

# EDITORIAL: METHODS FOR A RECONSTRUCTIVE PEDAGOGY

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Last year, Keith Diaz Moore, the dean of University of Utah's College of Architecture + Planning, proposed we explore the theme of "citizenship" for *Dialectic VII*. The idea of citizenship is intimately linked with the need to address injustice and imbalance; in fact, without the latter two, there would be no need for citizenship. In the past three years, the School of Architecture has been aligning its curriculum to core values of social justice and community engagement while probing the scope of the College's commitment to:

1. **Responsibility:** a responsibility to past, present, and future generations for the sustainability of our creative expressions that reallocate natural resources;
2. **Resilience:** a systemic understanding that poly-cultures and diversity nurture greater ecological and community resilience;
3. **Respect:** a respect for the health and culture of all places; and
4. **Response:** the demand to respond to the grand challenges of our time through innovative and collaborative modes of practice that demonstrate our commitment to excellence and quality.<sup>1</sup>

To arrive at 4Rs, however, is not easy. A conspicuous precondition is the recognition of and grappling with our disciplinary interests. The primary goal of each field of cultural production, as Pierre Bourdieu tells us, is to perpetuate a belief in its goods. Without a social belief in the architect and architecture as valuable expertise in the 21st century, we do not have a field. How do we then share our authority to name what is and what is not architecture with those outside our domain, without losing our identity? How do we extend the model of sweat equity to the whole globe, teaching

everyone to design for themselves, and still be alone in holding the title "designers"?

As products of modern education, academics and architects are particularly well situated to address the needs of urban and rural poor, African Americans, refugees, LGBTQ youth, and other disadvantaged groups equally subsumed within the purifying project of modernity. The pairing of "architecture" and "citizenship" can nurture, as Diaz Moore sensitively phrases, an "ethic of care" that uses our institutional privilege and the standards of professional "excellence and quality" to address threats to all of our futures. The pairing encourages us to train students in envisioning projects that assuage imbalance and injustice in modern societies. In some instances, injustice might even imply a critique of modernity itself. At Utah and Portland State, like many other institutions where the editors and contributors of *Dialectic VII* have studied and taught, it is commonplace to find studio projects such as housing the homeless, envisioning Zero Waste kitchens, bringing design excellence to dignify aging, and imaginatively welcoming transgender persons in public bathrooms. However, the moment we turn our attention to the tribal, chieftain, nomadic, and indigenous social arrangements that dot the earth today we see thorny aberrations or uneasy arrangements within the modern fabric. Then, architecture and citizenship become antagonistic terms.

Citizenship embodies a mode of being in the world whose exigencies are at odds with the professional practice for which universities prepare students. Citizenship is a form of involved living defined by passionate forms of relating to others, compromises, ways of knowing (research methods) and ways of working (applied skills). None of these attributes are aimed at contributing to autonomous knowledge.

Rather, they seek to procreate communities in which citizenship is lived. The knowledge and difference produced by citizenship contributes to the survival, mobilization, and resilience of cultures in which it is practiced. In contrast, the professional contribution of architectural academics and designers seldom happens in attending to the needs of their own lives.

Instead, professional disciplines like architecture, based in modern universities all over the globe, are structured not by the interconnectedness of everyday life but by the division of labor, knowledge, and expertise.<sup>2</sup> Our field is governed by the logic of scientific truth, efficiency, economy, originality, and knowledge for their own sake as well as for market viability. As a result, the professional and academic practice of architecture *as it stands today* is structurally incapable of the cultural affirmation of people whose value systems and social organization are at odds with industrial capitalism and modern science. How can one expect contemporary architects to contribute to the self-determination, healing, resistance, and recovery of systems of knowledge that scientific method and philosophical thought (think Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) have discredited as myth, superstition, and ignorance? Are architects not trained as modern “experts”? These are the mercenaries who help “develop” infrastructure in the Andean landscape; “empower” Bedouin women to artistically express themselves; and “teach” Afghan peasantry building skills so they can enter into the 21st-century economy.

The public interest design movement aims to extend modern benefits and expert knowledge to those whom the state and capitalism have so far failed to “serve.” However, the unwitting consequence of this honorable intention transforms to “failed to completely bracket and reorganize for participation in industrialized and commoditized culture.” The closures of thought behind well-meaning intentions like this alarm indigenous researchers like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, whose book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* calls on non-indigenous researchers (e.g., artists, anthropologists, lawyers) to kindly refrain from interfering in indigenous communities.<sup>3</sup> It has led the anthropologist Frédérique Apffel-Marglin to call for de-professionalization of indigenous researchers and development experts if they truly want to

contribute to the well-being of Andean culture. This is required, she argues, to preserve its unique “mode of being in the world, of being a person, of relating to others, both humans and non-humans, as well as different notions of time, of space and of nature.”<sup>4</sup> The Eurocentric definition of “development” guiding architecture regards all the cultural arrangements that Mark Jarzombek heuristically calls the “chieftain continuum” as backward, stagnant, and altogether lacking. Fully aware of this, Marie Battiste, author of *Decolonizing Education*, has committed herself to overthrowing “cognitive imperialism”—namely, having to be successful by somebody else’s standards.<sup>5</sup> She places competing definitions of development, creativity, and economic health at the heart of post-colonial education.

Eurocentric architectural education, research, and design methodologies ensure that the minds of those it graduates into the field of architecture are so completely colonized that they channel all their compassion, empathy, and service within the analytical frame of industrial rationality. As a result, wittingly or unwittingly, they reproduce the institutions of industrial and post-industrial capitalism and maintain the status quo. The editors of *Dialectic VII* responded to the limits of the 4Rs by including the subtitle “Decolonizing Architectural Pedagogy.” We hope that Linda Tuhiwai Smith would approve of our attempts to engage disadvantaged groups in modern society who have little to no cultural memory, landscape intelligence, native language, social institutions, research methodologies, and connection to land to fight for an identity outside of the modern world. As researchers indigenous not to the chieftain, but to the modern world, our public interest design movement is well situated. It has the potential to critique disciplinary culture and bring excluded citizens fully into its fold while honoring their diversity and humanity. When really brazen, it can respond to the commoditization of values in industrialized societies and propose nuanced economic and social arrangements.

To become “global citizens,” an aspiration shared by the faculty and Mimi Locker, the chair of School of Architecture at the University of Utah, is a radically different undertaking. It requires decolonizing knowledge: decolonizing the architectural mind,

academic culture, fieldwork, disciplinary speech and discourse, scholarship, and design methodologies. It takes Keith Diaz Moore's reference to poly-cultures and diversity as a nod to include all those people that colonized pedagogy has silenced and made invisible in its framework. This is a frighteningly tall order. We offer this issue of *Dialectic* as an opening to the uncharted territory of "architecture and global citizenship." This requires a new order of things and the reconfiguration of the order of the 4Rs.

As the first of the four values, Responsibility creates a slippage in the aforementioned critique of professionalism. Responsibility implies policing—or at least self-policing, for example in the form of building codes, licensure, and codes of conduct. These make responsibility and professionalism synonymous. Both are treated as neutral holders of judgment. The issue then becomes how to achieve Responsibility or, even better, accountability while bypassing the mediating abstraction of professionalism. We propose starting with:

- 1) **Respect** for the health and culture of all places, which entails an "enlargement of mind." This paves a more inclusive path to
- 2) **Resilience** as "a systemic understanding that poly-cultures and diversity nurture greater ecological and community resilience." The precondition of mutual accountability makes resilience a two-way street. This configuration in turn readies us for
- 3) **Response**, to mean collaboration not just between educators, architects, and students, but also with communities who hold a mirror to our professional identities (as educators, architects, and students). With respectful and resilient lateral learning, we may arrive at
- 4) **Responsibility** in a way that addresses the dangers of the mediating abstraction at the heart of professional training.

The contributors to *Dialectic VII* were selected because of the clear stance each took towards the project of decolonizing architectural knowledge. More

specifically, we were interested in seeing what concrete pedagogical strategies the authors used to connect transformative knowledge production to structural transformation in designers' ways of working. In the final account, we understood their contributions falling into four categories:

- 1) Interventions on academic culture;
- 2) The challenges and rewards of taking students away from the academy, which we term "fieldwork";
- 3) The potentials and limits of speech and discourse-based strategies enacted in seminar and lecture courses; and
- 4) New agendas for scholarly production.

These are arranged from those strategies involving the most broad and collaborative interventions to those that can be enacted by individuals. We are interested not just in critique, but also in reconstructive practices that begin, in small ways, to counter the dominant culture of the architectural profession from its roots in our educational institutions.

## PART 1: ACADEMIC CULTURE

The first step in pursuing a reconstructive pedagogy is to understand that all academic culture, and the academic culture of architectural education in particular, is a colonial project that disciplines the minds and bodies of students and faculty. As Pierre Bourdieu points out, education is a socializing process that not only organizes students' sense of personal agency within structural constraints, but which also conveys upon them social capital that enables them with power and privilege outside the isolated world of the academy.<sup>6</sup>

Architecture schools produce individuals with disciplinary skills, but they also cultivate aspirations in those individuals towards ends, which are, at base, competitive, exploitative, and devaluing of non-expert knowledge systems. Thus, our biggest challenge comes not from the exclusion of women, people of color, and those with other marginalized identities (though those

are significant), but rather from an academic culture that produces colonial *habits of mind*.

Shundana Yusaf, writing from the position of faculty, points out the dissonance that arises when critiques of modernity presented in seminar and lecture courses are inconsistent with students' experience in the suite of other coursework that make up their education. With her "malleability hypothesis," she emphasizes that the discipline can tolerate a diversification of approaches and perspectives. In fact, she argues, students can build on the "propensity for open-ended hypothesizing [that] comes from our training in architecture" to turn their critical education into tools of empowerment and creative and collaborative intellectual work. This, she argues, is what will enable the profession to remain relevant in the future.

Genevieve Wasser and Tucker Jones's essay, "The Denizen Collective," captures students' yearning for alternative modes of being. The experience of architectural education is colored heavily by a culture of efficiency and self-exploitation—fueled, as the authors point out, by coffee, hyper-critical juries, and all-nighters. Recent graduates of Portland State University's M.Arch. program, Wasser and Jones reflect on their attempt to pursue new ways of interacting with colleagues, of producing and exchanging knowledge, and of intervening into their school's culture. Their brief experiment holds within it seeds of an anti-capitalist politics that relies on gifting and collective ownership while also drawing on the potential for free democratic discourse. Yet, as they put it, "without dedicated leadership and organization, there was no system of accountability." This promising but brief flare of activism, resting on the shoulders of young designers already overburdened by the disciplining requirements of their studies and their impending plunge into the working world, did not produce the lasting change they had anticipated.

A shift in culture, then, cannot come exclusively from students. The nature of financing university education and the pressures to enter professional practice necessarily mean generations of students will continually flow through architecture schools. Continuity and the space to stage creative acts of self-determination that fall outside the logics of individual

cost-benefit analysis must be—at least in part—organized at an administration level and activated in both coursework and through the spaces, traditions, and social life of the school.

## PART 2: FIELDWORK

One of the most radical interventions on the structure of typical architectural education comes in the form of forays in design-build education that take students out of the classroom and places them in situations of hands-on learning in which they must negotiate community, material, environmental, and economic concerns in real-time. Given the agenda of this issue, we found it most appropriate to draw a parallel between this type of pedagogy and the rite of passage that fieldwork represents for students of anthropology. Anthropology has been well in advance of architecture in producing deep and sustained engagement with its own colonial foundations. For critical anthropologists like Paul Rabinow, leaving the academy for the field is an experience that allows the researcher not only to assert a problematic identity as neutral outside observer, but more positively, to return with a more profound understanding of their home culture.

We view the design-build studio/workshops described in the essays in Part 2 through this lens. These are not mere forays into professional culture, nor just skill-acquisition boot camps. Rather, both practices force students into contact with radically different actors and modes of being: in the case of Design-Build Bluff, with the Navajo people in the Four Corners Area in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, and in the case of RozO architectes office's "Architecture and Vegetation" workshop series, with a regional ecology that defies modern typological boundaries. Architectural education is, as Michel Foucault notes, a practice of the self; it describes models of relationships between humans, objects, and the environment. What we and the students involved learn from these experiences is that the buildings they create are not just propaganda pieces that celebrate hegemonic ideologies. Rather, these are complex multi-directional engagements with systems of knowledge, actors, and histories of violence that must be acknowledged. Yet, as Blyth et al. point out, these encounters, which seem so far outside the constraints of studio culture, must still conform to the

academic calendar and the pressures students feel for portfolio-quality products that will secure their futures once they leave their brief time as sanctioned outsiders.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith might note that missing from the fieldwork conversation are clear indications that researchers/designers are answerable to the communities in which they build. Neither team worked with local researchers or craftspeople as guides, and while RozO architectes office's workshops intentionally placed European students in the minority, they acknowledge that all their students are the products of modernist, colonial worldviews born from an international academic culture. While the Utah students build for specific clients, the studio in Reunion works on abstract notions of dwelling. For the sake of experimentation, they isolate ecology from the life-worlds of the inhabitants of the island. The architectural "textures" they propose offer compelling ways to describe the complexity of a post-colonial, even post-human, design process, but they also lean towards an abstraction uncomfortably close to the universalism from which they so desperately work to distance themselves. For this group, post-colonial scholarship is highly productive in informing an original process, but indigenous scholarship might offer future directions that re-center the lived post-colonial experience. In sum, the contact cultivated with both practices is transformative for the students involved, but our field has more work to do to disrupt the superstructures that organize architects' ways of knowing and being in the world.

### PART 3: SPEECH AND DISCOURSE

Beyond fieldwork, the burden of reconstructive education has often fallen on the shoulders of seminar and lecture courses in architectural history and theory. The two authors in this section take this issue of building new syllabi head on, offering similar and complementary strategies. Mrinalini Rajagopalan re-envisions the undergraduate survey of architectural history as a tool to "expand the imagination" of students. She uses three strategies—comparison, widening the lens, and social analysis—to show that canonic narratives of European cultural superiority cannot stand post-colonial probing. Her comparison of

an indigenous example with Abbe Laugier's "primitive hut" as the foundational act of modern architecture reveals Inuit Whalebone House to be far more sophisticated and culturally complex. Likewise, when she expands the lens to study Thomas Jefferson's neoclassical villa at Monticello in the wider context of the slave plantation, the neo-classical architecture belies democracy as a type of egalitarianism built on the "infrastructure of dehumanization." In scrutinizing the social conditions of production of knowledge at al-Qarawiyyan University, she proves that claiming studio or any other space of knowledge-making as a space of exception is a farce. As she notes, more promising routes to address our challenges follow if we acknowledge the legacies of "modern universities as environments that simultaneously inspire cosmopolitan learning and action while actively perpetuating existing social inequities."

Aneesha Dharwadker blames the Eurocentricism of architectural theory and design pedagogy for the slippage between responsibility and professionalism. Thinking through the most overt example of neoliberal high-end architectural practice, she shows that envisioning professionalism and responsibility as neutral holders of judgment results in a culture that grants aesthetic and environmentally sustainable status to one of the most expensive houses in the world, located in the city of Mumbai which has the third-largest slums in the world. She comes to the same conclusion as Rajagopalan: what narrative strategies do for lectures in architectural history, reading lists need to do for seminars in architectural theory.

She also invokes comparative analysis, widening the lens. "Introduce multiple, and at times productively conflicting, perspectives anchored in other parts of the world." Comparisons keep authors and practitioners from hiding behind universalizing philosophies and professional abstractions, "especially in post-colonial places that have suffered environmentally, economically, politically, and socially precisely *because* of imperialist attitudes and actions." To make visible the "othering" at the heart of these texts, she suggests re-reading Enlightenment giants Kant, Hegel, and Marx with tools offered by post-colonial critics like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, and historical realities of other modernities. Together, these strategies constitute

the first steps in decolonizing history and theory coursework. Yet, introducing architecture students to a crash course in post-colonial scholarship leaves open the question of whether scholars—especially minorities and women—will continually be burdened to re-explain basic historical injustices.

#### PART 4: SCHOLARSHIP

To this point, what avenues do we have for positive, productive, post-colonial scholarship today? Mark Jarzombek's essay offers a powerful model for the production of a different scholarly culture. Attending to a spectrum of political arrangements that he calls the "chieftain continuum," Jarzombek brings into focus peoples who have been silenced and suppressed by modern scholarship and discourse. Using new and old tools of reconnaissance, he maps the robust trade relations between the proverbially civilized states and chieftain societies until around 300 years ago. The devastation of the chieftain continuum, he insists, "was not caused, however, by some natural transition to a superior form of governance, but by a concerted effort of de-chieftainization": but by industrial imperialism, destruction of their ecology by mining or deforestation, replacement of shells with coins, and monotheism's irreverent attitude to nature. Literacy, nation-state, capitalism, and development appear differently when seen from the perspective of these oral societies. Instead, they are understood as forces of subjugation and the destruction of a way of life that made modernity possible. "The chieftain world—with all its grey zones—has to be seen not as something *before* modernism, but as *integral* to the modern world and its history, even if this history wants nothing more even today than to finish the job." This is only one route of scholarly exploration, but it is a powerful one. Another approach might document what researcher Anna Tsing calls the "zone of awkward engagement" between different systems of knowledge, and how both anti-modern and western capitalist approaches can be made equally strange.<sup>7</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: ON SITUATED RECONSTRUCTION

The architecture schools at Portland State University and the University of Utah share a commitment to what they respectively call Public Interest Design and

Community-Engaged Learning. Both are aware of the fine line between the transformative potentials of their programs and the temptation to use community-based design as a mere extension of students' professionalization. As the critical anthropologist Tania Li points out, they ask at what point does partnership with community groups turn to trusteeship, or "the intent which is expressed by one source of agency to develop the capacities of another."<sup>8</sup>

While shifting the content of pedagogy and scholarship is crucial to understanding where particular pedagogical approaches fall in this tricky territory, one key thing to reflect on is how faculty and students understand their own positioning or situatedness.<sup>9</sup> To this question, two considerations not yet touched on are important: the genre in which content is being delivered, and the identity of those producing it.

The genres we undertake to express our social or political aspirations say as much as the content of our efforts. How one writes, how one teaches, and how one practices reflect the habits of mind, relationships to others, and methods of communication that need to be considered when formulating alternatives to normative models. As an academic journal following the pattern of peer-reviewed scholarly production, *Dialectic* itself plays into normative notions of expert-validated knowledge. To counteract this, we work to mentor and exchange feedback with writers, rather than creating an antagonistic relationship between the arbiters of knowledge and those seeking to gain access to the rewards of inclusion.

To the second point, our contributors draw attention to some of the structuring forces that organize critical scholarship today. As contributing authors, we have three South Asian women, all of whom are trained in elite western academies, and one contribution from a linguistically French team. This speaks perhaps to who carries the burden of post-colonial scholarship, with the former English colonies holding a privileged position in "speaking for" a diverse range of global experiences. We also have two teams of recent graduate students, both influenced by experiences in Public Interest Design and design-build education. This might represent, we argue, the success of these programs in augmenting students' abilities to critically

reflect on their own pedagogical experiences and resultant professional positions. It also speaks to the ways their respective programs have encouraged collaborative practice over individual production.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the glaring omission that resulted from our process and procedures. In short, whose voices are absent? We sorely miss voices from indigenous scholars, a diverse group in and of itself who has significant stakes in the questions we are asking. Their absence is the strongest indication of the preliminary nature of our conclusions. The reason for their absence is first due to their lack of representation in the academy more generally and perhaps also the lack of support these scholars get for their efforts once admitted. In addition, decolonization theory and discussions of race in the U.S.—especially regarding the Black experience—have never found a comfortable ground of exchange. In a field where both of these discussions are highly underdeveloped, we hope that this issue and the one that follows provide a forum for productive exchange between these realms. This issue's silences likely also have to do with the framing of the proposal or the circulation of the brief, which likely appealed to the institutional and intellectual circle surrounding the editors—namely, those emerging from white-dominated, Eurocentric and elite institutions. While acknowledging these absences, we hope our contributions, and especially those of the included authors, encourage a diversification of pedagogical approaches that reach from the scale of the individual scholar to the structuring of entire curricula. The institutional shifts and incentives needed to produce a truly reconstructive pedagogy are difficult but attainable, and we hope our institutions might be models for others who feel the urgency of this proposal. ■

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## ENDNOTES

1. Keith Diaz Moore, "Dean's Welcome," <http://www.cap.utah.edu/our-mission/> (accessed Jan 10, 2018).
2. Frédérique Apffel-Marglin attributes the connection between university and factory to Emmanuel Kant, the grand architect of modern education that today dominates the entire globe. Referring to *The Conflict of the Faculties*, first published in 1798, she notes:  
  
At the very beginning of his famous work Kant invokes—rather offhandedly—the factory as the model for the university and the organisation of knowledge (*fabrikenmaessig*) with its 'division of labour, so that for every branch of the sciences there would be a public teacher or professor appointed as its trustee, and all of these together would form a kind of learned community called a university' (Kant 1979: 23).  
  
Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, "From Fieldwork to Mutual Learning: Working with PRATEC," *Environmental Values* 11 (2002): 359.
3. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
4. Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, "From Fieldwork to Mutual Learning: Working with PRATEC," *Environmental Values* 11 (2002): 345–67. Quote from p. 347.
5. Marrie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2013); Mark Jarzombek, "Modernity and the Chieftain Continuum" *Dialectic VII*: 63–73.
6. Roy Nash, "Bourdieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1990), 431–447.
7. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
8. Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*, 2007, 5.
9. The dependence of \*meaning (and/or \*identity) on the specifics of particular sociohistorical, geographical, and cultural—from *Oxford Reference*.