the fieldwork in *Héliport* reveals a patchwork of marginal spaces, forgotten by the ruling institutions but under an unrecorded local maintenance. Cities and buildings are moving objects, endlessly adjusted.¹² However, interrogating the invisible present must keep us in the motion of projection to avoid falling into a static fascination. There lies perhaps the most challenging aspect for architectural ethnography, and arguably, its limits.

The brief “*Héliport: vers un socle plus ouvert*” presents the plinth as an obstacle: kilometers of blind walls, closed ground floors, impermeability between parking and street, (dis)connection of elevated garden, concrete materiality, etc. “*Opening the plinth*” invites us to clarify the blurred contours between private and public realms. Rather, could it be addressed as an opportunity to rethink the plinth as signifier: an urban structure with a clear definition, “open” to everyone (whatever culture, gender, age, income...), to all activities? To borrow again the theatrical metaphor: make it a meaningful stage. The walls of the plinth could get some thickness, ranging from a separating line [between spaces of different value, urban chambers] to a container of techniques (supporting performances displayed on public space), a backstage, a curtain—a movable wall that expands the street realm for a while—a building, or inhabited wall, backgrounds for new plays/activities.

Mapping is a historical and territorial reconstruction of a site-palimpsest.¹³ Ethnography reveals different sense(s) of the same place and stimulates interpretation. Finally, that is perhaps what we, as contemporary architects and urbanists must do in priority, working with interstitial spaces: building or restoring democratic meanings in urban settings and keeping our practice political. ■

ENDNOTES

1. "Héliport: *toward a more open plinth*" – design competition launched by the City of Brussels and the Brussels Bouwmeester on October 8th, 2018.
2. "*Plan d'Aménagement Directeur Maximilien-Vergote*" (PAD) – vision developed for the Northern Quarter by the design team: 1010au & grue, 2017 – ongoing.
3. Alan D. Marvell and David Simm, "Unravelling the geographical palimpsest through fieldwork: discovering a sense of place," *Geography* 101, no. 3 (2016): 126.
4. ASBL Cité Modèle, local antenna of the social housing company *Le Foyer Laekenois*; PCS Quartier Nord, social cohesion program jointly supported by the municipality of Brussels and the social housing company *Le Foyer Laekenois*; Maison de Quartier Millénaire, municipal community house (for elders mainly); Maison de Jeunes l'Avenir, municipal youth house, closed since 2017 after being damaged.
5. See call for interest "*Héliport : vers un socle plus ouvert*." See also discussions conducted in March 2019 with PAD Maximilien-Vergote authors (1010au & grue) and the winning design team selected for the study on the *Héliport* plinth (Centrale).
6. Camillo Boano and Giovanna Astolfo, "The new Urban Question: A conversation on the legacy of Bernardo Secchi with Paola Pellegrini," *Society and Space*, December 16, 2014.
7. Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-between* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
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9. Hilde Heynen, "Space as Receptor, Instrument or Stage: Notes on the Interaction Between Spatial and Social Constellations," *International Planning Studies* 18, no. 3-4 (2013), 342–357.
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13. Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens, *Loose Space: Diversity and Possibility in Urban Life* (London: Routledge, 2006).

FIVE POINTS OF “INFORMAL” ARCHITECTURE: TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE OF ABUNDANCE

ASHLEY BIGHAM

ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the invocation and use of the term “informal” in architecture, particularly when used to describe non-Western cultures, peoples, and spatial practices. When discussing “informal” architecture, particularly open-air markets and bazaars, architects have too often conflated economic definitions of informality with definitions of architecture form. In post-socialist contexts, the complex history of retail spaces exposes how friction between local economies and global supply chains can create unique architectural experiences. Through an ongoing study of open-air markets and bazaars in Ukraine, this essay proposes five possible points of informal architecture in an attempt to change the narrative from scarcity to abundance: (1) localized formality, (2) organizational intelligence, (3) color material, (4) adaptation and disruption, and (5) experiential excess.

This paper engages two examples of recent architectural projects in Ukraine, one designed by Outpost Office and one by Ukrainian architect Alex Bykov, both of which use Ukrainian bazaar culture and collective spatial practices to inform contemporary works of architecture. The case studies presented here provide useful examples of how architecture can serve an infrastructural role for the informal, providing a framework for the organization of objects, an attitude toward the use of materials, and strategies for utilizing informal economic and social networks.

I think that if you go into social criticism, you put poor people where you feel they belong. You are judgmental yourself; it's you who makes the categories. I think that the judgmental look is in the eye of the beholder.¹

— Marjetica Potrc

As capitalism expands to new territories in post-socialist contexts, shopping spaces are caught in the transformation of economic systems, giving formal characteristics to economic relationships. The result is a spliced condition of public and private spaces—mini shopping cities with their own regulations, security forces, currencies, and social hierarchies. The space of shopping is neither democratic nor free; it can require negotiation or provide anonymity. Shopping can lead to regret or disappointment, but also to the fulfillment of desire. As Sharon Zukin has noted, “Cultural theorists are only half right when they say that by choosing products, we create our identity. Our identity is formed by the whole activity of shopping—an activity that we experience as both freedom and necessity.”²

Markets are the original fulfillment networks—analogue systems of procurement, processing, storage, and distribution—and increasingly relevant as architects work to understand how intertwined global and regional forces create spaces where architecture is not merely the result of specific conditions, but is an active agent in the network itself.

Informal markets, those with non-Cartesian arrangements of market stalls, stands, kiosks, and other street vending elements, are considered outside the architectural canon. It is not that these spaces lack architectural interest, it is that contemporary architectural training does not equip architects to interpret them within our prescribed vocabularies and modes of viewing. Ukrainian bazaars, the focus of this

essay, are not necessarily chaotic, as often described; in fact, their logic is a physical manifestation of layered economic, social, and political forces, each with its own physical requirements.

What anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss defined as “bricolage”—making do with institutional and cultural contexts—is a particularly useful term to consider in the Ukrainian context.³ Architects have explained this phenomenon similarly, as in Koetter and Rowe’s use of the term “collage,” Charles Jencks’s “ad hocism,” or more recently, Keller Easterling’s “architectural entrepreneurialism.”⁴ Lévi-Strauss’s “bricolage” is preferred in this context, as it encompasses both the individual material acts *and* the collective social networks associated with their production. In addition, the anthropologist Anna Tsing’s use of the term “friction” provides a more nuanced understanding of how “regional-to-global networks of power, trade, and meaning” are productive relationships, not one-sided exchanges. An architecture of abundance reveals the tension between the individual and the collective; it utilizes part-to-whole relationships in both formal and social constructions. It results not in a “series of parts” or a “whole” form, but in a form through which forces (visible and invisible) are made material. An architecture of abundance is neither continuously emergent nor static; it is a constant state of transition, without a beginning and endpoint, where transformation is a constant state of being.

The difficulty of obtaining goods in the Soviet Union created a cultural network of alternative methods of procurement, and an enormous amount of time was spent in the pursuit of everyday items. The result was a culture of *blat*, an informal economy of favors that were required to obtain certain goods or services.⁵ *Blat*—a personal fulfillment system—relied on relationships and loose social networks. According to some scholars, “the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics might be seen as the most entrepreneurial society ever” in that it “forced all citizens to become micro-entrepreneurs, to enact entrepreneurship in even the most mundane facets of everyday life.”⁶ This micro-economic activity in many ways kept the economy from collapsing and provided a way for citizens to self-organize and procure the necessary goods to cope with shortages and poor distribution networks.

The culture of micro-entrepreneurship survives today in Ukraine in many aspects of daily life, and is maybe most clearly articulated in the physical form of markets and bazaars. Informal economic networks were in place during the demise of the formal state in 1991 and heavily influenced the economic and architectural development that followed.⁷ The result was an architecture that gave form to economic systems, materialized loose social networks, and offered collective solutions to the issues of scarcity. In a vacuum of planning regulation and enforcement, contemporary bazaars and markets in Ukraine recall Koetter and Rowe’s vivid description of seventeenth century Rome in their book *Collage City*: “that inextricable fusion of imposition and accommodation, that highly successful and resilient traffic jam of intentions, an anthology of closed compositions and ad hoc stuff in between.”⁸

Although shopping in America has been almost exclusively “formalized,” it often avoids form (as a permanent condition) and instead focuses its efforts on crafting the experience of shopping through a network of designed objects, platforms, and mediated relationships. In America, the farmers’ market is a rare, seasonal, and highly regulated event. Handcrafted goods are now more typically bought and sold through global digital platforms such as Etsy or Amazon Handmade.⁹ Terms like “small batch” or “slow”, once the province of local artisans, are used today to increase the market value of an item by drawing attention to the performance of labor. Indeed, the search for an “authenticity” in the products we purchase has driven us to some contradictory (and ironically humorous) practices. Despite America’s fascinating culture of mass consumption, and nearly twenty years after the publication of the *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, there still remains surprisingly little discussion of shopping in U.S. architectural academia or disciplinary practice.¹⁰

As Ukraine recovers from the economically devastating 1990s and transitions to a market economy, it has adopted some of the consumer and infrastructural norms of the West: namely, the recent popularity of big-box supermarkets. Supermarkets no doubt have certain advantages over open-air markets, including modern refrigeration, availability of parking, climate-controlled interiors, and a large selection of products

in a “one-stop” shopping experience. However, as more big-box stores open in Ukraine, open-air markets and bazaars have not disappeared as they have in some other post-Soviet countries. Supermarkets are not necessarily *better or worse* than open-air markets; they serve different social functions and exhibit distinct “material ethics,” a term used by Rosalyn Shieh to describe a cultural attitude toward material use.¹¹ Bazaars may appear to the Western-trained eye as exotic spaces filled with wonder and delight, but to the average consumer they are spaces of daily interaction and source of material fulfillment. They are not *wild*, but typical. Not chaotic, but logical. Not noisy, but acoustic. They do not represent scarcity, but celebrate alternative abundances.

The East and West have a long political, social, and artistic history of highlighting each as the Other.¹² For the purposes of this essay, we should consider both in a vacuum free of value judgments, simply as various degrees of *different or similar*. As Slovenian curator Zdenka Badovinac has noted, our histories and identities are not without collision; in collective thought and daily practices, the East and the West are tied together by our parallel, crisscrossing, and at times, interrupted histories. As Badovinac writes, the struggles of Eastern Europe are shared with “the whole of the non-Western world—a world that, for political and economic reasons, has not been able fully to integrate the processes of modernity—among which processes we can include the system of historicization itself.”¹³ As we consider the spatial practices and specific sites of consumerism, we must recall the general economic prosperity of the West in recent decades and the struggles of many post-Soviet countries during the same time.

By its very name, informal architecture categorizes all architecture by its supposed level of formality. While seemingly harmless in concept, in practice it is important to recognize that the term *informal* is most often used to describe non-Western cultures, peoples, and spatial practices. The informal is indicated only by the absence of formality, and therefore cannot be defined on its own terms. On the one hand, one rarely describes a notable singular building as formal architecture; rather, more descriptive terms are used to describe the specific form, material, or aesthetic

composition of a work within a subcategory (minimal, ironic, indifferent, heroic, activist, figural, etc.). On the other hand, among works categorized as *informal* there is typically little attention paid to a deeper understanding of the structural characteristics and cultural particularities of a work.

There are two reasons architects have misused the term *informal*: first, we have too often conflated economic definitions of informality to definitions of architectural form, and second, we have focused only on the global organization of the built environment, not on the individual unit formations and their collective relationships. Through an ongoing study of open-air markets and bazaars in Ukraine, this essay proposes five possible points of architecture away from singular interpretations and toward *an architecture of abundance*. These points should not be read in the same way as Le Corbusier’s “Five Points” (rules to which one must ascribe), but I propose we use these points to identify specific attributes, characteristics, or descriptors that might exist in any architecture, formal or informal.¹⁴ They are points that point toward, not points of regulation.

Bazaars are particularly useful in this pursuit because they are extra-architectural: they evolve more than they are created. They are more than a collection of buildings; they are temporary and permanent structures, complex fulfillment networks, rehearsed spatial practices, and logistical bodies of objects and people. As troublesome as the term informal architecture may be, it would be equally problematic to replace this term with another singular term that would inevitably flatten our understanding of the nuance within a type of architecture that produces variety, difference, and constant transformation in vastly different global contexts. Rather, an architecture of abundance encourages architects to understand more, not less, about the policies, social relationships, and cultural histories that create architecture. This way of viewing architecture brings forward useful characteristics that can be studied and implemented elsewhere. Architecture is not a summation of its characteristics, and strict points exclude future invention. How can we instrumentalize lessons learned from architecture labeled informal in the same way we learn from canonical precedents?



Figure 1: Rynok Barbashova, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
Courtesy: Ashley Bigham

NEW TERMS

There are five terms we can use to discuss, share, and learn from informal architecture to change its narrative from scarcity to abundance: (1) localized formality, (2) organizational intelligence, (3) color material, (4) adaptation and disruption, and (5) experiential excess.

Point 1: Localized Formality (Figure 1)

Formality is a central concern to both the viewer and the curator. Ukrainian markets thrive on moments of localized formality within a sea of formal collage. Markets are not simply typological hybrids; rather, they are assemblages of interconnected formal systems that exist and operate simultaneously. Each modular unit is embedded with compositional logics: symmetry, repetition, attention to scale, rhythm, etc. Vendor stalls are rectangular in shape, with each wall covered with gridded panels or tight shelving, and with

the occasional display table or row of symmetrical mannequins. Each stall is oriented to the central singular viewer, indifferent to the neighboring unit: each a singular, immersive world standing alone, side-by-side. Each object is arranged meticulously, its position and placement remaining constant even when the physical infrastructure of the market dictates that objects must be disassembled at the close of day and rearranged again in the morning. The stacking ability of the objects themselves is on display; nested pots form tall columns demanding attention from passersby. The seller’s body often completes the symmetrical arrangement perched on a small stool or collection of wares. Everything is in its right place.

Point 2: Organizational Intelligence (Figure 2)

Displays are organized to catch the attention of buyers. They reflect a high level of aesthetic concerns. Jeans are layered and draped to create an overwhelming sense of abundance. Sunglasses are sold in the sun, and umbrellas appear on rainy days. Long aisles of shoe stalls are organized by type: men's shoes, running shoes, kids' shoes, black shoes, knockoff Nikes, shoes with three stripes, shoes with heels, shoes for family members who get along, and shoes for families who don't. Bins of slippers overflow, reminding you to keep an extra pair for guests, signaling households of abundance. Everything is within an arm's reach, or conspicuously just outside its range.



Figure 2: *Tsentral'nyy Rynok*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
Courtesy: Ashley Bigham

Point 3: Color Material (Figure 3)

Market infrastructure, comprising sheet metal, aluminum frames, crates, cardboard boxes, ceramic tiles, or wooden pallets, are used in its raw form to create a backdrop of neutral tones that can be embellished by items for sale. From ash-colored metal to café au lait cardboard, the stage is ripe for adornment. Thus, the color of each object becomes its most important material property. This is especially true where children's toys are concerned; the number of items displayed at one time depends on how many color variations are available. Objects are advertisements, and color can symbolize the abundance of choices. After all, color is free; a red bike and a blue bike cost the same. Embrace that color is both free and freeing. Color resists the tired narratives of post-Soviet gray. Every color is a material, and every material is a color.



Figure 3: *Tsentral'nyy Rynok*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
Courtesy: Ashley Bigham



Figure 4: *7th Kilometer Bazaar*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
Courtesy: Ashley Bigham

Point 4: Adaptation and Disruption (Figure 4)

Bazaars are designed through political and economic disruptions. All bazaars bear some physical markers of the transition from a socialist to a market economy. The Seventh Kilometer Bazaar near Odesa, one of the largest markets in Europe, offers an urbanism of systematic spatial adaptation. Born of a disruption in modern standardization, the market's main building material and organizational module is discarded shipping containers. As Soviet containers were not compatible with international standards, surplus containers were

moved outside the city to become the infrastructure for the rapidly expanding market. Shipping containers used as market stalls can be opened and closed with ease to reveal any variety of interior organization or wares. The market exists within a context of ambiguous regulations, tax exemptions, and "black market" trading, but also offers a website complete with live web cams of the market spaces. These disruptions and adaptations may seem paradoxical, but embracing these constraints can create new material economies.



Figure 5: *Saltivs'kyi Rynok*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
 Courtesy: Ashley Bigham

Point 5: Experiential Excess (Figure 5)

There are relational, social, and communal aspects of bazaar shopping that cannot be replicated in supermarkets. Citizens have personal histories with places of shopping. You may often hear customers say, “I remember when that market was much bigger/smaller/ just starting/only a piece of dirt/filled with pickpockets/ the place to find anything/built over a cemetery/ where my grandmother worked,” etc. These personal remembrances, both positive and negative, can ensure their survival. Some say they specifically shop at bazaars because they are worried open-air markets will become obsolete with the development of supermarkets, or in a specific attempt to support the “grannies” or pensioners who typically sell there. Others swear it is the place to find the freshest organic fruits and vegetables.¹⁵ Choose to create and nurture experiential excess for technical, economic, comfort, and sentimental reasons.¹⁶ Everyone may disagree on the reason, but agree on the action.

TOWARD AN ARCHITECTURE OF ABUNDANCE

What can we learn from engaging these alternative points in the creation of new works of architecture? Two recent projects in Ukraine—one designed by Outpost Office, a practice I co-direct with Erik Herrmann, and one by Ukrainian architect Alex Bykov—use Ukrainian bazaar logics and collective spatial practices to inform contemporary works of design. These projects provide case studies for subverting architecture’s predisposition to otherize architectures and spatial practices not immediately intelligible as formal, replacing these dispositions with active engagement toward an architecture of abundance.

Open/Work is an exhibition of the work of the first students to complete the first year BA Program at the newly established Kharkiv School of Architecture. It was created through a collaboration between Outpost Office and the students of the Kharkiv School. In this

challenging context of bricolage—a design-build project at a newly formed school situated within the economic and political context of post-Soviet Ukraine—this project was both an aesthetic project about display culture at Ukrainian bazaars and a logistical challenge to design using only local materials that were readily available in Kharkiv’s bazaars. This design and procurement process not only allowed us to meet the tight schedule and budget, but it also utilized students’ informal networks and the institution to develop unique design solutions in real time.

Open/Work implements design tactics and construction methods from these iconic bazaars to produce a suspended field of objects. It deploys organizational methods and detailing to create a system equally related to commercial acts of display and museum storage. The items on display include student models and drawings, as well as items borrowed from around

the school including lecture posters, books, pencils, pillows, hard hats, and woodworking tools, highlighting the material abundance necessary for architectural learning. The exhibition is a floating archive that invites visitors to look at objects, touch them, and inspect them more closely. The design encourages visitors to behave as if they are at a bazaar, where testing, touching, and tasting occur before purchasing. The creation act of organizing and displaying objects gives the students the autonomy to speak “through the medium of things,” creating both individual and collective non-verbal narratives.¹⁷ Both the act of curation and the act of viewing require a more direct experience of the object itself, resulting in improvised interactions between participants and uncanny relationships.

Drawing on similar themes, Alex Bykov’s exhibition “Markets in (post)Soviet Ukraine” transforms a meat counter at the Volodymyrskyi Market into an



Figure 6: *Open/Work*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
 Courtesy: Erik Herrmann

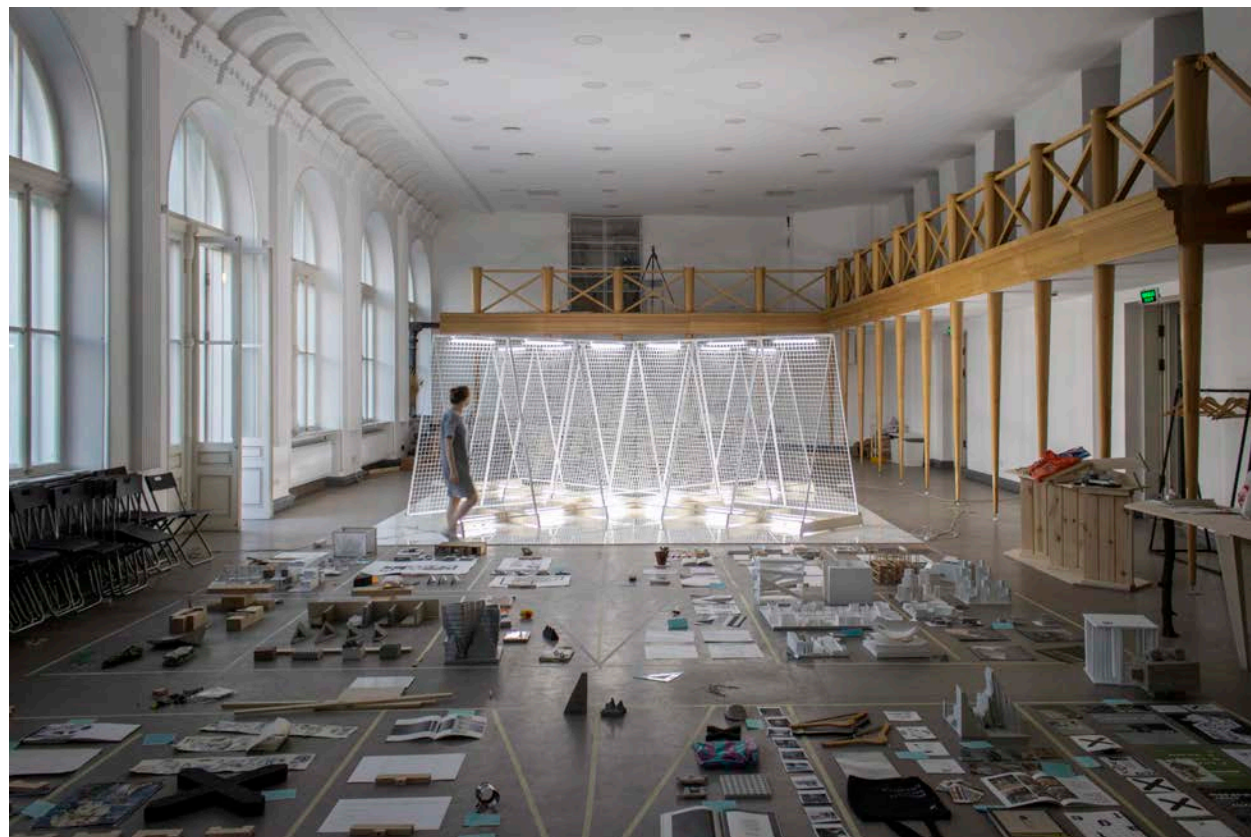
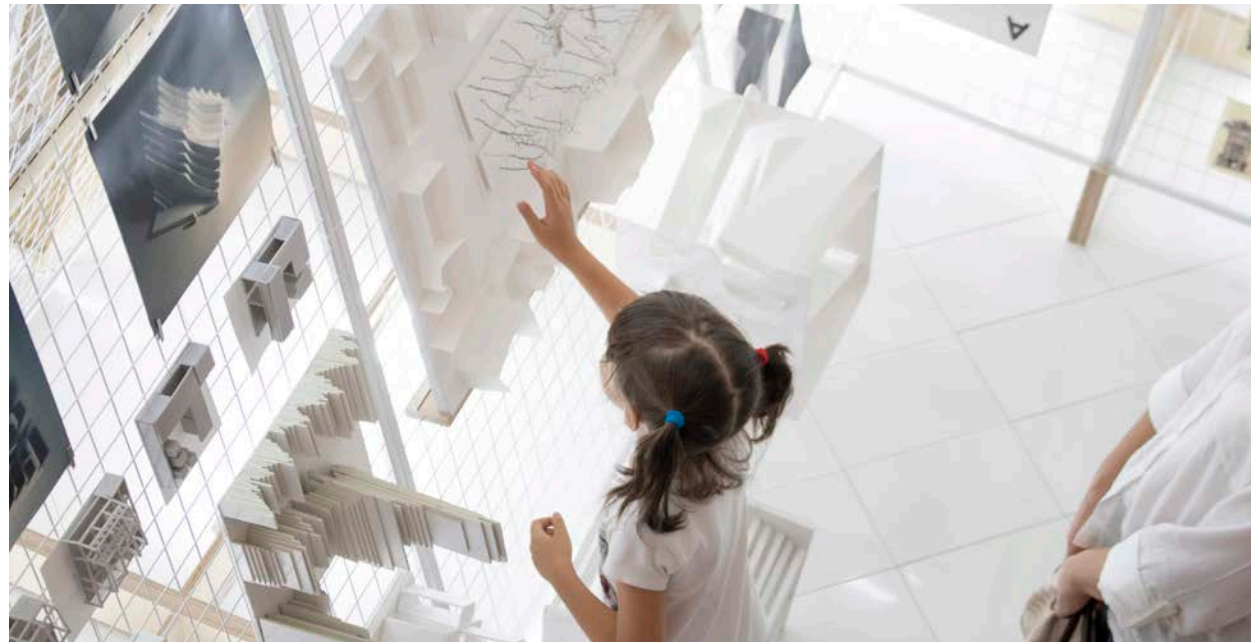


Figure 7 & 8: *Open/Work*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
 Courtesy: Erik Herrmann

exhibition space during Kyiv Art Week highlighting the market building's historic, and contemporary, cultural value. According to Bykov, the exhibition and the accompanying series of public discussions "question how trade is organized by a society and how a society is reorganized by trade."¹⁸ This exhibition highlights the improvisation of the actors in the scene, flattening the relationship between the historic site, the active marketplace, and a traditional gallery space.

and strategies for utilizing informal economic and social networks. These projects show how crafting new relationships between curators, viewers, and content can equalize the act of the creator and the act of the viewer. By embracing these points of "informal" markets, we can bring new understanding to a thriving type, learn to engage social systems of fulfillment, and bridge the current dichotomy between formal types. ■

In an age of material excess, architecture is no longer tasked with the creation of totally new constructions; increasingly, it is tasked with the recombination, reuse, and reorganization of the material abundance already existing in our built environment. The case studies presented here—both the bazaar itself and each architect's creation—provide useful examples of how architecture can serve an infrastructural role for the informal, providing a framework for the organization of objects, an attitude toward the use of materials,



Figure 8: *Volodimirskiy Rynok*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2019
 Courtesy: Alex Bykov

ENDNOTES

1. Marjetica Potrc, *Next Stop, Kiosk* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 2003), 43.

2. Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 253.

3. As Claude Lévi-Strauss writes, "...the 'bricoleur' also, and indeed principally, derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he 'speaks' not only with things, as we have already seen, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities." Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21. See also Irénée Scalbert, "The Architect as Bricoleur" *Candide: Journal for Architectural Knowledge*, no. 04 (2011): 69-88.

4. See Fred Koetter and Colin Rowe, *Collage City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979); Keller Easterling, "Launch" *Perspecta* 47 (2014).

5. Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 37. According to Ledeneva, *blat* is "an exchange of 'favours of access' in conditions of shortages and a state system of privileges."

6. Alf Rehn and Saara Taalas "'Znakomstva I Svyazi' (Acquaintances and connections) – Blat, the Soviet Union, and mundane entrepreneurship," *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 16 no. 3 (August 2004): 235-250.

7. Abel Polese and Peter Rogers, "Surviving post-socialism: the role of informal economic practices," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 31 no. 11/12 (2011): 612-618.

8. Fred Koetter and Colin Rowe, *Collage City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

9. Despite my frequent trips to Eastern Europe, my Soviet decanter set was bought on Etsy from an antique dealer in Berlin, Pennsylvania.

10. See John McMorrough, "City of Shopping," in Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, and Sze Tsung Leong, eds., *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, Project on the City, v. 2 (Köln: Taschen, 2001) 201. According to McMorrough, "Architecture's antagonism toward shopping is due in part to its historical preoccupation with form and composition. By imagining space in terms of bounded, stable, and unchanging entities, architecture has been largely unable to accept the excessive and formless nature of shopping."

11. Rosalyne Shieh, "It's fine." *Log* 41 (2017): 41. "In place of an aesthetic that represents a culture is an attitude, a material ethics."

12. See Zdenka Badovinac, "Happy End of the Cold War," in *Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 239-262. Although the understood shorthand of "East" and "West" will be used in this text, when possible specific geographic locations will be used, specifically *Ukraine* and *America*.

13. Zdenka Badovinac, "Interrupted Histories," in *Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 89-101.

14. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre complete 1910-1929* (Zurich: Editions Girsberger, 1964), 128-129.

15. See Abel Polese and Aleksandr Prigarin, "On the persistence of bazaars in

the newly capitalist world: reflections from Odessa," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 31 no. 1 (Spring 2013): 110-136.

16. See Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier, 1910-1965*, ed. Hans Girsberger and Willy Boesinger, trans. William B. Gleckman (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967): 44. "Thus we are led to choose the roof-terrace for technical reasons, economic reasons, reasons of comfort and sentimental reasons."

17. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21.

18. Alex Bykov (architect, photographer), digital correspondence with the author, August 2019.

SUBVERTING PRACTICE

CONTINUUMS OF DRAWING AND BUILDING

CHRIS CORNELIUS INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON

ARCHITECTURE AND THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

JAMES MILLER, ERIC NAY



Chris Cornelius is a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, focuses his research and practice on the architectural translation of culture; in particular, American Indian culture. He is the founding principal of studio:indigenous, a design and consulting practice serving American Indian clients. Cornelius holds a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Virginia and a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he is now an Associate Professor. He has previously taught at the University of Virginia. Chris is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. He received the inaugural J. Irwin and Xenia S. Miller Prize, an Artist in Residence Fellowship from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, and multiple wins in the Ken Roberts Architectural Delineation Competition (KRob). Cornelius teaches at the undergraduate and graduate levels including a seminar course on visual thinking and mapping. Chris was among a group of indigenous architects who represented Canada in the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.



James Miller is an Assistant Professor in Environmental Design at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada within the Faculty of Design. James's research focuses on traditional and indigenous knowledge systems in the production of sustainable and resilient environments; his work engages indigeneity and decolonialization. James's current research investigates indigenous placemaking within the climate diaspora and Hawaiian architectural design epistemologies. James holds a PhD and M.Arch. from the University of Oregon and a B.Arch from the University of Notre Dame. He has worked in architecture offices in Hawaii, Indiana, and Oregon and currently holds his own practice; current projects include primary schools in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Hawaii that are based on collaborative and indigenous design approaches. As a Kanaka Maoli, James collaborates with other indigenous educators on guidelines for decolonizing curriculum, and he sits on an Indigenous advisory committee for renovations and new construction of Hawaiian charter schools.



Eric Nay is an Associate Professor at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada within the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Eric teaches architecture and design histories and theories, environmental design studios and advises graduate students. Eric's educational background includes PhD, Toronto; M.Arch, Cornell; B.Arch, Kentucky and postgraduate studies in law, Hamline. Eric has worked in architecture offices in New York City, Chicago and California, including SOM. Eric's research centers on critical heritage studies, indigenous design and multiple modernities. His teaching experience includes the University of California, the University of North Carolina, Cornell University, and others. He has also taught at universities in the Middle East and Asia. Eric has published broadly across academic and popular media in numerous articles, book reviews and digital formats. He has held positions as Associate Dean, Program Director and Grievance Chair, while also serving on the provincial level in a number of positions supporting positive university/government relations.

CONTINUUMS OF DRAWING AND BUILDING

CHRIS CORNELIUS INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON

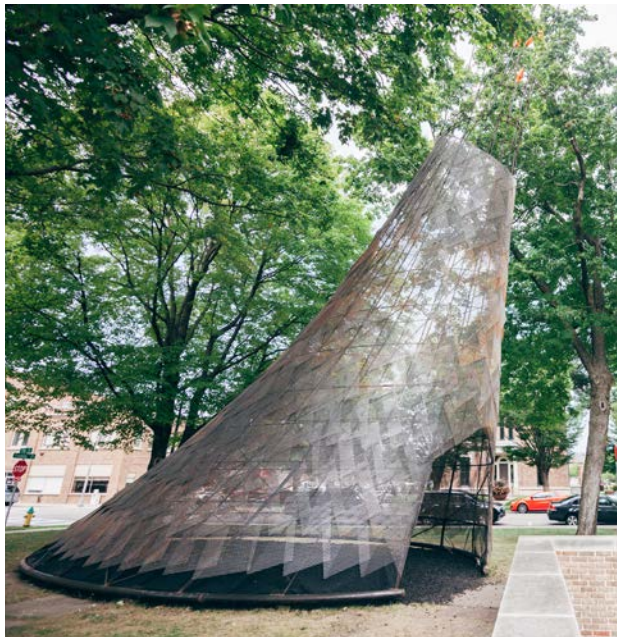
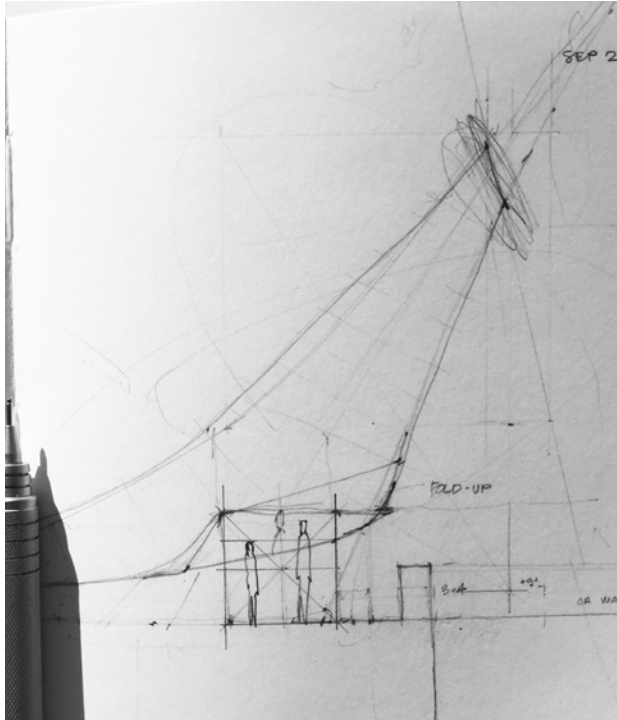
The following is a transcription of an interview conducted by editor Michael Abrahamson with Chris Cornelius of studio:indigenous on January 17, 2020. Cornelius gave a lecture during the School of Architecture's Fall 2019 lecture series, and participated in a workshop with faculty on decolonizing architectural pedagogy. Each question posed below frames a different way in which his work might be considered subversive. Among them are: subverting the linearity and finality of the design process by placing both drawing and building on a continuum that stretches beyond the conventional phases of the architectural process; subverting the conventional divide between elite and popular cultures and between design and research; subverting the discipline's conventional ignorance of indigenous issues, spaces, and practices; and subverting the expectation of originality within architectural work by repeating the same design methods in series.

The interview is illustrated by a selection of Cornelius's Radio Free Alcatraz drawings, which explore the historical, geological, and cultural context of the 1969–71 Occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Through collage, tracing, juxtaposition, and deconstruction, this drawing series shows the ways that this occupation by the Indians of All Tribes organization indexed indigenous spatialities and architectures, makes proposals for the process of land decolonization, and derives formal potentials for a decolonized architecture. As Cornelius mentions in the interview, this series continues to evolve and develop both toward and against a more concrete architectural proposal, and should therefore be considered one among several examples of Cornelius's continuums of drawing and building.

MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON (MA): Drawing and modeling are essential to your practice. In these media, you seem intent on recontextualizing techniques of collage, appropriation, and chance that have a long history in both elite and popular culture; in other words, your work draws as much from modernist avant-gardes as it does from more contemporary youth- and counter-cultures like hip-hop and graffiti. In using these formal and compositional techniques, how do you see your relationship to the various histories that they evoke—histories of our discipline, histories of the professional work of architects, and your heritage as an indigenous person?

CHRIS CORNELIUS (CC): I would say that's absolutely true about the work, the way that I think, and also the way that I teach. For me, it's really about not drawing any specific conclusions, both literally and figuratively, when starting projects. The drawing and modeling are really instrumental in the beginnings of projects when starting to gather ideas. Collage, appropriation, recontextualizing, it's a kind of syntax, or a way of putting things back together. I do look at other people that were doing this, like Duchamp, Schwitters, Rauschenberg, who I think perhaps were trying to break out of what people saw as high art in their time, and advocating for something else while being activist and radical.

When I look at things like hip-hop, and when I teach it in architecture studios, it's about sampling and how the entire genre, the culture, the artistic expression, built something from nothing by assembling things together. For me, the early drawings were trying to assemble thoughts in a way where you're not quite sure what the conclusion is, but you do know that in the end you'll draw one or more conclusions from the piece.



Figures 1-3: Initial sketch, scale model, and built installation of Wiikiaami, Exhibit Columbus, First Christian Church, Columbus, Indiana, 2016-17
 Courtesy: studio.indigenous

The basic principle in those drawings was not to censor myself or try to edit or parse what it was I was putting on the page. Really, if it came into my brain it went on the page.

But the Radio Free Alcatraz drawings are thematic, so it's not just anything can be put into the drawing. The things that fit into the theme are the things that end up in the drawing. I do think that as a culture, as creative people, we should be pulling in more than just what we know, we should be thinking about the larger culture. The ways that images are consumed and thought about can be unpacked in the collage or reassembly manner.

MA: In terms of your relationship to the history of architecture as an academic discipline, would you say that your work is about the way we open ourselves to influences outside that discipline?

CC: I think that's partially true, but part of it is a matter of what we've seen and known in architecture previously, and to reassemble those things. The way that I would describe it is that it's kind of a way of dreaming. Our brains pull in information while we're conscious during the day—people we meet, situations, spaces—and then

our brain re-sorts them while we're sleeping, in ways that we don't even understand sometimes. That's the kind of thing that I'm trying to use as a creative tool to generate ideas, this dreamlike re-sorting. It might be flipping something, mirroring something, tracing something, doing something else to it. I'm trying to get into the cognitive parts of my brain that don't judge things or rely on taste. Those parts that really just don't censor or edit things too much.

MA: You sometimes label your drawings and models "design research." Can you describe how you personally understand that phrase, and how you understand the relationship between design and research? Is the kind of work you do somewhere in between? And how do you see the relationship between your drawings and your completed buildings? Do your drawings point toward building designs, or do they stand alone as records of a thought process?

CC: Like most people that have been educated in the way that we've been educated as architects, I used to think of it going from idea, then representation, then drawings, a model maybe, then a building. There's supposed to be a high fidelity between all of those things. Each one is a scaled representation of the building. Now, I'm much more interested in these things being a continuum that fluctuates. For me, the design research part of it isn't something you do before the project starts, and then you start designing the project later. They're actually part of a larger continuum. What are all of the things that I want to pull into a project—ideas, concepts, influences, references? All of those things start to get pulled into the design research for me.

The trajectory of my work has gone from doing these kinds of drawings, making some of the models that I've made, and then, finally, building these temporary installations as the full-scale versions. I'm interested in asking if I can make an installation like the way that I drew it. When I make these installations, to be honest, it's harder for me than it is to draw it. And I am interested, now, in how I can continue that trajectory—can I get things back into a drawing? How would I draw what I built? Everything's not intended to be instructive.

For instance, in the Columbus project [Wiikiaami, for Miller Prize 2017] I didn't do any drawings, per se, in the sense of construction drawings, because I was constructing it. We worked, basically, off of a 3D model, and if we needed a measurement we just pulled it off the 3D model. Even when we worked with the structural engineers, we handed them that 3D model and they did all of their analysis based on that. We didn't have drawings to hand to them. So that kind of broke open the idea of this continuum for me. That particular project started with a sketch and a physical model. That physical model was based on a series of other models I had done four or five years before. I was really interested in how I could now take this old thing and make it full-scale.

The relationship between design and research, and drawings and buildings, is one that is continuous. It's not a process where you do one thing and then you do the next thing. It's not that you do research and then you design. The research is actually part of all of it. The actual design, meaning the process of doing an actual drawing or an actual model, is part of the research for me. I'm not really a writer, so I wouldn't write a paper or anything before I started a project, for instance. But I would compile information in a visual manner, or I would translate it in a visual way.

With the Alcatraz project there's quite a bit of research embedded in it. In the drawings, you'll find that I've done tracings of indigenous dwellings all over the US, because I'm interested in how those things may be similar or how they're different. I draw them in plan, I draw them in section, I'll trace over historic maps or even vernacular maps of indigenous settlements where I don't even understand how they were made. Those tracings get put into the drawings. There is a lot of research that goes into this specific set of drawings. I would say out of the entire time it takes me to do one of these drawings, in a six- to eight-week period, probably seventy percent of my time is spent finding things and tracing them. The tracing is a way of taking a thing I'm researching and synthesizing it into a thing that's part of the design process. All of it can then be integrated. After that I have to figure out how I want to synthesize or translate it into an architectural thing, whether that's a building or an installation or some other physical artifact.

MA: Would you say that in the case of the Columbus project, or Alcatraz, that the built thing is the end point, or is it just another step in that continuous process?

CC: That's interesting. They're very different. Obviously, for Columbus, there was an event, a timeline for it to exist. But to me it's existed much longer.

MA: The two projects are very different, because Alcatraz hasn't culminated in a building yet.

CC: It's kind of interesting, the coupling of those two things. With Alcatraz I'm actually finding it a little, not difficult per se, but challenging to translate it into a building. It's not that I don't know how to do that. Maybe there's a little bit of hesitation on my part that I need to get over in order to start pushing it in that direction. To me it seems it's much bigger than a building. I want this building to be able to do things that we haven't thought buildings could do. There's a whole series of thoughts and ideas in it that I haven't quite figured out whether to draw or model.

Because it's a longer project, it's a self-initiated project, it's a research project, it's different and doesn't necessarily have a deadline like Columbus and the other installation work I've done. It's moving at a sort of geological pace while the other things are moving at more like a weather pace—things happen fast and they last for a little bit, and then they go away.

But it's interesting to think about. To be honest, that is what currently compels me, is that now that I've done these things, what's next? And I did do a big project with Antoine Predock early in my career, a great project that exemplifies a lot of my thinking about how indigenous architecture should be. People who are observers of my work are really wondering how these new drawings and models translate into a building. For me, it's pretty straightforward in the sense that what I'm trying to do, to get these ideas into a building, is already something I know how to do. I know how to make a building, but can I translate these qualities and characteristics into experiences? The installation work allows me to do that very quickly, at a smaller scale.

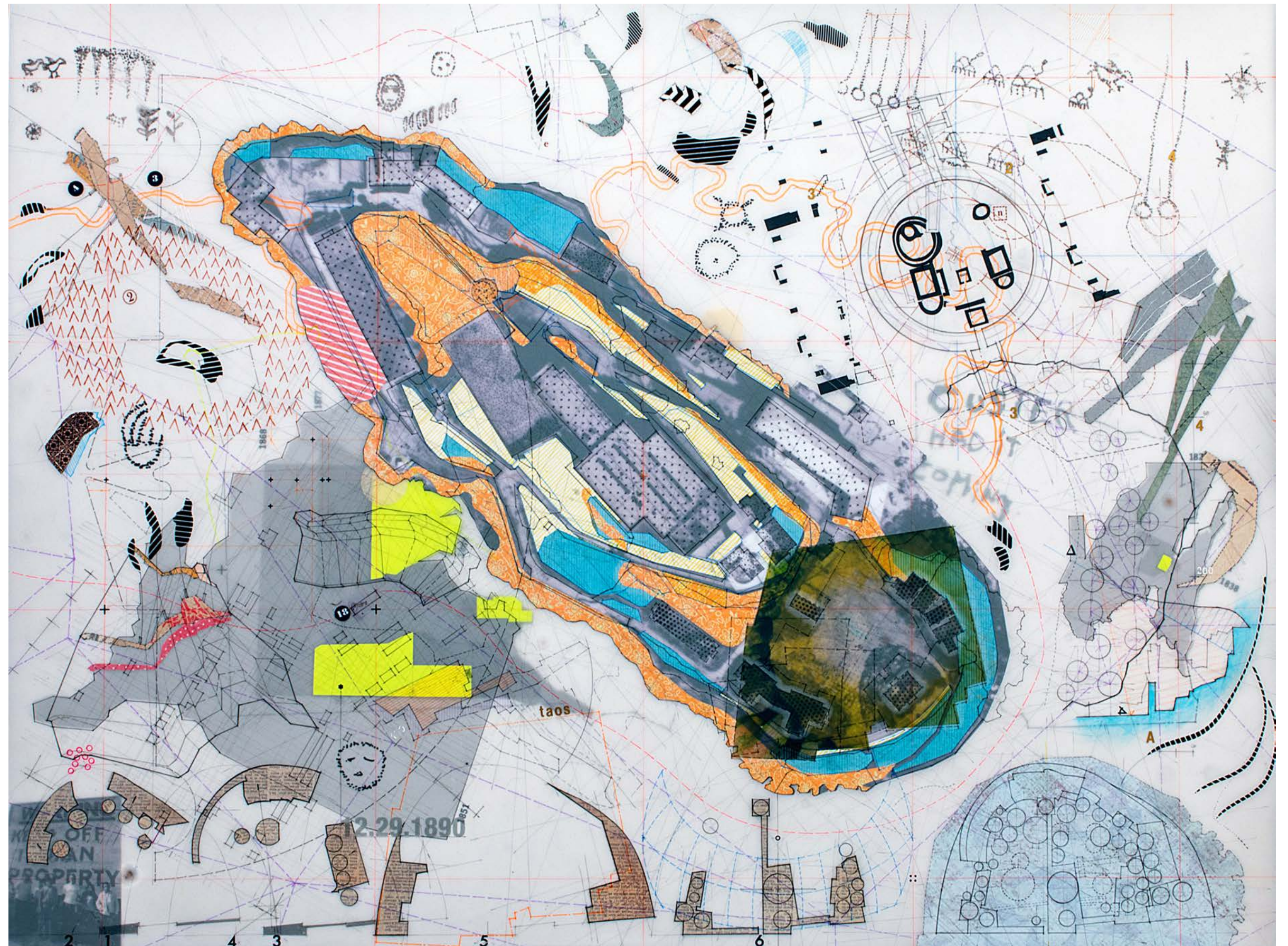


Figure 4: "Territories," from the Radio Free Alcatraz series
Courtesy: studio:indigenous

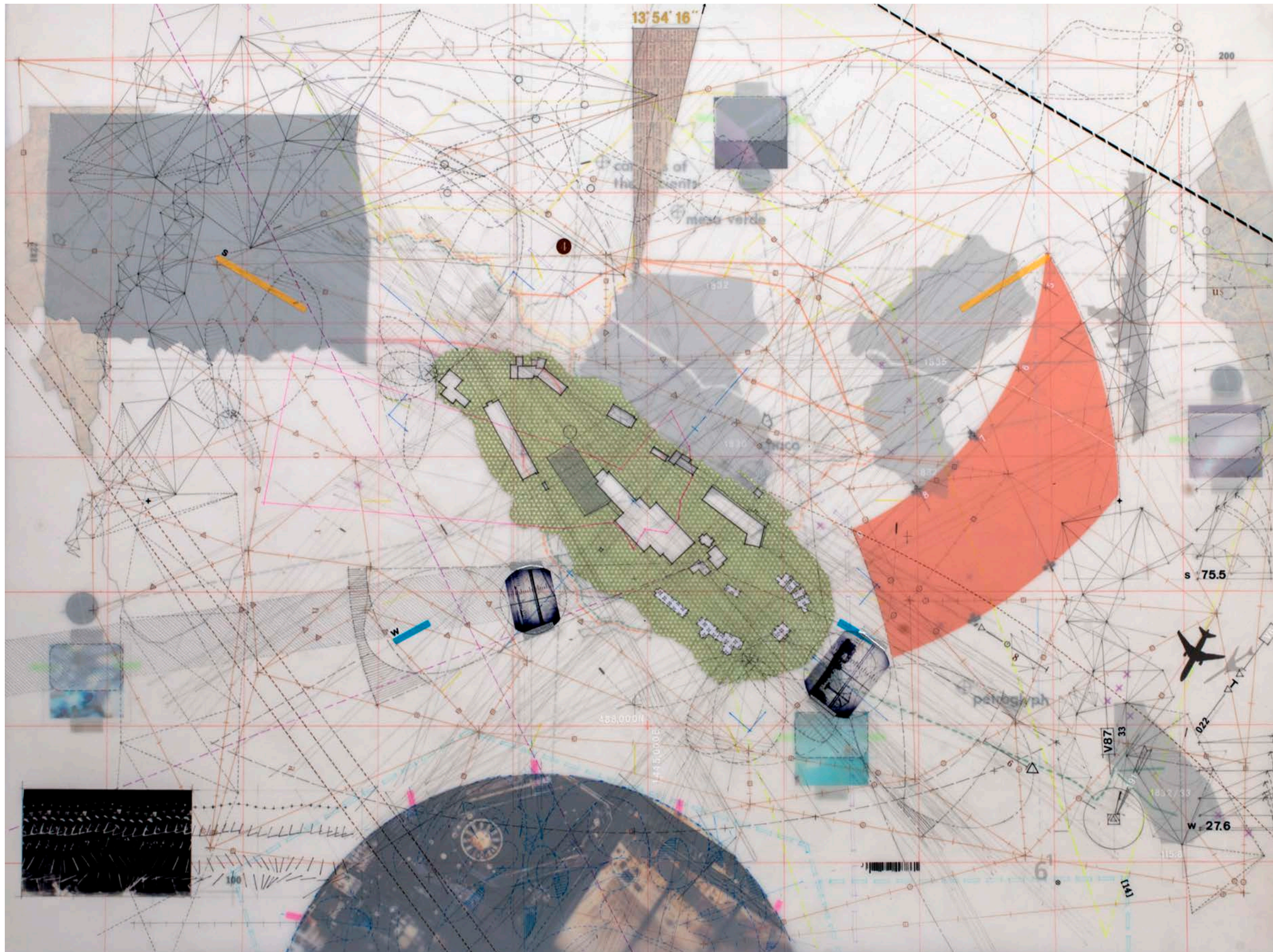


Figure 5: "Trajectories," from the Radio Free Alcatraz series
 Courtesy: studio:indigenous

There's definitely a continuum between the drawings and models and what would manifest itself as buildings, but it is not this one-to-one correspondence. It's not just that I'm going to scale the Alcatraz drawings up and make a plan or a section. That's not how it works. These are just the way I'm currently thinking about how to represent ideas or notions in an architectural project.

MA: You often emphasize the role of storytelling in your practice, and connect this to your membership and participation in oral traditions as an indigenous architect. One might say that oral knowledge traditions develop over time through retelling and repeating a set of stories with subtle variations. Similarly, in your design research you often work in series, developing a set of shared themes and formal guidelines that you allow to unfold multiple times. Do you see a connection between your serial working method and oral traditions of knowledge sharing?

CC: I certainly do. My earliest understandings of indigenous oral traditions was not only that they were a way of conveying the culture, but that the storyteller is important in the process. They have degrees of freedom in what they want to emphasize or deemphasize in a story. The story could be the same story told by ten different people, over ten different time periods. Some storytellers might take longer, or add detail, or reduce detail. I'm interested in that, as a designer, when I'm telling the story I can choose to emphasize or deemphasize certain parts, but the core of the thing stays the same, meaning that the way the culture is conveyed stays the same. So I might be trying to make indigenous architecture that is based in certain cultural principles that have always been the same, but what it looks like is completely different. It's not what traditional indigenous art, or patterns, or dwellings, even, looked like. There are other circumstances within it, however it's still based in the same culture and way of thinking.

With the series idea, I am interested asking what if I did something multiple times? Maybe it's like how an Olympic athlete might train. They might be doing things repeatedly in order to improve certain parts of their performance, but not just to do it wholesale. No one's going to go out and run a marathon every day. They

have to train to do that. When I build models in series or do drawings in series, it's like athletic conditioning in preparation for the event. The larger commissions are those events. I should be able to do them more easily, and embed some of those thoughts into a larger project through doing a series.

I also like working in series because I get to have more than one kick at a can. You're able to think about things you hadn't thought about before. I try not to anticipate future iterations when I'm doing the current iteration. I just allow each iteration to be its own thing that addresses whatever circumstances. I started with drawings and models, and now it's installations, which I've started to do in series and will continue in the coming years. I'm interested in that way of working.

What interests me, too, is that, as an architect, when I look at other kinds of artists, I often wonder why they might do the same thing over and over again. It's different in our discipline. Like Tony Smith's sculptures. They're beautiful, but certainly you know one when you see one, because of the repetition of the work. I'm interested in repetition, but not repeating in that way—repeating in a language that's my own so that people can understand that it's my work based on the things that I'm trying to advance or expand.

Working in series is part of being able to retell the story to get new insights, even if, in the end, it's the same story. There's definitely a connection between storytelling, oral traditions, and the work that I'm doing.

MA: Your most recent design research series, Radio Free Alcatraz, not only makes an impassioned argument for decolonization—for quite literally handing back unceded and stolen land—but also provides the groundwork for an architectural project. Can you describe that project, as it stands right now, and the ways your research into the history of Native American land rights and this particular indigenous protest movement continue to inform the development of your architectural proposal?

CC: I have always seen and understood colonization as a system and/or an apparatus, meaning that it's very systematized. I borrow some of my terms from Linda

[Tuhiwai] Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies*.¹ She talks about many things that are basically architectural acts: drawing the line and saying "this is the boundary," or establishing a center and then everything is judged based on your relationship to the center—I'm in or I'm out, I'm in the boundary or out of the boundary. Those can be seen as architectural acts as well as political and colonizing acts. I think that we can use design in the same way, to dismantle that system.

The Alcatraz occupation was intriguing to me when I began to learn about it because they wanted to make architecture, basically. They wanted to make a cultural center, a native university, and a native ecological center on the island. It wasn't just about how they owned this property and now they've got it back—they actually wanted to do something with it. For all intents and purposes, they had the right to do that based on treaties indigenous peoples had made with the US government. That's why they were trying to take the land back. They weren't just trying to do a sit-in, or take something that wasn't theirs. They were saying that this is rightfully ours based on the agreements that we've made with you.

It's a microcosm of a larger issue we should be thinking about. How do we begin to have a dialogue about honoring these treaties in some way, shape or form? We'll never be able to do it one hundred percent, but if land is given back, there should be some plan to put it toward the greater good. I think architecture can have a role in that. That's where I see my role, is in trying to establish parameters and ways of thinking about how you actually do that. It's not just always making a cultural center or something that memorializes, but to really say, "This is how indigenous sovereignty is expressed." Yes, it's land, but it's also indigenous funds, it's indigenous lawyers, it's indigenous doctors, it's indigenous architects and contractors, it's indigenous governments. Everything that is tied to that land becomes indigenous. It's not a part of the paternalistic relationship that has been created for indigenous people in the US and Canada, where the government is supposed to be taking care of us in some way, or speaking for us.

The idea that land is the foundation for all of that is the bigger question that I'm trying to present in the Alcatraz work. What would a native university really look like? For me, it's something different than any other university in its structure, its composition. Even its policies would have to be very different. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

ARCHITECTURE AND THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

JAMES MILLER, ERIC NAY

ABSTRACT

This paper critiques the application of the rights of nature in the production of eco-friendly architecture from a decolonizing perspective. The question at the center of our argument is whether the rights of nature can be useful as a method to express deeper relationships between natures and not peoples in architectural practice, or is the taking up of the rights of nature just another colonial manifestation of *terra nullius* meant to ensure settler colonial regimes are maintained in perpetuity? To tease out this question, a recent architectural competition in Hawaii is analyzed and explored as a methodology, alongside other architectural projects that serve as far more successful attempts at addressing indigenous rights, epistemologies, and ways of building that acknowledge settler colonialism and the need to decolonize architectural practice through respectfulness and reflexivity.

The term the *rights of nature* is often used within the discourse of environmental justice to achieve particular goals and effects, which, we argue, is yet another colonial expression of *terra nullius* meant to ensure settler colonial regimes are maintained in perpetuity. This paper posits that use of the rights of nature is problematic in its production of eco-friendly legislation and eco-friendly architecture, and both require critical assessment. The rights of nature is plagued by conflicting usages, post-colonial interpretations, and a historiography that stretches back from the early yearnings of American environmentalist John Muir for environmental justice to a growing number of legal arguments that have now been established as precedential cases expanded as the result of fears of environmental degradation and indigenous activism over lands and resources that were previously stolen, abused or neglected under settler regimes. In 1972, the case of *Sierra Club v. Morton* came before the US Supreme Court, which led to deliberation over whether nature should have its own rights, although without success. Justice William O. Douglas wrote in his dissent, "Contemporary public concern for protecting nature's ecological equilibrium should lead to the conferral of standing upon environmental objects to sue for their own preservation."¹

New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to create and pass laws acknowledging that nature is no longer subject to human ownership. This new ideology appeared in New Zealand acknowledging that people are part of nature; they are not separate from it or dominant over it. These laws have since expanded globally to emphasize nature as a rights holder, as well as the importance of human beings to uphold and protect these rights. The rights of the Te Urewera National Park and the Whanganui River in New Zealand were precedent-setting cases in which nature was granted legal recognition in 2014.

Current architectural practices, framed as "green," often operate under the guise of ecological sustainability using the rights of nature as a form of justification, but the architecture that results often produces an inauthentic form of Indigenization using methods that are problematically embedded within the interweaving of the rights of nature and *terra nullius* in support of settler-colonial fantasies. The rights of nature can provide a dangerous form of justification for the consumption of indigenous knowledge and can justify efforts to occupy and develop land in ways that are perceived as being more sensitive and harmonious with nature, yet are not. To derail these dangerous fantasies and practices, we need to provide limits for how concepts like the rights of nature may be applied as guidelines within architectural pedagogy and practices, while respecting and acknowledging the domain and the intellectual property of indigenous peoples. We must actively question how we teach and use the rights of nature in the architectural studio, while constantly reflecting on whom these enlightened approaches are serving.

In consideration of the dialectical relationship between humans and nature, the rights of nature posits that nature has fundamental rights of its own. Yet, humans are intrinsically a part of nature. Dr. David R. Boyd, who currently serves as the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment and is an Associate Professor of Law, Policy, and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, draws upon many real-life examples, including New Zealand's *Te Urewera Act*, that have granted ecosystems legally enforceable rights, as well as other ground-breaking lawsuits, to argue how the rights of nature could restructure environmental law and public policy.² In 2019, a number of rivers, including the Klamath in the US and the Plata in Colombia, became bona fide legal "subjects" using the rights of nature as a legal instrument. Lake Erie, too, now has legal rights, which allows citizens to sue on behalf of the lake when it's being polluted.

"From 1954 to 2014," Boyd writes, "*Te Urewera* was an 821-square-mile national park on the North Island, but when the *Te Urewera Act* took effect, the government gave up formal ownership, and the land became a legal entity with 'all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person' as the statute puts it."³ Nevertheless, the rights of nature provides a groundbreaking, albeit

flawed, method for navigating nature and personhood simultaneously, while providing a legal framework for non-indigenous persons and institutions to acknowledge complex epistemological frameworks that go beyond the limits of western notions of land, property and place, amongst others. The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature asserts:

The rights of nature is about balancing what is good for human beings against what is good for other species, what is good for the planet as a world. It is the holistic recognition that all life, all ecosystems on our planet are deeply intertwined...Rather than treating nature as property under the law, rights of nature acknowledges that nature in all its life forms has the *right to exist, persist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles*...⁴

Furthermore, the landmark design and construction of a "Living Building" by one of Aotearoa, New Zealand's Maori tribes, the Ngai Tuhoe, provides an example of a potential model to respectfully engage the rights of nature, respect indigenous epistemologies, and prioritize the sovereignty of community to produce a building that attempts to fulfill decolonizing goals. The Living Building Challenge, of course, still operates within the dominant oppressive colonial knowledge system, and its exemplary goals and practices have been established in relation to the colonial norm. Arguably, the Living Building Challenge appropriates indigenous systems design principles and commodifies them within western constructs. The Living Building Challenge eschews industrially produced building products in lieu of local crafts, but building codes and standard construction techniques still shape its normative practices. As benevolent as it might seem, the Living Building Challenge has limits in addressing the goals of the rights of nature on a very practical as well as conceptual level.

In *Te Urewera*, longstanding legacies of colonisation and oppression, ranging from illegal land confiscation (*terra nullius*) to scorched earth policies and treaty abuses, resulted in a number of damaged relationships and a damaged landscape, which was further exacerbated by a succession of New Zealand governments that ignored the belief systems and land practices of the Tuhoe. In

2014, Te Urewera, Tuhoe's ancestral homelands, were legally returned to the Tuhoe alongside an official governmental apology. The Tuhoe people then built the first ever "Living Building" in Aotearoa as part of this reclamation, working together with a New Zealand architect who respected and cared about their beliefs and conceived of the building as a symbolic testament to Ngai Tuhoe values and their vision of self-governance centred on a relationship with the land as a subject. By adapting Living Building Challenge criteria as a methodology to respectfully engage, adapt and compromise western building practices and green building practices, they foregrounded and respected Tuhoe values and beliefs with the personhood of the land at the center of all design and construction decisions.

Central to the notion of the rights of nature are the intertwined notions of property and *terra nullius*. The historical notion of *terra nullius* remains central to many contemporary post-colonial critiques and reminds us that *terra nullius* is a tool that centers the colonizer by allowing for the conquest of land deemed empty and in need of improvement. One might say that the notion of *terra nullius*, therefore, remains a significant component within architectural practice, even when framed as eco-friendly and sustainable. Unimproved land, seen through settler eyes, is unsettling. *Terra nullius* translates as "land that belongs to no one." In international law, *terra nullius* was originally established to allow that the first nation to "discover" unoccupied land was entitled to seize it, as long as it could be proven that the land had never been occupied or improved. *Terra nullius* is still used to justify the occupation and seizure of land, as well as environmental and social degradation from a settler colonial perspective.

The rights of nature also appears to be situated within current environmental politics, with Ecuador playing a large role in this definition.⁵ However, seen from another vantage point, the rights of nature appears, on the ground, as a historical indifference to the environment as well as indigenous peoples and their ways of being. The notions of environmental justice and spatial justice, while used interchangeably, are notions driven by neoliberalism, as the capital-driven metabolic of sustainability drives green architecture.

This mindset has created its own body of white saviours, most noticeably in the Public Interest Design movement and in the "greening" of architectural pedagogy worldwide. The stilted language of Public Interest Design is shaped by catchphrases such as the "Triple Bottom Line" and is supposedly shaped by "Professional Ethics," which both serve legitimizing the socio-political and environmental agendas that capital requires to rebrand and repackage development to align with dominant cultural trends. The colonial tropes of rationality, industry, progress, and capitalism persist. Inasmuch, Public Interest Design is as mired in failure as the modern project it attempts to critique, and remains compromised from the start.

Furthermore, imagining the rights of nature as a legal framework, the case studies of the Ecuadorian and Brazilian constitutions have provided scholars with a testing ground for how to apply the rights of nature to post-colonial systems that could affect architectural practice and attitudes in profound ways. Where these notions fail, such as in the expansion of the Trans-Amazonian highway, gold mining conflicts, and other development projects in Brazil, persecution of indigenous peoples and their land rights still follow. The Water Protectors movement, spurred by indigenous opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock Reservation, highlights issues at the intersection of the rights of nature, *terra nullius* and indigenous rights.

As a more current example, Hawaiian groups have opposed building the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) on top of Mauna Kea for years because they know the mountain as a sacred part of their cosmology. Mauna Kea towers more than six miles above the seabed, and for indigenous Hawaiians, the peak is known as the most sacred ground in the entire Pacific. It is both a burial ground for indigenous Hawaiians' most revered ancestors, and the point believed to have been created by the gods as the place from which humans can ascend to heaven. However, Mauna Kea's height and location also makes it appealing to astronomers and a conglomeration of international researchers, universities, and commercial interests.⁶ After a five-year search, Mauna Kea was chosen as the place to build the most sophisticated telescope in the world. While previous attempts to place telescopes on Mauna Kea



Figure 1: A photograph depicting the Pu'uhuluhulu University at the base of the Mauna Kea Access Road. Through Kapu Aloha, Kanaka Maoli have used this space to conduct protocol and provide educational courses to the public regarding indigenous knowledge, rights, and more. Courtesy: James Miller

were averted, this time seems different. There is more money and a broader range of actors who will benefit from the project, meaning protesters will have to dig in and do whatever it takes to keep the project at bay, and that they will face challenges they have never seen before. At the core of this conflict is an epistemological argument, as well as a legal argument. Recently, the movement of Kanaka Maoli (native Hawaiians) to *kia'i* (protect) Mauna Kea has demonstrated the continuity of indigenous peoples calling upon of the rights of nature to ground their case. For Kanaka, the earth is considered a sibling and an ancestor.⁷

Furthermore, it is worth exploring the case of the Kia'i Mauna Kea as a segue to issues pertaining to a recent architectural competition hosted by the University of Hawaii. Since 2015, with initial site preparation for a TMT underway, Kanaka Maoli have been standing ground to protect the rights of Mauna Kea. Figure 1 depicts the

Pu'uhuluhulu University set at the base of the Mauna Kea Access road and heart of the Kapu Aloha movement. To Kanaka Maoli, the peak of Mauna Kea is the place where Wakea (Sky Father) and Papahānaumoku (Earth Mother) united to give birth to the Hawaiian People. Mauna Kea is the *piko* (umbilical cord) of Kanaka Maoli. However, it is also the site at which colonial power resides through the ideals behind *terra nullius*. The state government of Hawaii has claimed this site for the development of twelve observatories and the contentious TMT, since Mauna Kea remains "empty" and undeveloped. The state considers Mauna Kea to be ceded land, a highly contested designation that dates back to the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani by the United States government.⁸

While the TMT International Observatory claims economic benefits for Hawaiians through jobs and STEM scholarships for Hawaiian students, the TMT and the

state government of Hawaii both ignore the rights of indigenous peoples and the true impact of the development on the environmental, social, and cultural wellbeing of Hawaii. Kanaka Maoli value astronomical technology, as arguably the greatest navigators to have traveled the earth by direction of stars; however, Kanaka do not support the environmental, social, and cultural degradation that the TMT will create. In fact, support for the TMT dropped sharply between July and September 2019.⁹ Existing astronomical development on Mauna Kea to date has been unpermitted and built against the will of the Kanaka Maoli community, demonstrating a pattern of disregard for the rights of Mauna Kea and the Kanaka Maoli.¹⁰ Today, this site can be seen as a modern battleground between the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of nature, and settler colonialism. This case exemplifies the rightful place of indigenous peoples in the protection of nature—a space threatened by colonization. It has not been discussed as of yet, but under their right to self-determination, Kanaka Maoli would likely support the designation of The Rights of Nature over Mauna Kea with Kanaka as the party responsible for the mountain's protection.

Earlier it was argued that a conquest of Western knowledge systems is both to marginalize indigenous knowledge and colonize and commodify indigenous knowledges of value, such as the inherent sustainability of indigenous systems design. The TMT represents yet another act of western science discrediting the value of indigenous knowledge. Hawaiians and their Polynesian ancestors possessed unparalleled knowledge of the sea, the winds, and the stars—knowledge that allowed them to traverse thousands of miles of open ocean to the most remote archipelago in the world. In her translation of the Kumulipo, Princess Liliuokalani stated, “The ancient Hawaiians were astronomers, and the terms used appertained to the heavens, the stars, terrestrial science, and the gods. Curious students will notice in this chant analogies between its accounts of the creation and that given by modern science or Sacred Scripture.”¹¹ Westerners, until recently, did not believe that Hawaiians had the capacity to charter the sea without sophisticated material technology; rather, they assumed the islands were discovered by happenstance. This led to the misguided assumption of the indigenous genius, like today, that robs indigenous

knowledge systems and technology of their relevance. Claiming the use of Mauna Kea for the advancement of modern science and for the betterment of society strips Hawaiians of their right to self-determination, their right to sovereignty, their intellectual property rights, and their rightful place in the protection of Mauna Kea and its rights.

Furthermore, as a methodology for revealing the limits and fears around the use of the rights of nature in more detail, an international architectural design competition hosted by the University of Hawaii provides another explanatory case study to see how interpretations of the rights of nature collide. The competition brief challenged architectural designers to provide innovative design solutions responsive to “the uniqueness of the Hawaiian context and to drive change in the urban and rural development of Hawaii using ecologically sensitive approaches to design.”¹² It sought new design ideas for buildings, environments, landscapes, community programs, transportation solutions, and more. Designers were called to address multiple topic areas including housing for all, food autonomy, resource independence, community-centered mobility, and healthy citizens, with singular designs centered on a quadruple bottom line approach (socially, economically, ecologically, and culturally sustainable). Building Voices was more about innovative ideas than place-based design. However, neither the competition brief nor the entries critically engaged the structures of settler-colonialism that have driven the Hawaiian built environment toward unsustainability—the issue that the competition was positioned to respond to in the first place. Framed within a professional institution and staged as an international event, the competition can be seen to continue the marginalization of Kanaka Maoli voices while perpetuating the claiming of indigenous knowledge and indigenous space without respect or accuracy, while actively reinforcing settler-colonial structures through the subordination of local indigenous knowledge systems as a trope.

The most heralded entries demonstrated a complete disregard for indigenous design knowledge systems and sensibilities. This absence reveals a fundamental inadequacy of the competition to acknowledge indigenous epistemologies as having value. These entries appropriated and whitewashed indigenous

knowledge as framed as “enlightened” practices. Shaped by a more grounded relationship to the land and the rights of nature, the flawed methods these entries displayed included directly referring to indigenous belief systems without accuracy nor permission. While the sustainability and resilience goals of the competition were thoughtful, they disregarded the larger context of development in a settler-colonial state and Hawaii's fraught settler colonial context. If the cultural richness and ecological diversity of nature were central to the competition's theme (not to mention its title) consideration of asymmetrical power dynamics within the context of Kanaka Maoli needed to be centered as well.

The competition itself did not critically engage the voices of Kanaka Maoli. To truly situate a competition in Hawaii, the competition should have recognized the dynamics of the settler-colonial structure and recognized the Hawaiian peoples to be affected by its results through the inclusion of Kanaka Maoli kapuna (elders and keepers of Hawaiian knowledge) in both the development of the competition and evaluation of

entries. In fact, the voices of Hawaiian scholars seemed to be marginalized to the periphery of the 2017 Building Voices Symposium that accompanied the competition. A panel on decolonizing cities provided a space for Hawaiian scholars such as Konia Freitas to engage with the notion of decolonization. Unfortunately, the engagement of these valuable thoughts, methods and frameworks remained peripheral to the architectural competition.

The winner of the competition, “Outside House,” posed a design for a house that placed the land first, thus delving into the rights of nature as an ethical position (see Figure 2). Consisting of two small pavilions, labeled *mauka* (mountain side) and *makai* (ocean side), the concept was designed to organize living space outside on the agricultural land of upcountry Maui. The design was thoughtful, with minimum impact to the landscape, and was described as supporting health through living outside with nature. However, the description of the design draws reference to a specific relationship with the land without acknowledging the borrowed practices of Kanaka Maoli that sustained a healthy and



Figure 2: A photo of Outside House. The *makai* [hale noa] structure is to the left and the *mauka* [hale kuke] is to the right in the photograph. Courtesy: From “Hawaiian cabins by Erin Moore are designed for life outdoors,” by James Brillon, 2017, *Dezeen*. <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/11/18/outside-house-erin-moore-float-life-outdoors-cabins-maui-hawaii/>. Copyright 2017 by Olivier Koning.

resilient relationship with the land through indigenous design practices. The design and documentation of the project further reinforced settler-colonial attitudes, while serving as a clear example of settler-adoption and settler-nativism and avoiding settler self-critique altogether.¹³ Furthermore, the use of the house as a retreat for short periods of time demonstrates both the privilege within the narrative of the architectural competition as well as revealing its function as a vehicle for the territorialisation of indigenous lands.¹⁴ The fundamental problem remains that indigenous architectures, inclusive of Kanaka Maoli architectures, are largely disregarded within architectural disciplines or appear on the periphery as *traditional* and *vernacular* practices.¹⁵

Modern on Maui, an online magazine dedicated to “an online celebration of Hawai‘i’s unique form of modernism through the lens of architecture, photography, real estate, and style,” published a telling review of the project titled, “Hawaii as the Perfect Architecture Laboratory.”¹⁶ The article disregards a Kanaka representation in the production of the built environment and denotes Hawaii as a land free for the taking of imaginative minds. Rather, proponents of architectural design and real estate development on Hawaii need to recognize their position within the structure of settler colonialism and acknowledge the voice and authorship of Kanaka Maoli. Through disregarding these critical issues, they are able to claim the land as free of natives. The article describes the winning project by stating that, “It offers us a chance to focus on a simplified response to these primal human concerns.” This describes the design approach as a form of architectural deconstruction, splitting uses of the traditional western home and opening it up for outside living as a means to address more “primal” needs and desires. The trope of expressing indigenous dwelling as being outside in nature and primal (primitive) reproduces colonial and racist stereotypes. Edward Said tells us that the “Orient” is not something out there; rather, it is something that Europeans imagined it to be in service of their own self-imagination. The Orientalizing gaze thus allows the colonizer to see people not as people, which translates into practices, policies, and architectures. These perceptions become a basis of how the colonized, in turn, are forced to reconstruct themselves.¹⁷

Appropriated knowledge such as the *hale kuke* (kitchen) and *hale noa* (sleeping house) on the *kauhale* (homestead) have been a living tradition of Kanaka Maoli design knowledge for centuries, but this tradition is neither recognized nor respected, just as in the case of Hawaiian astronomical and navigational knowledge. In the projects, disregard of living traditions tied to the land both decontextualizes the history of the land and disregards Kanaka identities in the land. The will to adapt and appropriate building methods and ways of being, as represented by the “Outside House,” lacks acknowledgement of the epistemological systems and beliefs that produced the spatial practices and ways of being on the land that are supposed to be celebrated. The *Modern on Maui* article states that the land was put first, “when creating the innovative and flexible compound for clients with an eco-centric worldview.” This both invokes notions of *terra nullius* and settler-adoption, but denies indigenous authority. The competition entry reminds us that thoughtful design processes need to be respectful of the design knowledge(s) being borrowed, adopted, or reinterpreted, and their intent. Without reflexivity on the matter, the settler-colonial structure can only be further reinforced as an act of ongoing manufactured ignorance.

The client, a land conservationist, is also a problem. She is framed as existing outside of local traditions and contexts, which is yet another colonial trope. She requested a project that would reinforce her connection with the sub-tropical landscape of upcountry Maui.¹⁸ The Outside House is intended to demonstrate the client’s eco-centric worldview.¹⁹ This worldview epitomizes the notion of settler nativism and settler adoption. Inasmuch, the Kanaka Maoli worldview and cultural traditions are based on a very different relationship to Hawai‘i than that of settlers. This cannot be overstated, and it is here that the rights of nature becomes a methodology for abuse. Kanaka representations of land are unlike those of settlers; as descendants of Haloa, nature is the Kanakas’ sibling. The notion of having “roots,” as born and raised in Hawai‘i, is problematic for non-native Hawaiian inhabitants. Hawaiian scholar Ho‘omanawanui Ku‘Ualoha describes the issues tied to settler nativism in contrasting the difference between settler and Kanaka views of the land:

These differences are also apparent in settlers’ continued references to Hawai‘i as a “landscape,” “geography,” and “environment,” English words that connote a Western-based understanding of what land is, terms that overshadow and negate Native understandings of land as ‘ina, which for Kanaka Maoli is familial... The value of ‘āina is familial. The land sustains us, nurtures us like a family member. In our culture, the values of aloha ‘āina (love for the land) and malama ‘āina (caring for the land) are fundamental. But for non-Natives, land is a commodity that can be bought and sold, it is the monetary value land possess in haole (white) culture that accelerated Kanaka Maoli dispossession of ‘āina.²⁰

In the end, the Building Voices competition provided a platform for designers to misappropriate Kanaka traditions using a variety of hegemonic tropes, while further participating in the land dispossession of Kanaka Maoli. By prioritizing environmental aspects of context without addressing the settler-colonial structures in place, the competition further dispossessed indigenous peoples for the purpose of claiming their knowledge systems and ancestral home—with the rights of nature as a form of righteous justification. Just as the critique of Hawaiian literature demonstrates the dispossession by hegemonic power, Hawaiian architecture furthers the asymmetric power of the settler state and dispossession of Kanaka Maoli’s rights.²¹ Within the discourse of environmental and ecological sustainability, one must think critically about the encroachment of indigenous peoples’ rights. Kanaka Maoli stand firm behind the land and their right to manage it: *ma hope o ka ‘āina*.²² We propose that further limits for how the *rights of nature* is taken up in architectural practice are needed, and that these limits must be centered on the intertwined notions of respect and reflexivity.

The thoughtless adaptation of indigenous tropes, imagery and sensibilities can only perpetuate settler colonialism, while foreclosing opportunities for productive dialogue and reform. We must promote spatial justice by acknowledging these limits. There are a number of methods in which the rights of nature may be taken up more thoughtfully. The work of Douglas Cardinal serves as a model for how indigenous

architecture is both possible and able to productively trouble the settler-colonial mindset. Douglas Cardinal, who is of Métis and Blackfoot heritage, and is known for his flowing curves and canon-rupturing modern buildings such as the First Nations University of Canada in Regina, provides this kind of voice. However, his voice is noticeably absent from classrooms across North America today. Cardinal’s work is an exercise in methodology, which becomes apparent in how he speaks about his work, his clients, and how he sees himself.

To conclude, architectural designers must become more cognizant of power structures, such as settler-colonialism, within contextual analysis and problem defining. While a simple bullet-point list of key pathways for students, *kumu* (professors), and practitioners may be desired, the Rights of Nature’s relationship to indigenous epistemologies and practices cannot be answered with a simple list of objectives. Rather, an indigenous or decolonial methodological approach to the rights of nature and its use within architecture requires transformation – it requires surrendering to an alternate epistemology. As the discipline shifts focus more from artifact to process, there is opportunity to engage with the complexities inherent in these power structures and to overcome them, and through this process decolonize the discipline. We need to prioritize indigenous knowledge, intellectual property, and sovereignty over western notions of knowledge, and indigenous knowledge cannot be commodified. ■

ENDNOTES

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SUBVERTING THEORY

TRIP MR. NOBODY UP BY ARCHITECTING YOUR BODYMINDS, *S’IL VOUS PLAÎT*

ANNELIES ALICE DE SMET

(IM)PROPER SUBVERSION: TAKING ARCHITECTURE FROM BEHIND

COLIN RIPLEY



Annelies Alice De Smet is, as a PLAYLEGGER, a collection of bodyminds, females, learners, companions, creators, solo-walkers, responders, and an interim cluster of stardust. Her Curriculum Vitae runs along a master's degree in visual arts and a master's degree in architecture, and crosses a period of working as a freelance scenographer in the Netherlands and as research assistant at the Centre for Public Space Research at KADK Copenhagen. Recently, the PLAYLEGGER seriously-playfully presented her PhD *Architecting Bodies by Immersive Gestures* (2018), supervised by Prof. Dr. Nel Janssens, and started a post-doc position at KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture on politics and poetics of proximity. The thread running through the PLAYLEGGER's life is the profound need for shifting perspectives toward more corporal, empathic, desire-full attitudes concerning 'this world' (i.e. environments) as well as about 'we' (i.e., multi-species entanglings).



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TRIP MR. NOBODY UP BY ARCHITECTING YOUR BODYMINDS, *S'IL VOUS PLAÎT*

ANNELIES ALICE DE SMET

ABSTRACT

In this essay, the author-architect-learner argues that working in architectural education with the embedded and embodied self-image of architect-learners offers a situated starting point to take a different turn on abstracting and numerical tendencies in design thinking. Abstracting and numerical styles of design thinking are problematized by their tendency to disembodify the human body, conventionalize body-architecture relationships, and deteriorate embodied design thinking. To make subversive endeavors in the context of the architectural design studio, a tentative frame of thought (by two imaginative personas *Mr. Nobody* and the *bodymind*) and a performative spatial practice (called *architecting bodies*) is proposed on the basis of the author's practice. *Architecting bodies* aims to foster embodied design thinking by bodymindly engaging with environments via carefully *instructing* and rigorously *responding* to environments. Instructs for responding provide a structure to enable embodied interactions outside the pattern of habit and outside abstract and numerical styles of design thinking. Performing (eccentric) instructs addresses the fragile bodymind by *opening up micro-situations of risk*. In micro-situations of risk, sensitivities for creating-with, relating-with, and therefore becoming-with the environment are practiced while keeping the response embodied. Moving and becoming (eccentrically) moved are vital shifts sensitized by the bodymind, and wherefrom embodied responses in multimedia (artifact, drawing, photo, film, sound, act) spring. The competence to work with the situated self-image of architect-learners enhances the exploration of alternative bodymind-environment relations and cultivates an embodied environmental awareness broader than the human alone.

OPENING WORDS

The following proposition to subvert prevailing abstract and numerical styles of design thinking did not come into being by literature study and analysis, but *in* the convergence of my two practices—research and teaching. My artistic-led research in architecture departs from adopting a micro perspective to explore embodied immersion as the politics and poetics of proximity to that which is unexpected and unforeseen in encountering environments. Correspondingly, this artistic-led research is driven by the creation of embodied responses in multimedia environments. My teaching practice in architecture is primarily oriented to design courses; by operating on the point of convergence of two practices, I foster embodied design thinking within the *learning environment*. Opting for the term "learning environment" as an alternative to design studio emphasizes my approach to learning *within* environments (i.e. learning with, in and from, and not so much about). In order to transpose a level of sensitivity to styles of design thinking *from* research to the learning environment, I invented two personas: *Mr. Nobody* and the *bodymind*. Each persona evokes a style of design thinking interfering in the relation between bodies and architecture (and by extension, environments). Together, the personas draw a tentative frame of thought to foster embodied design thinking in practice.

Owing to the breeding ground of this proposition—the convergence of two practices—the style of this essay is a tone landscape. Readers are invited to thread their way through experiences, concepts, and embodied artifacts like collages, drawings, maps, plans, and pictures. Making an associative, imaginative reading [of the visual material] next to a discursive reading [of the text] is crucial. In the first part of the essay, the two personas are introduced, and the second part provides

three concrete instances of activating *architecting bodies* in the context of teaching and research.

THE BIRTH OF MR. NOBODY AND THE BODYMIND

Irrespective of diverse design studio approaches, there is a regulating way of thinking at work in design when it comes to bodies and how they relate to architecture. To make the tendency of disembodied styles of thinking fathomable, I gave birth to *Mr. Nobody*.¹ Mr. Nobody is the ghost of a skinned man who lost early in architectural history his recalcitrant, sensual, sexual, excreting, ambiguous, messy, contingent, incoherent, and mortal body. Mr. Nobody is seemingly neutral: nowhere to be found and yet omnipresent (Figure 1).

The birth of Mr. Nobody problematizes disembodied tendencies in design thinking that grasp the relation between bodies and architecture in numerical, abstract, and idealizing thoughts. Through the history of

architecture, bodies and architecture function as each other's model.³ The human body was, and to some extent is, "an outstanding source of proportions" that founds order, form, beauty, and symbolic and mythical significance of architectural objects.⁴ In return, the human body is considered as given, static, coherent, and male. This ideal human (male) body runs through the primitive hut, classical architecture, Middle Ages, Le Corbusier's Modulor scale, functionalism, organicism, and ergonomics.⁵ Hence, even if Mr. Nobody gets differently understood and handled by architects over time, the idealizing, reductive, and plainly gendered ideas that accompany him do not seem to lessen.

As a matter of fact, every architect-learner is familiar with Mr. Nobody by standard ergonomic handbooks such as *Neufert Architects' Data* and computer-aided design (CAD) libraries that are recommended by architectural education.⁶ The *Neufert*, first published in 1936 by Ernest and Peter Neufert, collects all measurable data of spaces and objects with regard to the human body, and is still considered the architect's bible. Ernest Neufert, architect and assistant of Walter Gropius, realised with this book an important contribution to the rationalization and standardization of architectural production.⁷ Through committing Mr. Nobody to paper by thousands of diagrams and innumerable measurements, it is highly likely that design thinking is also affected. What's more, today Mr. Nobody is encoded in the well-known drawing blocks of CAD libraries, which makes implementing him only one mouse click away. What is at stake here is that even if every architect-learner is familiar with Mr. Nobody, s/he might not be attentive to what he represents. That is an utterly dangerous threat to design thinking. Installing Mr. Nobody standards and ideals risks infecting ontic thoughts on bodies and architecture. Furthermore, by designing with a standardized body—that is in effect a repetition and idealization of a ghost human male body—architect-learners do not become precursors to understand how (or why) Mr. Nobody functions the way he does.

To the contrary, Mr. Nobody neutralizes diverse understandings of bodies and their multiple (and possible) relations to architecture. The main risk is that Mr. Nobody neutralizes himself and his effects in design thinking by deprioritizing any attempt to challenge him,

let alone get under his skin. Hence, Mr. Nobody involves "a necessary loss of that which is already there – an effective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind" that is the loss of the *bodymind*.⁸

My creation of the *bodymind* persona was inspired by and in analogy with Donna Haraway's "natureculture" to reject the dichotomic split between body and mind.⁹ The *bodymind* is a reminder to *not* rely on dichotomies that are inherently irreconcilable, hierarchic, and essentializing. The *bodymind* is thought of as the fleshy "self-image" of architect-learners that offers an embedded and embodied starting point to subvert the tidying mania of Mr. Nobody, whereby idea(l)s lord over matter, minds over bodies, man over woman...¹⁰ Working with the *bodymind* gets under the skin of Mr. Nobody, because the relational, situated, and gendered condition of *bodyminds* becomes tangible. Embodied design thinking is fostered from *within* these conditions.

As with any subversive endeavor, daily practice is the only way to "stay with the trouble" of reclaiming design thinking out of disembodied tendencies and give rise to certain sensations, affects, intensities, and emergences.¹¹ Therefore, a performative spatial practice to activate the *bodymind* is proposed and called *architecting bodies*. *Architecting bodies* stirs alternative *bodymind*-environment relationalities to foster embodied design thinking outside abstract and numerical styles of thinking, and can be practiced individually as well as collectively. In its most basic form, *architecting bodies* foregrounds *bodyminds* within the architectural learning environment so that their relational, situational, and situated condition becomes tangible for all architect-learners. By designing basic environmental-somatic exercises that stir embodied receptivity and responsivity (real-time, real-life and on scale 1:1), *bodymind*-environment relations can become tentatively experienced. In other words, *architecting bodies* accepts *bodyminds* and their lived experiences as a medium. Hence, the *bodymind* of architect-learners becomes

A medium for creative exploration that can be softened or stretched, held taut or pulled elastic. The lived experience of the body, of feelings, emotions, of thoughts themselves, can be

explored through experimental means; habitual patterns challenged and new ways of being and behaving put to the test. Yet such practices do more than shape the body and the mind, since time and space are experienced only in-and-through the felt encounter.¹²

This "doing more than" of practicing *architecting bodies* prepares the ground for studio discussions on what architecture is, can do, and become as part of the ongoing effort not to accept *bodyminds* and architecture, as well as their relationality, as standardly given.

TOWARD A BASIC INSTRUCTING-RESPONDING BODYMIND

A first instance of *architecting bodies* is the collective performance of a weekly ritual in the comfortable (known and safe) environment of our school. In the framework of the second Master Design studio HABIT-AT-ION (2018-2019), architect-learners are instructed to design (in pairs) a specific studio setting for each working day (9:00 a.m.-6:30 p.m.).¹³ The *instruct* is given by the tutors: each pair of designers is responsible for constructing their design with what is available in the room (such as chairs and tables), as well as for taking it down at the end of the day. *Instruct* is deliberately used here as a noun, to recall the Latin *instruere*. *Instruere* means to "arrange, furnish with information, and teach" and is cognate with structure.¹⁴ An *instruct* is therefore understood as "to provide a structure." By turns, each of us, tutors-architect-learners included, becomes the creator/designer at least once. As a group, we *bodymindly* respond to the setting of the room while not changing anything.

This drawing and snapshot display how Seyfettin Gökmen and Thomas Ghyoot turned the studio into an interrogation room (Figures 2 and, 3). When I, as tutor-architect-learner, entered the room that morning, the designers were already gone. Without a discursive order I followed the narrow corridor toward the end, where a table blocked further passage. One chair was placed in the middle of the table, obviously for the architect-learners, and two chairs were placed at the opposite side for the tutors. I sensed the humor of possible future situations, although I was besieged by such doubts as: Why do I feel uncomfortable with



Figure 1: *Mr. Nobody*, 2018. Digital collage, variable dimensions.² Courtesy: A. De Smet

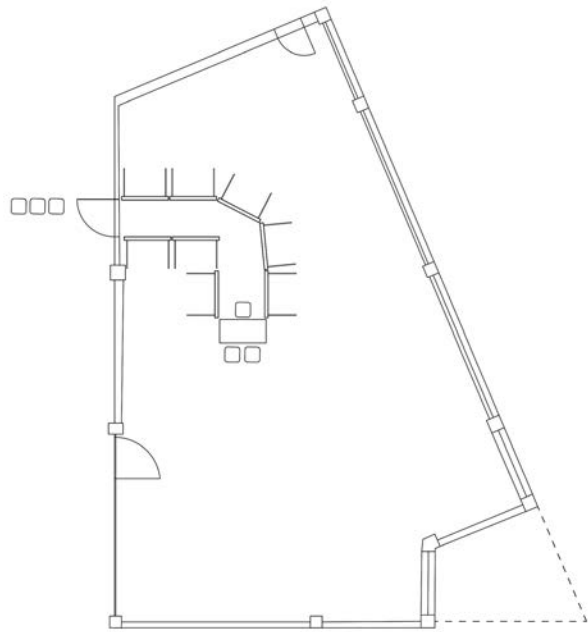


Figure 2: Learning environment setting for one day (05.12.2018).
Courtesy: Drawing and design by Seyfettin Gökmen and Thomas Ghyoot.

What the photograph does not display is that outside the studio there was a waiting room created by a row of neatly ordered chairs that instructed—again without discursive order—all architect-learners to wait their turns. Remarkably, it went off smoothly. All entered one by one, followed the narrow corridor, and took their place in the suspects’ chair. Occasionally someone walked in, apologized, and left. At a single glance, all of us—including students from other design studios—responded to the spatial-temporal-material instruct and sensed the seriousness of our play. Moreover, in this setting our human interrelations became highlighted, as well as my relation to the design propositions that came to the table. Again, doubts struck me: Is it only in my imagination that designs (can) become suspicious? How does my hunt for hidden facts in designs influence the way I offer feedback? Is my speech really sounding more plea-like, and does my contribution cause architects-learners (myself in the first place) regularly to blush? Throughout fourteen settings, our bodyminds became fairly present by dirty clothes, pins, and needles in our legs, pain in our backs, tired feet, rumbling tummies, and blushes to the roots of our hair.



Figure 3: Learning environment setting for one day (05.12.2018).
Courtesy: by Seyfettin Gökmen and Thomas Ghyoot.

What can we learn from presencing our bodyminds in architectural learning environments by somatic-environmental exercises? First, by working against the common way of setting up a design studio, we collectively work against the conditioning that posits certain experiences—such as strangeness, embarrassment, peevishness, discomfort—as best avoided. By performing, we learn that such experiences are part of our affective bodyminds and can then open ourselves toward new possibilities. Of interest is what these embodied interactions can bring about to architect-learners, which we all are, on the level of embodied design thinking.

Second, each setting has its own particular impact on our bodyminds, our interrelations, and our relation to the space of the studio. Our experiences of these daily setting vary from individual to individual. Moreover, one’s experience can also change during the day, by the hour, and sometimes by the minute and second. From this awareness, we work toward a ground of collective intimacy and trust in our bodyminds; even if we experience the setting differently, we cannot escape becoming influenced and affected by it. Third, what

a setting that highlights the authority of tutors as interrogators? Why can’t I stand that this kind of authority sticks to my bodymind? What should I do? Should I disobey by taking a seat on the suspect’s chair? Or, would rebelling against this setting be pointless? I decided to take a seat on the interrogators chair, wait for my colleague, and take the day by surprise.

rises to the surface is the assumption that “the (diverse) bodily form is not independent of the architecture, nor is the architecture independent of the body; they are *mutually constitutive*.”¹⁵ Finding intimacy and trust in the situated and relational condition of our bodyminds, and its mutual constitutiveness with environments, makes it hard (if not unthinkable) to disembody bodies into abstract and ideal entities. Are you becoming troublesome Mr. Nobody? Finding trust and intimacy is a crucial step to stimulating openness toward intervening more unfamiliar bodymind-environment relationalities, and therefore exploring multiple embodiments.

TOWARD A CAREFUL INSTRUCTING-RESPONDING BODYMIND

The second instance of *architecting bodies* builds further on the previous example. This focuses on careful instructing-responding to stimulate first-person perspective processes and embodied interaction with specific environments. The environment is free for architect-learners to choose, as long as it is considered relatively safe and familiar. We ask architect-learners to pre-design a specific encounter with the chosen environment by means of instructing their interaction. Instructs

...work by providing a structure (from the Latin “*in’-struere*”) in which interactions can take place. It assumes an active process-with-a-purpose that cannot exist without people (and their values, experiences).¹⁶

To carefully make an instruct, the following outline is offered: What (is your interaction)? Where (will your interaction take place)? How (what characterizes your interaction)? When (at what specific moments, which duration)?¹⁷ Responding to an instruct is introduced as the creation of real-life, real-time, and on scale 1:1 embodied answers to that the question of what moves the bodymind within the interaction with the environment. In the architectural learning environment, responding can involve any kind of making (including a making in the mind) and can be manifested in different media, languages, modes, and styles. Even not responding is considered a response.

Sofie Coose, an architect-learner of the second Master

Design studio *HABIT-AT-ION* (2018-2019), created the following instruct: What? Imagining other-than-humans. Where? Loo, Zoniënwood, Brussels, Belgium. How? By bodymind, paper, pen. When? After sitting still for a minimum of one hour. Communication? By narration, collage and poem.

Coose opted to sit still on the ground of the forest with pen and paper. She invited herself into a momentary pause to feel the connection between her bodymind and multiple other-than-human bodies that made up the forest. She took her attention as a set of feelings swinging between fear, pleasure, discomfort, and serenity (Figure 4). By creating a sense of her bodymind as felt, Coose noticed how the sounds of the forest influenced her feelings and distracted her attention. Curiously, and in non-judgment, she followed the sounds as ‘welcome distractors.’ Could this alert absent-mindedness be called receptivity? Attending to distraction was the paradoxical field in which Coose operated while meandering from the obvious to the subtle, from the loud to the quiet. Each sound embodied the presence of another body affecting hers; the reverse held, too: her presence affected how the forest made “itself” heard. After one hour, Coose responded to this awareness by a series of drawings from the perspective of her ‘welcome distractors’ (Figure 5). By drawing and tuning into the rhythm of sound, her attention shifted again from sound to movement. How does movement change? What could be ‘its’ texture and density? Receptively, she extended her attention to a wider perimeter of the forest. Different points of view were visited while she stretched her awareness as far as her ears could reach. From there she moved further, through imagination and into atmospheric movements of day-night and seasons (Figure 4).

Coose’s interaction makes clear that instructs work “as a kind of channeling devices of experiences” without chaining the interactions to a specific goal or outcome.¹⁸ In other words,

Instruct[ion]s function as constraints because they suggest boundaries to the interaction. However the boundaries set by the instruction create an *open* collection of events. What is confined nonetheless remains open because instruct[ion]s refer to *possible* experiences

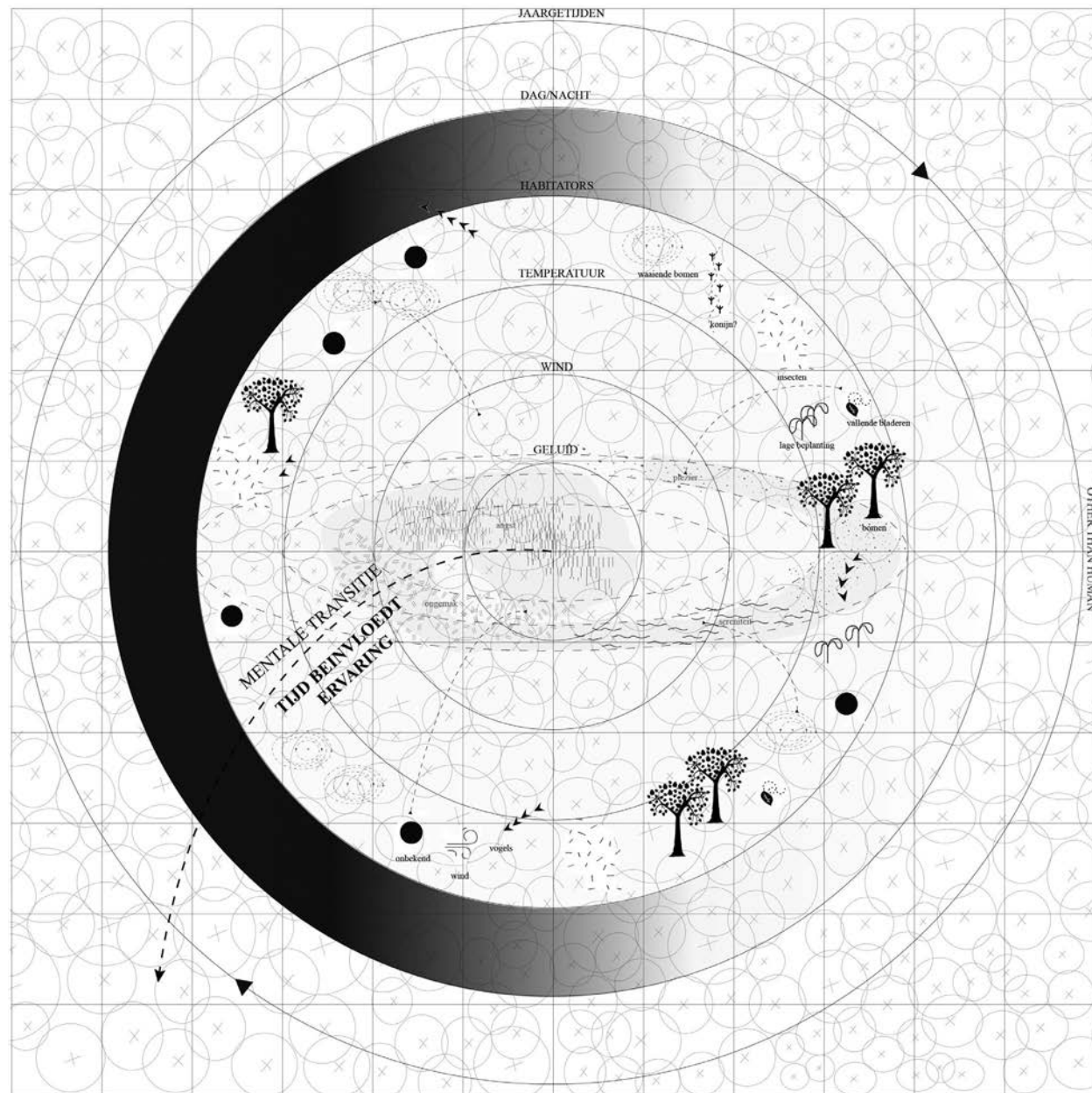


Figure 4: S. Coose. *Constellatie van Bewustwording* (Constellation of Becoming Aware). 2019. Digital drawing. Variable dimensions. Courtesy: Archive of S. Coose.

in the *future*. They don't predict what will be experienced, but they anticipate experiences that might happen.¹⁹

Coose's instruct anticipates a response as an actualized, materialized and embodied answer to that which moves her within the frame of imaginatively encountering other-than-humans. Her instruct does not predict the sounds and movements she is moved by and responds to by means of drawing. Nor does her instruct predict

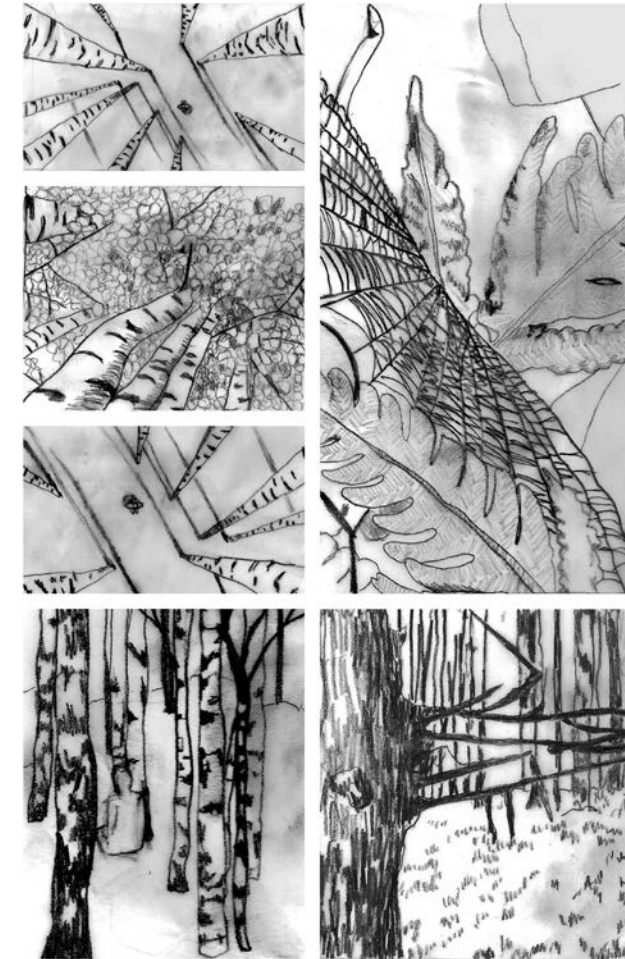


Figure 5: *Insect*. 2018. Drawing with graphite pencil on white acid-free paper 80 gram. 9x15 cm. *Falling Leaves*. 2018. Drawing with graphite pencil on white acid-free paper 80 gram. 7x21 cm. *Pitter-Patter*. 2018. Drawing with graphite pencil on white acid-free paper 80 gram. 16x9 cm. Courtesy: Scans from the archive of S. Coose.

the paradoxical field of her operations (i.e., welcome distractors). By operating in this field, Coose performs against the impression that certain experiences in an encounter with the environment are best avoided. Instead, the push-pull of multiple stimuli and frictional experiences are engaging and micro-transformative.

By moving to what moves, Coose proposes that embodied creation is latent until situations, sites, and different time-space-matters entice them. That is to say, embodied responding cannot happen in abstraction or in a vacuum. By carefully instructing-responding, it becomes tangible (as well as acknowledgeable) that each move, each response, and each interaction is not

completely in or out of control of the architect-learner. This implies a (micro-)move out of the hierarchic and dichotomic grip of Mr. Nobody, and toward an increased sense of porosity between bodyminds and environments. Sensing the porosity of bodymind-environment relations involves meeting one's fragilities by micro-risk taking, with practice and care for what might become.

TOWARD AN ECCENTRIC INSTRUCTING-RESPONDING BODYMIND

For *architecting bodies* that want to irritate Mr. Nobody more seriously/playfully, it is not only crucial to enable interactions with the environment outside abstracting and numerical styles of thinking, but also outside self-centering habits. Again, instructing and responding seems a helpful approach, because instructs can be created to de-settle borders (of convention, control, authorship, authority, centrality and self-promotion) by which micro-openings are made, imagination becomes stirred, and "interpretation [operates] as an artistic principle."²⁰ Encountering the micro-openings of "maybes", "ifs", and "perhaps-es" can keep embodied design thinking supple as well as attentive for fixations at the centre. Moreover, as Braidotti states, "there is no becoming of the centre, but only away from it. This process, however, is anything but automatic."²¹ Therefore, *eccentric instructs* deliberately target patterns of habit. Eccentric instructs

Start from the assumption that a subject is a sedimentation of established habits, these can be seen as patterns of repetitions that consolidate modes of relation and forces of interaction.²²

A third and final instance derives from my doctoral study. In the walk *CH A05 20140105 - Gesturing I* deliberately looked for a risky post-industrial urban environment and constrained my habitual bodymindset for walking (by an unfamiliar approach toward the environment derived from literature).²³ My instruct for walking was: First, follow the R9 (i.e., the five-kilometer long periphery around Charleroi) as the guide for your route. The pedestrian route along the R9 runs through bridges and tunnels, and is occasionally cut off. To continue walking thread your way through!

Next, use the Inuit practice of re-enactment by means of gesturing as your bodymindset. Follow the Inuit practice on the basis of this short textual description:

An Inuit traveler, returning from a trip, could recount every detail of the environment encountered along the way, miming with his hands the forms of specific land and sea features. Such gestural performance, after a long journey, could last many hours.²⁴

Third, within this instruct the usage of instruments is prohibited except for hands and memory.

It must be clear that this instruct was constraining not as an end, but as a means to mobilize 'how elses' of bodymindly relating. The kind of constraining envisioned here was inspired by Manning's "enabling constraint":



Figure 6: Response CH A05 R31
Courtesy: photo by the author-architect-learner.

An enabling constraint is positive in its dynamic effect, even though it may be limiting in its form/force narrowly considered.²⁵

Correspondingly, eccentric instructs are an invitation for architect-learners to move along as well as to (micro-)move the stable centre called 'self'. Because

this basic, ego-deflating principle is ground zero of subject formation. The recognition of alterity in the sense of incommensurable loss and an unpayable outstanding debt to others entails the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity, and desire, which one is not in charge of.²⁶

While walking and performing the eccentric instruct, I was in the embrace of questions and doubts such as: What if each interaction, each gesture is a breath



Figure 7: Response CH A05 R27
Courtesy: photo by the author-architect-learner.

impossible to repeat, to bring back or even imitate? How can I move on when my hand and the environment are still wavering? How to find "form" when both – hand and environment – are prone to change, when both are living time-space-matter? Operating within this instruct magnified my habit of approaching time-space-matter as single and definite, even if I could not find a definite form and contour to be mapped. The friction between my lived experience and my Euro-American heritage of communicating and thinking time-space-matter (as being definitive, singular, still...) generated a strong disappointment in the static photos of my hand gestures (Figures 6 and 7).

The *micro-situations of risk* I encountered in this walk were not for the sake of sensationalism, spectacle, kicks, and unending chaos. Micro- is that which concerns intimate bodymind relating. Moving and becoming (eccentrically) moved are vital shifts in

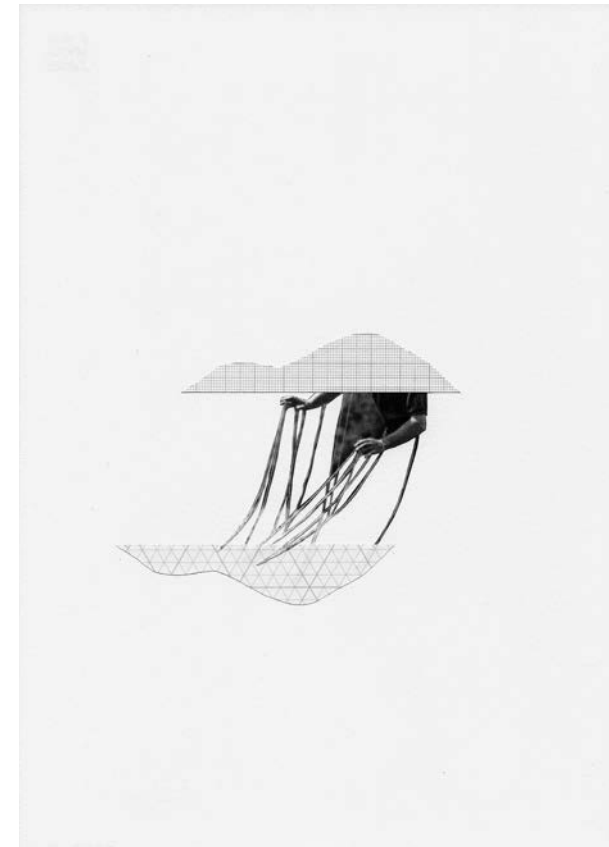


Figure 8: Response CH A05 R14
Courtesy: drawing by the author-architect-learner.

relating that can be sensitized by the fragile bodymind, such as micro-sensations, micro-feelings, and micro-becomings. Moreover, micro-concerns that which takes place under the threshold of the manifest and immediately noticeable. By regularly opening up micro-situations of risk, *fragility* can become appreciated as a shared and relational mode. Etymologically, fragility comes from the Latin "*frangilis*", from *frangere* "to break" and embraces a variety of breaks.²⁷ In the context of performing eccentric instructs, fragility can be thought of as breaking with the habit of disembodied styles of thinking in architecture, as to break up with Mr. Nobody.

In this light, the challenge for architectural learning environments is to make space for different fragilities, degrees, and intensities of fragility while acknowledging that fragility is *not* a passing or individual affair. In taking a (micro) risk, architect-learners come face

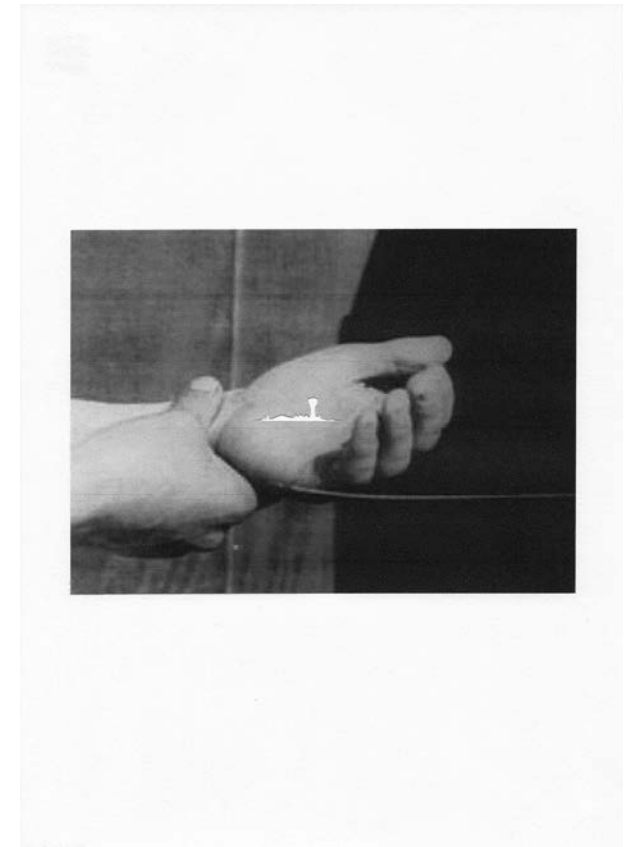


Figure 9: Response CH A05 R32
Courtesy: drawing by the author-architect-learner.

to face with the fragility of their bodymind *and* the environment, neither controllable nor predictable because “different contexts affect what becomes risky.”²⁸ All my efforts to imagine and gesture arctic landscape features along the R9 were to no avail. I felt lost in the mess, and wondered what happens with all the gestures that stuck to my bodymind. Six days after the walk, and by a series of memory drawings, I tried to evoke those features of Charleroi that became incorporated by gesturing (Figure 8 and 9).

CLOSING WORDS

By moving along experiences, questions, doubts, ideas, and propositions, I have encircled an approach to stimulate a genuine two-way interaction between bodyminds and environments in architectural education. Instructing and responding (basic, careful and eccentric) to environments is key to this approach. Instructing offers a structure to enable the embodied interaction and embodied design thinking of architect-learners outside abstracting and numerical patterns of habit. By performing (eccentric) instructs, micro-situations of risk (can) open up wherein sensitivities for creating-with, relating-with, and therefore also becoming-with environments is practiced. By inviting architect-learners to operate within the lively and mutual constitutiveness of bodymind-environment relations, as to open up micro-situations of risk, they can learn that taking a (micro) “risk depends a lot on what you care about.”²⁹ In other words, architect-learners can come face to face with that what they care about in architecture, and thereby learn to work against the conditioning.

What’s more, micro-situations of risk can be thought of as embodied and embedded time-space-matter for cultivating a specific kind of care: the care for relating as to cherish the state of becoming. Relating and becoming go hand in hand. By relating, *architecting bodies* become, and becoming is a relational process. Haraway puts it more straightforwardly: “We become with each other or not at all.”³⁰ The same goes for *architecting bodies*, they become in and by relating to a myriad of other bodies and not in abstraction or a vacuum. The state of becoming is thought of as the situated and situational time-space-matter wherein what was (familiar, known, stable, framed) propels into

“*what might become*” (other, yet unknown, unstable). In this light, taking a micro-risk also involves a sense of care for not-yet formed bodymind-environment relations and... your yet-to-become *architecting bodies*. ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Nel Janssens for formulating valuable feedback on *architecting bodies* and embodied design thinking. For consciousness-raising about the body as architecture, I am thankful to Nel Janssens and her reference to the work Marc Godts.³¹ Furthermore, I am grateful to Sofie Coose for supplying visual material of her design.

ENDNOTES

1. Ania Mr. Nobody is here limited to disembodied styles of design thinking, though this problematization can be thought of as a composite of issues relating to the increasing standardization and objectification (i.e. decreasing embodied imaginations and plural understandings) of what architecture, bodies, and their mutual constitutiveness can become.

2. For the collage, the following source material is used from background to foreground: Rineke Dijkstra’s *Beach Portraits* from 1992-2002 (Dubrovnik, Croatia, July 13, 1996); Michelangelo Buonarroti’s *David* from 1501-1504; Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s *Veduta di un gran Masso* (Avanzo del Sepolcro della Famiglia de’ Metelli sulla Via Apia) from 1756.

3. Based on a cross reading of: Manuel de Solà-Morales, “Absent Bodies,” in: *Anybody*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (New York, Cambridge, London: Anyone Corporation & The MIT Press, 1997), 18–24. Karina Van Herck and Lieven De Cauter, “Het lichaam van de architectuur: van antropomorfisme tot ergonomie,” in: *Dat is architectuur: Sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw*, ed. Hilde Heynen, et al. (Rotterdam: 010, 2004), 736–746; Jeremy Till, “A semblance of Order,” in: *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2009), 27–41.

4. Peter-Willem Vermeersch, *Less Vision, More Senses. Toward a More Multisensory Design Approach in Architecture* (PhD diss., KU Leuven, Departement Architecture, Urbanism and planning, 2013), 2.

5. Based on a cross reading of: Manuel de Solà-Morales, “Absent Bodies,” 18–24. Karina Van Herck and Lieven De Cauter, “Het lichaam van de architectuur: van antropomorfisme tot ergonomie,” 736–746. Jeremy Till, “A Semblance of Order,” 27–41.

6. Ernst Neufert and Peter Neufert, *Neufert Architects’ Data* (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2003).

7. Hilde Heynen André Loecx, Lieven De Cauter and Karina Van Herck, *Dat is architectuur: Sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw* (Rotterdam: 010, 2004).

8. Rosi Braidotti, “Afterword,” in: *Angelaki* 17, no. 2 (September 2012): 174.

9. Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene. Donna Haraway in Conversation with Martha Kenney,” in: *Art in the Anthropocene. Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 260.

10. Rob Imrie, Visiting Professor in the department of Sociology at Goldsmith University – London, states that “practicing architects, like the students, define the human body in relation to their self-image” while this “self-imaging” of architecture has the potential to develop a heterogeneity of bodily images and knowledges, based on architects’ experimental understanding of their bodily interaction with/in diverse built environments.” Rob Imrie, “Architects’ conceptions of the human body,” in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21, no. 1 (2003): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d271t>.

11. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2016).

12. Emma Cocker, “Practices (3): Time Stretches,” in: *No Telos*, ed. Danica Maier and Emma Cocker (UK: Beams Edition, 2019), 85.

13. The second Master Design studio *HABIT-AT-ION* (2018-2019) is led by Nel Janssens, Carl Bourgeois and myself at KU Leuven – Faculty of Architecture – Campus Sint-Lucas Brussels.

14. *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Sol Steinmetz and Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh, New York: Chambers Harrap, 1998), s.v. “instruct.”

15. Rob Imrie, “Architects’ conceptions of the human body,” 51.

16. Nel Janssens and Gerard de Zeeuw, “Non-Observational Research. A Possible Future Route for Knowledge Acquisition in Architecture and the Arts,” in: *Perspectives on Research Assessment in Architecture, Music and the Arts: Discussing Doctorateness*, ed. Fredrik Nilsson, Halina Dunin-Woyseth, and Nel Janssens (London, New York: Routledge, 2017), 149–157. Instructs as developed by Janssens & de Zeeuw are part of “non-observational research, producing situated knowledge for action and change”, *ibid*, 149.

17. Based on a study of Hans-Ulrich Obrist and ICI, *Do It: The Compendium* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2013).

18. Janssens and de Zeeuw, “Non-Observational Research. A Possible Future Route for Knowledge Acquisition in Architecture and the Arts,” 152.

19. *Ibid*.

20. Hans-Ulrich Obrist and ICI, *Do It: The Compendium*, 17.

21. Rosi Braidotti, “Nomadic Ethics,” in: *Deleuze Studies* 7, no. 3 (2013): 344.

22. Rosi Braidotti, “The Politics of ‘Life Itself’ and New Ways of Dying,” in: *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), 213.

23. Annelies Alice De Smet, “Architecting Bodies by Immersive Gestures” (PhD diss., KU Leuven, Department of Architecture, 2018).

24. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 232.

25. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act* (Mineapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 93.

26. Braidotti, “Afterword,” 174.

27. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, version 2.2.1 for Mac, s.v. “fragility.”

28. Beda Ring, Brady Burroughs, Henri T. Beall, *Architectural Flirtations: A Love Storey* (Stockholm: ArkDes, 2016), 453.

29. *Ibid*.

30. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 4.

31. Marc Godts, “Black Mirrors. What Is It I Look for in (Black Mirrors)”, in: *Proceedings of the Conference Knowing [by] Designing*, ed. Johan Verbeke and Burak Pak (Brussel-Gent: LUCA, KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, 2013). Marc Godts, “Om Wereld En,” accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.umwelten.be>.

(IM)PROPER SUBVERSION: TAKING ARCHITECTURE FROM BEHIND

COLIN RIPLEY

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the subversion of architecture by starting, once again, from the ground. The dual role of foundations, both in inventing the ground and supporting the structure, is interrogated, as are questions of the proper and of property in relation to building. How might we sever these relationships, render the foundations of building in the proper ineffective, and subvert building?

As a guide in this discussion, the paper relies on the life and work of Jean Genet, French modern novelist, playwright, homosexual, and thief. In this work, Genet acts as a thief, allowing us to work surreptitiously, to steal meaning, to uncover ways of understanding architecture that might otherwise remain hidden. Genet is a master of subversion; in his early novels, and particularly in his great prison novel *Miracle of the Rose*, Genet offers a collection of tactics for undermining authorities and systems, including architectural authorities and systems.

"If extreme mobility is a sign of modernity, why not send, whole and by air, Chartres cathedral to spend almost a year in Tokyo?"

— Jean Genet, "Chartres Cathedral"

A COSMOPOLITANISM OF ESTRANGEMENT

To subvert something—an institution, an established system, a discipline—is to undermine its power and authority, to cause its downfall, to overturn or overthrow it from the foundation.¹ Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin *subvertere*, from *sub-*, from below, and *vetere*, to turn. Subvert is related to similar turning words, such as invert, to turn inside out; pervert, to turn to ill effect or thoroughly; revert, to turn back; convert, to turn around altogether. Subversion is thus a quiet, surreptitious turning, one that takes place not from above, not as the result of a frontal attack, but in darkness, underground and out of sight. Despite the image produced by the dictionary definitions—a building crashing down—in today's parlance subversion is not a sudden, violent action, but a slow, careful process that redirects processes and resources, a hollowing out; take, for example, the way in which psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-81) used the term *subversion* to signify the slow and careful removal of the psychic mechanisms that produce the subject, leaving a meaningful void.

Subversion in this sense does not work by attacking the foundations of a structure directly, not by planting a bomb beneath the ground, but by turning a structure against itself, against its most fundamental conceptions and beliefs, against its own foundations. It turns out that subversion is not so much an overturning of a superstructure from the foundations as an overturning of the foundations from the already-turned

superstructure; it is a cutting of that critical reciprocal linkage between superstructure and substructure, between assembly and ground. This is what makes subversion so much more dangerous than simple terrorism: like the work of termites, the process is not evident until the damage is done, and that damage can be fatal. This is why, too, the fear of subversion, the fear of an unseen infection, can be the most dangerous subversion of all.

Foundations, undermine, superstructure, ground: it is striking the degree to which subversion is lodged in architectural terms and concepts. Subversion, one might suggest, is at its root an architectural concept. Certainly, it is a turning that operates on and through one of the key relationships that underlie architectural thought and practice, the relationship between structure and ground. This situation raises some intriguing questions. What, for example, is the role of architecture vis-à-vis subversion? Can we understand architecture as a protection against cultural, spatial and social subversion, as a means of maintaining discipline and order, or should we understand it as a technique, as a tool for producing subversion? My intuition, which will need to stay as an intuition, perhaps a ground, for the purpose of this paper, is that neither of these options is correct, and indeed that the question itself produces a false binary; rather, I would like to simply maintain for the moment the notion that architecture and subversion partake in a structural parallelism. Architecture is inseparable, as a positive or negative term, from subversion; architecture is, always-already, a subversive activity, but a subversive activity in the service of power. Which brings me to the primary question of this paper: if architecture is already a subversive activity, is already subversion, what could it mean to subvert architecture?

In order to move this analysis forward, I propose that we consider the thinking of Jean Genet (1910-86), French novelist, essayist, playwright, and homosexual thief. Genet does not figure strongly in discussions of architectural theory; aside from my own work and one article by Benjamin Bratton that is only obliquely interested in architecture, I have found no mention of him in the architectural canon.² Nor did Genet, in his extensive writings, produce a large body of work that explicitly discussed architectural theory; although

architecture plays a significant conceptual role in both his novels and his plays (and in his life), he only produced two articles dealing with architecture as a central concept: "That Strange Word...", an essay dealing with the relation of the urban and the theatrical, originally published in *Tel Quel* in 1967 (the strange word is "urbanism");³ and "Chartres Cathedral," published in *L'Humanité* in June, 1977, from which the epigraph to this paper has been taken.⁴

In brief, Genet's essay, as the title would suggest, is a discussion of that great monument of French gothic architecture. Genet understood Chartres to be more than an architectural masterpiece, but also to be one of the great icons that constitute the French nation, pointing to the greatness and the genius of the French people. For Genet, though, this iconic status, or at least the French nature of the Cathedral, is a myth: this founding icon of the French nation is not, as Genet points out, French at all.⁵ Genet in essence contrasts two very different lines: the straight line, the lineage of the nationalist construction, the received official story of the Cathedral on the one hand; and the wandering, meandering line(s) of the itinerant workmen from all over Europe (and likely beyond) who actually built cathedrals like Chartres, on the other. Genet's interest here, as often in his work, is in the relationship between these two forms, between the subaltern voice and the master discourse (although of course he would not have used those terms), in the way the story of the straight line, the argument of lineage but also the argument of the static, the grounded enduring and embedded line, overrides and suppresses the story of the wanderer—and conversely, the potential for the meandering line to cast doubt on, to call out as a fiction, to undermine, possibly even to subvert, the straight line, the possibility of the line of the thief to subvert the line of architecture.

Toward the end of the essay, Genet produces the striking architectural image laid out in the epigraph to this paper. Put simply, his proposal is to disconnect the Cathedral from its ground, from the nation that the Cathedral in the end helped to produce, while simultaneously to reconstitute the international character of the building. This is clearly not a surreptitious proposal; the recent fire at Notre Dame de Paris and the resulting angst across France points

to the effect of such an action. On the other hand, if Chartres were anything but a building, this would not be such a preposterous proposal; the idea of sending cultural treasures abroad as parts of exhibitions is of course an everyday part of contemporary cultural diplomacy. And yet, the proposal remains a shocking one, not simply because of the technical audacity that it represents but also because of its effects on a deeper, more structural level. By removing the Cathedral from its site, by raising it up into the air (note that the specific destination of the building in Japan is not the issue here), the proposal breaks the fundamental link between building and ground, the connection on which all questions of property, of ownership, of identity are developed, and in so doing calls into question the very existence not of the building, but of the ground.

In order to clarify this last statement, we should look more closely at the concept of ground. Ground, by most dictionary definitions, describes the surface of the earth, but this is clearly both an inadequate and misleading definition. Mark Wigley, in his work on the architectural foundations of philosophy, has examined the relationship between ground as understood by architects and as developed in the regime of philosophy, particularly in the works of Heidegger and Derrida.⁶ In his analysis, Wigley shows that the ground in philosophy is nothing more than the place from which we start as thinkers, the place on which we stand. Further, this ground, this place on which we stand, is just an abyss filled with the constructions of our predecessors; that is, the ground is artificial, constructed, a product of our thinking. This situation is perhaps more clear in the world of philosophy than in that of architecture; it is easy, after all, to imagine a ground for philosophy that has at best a metaphorical relationship to the surface of the earth on which we build. However, I would like to argue that the situation is in fact more general, that the ground is never simply the surface of the earth as such, but rather is always the ground *for something*. This notion is buttressed by the etymology of the word ground, which appears to derive from a Proto-Germanic word meaning “deep place.”⁷ Ground, then, is defined not by what is below it, not by being the surface of something, but by what is above it, by what stands on the ground. In terms of the relationship between building and ground, then, we cannot say properly that the ground exists before

the building is constructed. It is the building, or its architecture, that brings the ground into being as a place on which to stand, that defines the ground’s properties.

Architecture is expected to produce a ground in which the rules are clear and reliable; indeed, such a statement could stand, at least provisionally, as definition of architecture. This means, first of all, producing a ground that is stable, on which the rules of action are reliable and comprehensible, on which the physical and conceptual abyss that is under our feet is not in danger of swallowing us up. Architecture’s role, in part, is to obscure the irreality and artificiality of the ground that has been constructed, to naturalize the ground. There is also a temporal-conceptual sleight-of-hand in operation here: in order to produce stability, architecture must construct a ground that appears to exist prior to its own construction, a ground that pre-exists the very architecture that creates it. Architecture must therefore produce not just a ground, but a *proper* ground.

Proper: there are few words more tightly bound to architecture. Through its institutional and financial connections to power and money, architecture always has to act within the realm of the proper. More than this, as the analysis of ground would suggest, architecture has the responsibility to not just conform to the proper, but in effect to both produce and define the proper. One could say, in fact, that architecture is the art of the proper. Proper is also a powerful and curious word, derived from the French *propre*, meaning both “own” as in “my own”, *ma propre*, and clean.⁸ Proper is about identity, about group identity, about enforcing what is ours over what is foreign, what is theirs: and what is not ours is improper, unclean. A proper architecture (meaning *all* architecture), is therefore primarily about separating and maintaining, about the production of lines and walls of division, about constructing interiors (where we are, where all is proper and clean) and exteriors (where the barbarians and the non-human live in filth). Thus the ground as constructed by architecture is a ground of interiors and exteriors, a binary ground of division. The proper ground is indeed nothing more than the ground of *proper-ty*, of ownership, of the lines that enclose and divide, of inside and outside, of us and them.

If architecture is so tightly bound to the proper that architecture has the role of creating, defining, disciplining and policing the proper, then to subvert architecture might be to think the architecturally improper.

The proper ground is a ground of property, a ground with properties of propriety, a ground where everyone has a place, where the rules are known. We know, though, or at least we suspect, that this propriety is ingenuine, that architecture acts as a prop to prop up this stage scenery of the proper. The French anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65) put the matter succinctly and powerfully in 1840: “*property is theft.*”⁹ Property is the master’s discourse of theft, a discourse of the once wandering and furtive line that has repressed and hidden its origins and that disguises itself as the direct, right, straight line of the proper.

Who better, then, to guide us to the improper of architecture than a thief?

In that same year of 1840, the Colonie Pénitentiare de Mettray opened its doors as a utopian institution in the Loire valley devoted to caring for deprived, disadvantaged, or abandoned children (for the most part boys), many of whom had been arrested for petty crimes such as vagabondage.¹⁰ Mettray was a direct outcome of the utopian movement in French modern architecture, and formed the subject of the last chapter of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*.¹¹ Genet was sent to Mettray when he was sixteen, in 1926, and spent several years there.¹² The Colonie appears as a setting in several of his books, but the most thorough treatment is in his great novel of fate and transformation, of love and betrayal, written on flour sacks while he was a prisoner at Fresnes prison, *Miracle of the Rose*.¹³ Genet makes use of a number of descriptive tactics that re-appropriate the site for his own ends, that re-draw the ground of punishment. These tactics, as I have discussed elsewhere, are topologically akin to laying a piece of tracing paper over the site and redrawing it from a different position and with different ends in mind, ends founded in transgression or subversion, lifting us as readers into a new and different world.¹⁴ Here I will call the lines that are drawn on this second layer, lines that move and change, lines that start and stop, lines that dance and move through walls,

Genet-ic (*trans*)formations, not simply because they are grounded for me in the work of Genet, but also because of their ability to form the genetic material for a meandering and distinctly improper conception of architecture. These are (*trans*) tactics that Genet uses in his texts to describe and subvert buildings (and other things), tactics that can be understood as in opposition to the (*cis*) strategies of the institution:

Transsubstantiation, in which one object or event is transformed into another, or one substance changed into another, the mechanism that Sartre refers to as *magnifying judgement*;¹⁵

Transsimilation, or correspondence, in which two places, objects or people are understood to be discrete manifestations of a single reality;

Transmiseration, in which the meaning that a place, object or situation takes on is changed as a result of the tactics of inhabitation used to *détourne* it;

Transfiguration, in which a chain between the wrists of a condemned man remains a chain, but changes to a chain of roses, in which a person, place, idea or object remains itself, but changes its materiality or its form; and

Transcorporation, in which the intangible act of writing (for Genet) or design (for us) becomes bodily, has concrete effects on the world and on our lives, making insubstantial the walls of our prisons.

These tactics are evanescent and transient. Their effects at best burst into bloom and then fade quickly, lacking the power to create any permanence, any new grounds. Born, according to Sartre, from Genet’s masturbatory fantasies, these tactics can only survive as long as one’s desire – or, as Genet might put it, until the right arm gets tired. Critically, though, these transformations are not presented as elaborate fantasies, as poetic descriptions, as existing in the world of metaphor, but as concrete realities: the chain does not appear like a chain of roses, or take on the form of a chain or roses, but becomes a chain of roses; the murderer does not walk in spirit through the walls

of the prison, but walks simply in his flesh through those same walls. This is the miracle of Genet’s *Miracle of the Rose*, but it is also the miracle of architecture, the means by which architecture operates: the fantasy, always born of masturbatory desire, that presents itself as real, the artificial and imaginary ground that insists on its solidity and permanence. This is, to paraphrase Deleuze, (“taking architecture from behind”), using architecture’s own methods to overturn its structure.¹⁶

I will conclude with one last observation from Genet. In an interview with Hubert Fichte in 1975, when asked what sort of revolution he would prefer, Genet responded that he had no desire for any revolution:

The current situation, the current regimes allow me to revolt, but a revolution would probably not allow me to revolt, that is, to revolt individually... My point of view is very egotistic. I would like for the world—now pay close attention to the way I say this—I would like for the world not to change so that I can be against the world.¹⁷

This is exactly the question that is at issue here, in this discussion of subversion in architecture, of the subversion of architecture: we cannot subvert architecture by changing architecture, because that after all amounts just to the (re)production of the proper. To subvert architecture, we need to be always against architecture, even while using architecture against itself. It is this *against* that is most critical here—an against that can never transform itself or become a *for* by simply changing its object, an against whose teleology can only ever be negative. We need architecture not to change, so that we can be against architecture. If we are sincere about our desire for subversion, we will need to embrace anti-architectures, ways of thinking and building that desperately resist the utopic in all its aspects—including the utopia of the non-utopias—embracing the slithering line of the migrant, the transient and immaterial, blood and sperm and concrete and feathers, meaning and non-meaning, life and life, but also death and death, frantically drawing and building our dream worlds until our right arms are exhausted. ■

ENDNOTES

1. See Oxford Dictionaries (en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/subvert), Merriam-Webster Dictionaries (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subvert), Webster’s Dictionary.
2. Benjamin Bratton, “For a Staging of Jean Genet’s The Balcony in 2007,” in *Dispute Plan to Prevent Future Luxury Constitution*. (Sternberg Press, 2015), 54-113; Colin Ripley, “Safe as houses: The Mettray Colony as seen by Jean Genet.,” *Space and Culture* 9, no. 4 (2006): 400-417.
3. Jean Genet, “That Strange Word...,” in *Fragments of the Artwork*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 103-112.
4. Jean Genet, “Chartres Cathedral,” in *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Albert Dichy, translated by Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 164-170; epigraph 166.
5. Ibid., 165.
6. Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s haunt*. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1995).
7. See for example the Cambridge English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ground>, accessed August 12, 2019. For etymological information, see the Online Etymological Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ground>, accessed August 12, 2019.
8. Online Etymological Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/proper>, accessed August 12, 2019.
9. P. -J. Proudhon, *What Is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*. Translated by Jordan Manley and Benjamin Ricketson Tucker. (Alfred, NY: Whitlock Publishing, 2017).
10. For more information about this period of Genet’s life, see Ripley, op. cit. For a complete and thorough biography of Genet, see Edmund White, *Genet: A biography* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
11. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979).
12. See Albert Dichy, “A Chronology,” in White, op. cit., XXI-XLII.
13. Jean Genet, *Miracle of the rose*. Translated by Anthony Blond (New York: Grove, Evergreen, 1988). Original work 1942, pub. 1951; trans. 1962. Genet also discussed Mettray at length in two other works, his unproduced radio play *L’Enfant Criminel*, (Paris: L’Arbalète Gallimard, 2014) and an unpublished film script, *Le Langage de la Muraille: Cent ans jour apres jour*.
14. Ripley, op. cit.
15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). For example, Sartre tells us that “Genet’s art is a mirage, a confidence trick, a pitfall. In order to make us eat shit, he has to show it to us, from afar, as rose jam. That is the purpose of the “magnifying judgements...” Sartre, op. cit., 498.
16. Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic,” in *Negotiations*. Translated by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 6. Deleuze refers to his own process as one of “taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous.”
17. Jean Genet, “Interview with Hubert Fichte,” in *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, edited by Albert Dichy, translated by Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 132.

CALL FOR PAPERS & PROJECTS DIALECTIC IX

Dialectic IX: Decolonizing Architectural Technologies

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Abstract (350 words)

Short CV

Design and technology are inextricably connected, radically impacting the way we produce form and inhabit space. In the last several decades, technological shifts have pushed efficiency, performance, and data mediated approaches to spatial production under the guise of objectivity and universal applicability. But the distance of these physical and digital tools from the idiosyncrasies of the human hand and mind, does not make them neutral instruments. Their placement after **decolonizing** (a process of achieving self-realization of a previously dominated people) in the title of *Dialectic IX* is strategic. It strips away from “**architectural technologies**” all claims of universality, scientific neutrality, and knowledge progression, reframing both decolonization and technology as cultural practices. Furthermore, the focus on techniques in our thematic identifies the locus of resistance to spatial inequity and colonial erasure, not elsewhere but squarely in designers, preservationists, urbanists, cartographers, engineers, programmers, and most of all in educators.

Acknowledging technology’s role in perpetuating and amplifying spatial and social structures that discipline human behavior, choices, and imagination, how might it be used instead as a tool for delivering cultural sovereignty? We have numerous examples of this. In recent years, preservationists, anthropologists, and archaeologists have adopted digital techniques such as 3D scanning, photogrammetry, and augmented reality to protect, interpret, and transmit not only tangible or built heritage, but also intangible expressions of culture--performances, practices, oralities, and lived experiences. Indigenous artists and urbanists are employing digital media technologies such as virtual reality, mobile apps, and sound recording as new

modes of storytelling that are immersive, relational, and non-linear. In architecture, interactive tools have fostered participatory and collective modes of working, expanding the agency of designers and community end users in creating more adaptive and inclusive environments. The building industry has transformed vernacular building materials such as earth and wood by connecting them to advancements in construction technology and contemporary concepts of ecological design and circular economies. Geographers, film makers and landscape architects have also brought the act of mapping into question. Learning the notation of landscapes with petroglyphs, natural observatories, smoke signals, and dance has brought into sharp focus scientific mapping as an instrument of cultural domination. The emerging field of cultural mapping, in conjunction with geo-spatial information technologies, has been employed to protect tribal resources, expand the potential for engagement and empowerment for indigenous communities, and spatialize new ways of knowing the relationships between people and places.

The editors of *Dialectic IX* welcome submissions on the braiding of different cultural attitudes to building construction with industrialized modes of project delivery, recoveries of endangered ways of building, harvesting materials, and the application of technologies both material and immaterial, animate and inanimate, in design thinking and practice. How are the lines of inquiry opened by immersive storytelling, cultural mapping, and the collection of indigenous epistemologies disrupting status quo practices of communication, analysis, and production employed in the design of cultural landscapes? Do we have good examples of new research methods in design that address the biases implicit in technology? Are there case studies that insist on human processes to offset technology’s tendency to favor merciless efficiency, optimization, and cost-effectiveness? How are colonized peoples re-appropriating the technologies that have excluded, erased, and othered them in the past?

“Decolonizing Architectural Technologies” not only responds to the social inequities perpetuated through notions of knowledge progression and human advancement, but it also makes space for new directions in design technologies, informed by diverse ways of knowing and creating. *Dialectic IX* invites articles, reports, documentation, interviews, and photo essays on best practices of decolonizing architectural technologies. Possible contributions may also include mapping of ongoing debates across the world, and reviews of books, journals, exhibitions and new media. Please send abstracts of 350 words and short CVs to Shundana Yusaf shundana@arch.utah.edu and Tonia Sing tonia.sing@gmail.com by **June 1st, 2020**.

Accepted authors will be notified by June 15th. Photo essays with 6-8 images and full papers of 2500-3500 words must be submitted by August 15, 2020, (including visual material, endnotes, and permissions for illustrations) to undergo an external peer-review process. This issue of *Dialectic* is expected to be out in print by fall 2021.

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