



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 as 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.

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.

TURNING THE MASTER’S HOUSE AGAINST ITSELF

MICHAEL ABRAHAMSON

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.