DIALECTIC IV

ARCHITECTURE AT SERVICE
A PROFESSION BETWEEN LUXURY PROVISION, PUBLIC AGENCY, AND COUNTER-CULTURE
Dialectic is the refereed journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Utah since 2012 providing a forum for the true spirit of dialectical thinking. This journal brings together the most compelling opposing voices in the discipline today, interrogating the issues, values, methods, and debates that are important to the community of educators at the University of Utah and abroad.

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DIALECTIC IV: ARCHITECTURE AT SERVICE?
A Profession between Luxury Provision, Public Agency, and Counter-Culture

When defining architecture, the debate codified in mid-nineteenth century as "Architecture: Art or Profession" is far from dead. The emphasis on the primacy of the program, function, and technological problem solving is still robust; though there is no consensus among its champions about the addressee of architectural design. Should architecture be serving the interests of the client, the users, or the vision of the architect? Should its primary duty be to the profession, the debates in the media, or the symbolic client, namely the public at large? The opponents of this faction, in turn, insist on artistic freedom from such constraints and call for the autonomy of the discipline. Art-architects as well as practitioners of architectural history, aesthetic philosophy, and semiotics dominate this school of thought. These questions are highly charged with political and ideological leaning, full of consequences for teaching, practice, and society, and therefore in need of dialectical interrogation.

Following a liberal reading, architects belong to the tertiary service sector and could serve as a poster child for open market competition: which other profession would ask its members to fight for commissions through public anonymous call for proposals to be judged by blind peer review? And even if this idealizing view of architectural competition has been passed by real existing practice and society, the general notion of architects providing planning and design services for institutional and private clients cannot be disputed.

In a more conservative interpretation—and with a sense of realpolitik—architecture cannot but serve the interest of its stakeholders, which are traditionally members of the financial, political, and intellectual elites. Architectural services are provided only for those being able to pay, and since the fees of architects are closely connected to construction costs, there is a clear relationship between investment per cubic unit and architectural design intensity. Traditionally architects were spared for the most valued building tasks within society: the temples, churches and shrines, the palaces and private villas, the monuments, state institutions, and corporate headquarters. Although this close link between architecture and power has been challenged repeatedly, the reality of the practice today still is one of delivering luxury goods. Since this problem is one of architectural representation, architects and critics following this worldview hope for the "enlightened" affluent client (institutional, corporate, or private) to commission the artistically most advanced designers, so that they may carry out daring experiments, for the progress of contemporary culture and the discipline at large.

Seen from a more materialist perspective, architecture is part of the intellectual superstructure of culture as well as of the productive base of society. Architects are involved in matter of fact processes of production and organization of labor, in the distribution of goods, products, and services, and in the provision of reproduction of labor forces. Therefore, architecture and the built landscape represent the societal forces by necessity—there is simply no other way than to think, design and build a neo-liberal architecture within a neo-liberal society. Architects would first have to understand and then take into account the work of the intellectual as "producer" within the production process, within the larger socio-economic system, as Walter Benjamin and Manfredo Tafuri have already suggested. From a slightly different angle thinkers of critical theory have argued for a more dialectical relationship between culture and base, where vanguard architecture might reserve a space of semi-autonomy that would allow for a critical comment and progressive practice within the existing societal forces. Or if this alternative practice is hard to find within the design community, then at least there might be room for an alternative counter-culture within everyday use, appropriation, and practice of the city...

Dialectic IV convenes contributions with new takes on the long-held proposition that architects are providers of design services. They service everyone from the status quo all the way to the subaltern. We know well how architects have historically fashioned themselves to be able to procure the most valued building commissions a people have to offer. But how have the members of the same profession managed to fashion themselves as the custodians of the public good?

Following the thematic issues of Dialectic II on architecture and economy and Dialectic III on design-build, the fourth issue of our peer-review journal explores architecture at service—of whom, for whom, service to what ideals and realized how?

Ole W. Fischer
Mira (Mimi) Locher, FAIA, LEED AP

Mimi Locher is an educator, writer, and practicing architect working in the U.S. and Japan. She is the Chair of the School of Architecture at the University of Utah and a partner in Kajika Architecture. She is the author of three books, Super Potato Design, Traditional Japanese Architecture, and Zen Gardens.
I am very pleased to introduce the fourth volume of *Dialectic*, the journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Utah. As with our first three issues, we wish to employ this journal to engage the academic community in a dialectical discourse on issues that are meaningful and timely in our School, our location in the western United States, and the discipline of architecture in general. As Prescott Muir, our previous Chair of the School, noted in the introduction to *Dialectic I*, the point is “reconciliation” through “persuasive dialogue” rather than continuing the conflict of “polarized and obdurate public discourse.” We began the series with a look at the problem, theory, and practice of architecture as we engage it at the University of Utah—the ways in which our local culture and environment mingle with the ideas of our students and faculty to address “global perspectives for taking local action.”

*Dialectic II: Architecture between Boom and Bust* focused on the intrinsic relationship of the economy and architecture and the changing role of the architect within that sometimes uncomfortable alliance. The inequalities, dilemmas, and potentialities embedded within the economic cycle are part and parcel of the practice and teaching of architecture. The third volume, *Dialectic III: Dream of Building or the Reality of Dreaming*, looked at the role of design-build pedagogy and practices in today’s architecture curricula and in the realm of not-for-profit architectural design. As our own design-build program, DesignBuildBLUFF, celebrated its tenth anniversary, it seemed an appropriate time to review its history and stake out the future for design-build programs and practices.

*Dialectic IV: Architecture at Service?* builds on one of the issues inherent in our and many design-build programs and addresses a topic that is central to the School of Architecture—service. As we firmly believe and declare in our vision and mission, “Architects must respect and respond to the communities in which they work. The School of Architecture has a proud tradition of community engagement. Our students and faculty enable communities and clients to connect their values with making and the production of space. An architect should be a dedicated team player and seek to elevate everyone in the community through collaboration. They should be constantly curious, learning, and expanding their understanding of culture and the impact of architecture on communities.”

Engaging with and serving communities through a variety of architectural activities is at the core of who we are as a School of Architecture. Even before entering the undergraduate architecture major, students in prerequisite architecture courses are introduced to the concept of leveraging architecture for the service of others. Throughout the undergraduate and graduate curricula, we seek to understand and learn from the diverse communities found in our locale, those drawn together by common cultural experiences, spirituality, work, immigration, education, refugee status, the draw of the mountains or desert, and the like. We consider the role of the built environment in these communities, and how we, as designers and architects, can raise awareness of the value of a well-designed built environment. We learn from communities to understand their assets, dreams, and needs. With these communities, we pose questions that have architectural implications. How do we create a point of pause along a town trail? What is the 21st century Girl Scout cabin? How can a new facility best serve the urban homeless population?

While we have earned a national reputation for our DesignBuildBLUFF program and the houses designed and constructed by our students on the Navajo Nation lands in southeastern Utah, we strive to further embed that program in the community, to serve greater community needs. These kinds of efforts also extend...
beyond the state of Utah, to places we engage with through carefully crafted study tours. In New York City, students visited architecture firms and city offices, asking how the actions of architects can aid in the recovery from a horrendous act of terrorism and help rebuild the human spirit. In Ofunato, Japan, students met with local citizens and government officials and asked how the built environment can be designed both for safety and the elevation of the human soul. In summer 2016, students will get to know the Puerto Rican population in Chicago and ask how abandoned buildings can be revitalized to support the local culture, community, and economy. These are but a few of our students’ opportunities to consider architecture in the role of service.

We know, however, that in the world outside of the university, our graduates have to make difficult choices about who and how they want to serve as architects. In 2004, Bryan Bell wrote “Designing for the 98% without Architects,” his foreword to Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service through Architecture. Bell introduced the 98% by showing us that only 2% of new home buyers work with architects. The great majority of the population of the United States has little or no access to professional design services. While we strive to combat that overwhelming statistic in the academy, we know that the professional world faces different kinds of constraints. This issue of Dialectic addresses those needs and constraints.

I am grateful for the consistent efforts of our Dialectic team, led by faculty editor Ole Fischer with Shundana Yusaf, José Galarza, Prescott Muir, and graduate assistant Joseph Briggs. Their work encompasses the entirety of each issue—from determining engaging topics, to soliciting, selecting, and editing the included texts, working with reviewers, designing the layout, to seeing the issue through publication and distribution. The continued success of the journal is due to their devotion and hard work. I invite you to read, contemplate, question, and enjoy it. And please consider contributing your ideas and writing—the call for papers for Dialectic V: The Figure of Vernacular in Architectural Imagination can be found at the back of this issue.

Mira Locher, Chair

ENDNOTES


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Prescott Muir is a tenured professor and former chair in the School of Architecture at the University of Utah where he continues to teach a range of subjects from the Introduction to Architecture to the Capstone Graduate Design Studio. He received his graduate degree from Columbia University and first professional degree from the University of Southern California. His interest in the art history of architecture began at the University of Utah where he holds a BFA degree in painting and drawing. He started his practice in apprenticeship to James Pulliam and Paolo Soleri that continues with offices in Salt Lake and Los Angeles. In 2012 ORO Editions published a monograph on his work entitled, It By Bit. He has acted as a visiting critic, exhibited and lectured widely, served on design award juries, been recognized in the national press and received numerous design awards. In 2008 he was elevated in the category of design to the AIA College of Fellows.
RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF AN ARCHITECTURAL AVANT-GARDE IN AND FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

JOAN OCKMAN

ABSTRACT

Has the concept of an avant-garde outlived its usefulness in architecture? Should it be consigned to the dustbin of twentieth-century ideas? Or can it be reinvented and made meaningful and serviceable for a progressive culture of architecture in the twenty-first century? This essay explores this question, offering a rather surprising answer. Challenging the received understanding of the avant-garde—from Peter Bürger through Manfredo Tafuri and beyond—as primarily negational, it reaches back to the origin of the term in French military usage, arguing that the avant-garde performs an essential service with respect to the main body by going out front in order to scout what is on the horizon and to lead the way forward. In this sense, the text emphasizes, the avant-garde should always be understood as part of the larger social collectivity. This suggests that a new narrative of avant-garde architecture needs to be written that concerns itself more with institutions than with individual authors, more with effective strategies for advancing socially desirable visions of the future than with radicalism for its own sake.

AN OUTRAGEOUS PROPOSAL

I want to begin with a proposition that may sound outrageous: “Architecture can be of service to society only when it becomes truly avant-garde.” Does this statement seem hopeless to you? You are probably thinking that the whole concept of avant-gardism ought to be consigned to the dustbin of exhausted twentieth-century ideas. Wasn’t the so-called historical avant-garde in architecture—the one of the 1920s—a pathetic failure? Wasn’t it a casualty of its own naiveté? All those projects to radically transform society through new technologies, rational planning, and standardized production! Didn’t they mostly end up buttressing the system in power? Wasn’t the slogan in Le Corbusier’s Vers une architecture—“architecture or revolution”—addressed, at least in part, to the captains of French industry?1 Certainly Messieurs les industriels grasped that by giving workers decent housing they could get better productivity and compliance out of them. Herbert Marcuse gave a name to this: “repressive desublimation.” It meant satisfying desire at a lower level than the one at which the desire actually exists.2 And notoriously the residents of Le Corbusier’s workers housing at Pessac rebelled, asserting their right to determine at least the décor of their own homes.3 And what about those idealistic artists and architects in the USSR and their sympathizers—true believers who created exuberant agitprop posters and scenography for the streets of Soviet cities; who quit making art in order to design functional clothing and equipment for the New Man and New Woman of a new communist society, even abandoning their studios to become factory workers themselves;4 who drew up expert plans to house Stakhanovite workers in remote and frigid outposts of heavy industry? What good did they accomplish? If they didn’t acquiesce to being accomplices to a brutal regime, didn’t they just become its victims?
And later in the twentieth century, what about the so-called neo-avant-gardes? Those who—doubly disillusioned by the collapse of the politically engaged architects of the ‘20s and then by the experience of those who quixotically dreamed, yet again, of transforming social relations in the ‘60s—retreated into “autonomy,” into purely aesthetic forms of practice? Or those who, in the name of postmodernism, having disembroiled themselves of the moralism of modernism, gleefully celebrated an “end of prohibitions,” repeating the heroic gestures of their predecessors, but now ironically or as a joke?5

And more recently: what of those avant-gardists who have turned architecture into a fashionable commodity and themselves into celebrities? Who have put their signatures equally on museums and handbags? Isn’t the word **avant-garde** at this point simply a synonym for “cutting edge,” a tool for branding and marketing, a style option for the creative class? Hasn’t the avant-garde become, as Thomas Crow nicely put it a generation ago, a research and development arm of the culture industry?6

**WHAT IS AN AVANT-GARDE?**

Let’s back up. What exactly is an avant-garde? We’re talking primarily about architecture here, but unhelpfully for our field this fraught term has largely been framed and elaborated by critics and historians in other disciplines. Among the various theories that have been put forward in the last half-century, Peter Bürger’s has undoubtedly been a flashpoint, even as it has also been qualified and criticized. Bürger’s book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* appeared in German in 1974 and in a second edition in 1980.7 A scholar of comparative literature much influenced by the Frankfurt School philosophers, he based his definition largely on his own earlier work on Dada and Surrealism.

What Bürger argued was that the avant-garde of the period 1910–1925 represented a third phase of modern art’s development. In the first phase, which coincided with the rise of bourgeois society in the mid-eighteenth century, artists became independent of their former court patrons and entered the marketplace. But they also strove to maintain their distance from the world of everyday commerce and, in accord with Immanuel Kant’s definition of art as “purposeless purposiveness,” claimed a higher, more spiritual value for their work. With the emergence of the Romantic movement early in the nineteenth century, the figure of the artistic genius came into being, an individual whose work was in critical tension with society at large, but who still dreamed of bringing about a more beautiful and harmonious future world.

The second phase in modern art’s development occurred in the late nineteenth century as artists found themselves further alienated, not only from a materialist society but also from an ugly industrial civilization. In this phase, exemplified by the Symbolist and Aesthetic movements, they sought to remove themselves from the world completely, taking refuge in the dreamworld of pure form. This development was the historical and dialectical precondition for the third phase, that of the twentieth-century avant-garde(s). Attempting to overcome, or “sublate,” the divide between art and life, and to reintegrate their work with existing social realities, they lashed out against the false organicism and escapism of the *fin de siècle* artists, repudiating not just their nostalgia for a preindustrial civilization but also the institutional edifice of high art. While by 1910 the artistic mainstream began to embrace new technologies and to take metropolitan life as subject matter, a cadre of radicals took a more extreme position; they sought not just to renovate the preceding aesthetic tradition but to dismantle it completely. It was precisely this demolition work, directed against art’s institutional status and function in society, that was the hallmark of avant-gardism for Bürger. For the first time in history, art recognized itself as an ideological construction and became its own object of criticism:

> "The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practice once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society.‘"8
Yet this project of returning art to “life praxis” would be undone by capitalism and its ability to co-opt any and all challenges to its logic. By the second half of the twentieth century the negation of negation—of the avant-garde’s attacks on society—led to the emergence of a new institutional art practice, that of the neo-avant-garde. This, according to Bürger, marked the counter-revolutionary final stage in the avant-garde’s development. At this point, the most challenging work of the 1920s was relegated to a pedestal in the museum, as Marcel Duchamp had brilliantly anticipated with his urinal-fountain, and elite and mass culture became indistinguishable, though not in the way the earlier artists had hoped when they dreamed of overcoming the difference between art and life. The restoration of art’s institutional vocation and status by way of this historical process left Bürger ultimately to speculate, in a wistful echo of Adorno, whether some degree of autonomy from reality was not necessary, precisely in order for art to retain “that free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable.”

Since the 1970s the inevitability of Bürger’s narrative of the rise and fall of the avant-garde has been contested by a variety of critics. Among the earliest and most articulate were a group of formalist-inspired art historians and theorists associated with the journal *October*. Rosalind Krauss, for one, hailed postmodernist art as a major breakthrough in her essay “The Originality of the Avant-Garde” (1981), arguing that the originality of the most significant contemporary artwork lay in its reversal of the earlier avant-garde’s premium on originality; what was innovative and critical in the work of Sherrie Levine, for example, was precisely her copying of the work of other artists. While Benjamin Buchloh initially remained more skeptical regarding the value of the neo-avant-garde’s “paradigm repetitions,” his younger colleague Hal Foster, in an essay titled “Who’s Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde” (1996), made the case that the neo-avant-garde represented a genuinely new and useful development inasmuch as its belated or deferred perspective allowed it, “at its best,” to comprehend and expand the meaning of the earlier avant-garde’s experience in a way that was impossible the first time around. Interestingly, as the initial formalist bias of the *October* critics increasingly became inflected with poststructuralist perspectives in the 1980s and ’90s, they moved closer to the discursive framework of institutional critique. This not only enabled them to better elucidate the relationship of contemporary art to the museum, the gallery, and the art market, but brought them more in line with the institutional focus of Bürger. At the same time, they and other critics also demonstrated persuasively that Bürger’s effort to extract an overarching theory of the avant-garde from his narrow reading of Dada and Surrealism was flawed inasmuch as it was unable to account satisfactorily for less socially engaged movements (Cubism and De Stijl, for example) or for less negational ones like Russian Constructivism. It was evident that modern art was a complex and plural field of cultural production, and so were the various avant-garde tendencies associated with it.

WHAT DOES PETER BÜRGER’S THEORY HAVE TO DO WITH ARCHITECTURE?

The criticism of Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* for being insufficiently differentiated must also be extended to his treatment of architecture, which he neglects almost completely. In fact, the avant-garde in architecture has hardly been theorized at all, with a single notable exception: Manfredo Tafuri’s *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*. Not surprisingly, given both its architectural focus and its density, the book has been largely ignored by those outside the field of architecture. Published in Italian in 1980 but based on essays written over the course of the previous decade, Tafuri’s disillusioned account, like Bürger’s, was written in the aftermath of the 1960s and at the beginning of the contentious debates over postmodernism. Having already witheringly dismissed attempts to rekindle “hopes in design” in his earlier book *Architecture and Utopia* (1973), he now added an acerbic critique of the historicist and Pop-cultural pastiches that he saw emerging on the international scene in the late seventies. “Architecture as politics is by now such an exhausted myth that it is pointless to waste any more words on it,” Tafuri writes in the book’s introduction.

Indeed, if any self-respecting left-wing architects remained after the experience of the 1960s—if any of them managed to retain some tattered remnants of social idealism—Tafuri’s intransigent verdict on architecture’s situation in contemporary society could only have induced a more profound sense of depression. As
the subtitle of his book indicates, his genealogy of the avant-garde begins in the eighteenth century, although, unlike Bürger’s, in Italy rather than France. His point of departure is Piranesi, an architect-draftsman whom Tafuri presents in the opening chapters as the earliest protagonist to discover the principle of transgression as a radical form of architectural behavior. Piranesi’s “wicked” pleasure in breaking architecture’s rules—ignoring the laws of perspective in his *Carceri* series, undermining the authority of architectural language as a *grammaire raisonnée*, and disarticulating form to the point of formlessness in his *Campo Marzio* drawings—constituted, according to the Venice historian, an explo-sive attack on bourgeois conventions of propriety and a critical dissection of architecture. “They despise my novelty, I their timidity,” Piranesi inscribed on one of his etchings.17 In Tafuri’s eyes, it was this “discovery of the negative,” the revelation that “[a]rchitecture is nothing more than a sign and an arbitrary construction,” that made Piranesi a proto-avant-garde architect.18

Moreover, Piranesi’s audacious acts of creative destruction were also, and above all, an assertion of artistic freedom, or at least the fantasy of it. His “adven-tures” thus become the inception of an itinerary that leapfrogs, in Tafuri’s discontinuous narrative, over the nineteenth century into the early twentieth. Exposed now to the shocks of modern life, to a metropolis characterized by anonymous economic and social relations and relentless sensory bombardment, the most radical inheritors of Piranesi’s emancipated aesthetics responded anarchically, founding movements like Italian Futurism and German Expressionism. Yet these militantly utopian manifestations would find their limit by the end of the 1920s, brought up short by new realities, their agency increasingly circumscribed by repressive regimes, their dream of freedom ultimately illusory.

This is the story, played out in different geographic contexts and at different operational scales, that occupies the long central section of *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*. Tafuri’s book then culminates symmetrically with a concluding pair of chapters on the neo-avant-garde. And here the historian more or less confirms, with respect to architecture, Bürger’s verdict on the cultural production of the 1970s. In the work of the most intellectually rigorous architects of the day—Aldo Rossi, James Stirling, and the Five Architects of New York among the principal exemplars—architecture retreats once again into an ivory tower of pure form-making, isolating itself from the world of everyday life so as to better pursue its own games of seduction. Tafuri takes the metaphor in the title of his penultimate chapter, “L’Architecture dans le Boudoir,” from a book of 1795 by the Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. Sade had maintained that the best way for the sexual libertine to preserve the fantasy of potency and eroticism was to keep the boudoir completely sealed off from outside distractions. Likewise, Tafuri sug-gests, architecture can best sustain the illusion of its own power within the closed chamber of architectural form; here what were once “languages of battle” [for the earlier avant-garde] can flourish as “languages of pleasure”—although without the liberating release achieved by Piranesi, and with a symptomatic sadomasochistic cruelty.19 But what other options existed at this point? No less troubling to Tafuri were those who were attempting in the 1970s to reconstruct more humanistic utopias. Louis Kahn’s effort to design build-ings that harked back to a bygone era of institutional grandeur and republican virtue or, alternatively, Robert Venturi’s exaltation of the “ephemeral icons” of popular culture and commerce were no less guilty of escap-ism.20 In Tafuri’s view, Kahn and Venturi were just the opposite side of the coin of Rossi, Stirling, and Eisenman. “Upon awakening,” as he writes in the concluding sentence of the book, the contemporary architect could only come up against “a ruthless wall,” his superfluous “image of estrangement” no compensation for the iron laws of reality.21

**BACK TO THE BEGINNING**

Against these aporias traced by both Bürger and Tafuri, and in contrast to the efforts by some postmodern intel-lectuals to defend the existence of a still potent oppositional force within the neo-avant-garde, I want to try to take a completely different tack here. To do so it will be useful to return to the original meaning of the term *avant-garde*, if only to underscore the contradic-tion that exists in this concept from the outset. As many commentators have pointed out, the term originally came into cultural usage from military vocabulary. Starting in the fifteenth century, *avant-garde* referred to an army’s forward march. The avant-garde was the portion that was deputed to go out front in order to re-
connoiter, to skirmish with the enemy as necessary, and to report back to the main body about conditions ahead. The Online Etymological Dictionary quotes a 1901 book on military strategy by a French general and expert on Napoleonic warfare:

"The avant-garde générale, avant-garde stratégique, or avant-garde d'armée is a strong force (one, two, or three army corps) pushed out a day's march to the front, immediately behind the cavalry screen. Its mission is, vigorously to engage the enemy wherever he is found, and, by binding him, to ensure liberty of action in time and space for the main army."22

Within the cultural domain, the term made its first appearance at the beginning of the nineteenth century around the same time that military science was becoming a subject of systematic academic study. One of the first instances of this semantic transfer may be found in a book of 1825 titled *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles*, which contains the thought of the French utopian socialist Henri de Saint-Simon. It concludes with an imaginary dialogue among an artist, a scientist, and an industrialist. The passage reads:

"It is we artists who will serve as your avant-garde [qui vous servirons d'avant-garde] since art's power has greatest immediacy and rapidity. ... Since we address ourselves to mankind's imagination and sentiments, our work inevitably exerts the strongest and most decisive effects. And if today we appear to play no role, or only a very minor one, this is because the arts lack what they need most for their energy and success, namely a common impulse and a unifying idea."23

Looking forward to a day "when egoism, that bastard fruit of civilization, has been pushed back to its last defenses, when literature and the fine arts will have put themselves at the head of the movement and finally aroused in society a passion for its own well-being," the artist exclaims:

"What destiny more beautiful for the arts than to exercise a positive power over society, to play a true priestly role [un véritable sacerdoce], and to charge ahead at the forefront of all the intellec-

tual faculties in the era of their greatest development!"24

Two decades later, a similar usage occurs in an article by the art critic and theorist Désiré Laverdant, a follower of the other preeminent nineteenth-century utopian social theorist, Charles Fourier, and also addressing itself to the mission and role of the artist in society:

"Art, as expression of society, manifests, in its highest development, the most advanced social tendencies; it is the precursor and the revealer. Yet to know whether art is fulfilling its role as initiator worthily, whether the artist is truly avant-garde [si l'artiste est bien à l'avant-garde], it is necessary to know where humanity is headed, what the destiny of the human race is."25

One further instance, which also emphasizes the artist's prescience, may be cited from an architectural context. The author is César Daly, editor of the monumental French journal *Revue générale de l'architecture*. A staunch believer in human progress and advocate of a central role for modern architecture in advancing it, Daly was also a habitué of Fourierist circles. In his introductory editorial for the Revue of 1856, he emphasizes that the journal's mission is more than to document contemporary architectural work; it is "to be an active scout of the path to the future" [remplir la mission active d'éclaireur sur la route de l'avenir].26 Although Daly uses the military term éclaireur rather than avant-garde, the idea is no different: the historically appointed destiny of a progressive architectural culture is to lead the main body and make it aware of what lies on the horizon.

The utopian socialist visions of Saint-Simon and Fourier closely overlapped, both philosophers being driven by revolutionary ardor to overhaul bourgeois society and by the belief that art must be instrumental in that endeavor. But it is worth noting that there was a significant difference between their outlooks, one that verges on contradiction. Close to the leading engineers at the École Polytechnique in Paris, Saint-Simon envisaged a society led by an elite trinity of scientists, industrialists, and artists operating as a vanguard at the very center of a modern mass society. Fourier, on the other hand, an idiosyncratic genius with rather bizarre views
about human relationships and other matters, had a more decentralized view of the ideal future society; he embodied this in his concept of the phalanstery, an experimental community defined less by its relations with society at large than by its nature as its enclave character. (Incidentally, the term phalanstère is also of military derivation, related to the word phalanx.) This philosophical difference persists into the twentieth-century conception of the avant-garde, which, as I have suggested, vacillates ambiguously between the poles of social engagement and aesthetic autonomy.

TOWARD A (NEW) ARCHITECTURAL AVANT-GARDE?

In the case of architecture, however, the contradiction between engagement and autonomy tends to be nullified, undercut by the specific nature of architecture as a discipline and a professional institution. Unlike the other arts, architecture can never truly be autonomous, at least not if the architect sees her vocation as to build actual buildings in the world. The architect does not have the prerogative not to work within existing power structures. Unavoidably she is obliged to work at the level of both the superstructure and the base, to provide services that are both immaterial and material, artistic, and technological. She is generally subject to real-world constraints—economic, legal, financial, environmental—to a much greater degree than her counterparts in other cultural fields. For this reason, an entirely different conceptualization of avant-garde practice is required, one that does not boil down to a matter of negation, as it does for Bürger, or transgression, as for Tafuri. Indeed, it seems evident that the distinctions on which the dominant theory of the avant-garde has turned for the last century—between engagement and autonomy, opposition and affirmation, radical praxis, and establishment modernism—are, when it comes to architecture, inapplicable or, more precisely, relative rather than absolute.

Sozialreform
oder
Revolution?

Mit einem Vorwort:
Militz und Militarismus.

Von
Rosa Luxemburg.

Umgang 1899
Verlagsanstalt und Verlagsbuchhandlung der Neupauer Buchhandlung
Ö. Gebrüder.

Figure 1: Rosa Luxemburg, Social Reform or Revolution?, 1899.

ARCHITECTURE
OU RÉVOLUTION

Figure 2: Le Corbusier, "Architecture or Revolution?" from: Vers une Architecture, 2nd edition, 1924.
This returns me to my initial proposition, to be rethought now in light of architecture’s unique nature as an institution. And the gist of my argument is the following: the role, the only role, that forward-thinking twenty-first-century architects can have in society today is neither anti-institutional nor extra-institutional but avant-institutional. Architects can be most “avant-garde” today by positioning themselves at the forefront of the most progressive social initiatives. In doing so, they will be challenging the default modes by which the profession provides design and planning services. Given historical experience, I realize that what I am calling for may sound like repackaged liberalism, or worse, simply fantasy. But let me suggest that it’s a form of realism. Call it radical realism.

For what I have in mind is not really a matter of the architect’s agency at all, at least not per se. It’s instead a sober anticipation of how the practice of architecture will change—will have to change—in response to impending twenty-first-century developments. At the largest scale, the most pressing of these will most likely be related to the effects of hyper-urbanization in cities around the globe and to a cascade of environmental consequences unleashed by current modes of industrial production. Such complex twenty-first-century realities—which it does not take a Buckminster Fuller to predict with certainty—will demand to be addressed by those who have the professional training to do so. Architects who have long complained about their profession’s marginalization, about the small percentage of the built environment they have had a hand in creating—is it 20%?—will inevitably, if for no other reason than the specialized knowledge and practical experience they can bring to the task, be called upon to be of service.

In this context, it will be much harder for architects to go on producing what Tafuri a generation ago called a “negligible object,” for architecture to remain a trivial pursuit. The need for reconstruction of damaged or threatened built fabrics, for structures that can provide for uprooted and unsettled populations and essential social services, for the organization and planning of both new proximities and new mobilities—indeed, for the redistribution of spatial resources on a planetary scale—is bound to become so urgent in the century ahead that the almighty profit motive will be forced to yield its stranglehold over our present approaches and principles of action. Starchitecture? A luxury no one will be able to afford.

This is not apocalyptic science fiction. Nor is it a Machiavellian theory of acceleration—a strategy for bringing about the revolution sooner rather than later. As far as the environment is concerned, those who could be written off as Cassandras in the 1960s and ’70s (and even as recently as Al Gore’s bid for the American presidency) have credibility today. Perhaps this is the beginning of an answer to the question of how to restore to architecture the tasks that capitalist development took away from it. Of course, the regime of global finance and the disparities of wealth and poverty engendered by it will not dissipate quickly. But it is already evident that architects cannot as easily vaunt top-down, aestheticized views of grim bottom-up realities. “Research,” it is increasingly being realized, is not neutral; like the report of the military scout, knowledge and data collection have to be put to use. (One thinks of Rem Koolhaas flying over Lagos in a helicopter borrowed from the Nigerian president, observing how what on the ground appeared to be pure chaos resolved itself from above into a spectacular pattern of “metabolism and flows.” This perspective on things is passé.28)

Finally, I must be perfectly clear that I do not see salvation as coming from a new elite of high-tech producers. The technocratic dreams of the Saint-Simonians belong to another age. So do the early visions of Le Corbusier, their descendant. And so will the digital-architecture priesthood of current vintage become an anachronism. But I believe that architecture-related institutions that have their eye on the future, that have a realistic and critically informed understanding of current developments, and—not least—that possess a democratic and ethical esprit de corps can precipitate positive incremental change today.

The kind of institutions I have in mind include experimental schools, activist city administrations, open-minded organizations that foster collaborations with researchers and workers in adjacent professions and trades, and museums and publications that are independent in outlook. From a historical standpoint, there are plenty of precedents for constructing an alternative account of the architectural avant-garde along these
lines, one focused less on individual buildings and authors and more on collective contexts of production orchestrated by visionary thinkers. Such a history would encompass well-known examples like the Bauhaus and the Vkhutemas; but also Ernst May’s New Frankfurt, the municipal architects of Red Vienna, and the GEHAG of Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut in Berlin; the Landesmuseum of Alexander Dorner in Hannover and the London Underground of Frank Pick;29 the planners of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the postwar architecture department of the London County Council; the Institute of Design in Chicago under László Moholy-Nagy and the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm under Max Bill and then Tomás Maldonado and others; perhaps even a corporate firm like Skidmore Owings & Merrill in its early years. Each of these institutions belongs to a particular time and place; none was a permanent or unqualified success. Yet they refused to remain subservient or servile with respect to the status quo. All were conscious to a greater or lesser extent of the need to operate strategically and critically in relation to the existing ideology and system of power, and all were convinced that the services they were performing would help improve life for the many rather than the few.

ENDNOTES
8. Ibid., 49.
9. Ibid., 54.
13. For Buchloh’s subsequent repudiation of his earlier affinity with Bürger’s position and his criticism of the latter’s refusal to recognize the specificity and relevance of art practices that emerged after World War II, see the introduction to his book Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), xiii–xxiii.
16. The Sphere and the Labyrinth, 8.
18. The Sphere and the Labyrinth, 54.
19. Ibid., 301.
20. Ibid., 295.
21. Ibid., 303.
24. Ibid., 347. See also the translation of these passages in Donald Drew Egbert, “The Idea of ‘Avant-garde’ in Art and Politics,” American History Review 73 (December 1967), 343.


27. The Sphere and the Labyrinth, 294.


ABSTRACT

"In-service" implies a sense of purpose or value beyond itself. *Sui Generis* builds a case for architecture of the in-between. That is a call for a long overdue rapprochement in the historic argument between the ancients and the moderns or as applied to architecture, between the practices of the workshop and those of the enlightened architect. By invoking Kirk Varnedoe definition of humans as "meaning makers", this essay reminds us, we are conditioned to convert the distracted to haptic that invariably diminishes if not extinguishes architecture's exceptional role. The meaning makers would simply invite seven billion more passive consumers. Whereas, architecture's value resides in its disruptive capacity to call us to "attention", in its service of the here and now, and its engagement not in the mapping of cognition or making of anything other than experience itself.

"To be an artist! Yes I wanted to be one, not only to escape from the material jail, where property large and small, imprisons us in a circle of odious little preoccupations, but to isolate myself from the control of opinion... to live away from the prejudices of the world."

George Sand

Ms. Sand’s indebtedness to the Rousseauian campaign against private property notwithstanding, we see here the early nineteenth century fealty to the western ideal of genius and the artist unfettered by utility, convention, material, and culture. The quote also reflects the Enlightenment's newly minted definition of the fine arts including not only visual artists but writers, musicians, and architects as disciplines no longer accountable to the everyday, rule-bound preoccupations of the workshop. Though many (Danton, Belting, Vattimo, Jameson, Bataille, Jencks, and Eisenman) have declared the death of the fine arts, architects' ambivalence towards income and associations with the job site suggests the influence of the Enlightenment persists. Indeed, in both the education and practice of architecture, the current emphasis on process, collaboration and engagement are historic attributes of the workshop as much as some novel way of thinking and doing. We may be merely viewing a resurgence of the historic argument between the ancients and moderns that played out in the late seventeenth century France.

Following Manfredo Tafuri's "architecture of the sublime uselessness;" from its inception the inclusion of architecture in the redefinition of the fine arts as modern and forward thinking was an uncomfortable fit for this purposeful discipline with a foot in both ancient and modernist camps. I am asked by colleagues who teach beginning design how to explain both architecture's commitment to the abstract and the utter disregard for the conventional thinking of incoming students. Their
conventions assume architecture is nothing more than metaphor closely aligned with market, cultural, and symbolic influences. Then invariably students will ask to just give them the rules by which they can determine and guarantee good architecture. My subconscious and no doubt flippant response is “there are no rules.” How can this be? Where does this notion come from, with its abiding commitment to the obscure? The National Architectural Accreditation Board’s (NAAB) rather rule-bound intrusion into the education of architects may reflect the discomfort with these abstract notions and thus begets a return to the methods better suited to the workshop, with its celebration of minimum competencies and disregard for the judgment of the eye. Outside of the academy, I’ve witnessed a similar populist backlash that has fostered people’s choice awards and such punitive rule-bound limits as zoning based design review that cedes design control to community councils and their more egregious corollary: covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) imposed by one neighbor upon another. All this is to impede the new and particular.

If architecture is the pause button, look away, or exception to the everyday as former Dean of Columbia University, Mark Wigley suggested in his advice to architecture students, then by definition the discipline must pose a resistance to the very process by which we convert the unfamiliar to the familiar through cognitive mapping. The human ability to process and assimilate new information is a product of millions of years of evolutionary development and thus a very sophisticated and practically automatic response. Our natural inclination as a matter of self-preservation is to move from a state of distraction or stress induced by the unfamiliar through interpretation and assimilation to a point of understanding and return to equilibrium. As Aristotle observed, we transfer metaphors from one object to identify and cognitively map another, or as contemporary behaviorists suggest, to lower stress and conserve energy. Therefore, if the aim of architecture is to slow down or distract this powerful cognitive process and maintain the object of fascination in some existential state of suspension, then it would seem counterproductive to burden the design process with the weight of metaphor and convention. After all, Beethoven never listened to the work of Mozart for fear of compromising his creative impulse.

What were the root causes of this autonomous behavior and are they still operative? Though the underlying impulses have changed, the attributes of this autonomy and its commitment to an architecture that defies cognition—and is thus perceived as inexplicable or even worthless—remains essential to the discipline. Indeed, as Kirk Varnedoe observes, “Art is the switching agent, receiving messages and sending it back out in code.” The modernist resistance to the complacent is a rather recent phenomenon compared to the workshop’s centuries-old acceptance of the habitual, with an emphasis on communicating methods and techniques from one generation to another. One deals with unraveling, the other with perpetuating. The modern idea of architecture is the pause or exception to the absent-minded flow of cognition.

Prior to the seventeenth century, for the previous two thousand years of recorded history the arts, and specifically architecture, were the domain of workshops in utilitarian service of religion and for the entertainment of aristocracy. The architectural product of the workshop represented the world in the way it presented itself. Unlike the workshop that mimics nature, modernism set up a reciprocal agreement between art and nature where art invites us to see nature differently. In this ancient workshop tradition, authorship was irrelevant, with the work often relegated to journeymen, shared between guilds without attribution, and completed over generational time. Craft and the mechanical arts of which architecture historically belonged were predicated upon replication, diligence, and adherence to Platonic rules such as the Vitruvian principle of “propriety” or purpose. The economic and social status of the architect was low due to its association with the Hellenistic and Roman notions of the “vulgar” as applied to manual and compensated labor, whereas “liberal” was free, intellectual, educated, and highbrow. Though something one would aspire to, even in the medieval era, architects continued to be associated with the humble trades such as cooking, horsemanship, and shoemaking.

Douglas Biow would suggest the emergence of autonomous behavior began in quattrocento Florence; however, it was more importantly codified on a national scale after the Fronde Revolt in seventeenth century France when Louis XIV consolidated power and cre-
ated the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture as retribution to the guilds for their patronage of the nascent nobility. We see the emergence of the fine arts as distinct and separate from the mechanical arts. By 1690 the French Dictionary identifies architecture as included in the fine or “elegant” arts, relieved of past “vulgar” associations. However, this was not a universally accepted proclamation, for the workshops and their adherence to rule-bound utility, imitation of nature, and precedent continued for 200 more years. At this time, there was an open quarrel about the supremacy of the moderns versus the ancients in their respective influence over science and the arts. Current calls for the very same attributes of the workshop, though naively disguised as unassailable new ways of thinking are simply the same old argument. It’s essentially a new call for imitating imitating.

The philosophical underpinning for the autonomy of the fine arts owes much to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s eighteenth century attack on the corrupting influence of property, and his adherence to pure honesty in Confessions. Rousseau was suggesting the fine arts be applied in service to society by supplanting the role of church and nobility. Notice here he opens the door to a new source of patronage. Not the unequivocal modernist, the Swiss iconoclast preferred a fine art of the public festival rather than the veneration of objects of art. However, with the benefit of the French Revolution, another philosopher, Immanuel Kant created the definition of innate genius and furthered the necessity for its autonomy. In practice architects, through the Academy and its invitation to court, aspired to emulate nobility by distancing themselves from physical labor and utility. The social ambition of the profession transcended the populism of the revolution and became, through the architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, the exemplar for independent spirit as represented by the George Sand quote that I began with. We see in Ledoux’s Salt Works a series of autonomous object buildings standing in isolation, each with its discrete character.

Kant, the first modern philosopher, defined the idea of creative genius as a purveyor of aesthetic content. The products of genius were inherently useless and unprofitable: “it is the patent of nobility.” He wrote, “taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.” Later the notion of taste and its body associations coincided with the elevation of sight or the “eye” as the preferred mediator for the newly articulated genius. By the mid 20th century we see the eye, at the expense of other senses, prevail as the sole determinant of aesthetic judgment as espoused by critics like Clement Greenberg. Arthur Schopenhauer added to Kant’s aesthetic ideas with “we rarely see the useful united with the beautiful ... the most beautiful buildings are not the useful ones; a temple is not a dwelling house.” The Romantic poet, John Keats, in conceding his life to art reminds us that everything [that matters] is spoiled by use. Indeed aesthetics could be appreciated innately as well as universally as long as it was not corrupted by property (commodification). Art and Architecture with capital A’s existed solely for aesthetic satisfaction and the pursuit of the sublime.

At first the new idea of aesthetics emulated the aristocracy’s disinterest in utility. Kant further insisted on “autonomy of the will as a fundamental premise of bourgeois freedom.” Then, by the early nineteenth century, rather than pandering to aristocracy in a post-French Revolutionary world of continuing conflict between the proletariat and the ancient Bourbon regime, aesthetics became the champion of the bourgeois and those economic forces that elevated the stature of the merchant class. With Kant’s a priori rejection of the moral philosophies of the ancients, the autonomous will of the artist became the supreme principle of be-
havior if not the justification of personal initiative and gain. The poet Friedrich Schiller suggested art is to supplant the profane by providing virtue and “rescue humanity’s lost dignity” in aspiring through art to a perfection previously attained only through religious adherence. Here architecture begins an endless pursuit of charisma and luxury that continues to this day. The artist’s new status is exemplified by Courbet’s portrait of a chance encounter with a respectful collector and his genuflecting servant.

Though the notion of a profession began innocently enough, it became propelled by Rousseau’s definition of the fine arts as discrete from the applied or mechanical arts that had previously informed the craft of architecture for millennia. Carried with the development of the arts as less obliged to specific patronage was the conflation of the sublime and useless at the expense of utility. Ultimately, the definition expanded to include the uncanny and grotesque, while various attempts were made to reclaim utility and the other attributes of the workshop. However these efforts were an external critique of industrial production and thus marginalized with little chance for success.

One noteworthy challenge to the disassociated fine arts and their bourgeois patronage came initially from a desire to infuse the Christian ethics of economy, material honesty, and social welfare into an otherwise secular movement. This was promulgated through the pious life example of the Nazarenes, idealistic images of the Pre-Raphaelites, and polemic of Ruskin, Pugin and Morris. Public nostalgia notwithstanding, the return to the workshop by William Morris and the English Arts and Crafts movement, with its attempts to merge the autonomy of the fine arts with conventions of a material bound craft, was inherently problematic. Here we see Morris instructing on a loom with his back to the students, educating not through dialogue but by imitation. He is effectively on stage as a maestro, both conducting and concealing, that suggests his reticence to fully concede the newfound notoriety of the artist. In the News from Nowhere, Morris projects a utopian future of the interdisciplinary, communal imitation of nature, honesty of hand labor, and social dynamic of the workshop. This romantic tome runs cross-current with the nineteenth century modes of production such as Taylorization and the time/space efficiency suggested by the single frame photography of Muybridge and Marey. Literally, Morris’s utopian future was a return to the ancient tradition of entertaining aristocracy by producing handmade objects only the rich could afford. Nonetheless, the longing for a better and more perfect English world as promoted by the Arts and Crafts...
movement touched a popular nerve that became a point of envy for the emerging German and Russian economies.

Freed from the feudal constraints of the workshop based economy of the Russian Tsars, Rodchenko, Malevich, and the Russian Constructivists and Suprematists created an abstraction based challenge to the influence of English Arts and Crafts by presenting a world that defied interpretation. The tabula rasa of radical cropping, overhead photographic views, and spatial constructs of Rodchenko challenged conventional perception and resisted the normative process of converting the unknown to the known. Because the images defied the generation of meaning, they remained alive and continued to provoke as a unique foil to the very regime they represented. By comparison the workshop, with its social and craft orientation, was viewed as atavistic and practices “lazy” by comparison to the efficiencies of the new industrialism.18 In a similar vein, Greenberg comments that “peasants prefer kitsch because it takes no effort.”19 Malevich’s irreducible abstractions, El Lissitzky’s floating two-dimensional forms and Malevich’s rival, Tatlin’s gravity defying tower, were other examples that broke with the tsarist convention by resisting cultural and cognitive assimilation. Though eventually these works became contextualized by their associations with the dynamism of Futurism and the nihilism of Dada, they continue as a touchstone for contemporary practice as seen in the picture of architect Steven Holl in his pilgrimage to Malevich’s grave. Later, during the thirties, Walter Benjamin’s distracted wanderings of the flaneur and Kurt Schwitters’ Merzbau purely abstract constructs provided subsequent methods for disassociation, so that one could aspire “to be truly alive.”20 Rodchenko’s and Malevich’s breakthroughs in demonstrating the universal resilience of abstraction, and thus repudiation of the workshop, contributed to the mid-century institutional acceptance of the material and structuralist based abstractions of architects Mies and Kahn. Indeed, Philip Johnson claimed the abstract paintings of Malevich were “the strongest single aesthetic influence on the grammar of architecture.”21

Fortuitously, the nineteenth century shift in fine art patronage to the emerging bourgeoisie now seems to have allowed the fine arts to survive the Post-Modern pronouncements of the death of history, and in the case of architecture, its explosive demise with the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe. In a capitalist society, the prevalence of autonomous architecture is due as well to the cult of personality that it engenders and the media’s insatiable appetite for simulating the very sensations only architecture can deliver. Varnedoe observes, “Art is dead but won’t lie down.”22
Karol Berger argues the value of art ranges from new interpretations of existing metaphors to the creation of new metaphors. As stated previously, for architecture, essentially a corporeal medium, the creation of metaphors invariably hastens its death. Architecture must resist interpretation and thus prolong the intrigue. Once again in this current time of uncertainty, we see a call to chasten architecture with a return to the workshop and its realm of the interdisciplinary, collaborative, and rule-bound certainty. However, as in Varendeoe’s view, “finding something that defies meaning […] is not in fact easy […], because we are meaning makers, not just image-makers.” Therefore let’s not once again succumb to the “lazy.” Like Malevich, Rodchenko and Ledoux before them, while we may be working with precedent in service of a particular situation, we must be open to the potential to inadvertently reveal a new way of thinking.

Sui Generis, as unique to architecture, is an open-ended proposition as Anthony Vidler suggests … constantly emerging. Wigley’s break from the everyday with the potential of changing everything and thereby inviting us to live differently can be a way forward for the autonomous and abstract attributes of architecture. As uncomfortable as it may seem—after all, that’s the point—the label of “useless” may be an apt characterization if only coined by the very assimilation that architecture hopes to avoid.

ENDNOTES

10. Ibid., 60-65.
11. Ibid., 178.


PRACTICE & PEDAGOGY

CRITICAL PRACTICE: ALTERNATIVE MODES OF DEVELOPMENT
JOE COLISTRA

AGENCY AND ACTIONS IN THE MAKING OF PLACE
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CRITICAL PRACTICE: ALTERNATIVE MODES OF DEVELOPMENT

JOE COLISTRA

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an alternative mode of community development that promotes participatory action and empowerment through design. When residents in a historic residential neighborhood of Denver, Colorado learned of a plan to build speculative housing, they pooled resources and expertise in order to buy the land out from under a developer and build a project they felt would be more congruent with the scale and character of their neighborhood. This self-development model generated a great sense of pride and accomplishment as the neighborhood witnessed the emergence of a community asset shaped with their own ideas and resources. The group found a voice through architecture. They chose to be active agents in the process of community building rather than allow their interests to be appropriated by outside forces.

Forty-two long-time residents, all living within a few blocks of the project, put their own homes up for collateral in order to secure a construction loan for this $2.5 million townhouse development. Acting as community organizers, we were able to leverage the first project’s success into several other community-based ventures.

As the architects, we were cognizant of the political nature of this process and led the citizen group through the participatory actions of establishing a pro forma, setting up a Limited Liability Company, acquiring the land, securing financing, selecting professional engineers and contractors, and ultimately designing and constructing the project. These processes are appreciated as larger components of community building. Unlike gentrification, where return on investment leaves the neighborhood, all profits from this project stayed within a few blocks. More importantly, neighbors willing to invest in their communities are investing in themselves and the belief they can act critically and strategically to restructure a world they cannot completely remake.

INTRODUCTION

These case studies present a design process in which the traditional roles of both the architect and client have been contested. These projects test participatory development strategies that not only engage community but also deliver a built environment that reflects the values and mores of that community. The group that contacted us for assistance were not real estate developers; rather, they included an attorney, accountant, city planner, historian, real estate broker, teacher, computer programmer, health care professional, non-profit administrator, and several members of the building trades working primarily for small neighborhood contractors. These residents all lived in the Curtis Park neighborhood in Denver, Colorado.

The fact that the neighborhood provides housing options for this group speaks to the diversity of the neighborhood. A five-minute walk from Denver’s central...
business district, the area is one of the city’s oldest neighborhoods. It is also one of the most economically and racially diverse. Its tree-lined streets include Victorian mansions, Italianate rowhomes, and quaint Queen Anne bungalows that have miraculously survived the destructive tendencies of American urban revitalization. (Figure 1)

When these neighbors learned of a plan to build a 16-unit apartment building on an empty lot between two historic single-family homes, they began to seek an opportunity to operate within the market forces that were luring investment to their neighborhood. They sought to provide an example of a viable real estate development while protecting the neighborhood’s historic character. Our firm was working on several small projects in and around the neighborhood when the group engaged us to imagine possibilities for the property. The resulting project, Champa Terrace, involved collectively creating a unique participatory model of development within the community.

Once envisioned as a primary connector to the Denver Airport, Curtis Park has remained zoned as a high-density growth corridor despite the relocation of the airport twenty years ago. This zoning so close to downtown makes the neighborhood ripe for redevelopment typically associated with gentrification: older building stock replaced by new amenity-rich market rate housing. Long-time committed neighbors, largely through their neighborhood organization, are constantly on the watch for gentrifying developers looking to build large-scale projects on consolidated lots made possible by razing historic buildings, despite the existence of a few limited historic districts. In the past, the group has even been successful in establishing a few limited historic districts in an attempt to protect the character of the neighborhood.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our firm, in situ Design, was contacted by a core group of leaders within the neighborhood organization to assist them in exploring development options. We assisted twenty-three neighbors in forming an investment group called CPIG (Curtis Park Investors Group) that set out to design and construct an infill project they felt to be more congruent with the scale and character of their neighborhood. (Figure 2)

From a broad range of professions and economic backgrounds, residents were brought together by concerns about the future of their neighborhood. A true example of crowdsourcing, these long-time residents, all living within a few blocks of the site, put up their own homes for collateral in order to secure a construction loan of $1 million. We expanded the traditional services provided by an architecture firm by assisting the group in becoming politically organized. An operating agreement was drawn up outlining the structure of the limited liability company (LLC) that set up shares in the venture to be acquired for as little as $5,000. This allowed as many people as possible to participate in the process. As with any LLC, a core group was established as Managing Members. Remaining investors were established as Members. The group established Articles of Incorporation, opened a bank account, and began the process of soliciting investment dollars.
Informational brochures on CPIG were distributed throughout the neighborhood and $40,000 was collected in just one week. This provided the group with earnest money to put down on the lot in question. As it became increasingly clear that the group had the resources to self-develop the site, they initiated conversations with a local bank. The bank was happy to loan 1 million dollars to a group willing to put up their own homes as collateral. They recognized the power that came with organizing politically. Appreciating the sizeable opposition to a large speculative apartment project, the original real estate developer who had been interested in the site retreated. In the coming months, we continued working with CPIG to develop a 4-unit townhouse project that would be called Champa Terrace.

While none of the investors had development experience, we drew on the collective knowledge and resources to establish a pro forma, acquire the land, secure financing, and select professional engineers and contractors to ultimately construct and sell the project. Our services began as a simple hourly rate but grew into a professional services agreement as soon as the project scope was better defined. We led the group through the development process, but they systematically made every decision. For example, when interviews were conducted to hire a contractor, we structured an evaluation sheet that could be weighted and scored by the investment group. At the conclusion of the interviews and lengthy discussions, they voted based on the number of shares each controlled. This process continued in order to make decisions on everything from color selections to the execution of our contract. The group appreciated all these processes as larger components of community building.

PARTICIPATION

Large open-meeting design workshops were facilitated in order to arrive at a project with which the group felt comfortable. Operating out of a neighborhood storefront shared with a coffee shop prior to this development project, our architectural office became a central meeting place for both the project and the community. Citizen-investors stopped by incessantly to view progress; the need to provide real-time renderings of design updates and the impact on the cost model necessitated an integrated approach using Building Information Modeling (BIM). (Figure 3) As laypeople, the group expected the intricacies of the project to be communicated visually in an accessible way. They also needed the project’s formal information translated into cost and schedule ramifications.

One might believe the technology of advanced BIM software would alienate the stakeholder group; however, we found the opposite to be the case. It was the use of the BIM model as an information-centric construct that allowed dialogue to occur. We were able to move beyond token participation towards a dialogical practice. This deep knowledge allows for the transformation from silent investor to active participant.

The project sold out before the completion of construction at prices well above what is typical for the neighborhood. This was a win-win for the investors; not only did they see a healthy return on investment, their own property values were driven up as well. Unlike gentrification, where return on investment leaves the neighborhood, the profit returned to members of the investment group stayed within a few blocks of the project.

MERCHANTS ROW BROWNSTONES

The recipient of several design awards, Champa Terrace was lauded in the local press for its proactive approach to community development. With some coax-
ing from the architects, the core group of twenty-three neighbors was persuaded to roll over their profits from the project into a larger, more complex project that would be named Merchants Row Brownstones. The initial goal of this second project was to investigate development options for another empty parcel of land in Curtis Park.

The development group for this second effort grew to forty-two neighbors. As before, most lived within blocks of an empty site that was vulnerable to outside development, and several put their personal residencies up for collateral in order to close on a 2.5 million dollar construction loan. Structured slightly differently, the investment group on the second project was so large that we tiered the investment into guarantors, who would receive a preferred return upon the repayment of the loan, and non-guarantors. This structure was based primarily on meeting the minimum collateral requirements of the bank. The decision making process remained the same as the first project: one share buys one vote.

Discussion held in town hall-style meetings resulted in a 6-unit multifamily housing development modeled after a rowhome prototype common to the neighborhood. Because this project was significantly larger than the first, several presentations were also made to the broader community at neighborhood organization meetings. The investment group prioritized the relationship of form, mass, and scale to the surrounding architecture. Rowhomes, particularly on corner properties, are a common typology in the neighborhood. Also, a tripartite [base, middle, top] organization of the massing is common. We achieved this by utilizing ground-face masonry units to convey a rusticated base. A field of brick composes the middle. Precast units atop the masonry wall are an indication of an abstracted cornice. Raised entry stoops all face the street with glass canopies that mimic the cable-stayed canopy of the adjacent 1890s structures. (Figure 4) The first floor elevation set at 5’4” allows inhabitants to engage passersby at the sidewalk while maintaining a comfortable separation between the public and private realms.

Figure 4: Merchants Row, Champa Street view (photo: Frank Ooms)
As the section illustrates, (Figure 5) this strategy does not allow for the ceiling height required for a garage and thus units step up around a three-story lightwell that allows daylight to penetrate deep into the units. (Figure 6) This alleviates the challenge of bringing light into long interior units where side windows are typically not possible. Frosted glass partitions at the master bedroom and master bath also utilize borrowed light, an advantage of the vertical configuration of the units. Had the pro forma required us to stack apartments over the walk-up townhomes, this daylighting strategy would not have been possible. Despite being zoned for higher density, the investment group was actually willing to underbuild the site, believing the highest-and-best use for the property was to limit the height at three stories. They felt this to be more compatible with the neighborhood.

Another advantage of the ground-to-sky units is the potential inclusion of accessory dwellings in the development model. While land costs drive a certain product, it was important to the group that the project be configured in such a way that it could resist the homogenizing mechanisms of gentrification. Walk-out basements are marketed as “flex-space,” perfect for a home office in order to side-step parking requirements, but are easily configured into an affordable rental unit or granny flat. Again, this is a strategy that probably would not have been considered within a purely profit-driven model.

It was also important to the group that critical design concepts not be compromised by misguided zoning regulations or historic district design guidelines. The carefully labeled “flex-space” is a case in point. Another procedural nuance that offered resistance to the regulation of the built environment and was critical to the project’s success was the categorization of the units as Attached-Single-Family. Not only did this reduce professional liability associated with condominium developments, it also allowed the group to avoid the creation of a homeowner’s association. One requirement of this classification is that each unit must maintain its own lateral bracing; that is, should one unit’s lateral bracing be compromised, adjacent units must maintain their own lateral stability. This is made visible in the design by exposing the steel cross bracing in the three-story lightwells.
The primary feature of the exterior is a reinterpretation of the historic bay window: a three-story structural glazing system. Stepped out from the façade, side windows at the bay frame views to downtown while the translucent bays glow to activate the street with vitality at night. (Figure 7, 8) In keeping with the do-it-yourself nature of the development process, the glazing system employs extremely simple standard construction detailing to achieve the glass bay. (Figure 9). Despite historic district guidelines that require punched windows in a solid field, the group was able to convince the Historic District Review Board that the pattern of frosted and clear glass configured in the proportions of window openings in the neighborhood met the intent of the guidelines.

Convincing the development group to challenge the literal reading of the historic district design guidelines was no small accomplishment, given that many of the investors had an affinity for historic preservation that bordered on militant. Also significant was the fact that many of the neighbors had been involved with establishing the historic district. Through models, renderings, and analysis diagrams the group came to agree upon the notion that contemporary development should not try to replicate historic buildings, but rather, contribute to an ongoing conversation with the existing context.

These glass bays have an undeniable temporality to them. They not only define space and mediate light but also reflect back the neighborhood context. They allow volumes to change throughout the day, and the varying translucency allows the glass to seemingly exist in various states of solidity simultaneously. The varying depth of space inside the units also allows the bystander to glimpse into the units but views are distorted and blurred as the light changes.

CONCLUSION

It is a commonly held belief that a development process that values community input could not possibly yield the same design quality afforded to projects not
shackled by design by committee. However, like the first project, this one sold out quickly and received several awards, confirming that consensus-driven participation need not be seen as a design process that delivers mass appeal to the lowest common denominator, unreflectively and without the potential for a cohesive theoretical stance.

This model of community development, requiring very difficult decisions regarding profit versus density and working within a political system, generates a sense of pride and accomplishment as the structure takes shape. The willingness to invest in one’s own neighborhood reflects a willingness to invest in oneself, and the belief that these actions can allow one to act strategically and critically to restructure a world one cannot wholly remake.

While the process presented here aspires to empower a community through a participatory design, it does not fully engage issues of inclusion and poverty. It admittedly succumbs to existing market forces and invites meaningful participation by those who can pay the price. However, it is perhaps only through working within this system that an incremental reordering might occur. The design and construction process is but a fleeting moment in the life of a building, but the buildings themselves remain as clear territorial demarcations of community. While the scale of the community intervention shown here is small, the participants move through and away from this process changed forever from passive occupants of a built environment to citizens armed with the knowledge and resources to act upon the world.
ABSTRACT

Who makes places and who gets to occupy them? This paper will address that question by conceptualizing a shift in architecture as a noun to architecture as a verb. When architecture is conceived of as a verb it alters the focus from product to process. In doing so it embraces the social production of spaces and discussions of who qualifies as a form giver and how form is given. If verb-based architectures represent a paradigm shift, then what is the role of the twenty-first century architect, and what should it be? How can the teaching and the praxis of architecture support a change from a product to process-oriented model? How do new modes of agency in making provide alternative models for subjectivity, difference, and identity to arise via spatial appropriation in the change from previous naturalized spatial practices? In order to unpack this dialogue, the pedagogy behind an architecture thesis focused on making place in a refugee camp will be discussed to provide concrete and visualized narratives to the complex notion of agency and action in design.

INTRODUCTION

If art contributes to, among other things, the way we view the world and shape social relations, then it does matter whose image of the world it promotes and whose interest it serves.

—Hans Haacke

Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?

—Jean-François Lyotard

Who makes places and who gets to occupy them? This paper will address that question by conceptualizing a shift in architecture as a noun to architecture as a verb. In doing so it embraces the social production of spaces and discussions of who qualifies as a form giver and how form is given. How does a move from a noun-based architecture to verb-based architectures allow one to interrogate how spaces construct a particular world view; the role of the twenty-first century architect as it is and as it might be; and how the teaching and the praxis of architecture might support a change from a product to process-oriented model. How do new modes of agency in making provide alternative models for subjectivity, difference, and identity to arise via spatial appropriation in the change from previous naturalized spatial practices? In illuminating these questions, what follows is a description of an architectural thesis pedagogy wherein a verb-based design process begins with an anthropological notion of design practice as cultural practice, and a desire to challenge the current authority and power of the architect in favor of a co-production of place. In order to achieve those goals, the design thesis discussed uses the notion of the architectural verb to inform an architectural noun by identifying a group on the margins of an already vulnerable population who have no agency over the design
of their built environment; (2) supporting cultural praxis by approaching form making as taskscape \(^4\) creation; and (3) providing a methodology by which residents can generate and manipulate the public architectures they need and desire as a co-production of power and authority.

**FROM ARCHITECTURE TO ARCHITECTURING**

_The role of architects and academics cannot be neutral: if played out uncritically it reverts to the interests of those in power. [...] In the context of agency, intervening takes on a political and ethical meaning._

—Florian Kossak, et al.\(^5\)

The fixation of architectural praxis with the celebration (or commodification) of aesthetic genius in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been supported by an emphasis on the architect as reified author of the artistic object, rather than as facilitator of cultural practices. Is it possible for an architectural verb to counter notions of cultural commodification and aesthetic genius in search of extending architecture culture to those specific people and distinct places left out or behind those discussions and decisions—and, as a consequence, reconceiving of the role (and implicit power) of the architect?

Architect Craig Wilkins has previously crafted a conceptualization of architecture as a noun and a verb in addressing the omission of African-Americans from both the practice and disciplinary thinking of architecture.\(^6\) For Wilkins, "the static, concretized understanding of architecture" as a noun keeps "it from changing with the demands of a multicultural society."\(^7\) When architecture is examined as an action, state, or motion (i.e. a verb), Wilkins asserts it opens up "other possibilities for our shared environment" that present a "more fluid, inclusive, and mobile manner of engaging the built environment."\(^8\) Thus the verb allows architects to purposefully embrace their role as facilitator of whose image of place gets crafted.

The distinction between architecture as a noun and as a verb is paramount, as the former derives its definition from a conception that is bound in formalism and reification, and fixed in the inert qualities of the material object.\(^3\) The later [anthropological] conception of architecture is produced by many peoples, representative of everyday activities, and a "way of life."\(^9\) A populist notion of design allows for the processes of dynamic social interactions to take precedence in the making of the architectural product. While all academicians and most architects would lay claim to a design process (and rightfully so), the distinction made herein is that architectural pedagogy and practice has been a form-based and/or product-based process. When a design process informed by cultural practices becomes the product, the results are potentially non-fixed, adaptive and transformative sets of forms, either in configuration and/or in use. Thus, the defining of architecture as a verb is deployed as a means to rethink design processes (and products) as actions of agency by the users-cum-makers _in concert with_ architects, rather than as an inert gift from a Maker/Architect [or financier/client] to users. This transition from Architecture to architecturing involves the co-production of making place wherein both professionals and residents are valued for their relative expertise related to culture, inhabitation, and creating. Architectural practice in this schema involves the facilitation of cultural practices as an equal [and/or foundational] design activity to the manipulation of form and space. It also implies that architectural practice is plural in authorship. The making of architecture, then, is not just a neutral, aesthetic manipulation of technique under the rubric of art praxis, but more broadly encompasses the politics and ethics of making.

**THE ARCHITECT AS CULTURAL PRACTITIONER**

_I neither am nor will be obliged to tell your lordship or any other person what I intend or ought to do for this work; your office is to procure money [...] the designs for the building you are to leave to my care._

—Michelangelo in reply to the cardinals regarding St. Peter’s Cathedral\(^11\)

Extant design and development processes are reinforced both by historical precedent and contemporary practices in the Global North that perpetuate a naturalized mainstream praxis and teaching pedagogy.\(^12\) A 1976 _Newsweek_ interview with architect Peter Eisenman encapsulates sentiments toward practice that...
abound still—namely, that the professional architect wields the power and expertise to know what is best for the client and/or the public, and it is the architect’s job to convince them of such. The disavowal of client participation in the design process began with the professionalization of architecture in the United States in the late nineteenth century and, despite the incursions of public interest design, is still the prevailing attitude today.

These attitudes of the profession begin in the classroom where architectural pedagogies reinforcing the authoritarian role of the architecture as form giver remain. Theorist Peter McLaren notes the problem of these naturalized structures that wear the mask of neutrality:

> Mainstream pedagogy simply produces those forms of subjectivity preferred by the dominant culture, domesticating, pacifying, and deracinating agency, harmonizing a world of disjuncture and incongruity; and smoothing the unruly features of daily existence. At the same time, student subjectivities are rationalized and accommodated to existing regimes of truth.

In other words, unless the ideology of the architect and her productions are challenged in school, it is difficult to dislodge the practice of architects outside the academy. Acknowledging this stasis, a verb-based pedagogy seeks to allow (student) architects to critically question the way things are and replace them with the way things might be. It seeks to subvert who makes the built environment and who occupies it as a static giver and receiver relationship with a conflation of multiple peoples supporting a co-production of place. A verb-based pedagogy allows for (student) architects to transform from sole author of a unique form to mediator of an adaptive built environment wherein reality and forms are understood as *in process*. It also sanctions access for those people left out and behind of traditional design practices to participate in the making of the places they occupy. Thus, the right to place is not just about its occupation, but also its inception.

The pedagogy behind this thesis design instruction emphasized the notion that architectural design is not about buildings or rooms, but about people. Thus, to grapple with a rethinking of the relationship between designer and the user of the designed, architectural practice as a form of cultural practice was placed as a design foundation. Borrowing anthropologist Tim Ingold’s conceptualization of the human occupied landscape as a taskscape became a way of establishing a verb-based design method. Ingold highlights the temporality of lived spaces by invoking the term taskscape to denote the patterns of people’s active engagement in dwelling in the world. In other words, the physical environment is not a “neutral, external backdrop to human activities,” instead it is “a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space.” Place is a conflation of space and time and, therefore, inseparable from human experience and rituals so that space-time (or place) is not merely a container for human occupation, but is shaped through human actions. Thus, the physical and cultural are inextricably intertwined. Within this frame, then, how can architecture move from intercession (the act of intervening on behalf of others) to provocation (where design is a testing mechanism challenging power, control, and authority) with the aim of multiple voices become design agents?

DESIGNING AGENCY WITH NADI AL ATFAALS

> […] knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.
> —Paolo Freire

The refugee situation was deemed appropriate by the thesis committee for a verb-based architectural investigation of agency, as graduate student Nada Maani’s research revealed the observation that refugees in camps exist in a biological sense, but no longer have a social or political existence. In addition, refugees have no right to land and no right to work. There is no sanctioned employment in the camps and refugees cannot work in their host country. Some trade and business is tolerated in camps, but most commerce is not sanctioned. Thus, the background of camp life is inactivity and socio-economic stasis for the exiled refugees. The displaced end up on the periphery, as refugee camps become a permanently temporary place to wait away from society until they can return to their home country—which can take years, or even decades.
Designed based on military camp planning principles, efficiency—not humanity—is the first priority. In addition, the dwelling unit (often a caravan) becomes a primary mode of spatial organization, but little consideration is placed to social or public spaces. While the security of the individual remains paramount, the socio-cultural lives of inhabitants remain either tertiary or dormant. The urban infrastructures the camps deploy is top-down in terms of power and the control of the socio-physical environment, with the temporary, not permanent as their guide. In other words, camps are seen as a transitory fix, not a stable dwelling. Despite this focus on the provisional, a generation can grow up knowing only camp life, with refugees globally spending up to 19 years living in camps.23 This is an ironic moment within urban design discourse because while the camps are conceptualized from a top-down mentality, they have few permanent structures and certainly not the public amenities that usually complement master planning. As Michel Agier notes, 

“The question that I raise [...] is whether these people will remain without a voice, or whether their space of an outcast life, however strange it might be, could be transformed into a site of social life and political expression, thus also transforming its victims, whom we still perceive as more or less guilty or undesirable, into recognized subjects with a kind of citizenship in practice.”24

Thus the place constructed in refugee camps is done so by experts who prioritize resource allocation without consideration or consultation of socio-cultural actions and needs of the refugees, who have been left out and left behind of decisions regarding how they live. While the camp does not appear to be an architectural noun in aesthetics, it is in issues of authority and control over how the refugees dwell; it is just lacking in the permanence that the architectural noun usually conveys.

With this contextual awareness, Maani narrowed her focus to those affected by the Syrian Civil War/Syrian Uprising that began in the early spring of 2011 as part of a series of protests known as the Arab Spring.25 She became interested in the substantially overpopulated Za’atari Syrian Refugee Camp located next to Mafraq, Jordan.26 Located a mere 12 kilometers from the Jordan-Syrian border, the daily refugee flow often peaks at 4,000 people a day.27 While almost two-thirds of the occupants are children, only roughly 16,000 (or 32% of) children are enrolled in the camp’s three schools. The camp has taxis, hospitals, almost 600 restaurants and an ‘illegal’ commercial district of about 3,000 shops. Problems endemic to the camp include insufficient food; poor infrastructure; restrictions of free speech; and high rates of violence, rape, prostitution, and drug-dealing. Maani also noted that female children were particularly vulnerable within the camps, with only 42 percent attending school and 46 percent entering into arranged marriages before the age of 18 (well above the 13 percent of female child brides in Syria itself). The life a female child in the camp becomes one sequestered within the privacy of the caravan (whether her parents’ or her husband’s). Figure 1

Figure 1: Typical section through unsanctioned commercial core made of caravans showing gendered, public-private relationships with caravan dwellings being used for both commerce and dwelling. Drawing by Nada Maani.
Based on her initial investigations, Maani crafted a thesis question: How can architecture transform a refugee camp into a livable city that is designed around existing social networks? Like many architecture students of the millennial generation, she had a (Global North-based) humanitarian value system and a set of design skills, but was unsure how to link them without engaging in a form of architectural colonialism. With the guidance of her thesis chair (Wortham-Galvin), her exploration of that question was framed by the following foundations for engaging in an architectural verb: contemporary cultural landscape studies and fieldwork; understanding the nature of Islamic urbanism as the cultural inheritance brought to the camp by the refugees; and situating the physical interventions within the concept of the liminal.

Cultural landscape studies provided an intellectual intersection between physical places and anthropological notions of culture. Thus, given the direction of culture as a set of practices (and thus, a verb) rather than a set of objects (i.e., nouns), Maani conducted fieldwork. She spent her winter break travelling between her parents’ home in Jordan and the Zaatari camp. She spoke with NGO workers in the camp, toured the camp as a whole, and then focused on the quotidian experiences in the camp’s unofficial commercial center and the primary cardo-decumanus: along the Champs-Élysées. (Figure 2) Summarized, her visualizations noted that despite being designed in a top-down bureaucratic manner, grassroots urbanism flourished in the camp (Figures 1-4). Based on her fieldwork, Maani noted that the Zaatari refugee camp is gradually moving away from a top-down service facility into a self-provisioning urban conglomeration, where refugees are provided with various forms of cash-based assistance and encouraged to address their own needs themselves. Local camp leaders figure heavily in the tactical operations of the camp as they smuggle humanitarian goods and drugs. The thriving commerce on the Champs-Élysées is technically illegal, yet 11 million U.S. dollars change hands in this commercial district each month. The bridal shops are some of the most popular, with approximately 30 weddings a week taking place in the camp. Because of the unsanctioned commerce on the Champs-Élysées, at least 65 percent of residents do have some form of income. In order to support their unsanctioned, bourgeoning commercial center, the refugees modify U.N. provided caravans individually for ‘public’ uses, and urbanistically (in defiance of the official surveyed camp plan) so that their arrangement allows for the simulation of courtyard

![Figure 2. Sample fieldwork diary entry by Nada Maani.](image)
spaces between domestic caravans. Thus, in seeking control over where and how they dwell, primarily male adult refugees adapted their environment. Organic development and tactics toward making the camp livable have taken hold. Nevertheless, children and women are on the margins of these efforts. Maani wanted to bring them to the center via an architectural facilitation emphasizing their agency in the camp rather than their current invisibility.

Maani’s observations of the life ways of the people of the camp—both public and private—led her to the following four revisions of her initial decisions. (Figure 2) First, she wanted to use specific interventions in the Champs-Élysées as a prototype or model that she intended would spread diffusely over all of the neighborhoods as determined by the residents. Second, she wanted to design with a focus on the children of the camp, with a particular awareness of the needs of female children as well as women. Third, she wanted to use the materials of the caravan as a primary architectural material source. (Figures 3 and 4) Fourth, given the socio-cultural nature of the layered Islamic multi-publics, Maani wanted to transform the hard edge between the (male) public space of the camp—the Champs-Élysées—and the (female) private realm of the caravans, and find a way for all refugees to experience social conviviality. (Figure 1)

Given that her proposed area of investigation took place within a hastily constructed urbanism, it was important for the design process to acknowledge the relationship between culture, custom, and space as critical to designing for plural constituents (children, women, and men) in a predominantly Islamic culture. Maani studied the liminal places—the thresholds—between the public space of the urban and the private space of the domicile to understand how public and private spaces are physically manifested, enacted, and/or contested in Islamic cities. The goal was to construct a design process that would support agency in the development of multiple publics in a society wherein interiority dominates the life of Islamic refugee children and women. In doing so, she intended to transform roles with an eye toward Islamic custom and tradition, but not radicalized replacing with Global North-based values and notions of what public space is and/or should be.

In order to do so, Maani studied Victor Turner’s characterization of liminality, in order to go beyond the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the liminal as a thresh-
old. Turner characterizes socio-cultural liminality as a state in which the individual is "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'." That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and constitutively ambiguous. This aligns with the state of the refugee, displaced from their home countries and often living permanently in a temporary state. In order to address the socio-cultural liminal state of refugees, this thesis design process sought to embrace the architectural liminal moment between the public and the private and reformulate its tectonics, use, and design. The thesis was also planned to balance interactions between the tactical and the transitory with intentional forms of permanence. This dialectic between the transitory and the permanent was encouraged because while refugees often desire the right to return to their own countries, the reality is that many live for years or decades in camps before they are resettled. While the camps respond to an emergent moment, people are living significant portions of their lives in situations that are treated as temporary. Without trying to threaten the host country with a perceived permanent occupation of their territories, how can a fuller living experience be designed while refugees “temporarily” dwell in camps? Can an architectural verb be a mode of negotiating a liminal state of temporary permanence into a better living situation?

Figure 5. Sample studies of child-oriented verbs and the interior spaces that could support those actions done in photo collage, model, and watercolor. The verbs depicted above (a fraction of the study) from left to right include napping, drawing, and watching. Design studies by Nada Maani.
Following a foundational understanding of Islamic urbanism (morphologically and socio-culturally), Maani focused on the Syrian courtyard house and its ability to balance local building materials and methods, environmental systems, and social and familial structures. She was interested in how the courtyard satisfied the needs for women’s and children’s public spaces and the families’ private space at the same time. Her interest was also piqued by its temporal nature because of its changing functions. She noted the significance of the Syrian souq as the hub of everything sociable. Those issues were critical as she sought to use the socio-cultural performative publics (and privateness) of the tradition of the courtyard and the architectural liminal layering that supports it by using and transforming the materials and morphologies present in the camp: the caravans and the emerging lively, unsanctioned (male-dominated) souq. She took as her palette the traditionally unseen liminal space of the courtyards and the rooftops of traditional Islamic urbanism and transformed it atop the caravans. Her intervention asserts a socio-cultural permanence supporting the layered publics of children and women, while simultaneously bringing families together in a variety of realms along the camp’s ever-changing souq. Maani wanted to ameliorate the “dropping out of common space” and “loss of a geographical place” for the refugees with an attention to how those spaces function to support all peoples within the Islamic cultural landscape. She was neither trying to supplant Islamic tradition with a Global North socio-physical conception of the public, nor did she want the extreme marginalization of female adults and children in the camp to go unaddressed. She wanted to manage changes in public-private configurations, assert agency, and do so from a consideration of the Islamic taskscape, its traditions, and its potential for alteration. In other words, she wanted to respect the Islamic cultural landscape while opening up opportunities for children’s and women’s right to participate by reorienting the current static, male-dominated and limited public realm of the camp.

Maani’s studying of the tectonics of the caravan and its material components were layered with her socio-cul-

Figure 6. Sample studies of child-oriented verbs and the interior spaces that could support those actions done in photo collage, model, and watercolor. The verbs depicted above (a fraction of the study) from left to right include: jumping, eating, climbing, and chatting. Design studies by Nada Maani.
tural research and her vernacular traditions studies. All three research operations led Maani to craft a kit of parts that could support the most vulnerable within the camp—the women and children—with a means to inhabit the camp more fully, yet safely. Maani’s tectonic and spatial manipulations of the existing materials and typologies (both within the camp and transported from Syria), allow for more robust publics to engage in camp life outside of one’s private caravan. The transfiguration of the (already manipulated) commercial caravans would allow for a reorganization of the notion of the camp’s publics; a transformation of the camp’s organization based not on outside organizations, but on the patterns of culture of the residents; and a means for understanding the negative hierarchies existing in the camp’s design and how to facilitate more positive socio-cultural structures. Her kit of parts, honoring the liminal layers of the traditional courtyard, develop what she calls nadi al-atfaals (children’s clubs): a system of child-oriented public interior spaces that sit atop the caravans. Her ‘rooftop’ infrastructures are meant to be permanent (but removable when the camp is no longer needed), allowing the caravans to continue to come and go daily (as is current practice). Her el-

Figure 7. Development of child-oriented nadis as public spaces shown in elevation along Champs-Élysées. Fictionalized story narrative of potential resident development is provided below drawing. Drawing by Nada Maani.

Figure 8. Four examples of phased development of child-oriented nadis as public spaces shown in elevation with details of verb-based screen system above. Fictionalized story narrative of potential resident development is provided below drawing. Drawing by Nada Maani.
evated nadis, thus, allow more stable patterns of culture to emerge atop the ephemeral hub of souq activities. (Figures 9 and 10) In addition, the structure of the nadis would provide a currently absent liminal space in front of the commercial caravans. Through tactical occupation, this scaffolding would be used to enhance the burgeoning urbanity of the souq by providing an extra layer of inside-out space for social productions. While the scaffolding infrastructures, which also provide access to water, solar energy, and stairs, would be permanent—the activities therein, and their designed manifestation, would change based on children’s and women’s needs and desires in the camp, and thus, would change over time.

By investigating the camp as a child-oriented task-scape and asking what children do, and how an additional layer of outside-inside space could support their more visible introduction into camp life, Maani intended to enhance the quality of cultural life and infrastructure for all residents. Maani was asked to identify a list of verbs that support the actions of the children, not only extant but also those desired, and to study those verbs through collages, models, and in drawing perspectives to understand how form and space could support them. (Figures 5 and 6) Once she had identified her technical manipulations of the caravan structure and a series of tectonic screens that would support an ‘elevated’ new set of publics, she returned to her verbs to begin to study how her tectonic and spatial choices could be manipulated to support those verbs. Maani designed a tectonic system that is supported by a system of screens. Her nadis address such actions as reading, gathering, crying, drawing, creating, dangling, watching, eating, etc. (Figures 7 and 8) They also support access to critical infrastructures such as drinking water, bathing, toilets, and electricity. She did not master plan the specific locations or programs of the nadis; rather, the assertion is that it is the designers’ role to facilitate how that kit of parts allows the residents to choose where and when they want the what to happen in support of more diversity of publics within the camp.
In utilizing a system of screens (transformed from Islamic courtyard and façade design), Maani intends for the people of the camp to determine locations, program, and design the nadis to support the various neighborhoods diffuse throughout the camp [Figures 7 and 8]. In doing so, Maani seeks not to mimic the morphologies of the courtyard and the souq but to transform those typologies to support the multi-layered publics that exist in resilient Islamic urbanism and allow them to flourish and transform the thinner and more restrictive version of Islamic culture that exists in the camps. The nadi system is meant to support healthy and safe spaces for women and children as well as to activate choice and opportunity not only in their location, but also in their use and continual adaptation. They are also meant to challenge issues of ownership and controlling in the making of the camp by supporting refugees’ right to cultural expression and place making. When the camp is no longer necessary, the scaffolding can easily be removed and/or adopted by the host country for their desired manipulation.

The social contestations present in refugee camps are numerous and varied relating to who makes places and who occupies them when the inhabitants are fundamentally displaced peoples. In their well-intentioned response to provide humanitarian emergency aid, these master planned camps regulated by the United Nations and/or host countries are socially regulating peoples in ways that delimit their ability to capably embrace their patterns of culture and assert their interests in making and inhabiting place. This design process has proposed that in order to support a humanistic development of cultural publics in these camps, developing a design process that orients toward the most vulnerable takes advantage of resources at hand and designs them in a way that facilitates the agency of the refugees.

**AGENCY AND ACTION**

[...] the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work [...] I seem to call for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author.

—Michel Foucault

This paper describes a design thinking process predicated on the proposition that architecture is about people, not buildings. In a social context of increasing demand for greater democratic authorship and ownership of the built environment and the public realm, the roles of the architect and of design need wider and deeper examination. While architects have specific knowledge (and power) in the design of buildings, they also (sometimes) unwittingly facilitate knowledge and material production based on their epistemological assumptions and taste culture. Whose interests does the profession serve (and whose does it deny)? The design process described has emphasized resilience by looking at those most vulnerable (in this case refugee children), understanding where they came from, what they might need now, and supporting those issues through verb-based design thinking that promotes discussions of agency in the way we shape place.

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Nada Maani, M.Arch, recently graduated from Portland State University as one of the first three students in the United States to obtain a Certificate in Public Interest Design as part of her degree. Nada was born in Am-
Professor Sergio Palleroni served as a key discussant. Maani’s thesis was chaired by Wortham-Galvin, and that will empower people both socially and politically. The intersection of architecture and politics and thus design will be more unsatisfactory still. “The temporality of the landscape,” World Archaeology 25(2) (1993), 152-174.


4. The term taskscapes is defined later in this essay and comes from Tim Ingold, “The temporality of the landscape,” World Archaeology 25(2) (1993), 152-174.


7. Ibid, xv.

8. Ibid, xvi.

9. For a further discussion of culture see Wortham-Galvin, “Making the Familiar Strange,” op. cit.


14. The history of professionalization of architecture in the U.S. is well told by Dana Cuff, Architecture: The Story of Practice (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). On page 40, Cuff quotes Mariana Van Rensselaer writing in 1890 about the problem of client participation: “And if what you get is not quite all you want, or exactly what you think it ought to be, why be thankful still; for changes are (nay, the certainty is) that had you interfered, the result would have been more unsatisfactory still.”


17. Tim Ingold, op. cit.

18. Ibid, 189.


20. A Nadia Al-Aftaali as defined in the article and by Maani in her thesis is a children’s club.


22. Maani’s research noted that at the start of 2011 there were 7.2 million refugees in exile with host countries primarily consisting of developing countries in the Global South that struggle economically with the responsibility of allowing refugees to settle permanently on their land. Nada Maani, “Refugee Camp to City: From Reactive to Resilient” (M.Arch thesis, Portland State University, 2015). See also Michel Agier, Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

23. Maani, op cit.


25. Those protests of President Bashar al-Assad’s government became an armed rebellion with the Syrian government losing control of over 70 percent of the country and 40 percent of the population by the summer of 2013. Maani, op cit.

26. Established in 2012, as of November 2014, Zaatari contained 81,766 refugees, while designed to hold 40,000 over its 1,310 acres. Maani, op cit.

27. According to camp director Killian Kleinschmedit (UNHCR) it costs one million dollar a day to run the camp. All stats in this paragraph are from Maani’s thesis, Maani, op cit.


29. This paper will focus on a description of the design process rather than the foundational discourses and intensive background research as the pedagogy behind the thesis direction was driven by issues of agency and a conceptualization of architecture as a verb.

30. The work of anthropologists Clifford Geertz, Bronislaw Malinowski and Ruth
Benedict were emphasized as guides both for definitions of culture and for the role of ethnographic fieldwork.

31. For a cross cultural discussion of architectural liminality, see B.D. Wortham-Galvin & Isaac Williams, "Walking the City: The Physical and Social Urban Form Made Public," Proceedings for the ACSA 96th Annual Conference (Houston, March 2008).


34. Traditional Arabic urbanism is, in part, about interiority, with a significant part of the life of the city takes place behind the solid, imposing walls within the ubiquitous courtyards. In fact, the hierarchies between the publicness of a main street and the back of house activities that take place in the alleys of the Global North are displaced in the medinas of the Global South to the courtyards and the rooftops. While Global North urbanism may lay claim to the loggia, porch or the balcony as the liminal space of ambiguity (where the public and private realms commingle), for Arabic urbanism, it is the courtyard and rooftops that serve as a moment of difference. Its activities performed therein also dance between full exposure and concealment, particularly with regard to the patterns of culture for women and children. Wortham-Galvin and Williams, op cit.


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ABSTRACT

Peter Eisenman’s writings, projects, and built works constitute a profound rejection of contemporary architectural thinking and practice. While he has many admirers, he is criticized by many architects for alleged self-promotion to the detriment of the interests of his clients. In light of this, the decision by the American Institute of Architects to honor him in 2015 with the Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education seems difficult to understand. It can be explained in the context of the architectural profession’s need for disciplinary grounding, which Eisenman is uniquely able to provide. By embracing him, the profession assumes a mantle of intellectual rigor and vigorous discourse in questioning its own principles and practices. In reality, however, Eisenman’s critique has no effect on the profession. His ideas are apolitical by their nature, and can therefore be discussed without fear of offending clients or the public. The very incompatibility of Eisenman’s ideas with contemporary practice renders them ineflectual and therefore harmless. The profession cannot, however, accept him as a peer whose work exists in the same realm as theirs. For this reason, the honor conferred on him was for his role in education rather than design, where he is at a safe remove from the profession’s domain. This deft handling of a controversial figure leaves the profession’s need for disciplinary grounding unanswered.

“[Eisenman] was then and remains the great iconoclast—unrivalled, unrepentant—who has spent a lifetime breaking past certainties and images of architecture, to allow the emergence of the new.”
—Alan Balfour

“The divorce of architecture from the contamination of the real world has been a constant in Eisenman’s work, the precondition for his self-creation as a cultural figure of international repute.”
—Diane Ghirardo

“A servant of uncompromising investigations into the very idea of architecture, he ignites by his teaching, writing, books, and the arguments of his own design work, a fire within rising generations of young students, both here and abroad, to dare to pursue a life-long habit of probing discourse and debate. The rigor of his investigations into the past, present, and imagined future of design has sparked a quality of discourse in classrooms around the world that has elevated the intellectual credibility of education so necessary to the vitality of an architecture that speaks to and of its time.”
—from the 2015 Topaz Medallion citation

A PECULIAR AWARD

The Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education, conferred jointly by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), is one of the most prestigious honors an architectural educator can receive. In 2015 it was awarded to Peter Eisenman. At first blush, this seems a peculiar choice, not because there is any doubt as to Eisenman’s importance and influence as an educator, but because the award is also a token of the AIA’s high favor. It is not at all clear why the AIA would want to honor him in any fashion.
Among much of its rank and file, Eisenman is viewed with suspicion, if not hostility. His devotion to abstract theories and his use of his buildings (read: his clients’ money) to exemplify them offends the ingrained pragmatism of many American architects. For many, he is a poseur who has, through self-promotion and political maneuvering, usurped a role as one of the world’s most famous and influential architects. If that were not enough, his publications and projects amount to a condemnation of the established profession.

In all likelihood, there was some sentiment within the AIA to recognize Eisenman in some way. Along with his many passionate detractors, he has a substantial contingent of admirers that includes many prominent architects as well as a large group of younger architects whom the AIA is eager to court. Satisfying this constituency without alienating the majority would have been a challenge, to say the least. Given his small but prominent body of built work, Eisenman might have been a strong candidate for the Gold Medal, the AIA’s recognition of outstanding contributions in design. That would undoubtedly have ignited a firestorm of protest among the membership for the reasons given above. Giving him an award for education solved this dilemma, but not without certain stretching of the customary criteria. Eisenman’s contributions as a teacher are inarguable, but in the past the Topaz Medallion has been reserved for someone who had spent a substantial portion of his or her career as a professional educator. While he has taught in one context or another almost continually, Eisenman makes a point of distancing himself from career academics: “I mean, a lot of people say, you teach at Princeton, you teach at Yale, but I never had tenure at those institutions. I never wanted tenure at those institutions.”

A close reading of the AIA’s Topaz citation of Eisenman (see above) sheds considerable light on the issues at stake. The ghost of Eisenman’s building practice haunts the text as it carefully negotiates the relationship between teaching, theory and practice. Eisenman’s professional activity is referred to as “design work” which carries “arguments,” emphasizing its intellectual as opposed to professional nature (those AIA members who accept these buildings at all will do so only if they are seen as experiments, not as viable models for the profession). The word “discourse” (taken from Eisenman’s own vocabulary) appears twice, first as a laudable and challenging “habit” for architects, portraying the professional architect as critically engaged with his or her work. As we shall see, this is a central aspect of liberal professionalism. Its second mention backtracks on this idea, however: discourse takes place not in practice but in classrooms, and elevates “the intellectual credibility of education” rather than that of the profession itself. This is both a jab at academics (their credibility is implicitly questioned) and an attempt to elide the persistent turmoil in the relationship between education and the profession. The phrase “necessary to the vitality of an architecture that speaks to and of its time” is a skillful bit of code that sounds very different to different audiences. It avoids saying that education as presently constituted is vital for architecture in general, a nod to the many professionals who would like schools to address the demands of practice more directly. For others, the qualification “to and of its time” is likely to sound like an endorsement of the idea that this is the proper role of architecture. To those familiar with Eisenman’s ideas, it may sound like an endorsement, if not of the ideas themselves, then of their broad goal.

A key phrase appears at the beginning: the evocation of “the very idea of architecture.” What is interesting about this phrase is that it can be asserted as uncontroversial. This demonstrates the profession’s consensus that architecture exists outside of any particular practice and accepts the notion of an “idea” of architecture that is fundamental and singular. It is remarkable that architects continue to believe such an idea exists when there is very little agreement among them as to its nature and content. This question is particularly urgent today, as there is increasing pressure in the building industry to adopt measurable performance as the first criterion of design. This is a value more closely associated with engineering than architecture, and architects have varying degrees of difficulty adapting themselves to it. At one extreme are architects who embrace this redefinition of their role, not recognizing the danger it poses to the profession. At the other extreme are architects like Eisenman who re-examine architecture’s ontological and epistemological grounds in their search for this idea. Apart from the specifics of his work, then, Eisenman is a stalking horse for this identity crisis within American architecture. We will see that the notion of service is at its core.
THE PROFESSION AND THE DISCIPLINE

Architects, and the AIA as their professional voice, must face the dual nature of modern liberal professionalism. This model arose under industrial capitalism, responding to the dramatic expansion of specialized domains of knowledge and society’s need for such knowledge in its projects. A liberal profession is a social creation. Society recognizes a profession in response to the need for a service calling for specialized, often technical, knowledge. Due to the highly specialized nature of this knowledge, only experts in the field can establish appropriate standards for its application to social needs. The prerogatives of social status and financial reward that attend the recognition of a profession flow from an implicit contract between the profession and society: in return for society’s granting it these prerogatives, a profession provides a socially necessary service and ensures that this is done in accordance with the highest standards. This creates a duty on the part of a profession to continually develop its knowledge and revisit its own standards. Professionals must therefore engage in disciplinary discourse, the purpose of which is to elucidate principles by which knowledge in that discipline is to be sought, verified, and applied, and to perform rigorous self-examination. Such discourse by definition precedes practice in the sense that it is presumed to govern practice.

As constituted in liberal capitalist societies, a profession serves two masters: society, via the service it provides, and the discipline whose principles it obeys. The fundamental principle of a profession—its raison d’être—is service; that of a discipline is discourse. A discipline deals in ideas whereas a profession contends with pragmatic realities. These disparate principles can lead to criteria, methods, and conclusions that may diverge or even contradict each other. It is no surprise, then, that the demands of a discipline and the realities of its cognate profession are frequently at odds.

Such conflicts can be productive for both the discipline
and the profession. The internal discourse of the discipline grounds the profession in ideals and principles and oversees the production and application of new knowledge. Practice can invigorate the discipline, providing social contexts which prioritize its knowledge and research, and inform the limits of its application. But the fact remains that discipline and profession embody different principles. While their relationship is socially mandated, there is no guarantee that it will be amicable.

Thus, the architectural profession must recognize a discipline of architecture distinct from its practice. When the AIA’s Topaz Medallion citation refers to the “intellectual credibility” of architectural education, it is actually speaking to the disciplinary bona fides of its practitioners. The question, then, is how and by whom the discipline is defined. The definition of any discipline draws upon its own history, but this history is of course open to interpretation. This interpretation is the domain of what may be called disciplinary practitioners. Architects refer to this group loosely as “theorists,” whose medium may be writing, drawing, computation, building, or a combination of these. There are many types of architectural theorists including historians, philosophers, and sociologists, among others. However, it is the theorist-practitioner who has most immediate influence on the profession. These are architects who illustrate their theoretical ideas in drawn and/or built projects as well as in writings.

Eisenman is pre-eminent among such theorists. His intellectual credentials are impressive: a Ph.D. in architecture from Cambridge, a series of teaching appointments at the world’s most prestigious architecture schools, and a large body of erudite writings that draw upon the ideas of several respected academics in other fields. His numerous drawn projects have been extensively reproduced in books and periodicals. His built oeuvre, although comparatively small, includes several projects awarded via design competitions with other renowned architects. What buildings he has realized have received a great deal of attention in both professional and popular publications. Further enhancing his appeal to the profession, Eisenman has actively cultivated his relationship with it. He became a Fellow of the AIA in 1981. He has been a frequent contributor to professional publications since 1963, including Architectural Forum, Architectural Design, Casabella, A+U and Progressive Architecture. When he was attacked in the pages of Progressive Architecture in 1994, he went to great lengths to defend his ideas before the professional readership of that magazine.

On these grounds, Eisenman appears to be a good candidate for recognition as a disciplinary authority by the profession. His ideas, however, preclude anything like the current model of professional practice. He criticizes current design practice for its failure to embody an authentically (as opposed to stylistically) modernist sensibility whose essential feature, he says, is “the fundamental displacement of man [...] away from the center of his world.” One consequence of this position is that “[o]bjects are seen as ideas independent of man,” implying that architecture should not respond to felt human needs. Eisenman conceives of architecture as an autonomous discipline whose principles originate within itself. Specifically, he contends that function as usually understood has no role in architecture. A productive relationship cannot be built between such a notion of the discipline and a profession that must serve socially-defined needs. Eisenman would make the discipline of architecture incompatible with the service society looks to architecture to provide.

Eisenman is not the only architect to adopt principles incompatible with practice. Leon Krier’s famous dictum, “I don’t build because I am an architect. I can make true architecture because I do not build,” called attention to the incompatibility between the services society demanded of architecture and principles of the discipline, as though doctors were suddenly required to perform euthanasia. Eisenman’s position is different: he maintains that his work reflects society’s true condition, although some of its members may not realize or be willing to acknowledge it. Running through Eisenman’s writings is the claim that his understanding of modern life is better grounded in history and social reality than others’, and therefore a more correct basis for architecture. From the point of view of an architect working with today’s typical client, however, such a position amounts to an abdication by disciplinary discourse of its role in guiding professional activity.

Paradoxically, the very radicalism of Eisenman’s ideas
helps the profession embrace him. Since it would be impossible for architects to put his ideas into practice in the current state of affairs, the ideas have no real consequences for them. At most, they can be entertained as intriguing thought experiments that have no effect in the real world. In any event, the substance of the ideas matters little as far as the profession is concerned. Very few architects have more than a superficial familiarity with them. What does matter is that Eisenman provides the profession with disciplinary credibility. Embracing Eisenman provides evidence that architecture sustains a vigorous disciplinary discourse. He thus performs a service for the profession: he provides disciplinary credibility, which, as we have seen, is essential to maintaining its status.

THE PROFESSION AND THE ACADEMY

In most domains, professional schools have a clear relationship to the corresponding profession. In addition to training future professionals, academics conduct research that provides ideas and concrete knowledge that assists professionals in their work. Medical academicians conduct research that may result in new drugs and clinical procedures. Legal scholars develop ideas that can be applied in litigation and legislation. Both take certain features of practice as given. Physiology works the same way in the lab and the hospital. Legal procedure, while subject to long-term changes, is fixed at any moment as the context in which legal theories must work. In architecture, however, the relationship between academics and professionals has been weakened to a critical degree.

To be sure, many architectural academics carry out research that can be applied in practice, in such fields as building performance, new materials, digital fabrication, and design technology. But a large number do not feel bound to accept the conditions of practice as realities to be contended with. There is a strong sense among them that these are contingent, not essential to architecture per se. This frees them to explore ideas that have no application in current practice, and that may even be in direct contravention of some of its essential aspects. Such exploration can benefit the profession by providing some of the self-criticism that it needs to sustain its credibility. However, the magnitude of the disparity between the present interests of the academy and current conditions of practice is dangerous.

Given its need for a disciplinary grounding, the alienation of the profession from the academy threatens its credibility, and therefore its viability. This situation is dangerous for the academy as well. From a broader cultural perspective, the two functions mentioned above are secondary to its most fundamental purpose, which is to sustain and advance the discipline itself. In contemporary American society, much cultural work must justify itself economically. Service to the profession and, by extension, to society provides this justification for architectural academia. Such a great distance between academia’s service to the profession and its disciplinary mission threatens its existence.

This alienation is another aspect of the strategy of awarding Eisenman the Topaz Medallion. As the preceding analysis shows, the award was an attempt by the profession to place Eisenman within the confines of academia. Doing so, in the minds of many architects, relegates him to a world that has little or no connection to their own work.

In the meantime, society continues to demand buildings, and architects are confused as never before as to what they should be doing. Fulfilling demands for better performance fills much of the void. What remains is often given over to formulaic repetition or displays of technical virtuosity for its own sake.

THE PROFESSION AND POLITICS

The role of liberal professions in society’s political life is complex. Professionals are often called upon to provide expert opinion on social policies that lie within their competence. Professional organizations like the AIA typically employ lobbyists to influence political decisions for their members’ benefit. More positively, a profession’s disciplinary principles may contribute to an evolution of social norms, as happened when the architectural profession began advocating sustainable building practices. However, a profession can influence social policy only if it speaks with one voice. Since its membership usually reflects a diversity of political opinions, this is not often the case. With rare exceptions, therefore, pro-
fessional organizations must remain scrupulously neutral on political issues.

From the profession’s point of view, a great virtue of Eisenman’s ideas is that they are (or claim to be) resolutely apolitical in the usual sense. His style of argument is to make statements that purport to be either universal truths about architecture (e.g. “What defines architecture is the continuous dislocation of dwelling, to dislocate what it in fact locates.”19), or objective descriptions of our current cultural condition (e.g. “the only constant truth now about the idea of a thing is that it is not the thing itself, and therefore contains the presence of the absence of the thing.”20)

From the outset, Eisenman has pursued a notion of architecture as a discipline with its own immanent nature, which he calls architecture’s “interiority”. It does not depend on external factors arising from social, functional, or material forces. He insists upon architecture as an autonomous discourse that has its own specific ways of relating to culture. Any analysis of the relationship of a particular building to a cultural configuration is for him a case study in that disciplinary specificity. Values attaching to a cultural configuration do not attach to its architecture:

“[M]y work basically says that while I may have my own personal political leanings, or I may have affinities to conservative politics, when it comes to architecture, ultimately its politics is autonomy. That’s why I can look as Leon Krier does at Albert Speer […] I believe that the architecture that the fascist regime was doing was a very important moment in time.”21

In the same vein, he published an intensive study of the work of Giuseppe Terragni,22 who for a time worked for and supported the Fascist regime in Italy, without reference to its political context, which he considered irrelevant to the architecture.

Eisenman claims to reveal our true current condition in order to understand the conditions under which architecture is created at the present time. From his perspective, the human condition is historically determined and thus cannot be altered by human decisions. Neither architecture nor anything else can affect it in the near term. His ideas are apolitical in the sense that they refuse any socially determinative role for architecture. This position has attracted a great deal of criticism from those who see a political stance in the very denial of architecture’s political significance.23

Thus Eisenman’s ideas, while controversial, are devoid of any political agenda that could affect actual practice, making them well-suited for the disciplinary discourse of a profession that must remain politically neutral. Diane Ghirardo perceptively noted the importance of this to Eisenman’s prominence, writing that his “emphasis on formal autonomy to guarantee that though his work may offend visually, aesthetically, or experientially, it will never offend politically.”24

THE PROFESSION AND THE FUTURE

The foregoing is an attempt to understand an apparent conundrum: that the American architectural profession chose to honor an architect who rejects its most fundamental values. The profession, perhaps feeling its current lack of direction, sought to embrace a man whose name is synonymous with architectural discourse, thereby reassuring itself and (it hoped) its public that this discourse is alive and well. Peter Eisenman’s unique qualifications as an intellectual as well as a building architect made this recognition palatable, even to his detractors, with the caveat that it be in the realm of education rather than architecture itself. Thus, the conundrum is resolved: the award was a logical response to the profession’s need for disciplinary legitimacy.

Of course, honoring Eisenman does not address the underlying problem. There is a crying need in architecture for a disciplinary discourse that speaks to practice, that addresses the array of changes that face both profession and discipline, that will empower architects to become more effective in social and political debates. That he does not provide such a discourse is not a criticism of Eisenman himself; this was never his intention. The profession, represented by the AIA, has managed to appropriate his work so that it gives the appearance of providing disciplinary legitimacy while leaving the profession’s existing value structure intact. By doing this, it can claim to address the issue while not disturbing its members’ practices.
But if it is to survive as a profession, architecture needs real disciplinary legitimacy—real disciplinary discourse—not its mere appearance. Its lack is tangible. Practicing architects today constantly bemoan challenges to their customary role. Holistic design, the traditional province of architects and their greatest service to society, is being eroded by a growing number of specialized experts who lay claim to some portion of building design. Their claims are based on their supposed ability to enhance the technical or financial performance of a particular process, system, or component. Some architects try to compete on these terms. This strategy will not preserve holistic design: by definition, no one can be an expert at everything. The great challenge facing disciplinary discourse in architecture today is to enunciate a basis for the value of holistic design in the face of pervasive social demands for better performance. By anointing Eisenman, the AIA has only distracted the profession from the need for such a discourse in American architecture.

ENDNOTES


4. As S. Stephens writes, “[t]he American mainstream professional, neither fan nor convert, tends to view this emergence of polemicist-theorists with suspicion or hostility.” S. Stephens, “Rota-models; Polemicist-theorist,” Progressive Architecture 58 (May, 1977), 68.

5. Among those who wrote letters supporting Eisenman’s nomination were: Henry Cobb, former Dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and partner of I.M. Pei; George Baird, Dean of architecture at the University of Toronto; Alan Balfour, who has served as Dean of architecture at Rice University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Georgia Tech as well as chairman of the Architectural Association in London; Thomas Fisher, Dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota; and Marlon Blackwell, Chair and Distinguished Professor at the University of Arkansas Fay Jones School of Architecture.

6. Past recipients of the Gold Medal include fellow New York Five members Michael Graves and Richard Meier, as well as “iconoclasts” such as Thom Mayne and Frank Gehry.

7. Some recipients have had distinguished careers as practitioners in addition to their roles in education, but they have at some point devoted themselves to education, typically by occupying a prominent post at a major architecture school.


10. The 1981 citation for Eisenman’s elevation to Fellowship reads, “As designer; as founder and director of The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies; as writer, teacher and lecturer, he has contributed as few others have done to the understanding and appreciation of the art of architecture.” The American Institute of Architects, “FAIA_1981_EisenmanPeter_text_PR”. The American Institute of Architects Archive, Washington, D.C.


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.


17. “Alternative views of the world might suggest that it is not wholeness that will evoke our trustful feelings and that it is precisely the wholeness of the anthropocentric world that it might be the presence of absence, that is, the nonetheless, the fragment which might produce a condition that would more closely approximate our innate feelings today.” Peter Eisenman and Christopher Alexander, “Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture,” first published in Lotus International 60 (1983), 60-68. Reprinted in Studio Works 7 (Princeton: The Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 50-57.

18. In general, apparently, however, there is a school of thought that separates legal scholarship from the practice of law. See Meir Dan-Cohen, “Listeners and Eavesdroppers: The Audience for Substantive Legal Theory”, University of Colorado Law Review 63 (1992), 569.


23. As Jennifer Bloomer remarked, “How, I wonder, can architectural formalism, even and especially the avowed apolitical, not be political?” Eisenman et al., “Eisenman (and company) Respond,” 88.

ABSTRACT

Even theoretical architectural works that deliberately bracket aspects of ‘reality’ perform services for a multitude of people and situations. To describe and theorize this hidden multitude, Daniel Libeskind’s *Three Lessons in Architecture* (1985) offers an exemplary work. Unfortunately, the project was destroyed in a fire at Palais Wilson in Geneva, Switzerland in 1987, thus scholarship has been limited. A closer look at this project’s history shows that its theoretical and practical point of departure was more complex than previously noted.

Comprising a densely written text and three machines, the project, installed at the 1985 Venice Biennale, performed its services in several ways: it was a personal exploration of architectural hermeneutics, a pedagogical exercise for Libeskind’s graduate students at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, a promotional tool for both the architect and Cranbrook, and a disclosive machine for the architectural imagination. This essay argues that *Three Lessons* was a paradoxical work whose services addressed these different people and situations through the central idea of “participatory experience.” This idea promoted competing values that oscillated between luxury, agency, and countercultural ideals. As a specific manifestation of an ambiguous late-modern attitude, this oscillation between ideals shows how Libeskind tried to develop his work and overcome the era’s cynicism by a renewal of poetic energies.

“Architecture is [...] the machine that produces the universe that produces the gods.”
—Daniel Libeskind, The Space of Encounter

Even theoretical architectural works that deliberately bracket aspects of ‘reality’ perform services for a multitude of people and situations. To describe and theorize this hidden multitude, Daniel Libeskind’s *Three Lessons in Architecture* (1985) offers an exemplary work during the late Cold War era. Unfortunately, the project was destroyed in a fire at Palais Wilson in Geneva, Switzerland in 1987, thus scholarship has been limited to the architect’s scant publications. A closer look at this project’s history shows that its theoretical and practical point of departure was more complex than previously noted.

Comprising a densely written text and three machines, the project, installed at the 1985 Venice Biennale, performed its services in several ways: it was a personal exploration of architectural hermeneutics, a pedagogical exercise for Libeskind’s graduate students at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, a promotional tool for both the architect and Cranbrook, and a disclosive machine for the architectural imagination. This essay argues that *Three Lessons* was a paradoxical work whose services addressed these different people and situations through the central idea of ‘participatory experience.’ This idea promoted competing values that oscillated between luxury, agency, and countercultural ideals. As a specific manifestation of an ambiguous late-modern attitude, this oscillation between ideals shows how Libeskind tried to develop his work and overcome the era’s cynicism by ramifying architectural possibilities.

THREE LESSONS IN ARCHITECTURE

In response to Aldo Rossi’s invitation to be one of six entries to represent the United States in the 1985 Ven-
ice Biennale entitled *Progetto Venezia, Three Lessons* attempted to reframe the set of artifacts and relationships called architectural machines. Designed and constructed by Libeskind and his graduate students at Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hill, Michigan, it was part of their curricular requirements during the 1984-85 academic year. In this pedagogical context, the *Three Lessons* was developed. Created in the basement studio under the Saarinen library, the resulting project was described by Libeskind as “metaphysical equipment.”

With Libeskind’s bitterly contentious resignation in late-February of 1985, *Three Lessons* was the final project the Artist-in-Residence and his students were legally required to execute in time for the exhibition in Venice.

At the outset of the project, Libeskind proposed to work on Piazza di Palmanova, the public square in the heart of the star-shaped Renaissance fortress city that was one of the ten Biennale sites. The project was conceptualized as one large machine in three parts—Reading Machine, Writing Machine, and Memory Machine—that responded to the Biennale organizers’ call for a “new urban quality, made not of ambitious and totalizing hypotheses but of small and measured interventions.”

Libeskind’s motivation for making a project based on three historical eras of architectural machines was not about “simply providing another craft, ideological or industrial solution” as one might find in the Modernist machine tradition. Unlike everyday machines that operate on the world, these machines were figuratively installed between people and their imaginative constructs. Ironically, he enlisted a language of literal mechanisms (gears, pulleys, cranks, etc.), fragmented forms, and allied them to late-modern concerns for smaller cultural narratives (using references, titles, labels, etc.). This was a hermeneutic endeavor, responding tacitly to Paul Ricoeur’s paradox of “how to become modern and to return to sources.”

Engaging the Biennale’s call, Libeskind decided that his metaphysical equipment would “present an alternative solution by exploring participatory reality.” On a basic level this meant that unlike his previous experimental works (*Micromegas* and *Chamber Works*), the machines were to be physically used. In fact, he wanted to install them within the public square in Palmanova so the local people could play with these “demonstrations” of a creative standpoint. Yet, the notion of participatory experience is more complex and fraught with contradictions that can be seen throughout the project. To understand what Libeskind meant by participatory experience in the Golden Lion winning project, it is first necessary to introduce each machine individually.

**LESSON A: READING ARCHITECTURE**

The Reading Machine (Fig. 1) was a large wooden wheel supported on a structural wooden frame resting on the floor. Comprising two circular planes mounted on a central pivot with shelves held between them, the machine’s outer faces had exposed gears that allowed the shelves to stay at the same angle to the floor.
when the wheel was turned by a reader. The Reading Machine held eight handmade books for a reader’s contemplation without them having to move from their chairs. The wheel's recursive actions were mirrored in the recursive texts that were each composed of a word or phrase: Energia, Created, Being, Idea, Power, Subject, Spirit, and Will to Power. These words or phrases are crucial themes in Continental philosophy’s study of technology and metaphysics from which Libeskind liberally draws. These words are then fragmented and repeated in wide-ranging order to appear like different forms of literary texts (poems, prose, aphorism, etc.).

Apparently was made by hand using medieval craft traditions of the monastery, Libeskind claimed that no modern conveniences like electrical power or glue were used in the Reading Machine. Seeking a return to “origins,” it was dedicated to the early Italian father of humanism Petrarch, who saw virtue in a life of solitude and practical value in the ancient past. It drew directly from Agostino Ramelli’s bookwheel (1588) and the fact that machines played “a pivotal role in many humanist questions involving technical affairs that were bound by means and instruments.” Yet, this piece of equipment prompted participants to interpret through their embodied use the mathematical regularity of the transcendental worldview that once underpinned ancient machines.

LESSON B: REMEMBERING ARCHITECTURE

The Memory Machine (Fig. 2) was a light wooden framework supporting a complex network of ropes, pulleys, doors, and 18 spectacles (e.g., “cloud machine” and “schizophrenic forum”). It had a dense and idiosyncratic arrangement of mechanical components that challenge verbal description to this day. This “internal equipment and the arrangement it reveals” were akin to the backstage of a theater outside of which performances occur. It offered to a Biennale visitor “that which can still be remembered in architecture.”

Playing upon the enigmatic mnemonic device that Giulio Camillo presented to the King of France, the Memory Machine was dedicated to Camillo’s one-time roommate, the Dutch humanist Erasmus. The Memory Machine “represents the workings of a Renaissance Mind” and was based on classical architectural practices prior to industrialization. Here, as in a Renaissance interpretation of Vitruvius, Marco Frascari explained, the forces that impel the machine are seen as “analogous to imagination [fantasia], the force that moves the human mind.” This machine attempted to open a participant to a theater of memory that was dependent on interpretations of symbolic fragments through embodied use of the mechanism.

LESSON C: WRITING ARCHITECTURE

Composed of 49 rectangular volumes evenly arranged in seven by seven rows, the Writing Machine (Fig. 3) was mounted in nested frames that sat on the floor. Made of wood, graphite and metal, the machine had a “gear-shaft-driven system” that enabled its forms to be operated by turning different handles on its perimeter edges. Each face of the 49 volumes had four distinct representations: saints, square parcels of a Palmanova site model, overlay and abstract diagrams, and shattered mirrors. When users cranked the machine, the fragmented representations, seemingly in random order, imaginatively reinterpreted the city’s existing pattern on the upper surface of the machine.

Dedicated to French Enlightenment writer Voltaire, the machine was constructed through industrialized processes that seemingly embraced Galileo Galilei’s observation that the structure of our world is essentially
From this modern social imaginary, the Writing Machine "teaches the artless science" of architectural production in a fully professional workaday setting "from nine to five." Yet, this "computer" was made parodic because it was able to say yes, no and even "maybe." In short, its construction was not beholden to narrative stability; in fact, Libeskind says, it "is the first totally unstable text" that revealed poetic contingencies for its users.16

PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES

Reaching back to Vitruvius, Three Lessons attempted to productively engage the history of architectural machines. Seeing the machine as both index and instrument in architecture’s development, Libeskind advanced the project as a recovery that would expose “residues of something that is truly important: the participatory experience.”17 This experience is fundamentally different from the contemporary notion of ‘participation’ that more or less successfully incorporates ‘users’ into the design process.18 With this difference in mind, one must first note that Libeskind’s use of the article “the” in “the participatory experience” is misleading. A more careful reading shows that participatory experience must be unpacked as multivalent in three ways.

First, participatory experience was initially articulated as the involvement of the Cranbrook students in the design and construction of the machines. The students engaged in the process of making the machine by loosely re-enacting historical practices of architecture, like not using electricity. This participatory experience enabled students to understand and physically experience what architects and builders of past eras felt in the crafting of the machines.

Second, participatory experience was "the emblem of reality that goes into their making."19 Emblem, in this sense is a symbolic representation that is not an entirely willful invention. These are seen in the use of collage, figuration, and other techniques. Emblem is a conceptual distillation through representation that is historically constructed but retains a trans-historical aspect because "history," Libeskind explains, is "a type of experience that cuts across time."20 In experiencing this emblem, a user of a machine would be able to experience the efforts of the students, architecture’s intellectual history, and become attuned—however subtly—to architecture’s past.

Third, participatory experience as Libeskind used it can be understood as the involvement of the public in the design’s ephemeral performances and productions of spaces for the imagination. The physical use of the machines by visitors to the Biennale, Libeskind argued, would encourage ruminations about the work’s lessons, including their content (program, forms, and their relation to their site).

In all three cases, Libeskind framed the participatory as a carnal experience. It engaged with the fullness of the body even when it was attempting to prompt the most abstract thinking on architecture’s destiny. In other words, reading, memory and writing in architecture were not abstract notions but embodied practices heightened and exaggerated by architecture machines. Thus, the project was for "those who ask the question [...] [so] the problem of architecture might come into focus on the one hand, and some part of it might fall into oblivion on the other."21 To say this differently,
when read as one large machine the project symbolically (though hermetically) disclosed and concealed issues related to architecture’s perceived ‘crisis’ for those willing to engage (e.g., What is the role of ‘reading’ in an age of technology and metaphysics?).

Linked to the plural conception of participatory experience, Three Lessons, knowingly or not, promoted the competing ideals of luxury, the countercultural, and a form of agency. These oscillating ideals, however paradoxical, must be read relative to Libeskind’s discourse theorized for the machines’ usage. Seeing the machines in this light can enable a richer understanding of the project to emerge.

Participatory experience is central to the common characteristics of a ‘luxury item,’ which include exceptional quality, beauty and pleasure, expensive cost, rarity, selective distribution and personalized services, exclusivity, and art or avant-garde creativity. Save for the hedonistic and commercial connotations, all seven characteristics appear in the Three Lessons. Built in the privileged remove of Saarinen’s academy, the mechanisms are exquisitely wrought, expensive, singular, and conventionally ‘useless.’ Even a cursory glance at the 1985 Biennale’s two-volume catalogue shows how the other submissions pale in comparison to Libeskind’s wonderfully intemperate offering.

Its luxurious qualities also operated on the semiotic level. Like much of Libeskind’s early work, Three Lessons was characterized by referential excess free from rational constraint (truth as correspondence). This freedom caused frustration, as Julie Eizenberg exhibits in conversation with the architect about his work: “STOP, STOP! Just for one minute, answer a question without quoting somebody else.” This sense of extravagance seemed to retreat from open inter-subjective discourse. Yet, the “elaborately constructed and enigmatic” work also engendered extensive conversations in conferences and publications that are too extensive to list. The participatory experience of luxury offered material artifacts that shaped a space of discourse among an astute public.

Three Lessons also has a countercultural streak. A counterculture is a subgroup that is at variance with what is believed to be the fallacious constructs of prevailing social norms. At its most critical, the counterculture challenges existing values which are imposed on individuals or groups, thereby limiting human potential and social possibilities. Libeskind calls this condition “totalitarianism” because it requires subservience.

The countercultural ideal is seen most clearly in Libeskind’s choice to recover literal machines as something that architects should design and construct. This choice was presented to the Biennale’s public to challenge the profession’s limited definition of what constitutes architecture proper. The countercultural ideal was also cultivated in the three machines’ resistance to conventional utility (modernist instrumental reason) and historicism (postmodernist aesthetics) through a user’s participation in the dizzying network of signifiers that point within and beyond architecture’s disciplinary boundaries. This was meant to critique both the profession’s and academy’s prevailing norms of late-modern cultural expression.

Participatory experience when using the three machines was also linked to a form of agency. Typically, agency refers to an individual’s willful intervention in a setting. It implies making goal-oriented choices that might alter ‘structures,’ like professional institutions, that limit or negatively impact possible actions. The promotion of both luxury and countercultural ideals has ties to the willful intervention of agency. Luxury, for instance, has been cultivated to resist the homogenization of culture through mechanization, whereas the countercultural has developed to intervene in dominant culture against the excess of bourgeois luxury.

In Three Lessons, agency—couched in a phenomenological orientation (Libeskind was after all educated in the “Essex School”)—was sought through the design of a disclosive work. This was in the tradition of Martin Heidegger’s “aletheia (ἀλήθεια),” which has been translated as “unconcealedness.” This suggests that a disclosive work can open an ontological ‘world’ to effect change. From McLeod’s perspective, this type of work lacks the political teeth to substantially alter political praxis. She is correct at the level of a “politics of problem-solving,” but as Nicholas Smith explains, world disclosure comes first through a process of “rendering articulate.” When a world is unconcealed,
insights are rendered visible for the maker or person in the midst of an experience of a work. These insights can help them re-interpret their situation anew from within a given framework. While it is impossible to say what these insights might be in any given experience, Libeskind believed that these insights could help re-make aspects of how architecture engages society. Thus, the project’s lessons should not be seen as critical passivity but an attempt to rethink and spur insight for future action.

COMING BACK AROUND

Architecture “fixed in a permanent state,” Libeskind says, “is for me no longer tenable.” His quote evokes the idea that with the emergence of an ambiguous late-modern attitude when old certitudes were called into question, there was a splintered sense of what constituted truth, reason, and perhaps even common good. This sense produced anxiety and raised profound questions. “How do we renew our cultural traditions, transform our social practices [...]?” Nikolas Kompridis asked, “when they break down or are challenged in such a way as to preclude going on as before?”

At the so-called “end of history,” this line of questioning provoked narratives in the 1980s, perhaps best exemplified in the discourse of Peter Eisenman, that architecture had “entered its end” due to diminished or exhausted expectations. This was what Libeskind evoked in the cryptic suggestion that the Three Lessons “releases the end to itself; not to take the end, but to release the end to itself.” Libeskind was not alone in his use of machines to explore this narrative. This coupling is also seen in the work of his contemporaries like John Hejduk, Neil Denari, Douglas Darden, Liz Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, Jessie Reiser and Nanako Umemoto, among others. Yet, what differentiates Libeskind’s early work is the way he worked through this narrative.

Libeskind evolved a design practice that focused on participatory experiences for different people and situations to disclose carnally trans-historical dimensions of architecture. This was fundamentally a hermeneutic effort, which Alberto Pérez-Gómez explained, was about “interpreting the traces and documents of our past, invariably with fresh eyes, to discover hitherto hidden potentialities for the future.” Paradoxically, these experiences were linked to luxury, agency, and countercultural ideals that at times promoted competing interests.

It is arguably due to this oscillation of values, without the expressed need to operate within the politics of problem-solving that the Three Lessons could open imaginative possibilities for architectural thinking. Coupling fragments of program, mechanical forms, discourse, historical traditions, and smaller socio-cultural narratives (text, literary references, etc.) he sought a sumptuous, if not overwhelming, whole that was not merely an end in itself.

As Richard Kearney argues, “poetics without ethics leads to dangerous play.” Libeskind implicitly understood this danger and in his introduction to the Three Lessons proposed an “ethic of Love.” He learned this, he says, from Aldo Rossi. This was a disciplinary ethic to guide the architect’s experience in the continuance of architectural traditions through a return to origins. The ethic was characterized by an “evergrowing watchfulness [...] [that] becomes a ‘duty’, a ‘vigil’, over that vulnerability and exposure we have both come to call ‘Architecture.’”

In hindsight, these architectural possibilities might be politically effete, due to an excessive historical attentiveness, hermetic language, and a growing reliance on form (that would be developed in Libeskind’s later work) at the expense of social intervention. However, by generating these possibilities, the project offered its hidden multitude (architect, students, academy, and public) a renewal of poetic energies while making visible invisible ideas and traditions through a “striking and sumptuous manifestations of ideas.” Libeskind’s project holds up these efforts and values in the face of diminished expectations for those willing to engage, critique and imagine architectural possibilities.

ENDNOTES


2. For example: Ersi Ioannidou, “Humanist machines: Daniel Libeskind’s ‘Three

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4. Ibid., 10.


9. Though the machines burned oddly the books survived. They are now at the Getty Center, except for the idea book was stolen during the exhibition in Venice.


13. Ibid., 51.


HISTORY I: VITA CONTEMPLATIVA

CONCRETE ABSTRACTION: ON A CRITICAL THEORY OF (NEW) BRUTALISM
MATTHIAS RUDOLPH, NIKOLAS LELLE

ARCHITECTS TO THE RESCUE:
EXHIBITIONS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL GALLERY AEDES, 2000-2015
MÁRCELA GARCIA
Nikolas Lelle lives in Berlin. He studied philosophy and sociology in Frankfurt am Main and Mainz, Germany. He specialized in Critical Theory, Marxism, Aesthetics and the history of National Socialism and is currently writing a dissertation on the National Socialist construct of "German Work." He published articles on the elements of National Socialism and Anti-Semitism and on the way Germany deals with its past.

Matthias Rudolph studied philosophy, sociology, and political science in London, Hamburg, and Frankfurt am Main, and is currently finishing his Master’s program in Frankfurt. In his studies he focused on Critical Theory, Marxism, Foucault, and Aesthetics. Having spent (and enjoyed) a lot of their study time in Brutalist buildings in Frankfurt, Hamburg, and London, Nikolas and Matthias started thinking about the specific features of this architecture that is so often hated. Together they are writing about New Brutalism.

Marcela Garcia graduated from the National Autonomous University of Honduras with a Bachelor’s Degree in Architecture. She then obtained a Master’s Degree in Art History from the University Bordeaux 3 "Michel de Montaigne" in Bordeaux, France, thanks to an Erasmus Mundus scholarship. She is currently a Ph.D. researcher at the University of Geneva in Switzerland, funded by the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship for Foreign Scholars. Her dissertation builds on one of her previous works that focused on the history and influence of the architectural center “Arc en rêve” in Bordeaux. She is currently examining architectural centers and galleries in Europe, from the late 20th to the early 21st century. Taking a comparative approach, she analyzes the different discourses these institutions create on contemporary architecture by means of their exhibitions.
ABSTRACT

Between German hip hop tracks celebrating concrete, step-by-step instructions in DIY art magazines for creating your own concrete egg cups, and electronic music labels that employ Brutalist aesthetics, concrete recently has seen an upsurge in (pop) cultural attention. On the other hand, there is the old post-modern cliché that takes buildings made of concrete as ugly and unwelcoming examples of post-WWII urban planning. In this paper we want to develop a third perspective, one that neither understands concrete as the newest en vogue material, nor rejects it and the Brutalist buildings made from it solely on the grounds of an unpleasant first impression.

The sensual awkwardness of Brutalist buildings and the rejection of them is the starting point for our alternative reading of Brutalist architecture. This reading understands concrete buildings as reminders that there is something fundamentally wrong with society. It takes New Brutalism as the architectural answer to the catastrophes of the 20th century. Following Hegel one has to say “philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying,” a statement that is all the more true for (post-Shoah) architecture.

In this paper we illustrate our arguments through description and analysis of the former headquarters of the German Federal Railway. We focus on two specific elements of Brutalist architecture which we call structural expressionism and irreconcilability: the transparency of materials and structures on the one hand, and a specific relation to society on the other, following and adding to Reyner Banham’s distinction of aesthetical and ethical aspects in the discussion of Brutalism.

TOWARDS A NEW READING

Between German hip hop tracks celebrating concrete, step-by-step instructions in DIY art magazines for creating your own concrete egg cups, and electronic music labels that employ Brutalist aesthetics, concrete recently has seen an upsurge in (pop) cultural attention. On the other hand, there is the old post-modern cliché that takes buildings made of concrete as ugly and unwelcoming examples of post-WWII urban planning. In this paper we want to develop a third perspective, one that neither understands concrete as the newest en vogue material, nor rejects it and the Brutalist buildings made from it solely on the grounds of an unpleasant first impression.

The sensual awkwardness of Brutalist buildings—not least produced by the material they are made of—and the rejection towards them is the starting point for our alternative reading of Brutalist architecture. This reading understands concrete buildings as reminders that there is something fundamentally wrong with society. It takes New Brutalism as the architectural answer to the catastrophes of the 20th century, but not in the sense of serving as escape routes. Brutalist buildings do not flesh out a perspective beyond capitalist society, and they shy away from establishing a safe haven within precisely the kind of wrong society which they aim to denounce.

In this paper we focus on two specific elements of Brutalist architecture which we call Structural Expressionism and Irreconcilability: following Reyner Banham’s distinction of aesthetics and ethics in architecture, we first discuss the transparency of materials, structures, and technical systems in Brutalist architecture. Diving into the tension between aesthetics and ethics, we then focus on its specific relation to society, which is one of irreconcilability, establishing a mode of negative criti-
cism. (Figure 01) We illustrate our arguments through description and analysis of the former headquarters of the Deutsche Bundesbahn, the German Federal Railway (today Deutsche Bahn AG). Read in this way, Brutalist buildings turn into interesting phenomena for a critical theory of architecture that asks for its aesthetics and ethics.

ROUGH POETRY

Understanding Brutalism as an answer to the catastrophes of the 20th century requires a focus on post-war Brutalism, or New Brutalism. The Brutalism of Le Corbusier and others, to mention just the famous Unité d’Habitation, has something in common with Bauhaus and other modern movements in architecture, art and politics: they share an unbroken belief in social change, in progress. That can’t be said in the same sense of New Brutalism and post-war architecture in general. Wolfgang Pehnt, a German architecture theorist and critic, characterized post-war architecture with the words “the end of confidence,” “das Ende der Zuversicht.” After WWII and the Shoah, art movements no longer believed in the same concept of social progress. If anything, it is this insight into the dialectics of enlightenment that has to be learned from Adornian critical theory.

New Brutalism has never been a mainstream movement, even though a lot of buildings are built following that style. In the debates on New Brutalism Alison and Peter Smithson claimed:

‘Any discussion of Brutalism will miss the point if it does not take into account Brutalism’s attempt to be objective about reality – the cultural objectives of society, its urges, and so on. Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work. Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical.’

We add that discussing the ethics of Brutalism means to understand how it relates and reacts to society. The way Brutalism relates to society, to its organization and constitution, makes it an “architecture of reality.” While this is the most intriguing point, it is precisely this “rough poetry” that is usually referred to as ugly and unappealing. (Figure 02)

This point is also taken up by Reyner Banham, who established the distinction of aesthetics and ethics in architecture theory. In his famous and influential book The New Brutalism, he wrote that Brutalism “makes the whole conception of the building plain and comprehensible. No mystery, no romanticism, no obscurities about function and circulation,” a sentence that sounds like the slogan of a critical theory of society.
Writing when the first New Brutalist buildings had just been built, Banham pioneered the critique of this architecture by defining the characteristics of the movement. The specifics of New Brutalism are "its brutality, its je-m'en-foutisme, its bloody-mindedness," he argued. By describing and analyzing specific buildings, one of them the Hunstanton School of the Smithsons, he proposed three essential qualities of New Brutalist architecture: 1. Memorability as an Image; 2. Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3. Valuation of Materials 'as found'. The second and third points are evident. New Brutalist buildings express their structures and materials and are known for the valuation of materials 'as found.' In order to understand the very specifics of Brutalist architecture, according to Banham it is not enough, however, to assume a "formal legibility of plan": "Such a relationship between structure, function, and form is the basic commonplace of all good building of course, the demand that this form should be apprehensible and memorable is the apical commonplace which makes good building into great architecture." Specific for Brutalist buildings is that they work as an image: "Basically, it requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by the experience of the building in use."

"Remembering that an Image is what affects the emotions, that structure, in its fullest sense, is the relationship of parts, and that materials 'as found' are raw material," we have the three qualities of New Brutalist buildings according to Banham. Now we arrive at a twofold understanding of Brutalism: first, the aesthetic side as defined by Banham's three points, and second, the ethical side, the question of the relation to society, characterized by that certain "bloody-mindedness." We want to reframe these elements of Brutalist architecture as Structural Expressionism on the one hand and Irreconcilability on the other.

A CONCRETE MONSTROSITY

We illustrate our argument through the description of a specific building. At first glance, the former headquarters of the Deutsche Bahn AG (DB) in Frankfurt, Germany, seems peculiarly misplaced, both in time and in space. Admittedly, this building is not an obvious choice for a paper on New Brutalist architecture. While
its massive concrete walls are reminiscent of the heyday of Brutalist architecture, those days were already long gone when it was built in the early '90s. Stephan Böhm, the architect, had never built something like that before or since. Just as Stephan Böhm is the son of famous Brutalist architect Gottfried Böhm, the DB headquarters could easily be described as heir to a Brutalist tradition. By choosing for our case study a building that defies the traditional historization of New Brutalism from the 1950s to the early 1970s, while it still exhibits all the key features, we take a position beyond architectural fads to discuss both the aesthetics and ethics of New Brutalism. (Figure 03)

STRUCTURAL EXPRESSIONISM

The building was late, both aesthetically and structurally, built at a time when the move of the DB headquarters to Berlin was inevitable, leaving the Frankfurt building unfinished. Back then, the building worked with its surroundings: a predominantly residential area on one side, a massive goods rail depot on the other, setting a very fitting background for the headquarters of the federal railway. The outer blocks were built only as high as the residential housing blocks around it, arranged like satellites surrounding the central tower in the middle, somehow integrating the building into the area. The railway tracks are gone now, leaving the building in stark contrast to the polished facades of the newly built "Europaviertel," a high-value residential area, following today's white wall mainstream style.

The headquarters are an idiosyncratic combination of glass and concrete, while displaying the technicality of construction. Like the Barbican, both are marked by a certain "clarity of form and robustness." The materials are on show everywhere; one's first impression is dominated by the mass of visible concrete, a gigantic middle tower block, huge concrete pillars, and an overwhelming entrance hall completely made from glass with steel support and, again, huge concrete pillars coming through the glass ceiling. (Figure 04)
The amount of concrete and glass helps make the overall structure of the building comprehensible. The view from most windows in the office spaces leads to other parts of the building, and there are windows between the satellites and elevators made of glass to make sure you know exactly where you are. And for a bird’s-eye view, there are always the rooftop terraces to see the whole compound laid out nicely below. This transparency is playfully underlined by the original model of the building that is displayed in the entrance hall, and a pattern that looks like a stylized floor plan stuck on every other window, articulating the comprehensible character of the structure. These elements turn the building into an “immediately apprehensible visual entity.” In this sense, the building can be read as an “image.” And “the form grasped by the eye” is “confirmed by the experience of the building in use.” But there is more to it than just Banham’s three points of material, structure and image.

“Banham appreciated the stark imageability of the art brut aesthetic of the Hunstanton school, where ‘Water and electricity do not come out of unexplained holes in the wall, but are delivered to the point of use by visible pipes and manifest conduits.’”

This does not remain on the level of the “imageability;” this quote about pipes and conduits—also about cables, wires, pillars, and so on, one could add—transcends the focus on mere appearance. This is where “honesty in structure and material,” the way the building exhibits how it is constructed through the building itself, the visibility of the materials in use, and the way they are used, becomes more than just that. This is the point at which a certain relationship of the building to itself can be understood as a specific relationship to society, tackling the entanglement of aesthetics and ethics.

Aesthetically it is no coincidence that the reproductive facilities of the DB headquarters and the reproduction of the people working in it are taken together. The places designated for regeneration at work, namely the cafeteria and the courtyards, are characterized by visible wires, pipes, and air conditioning outlets. This seems like a commentary emphasizing the fact that the building itself, too, is involved in societal relations of reproduction. There is “no mystery, no romanticism, no obscurities about function and circulation,” to quote Banham again. Even more clearly, this can be read from the history of one of the satellite blocks. The outer block, built with the first part of the building, was designed to be the bridge to the second part as it was originally planned, doubling the size of the complex.
and adding a second tower and another circle of satellites around it. Because of the move to Berlin, it was never built. As it is now, this bridge is reaching outwards into nothingness. All by itself the building presents its reproducibility and its (historical and material) conditions of production. (Figure 06)

The exposition of the conditions of production and reproduction through the building itself is a crucial part of what we call Structural Expressionism. The building demonstrates that it is built, that it is produced and reproducible, and not fallen from heaven. By doing so it refuses reification. This is nothing trivial, but should be understood in its full importance. We argue that, emphatically put, Brutalist buildings can be read as anti-fetishistic buildings, not concealing but exposing that they are made.

IRRECONCILABILITY

Brutalist buildings are not usually met with appreciation. On the contrary, people complain about their unwelcoming style, their harshness, their foreignness. Brutalist buildings are turned into objects of rejection and hatred. The Birmingham Library, being demolished the very moment this article is written, "had been met with criticism from the likes of the city’s Director of Planning and Regeneration of the time who described it as a ‘concrete monstrosity’." The students of 1968 were not quite as forgiving, but as rumor has it, proceeded straight to setting flames to Paul Rudolph’s A&A Building on the Yale campus.

This aversion, ascribed to a superficial ‘ugliness,’ and the complementing rejection in the reactions of observers, is what we want to take seriously in order to turn the argument around and to discuss the ethical side of Brutalism. To illustrate what this means we have to come back to the case study.

The DB headquarters, too, has had its fair share of criticism. One can find hate speeches against it on the Internet, and it, too, has been called a ‘concrete monstrosity’. The innocent observer can understand what is meant by that. From the outside the building simply strikes one as a gigantic gray entity with no obvious end. By all common standards, it simply cannot be called handsome or beautiful. Impressive, sure, but not in any way pleasing to the eye. In a way it serves as an interruption, disturbing the usual aesthetic categories. In contrast to the new buildings around it, it interrupts the normal, the usual, the expected. (Figure 07)

But the DB headquarters are not just arbitrarily or ac-
cidentally ‘ugly.’ To quote the Smithsons again, Brutalist buildings “attempt to be objective about ‘reality’”\(^\text{18}\) and our specific case is no exception to this observation. Taking the position that reality looks unfriendly, so these buildings look unfriendly, might be oversimplifying the matter a little, but there is something to it. This is where we want to turn things around.

The aesthetic expression of objectivity about reality can be found, for example, in the absence of facades, in the display of the materials in use and of the technical systems working in the building, i.e., in the “honesty in structure and material,” as quoted above. It also means not to conceal its own involvement in society—the fact that it is built, under certain circumstances, under specific conditions, and at a certain historical point. Taken together this is what we have called Structural Expressionism. And in our case we add that being objective about reality does not mean to feel at home in it.

On the contrary, we want to interpret this objectivity in an Adornian way such that what Adorno wrote about modern art can be re-read as a sentence about Brutalism. He said: “Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous.”\(^\text{19}\) We interpret the aesthetics of Brutalist architecture as “mimesis of the hardened and alienated.” It does not deny reality, for example, by being unfunctional or by ‘innocuously’ building beautiful castles in the air. Instead its ‘eloquence’ comes from its confrontation with reality. And following Adorno, it is here that the possibility of transcending it emerges.

The potential of this self-conscious mimesis lies in what Adorno, in his lectures on aesthetics, called “alienation from the alienated world.”\(^\text{20}\) Through the mimesis of the alienated, Brutalist architecture itself becomes alienating. But alienating not from a ‘true’ or ‘real’ world or from the way things should be, but instead alienating from an already alienated world. This is how Brutalism “tries to face up to a mass-production
society,”21 not by ignoring its existence but by being painfully aware of its own entanglement. This is why Brutalism can never be fully grasped if only discussed aesthetically and without a corresponding focus on ethics. This is the heart of Brutalism’s “rough poetry.”

Thus, Brutalist buildings forcefully denounce the society in which they are built, even though they are not able to give advice, a solution, or a positive answer to the wrongness they expose. Rahel Jaeggi notes:

“To merely observe that the status quo is ‘constructed’, open to questions and generally changeable, does not by itself generate any criteria for deciding whether and why certain institutions and certain understandings of social reality are wrong and should, therefore, be changed.”22

Those buildings, as might be admitted, do not even serve as a place to hide and do not give any criteria for a better world. This demands a critique of ideology and, in this case, a critical theory of Brutalism. But in refusing to reconcile in an antagonistic world, these buildings represent “architecture of reality,” following and adopting Hegel’s claim: “philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying”—statement that is all the more true of (post-Shoah) architecture.

Taken together, the two points—Structural Expressionism and irreconcilability—and the complex tension between aesthetics and ethics characterize the features of (New) Brutalist buildings and their specific relation to society. This relation is one of negative criticism, one that exposes the wrongness of society but without attempting a solution. Following Adorno, Brutalism instead is “mimesis of the hardened and alienated,” thus becoming “eloquent,” transcending reality by being realistic about it. At a time in which some of its most celebrated examples are being demolished, a critical theory of Brutalism is all the more necessary.

ENDNOTES


5. Ibid., 23.

6. Ibid., 28.

7. Ibid., 23.

8. Ibid., 25.

9. Ibid., 25.

10. Ibid., 28.


ARCHITECTS TO THE RESCUE: EXHIBITIONS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL GALLERY AEDES, 2000-2015

MARCELA GARCIA

ABSTRACT

The German architectural gallery Aedes was established in West Berlin in 1980 by Kristin Feireiss and Helga Retzer, as a platform for discussing contemporary architecture through exhibitions, lectures, and publications. During its first 20 years, Aedes functioned as an entirely private gallery and presented mainly single architects and iconic projects. The gallery changed its institutional framework in 1999 by creating a parallel non-profit association, Aedes East, making it possible for Aedes to have new sources of funding and expand its program. From that moment on, the gallery organized more thematic and collective exhibitions, some addressing the way architects work and the role they should have in society. The message was initially directed to architects themselves. For instance, in 2005 Aedes organized the exhibition Find the Gap—New Spirits and Strategies for Architecture. Through the works and practices of 13 young German teams, the gallery showed the ways in which architects were redefining their profession to keep it alive and relevant. In 2013, Aedes went even further and encouraged architects to reach out to the rest of society and put their profession to the service of social and environmental issues in developing countries. That was the main intention behind Smart City, The Next Generation, Focus Southeast Asia, an exhibition with original projects for countries in Southeast Asia. Smart City stands as an example of a ‘reactive’ and ‘activist’ exhibition, one that attempts to solve contemporary issues in the world, an approach that Aedes shares with other institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The gallery is therefore aligned with the general architectural discourse of the last 15 years that exhorts architects to reconnect with their social responsibilities. A small and independent institution, Aedes further expands and experiments with this discourse in its own way.

What should be the role of the architect in the 21st century? To save the world—at least according to German architectural gallery Aedes Architekturforum, which since the early 2000s has been urging the architectural profession to engage in alleviating social and environmental issues across the globe. Its significance stems from three things: first, it is one of the oldest and most prolific architectural galleries in Europe; second, it focuses on international issues; and third, Aedes’ co-founder Kristin Feireiss belongs to the circles that validate contemporary architects. Over time, the gallery has attained local and international recognition through showing Berlin before and after the fall of the Wall, as well as through exhibitions of architects from the mainstream international scene. Many of them, such as Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, and Frank Gehry, to name just a few, were at the early stages of their celebrity status at the time of their first show in Aedes. The gallery is also known for its co-founder Kristin Feireiss, who was director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI)—the country’s architectural museum—from 1996 to 2001, curator of the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1996 and 2000, and a jury member of the Pritzker Architecture Prize since 2013. Feireiss has been co-director of Aedes, together with architectural photographer Hans-Jürgen Commerell, since 1994.

This paper focuses on the changes in Aedes’ program since 2000, in particular on its shift from exhibitions of individual architects and single projects to themed exhibitions, such as architecture from developing countries and environmental issues. Two exhibitions illustrate this transition: Find the Gap in 2005 encouraged young architects to redefine their profession through new survival strategies, and Smart City in 2013 advocated for the use of these strategies to improve living conditions in developing countries. Aedes shares this approach with other institutions such as the Museum
of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), and is therefore aligned with the reigning architectural discourse. However, its institutional characteristics allow Aedes to experiment with this discourse in its own way.

Kristin Feireiss and Helga Retzer founded Aedes in West Berlin in 1980 as a gallery aiming to promote contemporary architects from Germany and abroad, just three years after the beginning of the International Building Exhibition (Internationale Bauausstellung, IBA), a massive 10-year housing operation that turned the western part of the divided city into a center of architectural experimentation and attracted architects from numerous countries. Aedes benefited greatly from this construction boom because the IBA created an ideal opportunity to discuss architecture. Additionally, architects’ participation in the IBA made it easier for the gallery to reach out to them and exhibit some of their works. The late 1970s and the 1980s were also a time when private collectors, art galleries, and a new wave of institutions devoted to the presentation of architecture across Europe and North America were looking to acquire architectural drawings, particularly by living architects. Some of these institutions were important national museums like the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, founded in 1979, and the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt, established in 1984. Unlike those museums, Aedes was a rather small-scale and independent initiative, in many ways similar to an art gallery but exclusively devoted to architecture. As such, Aedes holds the distinction of being Germany’s first architectural gallery, with the primary intention not to sell drawings—even though it did sell some occasionally—but rather to show them as part of the process underlying the creation of architecture.

FROM MONOGRAPHIC TO THEMATIC: A CHANGE IN STRUCTURE

Aedes has been extremely prolific, showing more than 530 exhibitions from its opening in September 1980 until September 2015, most of which were produced in-house and the rest by other institutions. Regarding the
gallery’s exhibition policy, Feireiss has always maintained that she only shows what she finds interesting. Additionally, her background in art history instead of architecture has allowed her to explore her interests instead of limiting herself to current trends. That is why, during its early years, the gallery exhibited architects from two opposing trenches: Postmodernism and Deconstructivism. This subjective approach has been possible thanks to the gallery’s reliance on private funding rather than public subsidies for its activities. Aedes generates its income from several sources and activities: from its café, sale of its catalogues, sporadic sale of drawings, private sponsoring, contributions from exhibited architects, and from Feireiss’ work as an independent exhibition organizer and editor. This financing model, in place from the very beginning, was the main reason for mostly monographic exhibitions and on single architectural or urban projects in the first 20 years of the gallery’s history. Even though exhibitions of single architects and firms, especially those of international reputation, are responsible for Aedes’ recognition outside Germany, these exhibitions have also maintained the “architect as celebrity” phenomenon that emerged in the 1980s and is still visible today. However, this phenomenon has been gradually challenged since early 2000s, even by those same actors who helped establish it in the first place.

Aedes has lately tried to distance itself from the cult of individual architects by incorporating more thematic exhibitions into its program. To this end, the gallery’s owners created a parallel non-profit association called Aedes East International Forum for Architecture in 1999. At the time, Aedes held exhibitions in two venues: Aedes West, located since 1989 in Savignyplatz, and Aedes East, situated in the Hackesche Höfe complex in the city center, Berlin-Mitte district, since 1995. Since 1999, the intention was for Aedes West to remain private and devoted to monographic exhibitions, whereas Aedes East would develop more complex exhibitions financed through new sources of funding that are permitted only to non-profit associations, such as revenues from memberships and funding from the European Union and from federal and lo-
cal governments. Aedes East would also depart from the gallery’s traditional orientation by looking outside of Berlin and into trends in other regions, most notably in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Other goals at the time were to present more young architects and to work with architectural schools.8

As a consequence of this restructuring, Aedes’ exhibitions did change significantly; even though monographic exhibitions remained an important part of the gallery’s program, single project exhibitions have drastically declined and have become marginal since the early 2000s. In contrast, thematic exhibitions, which only sporadically outnumbered single project or monographic exhibitions before 2000, have risen and become the second most frequent type of exhibitions in Aedes.

YOUNG ARCHITECTS SHOULD “FIND THE GAP”

With its 25th anniversary exhibition in 2005 titled Find the Gap – New Spirits and Strategies for Architecture, Aedes consolidated its preference for themes. At the same time, it expanded the notion that architects work mainly for big projects in which the most important thing is the aesthetic signature of its creator. The concept of this exhibition was to showcase 13 young German teams who, through their projects and their practices, were redefining how architects work in the 21st century, in times of globalization, financial crisis, and political instability. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Feireiss and Commerell state that “the image of the supremely self-confident star architect often conveyed by the media offers no guide to the concrete professional situations facing these younger architects, whose careers tend nowadays to evolve along unpredictable trajectories.” This could not be further away from Aedes’ 15th year anniversary publication that underscored the gallery’s affiliation with renowned architects by featuring pictures from their past exhibitions openings with architects such as Aldo Rossi and James Stirling.9

Find the Gap can be interpreted as Aedes’ response to the 2002 International Architects Union Congress in Berlin, which Feireiss described as proof that the architectural profession “has become disoriented, desperate, unable to communicate, and racked by an identity crisis” because of the “lack of preparation for the changing image of the architect.”10 She further argued that architects in Germany were not sufficiently trained in communicating their work, a shortcoming that the exhibition addressed directly. Several projects in Find the Gap highlighted community participation. For instance, firm Bb22 integrated discussions with residents in their design process during renovation of the area surrounding Frankfurt am Main’s train station and organized bi-monthly reunions from 2003 to 2008 with people willing to debate about the city. This was a more democratic approach to architecture, one that involved the public and put the users, and not only the architect’s will, to the center of the architectural project.

The exhibition showed other ways in which architects were finding new strategies to practice their profession. Firms such as Behles & Jochimsen chose to work on multiple scales, reaching from design of small objects like door handles to bigger schemes, such as their proposal for a waste incineration plant. Other initiatives were not focused on building but on research, such as For Made’s experimentations with industrial materials. Another example is Kenny Cupers’ and Markus Miessen’s investigation and photographic project titled “Spaces of Uncertainty.” This project focused on the transformation of vacant spaces in Berlin, a methodology that Cupers and Miessen later transposed for Brussels and London. The aim of Schoper. Schoper Architekten’s intervention was to show everyday architecture as a way to valorize the anonymous in contrast to what they called the “cult of the new.” In what can only be qualified as “guerrilla” architecture, the Office for Subversive Architecture showed its illegal construction of a single family house on top
of pillars in London, a metaphor for house ownership that is nowadays becoming literally unattainable. Apart from their projects, it was also through their practices that many of the architects in the exhibition acted as the antithesis of a traditional firm; instead of having a single architect leading a big office with subsidiaries around the world, Find the Gap showed architects who normally work independently and even in different countries, but who create temporary associations for certain projects.

In spite of its innovative approach, Find the Gap conveyed a protectionist message in the sense that it was directed mainly at architects and failed to create a bridge between the profession and issues affecting the rest of society. According to the exhibition, young architects should find new strategies to adapt to current circumstances and redefine their profession if they want to keep it afloat and, by extension, continue working. This concern was not unjustified: Feireiss herself acknowledged that architects were one among the many actors involved in the building process by stating that “the architect has long ceased to be master craftsman and is now, at best, the conductor of an orchestra of specialists.” What was contradictory in this situation was that, at a time when architecture exhibitions were becoming more popular than ever, architects were progressively losing their grip in the construction industry.

IT’S TIME TO LOOK TOWARDS THE DEVELOPING WORLD: SMART CITY

Aedes put architects to the service of others in 2013 with Smart City, The Next Generation, Focus Southeast Asia. This exhibition synthesized some of the lessons learned in Find the Gap such as designing on a smaller scale, investing in research, and encouraging community participation. This time, however, they served a greater purpose: to aid developing countries in responding to climate change, to contribute to their social cohesion, and to help them come up with new solutions for housing, public facilities, and other infrastructure needs.
Smart City was an initiative of the Aedes East non-profit association that, as mentioned, focused on themes and on regions outside of Europe. Since 2001, Aedes organized at least one exhibition per year on Asia in the context of the “Asia-Pacific Weeks,” a yearly forum in Berlin meant to foster economic and cultural exchange between Germany and countries from this region. Many of these exhibitions were in standard formats, like presenting young architects from specific countries or the careers of outstanding single architects. In Smart City, however, Aedes went beyond its traditional role as a gallery exhibiting already existing works. Instead, it reached out to architects, urban planners, and architecture students to develop new projects that would form the subsequent exhibition. These projects addressed social or environmental issues in the Southeast Asia region. Professionals from both this region and Europe answered Aedes’ call for proposals and participated in three workshops in Phnom Penh, Jakarta, and Manila. Later on, students from the University of Düsseldorf designed the exhibition display in the gallery.

The exhibition features architects working at different scales, from punctual and realistic projects to gigantic and extravagant urban proposals. Three projects were built prior to the workshops and were situated in low-income neighborhoods. The first was a temporary bamboo swing over a river in Jakarta, meant to transform the river into a public space to reduce its pollution. The second project was a bamboo footbridge in the Philippines, built in collaboration with the residents. The last design was a football court surrounded by a seating structure in Bangkok. Other projects addressed bigger problems such as lack of housing and social exclusion, such as a design of prefabricated houses for the elderly that integrated information or commercial stands in which the residents could work. A project of a pedestrian block in Phnom Penh was meant as an opposition to the upsurge in privatized space, and a design for a new type of industrial warehouse was intended to provide better working conditions for employees through natural lighting and more ventilation. The exhibition also presented two strands of research: one illustrated how Southeast Asian airports are dealing with the in-
crease in air travel caused by low cost flights, and another one on creating a bamboo reinforcement material that could replace steel rods in concrete structural elements. Among the urban proposals, there were a ring belt outside of Jakarta and a flood-resistant park in Bangkok. And finally, two projects that felt out of place when compared to the otherwise down-to-Earth approach of the rest of the exhibition were a blob-like structure for a reservoir city and 13 high-rise residential towers.

The methodology used in the exhibition could easily have been transposed to developing countries on other continents, and many of the projects would have worked elsewhere as well, mainly because they addressed issues that exist in other places. Overall, Smart City stands as an example of a ‘reactive’ and ‘activist’ exhibition, one in which the curator takes it upon herself/himself to try to offer possible solutions for a contemporary issue, including solutions that may not even exist just yet.14 Other institutions, like the MoMA in New York, had also tackled contemporary problems, such as the rise in the ocean levels as a consequence of climate change and the American housing crisis following the 2008 financial collapse. The museum organized workshops with young architectural firms who created new projects which were then presented in exhibitions.15 These projects and Smart City constitute a great example of architects putting their knowledge, skills and even their mediation circuit—architectural exhibitions—to the service of urgent problems affecting the world. And in the end, this may be the key to preserving the relevance of architecture as a profession.

CONCLUSION

In the early 2000s, Aedes changed its structure and increased the number of themed exhibitions. Monographic exhibitions, however, are still an important part of its program. There may be multiple reasons for this, one being that monographic exhibitions are easier to organize and finance compared to the effort and cost of thematic exhibitions that necessitate further research, logistic and human resources, and time to prepare.
Figure 7: Smart City: From August 1 to October 7, 2013, in the Aedes am Pfefferberg location, Prenzlauer Berg district, Berlin. ©Aedes.

Figure 8: Overview of the Smart City exhibition display, designed by students from the University of Düsseldorf. ©Aedes.
The preponderance of monographs also shows that although the gallery and other institutions have tried to distance themselves from their laudatory practices, which benefitted mainly internationally renowned architects, this remains a tendency still deeply ingrained in the mechanisms that promote architecture.

Aedes is also not alone in urging architects to engage in social and environmental issues. On the contrary, the gallery is part of a generalized movement that includes renowned institutions such as the MoMA. In this sense, Aedes may not be a dissenting voice from the reigning architectural discourse, but this does not make its contribution less significant. It is thanks to its small structure and subjective approach that the gallery has more flexibility to experiment within the confines of this culture and expand it away from Europe and the United States, two main poles that dominate the global architectural scene. In particular, Aedes focused on Southeast Asia, with Smart City, and on Latin America, another region that has caught the gallery’s attention since 2000.

Aedes and other galleries, centers, and independent institutions that mediate architecture across Europe are not only providing a local point of view for questions that permeate the global architectural circuit, but they have also the advantage of being legitimate actors for discussing architecture and urbanism in their own cities. There could hardly be a better suited institution to debate Berlin’s development since the 1980s than Aedes. But nowadays, the gallery has realized that it is crucial to try to understand what is happening in the rest of the world and question the role that architects can play in it. Joining the ranks of those who want to save it seems to be a valid and necessary part.

ENDNOTES

7. Since June 2006, Aedes is located in the Pfefferberg complex, the building of a former brewery in the Prenzlauer Berg district. This is currently the sole location for the gallery.
11. Ibid.
HISTORY II: VITA ACTIVA

REFRAMING ‘SERVICE’: FASHIONING ARCHITECTURES OF ENGAGEMENT IN CAPE TOWN
SHARÔNE L. TOMER

ECO-ARCHITECTURE ADVOCATES: MAZRIA, REYNOLDS, AND PREDOCK’S PROFESSIONAL CROSSROADS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTALISM
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Alissa de Wit-Paul is currently working on her dissertation in the Art History department at Binghamton University. She received the 2015 Abu al Hadj award for research excellence. Her research focuses on the 1960s and ’70s green architecture movement. She is a licensed architect, certified interior designer, and LEED AP certified. Currently she adjuncts at Rochester Institute of Technology and Genesee Community College.

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REFRAMING ‘SERVICE’: FASHIONING ARCHITECTURES OF ENGAGEMENT IN CAPE TOWN

SHARÔNE L. TOMER

ABSTRACT

Goals of social responsibility have become increasingly espoused in architectural press and academic discourse. As architects struggle with how to fashion professional careers that reflect their personal and political values, this brief article suggests turning to ‘service’ as an area of action and reflection. However, it is not a call for fashioning new types of service or critiquing known forms. Rather, I focus this article on how to think about the contents and persons involved in the rendering of architectural services. Combining historical narrative and critical reflection, this article unpacks the concept of service and argues for questioning normative framings of the architectural profession. I am particularly concerned about framings that focus on the exchange of fee-for-service. Using feminist critiques of capitalism, I argue that framing architectural service as a capitalist exchange has the tendency to reproduce exactly the limitations that such analysis criticizes. I argue for broader understandings of what may be considered a ‘service’ and critically unpacking who is being served by architects, and who gets silenced or displaced through the course of service. I demonstrate these issues through a case in Cape Town, South Africa, which worked beyond the typical confines of ‘service’—for architectural practice in South Africa and architects generally. As a result, the case produced both architecture and social formations with long-lasting impact. I argue that the expanded notions of ‘service’ that it manifested may present ways forward for architects seeking to be more socially engaged.
ize, exploit, and render precarious the labor and resident status of black men and their families. (Figure 1) For this discussion, however, I leave aside the building forms in order to focus on the relationships between the projects’ clients, architects, and other assorted actors. These reveal an expanded notion of ‘service’ that suggests ways forward for fashioning architecture as a profession of social engagement.  

The desire to use architecture to address social problems is prevalent in contemporary discourse, but is certainly not new. The rapid and radical changes to cities and daily life associated with modernization have continually inspired architects to attempt to use their professional practices to address social needs. As Margaret Crawford discusses in her seminal essay “Can Architects be Socially Responsible?”, this concern has often been pushed to the sidelines, in part because of conflicting conditions through which professionalism has been instituted and because of how architects themselves have constituted their engagement. When attempting to be socially engaged, architects have repeatedly ideologically constructed an ‘ideal client’—the mass users of public space—but have not resolved the contradictions between the needs of that client and the actual paying patron. Additionally, Crawford argues that as architects have disdained working on quotidian sites such as middle class housing, in part because of licensing regulations and in part because of the dualistic search for profit and status, they have neglected the exact arenas in which architecture can make a social impact. She recommends that to resolve such contradictions, socially-minded architects “envision a new set of ideal clients, not the generic masses of modern-ism, but specific groups whose needs are not being served by the architectural marketplace.”

As Crawford suggests, architectural service in the ‘marketplace’—an apt term—is bifurcated between providing ‘signature’ works of architecture for private or institutional ‘patrons,’ or technocratically addressing social problems. Idealizing and abstracting the ‘masses’ neglects their needs in favor of those of paying clients, in turn affirming the perception of architecture as a luxury. Aligning the profession and the wealthy reinforces a view of architecture as a commodity. Such paradigms of architectural service can work to deepen asymmetries in society and the built environment, in ways that typically work through class, race, and gender.

However, while this attention to connections between wealth, inequality, and architectural service is useful, I am also concerned that capital is often represented as ubiquitous and dominating in regards to architecture. Cuff emphasizes architects’ dependence on the patronage of the ‘powerful and monied.’ Larson similarly portrays clients as [wealthy] patrons, “buying architecture.” In both models, the architectural profession is seen as ‘serving’ the wealthy, put to use to affirm status and aid in the process of reproducing capital. Even in models of architectural service where fee is eliminated, such as the increasingly popular pro bono model, the underlying assumption is that architecture is normatively a domain of the wealthy. The pro bono model asserts that in order to expand the recipients

Figure 1: The image on the left shows the condition of the hostels before upgrading, while that on the right is an example of an ‘upgraded’ building, with a third story added. Left photo, courtesy of Architects Associated. Author’s photo on right.
of architectural ‘services’, the element of fee needs to be eliminated. Like other types of aid projects, pro bono casts its recipients as unable to pay for service, affirming the normative privilege of the wealthy as architectural actors with agency. Rather than destabilizing capitalist framings of ‘service’, the pro bono model operates from an assumption of the centrality of fees in architectural service. In its conspicuous and celebrated absence, money becomes a primary feature of pro bono work. Pro bono does not escape being framed as a capitalist exchange, but instead is framed by its advocates as profit generating, or “good for business” in alternative ways.

Therefore, I want to explore understandings and deployments of service in which the ability of a client to ‘afford’ architecture is broadly and diversely framed, and not central to the social relationships that make up an exchange of architectural ‘services’. The Hostels Upgrades project works in this way. It takes on Crawford’s challenge to envision new clients for architectural service, but not by turning to a pro bono model. As I will discuss, the project was for fee, but without fees playing a central role in the formation of relationships between the architecture and ‘clients’ or in prescribing the services that were to be delivered. But before discussing the project, I will first discuss the context from which it emerged as a radical act of re-conceptualizing architectural service.

VOICES SILENCED

South Africa is a useful site for thinking about the power relations produced through the course of architectural service. There is a long tradition in South Africa of designing for the nation’s black majority. Yet this is a history in which the ‘users’ are neither clients nor fleshed out as groups or individuals. Rather, they have been predominantly abstracted and silenced, constituted as a design ‘problem’. This was particularly the case under apartheid, when architects and the state came together to reimagine urban housing models for ‘natives’. The state’s interest in controlling populations symbiotically met architects’ interests in solving housing shortages, using the latest technorationalist modernist processes. Like many other ‘high modernist’ design experiments, the users were subjected to radical experiments in social engineering, without concern for democracy or human rights. With the state serving as the client, the user was conceptually divorced from the service arrangement and in essence ‘silenced’ as a participant in the process. The resulting housing and planning models became the ubiquitous, regimented spaces of rows of ‘matchbox houses’, distinctly separated from the ‘individualistic’ spaces of white suburbia and commerce. (Figure 2) Although architects began in the 1970s to interject alternative spatial models to mitigate what many came to see as the destructive nature of the modernist apartheid city, ‘service’ was executed in similar fashion, without consultation with the intended recipients.
VOICES HEARD: A CAPE TOWN CASE

The Hostel Upgrades project in Cape Town, however, worked from a completely different model of architectural service. The project radically subverted the arrangement of architects working in service of the state or a conceptual project such as housing shortage or anti-modernist planning, in part because it was initiated and managed by the residents themselves.

The project began in 1985 when a group of residents of Cape Town’s migrant labor hostels began to organize to improve their living space. These residents, male migrant laborers, were exactly the silenced ‘natives’ discussed above. The conditions in which they dwelled reflected the neglect intentionally inflicted as part of South Africa’s policies linking labor, race, and space. The housing was cramped and under-serviced, with multiple men sharing sleeping rooms and the most minimal of facilities for cooking and washing. (Figure 3) The men’s lives in the hostels were precarious, as the right to dwell was tied to employment: men who lost their jobs also lost the right to stay in the hostels—and anywhere else in the city. Additionally, up through 1985, because of the influx controls known as the Pass Laws, spouses and children were only allowed in the city—and thus the hostels—for short visits. They otherwise were consigned to living in rural ‘homelands,’ away from husbands for most of the year. When the Pass Laws were repealed in 1986, and families were able to join husbands in the hostels, the situation only partly improved. While movement around the nation and to the city was now unrestricted, a housing condition of one man per bed became suddenly one family per bed. (Figure 4) It was at this point that the hostel dwellers expanded their project from ‘improving’ the hostels to ‘upgrading’ them to family dwelling units. The project was about more than housing, however; it sought to link housing conditions to the larger apartheid system, and thus served as an act of political resistance as well as housing demonstration.

The prospect of upgrading was challenging, both politically and architecturally. To address the architectural aspect, the hostel dwellers brought in a pair of architectural professors from the University of Cape Town. From the outset, the relationship between the architects and hostel dwellers subverted the apart-
heid-era norms. The hostel dwellers were vocal, active participants, addressed by the architects as individuals with agency. Together the architects and hostel dwellers worked out the designs for the upgrades through a participatory process that subverted the top-down models discussed above. Rather than presenting completed designs to the hostel dwellers, the upgrading was a product of partnership. Participatory design was conducted through multiple scales: designs were initially developed in close consultation with a team of hostel dwellers, then vetted and refined through public meetings. Next, demonstration units were constructed for all hostel dwellers to tour and comment upon, and based on their feedback the designs were further developed and eventually finalized.

EXCEEDING THE BOUNDARIES OF SERVICE

The inventive nature of service extended beyond the participatory process. The architects worked with the hostel dwellers in ways that shifted the boundaries of architectural service. Not only did the project’s participants question normative assumptions about who receives architectural service, they also reframed what is included in such services. The Hostels Upgrades illustrates the potential for architects to become full-fledged participants in intertwined political and architectural projects by working beyond the typical boundaries of architectural service. They did so by performing a number of atypical ‘services.’

The first of these was in politically representing the hostel dwellers. The hostels were (and remain, after apartheid) state-owned, with the hostel dwellers serving as renting tenants. While initial approaches to government agencies about the idea of upgrading were well received, the process of working with the state eventually forced the hostel dwellers into interactions with the local black representational authorities. As these authorities were generally considered illegitimate puppets of the apartheid state, negotiating with them would have made the hostel dwellers appear as apartheid cooperators, which would have been political suicide. To keep the process progressing, and safely for all involved, the architects took over as the public ‘face’ and voice of the project. Because the architects were white, they were not subject to the same political risks as the hostel dwellers. Additionally, they were able to strategically deploy their elite racialized and class-based status to the advantage of the project.

The architects performed these acts of ‘representation’ through the institutional infrastructure of a ‘Trust’—a governing body that would oversee the upgrading process. The hostel dwellers decided, in consultation with the architects and other advisors, to form the Trust after their ‘run-in’ with the local black authorities. The Trust ensured that the hostel dwellers maintained control over the process and product while also mitigating their political risks. As an institution, it was significant for mixed racial and class-based lines: its trustees included hostel dwellers and both black and white outside associates, including the architects, clergy members, and other professionals. As trustees, the architects blurred the typical boundaries between client and professional, and between paid, professional service, and ‘volunteer’ social service.

In hindsight, the Trust was one of the most significant institutional artifacts of the upgrading process. It served as a vehicle for its different members—hostel dwellers and advising black and white professionals.
and activists—to gain experience and make professional connections that benefited future careers. The upgrading process eventually served as a training ground for future (predominantly black) political leaders and gave all its participants, particularly the architects, a safe means of participating in anti-apartheid action.

The Trust also worked to provide vital financial services. Although the hostels were owned by the state, the cost of upgrading initially had to be borne by the hostel dwellers. As precarious, low-paid migrant laborers, they clearly had no income to pay for the project. To find funds, the Trust worked through the Urban Problems Research Unit (UPRU) at the University of Cape Town to hire a fund-raiser. She secured funding from international organizations, which enabled the construction of the demonstration and first prototype units. In this way, the architects as trustees indirectly worked to raise the funds for their own compensation for their architectural services.23

‘DESCRIPTORS’ OF SERVICE

Through these different roles and services, the Hostel Upgrades clearly does not fit into the model of architectural service produced by Cuff, Larson, or Woods. The clients were neither wealthy nor powerful. Yet, unlike the pro bono model, services were not donated. Instead, the architects produced a range of different, though interlocking services, which were constituted through dynamic relationships between the hostel dwellers, consulting professionals, the state and funding institutions. The architects provided both fee-based design services, though with fees being delayed until after fundraising,24 and civic-minded services as trustees of the Trust. It was a range of services that served both political and architectural goals. And importantly, the services—and voices evoked through them—informed each other and worked together.

To think about how such a range of services, and the power relations produced through them, sit outside of the normative framework of architectural service, I have turned to J.K. Gibson-Graham’s feminist critique of capitalism.25 Gibson-Graham problematize capitalism as a social and economic ‘descriptor,’ illustrating that reading capitalism as supremely hegemonic, as many scholars do, often invokes an implicitly binary and gendered lens. This then obscures different, ‘non-capitalist’ political-economy practices such as bartering, co-op exchanges and self-employment. This framework suggests reading the services performed by the Hostels’ Upgrades architects as unbounded by capitalism, and calls for developing more descriptors of service than ‘fee-based exchanges’. Gibson-Graham point out the possible readings that emerge when social relations are approached from a lens other than capitalism.26 Will reading architectural services through non-monetized descriptors suggest formations of more egalitarian power relations? Can such analytical frameworks lead towards openings for forms of architectural service that are socially engaged?

Figure 5: Although architecturally modest, the upgraded former hostels are drastic improvements over their previous form. In addition to each family now receiving a complete apartment instead of a bed, the buildings are built with cavity walls, stairs and entries configured to create gathering spaces, and new buildings strategically located to create ‘outdoor-rooms’. Author’s photos.
CONCLUSION

The construction of the Hostel Upgrades was incredibly drawn-out, but eventually realized. (Figure 5) In fact, the upgrading is still going on today, executed and managed within the City of Cape Town council by a former hostel dweller. And while regrettably a number of the initiating hostel dwellers died as a result of political violence or the daily risks that unevenly affect black men in South Africa, a number of other participants in the project have gone on to forge successful careers. One served as Cape Town City Manager, others have had national-scale political careers. For the architects involved, the project was an occasion in which they could deploy their professional skills in service of their progressive political values. It was a project in which the effects have rippled out beyond the architectural artifact.

In its entirety, the project represents an instance in which ‘service’ in its normative framings was disturbed and expanded, and in doing so, the services provided were profoundly socially engaging. The conditions under which the Hostels Upgrades were undertaken were far from typical for architects. Ironically, the incredibly restrictive late-apartheid political condition opened a space for radical intervention in ways that are often not possible in more democratic and peaceful contexts. Additionally, the fact that the architects were university professors meant they were financially able to defer payment for their work on the Upgrades. While such conditions may not be replicable, the ways in which service was conceptualized does suggest ways forward for architects seeking to be socially engaged. The project suggests critically and creatively thinking through not only the projects architects take on, but also how they engage with the host of actors involved in a project and what ‘services’ their skills enable them to provide. Then, perhaps, architectural service can break out of the straitjacket of its historic role of serving only those wealthy enough to afford the commodity and ‘luxury’ of architecture.

ENDNOTES


2. The range of literature that addresses design autonomy and the ways in which the architecture profession has been constituted also includes Kenneth Frampton, "Reflections on the Autonomy of Architecture," in Out of Site: A Social Criticism of Architecture, ed. Diane Ghirardo (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 17-26.

3. Information on this project primarily comes from interviews I conducted with the project’s participants and reports. The reports were predominantly conducted by the Urban Problems Research Unit at the University of Cape Town and include Western Cape Hostel Dwellers’ Association, ‘Western Cape Hostels Housing Upgrade Programme,’ Working Paper No. 36 (Occasional Paper No. 23) [Cape Town: Urban Problems Research Unit, University of Cape Town, May 1987]; Susan Liébemann, Tevia Rosmarin, and Vanessa Watson, “History of the Western Cape Hostels Upgrade Project” (Cape Town: Urban Problems Research Unit, University of Cape Town, April 1993).


7. Ibid., 32.

8. Ibid., 44.


11. Larson, Behind the Postmodern Facade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America, 15.

13. There is a large body of literature dissecting aid and poverty relief. For critiques of aid and arguments for instead employing capitalism (which I do not necessarily agree with), see William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (Penguin, 2006); Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (Macmillan, 2009).


15. Additionally, most architectural firms’ ability to provide pro-bono service relies upon free or cheap labor, provided by interns or students. For discussion of the role of labor and capital in architectural production, see Peggy Deamer, ed., *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).


20. This can particularly be seen in two cases in Cape Town: the design of Belhar by Roelof Uyttenboogaardt, and Mitchell’s Plain. See Giovanni Vie, Roelof Uyttenboogaardt: Timelapse (Padova, Italy: Il Poligrafo, 2006); and Ivor Prinsloo, "Mitchell’s Plain - the Planning and Design of 1 500 Houses in Area A," *Isilili San Sise Afrika* 2, no. 1 (July 1978), 47–77.


22. For a vivid illustration of these familial relations, see Lauretta G. Ngcobo, *And They Didn’t Die* [London: Virago Press, 1998].

23. Once the project was more securely funded, through the City of Cape Town, the architects stepped down as trustees so as to not pose a conflict of interest.

24. It is important to note that the reason the architects were able to delay compensation was because they were employed by the University of Cape Town. This in itself is a form of privilege, and the labor relations between academics and the university brings its own complicated conditions of legitimization and compensation.


26. For example, see discussion of post-Fordist economy in Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 164–165.


ABSTRACT

American architectural history in the early 1970s generally concentrates on the legitimization crisis surrounding the premises of postwar modernism by the two competing, largely New York-based factions, the "Whites" and the "Greys." What has been lost in this narrative is a third faction composed of architects, often working outside of major metropolitan areas, who responded to modernism’s crisis with a call for social responsibility. In the late 1960s and throughout the ’70s, New Mexican architects Antoine Predock, Edward Mazria, and Michael Reynolds embraced environmentalism’s questioning of modern building and designing techniques as unsustainable. These architects designed using vernacular building technologies, such as passive solar or locally found materials, to create what they understood to be ultimate solutions for environmental problems. These alternative solutions placed them in opposition to contemporary practice. Each of these three architects, Predock, Mazria, and Reynolds, redefined their practice throughout the 1960s and ’70s in terms of placing the environment as the driver of building design. These differences between their practices not only defined their architectural solutions, but placed them at different locations of opposition within the profession: one embraced, one marginalized, and one rejected. These relationships changed and became more fluid between themselves, the profession and the public. Although they were fringe in the 1960s and ’70s, today they are mainstream, traveling, writing, and lecturing about their sustainable philosophy to groups of citizens, legislators, architects, and architectural students.

In 1962, Rachel Carson published her book Silent Spring, creating intense awareness of and activity surrounding environmental degradation. Many young architects in the 1960s, including Antoine Predock, Edward Mazria, and Michael Reynolds, responded to this call to action and attempted to merge ecology with the traditional professional model. The purpose of architecture, therefore, was widened into saving the planet from human activity, as well as providing shelter for people and their activities. These architects did not find a design process to accommodate their wider scope; the utopic models of the high modernists, such as Le Corbusier, did not include sensitivity to geographic site, and the formalists, the New York Five such as Eisenman, focused on form and not preservation of ecology. In their search, these young architects became interior counterculturists, pulling knowledge from outside sources. They related themselves both in ideals and process to the environmentalist movement and became environmentalists practicing architecture more than architects adding environmental panache to their buildings. Green architecture became a process of not only developing a new building type, but of creating, negotiating and contesting between different beliefs on the process of integrating environmentalism with the architecture profession. Thus, examining several of these early green architects can illuminate their individual struggles in defining green architecture as a new, socially conscious, constructed field. In this sense, each architect attempted to define not only his or her own version of architecture and ecology, but to sustain a practice based on this new merger. This paper uses the careers of these three architects, Predock, Mazria, and Reynolds, as case studies to map a changing proximity to contemporary practice which environmentally minded architects continually negotiated, to varying degrees of success, in the late 20th century.
In New Mexico and Arizona there was a strong history connecting ecology and architecture through experimentation in implementing passive and active solar energy system within buildings, in contrast to the main theoretical debates within architecture in the 1970s. The most flamboyant debates surrounded a legitimation crisis critiquing the premises of postwar modernism, and centered around two competing, largely New York-based factions, the “Whites” and the “Greys.” Both theories based their discourse around defining alternative philosophical/linguistic theories by focusing on architectural form, not function or structure. Neither attempted to right ecological wrongs through defining how architecture practice could focus on environmental issues.

Between 1965 and 1967, three young architects independently moved to New Mexico: Antoine Predock, Edward Mazria, and Michael Reynolds. Each began to experiment with merging ecology and architecture. All three stated that they moved to New Mexico as a type of adventure, and with an attraction to the “enchanted” landscape. The 19th century railroad companies propagated this image of New Mexico as a location of “enchantment” through advertising. The ATSF Railroad coupled the exotic, adventurous West with the healing sanatoriums that already existed in Santa Fe. After studying engineering at the University of New Mexico in the late 1950s, Antoine Predock left to study architecture at Columbia University and then traveled throughout Europe. By the mid-1960s, Predock returned to Albuquerque to establish his architectural practice. According to Predock, in the 1960s one just “did right by the earth.” For him, this meant not deteriorating the efficiency of the natural landscape. Edward Mazria studied at Pratt, worked for modernist Edward Larabee Barnes, and avoided the draft by joining the Peace Corps in the early- to mid-1960s. He quickly became interested in finding solutions for passive solar architecture (architecture which heats and cools without the use of electricity) when asked to teach a course merging environmentalism and architecture at the University of Oregon in the early 1970s. This class focused his already-strong interest in mitigating the effects of population growth and resource depletion developed from reading the 1972 bestseller, Limits to Growth. Michael Reynolds moved to New Mexico after graduating from the University of Cincinnati. His thesis was published in Architectural Record in 1971. He responded to the general media’s focus on the overwhelming problem of garbage by developing and patenting a type of structural brick made of old beer cans, eventually designing a low impact architecture using these bricks.

All three architects established a practice in New Mexico after becoming licensed, and all three began investigating using architecture to diminish the impact of building on the environment. This is where their similarities ended. Predock designs focused on the site as the foundation of ecological design. Mazria concentrated on the application of passive solar design principles to reduce energy use. Reynolds used a process of bricolage, or utilizing found objects, as building materials to mitigate the excessive waste created by modern consumption practices. These differences not only defined Predock’s, Mazria’s, and Reynolds’ architectural solutions, but placed them at different locations of opposition within the profession: one embraced, one marginalized, and one rejected. All three negotiated their marginal status to continue to practice both within a contemporary profession and with their new ideals of green building practices. For this paper, three questions can inform us of their proximity to contemporary practice: do they focus on architectural form, what arguments do they use for justifying their architectural decisions, and what level of success, in terms of amount of actual practice, did they achieve within an ecological architecture paradigm?

PREDOCK

Antoine Predock began practicing architecture in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1967 after finishing his Master of Architecture from Columbia University. He began reading Ian McHarg’s seminal book Design with Nature, published in 1969, and J.B. Jackson’s theory of cultural landscape. Predock’s design philosophy, developed out of his reading of McHarg and Jackson, contained four themes: clay, body/motion, road cut, and desert beginnings. Clay introduces the development of a solution using architectural modeling embedded in a proximate landscape. Body/motion defines the architectural experience as the physical processional or journey. Road cut defines the problem of architecture as regionalist, in the sense that inspiration comes from the entire scope of a site’s cultural, historical, and geographical
history. This multi-layering of culture on landscape references McHarg’s process, outlined in *Design with Nature*, which analyzes multi-sets of important geographical data including physical, social-political, and geographic as well as ethical and philosophical. McHarg focused on ecology as the basis for quality design, where form follows not just function, but also respects the surrounding ecological landscape.6

Finally, Predock’s fourth concept, desert beginnings, explains how the high desert landscape of New Mexico taught him the importance of specificity of site. This concept also makes use of J.B. Jackson’s ideas regarding cultural landscape. Jackson, a prolific writer on the urban and sub-urban vernacular landscape in the 1960s, often criticized architectural practitioners of ‘cultural landscape’ for only looking at the visual and superficial.7 Predock responded to this challenge by living on-site, especially his New Mexican sites, before beginning to design in order to fully understand how the specific physical landscape overlapped with the cultural. Therefore, Predock emphasized the importance of not only physical and geographical landscapes, but also the cultural landscape into his architectural philosophy.8

Although Predock consistently used statements such as, “Don’t build on a flood plain, always consider sun, wind and siting, understand the embodied energy of building materials,”9 these concerns are not the primary drivers of his design work. For Predock, poetics of form and movement, reflective of a deep reading of cultural and physical landscape, predominate. Therefore, the contemporary practice of applying a systems approach to couple environmental design with architecture, such as the industry standard Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), falls significantly short of ideal.10 “The new sustainable design using LEED is just a box, there is no poetry.”11 In other words, without the search through poetic form generation, coupled with a deep understanding of site, true environmentally conscious architecture cannot be made.

In 1965, a local developer approached Predock about creating La Luz, a housing development in Rio Rancho, on the west side of Albuquerque overlooking the Rio Grande. In the 1960s, most housing developments surrounding Albuquerque followed the common suburban pattern of individual detached houses on single use streets using wood structures covered by Dryvit, a petroleum-based plastic stucco type material, which mimics traditional stucco finish. Predock approached La Luz, the housing development, significantly differently. (Figure 1) First, he slept in a tent on the site for several nights and analyzed how water, sun, wind, flora, fauna and topography interacted on this location in the high bosque along the Rio Grande (riverside areas along the Rio Grande).12 This led to Predock’s decision to utilize the existing sloped site to grade the units so that all areas had views of the mountains and bosque. The entire site also minimized non-local plantings and maximized water runoff into the natural bosque landscape, creating a system where the runoff from the housing development watered the chamisa, sage, and other indigenous plants found on the bosque. This system intentionally opposed common suburban sprawl sewage systems by maintaining all water and soil on the site to reinvigorate the natural landscape.

Predock also uniquely responded to the site by organizing attached living units terraced with shared spaces between them. By terracing the development, Predock again minimized bulldozing and maximized the view and solar exposure of each house. These units retained their own private entrances through a small exterior courtyard. He used as a precedent both native Spanish and Pueblo structures which applied courtyards as both entrances and central organizing structures. He intentionally placed garages away from dwellings, minimizing road construction and encouraging walking throughout the site. Predock therefore maintained a minimum footprint by building on five acres of the 85-acre site, reduced site disturbance by maintaining all water runoff and soil on the site, and diminished the negative effects of development on natural bosque landscape.

Figure 1: La Verda designed by Antoine Predock All photos taken by author.
Predock also challenged the norm tectonically. Concrete beams and columns supported an infill of adobe placed on deep concrete footings. These footings kept bulldozing to a minimum and most soil on the site. He utilized passive solar applications by relying on traditional adobe as a thermal heat sink within a strong concrete structure. He did not calculate these walls as technically accurate, but generally applicable. His buildings also used sun-shading devices to enhance the effectiveness of passive solar heating and cooling. Sunshades blocked direct sun during the times of most thermal heat gain—summer mid-day sun—yet allowed for natural daylight. They also let light, and therefore heat, into the building during times of high sun and cool temperatures, such as mid-winter. Although common hallmarks of green architecture today, sun shading, using adobe, and reducing the impact on the site were highly innovative approaches in the late 1960s.

Predock’s next important project was the 1970s Rio Grande Nature Center, which transitioned his work from a strict use of vernacular materials to a more formally driven expression of site. With this building, site specificity did not necessitate the local vernacular adobe, but use of found industrial materials, such as corrugated metal drainage tubing for an entranceway. (Figures 2 and 3) This building also worked with the land, but cut into the earth to become a type of concrete wall hunting blind, to experience the Rio Grande bosque without disturbing the animals. Predock relegated environmentalism as subservient to form. Here the forms related more to contemporary formalistic structures than to experimentation with ecological principles. For example, he used water tubing and natural daylight to produce a curved, soft counterpoint to the bosque pond viewed through the concrete blind opposite. Natural daylight highlights forms and focuses attention on the outside, not as an energy reduction strategy. The soft light poetically reminds inhabitants that they are in relation to the bosque. The concrete wall with punched openings created a formal barrier between visitors and wildlife.

Predock stated, “I never made being green a priority, you just did it, it wasn’t to fetishize it, is just silly, because it is only a tiny piece, architecture is also a poetic encounter.”13 Predock distanced himself from his earlier position; where the priority for La Luz was to minimize its ecological footprint, the Rio Grande Nature Center’s priority enhanced the visitor’s understanding of the exterior habitat, through form and natural light. Backing away from the materiality of adobe he showed affinity towards a more formalist, or as Eisenman called it, conceptualist approach. Conceptualism, according to Eisenman, equates architecture with model form. Models are architecture, built to full scale.14 Predock, in the Rio Grande Center, balanced this type of formal model manipulation and site specificity. Architectural literature discusses Predock as a regionalist, a sustainable architect, and a minimalist.15 This distance from his earlier strict reading of ecological architecture and towards a more academic architectural
philosophy helped catapult him into international fame and ‘starchitecture’ by the 1990s.

MAZRIA

Like Predock, Edward Mazria came to New Mexico in the late 1960s after working for the large modernist New York firm started by Edward Larabee Barnes. Barnes’ firm hired many Pratt graduates. Mazria came to New Mexico as a guest lecturer in the University of New Mexico architecture department. The department hired him for his New York experience in Barnes’ firm. At this point, Mazria’s interest in ecology was minimal. In 1973, during the oil crisis, The University of Oregon offered Mazria a class in environmental design because they assumed that anyone from New Mexico in the 1960s was fluent in passive and active solar architecture. In order to prepare for the class, Mazria temporarily lived between New Mexico (where his family remained) and Oregon. While staying in New Mexico he contacted an engineer from Sandia Labs on applying passive solar and ventilation in buildings, technologies they had developed while researching space- and weapons-based technologies. Sandia used photovoltaic technology in the 1960s to provide power for space-based satellites. By the early 1970s, around the oil embargo, the labs publicly released their interest in creating efficient earth-based photovoltaic installations.

The International Solar Energy Society (ISES) brought together solar energy-based engineers and architects in the 1960s. This organization, begun in 1955 by engineers, including those from Sandia National Labs and Las Alamos, was concerned with limited oil, gas, and coal resources as well as problems of safety surrounding nuclear power. As John Yellott stated in 1978, this movement gathered momentum and public interest: "Since the renewal of interest in solar energy utilization which began during the 1974 Energy Crisis, a very large number of individuals have turned their attention towards passive systems." Articles in national public media, such as the LA Times, the New York Times and Popular Science began producing articles about solar houses. Mazria joined the New Mexico affiliation of ISES in the early 1970s, and began to present his research in passive solar building at their conferences. Mazria’s research combined materials, wall thickness, solar orientation, and form. He and his students created a lab where these architectural elements were evaluated through a computerized sensor system. The data were presented at the second ISES Passive Solar conference in 1975. After his lecture, a publisher approached Mazria to write a book based on his research. He quickly became known as an expert in the field, publishing The Passive Solar Energy Book in 1979. The book is still found in many university libraries and is Mazria’s most publicly known work.

The Passive Solar Energy Book focused on technical patterns for creating passive solar buildings, using Christopher Alexander’s The Pattern Language as precedent. It is a tool for diminishing the use of finite energy supplies for indoor environmental control. Mazria supports a “new attitude towards architecture” where buildings respond to site, climate, local materials, and especially the sun. These patterns include how to locate and orient a building for maximizing solar gain. They also incorporate material selection, thickness, insulation and detailing into a complete system. Since maximum solar gain is not always appropriate, especially in the summer, he discusses locating and designing shading devices. Unlike Predock, Mazria and his colleagues stress their commitment to these patterns: “Our expertise in building and site ecology and its design principles, technologies and applications is the result of this approach to architectural design. We are internationally recognized as a leader in the field of environmental design and daylighting in architecture. Our office is unique in that we apply these principles to all of our projects.” Both Mazria’s early and later work emphasized the use of passive technology, in-
cluding daylighting, or reducing reliance on electrical light by allowing natural light into a space while taking into consideration the right amount of heat gain. He remains committed to passive design as an environmentalist. Today his focus is on Architecture 2030, which is an online version of sustainable patterns for alleviating global climate change.26

One example in his built work is the addition to the University of New Mexico Law School. (Figure 4) Mazria states that the “west facing site drove the design.”27 The concrete fins, a vertical solar shading device placed on the west side, controlled heat gain and allowed large quantities of daylight into the interior. Metal sun fins28 at the stairwells are another passive method to control daylighting and solar gain. Perhaps the best example of this fusing of low and high technology by Mazria occurs within the central circulation spine of the building. Specially coated sloped glazing provides the necessary blocking of heat gain and allows for a daylit interior street.29

Mazria’s firm, although it has not reached international fame, became very successful locally and regionally. He often competed with Predock for local commissions, winning quite a few. Similar to Predock, Mazria capitalizes on a more formal and modern approach, utilizing concrete and other non-vernacular materials. However, Mazria always maintains his obligation to the environment through passive solar technologies. Mazria merged this technology with contemporary professional practices; just as the form of the UNM Law School is familiar, it also strongly supports an ecological agenda. This ability to bridge contributes to Mazria’s success. His firm disbanded in 2003 when he became fully enmeshed in the imperative of climate change and the importance of altering our building practices to mitigate ecological disaster. Now Mazria travels extensively, lecturing on Architecture2030, his new “think tank transforming climate change problems into solutions through the design of the built environment.”30 Mazria remains committed to environmentalism through architectural passive systems.

REYNOLDS

Architect Michael Reynolds moved to New Mexico after graduating from the University of Cincinnati in 1969. In 1971, Architectural Record published his bachelor’s thesis describing a high-density multiuse structure in which individual blocks would be designed by the owners. Instead of pursuing a traditional career, in 1973 Reynolds patented a brick made from old beer cans and coined the phrase “Earthship Biotecture.” Biotecture “is for the home to care for the inhabitants and not vice versa”31 and the houses that provide this are called Earthships. (Figures 5 and 6) For Reynolds, houses should provide not only shelter, but food, water, and energy. Earthships are designed to be independent, self-sustaining, and completely off-grid. Electricity is provided by active solar (photovoltaic) and wind turbines. The houses also include rainwater catch systems with purification for drinking, and grey water systems that feed into a greenhouse which is a natural filter and

Figure 4: College of Law Addition University of New Mexico designed by Edward Mazria

Figure 5: Earthship Visitor Center designed by Michael Reynolds
place for growing food. Earthships utilize passive solar and ventilation techniques and are built out of predominately post-consumer recycled materials.

In 1973 Reynolds patented a type of building block made from wire, beer cans, and concrete. His stated purpose was to merge a contemporary concern for the problem of overwhelming amounts of garbage with the creation of ecologically sound residences. The concern about garbage arose from the media’s focus in the early 1970s—for example, the “Keep America Beautiful” campaign initiated in 1971.32 The “crying Indian” was the most famous and effective of these advertisements, with the caption “People start pollution. People can stop it.”33 Recycling, composting, and littering became household words, changing the relationship of modern detritus to the individual household.34 With each new media focus on an environmental problem, Reynolds added mitigating house features: unclean water led to rain water collection; poor sewer overflow led to sewage recycled into garden compost; lack of food globally led to households growing food in green houses; the energy crisis led to integrated wind turbines and photovoltaics, etc. For Reynolds, the house itself provided the answer, not just the individuals within it, which takes the link between building and environmentalism closer to the activism of the 1960s than the response of the 1970s.

Before Reynolds developed and patented his beer can bricks using wire, old beer cans, and concrete in 1973, he built the Thumb House [Figure 7] in 1971 using ‘found’ post-industrial supplies as primary building materials. By stacking them, Reynolds incorporated post-industrial materials as structure, not just skin. For Reynolds, architecture can both ‘fix’ the garbage problem and create a human-sustaining house.35 Unlike most architectural endeavors, Earthships developed over time and through much personal experimentation by Reynolds. For example, the reclaimed tires used as a foundation were originally stacked parallel, not overlapped. [Figure 8] These foundations failed because they did not bind together and collapsed with added loading. After solving this problem, he experimented with the integration of new systems, such as the use of different sizes of glass bottles to daylight interiors while remaining structurally viable. Earthships evolved to include integrated systems and their unique forms developed from this integration; for example, passive solar required south-facing glazing and greenhouses required sun. Using stucco over beer can bricks allowed for unusual rounded shapes. Rain-water collection bins snaked around rounded corners. Clients and practitioners of Earthships gave fantasy names to their houses: The Castle, the Hobbit Hole, Earthship Landing, etc.
Although Earthship technology could embrace more conventional shapes, Reynolds preferred the more outlandish forms. These forms, however, often failed as quality building envelopes. In the 1980s several clients sued Reynolds and he lost his architectural license. "As for aesthetics," Reynolds said to an interviewer 1982 interview that, "he doesn't give a damn how it looks as long as it works." Although form is secondary to technology, the form takes a rather unique style reminiscent of the ad hoc structures used by the 1960s communes. These houses often looked like fantasy dwellings, far from the tightly woven machinations of Peter Eisenman's House X. Where Eisenman challenged architecture by pushing against the social nature of built structure, creating unnerving spaces and conceptually driven forms, Reynolds, according to a 1993 New York Times article, challenged architecture by creating buildings as "a social mission that transcends architecture." Reynolds abandoned proselytizing to architects and spoke directly to enlightened users. Needless to say, Eisenman's work has had a greater lasting impact on the architecture and building professions until the late 1990s rise in sustainable design.

Reynolds' rejection of the architectural profession resonated throughout the 1980s to those with more countercultural tendencies. However, by the 1980s his practice based on Earthships was in jeopardy. After multiple lawsuits over leaky technology and problems with the changes in building and zoning codes, he lost his license for bad practices. His appeal waned in the '80s with the downswing in focus on the environment and critique of the 1970s counterculture. He continued his mission in writings, publishing several

Figure 8: Earthship experiments designed by Michael Reynolds
Earthship manuals and a philosophical text, *A Coming of Wizards*, in the late 1980s. *A Coming of Wizards* reads as a personal manifesto and new age philosophical text. For example, he writes, “A potential of relationship is learning to venture from the form. Vanish from thyself.” In comparison to Predock’s discussions of architectural process and Mazria’s technical patterns, Reynolds philosophical writing stand further outside the profession and professional recognition. These musings, his radically different building materials, and a propensity for fantasy forms locates Reynolds the furthest from common architectural practice. By the late 1990s, his reputation rose in connection to his books. He became a type of guru for a new generation of ecologically minded architects and he began to lecture internationally. His license was reinstated and the American Institute of Architects embraced him by having him lecture to their groups.

CONCLUSION

The fluid relationship between these architects and the profession of architecture changed over the 30 years between 1970 and 2000. In the 1960s and ‘70s they were in the fringe, but today they are considered mainstream, traveling, writing, and lecturing about their sustainable philosophy to groups of citizens, legislators, architects, and architectural students. Although Predock’s work on the La Luz development stressed a sustainable approach to design by using vernacular material, reducing construction impact on the site, and providing support for indigenous plant and animal life, he did not originally gain notoriety through his use of environmentally conscious design, but through embracing a more poetic response to site and form. Today, however, he is considered an early green architect who creates “environmental harmony” through his emphasis on site.

In contrast, Mazria continued to expound on the importance of building technology change. His ability to integrate alternative technologies into contemporary building practice provided him success in the form of many building commissions. Today his success is driven through the abandonment of traditional practice and a concentration on the sustainable architecture movement. Reynolds also now has tremendous success through his ‘staying the course;’ he bemoans how most counterculturists and hippies abandoned their beliefs to reenter mainstream society.

The role of environmentalism in each of these architects’ practice varies depending on who they service. Predock’s work focuses primarily on the direct user and the community at large. La Luz and the Rio Grande Nature Center provide the individual moving through the building or site with a varying experience of nature. These buildings remind the public that no building is isolated, but is always in negotiation with both the physical and cultural site. Environmentalism supports this philosophy, but does not drive it.

Mazria continually and conscientiously uses technology to diminish the negative environmental effects of modern consumerism. He consistently uses low-impact technologies, such as passive solar and daylighting, in conjunction with modern materials and forms. He prioritizes the wider ecology and services the earth first. He merged these technologies with function in the UNM Law School addition to provide a high quality experience. We do not yet know if the building actually performs better on an ecological scale than other buildings that did not prioritize eco-friendly technology. Mazria services the wider society and attempts to change the profession’s attitude to preindustrial technologies, such as passive solar. His book provided a working manual easily used by architects, but rarely cited, until the rise of the Sustainable Design movement in the late 1990s. Now he lectures internationally at architecture schools. He attempted to change the profession, but the wider society changed, embracing alternative technologies and Mazria’s earth-first attitude.

Reynolds also stayed the course and capitalized on the recent shift in ecological attitude. He does not attempt to service the architecture field, but to rebel against it. His clients remove themselves from the common culture, which they view apocalyptically as destroying the earth and civilization with it. The Earthship not only allows the client to live off the grid and independently, but aesthetically pronounces their withdrawal. Earthship’s service to humanity at large is to survive modern consumerisms hazards. Today, like Mazria, Reynolds’ attitude propels his career into the forefront of architecture schools and the public at large through lecturing, symposium, and TedTalks. The Earthships host a
visitor center and the city of Taos advertises their location as a tourist stop.

The merging of environmentalism with architecture created a revival of interest in the architects of the early 1970s. International architecture schools promote the early work of Predock, Mazria, and Reynolds through their lecture series and libraries. In essence, the Sustainable Design movement attempts to negotiate the same issues engaged by these early eco-architects. Where does the profession focus its efforts, on technology, poetic experience, and/or changing societal values? How do you enlighten other practitioners, through built or written form? Do you abandon the profession for the public or change the public through the profession? And finally, how do you know if you are successful?

ENDNOTES


2. Predock interview with the author, July 2014; Reynolds interview with the author, August 2014; Mazria interview with the author, 2014.


5. Oliver Hodge, Director, Garbage Warrior. 2007


9. Ibid.

10. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) was developed by the U.S. Green Building Association in the late 1990s and applied to buildings and professionals by 2001. LEED works by establishing minimum qualifications and standards through achieving points in a spreadsheet system. Each building earns points by better addressing energy, materials, site, light, air quality, and innovation than a 'standard' building. http://www.usgbc.org/leed


12. Interview with Mark Hershey, General Manager and Historian of La Luz complex by author, February 11, 2015.


16. Interview with Mazria by the author, August 16, 2015.

17. Interview with Mazria by the author, August 16, 2015.


22. Interview with Mazria by the author, August 16, 2015.


28. A sun fin is a horizontal perforated shelf which allows direct sunlight at angles below 45˚ effectively blocking midday and summer sun from directly entering a building.


31. I Want One; Earthships, http://earthship.com/I-Want-One/

32. Interview with Reynolds by the author, August 18, 2014.


34. Ibid., 15.

35. Interview with Reynolds by the author, August 18, 2014.

36. Ibid.


39. Peter Eisenman, House X, published in 1983, is a book highlighting a series of house designs, 1-10, where the formal and conceptual idea of a house becomes the organizing force which becomes the basis of spatial delineation, structure, and function.


43. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier both published collections of their work and personal philosophies when their building practices were struggling.


46. Interview with Reynolds by the author, August 18, 2016.
CALL FOR PAPERS & PROJECTS DIALECTIC V

Dialectic V: The Figure of Vernacular in Architectural Imagination
A Profession between Luxury Provision, Public Agency, and Counter-Culture

Deadline:
June 1st, 2016

Requirements:
Abstract (350 words)
Short CV

The School of Architecture at the University of Utah has a longstanding commitment to place-based architecture and defining the contours of the illusive concept of the American West. Dialectic V invites contributions that explore the vernacular afresh: as a quantifiable phenomenon, as an analytical category, and as an ethical stance. The editors of the journal welcome new takes on questions including but not limited to the definition, the role, and the challenges of the study of the vernacular.

The contemporary emphasis on locality and the creative expression of time-tested know-how of 'common folk' comes out of modern and postmodern valorization of cultural plurality. The turn to regionalism in architecture—whether critical or romantic, principled or a cynical tool to brand a place or pedagogy—is intimately wound up with the perception of capitalism and mass media as either suppressing or manipulating disparate cultural identities, local practices, or complex histories. Scholars like Thomas Hubka, Thomas Carter, and Dell Upton have shown connections between modernist and vernacular practices and how they anticipate each other. It should therefore not be surprising that schools like Utah attend to the lived environment of ordinary folk and look askance at the dazzling acrobatics of global starchitects as a native continuation of the modernist legacy. This stance produces and reinforces another ideal: a commitment to community engagement. It provides a framework for foregrounding humble but profound projects and modes of practice that give voice to those overlooked by spaces bleached of memory and rationally produced as commodity for glossy magazines and mass tourism.

However, the vernacular is not necessarily or inevitably a progressive concept. Tania Li and Jane M. Jacob have demonstrated the use of vernacular and indigenous as cognitive categories by colonial administrators to map territories and classify populations for a myriad of exploitative goals. Well meaning donor agencies like the World Bank in turn, perpetuating the same governmental strategies have deployed these same concepts as heuristic devices for denigrating certain people as bounded groups, fixed 'forever in place.' In Germany, a racial lens exalted the thatch roofs of its countryside as a proof of an immutable superior nature of German volk. Later all across the Middle East, the progressive ideal of cultural diversity has been leveraged to erect caricatures of walled cities aimed at self-orientalization and maintaining traditional gender and class inequalities. The vernacular is an unstable concept—always vulnerable to reduction and capture as cultural commodity and/or uncritical ideology.

What then is the vernacular? Is it foremost an economic entity or a cultural one? Does it refer to a process, language, or an image? Does it signify an object or its background? Is it a heuristic term for 'no logo' buildings, or is it a brand and a style in and of itself? Who are the actors involved in the making of the so-called vernacular? What are the different ways it has been instrumentalized in design practice and policy decisions—for example by framing insights into native landscape intelligence and responses to climate? Or does vernacular simply stand in for a life style—growing, building, and buying, local—whether as principle or fashion. Is it related to the ‘greening’ of commerce and consumption? Or is it a futile, perhaps reactionary resistance to the elision of place and place-based practices by globalized circulation of goods, ideas, people, and materials? These questions highlight the vernacular as an active and multifaceted term.
We would entertain papers or projects that ask: What is the value of marking the boundary between design produced according to disciplinary and extra-disciplinary criteria? What about architects like Hasan Fathi ‘reproducing’ vernacular and his followers perpetuating the approach? We would welcome proposals to document the Disneyfied use of the vernacular works in current tourism economies? How has a strategic deployment of vernacular studies in the history and theory of architecture operated? How could it? What does it mean to activate the distinction between pedgree and non-pedgree architecture today? Do the tacit structures of software and computation imply a digital vernacular? What is the vernacular of 20th century? Is it constituted by the low cost trailers offered by HUD in the United States and other agencies in different parts of the world or does the stick-frame American suburb qualify, and what does this say about how the vernacular is classed? Are ubiquity and absence of a professional architect all that are required, or is a specific depth of history required? If so, what does this do to the association of vernacular with the voices from below?

The editors value critical statements and alternative practices. We hope to include instructive case studies and exciting models for professional practice. Possible contributions may also include mapping of ongoing debates across the world, book, journal, exhibition and new media reviews. Please send abstracts of 350 words and short CVs to Shundana Yusaf shundana@arch.utah.edu and Ole Fischer fischer@arch.utah.edu by June 1, 2016.

Accepted authors will be notified by June 15th. Photo essays with 6-8 images, creative comment, art-work, and full papers of 2,500-3,500 words must be submitted by August 15, 2016, (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 September 2017.

DIALECTIC, a refereed journal of the School of Architecture, CA+P, University of Utah
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Provided by the Henrietta Johnson Louis Symposium
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ANNE MOONEY, Associate Professor and Principal Architect of Sparano + Mooney Architecture
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February 26, 2016
4:00 PM
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EMILIE TAYLOR WELTY, Architect and Tulane City Center Design/Build Manager
March 2, 2016
4:00 PM
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MICHAEL MALTZAN, Founder and Principal of Michael Maltzan Architecture
The Martin Brixen Memorial Lecture
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